



Moore in Strong Position to Benefit From Bragg Growth

BY MATTHEW MORIARTY: STAFF WRITER

Moore County is in good position to benefit economically from the expansion of Fort Bragg -- without most of the headaches.

That's the view of the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Regional Task Force. Several members of the task force were in Moore County Thursday evening to give a presentation at the Senior Enrichment Center on U.S. 15-501 near Eastwood.

Only a handful of residents braved the thunderstorms to attend the presentation, but those who did heard that of all the counties surrounding Fort Bragg, Moore County is likely to have the fourth-highest amount of growth and that it can accommodate and mostly benefit from growth.

"In many ways, you're very well-positioned to benefit in a positive way from that growth," said Don Belk, a regional planner with the task force, who led the discussion. "This is a tremendous opportunity."

Naturally, Cumberland County is expected to see the most growth, followed by Harnett and Hoke counties.

The BRAC Regional Task Force is a nonprofit group funded by government grants. It released a community impact assessment for the entire region on June 17.

By 2013, the base expansion is expected to increase Moore County's population by more than 4,000 residents, create more than 2,000 new jobs and bring in an estimated \$120 million to the economy.

Two new major commands will be located at Fort Bragg -- U.S. Army Forces Command (FORSCOM) and Reserve Command (USARC). There will be more four-star generals in Fort Bragg than anywhere outside the Pentagon.

Most of the growth is expected to be in the southeastern part of the county.

There is much to be done to prepare the county for that type of growth, Belk said.

The county has to prepare for the impact to the schools, increase the skills of the work force and build more infrastructure, such as water and sewer lines and roads.

Of the new residents expected to move here, only about 615 will be active military. But their families and civilians make the number much larger.

Of the new jobs created, most will be in government, construction, professional, retail and health care. Income should jump 3.3 percent, Belk said. The jobs will pay more, but require a more skilled work force.

"We've always had something of a brain drain as well," Belk said. "Our best and brightest go to university

and they don't come back."

To combat the problem, the task force used a \$5 million grant to create the All-American Center for Workforce Innovation. It coordinates all the schools in the region so they can work together to improve the labor force here.

On the housing front, Belk said that Moore County was in better shape than many places. There is enough housing to accommodate the expected growth, he said. But the county is lacking rental space.

Some members of the audience wondered why housing sales are so slow if all these people are coming. The task force responded that many of the people who have already relocated are renting and that the national economy has to be affecting sales.

"There will be no housing construction boom," Belk said.

The task force also said that Moore County needs to secure additional funding for school construction. The school system is building a new middle school and is talking about a new high school. Last November, voters approved a \$54 million bond issue to pay for building new schools and to expand and renovate existing schools, to accommodate expected increases in enrollment.

Belk said that the largest jump in school enrollment is actually expected this year, but that will be in elementary schools.

Expansion of the high school population is expected to come in 2011 when FORSCOM relocates to Bragg.

Expanding the size of classrooms and constructing temporary facilities may be a stopgap while the county raises the estimated \$21 million needed for new construction, Belk said.

Moore County needs to make sure that 95 percent of the county has high-speed Internet by 2013. The task force also recommended that the county's first responders join the state VIPER communication network.

"This region has really fallen behind in emergency communication," Belk said.

The people who come with FORSCOM are higher ranked and more wealthy, Belk said. They may be drawn to Moore County's gated communities.

On the health-care side, Moore County is more than prepared, Belk said. The only need is for more primary care physicians.

The county's hospitality is also a plus, Belk said.

"You have the region's premier lodging and resort facilities," he said.

It all adds up to Moore County being a likely destination for many of the wealthier people relocating to Fort Bragg.

"Moore County, out of all the counties, is in good shape," he said. "Your system is prepared to handle population growth."

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