



## 2025 Strategic Plan

### 1. Executive Summary:

**Overview:** The Monroe Chamber of Commerce is a business advocacy and trade organization dedicated to economic growth and creating an environment where local businesses THRIVE. We have an unapologetic love for this community and believe we live in the greatest community and greatest region in the world. We serve many roles to many audiences in the community:

- We are Story Tellers – Monroe and Northeast Louisiana have a beautiful and unique story with new pages being written every day. The Monroe Chamber of Commerce is committed to tell our story and not allow anyone position us or tell a story not true. We are committed to celebrating our businesses and community.
  - We are a policy advocate for business on the local, state and federal level.
  - We are a convener and builder of coalitions to ensure that key projects and infrastructure are completed and built.
  - We bring businesses and business leaders together, encouraging collaboration and connections among our members.
  - We are a uniter and Silo Buster.
  - We support and assist local business leaders and help them become community leaders.
  - We are the place to start to help your business grow and succeed.
  - We assist in building relationships, connecting key players in K-12, Higher Ed, Workforce Boards and Business and Industry.
  - We collaborate with surrounding communities to create strategies that grow membership and build strong, self-sustaining organizations.
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- **Mission Statement:** Our Mission is to create an environment in which our businesses thrive.
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- **Vision Statement:** We envision a thriving and vibrant community where we can raise our families with the assurance that our children will be well educated, have bright futures, and abundant job opportunities here in Northeast Louisiana.

- We have 11 Foundational building Blocks;
  - Integrity
  - Impact
  - Excellence
  - Accountability
  - Innovation
  - Teamwork/Collaboration
  - Leadership
  - Connection
  - Convener
  - Celebrations
  - Community

## 2. Situation Analysis

- **SWOT Analysis:** Great Moments are Born of Great Opportunity. There has never been a greater opportunity for Monroe, The Monroe Chamber of Commerce and Northeast Louisiana.
  - **Strengths:** Established & Engaged business community, diverse & growing membership, strong board leadership & active working committees, financial stability, *Leaders of Change*, dedicated & hardworking staff.
  - **Weaknesses:** Limited staffing capacity to meet growing demands, readiness gaps in workforce and infrastructure related to Meta project, educational challenges, and resistance to change within parts of the community
  - **Opportunities:** Meta project as a major driver of economic growth, expanding and preparing the regional workforce, enhancing staff capacity to meet future needs, deeper community engagement, regional growth and inclusion.
  - **Threats:** Meta project strain on existing resources if unaddressed, community apathy & negative perceptions, ongoing education system challenges
- **Market and Demographic Analysis:**

### Market and Demographic Analysis of Monroe, Louisiana

**1. Overview of Monroe, Louisiana: This overview is written as of today, with the understanding that our community is at the beginning of a very dramatic change.**

Monroe is a city located in the northeastern region of Louisiana, serving as the parish seat of Ouachita Parish and is the hub of Northeast Louisiana for education, healthcare, retail, restaurants and nightlife with a mix of urban and rural influences. As of the 2020 census, Monroe had a population of approximately 47,000 people.

The city is known for its historical significance, natural beauty, and diverse economy, restaurants, healthcare and the friendliest people in the world making it a key area for economic development and investment.

## 2. Demographic Profile:

- **Population Size and Growth:** Monroe has seen moderate population growth over the past decade. Monroe's population is diverse which is our strength. Quoting Larry Bell, "We are Monroe, Oneroe, a gourmet gumbo."
- **Age Distribution:**
  - Median Age: 33.8 years (slightly younger than the national median).
  - The largest age group is between 25-44 years, which comprises a significant portion of the workforce.
    - The Monroe/West Monroe Young Professionals are excited and engaged about our city and future.
  - There is a relatively balanced distribution between children, working adults, and seniors, though the city has a sizable senior population (over 65 years old), indicating a growing demand for healthcare services and retirement living options.
- **Ethnic Composition:** Monroe has a diverse population:
  - African American: Approximately 56% of the population.
  - White: Around 39% of the population.
  - Hispanic or Latino: 2-3% of the population.
  - Other (Asian, Native American, etc.): 1-2%.

The city's African American community plays a significant role in its culture, economy, and civic life. This diversity adds to the region's vibrancy and creates opportunities for businesses that cater to different cultural preferences and needs.

