

For Immediate Release

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**COMMISSIONERS VOTE UNANIMOUSLY TO SUPPORT NEW MANUFACTURING WORKFORCE CENTER IN
FOUR OAKS**

Leaders Hope Facility Will Replicate the Success of WDC in Clayton

Johnston County, N.C. – November 23, 2022. The Johnston County Board of Commissioners voted unanimously Monday night to approve up to \$17.5 million in matching funds to build a 60,000 sq.-ft. Advance Manufacturing Workforce Center in Four Oaks. The facility would have the same transformative economic development potential that the Johnston County Workforce Development Center (WDC) has made for the bio-pharma sector in the western part of the county.

The new center, which will be housed on a 16-acre property currently owned by the Town of Four Oaks, will be operated by Johnston Community College as part of a collaborative vision spearheaded by the [I-95/I-40 Crossroads of American Economic Development Alliance](#). The Crossroads Alliance was formed last year by leaders in the Town of Four Oaks and the City of Dunn to enhance infrastructure, workforce readiness, product development and job growth in southern Johnston County and northern Harnett County. The new training site will sit near Exit 87, across from the Four Oaks Business Park, within easy view of thousands of motorists traveling I-95 every day.

“Regional cooperation is a proven path to sustainable economic progress across generations,” says R.S. "Butch" Lawter, Jr., chairman of the Johnston County Board of Commissioners. “Our county is eager to partner with state and municipal governments, Johnston Community College and the Crossroads Alliance in taking this bold step toward manufacturing job-growth along the I-95 corridor.”

The County's commitment leverages contributions from numerous partners along a model similar to the one established in the early 2000s when leaders from education, government and business came together to create the Johnston County Workforce Development Center in Clayton. That 30,000-sq.-ft. facility is a collaborative venture between Johnston County, Johnston County Public Schools, Johnston County Economic Development, Johnston Community College and local employers such as Grifols and Novo Nordisk.

“With the commitment of up to \$17.5 million in funding from the Johnston County Commissioners, the I-95/I-40 Alliance has commitments for 70 percent of the funding required for a workforce training center at I-95 and Keen Road in Johnston County,” explains Harold T. Keen, chairman of I-95/I-40 Crossroads of America Economic Development Alliance. “In addition to workforce training for industry along the I-95 corridor, Johnston Community College’s Advanced Manufacturing Program will be based in the center. This is an exciting next step for highly skilled jobs in Johnston County and the I-95 corridor in Johnston and Harnett Counties. We anticipate additional funding to complete this project in the first half of 2023,” Keen says.

A \$1.2 million grant from the State of North Carolina supported the building’s design and initial engineering work. “Manufacturing is engrained in North Carolina’s economic DNA, and this new regional workforce asset will ensure we’ve got people with the advanced skills needed to keep this vital sector growing,” said N.C. Rep. Larry Strickland, who represents Harnett and Johnston counties in the General Assembly. “I’m eager to support this potentially game-changing project.”

I-95/I-40 Crossroads of America Economic Development Alliance is a unique multi-community partnership focused on maximizing the business attraction potential surrounding the junction of two major interstate highways. “The Alliance is grateful for the commitment and collaboration that's taken place between Johnston Community College, Johnston County Economic Development Office and our state legislators,” says Alliance President Reid Williams.

“Without their commitment, we would not be in this position. While also serving as an incubator for talent, this facility will become a central focus for job creation in the greater Johnston County region for generations to come. The Alliance looks forward to continuing to work with our partners and take the final steps necessary to see this historic project become a reality,” Williams says.

The Crossroads Alliance is one of numerous partnerships Johnston County economic development leaders have helped forge to boost the creation of high-paying jobs for its fast-growing population. Some 60,000 Johnston County residents, for example, commute daily to jobs in neighboring counties, according to the Johnston County Economic Development Office. “It’s a great honor and privilege to work with the Alliance,” said Chris Johnson, director of the Office. “In meeting with site-selection consultants around the region, time and time again they ask, ‘what are you doing about workforce’. It’s key to start developing that talent pipeline.”

The Johnston County Economic Development Office (JCEDO) facilitates value-added interaction between government, education and the private sector in encouraging and promoting job creation and economic investment in Johnston County. A unit of county government, JCEDO collaborates with local, regional and statewide partners and allies in providing confidential location assistance to businesses and technical support to the county’s 11 municipalities. Its menu of services includes customized digital mapping, labor and wage analysis, site readiness assistance and incentive packaging.

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