TWIN COUNTIES VISIONING
FOR A BETTER LIFE

A Regional Vision and Action Group Priorities:

Summary of Study Circle Dialogues and

Recommendations by the Twin Counties Community Partners Coalition

Twin Counties Visioning and Strategic Plan Process

November 29, 2012

Developed by Skeo Solutions for the
Twin Counties Visioning and Strategic Plan Process

Foreword

> ## The best way to predict the future is to create it.
>
> ### ~ Peter Drucker

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The Twin Counties Region has a rich, shared history as well as present-day economic and political ties that weave together residents of cities, towns and rural areas in a shared destiny. Our region is a special place to live, work and play, and we have many wonderful community assets upon which a vibrant and sustainable future can be built. Some of these assets are highlighted in the box on page 4 for reference; these assets were identified based on conversations with project leadership and in the Twin Counties Competitive Assessment study described on pages 4-5.

However, the past 10 years have been difficult for our area. We suffered enormous devastation from flooding during Hurricane Floyd in September 1999. We have lost our textile manufacturing industries and tobacco production has declined significantly. Our inner-city neighborhoods show evidence of decline with many homes boarded up. In October 2009, *Forbes* magazine listed the Rocky Mount Metropolitan Statistical Area as one of the 10 most impoverished areas in America.

In response to these indicators, the City of Rocky Mount, Edgecombe County and Nash County are partnering through the Twin Counties Visioning and Strategic Plan Process to develop a broad-based vision and strategic plan for the future of the Twin Counties Region. This report summarizes the outcomes from the Goals and Vision phase which included a regional Study Circle Dialogue process. This report summarizes the outcomes of the Study Circle Dialogue process and the subsequent recommendations of the Twin Counties Community Partners Coalition for a regional vision and a set of priorities to guide Action Groups in developing a strategic plan.

For more information about the project, please visit the project website: http://twincountiesvisioning.skeo.com
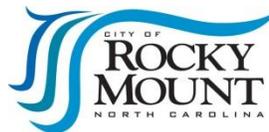
The most successful reinventions of these challenged cities that we have seen involve groups of people—perhaps small groups at first—sharing a commitment to bringing disparate people together in ever-expanding networks, raising expectations, keeping an eye on the big picture, but focusing on small, attainable successes and relentlessly building on them ...

While each city approaches the revitalization puzzle quite differently, the pivotal pieces are the same from one context to the next. They are (1) leadership, (2) civic infrastructure, (3) vision and plan, (4) social inclusion, (5) quality of life, (6) access to opportunities, (7) resource acquisition, and (8) image and perception ... In an environment of many challenges and limited resources, priorities must be set and investment targeted. A vision built with broad community input and consensus provides a framework for that difficult decision.

~ "Voices from Forgotten Cities: Innovative Revitalization Coalitions in America's Older Small Cities" (MIT's School of Architecture and Planning, 2007)

Contents

The following Addenda provide a supplementary record of the action ideas submitted by the Study Circle groups:

  Addendum A: Regional and Local Action Recommendations (Organized by Approach)

  Addendum B: Study Circle Submissions

  Addendum C: Recommendations from Just Health and Food Summit

Introduction

The City of Rocky Mount, Edgecombe County and Nash County are partnering to sponsor the Twin Counties Visioning and Strategic Plan Process. Launched in November 2011, this process is an opportunity for residents and community leaders to create a road map to a sustainable and prosperous community.

The goals of the Twin Counties Visioning and Strategic Plan Process are to:

- Create a shared vision and strategic plan based on the collective quality of life goals that community members have for their region, and
- Position the Twin Counties Region to succeed in a globally competitive economy.

To date, the region has made great progress in the visioning process including:

- Appointing a Coalition representing Twin County region to guide the process;
- Launching the process with a kickoff Public Forum;
- Framing the key issues of the process;
- Conducting broad community outreach; and
- Sponsoring a region-wide study circle dialogue process.

Project Milestones

Fall 2011: Project kickoff and Town Hall Forum
Winter 2011: Framing the issues
Spring 2012: Broad community outreach
Summer 2012: Study circle dialogues
Fall 2012: Determine vision and action groups
Winter 2012: Form action plans
Spring 2013: Develop integrated strategic plan

Completing the region-wide study circle dialogue process represents a significant milestone in the visioning and strategic plan process. Between April 23rd and September 15th, 2012, over 360 individuals participated in 64 study circles that met across the Twin Counties Region.

