

Hartsville: Top 20 College Towns under 25,000 Residents

When considering future economic drivers for Hartsville, the planning team agreed that Hartsville has a very unique, promising and ready opportunity: *Become a nationally recognized college town.* The ingredients are here.

- Coker College - a small residential college with an expanding enrollment
- FDTC - an expanding local technical college
- GSSM - a high school dedicated to science and math
- Hartsville High School - acclaimed IB Programme
- an engaged corporate community
- a work force development program
- Duke Center for Innovation
- a growing entrepreneurial community and arts community
- an intact and active downtown adjacent to campus
- numerous recreational opportunities

These are assets that are unique to Hartsville and represent a viable, sustainable and compelling foundation upon which to strengthen the local economy. These assets also are the defining elements of not just a great college town, but a life-long learning community - a higher education community. "Higher Ed" is more than the institutional sense of the phrase. Higher Ed is the city's belief that quality education is central to everything they do. This is what makes Hartsville unique.

However, Hartsville has not seen itself through "college town" eyes. Being known as a college town can be as simple as rethinking how the city promotes itself; and being a college town is not just for 18-21 year olds. A college town is a rich environment that supports, encourages and celebrates life-long learning for K-12, collegians, faculty and each person regardless of age. By aspiring to be a "top college town under 25,000 residents," Hartsville will create a lasting culture of life-long learning for all residents... *becoming* a vibrant knowledge town.

As illustrated to the right, the pillars of a college town and life-long learning are education, entrepreneurship, and entertainment. These pillars need to be supported by housing, a local economy that is diverse, of quality and sustainable, and all built on the foundation of strong community values. These elements work together to create a vibrant and sustainable college town environment.

Education is the raison d'être for a college town. Hartsville is blessed to have Coker College, Florence-Darlington Technical College as well as the SC Governor's School for Science and Mathematics and the IB Programme at Hartsville High School. Hartsville is higher education - high school through college. There are tremendous opportunities to build on existing efforts for collaborative research, projects, mentoring, service learning and community service with these schools.

Entrepreneurship is the lifeline to education, giving credence to learning and research. "I learn so I can earn and contribute." The Duke Energy Center for Innovation is an excellent engine for fueling the entrepreneurial spirit and sustainable enterprises. To have a breeding ground for ideas and inventions right in downtown is a resounding affirmation of the city's support for higher education, innovation and perpetual progress in the community... **the continuum of learning, exploring, working, earning, living.**

Entertainment provides the spirit of place, creates avenues for bringing the community together, and elevates the quality of life. Whether dining, meeting friends for a beer, catching a movie then a coffee, bowling, playing tennis, watching a play, attending a gallery opening or reading, or listening to blues in Burry Park, entertainment is the realm of the creative class. The higher education environment demands creative outlets and ones that are open and accessible beyond traditional business hours.

Housing that is diverse, affordable, of quality, and accessible is an absolute necessity to being a thriving college town. Students are not the only beneficiaries. Market research proves that towns that have a supply of diverse, quality housing that supports pedestrian activity is attractive to all residents and potential residents, particularly retirees, the creative class and young families. Housing not only provides homes, but also drives the economy.



The **Economy** should address the needs of a college town and will be served by residents and students if it is diversified. Opportunities for sustainable local businesses are ripe for college towns - coffee shops, housing, clothing, dining, services such as computer repair, cleaners, and copy shops.

Community Values make the college town feel like home. Students and faculty look for communities that have an authentic spirit of place that is nurtured by local history, culture, faith, beauty and community engagement.

According to the American Institute for Economic Research (AIER), there are 12 key criteria that have a powerful impact on a student's informal learning experience.

