

Doubling Down

The rapidly growing community of Converse offers unique development opportunities

BY BRANDI SMITH

Just 15 miles outside the second-largest city in Texas lies what might just be the state's best-kept secret: the community of Converse.

"You may drive through Converse and you may not see a lot happening right now," said Kate Silvas, executive director of economic development at the City of Converse Economic Development Corporation. "Trust me, there's a lot going on behind the scenes."

There's also a lot front and center: 1,000 developable acres, \$1 billion in buying power and \$100 million in public investments.

"It's just benefiting Converse tremendously," said Silvas.

Growing by Leaps and Bounds

Converse, like San Antonio, is located in Bexar County, which is growing more than twice as fast as the national average, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. The agency estimates a whopping 1.1 million new residents will move to the area in the next 25 years.

"Texas is growing by leaps and bounds," Silvas said. "Regulation in California, Illinois, New York and elsewhere is kind of magnetizing people to our area."

As those people flock to Central Texas, the city of Converse hopes to capitalize. It's already seen some benefits, including more than 200 new homes going up each year for the past 10 years. Another 400 are already plotted.

"There's just tremendous growth. We're seeing some multi-family housing developments as well, so it's really, really good in terms of density and retail availability," said Silvas. "It's an extraordinary place to find not only a place to live, but a place to do business as well."

Best and Brightest Talent Possible

More than 250 businesses have already set up in Converse and the city is working to bring in even more to accommodate the population boom.

"We're able to turn permits in 30 to 45 days. Rezoning, special permits, whatever. If it's legal, moral and ethical, we can do it and we are prepared to do so," Silvas said. "We are really in a great position to be able to make some positive things happen."

In addition to the city's ideal location, Converse businesses also have access to the highly trained and highly educated workforce pool being churned out of local colleges and universities.

"Many of these graduates are looking for places to work afterward and businesses pay attention to that," said Silvas. "They want to succeed and they also want the best and brightest talent possible."

The diverse skills of those workers make almost any industry a potential success in Converse, according to Silvas.

"The list of things that work here is almost endless," she said. "We have a lot of manufacturing and construction, as well as information and technology. Retail sales are very important. We are also working on hospitality and entertainment destinations."

Thrive and Succeed

Seeing this growth and development looming on the horizon, the Converse EDC changed its focus about five years ago around the time Silvas came on board. In its first 10 years, the EDC worked on acquiring property for a long-term project aimed at mitigating traffic. While that effort is still underway, staff are also paying special attention to luring new employers to the city.

"How can we make businesses succeed here?"

How can we make businesses grow here? How can we create an environment where businesses will want to be here and the businesses that are here become tremendous ambassadors for us?" said Silvas.

That's where those 1,000 developable acres, \$1 billion in buying power and \$100 million in public investments come in.

"There's also \$1.5 million dollars in incentive money," Silvas pointed out "Just come here and look. We'd love to have an opportunity to listen to their needs and see if we can make something positive happen."

"We want businesses to not only come here, but also thrive and succeed. We're trying to help them and the City of Converse be prosperous. We're really committed to that," Silvas said.

No matter the type or size of development, Silvas says there is certainly room in Converse. It won't be there forever, though, as businesses jump at the opportunity to build in such an ideal location.

"We have a great story to tell," she said. "I can't think of a single reason why you wouldn't consider and choose Converse in the end." ●

CITY OF CONVERSE HAS A LOADED DECK

- \$1.5 Million Dollars in Incentive money
- 1,000 developable acres
- \$1 billion in buying power
- \$100 million in public investments
- 30 to 45 day turn on permits
- more than 250 businesses
- more than 200 new homes each year