

# ECONOMY

The economy is a major factor affecting community development. Economic factors usually play a major role in initial community development. The availability and/or accessibility to employment centers, such as major commercial or industrial establishments provides a major growth stimulus. Moreover, the existence of employment centers can strengthen the financial stability of a community through the provision of sales tax revenues. A strong financial base increases a community's ability to provide a wide range of urban services. Therefore, economic trends and forecasts are important considerations in community planning.

## ECONOMIC HISTORY

Lexington's economic history is based in agriculture. Historically, farming has been responsible for most of the job creation in the community. Companies such as Myers, Inc., Martin Implement, Prairie Central Cooperative (formerly Kemp's) and just recently, the Illinois State University Farm, indicate that agriculture continues to be important for the community.

Most centers of employment in Lexington

have some tie-in to the agricultural history of the area. Several of the businesses were created out of some spin-off need, whether industrial or service-based, because of the agricultural-based roots of the area.

A majority of local employers have shops employing less than twenty-five and are mostly locally owned and operated. Among the most recognizable businesses are: Nelder Ford Group (auto sales/repair), Lexington Truck Service (large truck maintenance and repair), John's Paint and Body (large truck repair), Anvil Brand Shoes (horseshoe manufacturer), H & H Machining (machine parts manufacturing/fabrication) and Barker Chevrolet (formerly Ufring-Mason

Chevrolet) (auto sales/repair). Group Tool and Die also has operations in Bloomington-Normal but has had a Lexington location for several years. The downtown business district has also provided local services such as banking, grocery and restaurants and continues to do so.

## EXISTING CHARACTERISTICS

The locally-based economy of Lexington may always have a connection to the Bloomington-Normal economy. Based on the 2000 U.S. Census data, 1,020 people of Lexington's population of 1,920 were employed. Due to the number of Lexington's population that work in non-agricultural sectors, it is pre-



Exhibit 4-A. Anvil Brand Shoes

sumed that a significant number of residents work in the Bloomington-Normal area (see Table 4.1).

According to U.S. Census figures, many of Lexington's residents work in the following fields: education, health, social services, finance, insurance, real estate and manufacturing. This suggests the City may continue to see a decreasing dependency on agriculture for its economic survival.

For those choosing to work in Bloomington-Normal, average travel time is just under twenty-three minutes. This is about the same amount of travel time to Pontiac from Lexington. Some residents of Lexington may also work in Pontiac since it provides additional employment opportunities. It is likely Lexington residents

**Table 4.1  
Lexington Area Employment By Industry**

Category	Percentage
Agriculture/Forestry/Fishing/Mining	2.5%
Construction	7.9%
Manufacturing	15.0%
Wholesale Trade	4.4%
Retail Trade	8.7%
Transportation/Warehouse/Utilities	6.7%
Information/Related Sciences	2.4%
Finance/Insurance/Real Estate	14.6%
Management/Professional Occupations	4.6%
Education/Health/Social Services	18.6%
Arts/Entertainment/Recreation/Food Services	5.2%
Other Services	9.4%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

will continue to choose to commute to work in surrounding communities if Lexington does not attract additional "livable wage" companies to the immediate area.

In 1999, Lexington had a median household

income of \$46,146 (see Table 4.2). Average per capita (individual) income was \$20,898 in 2000. Median family income (average family income) was \$54,336 for this same time period. These were below the levels for McLean County but com-

**Table 4.2  
Area Employment and Income Level Comparisons**

Community	Labor Force	% Unemply	Per Capita Income	Median Household Income	Median Family Income	% Below Poverty Level
Lexington	1,057	2.5%	\$20,898	\$46,146	\$54,336	4.4%
Chenoa	991	1.9%	\$19,559	\$44,420	\$50,948	5.7%
Danvers	643	2.4%	\$19,598	\$52,647	\$58,355	5.0%
Downs	451	4.3%	\$22,468	\$53,750	\$56,932	4.3%
Heyworth	1,267	1.3%	\$20,655	\$53,043	\$60,648	3.1%
LeRoy	1,809	1.5%	\$20,743	\$45,781	\$53,986	1.9%
Towanda	293	1.3%	\$18,702	\$41,705	\$51,875	5.3%
McLean County	85,994	2.8%	\$22,227	\$47,021	\$61,073	9.7%

Source: United States Census, 2000

pared favorably with LeRoy, Chenoa and Towanda.

## **FUTURE ECONOMY**

A number of factors suggest a bright economic future for the City. It is important for Lexington to retain its existing economic base and to attract new businesses. This will help diversify the local economy and expand the local employment base.

The community has and will continue to work with area economic development officials in actively reviewing needs of existing businesses. Often, potential business partnerships can be discovered that lead to new businesses coming to a community when local businesses are actively engaged.

Opportunities abound for Lexington to further build its local economy. The presence of the Illinois State University Farm provides many possible agricultural research opportunities that could and will be explored that could be based in or near Lexington. Community leaders will work with the local area economic development council and university officials to explore such opportunities.

Lexington can expand its appeal as a “bedroom community.” This philosophy has served the City well for several years and will continue to do so when appropriately pursued. Potential growth

in population usually means potential growth for more goods and services, which means a steady growth in local business.

Young families looking for rural quality of life options and retirees are potential new residents of the area. These groups usually have the means and/or life experiences to bring added value to the community.

As the computer age continues to develop, many entrepreneurial computer-based businesses that no longer depend on large or mid-sized city locations are looking for rural locations. They are finding that rural locations provide a growth friendly atmosphere and that the cost of doing business is more reasonable. Many of these companies are combining offices with residences that allow these companies to operate on attractive and appealing “flex schedules” for their owners and employees. They are finding an attractive quality of life appeal in rural communities.

There will likely be future opportunities to add businesses on or near the I-55 Corridor. Such opportunities are reflected in the Land Use Plan presented in Chapter 7 of this report.