Academic Environment

- 1 Student Concentration: number of college students per 1,000 population
- 2 Student Diversity: percent of student body that are non-residents
- 3 Research Capacity: academic R&D expenditure per capita
- 4 Degree Attainment: percent of 25-34 year old population with bachelor's degree or higher

Quality of Life

- 5 Arts and Leisure: establishment per 100,000 population in arts, entertainment & recreation
- 6 City Accessibility: percent of workers 16+ who commute via public transportation, bike or walk
- 7 Creative Class: percent of workforce in the creative class
- 8 Cost of Living: average 2-bedroom rent

Professional Opportunity

- 9 Earning Potential: income per capita
- 10 Entrepreneurial Activity: net increase in total # of businesses per 100,000 population
- 11 Unemployment Rate
- 12 Brain Drain or Gain: year-over-year ratio of population with B.A. degree living in the area

While these criteria are focused on cities of population of 75,000 and higher, the criteria can be scaled for smaller cities such as Hartsville and can serve as valid benchmarks for guiding economic and community development decisions. Becoming a college town and elevating the city's focus on higher education will continue to bring together the academic, corporate, arts, and civic organizations as well as people of all ages, socio-economic levels, and professions.

A TALE OF THREE COLLEGE TOWNS

To understand the impact of being recognized as a college town, Hartsville was briefly compared to Oxford, Mississippi and Davidson, North Carolina. Oxford and Davidson are larger cities, and Ole Miss is a Division I research university; however, these towns are synonymous with their colleges. One cannot think of Ole Miss without the historic Oxford square and stately homes on Lamar Avenue coming to mind. If one thinks of Oxford, the next thoughts are tailgating in the Grove. Davidson College goes hand-in-hand with the charming, historic Town of Davidson - one really cannot separate the town from the campus because they are so dependent on and nurtured by one another.

A brief look

Hartsville, South Carolina

Town Population: 7,764 (2010 US Census Bureau Information)
Coker College Enrollment: 1,200 (Fall, 2012)

Oxford, Mississippi

Town Population: 18,916 (2010 US Census Bureau Information)
Ole Miss Enrollment: 17,142 (2012-2013 academic year, Oxford campus)

Davidson, North Carolina

Town Population: 11,283 (2012 US Census Bureau Information)
Davidson College Enrollment: 1,739 (2013-2014 academic year)

Oxford and Davidson promote themselves as college towns through websites, publications, blogs and numerous articles in magazines such as *Southern Living* and *Garden & Gun*. Hartsville, however, does not promote itself as a college town even though it is. Hartsville has an opportunity to enhance its brand as not only the home of Sonoco Products and Coker Farms, but as a savvy college town. The positive impacts on the local economy and enrollment can be significant.

According to *Livability.com*, the best college towns appeal not just to potential students but to potential residents and businesses looking for strong economies and opportunities to grow. Sports teams, research facilities, historic buildings, and proximity to bars and restaurants create an attractive atmosphere to spend four (or five) years, but a university's off-campus impact can also shape a town's character and keep people there for a lifetime.

"The same factors that make locations attractive to students also make them attractive to businesses," says Steven Cunningham, director of research and education at AIER. "A growing, highly-educated population with an extensive proportion of creative people and entrepreneurs means a high-quality labor pool. City accessibility supports morning commutes. Low cost of living means less upward pressure on wages. A high student concentration suggests enthusiastic part-time labor and internships. Favorable economic measures suggest a stable business environment and local demand for goods and services produced. All of these factors are important to quality of life in the broadest sense, which is important to employees and retirees."

According to the International Town-Gown Association, the relationship between students, faculty and residents is key to the success of a college town. In the best relationships, universities invest their intellectual resources to address city or neighborhood concerns, students work to better the surrounding community, and residents benefit from improved infrastructure when city and college leaders determine cooperatively how services should be offered.

The "college experience" is about more than simply attending a top-notch university. The city or town where the school is located also is important. The people students meet, the places they go, and the jobs they may hold are essential supplements to formal education.

American Institute for Economic Research

Becoming a great college town is much more than becoming a town that appeals to students and faculty. Being a great college town is good for creating a place that young families, retirees, professionals and start-up businesses want to call home. ***Being a vibrant college town means that Hartsville is a knowledge town and an intentional and prosperous life-long learning community.***