- **Household Income:** Monroe has a median household income of approximately \$35,000, which is lower than the national median of about \$70,000. Income disparity exists, with a large portion of the population earning below the poverty line. However, the city has pockets of middle-income families and high-income earners, particularly in residential areas and professional sectors.
- **Education Levels:** The educational attainment levels in Monroe show a mix of high school graduates and college-educated individuals. Roughly 85% of Monroe residents have graduated high school, but only about 22% hold a bachelor's degree or higher. There is a need for educational development, especially in terms of access to higher education and professional skill-building opportunities.

## 3. Economic Overview:

- **Industry Sectors:** Monroe's economy is diverse, with a strong reliance on healthcare, education, retail, and manufacturing.
  - **Healthcare and Medical Services:** The healthcare sector is one of the largest employers in Monroe, with institutions like St. Francis Health and Ochsner's LSU Health. The University of Louisiana at Monroe's (ULM) medical programs, Louisiana Delta Community College Nursing Programs, and The Edward Via School of Osteopathic Medicine (VCOM) also playing key roles.
  - **Education:** ULM is a significant economic driver, not only through educational services but also through research and development, sports programs, and cultural offerings. Louisiana Delta Community College is the #1 Community College in the nation offering a wide variety of educational and training opportunities.
  - **Manufacturing and Logistics:** Monroe benefits from its location along key transportation corridors, particularly Interstate 20, which allows for efficient shipping and access to major markets. Manufacturing, especially in the fields of food processing, chemicals, plastics and paper products, plays a significant role in the local economy.
    - Monroe manufacturing makes some pretty cool things including Monroe Steel, which is now on the moon.
    - 2 years ago, Local/Regional manufacturing formed an alliance called NELA MAC.
  - **Retail and Services:** Retail, hospitality, and service industries also contribute to the economy. While Monroe's retail scene has some national chains our heart and soul are local businesses, there is room for growth in higher-end retail and entertainment. Pecanland Mall receives over 2,000,000 visitors a year.
- **Unemployment Rate:** Monroe's unemployment rate tends to hover slightly above the national average due to its reliance on industries that are susceptible to market fluctuations. However, the city has seen efforts to attract more diverse industries to combat job loss in traditional sectors like manufacturing.
- **Business Environment:** Monroe offers opportunities for businesses to grow, especially in areas like healthcare services, education, logistics, and technology. The cost of living is low relative to larger metropolitan areas, making it an attractive option for companies looking for affordable operating expenses. However, challenges include the need for more highly skilled workers, as well as infrastructure improvements to support business growth.

#### 4. Market Trends and Opportunities:

- **Real Estate and Housing:** Monroe has a mixture of housing options, from historic homes to more modern residential developments. Housing prices are relatively affordable compared to other cities in Louisiana and the South. The market shows a demand for both affordable housing and higher-end developments, especially catering to younger professionals and retirees.

Investment in multi-family housing, townhouses, and senior living facilities may be a growing opportunity.

- **Healthcare Services:** Given the aging population and the prevalence of chronic health issues, healthcare services are in high demand. Expanding healthcare facilities and services, including specialty clinics and long-term care options, could see strong growth in the coming years.
- **Tourism and Recreation:** Monroe's location along the Ouachita River and its proximity to outdoor activities such as fishing, boating, and hunting, makes it a promising area for tourism development. There is potential for further investment in recreational tourism, including nature parks, cultural events, and festivals that could attract visitors from outside the region.
- **Retail and Consumer Goods:** While Monroe has basic retail offerings, there is potential for growth in specialized retail sectors, particularly boutique shops, unique dining experiences, and cultural stores that reflect the diversity of the population. Additionally, e-commerce and logistics-based services are becoming more prominent, especially with Monroe's access to transportation infrastructure.

## 5. The Richland Parish Data Center and its impact to Monroe.

\*In December of 2024, Meta broke ground on the world's largest data center in adjacent Richland Parish. The short term and long-term impact from this project will be generationally transformative. The trends of today will be very different in the coming months and years. This presents a great opportunity to unify our local business community, creating jobs, improving education outcomes, and find solutions to a region that will grow faster than it ever has.

## Conclusion:

Monroe, Louisiana presents a mix of opportunities and challenges. While the city has a strong economic base, particularly in healthcare, education, and manufacturing, there are areas where further investment and diversification could yield significant returns. By focusing on attracting and retaining talent, improving infrastructure, and expanding niche markets like tourism and specialized retail, Monroe has the potential to grow and adapt in the coming years. The city offers a relatively low-cost living environment, making it an appealing choice for businesses and residents, looking for a balanced lifestyle.

