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Published on *The Observer News Enterprise* (<http://www.observernewsenterprise.com>)

[Home](#) > What's next for Conover Station?

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Created 10/24/2011 - 6:33pm

 [10-25 Conover dedication.jpg](#) [1]

By NASH DUNN

nashdunn.one@gmail.com [2]

After nearly six years of planning, grant writing, funding and construction, Conover Station's first building is complete and open to the public.

Conover dedicated its Multimodal Center on Monday, officially opening a complex that will house community space, Greenway Transit Authority offices, the Conover Library and a future public train depot stop.

It is the first completed building of the city's economic revitalization project called Conover Station — a development that officials say has a lot more room to grow.

What's next for Conover Station begins with economic, landscape and utility additions revolving around the multimodal complex.

In January, officials will break ground on the Manufacturing Solutions Center (MSC). The future 30,000-square-foot complex will be Conover Station's second building and a draw for prospective businesses, said Conover City Manager Donald Duncan.

"They're the best kept secret in North Carolina," Duncan said, adding that the MSC helped create 153 jobs in the last quarter.

MSC, currently located at Catawba Valley Community College's East Campus, is a high-tech research facility that helps entrepreneurs develop prototypes and commercialize their products to market. The company works with a broad range of companies and products, including medical, motorcycles, textiles, upholstery, plastics, furniture, biotech and green manufacturing.

MSC has a history of helping create jobs. In the last 10 years, the company helped create or add more than 1,200 jobs across the nation. The total economic impact during that same time span was more than \$105 million, according to a 2009 survey by the National Institute of Standards and Technology, as well as recent statistics.

Large companies like L.L. Bean, Costco, Sears and Rubbermaid have all used MSC's services, but Catawba County manufacturers also utilize the business. LEE Industries, a textiles manufacturer based in Newton, uses MSC's services and announced the opening of a new manufacturing facility across the street from Conover Station earlier this year.

With the addition of the MSC and close-by manufacturers like LEE Industries, realtors say manufacturing is just one industry that could possibly move into nearly 15 acres of Conover Station real-estate for sale.

“Right now, there are a lot of different possibilities for prospective business,” said Jay Adams, senior brokerage partner with the Adams Commercial Real Estate Services (ACRES) that is marketing Conover Station property.

Adams said food, retail, manufacturing and entertainment are just some potential industries that could make the move into five different sections of acreage.

“There are very few projects where you can come in and do something that will survive,” Adams said. “This will be here and this will be part of downtown Conover. It’s something that will be long-lasting.”

A new storm-water treatment wetland will also act as an incentive to bring potential business to Conover Station. The wetland project, which has already started, will create an existing storm water management resource for future developers.

“The storm-water feature will handle all the storm water for the entire site, but will handle storm water for most of downtown as well,” said Conover Mayor Pro-tem Kyle Hayman. “That’s a pretty enticing feature if you’re going to develop property.”

The storm-water treatment feature will actually be fused with a public park for residents. City officials say the park — which is also under construction — will be a perfect place to walk the dog, relax and take a family walk.

More for the future

In coming years, Conover will also be a part of the state’s attempt to revitalize a public rail system to western North Carolina.

Plans are in the works for a future depot platform and bridge that will connect to the Multimodal Complex. The \$1.1 million depot is budgeted for 2017 and will include a skyline depot platform adjacent to a section of the Norfolk Southern Railroad. The platform will connect by bridge to a depot waiting room in the newly opened complex.

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