This report summarizes the outcomes of the study circle dialogue process including potential vision words, key challenges and action recommendations. Based on this information, the Twin Counties Coalition met on October 5th to select a final vision statement and identify a set of priority action groups that would form the basis of a regional strategic plan. These recommendations are summarized in this report and were presented to the community at the Town Hall Forum on November 13th, 2012.

Study Circles Process

Dialogue Process

Study circles bring people together to talk about an issue. Using the *Discussion Guide for the Twin Counties Visioning and Strategic Plan Process*, study circle groups met for one to four sessions. The sessions were facilitated by trained facilitators from the community.

By talking about existing conditions in the Twin Counties Region, participants gained a clearer understanding of regional interdependence and their own community's unique position in the regional economy. Participants developed new ideas about what they can do to help their community move forward towards a common vision.

Over the course of the dialogue, each group made a list of words that described their vision for the region, identified the primary challenges the region faces, and developed a set of action recommendations. At the conclusion of each study circle, these ideas were submitted electronically by the study circle facilitators. These ideas are summarized in this report.

Discussion Guide Development

Study circles use discussion guides to facilitate dialogue around an issue or set of issues. The *Discussion Guide for the Twin Counties Visioning and Strategic Plan Process* was developed by Skeo Solutions in consultation with the Core Team and Community Partners Coalition to guide discussion around the following issues:

- A vision for the Twin Counties Region.
- Identification of the challenges faced by the region.
- Generation of action ideas to address these challenges and achieve the vision.

As a starting point for the development of the guide, the project team reviewed the *Twin Counties Competitive Assessment* (TCCA) study by Dr. James Johnson with the Frank Hawkins

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Regional Assets

Location
- Proximity to multiple population centers and trade opportunities.
- Proximity to major transportation infrastructure, including the intersection of I-64 and I-95

Sense of Place
- Small-town atmosphere and sense of community
- Cultural history and character
- Community resilience in the face of disaster (e.g., flooding)
- Valuable parks and rivers that enhance quality of life and tourism
- Existing historic preservation and green initiatives

Strong Local Institutions and Businesses
- Strong local governments and economic development organizations
- Carolina Gateway Partnership and existing business incentives
- Existing base of industries and farms

Built Environment
- Walkable neighborhoods and downtowns
- Historic architecture
- Pre-developed industrial properties

Natural Resources
- Productive farmland
- Undeveloped, available land
- Tar River and natural open space

Kenan Institute of Private Enterprise of UNC-Chapel Hill. The study, which was commissioned by Edgecombe County, Nash County and the City of Rocky Mount, articulates some of the challenges and opportunities faced by the community as it tries to build a better future; it also identifies a number of regional assets that can provide the groundwork for moving forward.

Additionally, members of the Community Partners Coalition met for a number of facilitated discussions to identify key issues and priorities for the region. These issues are summarized in the text box at right.

The guide was developed based on the recommendations identified in these discussions and in the TCCA study. To download a copy of the discussion guide, please visit the project website.

Key Issues

The following key issues and approaches are drawn from the *Twin Counties Visioning and Strategic Plan Process Discussion Guide*, and were selected based on the findings of the TCCA Study and recommendations from the Coalition and Core Team.

- Align the leadership of the region.
- Improve conditions of poverty.
- Improve race relations.
- Improve K-20 education to equip youth to thrive and prosper.
- Retain young adults.
- Improve health outcomes.
- Address electricity costs in Rocky Mount.
- Job creation and talent recruitment.
- Nurture and grow the local elder care economy.
- Leverage the internet to promote the region.
- Rebrand as a sustainable community.

Data Analysis and Synthesis

The facilitator for each study circle was asked to summarize input from their group. The facilitators used a simple form on the project website to capture the vision themes, key challenges and recommended actions from each study circle. Records of each group's submission can be found in Addendum B.

The consultant team then compiled the study circle recommendations into a master spreadsheet and sorted the submissions according the following methods.