## 3. Goals and Objectives

- **Goal 1:** Economic Development – Work with existing partners to build a “gig” economy ( a nickname we gave the changing landscape of our area due to the Meta project)as the Richland Parish Meta project ramps up.
  - **Objective 1.1:** Work with local municipalities and economic development groups to identify needs and build community solutions.

- **Objective 1.2:** Work with the Richland Parish Chamber of Commerce in assisting them as they meet the growing needs of the Meta project.
  - **Objective 1.3:** Further develop the Richwood and Sterlington Business Alliances.
- **Goal 2:** Marketing Monroe and Northeast Louisiana
  - **Objective 2.1:** Use the Leaders of Change as the foundation to market Monroe and Northeast Louisiana (both inside and outside our region)
  - **Objective 2.2:** Expand our SEO/Press Release project.
  - **Objective 2.3:** Expand our podcast and reels.
- **Goal 3:** Workforce and Education
  - **Objective 3.1:** Partner with our K-12 partners in developing and preparing students for jobs.
  - **Objective 3.2:** Partner with our Higher Education partners in developing and preparing students for jobs.
  - **Objective 3.3:** Work in collaboration with other local partners to build a long-term community strategy for Workforce.
- **Goal 4:** Community Engagement
  - **Objective 4.1:** Support our arts and quality of life community efforts.
  - **Objective 4.2:** Use our Government Advocacy Committee to promote positive change, Build Legislative Relationships, Raise Awareness, foster public engagement, and monitor Legislation.
  - **Objective 3.3** Help members through public awareness and fun events.
- **Goal 5:** Small Business and Membership
  - **Objective 5.1:** Celebrate members through events and networking.
  - **Objective 5.2:** Build our next generation of Leaders through our affinity groups.
  - **Objective 5.3:** Develop value added programs to help our small business community.
  - **Objective 5.4:** Cultivate a membership that reflects diversity in both cultural backgrounds and types of businesses that fosters a sense of belonging and inclusion.
- **Goal 6:** Healthy Community
  - **Objective 6:1: SEO Project – Community Image Enhancement**  
Continue developing and supporting the SEO campaign in partnership with Kinetics to improve public perception of the region. This will include encouraging community participation through press release submissions and ongoing content creation to highlight positive developments in the area.
  - **Objective 6:2: Childcare for the Workforce**  
Explore and support initiatives that expand access to affordable, high-quality childcare options for working families. The committee will collaborate with local and state stakeholders to identify gaps and advocate for solutions that address workforce retention and support economic stability.

- **Objective 6:3 Healthcare Education**  
Promote accessible healthcare education throughout the community. This includes raising awareness of available health services, prevention strategies, and programs such as the CERT initiative and Marijuana education. The committee will work to increase health literacy and empower residents to make informed healthcare decisions.
- **Objective 6:4 Healthcare Survey Continuum**  
Build upon the existing community health survey by expanding data collection and engagement efforts. The goal is to better understand the needs of the population and use the results to inform policy, programs, and future committee priorities.
- **Goal 7: Long Range Planning/Growth**
  - **Objective 7.1:** Build a 5-year capital campaign to fill market gaps and grow our region.

#### **4. Key Initiatives**

##### **Economic Development:**

- The Monroe Chamber will continue to partner
  - City of Monroe – GROW NELA
  - Sterlington Business Alliance
  - Richwood Business Alliance
  - Richland Parish Chamber

##### **Marketing Monroe and Northeast Louisiana:**

- *Leaders of Change* - Our *Leaders of Change* rolled into 2025 after a successful 2024. Their goal is to share their unapologetic love for our city and region. Through a multimedia approach they inspire and educate both locals and others about the greatest community in the world.
  - 2025 Campaign:
    - Super Bowl - New Orleans and statewide. Our *Leaders of Change* will roll out a statewide print and digital campaign celebrating Monroe and driving viewers to a new landing page called "More in Monroe".
    - Social Media - Our *Leaders of Change* will focus on 4 areas with an aggressive social media campaign in 2025.
      - *Leaders of Change* Testimonial Videos
      - NELA MAC and other local jobs
      - Gig Economy
      - More in Monroe
      - "Did you Know" Fun Facts about Monroe

- Bayou Life - We will continue to use Bayou Life to celebrate our members, events and community.
  - The Monroe Chamber Happy Hour - The Happy Hour is a weekly one-hour radio show on KMLB (AM & FM) that celebrates our community and the amazing people that are the game changers and difference makers.
  - The Ouachita Citizen - Monthly half page ad to celebrate our great community.
  - Radio - We will use agreements with both Radio Groups
  - TV Commercials
- Social Media – We will continue to use all platforms of social media to inform market and message.
- SEO / Press Release Project – Work with our local health organizations to build key words and push out positive news.
- Newsletter – Continue to use our newsletter to disseminate information and promote members. We will also re-format this communication piece in 2025.
- Made in Monroe Podcast – build on the success of 2024 with 12 more podcast of people who could be anywhere but chose to be in Monroe.
- Reels – use our video shorts/reels to showcase what makes Monroe a cool city.
- Monthly Video Recaps – partner with a local production company to video our monthly activities, package it and use it promote the chamber.

