

WINTER 2023

DEVELOPMENTS

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT NEWS FROM NC PUBLIC POWER

Drexel Site after environmental cleanup with redevelopment in progress



Historic Drexel Rail Site Readies for Its Next Chapter

In its heyday, the original Drexel Furniture factory employed hundreds of people. Most were from the North Carolina public power Town of Drexel.

They manufactured furniture for folks in homes and businesses in the U.S. and overseas, including in American embassies and government offices all over the world, according to the “Encyclopedia of North Carolina.”

“It kept our little town alive,” says Drexel Town Manager Sherri Bradshaw. Drexel, a small town of 1,760 is located within a larger metro area of some 366,000 according to U.S. Census data.

When industry changes forced the factory to close in the late 1990s, Drexel residents were left without its crucial support—and with an eyesore of a site, some of which was environmentally contaminated.

For some communities, that would have been the sad end of it. But not for Drexel.

“I know that site’s history and what it has been,” Sherri said.

That means she also knows its potential. So does Alan Wood, President & CEO of Burke Development, Inc., along with representatives from other local organizations who are helping push along the site’s redevelopment.

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Drexel site conceptual plan

A NOTE from Carl

Historically, North Carolina has been called “the good roads state” as a tribute to our dedication to building a high-quality network of roads and highways. Today, a drive across our state is likely to take you through one of more than 70 public power communities where a major emphasis is now on developing ready industrial sites. Fortune has smiled on North Carolina in recent years, with a slew of major manufacturing announcements, made possible in large part by the availability of ready industrial sites. At ElectriCities, our focus remains on assisting the public power communities that we support to prepare industrial sites for the next generation of investment that’s sure to come to North Carolina, *the good sites state.*



Carl Rees, CECD
Manager, Economic and
Community Development

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OUR MEMBERS



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About seven years and nearly \$5 million in grants later, the 100-acre site—these days referred to as the Butler Hill Site—is expected to be ready around mid-2024. With cleanup complete, installing infrastructure, including the Town of Drexel's electricity, water, sewer, and natural gas services, is underway.

Much of the site is designated an ElectriCities Smart Site, guaranteeing it has met stringent requirements and is ready for industrial permitting.

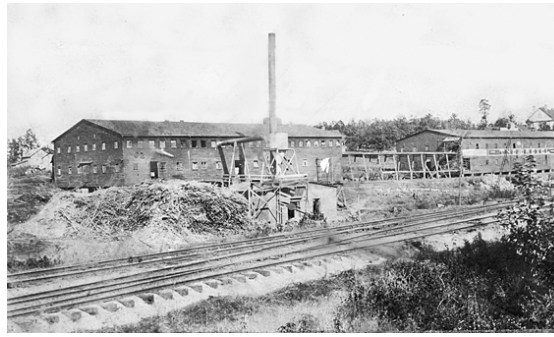
"It's the perfect site to do so much and to make such a big difference to Drexel," Sherri said.

One of its most attractive features? It's rail served, with the potential for two rail spurs.

That's a big deal—especially in the North Carolina foothills where topography often makes rail sites rare.

"Rail-served sites are in scarce supply as land availability and development pressures have seen potential rail-served properties taken off the market," said Joe Stallings, Director of Economic Development at the North Carolina Railroad Company. [NCRP has invested](#)

Left: The old Drexel Furniture factory; **Right:** Abandoned site with environmental contamination



[\\$500,000 in redeveloping the Butler Hill Site.](#) "Having a rail-served site in today's market can be a make-or-break situation for companies, especially those in manufacturing."

What's more, Burke County economic developer Alan Wood said, "Once those rail sites are gone, they're not making any more of them."

Alan said the redevelopment team's goal is to take away every conceivable reason a company might have to rule out the site.

"The lead time for industrial projects continues to shrink," Alan said. "Companies are generally not going to wait for a site to be developed. They want to be permitted and building in six months or less."

"If you don't have sites ready to go—have all this due diligence done, have it graded or a grading plan in place, have all your utilities and infrastructure sitting there waiting—there's no way you can meet those timelines."

"Redeveloping this site that's immediately adjacent to Norfolk Southern's main line is the kind of thing that can revitalize an entire town and a community," Alan said.

Sherri agrees. "It's going to be a game-changer for Drexel and for Burke County." ♦

SOCIAL MEDIA

Highlights

Follow our social media channels to keep up with all the ways ElectriCities' economic development team promotes our member communities and the value of public power across the state and the country.

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Representing ElectriCities members at the International WorkBoat Show in New Orleans



Congratulations to our latest Downtown Revitalization Grant recipients!



Good to Know

NATHAN HURET

Economic Development Director
Catawba County Economic Development Corporation

My favorite movies are: In my quest for advancing knowledge and understanding divergent perspectives, I tend to exclusively stick with the high-level content found in movies like “Groundhog Day,” “Trading Places,” “Coming to America,” “Step Brothers,” “O Brother, Where Art Thou?” and “Wet Hot American Summer.”

The three things I can’t live without are: My wife and kids when they smile, the ability to laugh at myself or with others, and running shoes with an open road or trail.