Vision
Vision words and phrases were reviewed and grouped according to similar categories by concept. For instance, words or phrases that included some iteration of the concept "opportunity" were grouped together. These words and phrases in this particular category included:

> Opportunity, Opportunities, Equal Opportunities, Resources for All, Diverse Opportunities, A Diverse city of opportunities, Economic and Social Opportunities

Based on the top ranking vision concepts, the project team developed a series of potential vision statements for consideration and refinement by the Community Partners Coalition.

Challenges and Action Recommendations
Challenges and action recommendations were sorted by the key approaches found in the *Discussion Guide for the Twin Counties Visioning and Strategic Plan Process*. In cases where a
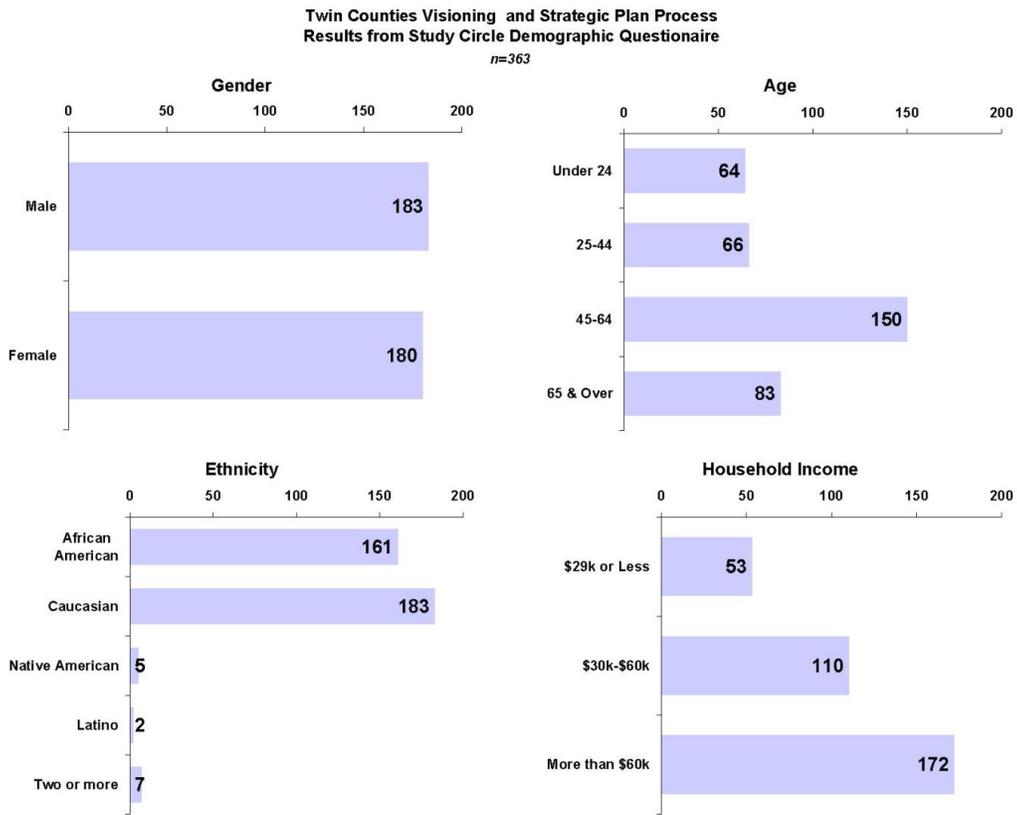
cluster of challenges or action recommendations did not fit one of the existing approaches, they were grouped into one of several emerging approach categories. In cases where a recommendation fit more than one approach, it was placed under both categories.

Once the recommendations were sorted by approach, a chart was developed to track how many recommendations fell into each category. To review the chart summarizing the number of recommendations by approach, see page 11.

For a full list of the regional action recommendations and local community action recommendations, see Addendum A.