## **Workforce and Education**

- Superintendent Accountability Lunch and Learns – we will host a series of luncheons featuring Superintendents Sam Moore and Todd Guice discussing the different aspects of the new Accountability system with the business community.
- Workforce Task Force – partner with Mayor Ellis and NELA MAC to build a task force to address workforce needs and challenges.
- Teacher Symposium – we will increase our sponsorship and presence in the Northeast Louisiana Teacher Symposium.
- STEM Support – Continue to support our K-12 partners and other organizations like The Northeast Louisiana Children's Museum to focus our youth on a STEM education.
- Entrepreneur Support – Work with local companies like Maven Scout to assist local entrepreneurs.
- Career Fair – host a Career Fair as part of our Non-Profit mission.
- Pair With Me – host our 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Pair with Me Awards.



- Resume Writing – hold a Resume Writing session in conjunction with our Career Fair.
- State of Local Education – hold our 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual State of Local Education.
- President and Chancellor Searches – Actively participate in the search for new leadership at Ulm and LDCC.
- DBE (Disadvantage Business Enterprises) – Work with area partners and state DOTD to assist local DBE's with credentials and certificates.

### **Community Engagement:**

- Create an Arts and Quality of Life Committee
- Government Advocacy Committee
  - Northern Exposure - Coordinate Northern Louisiana Chambers and Economic Groups for a day in Baton Rouge.
    - Priorities and Possibilities – partner with the WMWO Chamber to sponsor a breakfast in BR to promote both cities and the parish.
  - Washington DC Mardi Gras – Spend the week prior to Washington DC Mardi Gras lobbying with the city. Host 318 night.
  - Lunches
    - Governor Landry
    - Senator Cassidy
    - Senator Kennedy
    - Congresswoman Letlow
    - Speaker Johnson
    - State of Local Government
    - Other
      - Commissioner Strain
      - Secretary Bourgeois and Secretary Schowen
      - Lt. Governor Billy Nungesser
- Golf Tournament – Host our Annual Golf Tournament at Frenchmans Bend CC.
- Greencube Treasure Hunt – 2X a year. – a Sponsored treasure hunt to brand our partners Greencube.

### **Small Business and Membership**

- Continue Networking and Learning events.
- Coffee and Conversation
- Monroe Mingle
- Chamber 101
- Leadership Ouachita

- Leadership Ouachita Alumni
  - Social Savvy
  - Ambassadors
  - Young Professionals
    - 20 Under 40
  - Technology
    - Cyber Security and Technology Summit
    - TH Scott Awards of Excellence
- NEW: Explore a small business insurance program for our members.

### Long Range Strategic Planning

- Capital Campaign – Build a 5-year plan that will further position the Chamber to grow Monroe and Northeast Louisiana.
  - Staffing
  - Marketing
  - Other Resources

### 5. Strategic Partnerships

- Local government and economic development agencies:
- Educational Institutions:
- Regional Business Alliances:

### 6. Performance Metrics

- **Membership Growth:** The Monroe Chamber will grow to 1,200 members by December 31, 2025.
- **Event Participation:** We will grow event participation and event revenues by 10%.
- **Business Retention:** The Chamber will have a retention goal of 75%
- **Economic Impact:** The Monroe Chamber will play a key role with other community partners in building our new gig economy, workforce initiatives & strategies and growing local businesses.
- **Community Engagement:** The Monroe Chamber will lead in building community pride and awareness. We will achieve a goal of 7,500,000 impressions.

### 7. Conclusion:

The Monroe Chamber of Commerce is dedicated to enhancing the local business environment by focusing on workforce development, infrastructure improvement, and overall business climate enhancement. The Monroe Chamber has an unapologetic love for our city and region. Our mission involves supporting existing businesses and attracting new ones to foster economic growth in the region while building an environment where all local businesses thrive.