

What Manufacturers Look for When Choosing a Community

By Sam Howard

When a manufacturer considers building a new facility or expanding an existing one, the process rarely begins with incentives or announcements. Long before public discussions occur, companies quietly evaluate communities against a short list of practical criteria. Understanding that process helps explain why some places consistently attract investment while others are overlooked.

Energy is typically one of the first considerations. Companies assess not only current availability and cost, but also long-term reliability and capacity. They want assurance that power systems can support growth, withstand disruption, and

remain predictable over the life of a facility. Communities that can clearly demonstrate energy readiness often move forward in the evaluation process. Transportation follows closely. Access to highways, rail, and waterways affects shipping costs, delivery times, and supply-chain resilience. Manufacturers increasingly favor locations that offer multiple transportation options, allowing them to adjust when disruptions occur. Lewis County's river and rail access place it in a category that many inland or isolated sites cannot match. Workforce considerations are broader than simple headcounts. Companies look for reliability, trainability, and local support systems. They evalu-

ate whether workers can adapt to new technologies and whether communities value long-term employment relationships. The presence of skilled trades, maintenance experience, and a strong work ethic often carries more weight than raw population numbers. Equally important is certainty. Manufacturers value communities that can move efficiently through permitting, zoning, and infrastructure coordination. Delays create risk, and risk drives investment elsewhere. Clear communication, predictable processes, and cooperative leadership signal that a community is prepared to support development responsibly. Manufacturers also consider stability beyond the factory gate. They look at schools, healthcare access, housing, and overall quality of life. These factors influence whether employees will relocate, stay, and invest themselves in the community. Economic development is rarely just about a single project; it is about whether a place can sustain growth over time. Perhaps most over-



where he oversees company operations, financial management, and long-term strategy. The firm specializes in design-build construction, construction management, and pre-engineered building systems, with completed projects across the public and private sectors, including schools, hospitals, church-es, judicial facilities, detention centers, and industrial developments.

Howard also serves as Managing Member and Economic Development Manager for Northeast Kentucky Development, where he works to attract new and expanding industries to the region. In that role, he is directly involved in project development, site promotion, and financing strategies, including design-build leaseback models. His work brings him into regular collaboration with local and state officials, business leaders, and community stakeholders. Howard's focus is on job creation, infrastructure development, and strengthening the long-term economic vitality and quality of life in Northeast Kentucky.

looked is planning. Communities that have identified sites, assessed infrastructure needs, and thought through future demand send a strong message. Preparation reduces uncertainty and shortens decision timelines. In many cases, it is the difference between being considered and being passed over. Lewis County cannot control every factor that influences corporate decisions. But it can control how well it understands those decisions and how deliberately it prepares for them. By focusing on fundamentals—energy, transportation, workforce, and planning—the county positions itself not as a

hopeful participant, but as a credible option. In the final installments of this series, attention will turn to infrastructure as a long-term investment and to the role of community engagement in shaping what comes next. Economic renewal does not arrive unannounced; it is built through readiness, consistency, and shared purpose.

About the Author

Sam Howard is a construction executive and economic development professional with more than 30 years of experience in the building and infrastructure sectors. He serves as Chief Executive Officer of Trace Creek Construction, Inc.,

Editor's Note

This column is the fifth part of a guest series authored by Sam Howard and published by THE LEWIS COUNTY HERALD to encourage thoughtful discussion about Lewis County's future. Howard is the primary author of the series; I am serving as editor and host, working with him on clarity and presentation for HERALD readers. While we have been lifelong friends, this series appears because of his professional experience in construction and economic development and his interest in Lewis County's progress. The views expressed are those of the author, and readers are encouraged to engage with these topics as the series continues.

- Dennis Brown

PLANT BOARD

Cont. from page 1

decision for our customers to hold costs down," Stone said. "However, there are possible developments that may need to be considered before moving forward."

At the same time, the board is asking PJM, its Regional Transmission Organization, to study whether the city could move from its current AEP transmission zone to another.

"If this is possible, we could save on our transmission cost and possibly make the battery project less appealing," Stone noted. A meeting with PJM is expected to be arranged soon.

Another major document under review is a new Interconnection and

Local Delivery Service Agreement (ILDSA) from AEP. The agreement has been sent to McBrayer Law Firm for legal review, and Stone said the board hopes to act on it at the next meeting.

On the operations side, tree trimming has been underway for more than a month. Asplundh Tree Trimming Service worked in the area through the end of December, and Mike King has continued trimming work since then.

Grant activity is also moving forward. Buffalo Trace Area Development District has submitted a pre-application for an Appalachian Regional Commission grant to support both the city's well project

and a new hydrants project.

Utility customers will see a rate change this month as well. Stone reported that the Consumer Price Index for 2025 came in at 2.6 percent year over year, triggering a matching 2.6 percent increase in sewer and water rates to comply with loan requirements tied to the Black Oak Consolidation project. The increase will appear on this month's bills.

Stone closed his report by welcoming new board member Rob Kennard who replaces retiring member Jack Prater.

"I would like to welcome Rob Kennard to the board and thank him for his service to the community," Stone said.

BOARD OF ED

Cont. from page 1

placement.

Instructional and operational approvals included adoption of the Lewis County Middle School Comprehensive School Improvement Plan, approval to surplus district-owned cell phones, and approval of several field trips, including a high school softball trip to the Ripken Experience in Pigeon Forge and a Lewis County Career and Technical Center trip to Portsmouth, Ohio.

The board approved applications and agreements for use of district property for several community events at Central, Tollesboro, and Garrison schools.

Superintendent Jeff Aulick presented his personnel report, which included the certified hire of Haylee McClurg as itinerate LBD special education teacher at Central Elementary; classified hires Amber Bryant as GEAR-Up success coach at the middle and high schools and Carla Howe as secretary at Central Elementary; transfers for Karen Jordan and Melinda McGlone; retirements for Richard Thurman and Donna Jamison; the resignation of Haylee McClurg as part-time occupational therapist; and a notice of family medical leave at Garrison Elementary.

Members approved the

treasurer's report and payment of bills before adjourning.

Sign up for Alerts

By Dennis K. Brown

Residents are encouraged to sign up for Lewis County Alerts by visiting <https://www.smart911.com/smart911/ref/reg.action?pa=lewiscountyky> or by utilizing the Smart911 app.

Subscribers may choose from alerting options that include text, email, voice, and through the Smart911 app.

Download the Smart911 App from the Apple Store or Google Play, or by texting "Smart911" to 67283.

You should provide your address and preferred method(s) of contact. Adding your address will allow tailoring so you do

not receive alerts that don't pertain to your geographical area.

These alerts are provided free of charge, however standard text messaging rates and other charges may apply.

Residents may also subscribe for text only alerts by texting "LewisCounty" to 78015.

You will receive a confirmation back and will have the option to unsubscribe at any time.

You may modify your existing notification profile or unsubscribe at any time by visiting <https://www.smart911.com/smart911/ref/login.action?pa=lewiscountyky>.



Lewis County Health Department

Get Moving

Gentle • Easy • Comfortable with Diabetes

Join us for weekly movement sessions

We'll take things slow, follow along with simple videos from the American Diabetes Association, and focus on getting our bodies up and moving — no sweating or high-intensity workouts.

Fridays at 11 AM
Starting January 16th - Feb 13th

- ✓ Chair-friendly
- ✓ Low impact
- ✓ Go at your own pace
- ✓ No experience needed

Call 606-796-2632 to join us!

