

**Economic Development Citizens' Advisory Committee**  
***A Proposal to use "Community Visioning" for Economic Development***  
**(December 2004)**

*By Jeffrey Starkweather, Chair, Chatham Citizens for Effective Communities (CCEC), Economic Development Committee [Other Committee members include Larry Hicks and Gary Kibler]*

[NOTE: This proposal was sent to newly elected County Commissioners Patrick Barnes and Mike Cross to present to their fellow commissioners as a new economic development initiative at their January 2005 Board Retreat and Economic Development Corporation [EDC]. Neither occurred but the concept formed the basis for a consulting contract with the Center for Competitive Enterprises, Kenan Flagler Business School, UNC-Chapel Hill, to develop a strategic economic development plan in cooperation with a new EDC board. This initiative was put forward by the new county majority board (George Lucier, Carl Thompson, and Tom Vanderbeck) shortly after they took office in December 2006. To be completed in May 2008, the resulting economic development strategic plan will be the EDC's first such plan since it was created as a non-profit entity in 1997. The author is Secretary of the EDC and a member of the strategic plan subcommittee. Hicks is also a member of the new EDC board and Kibler is the new Director of the Chatham County Small Business Center at Central Carolina Community College. Former EDC Director Tony Tucker retired in the summer of 2006 and new EDC Director is Dianne Reid, former EDC Director for Orange County]

Below is a proposal for establishing a temporary economic development citizens' advisory committee reporting directly to the County Commissioners. The committee would be made up of a cross-section of the county, by demographic, geographic and employment/business status. Utilizing the "community vision and capacity" model recently outlined by the UNC School of Government [*See Institute of Government website: Popular Government, Special Issue – Economic Development, Spring-Summer, 2004, "Using Community Vision and Capacity to Direct Economic Change" by Anita R. Brown-Graham and Susan Austin, <http://php.unc.edu/sogcart/singlebook.php?id=813>], and building upon our adopted Strategic Plan and Land Conservation and Use Plan, this committee would develop a proposed economic development action plan.*

**Problem:**

- Chatham County does not have an economic development vision or action plan.
- Chatham in-county jobs pay below the state average in wages; yet we are ranked third in the state in per capita income primarily because nearly 60% of those who work must commute outside, eliminating the standard economic multiplier effect for jobs.
- Chatham is losing jobs, particularly manufacturing jobs, such as the 137 workers who will be losing their jobs as Charles Craft Inc. closes its Siler City plant. At last year economic development summit, a speaker from the Research Triangle Regional Partnership informed us that much of Chatham's manufacturing jobs are considered "old line" and most will be gone in ten years.

- Economic Development Corporation [EDC], formed in 1997, represents only a small segment of the county's citizens and economic development stakeholders and it has not demonstrated that it can bring good paying jobs to the county. Although it operates with county funds has not presented written economic development action plan to the county and has operated behind closed doors and without public input or scrutiny. [E.g. EDC claims it is not covered by the state's open meetings and public records law].
- While the county commissioners and citizens have spent most of the last several years working on contentious land use and residential issues citizens, economic development planning has been neglected. All citizens working together to bring good paying jobs to the county should be something that unites us all.
- Last March a large number of citizens and economic development stakeholders attended an economic development summit. There has been no follow-up to obtain the input and support of those who attended the meeting, as well others interested in this issue, in developing an economic development plan.
- We are not effectively utilizing our most important asset – our citizens. For example, there many residents to the county who have considerable experience in economic development and business whose expertise and experience are not being tapped.
- The need for a change of direction in economic development was supported by vast majority of voters in July and November in all parts of the county.

**Objectives:**

- Bring all sectors of the community together for collaborative problem solving on a critical issue facing the county.
- Broad citizen and stakeholder involvement builds community support and capacity [“community capacity” – essentially all the assets of a community, including its people, businesses, civic organizations, etc, that can be used to solve a community problem].
- Formal assessment of our economic development assets and weakness.
- Stakeholder and citizen consensus on economic development values and objectives.
- Specific action plan that spells out long-term and short-term steps and outcomes.
- Evaluation and recommendation on best organizational structure[s] and cooperative arrangement to carry out those steps.

- Ongoing evaluation procedures so that citizens, stakeholders and commissioners can determine progress in achieving economic plan's objectives and steps.

**Proposal:**

County commissioners, in conjunction with Goldston, Pittsboro, and Siler City, appoint a 21-member committee that would include a broad cross-section of the county – this could include representation from the EDC, Chamber of Commerce, small and large business, conventional and sustainable agriculture, non-profit community, citizen advocacy groups such as Chatham Citizens for Effective Communities, Friends of the Rocky River, Southeast Chatham Citizens Advisory Council, Chatham County United, citizens representing different professional and working backgrounds and citizens from all parts of the county. [i.e. 21 members is a suggested minimum, it may need to be larger to include representatives of all the above-listed groups.

An objective in picking people to this board would be to look for people who are open to hearing about new ideas and best practices use by other communities. Obviously, the committee should be made up primarily of “working” members. The large number of committee members is proposed to make sure that we include broad stakeholder and citizen involvement. The larger committee would be broken up into working sub-committees based on areas of interest or expertise.

As an initial step, the commissioners could appoint a temporary five member committee that would come up with a proposed list of members for the larger committee and possibly make recommendations for more of the details of this committee's work and timetable.

**Committee resources and technical assistance:**

Clearly, Tony Tucker and the EDC would be a primary resource for what they have been attempting to do in the last seven years. The EDC staff could assist in staffing this committee. But, the committee can also rely on a large number of regional resources, area college business and public policy schools and faculty, UNC School of Government, Triangle J Council of Governments, Research Triangle Regional Partnership, Southern Rural Economic Center, Empowerment, etc.

We should not re-invent the wheel. First, we already have somewhat of a model in the process we went through in developing a Strategic Plan and Land Conservation and Use Plan. Also, attached is an article from two faculty members at the Institute of Government who specialize in community economic development, entitled “Using Community Vision and Capacity to Direct Economic Change.”

Hire on a contractual basis an area expert on conducting such economic development community visioning processes or someone who has similar group facilitation skills to assist in the committee in its deliberations.

Here are a few of the key decision-making steps the committee would need to complete to arrive at a viable economic development action plan for the county: 1) community profile [assets and liabilities] and value; 2) trends analysis; 3) vision statement – possible/preferred outcomes; 4) action plan – short and long term strategies; 5) implementation plan and evaluation benchmarks. [New Oregon Model from Institute of Government – see attached article].

We would anticipate that at each step the committee would present its recommendations to the county commissioners for review and approval. Once the commissioners have signed off on a particular step, the committee would feel confident that they could proceed with the next step without continued conflict over the previous step.

**Timeline:** Approximately one year.

**Budget:** \$35,000 to \$50,000, depending consultation fees required.