Study Circle Demographics

Each participant was also asked to submit demographic information to help evaluate what groups the visioning process had engaged. Not all participants chose to share their demographic information. Of those that did, the following results emerged:

Twin Counties Visioning and Strategic Plan Process
Results from Study Circle Demographic Questionaire
n=363

Gender

Male	183
Female	180

Age

Under 24	64
25-44	66
45-64	150
65 & Over	83

Ethnicity

African American	161
Caucasian	183
Native American	5
Latino	2
Two or more	7

Household Income

$29k or Less	53
$30k-$60k	110
More than $60k	172

Cross Tabulations

Ethnicity - Income

Ethnicity	$29k or less	$30-$59k	$60k or more
African American	44	60	38
Caucasian	3	43	128
Native American	1	1	3
Latino	0	2	0
Two or More	2	2	3
Other	2	2	0

Ethnicity - Age

Age	African American	Caucasian	Native American	Latino	Two or more	Other
Under 24	48	9	0	0	5	2
25-44	20	41	3	0	1	1
45-64	61	84	1	2	1	0
65 and over	32	49	1	0	0	1

Study circle demographics closely matched the U.S. Census demographics for the Rocky Mount Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA):

	Rocky Mount MSA (U.S. Census, 2010)	Study Circles
Male	47.6%	50.4%
Female	52.4%	49.6%
African American	44.7%	45%
Caucasian	49.5%	51%
Native American	.5%	1.4%
Latino	5.3%	.6%
Two or more races	1.4%	2%

A Vision for the Twin Counties Region

Vision Words Suggested by the Study Circles

Each Study Circle group identified three words to describe their vision for the future of the Twin Counties region. The chart on the following page lists vision words and phrases in order of frequency recommended. Words and phrases recommended by two or fewer groups are listed on page 9. In addition, vision words were suggested by the Just Health and Food Summit and can be referenced in Addendum C.

Vision Statement Options

Based on the top ranking vision concepts, the project team developed a series of potential vision statements for consideration and refinement by the Community Partners Coalition.

Option 1
The Twin Counties Region is a diverse and neighborly community that prospers from our rich history, cultural values, strong educational system and entrepreneurial spirit.

Option 2
Grounded in a sense of pride in our rich history and culture, the Twin Counties Region is joining together to build a more prosperous future for our children, based on a thriving educational system, economic innovation, a business-friendly climate, and a shared commitment to bridge our divides and come together in unity to achieve our goals.

Option 3
The Twin Counties Region is a thriving crossroads of innovation where the diverse talents and experiences of our many communities foster shared opportunities for academic and economic success, healthy families, and welcoming neighborhoods.

Option 4
The Twin Counties Region is a welcoming community of opportunity for all with successful schools and young people, safe and healthy neighborhoods, thriving communities and prosperous, innovative businesses.

Recommended Vision Statement

Based on these options, the Twin Counties Community Partners Coalition selected the following vision statement to guide the region as an inspirational description of what the Twin Counties Region would like to achieve or accomplish in the mid-term or long-term future.

The Twin Counties Region is a thriving crossroads of innovation where the broad talents and experiences of our many communities foster shared opportunities for educational achievement, economic success, healthy families, and welcoming neighborhoods.

Most Commonly Suggested Vision Words and Phrases

Vision Words by Frequency	Frequency
Safe, safety, security, crime reduction	26
Opportunity, opportunities, equal opportunities, resources for all, diverse opportunities, diverse city of opportunities, economic and social opportunities	22
Diversified, diversity, integrated, diversely talented, a diverse city of opportunities	15
Educated, education, education addressing student aspirations, access to good schools and colleges, good education for all, quality education, educational opportunities	15
Pride, community pride, area pride, people pride, community spirit and pride	13
Unity, united, unified, working together, unity to improve	12
Healthy, healthy community, livable/healthy community, healthy people, health care accessibility	9
Spiritual, moral values, spirituality and culture, faith-based values	8
Prosperous, prosperity, thriving, quality of life	8
Viable, viable economy, thriving economy, economically stable, economic activity, prosperous	8
Respect. Respect everyone, respect for self and others	8
Family, community, family-oriented	7
Jobs, employment, friendly business climate, better jobs, good jobs	7
Dutiful service, serving, helping others, community involvement, involvement, helpful	6
Hope, positive, positive people, perception of a positive future	5
Friendly	5
Heritage, historical, culture, sense of culture and history	5
Progressiveness, progressive economic engine, crossroads of innovation: providing progressive opportunities, economic Hub, entrepreneurial	5
Hospitable/welcoming newcomers	4
Cooperation, sharing, coordinated	4
Excellence, striving for excellence, improving	4
Diverse housing, fair and affordable housing, nice buildings and houses, better housing and community	4
Global, crossroads to a Global Community, Crossroads	3
Innovative	3
Need for networking, connection, organizing	3
Visionary, future	3
Engaging youth & young adults, engaged, empowering the community	3
Diversely talented, many assets, diversity of types of businesses	3

