

CONVERGE

PEOPLE FIRST. PROGRESS TOGETHER.

EVENT PROGRAM

8:00 Registration & Networking

9:00 Program Begins

▶ **ALICE HOWARD, Chair, Beaufort County Council**
MAYOR KEVIN PHILLIPS, Town of Port Royal

Joel Braun • Chair, Beaufort County Economic Development Corporation

▶ **MAYOR LARRY TOOMER, Town of Bluffton**

Keynote Speaker Introduction

Berl Davis • President & CEO, Palmetto Electric Cooperative

Dr. Rebecca Battle-Bryant • Director, Office of Statewide Workforce Development

▶ **PAUL ARVANTIDES, Don Ryan Center for Innovation**
MAYOR HARRY WILLIAMS, City of Hardeeville

Danny Black • President & CEO, Southern Carolina Regional Development Alliance

▶ **MAYOR PHIL CROMER, City of Beaufort**
MAYOR ALAN PERRY, Town of Hilton Head Island

John O'Toole • Executive Director, Beaufort County Economic Development Corporation

11:30 Adjourn



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Welcome to Converge 2026!

February 18, 2026

Dear Friends,

On behalf of the Board of Directors of the Beaufort County Economic Development Corporation, welcome to **Converge 2026: People First, Progress Together.**

CONVERGE has become a cornerstone event for the Lowcountry—bringing together leaders from business, government, education, and the community to focus on the future of our regional economy. This year's summit centers on one of the most critical issues facing our communities and employers today: workforce.

From recruitment and retention to training and reputation, a strong workforce is the foundation of long-term economic success. Addressing these challenges requires collaboration, innovation, and a shared commitment to investing in people. That is why gatherings like CONVERGE are so important. They create space for meaningful dialogue, shared learning, and partnerships that move our region forward.

We are grateful to our speakers, sponsors, and partners for their leadership and support, and to each of you for taking the time to be part of this important conversation. Your engagement strengthens not only our workforce, but the future of the Lowcountry.

Thank you for joining us, and we hope you leave today inspired and informed as we continue building a resilient, thriving economy—together.

Sincerely,



Joel Braun, Chair
Beaufort County Economic Development Corporation

WHAT IS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

And Why Does it Matter to Beaufort County?

Economic development is the work done behind the scenes to bring jobs, investment, and opportunity to our community. It means helping new businesses locate here, supporting local companies as they grow, and making sure Beaufort County is a place where people want to live and work.

It's not just about business.

It's about people.

FORCES SHAPING BEAUFORT COUNTY

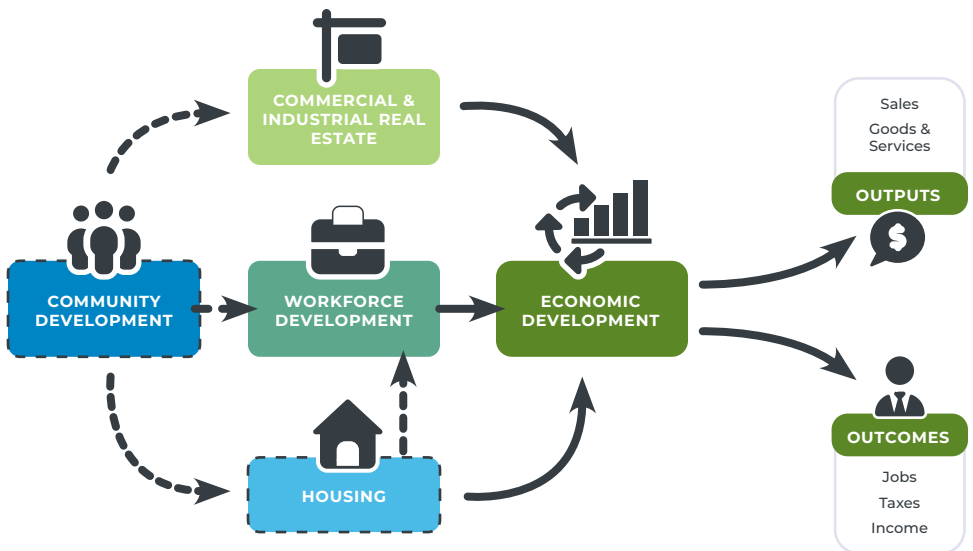
Conservation

Housing Development

Commercial/Retail Development

Economic Development

A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Business Retention & Expansion
Grants & Programs
Partner Resources
Local & State Incentives

B2B & Networking Initiatives
Technology & Innovation Support
Investment Attraction
Expanding Entrepreneurial Pathways

CONVERGE

PEOPLE FIRST. PROGRESS TOGETHER.

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