When I welcome a visitor to my town, I always take them to: Parks and/or downtowns throughout Catawba County. To me, both are great representations of a community’s priorities and investments. They also provide a quick glimpse into the spectrum of our offerings (potentially) for different audiences—be it those who want to be out riding on a mountain bike trail or those looking for unique restaurants and entertainment typically only found in larger metros.

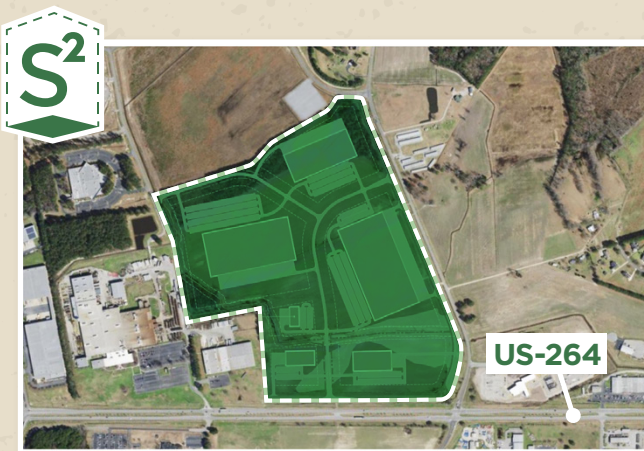
The most memorable place I’ve visited is: The Isle of Wight. If you’re ever in the neighborhood, I would highly recommend taking in the coastline sights while eating an absurd amount of locally grown cherries OR grabbing a pint at the White Horse Inn, reputed to be one of the oldest pubs in England (circa 1454).

Finish the sentence: North Carolina is: Where the weak grow strong, and the strong grow great. ♦

For more information about economic development in Catawba County, visit www.catawbaedc.org.

FEATURED SITE AND BUILDING

To see a full list of sites, visit: <https://www.electricities.com/econdev/>



GREENVILLE SMART SITE

Pitt County Industrial Site
 1911 Old Creek Road, Greenville, N.C.
 Available Acreage: 130.46 shovel-ready acres
 Sale Price: \$35,000/acre



TARBORO SHELL BUILDING

Industrial Shell Building in Tarboro, N.C.
 60,000 sq. ft. expandable; 25-foot clear height
 Near CCX intermodal terminal
 Sale Price: Available on request

Coworking as an Economic Catalyst

Coworking spaces—those places where entrepreneurs and small businesses share office space, services, and tools—aren't only about giving people a quiet space to work. They can spark and support ongoing economic activity and growth.

North Carolina's public power communities are proving just that with coworking business models that range from low-cost places to work away from home to thriving entrepreneurial incubators.

Take [Gig East Exchange](#) in Wilson. An endeavor by the City of Wilson and Greenlight Community Broadband, Gig East opened in mid-2021. Its focus was on providing small businesses and entrepreneurs what they needed to be successful, said Ashley Harris, Gig East Community Exchange Coordinator. By partnering with organizations like Wilson Community College's Small Business Center, the Wilson Community Improvement Association, and Raleigh Internet of Things, Gig East has increased its capacity to support its tenants and help them build their businesses.

Businesses in the exchange work together, and some that started there have since moved out into the community, "pouring right back into historic downtown Wilson," Ashley said.

The City of Morganton is turning a downtown building that's been vacant for about five years into a coworking space [with the help of an ElectriCities Downtown Revitalization Grant](#).



Will Aycock, General Manager of Greenlight Community Broadband, and Rebecca Agner, City of Wilson's Marketing & Communications Director, lead an event at Gig East Exchange in Wilson, North Carolina.

The idea for the space came about when the City enlisted a consultant to develop a strategic plan to attract IT businesses. Morganton's Main Street Manager, Abby Nelson, said the coworking space also addresses the need for available space downtown and will support nearby restaurants, coffee shops, and retail businesses.

Abby and Assistant City Manager Sonja Marston were inspired by the community and business-friendly programming in coworking spaces like [Spark Plaza](#) in Tennessee. With interest from potential tenants high, the Morganton team is excited to open their new space in late 2023.

In Louisburg, the Town-owned [Workspace](#) is supporting its small businesses by providing a reliable, low-cost place to locate long-term or for a few hours a day. Monique Wilkins, Economic Development Specialist at Franklin County Economic Development Commission,

said Workspace's steady tenants feel comfortable renting space from a trustworthy source. "The municipality not having to change their rental rates to roll with the market helps too," she said.

Whatever your community's goals for a coworking space, Clark Rinehart, a coworking consultant and founder of CoworkingNC, recommends finding someone in your community who would be a great coworking space operator and help them get started.

Also consider flexible leasing options and programming and events that authentically support your tenants.

"There's just something about being together, building relational trust that then spurs on that kind of catalytic growth, especially here in North Carolina," Clark said. "We have such diversity of industry with the growing tech sector, we are as well positioned as any state in the country to continue to grow a lot of different types of businesses." ♦

Developments is a publication of ElectriCities' Corporate Communications team in coordination with ElectriCities' Economic Development team.