Vision Words and Phrases Suggested by Two or Fewer Groups

An "All American Region"
Beautiful atmosphere
Caring
Communication
Counties
Creating, creativity
Dedicated
Determined, determination
Downtown nightlife
Edgecombe/Nash
Enhancement
Enrichment
Free citywide internet
Fun
Good retirement area
Growth
Holistic
Inclusive
Justice
Leadership, Take action/leadership
Loving Life
Neighborhood revitalization, beautiful neighborhood
Order
Ownership
Perception of image
Personal responsibility
Planning
Recreation
Rejuvenating
Resilient
Shopping centers
Successful
Sustainable, sustainability
Trust
Vibrant
Wholesome
Youth retainment, younger

Key Challenges and Action Recommendations

Each Study Circle group identified challenges and recommended three priority actions at both the community and regional scale.[1] The following chart summarizes responses organized by the approaches presented in the study guide. Challenges and action recommendations that did not fit an existing approach are footnoted as an "emerging approach."

First tier approaches (challenges mentioned most frequently) are the basis for the consultant recommendations for Action Groups presented in the following section. Second tier approaches could be considered for an Action Group, or incorporated as principles while addressing the first tier challenges. In addition the Just Health and Food Summit submitted recommendations (included in Addendum C) that support the formation of an Action Group devoted to Encourage Healthy Lifestyles.

Approach (from Study Guide)	Challenges	Community Actions	Regional Actions
First Tier			
Job creation and talent recruitment	68	60	51
Retain young adults	39	31	28
Improve educational opportunities and outcomes	37	52	40
Promote a positive image of the region[2]	30	32	50
Improve quality of life opportunities in disadvantaged neighborhoods	22	34	25
Second Tier			
Crime prevention and safety[2]	21	17	12
Build a regional sense of community	20	32	44
Community improvements and programs[2]	17	33	25
Address high electric costs in Rocky Mount	15	7	3
Encourage healthy lifestyles	12	15	15
Improve race relations and address race-based disparities	12	8	7
Third Tier			
Support a culture of personal repsonsibility[2]	5	-	-
Rebrand as a sustainable community	3	4	11
Grow the elder care economy	2	3	2
Leverage the internet to promote the region	1	7	13

[1] A full list of the Regional and Local Community Action Recommendations can be found in Addendum A. A complete record of the responses and recommendations submitted by each Study Circle group can be found in Addendum B.
[2] Not included in the Study Guide, but identified as an emerging approach.

Consultant Team Recommendations

Based on the top challenges and action recommendations submitted by the Study Circle groups, the consultant team outlined five potential Action Groups could be formed based on the following priorities. Each of these draft priorities (along with associated themes and action ideas) is discussed in further detail in the following pages of this section.

- Priority 1. Invest in job creation and talent recruitment.

- Priority 2. Retain young adults.

- Priority 3. Improve educational opportunities and outcomes.

- Priority 4. Promote a positive image of the region.

- Priority 5. Improve quality of life opportunities in disadvantaged neighborhoods (e.g., housing, healthcare).

Priority 1. Invest in Job Creation and Talent Recruitment

Job training and job creation was identified by the most groups as a challenge for the region. Participants also generated the most action recommendations addressing this issue. Recommendations center around the following themes:

Theme 1. Develop job training opportunities.
Participants recommend job training programs that:

- Expand the skill set necessary in the 21st century;
- Align with industries and businesses in the Region; and
- Coordinate student internship or mentoring programs with industries in the region.

Theme 2. Provide incentives that support local entrepreneurs.
Recommendations focus on incentives that support:

- Homegrown talent to develop viable businesses and sustainable jobs;
- Entrepreneurial ventures, particularly sustainable and "green" business ventures;
- Businesses that attract and retain the 25-44 year old population;
- Regional business incubator to develop a new industry cluster; and
- Agribusiness.

