



US CONEC ANNOUNCEMENT

October 22, 2026

COMPANY OVERVIEW

US Conec was founded in Hickory in 1992 and has been headquartered here ever since. The company designs and manufactures high-precision fiber optic components that make high-density fiber connections possible in communications networks and digital infrastructure around the world. US Conec is jointly owned by Corning Incorporated, Fujikura Ltd. and NTT Advanced Technology Corporation, and employs more than 1,000 people globally, including 289 full-time employees in Hickory. Demand for the company's products has grown rapidly alongside the nationwide build-out of digital infrastructure, and this expansion will add the production capacity US Conec needs to keep pace.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Is US Conec a new company to the community?

No. US Conec was founded in Hickory in 1992 and has been headquartered here for more than three decades. It is one of the City's most technologically advanced employers, with design, engineering and manufacturing all taking place here.

How is US Conec involved in the community?

US Conec has a long track record as a community partner. Catawba Valley Community College recently named the company its 2026 Community Partner Award recipient. US Conec has supported the NCCET Innovation Camps for more than 15 years, helping reduce camp costs and providing scholarships for students in grades 1 through 10. It is the headline sponsor of the annual Hickory Bot Battles, a multi-day robotics competition featuring more than 100 area school teams, and a long-time partner of the Catawba Science Center, including Saturday project-based workshops for area children. The company also has supported HKY4Vets in the past, which serves transitioning military members and their families, and is a long-time participant in the Catawba Apprenticeship Network.

What does this new project entail?

US Conec will invest \$140 million to equip and upfit a 221,000-square-foot industrial building under construction at the Catawba Commerce Center in Fairgrove Business Park. The building will house new manufacturing capacity for the company's precision optical components. US Conec evaluated locations outside North Carolina for this expansion, including two other states that were also offering incentives, before choosing to grow in Hickory.

Is US Conec already growing in Hickory?

Yes. Separate from this project, US Conec is moving forward with a 40,000-square-foot building in Fairgrove Business Park and approximately half of the former Transportation Insight site in downtown Hickory. The company also has a new production and engineering facility under construction at one of their existing sites in Hickory. These investments are not part of the incentive request. Once the Catawba Commerce Center facility is complete, US Conec will operate five facilities in the City of Hickory.

What types of jobs is the company committing to, and how many?

Under the proposed agreements, US Conec commits to creating a minimum of 200 new full-time positions in Hickory by the end of 2030, while retaining its existing workforce of 289 employees. The 200 new positions carry an average annual wage of \$60,000, above the current Catawba County average wage of approximately \$56,900 per year. Using economic impact multipliers, the expansion is expected to support a total of 310 to 340 direct/indirect jobs across the Catawba County economy.

Will these jobs be available to local residents?

Yes, and connecting local residents to these opportunities is a priority. US Conec has recruited from the regional workforce for more than 30 years and is a long-time participant in the Catawba Apprenticeship Network. Given the level of design, engineering and quality behind the company's products, a highly skilled workforce is critical to this expansion.

The growth of the fiber optic and communications technology sector in Catawba County has also prompted early work on the Catawba Optical Alliance for Talent (COAT), a workforce initiative to build local pipelines into careers in this industry. The concept envisions a privately led consortium of sector employers working alongside education and workforce partners on training programs, recruitment pathways and career entry points. COAT is in its conceptual stage and no formal commitments have been made, but it represents one pathway to ensuring this growth translates directly to opportunity for people who live here.

What is the timeline for this expansion?

The Catawba Commerce Center building is already under construction, and US Conec is expected to begin equipping it in 2027, with investment and job creation phased in over the following years. The main tenants of the project are expected to be complete by the end of 2030.

How will this benefit the City of Hickory, Catawba County, and their citizens?

At completion, US Conec's assessed tax value in Hickory is expected to grow roughly fivefold, to an estimated \$175 to \$200 million. That would make US Conec the third-largest taxpayer in the City of Hickory, behind only MDI and Corning, and estimated 2% of the City's total assessed value. It would also become the fourth-largest employer in Hickory.

Beyond the tax base, 200 new careers at above-average wages and the retention of 289 existing high-wage jobs represent meaningful opportunity for local residents. The expansion also strengthens Catawba County's position as one of the nation's leading communities for communications technology manufacturing, a sector directly tied to the country's broadband and digital infrastructure priorities.

What support is the State of North Carolina providing?

The State of North Carolina has indicated support for this project through a One NC Fund Grant and job training resources through the North Carolina Community College System. These state resources reflect the project's significance to the state's economic development priorities.

What are the local governments being asked to consider?

At a joint public hearing, both the Hickory City Council and the Catawba County Board of Commissioners will consider proposed local performance-based incentive agreements in support of the project. No local incentive action has been taken at this time. The public hearing is the required first step in that process under North Carolina law. Any action by either governing body would occur following that hearing. For citizens who would like to better understand how local performance-based incentives work, the Catawba County EDC has launched an Economic Development 101 content series on our website covering topics such as how these agreements are structured, how taxpayers are protected, and how the public process works – available at <https://www.catawbaedc.org/economic-development-101>.

When and where is the public hearing?

A date has not yet been set. A joint public hearing of the Hickory City Council and the Catawba County Board of Commissioners is currently projected for later in November. The date, time and location will be published at least 10 days before the meeting in the Hickory Daily Record and posted on the [Catawba County EDC website](#).