Theme 3. Develop regional business recruitment strategy.
Participants recommend developing a unified regional business recruitment strategy that:

- Coordinates across regional leaders and business groups;
- Leverages regional assets;
- Recruits multiple businesses to our area; and
- Leverages existing organizations to better promote and achieve economic outreach.

Theme 4. Invest in infrastructure and community development.
Participants recommend creating a business-friendly atmosphere through infrastructure and community development investments, including:

- Explore the feasibility of a new convention center that could host trade shows, conferences and meetings.
- Beautify all entrances into the region.
- Establish a "best of eastern NC" tourist stop that showcases products and services of the Twin County Region, modeled after "Tamarack" in Beckley, W Va.
- Support brownfield redevelopment.

Priority 2. Retain Young Adults

Retaining young adults is a crosscutting priority. In addition to the recommendations below, recommendations in the education and job training/creation approaches also emphasize this goal. Recommendations center on the following themes:

Theme 1. Invest in job training, job creation and entrepreneurship for youth and young adults.
Participant recommendations include:

- Offer paid internships or mentoring programs for students.
- Align courses and certificates with local industry needs.
- Establish a local Physician Assistant program and other medical degree programs.

Theme 2. Support leadership development for youth and young adults.
Recommendations recognize the significance of early and sustained leadership development investments in area youth and young adults. Participant recommendations include:

- Form focus groups to identify strategies that could help retain youth in the region.
- Develop a Twin Counties Youth Leadership Council.
- Host Leadership development training programs for adults.
- Involve younger people in event planning at regional entertainment venues to attract the 25-44 year old age group.

Theme 3. Develop amenities for young people.
Recommendations recognize the significance of quality of life amenities for attracting and retaining young adults in the Twin Counties Region. Participant recommendations include:

- Involve younger people in event planning at regional entertainment venues to attract the 25-44 year old age group.
- Bring more entertainment options.
- Retain youth specifically with good housing stock, social activities, and jobs
- Develop a major attraction which provides jobs along with activities for young people.

Priority 3. Improve Educational Opportunities and Outcomes

The challenge of improving educational opportunities and outcomes was ranked just behind retaining young adults; however, participants generated more action recommendations for this approach than for the other, indicating a high level of energy around this topic. Recommendations center on the following themes:

Theme 1. Expand vocational/technical training opportunities.
Over half of the education-related recommendations mentioned vocational training, and many emphasized coordination with local businesses to align courses and degrees with emerging job opportunities. Specific action ideas include:

- Form one vocational high school for Nash & Edgecombe Counties.
- Utilize area retirees to assist in teaching technical courses.
- Offer internships or mentoring programs for students.
- Create a liaison in the Superintendent's office to align courses with local industry needs.
- Establish a local Physician Assistant and other medical degree programs.
- Re-tool education for the "green economy."
- Provide evolving educational opportunities that match evolving job opportunities.

Theme 2. Provide a network of support for all children and youth.
Participant recommendations include:

- Make early childhood education (with funding) accessible for all children (0-5).
- Provide youth programs.
- Support students and parents in bridging the gap between school, home and community.
- Host beginning leadership development programs in schools for students.
- Adopt best practices to ensure educational system is supporting all children
- Develop charter/magnet schools that provide a radical change in educational approach
- Encourage collaboration between all school systems in the Twin Counties to attract quality teachers and produce prepared graduates.

Priority 4. Promote a Positive Image of the Region

This emerging issue received the fourth highest ranking as a challenge facing the Twin Counties Region. It tied the top challenge (job training and job creation) for the number of regional action ideas generated by participants, again indicating high level of support for addressing this issue. Recommendations center on the following themes:

Theme 1. Develop a vision that brings the region together.
Participants recommended developing a vision that:

- Promotes an "All American Region" and encourages everyone to get involved; and
- Inspires people in the Region to come together and support a "Neighbor helping Neighbor" community spirit.

Theme 2. Develop a positive awareness campaign.
Participant recommendations include:

- Create an independent entity to promote a positive image of the region.
- Publicize academic/athletic accomplishments, Rocky Mount Sports Complex activities.
- Use social media to promote the area and dispel negative stereotypes.
- Organize a "Relay for Community Pride."
- Retool existing communication venues and collaborate across sectors to create communications clearing house to share events and successes related to education, business, government, non-profits, and faith communities.

Theme 3. Market the region for business.
Participant recommendations include:

- Develop a website to promote the advantages of relocating a business, starting a new business, raising a family and retirement.
- Prepare feature articles highlighting local business contributions to the local economy.
- Send out a newsletter detailing updates about regional business meetings and projects.

Theme 4. Market natural and cultural heritage.
Participant recommendations include:

- Promote our assets such as the Tar River, parks, and local icons.
- Provide activities (rafting, boating, riverside amenities) that leverage natural assets.
- Promote the historical sites and history of the Region.
- Establish a "best of eastern NC" tourist stop to showcase local products and services.

Theme 5. Develop a coordinated Twin Counties Region marketing campaign.
Participants recommended a coordinated, multipronged effort that includes:

- Create a major advertising campaign utilizing both local and regional TV, internet.
- Hire a marketing team to develop graphics, increase activities, and host events.
- Develop a task force to update the community website.
- Use social media.

Priority 5. Improve Quality of Life Opportunities in Disadvantaged Neighborhoods (e.g. housing, healthcare)

Improving the conditions of poverty is the fifth ranked challenge. The action ideas grouped in this category focus on more immediate opportunities for assistance and development. Recommendations center on the following themes:

Theme 1. Improve educational, employment and entrepreneurial opportunities.
The more extensive lists of action ideas in the job creation and education categories may serve as long-term strategies for addressing poverty and life chances of children and adults across the region. Some of these action ideas identified an explicit connection between academic achievement, job opportunities and improving the conditions of poverty:

- Make early childhood education (with funding) accessible for all children (ages 0-5).
- Get GED to qualify for AFDC/Government subsidies.
- Get Legal Aid to clear records for our citizens.
- Recruitment of jobs/job creation that includes a living wage.

Theme 2. Invest in programs that support at-risk groups living in poverty (e.g. youth, seniors, disabled residents).
Participant recommendations include:

- Support the youth horse patrol.
- Support expansion of transportation options for seniors and the disabled.
- Provide healthcare options in neighborhoods.
- Expand youth programs that keep children out of gangs.

Theme 3. Invest in infrastructure and community development.
Participant recommendations include:

- Expand internet access.
- Improve housing conditions and affordability.
- Address vacant and abandoned homes.
- Improve lighting.
- Expand neighborhood-based services such as health centers and youth centers.

Theme 4. Address the intersection of race and poverty.
Participant recommendations include:

- Bridge the gaps in socioeconomic conditions and race relations.
- Increase funding for minority businesses.
- Address potential disparities in services provided to minority neighborhoods (street cleaning, electricity, etc.)
- Encourage open dialogue on race relations.

Final Action Groups

Based on the consultant team recommendations, along with the Just Health and Food Summit recommendations, the Community Partners Coalition agreed on October 5th to sponsor seven action groups. The Coalition decided to add action groups focused on (1) aligning regional leadership, (2) encouraging healthy lifestyles, and (3) investing in crime prevention and safety. In addition the Coalition decided not to sponsor an action group focused solely on youth retention because the group felt that addressing each of the seven priorities below would result in retention of youth.

The Coalition also determined that the following cross-cutting themes should guide the work of each of the action groups:

- Retaining youth
- Alleviation of poverty as well as regional and race-based disparities
- Telling a new story about the Twin Counties Region

The final seven action groups agreed on by the Coalition are listed on the following page. [3]

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[3] For recommended actions associated with Align Regional Leadership and Invest in Crime Prevention and Safety, see Addendum A. For recommended actions associated with Improving Health Outcomes, see Addendum C. For a summary of the recommended actions associated with the other four groups, see the preceding section of this report; for a full list of recommended actions associated with these groups, see Addendum A.

ALIGN REGIONAL LEADERSHIP

    Theme 1. Align elected officials and city staff around the Twin Counties Vision and Strategic Plan.

    Theme 2. Align existing organizations around the Twin Counties Vision and Strategic Plan.

    Theme 3. Increase public leadership and engagement opportunities

INVEST IN JOB CREATION AND TALENT RECRUITMENT (corresponds to Priority 1 above)

    Theme 1. Develop job training opportunities.

    Theme 2. Provide incentives that support local entrepreneurs.

    Theme 3. Develop regional business recruitment strategy.

    Theme 4. Invest in infrastructure and community development.

IMPROVE EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES AND OUTCOMES (corresponds to Priority 3 above)

    Theme 1. Expand vocational/technical training opportunities.

    Theme 2. Provide a network of support for all children and youth.

PROMOTE A POSITIVE IMAGE OF THE REGION (corresponds to Priority 4 above)

    Theme 1. Develop a vision that brings the region together.

    Theme 2. Develop a positive awareness campaign.

    Theme 3. Market the region for business.

    Theme 4. Market natural and cultural heritage.

    Theme 5. Develop a coordinated Twin Counties Region marketing campaign.

IMPROVE QUALITY OF LIFE IN DISADVANTAGED NEIGHBORHOODS (corresponds to Priority 5 above)

    Theme 1. Improve educational, employment and entrepreneurial opportunities.

    Theme 2. Invest in programs that support at-risk groups living in poverty (e.g. youth, seniors, disabled residents).

    Theme 3. Invest in infrastructure and community development.

    Theme 4. Address the intersection of race and poverty.

ENCOURAGE HEALTHY LIFESTYLES

    Theme 1. Improve health and mental health outcomes.

    Theme 2. Develop a robust local food economy that makes healthy food affordable and accessible.

INVEST IN CRIME PREVENTION AND SAFETY

    Theme 1. Support innovative crime prevention measures (e.g. youth engagement, community policing).

    Theme 2. Support ex-offender reintegration into the community to reduce recidivism rates.

    Theme 3. Address perceptions of high crime rates.

Looking Forward

The Twin Counties Region Study Circle Dialogue represents a tremendous turning point in the future of our region. The process demanded a significant outreach effort to engage members of the community that have not traditionally been involved. Over 360 community members devoted a Saturday, lunch hours or several week nights away from family and other obligations to offer their recommendations for how the Twin Counties Region can move forward in prosperity.

Based on this broad-based community input, the Community Partners Coalition selected the following vision statement to guide the region as an inspirational description of what the Twin Counties Region would like to achieve or accomplish in the mid-term or long-term future.

The Twin Counties Region is a thriving crossroads of innovation where the broad talents and experiences of our many communities foster shared opportunities for educational achievement, economic success, healthy families, and welcoming neighborhoods.

In addition, the Community Partners Coalition agreed to sponsor the following seven Action Groups to develop a strategic plan for the Twin Counties Region:

Recommended Action Groups

- **Align Regional Leadership**
- **Invest in Job Creation and Talent Recruitment**
- **Improve Educational Opportunities and Outcomes**
- **Promote a Positive Image of the Region**
- **Improve Quality of Life in Disadvantaged Neighborhoods**
- **Encourage Healthy Lifestyles**
- **Invest in Crime Prevention and Safety**

The Coalition also determined that the following cross-cutting themes should guide the work of each of the action groups:

- Retaining youth
- Alleviation of poverty as well as regional and race-based disparities
- Telling a new story about the Twin Counties Region

Although much has been accomplished, there is still a significant amount of focused attention needed to develop the community recommendations into a Strategic Plan for the Twin Counties Region. Looking ahead, the Action Group Phase will include the following steps:

I. **Action Group Formation**
   a. Additional research to identify existing related activities/organizations.
   b. Determine vital core group membership and other invitees
   c. Determine group leadership
   d. Establish ground rules and meeting schedule

    e.   Prep leadership for one-day workshop

II. **Action Plan and Strategy Development**
    a.   Clarify, refine, revise, and finalize objectives.
    b.   Establish indicators – how will we know we have achieved the objectives?
    c.   Establish success metrics – how do we measure progress?
    d.   Establish priority actions that will move metrics
    e.   Establish system of measuring success
    f.   Establish timeline of actions, responsibilities and monitoring.

III. **Action Plan Implementation (after the plan is published)**
    a.   Regular meetings to review progress
    b.   Regular check in on metrics
    c.   Regular re-evaluation and plan adjustment
    d.   Regular reporting/communicating - public, local agencies, and elected.

Sustained leadership, commitment and collaboration will be needed to successfully transition to and oversee the Action Group Phase of the process. The outcome will be a Vision and Strategic Plan for the Twin Counties Region that will provide a roadmap to a more sustainable and prosperous community.

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