Creating Their Own Futures:
Community Visioning and North Carolina Local Governments

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In a memorable scene from Lewis Carroll's classic, *Alice in Wonderland*, Alice comes upon the Cheshire Cat and asks, "Would you tell me, please, which way I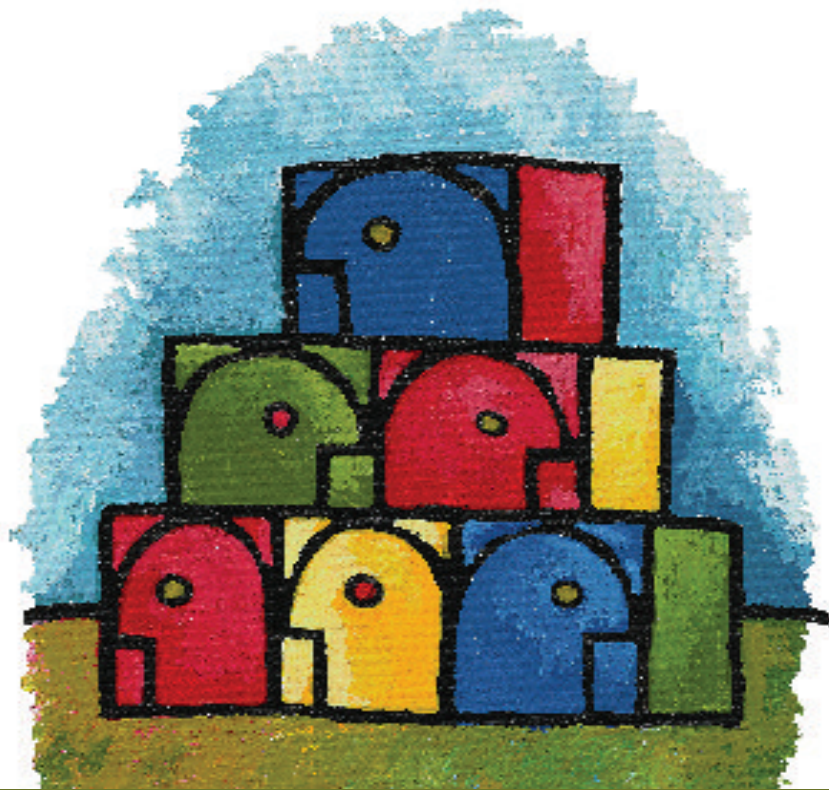 ought to go from here?" The Cheshire Cat replies, "That de-pends a good deal on where you want to get to." Alice responds, "I don't much care where." The Cheshire Cat answers, "Then it doesn't matter which way you go."

Like Alice, community leaders often face the quandary of what path to take. The journey is not merely a personal one, however. The whole community will embark on it. But, unlike Alice, community leaders must make deliber-ate decisions about the direction and the destination of their community's journey.

Do community leaders faced with deciding "Where do we go from here?" really know where the community wants to go? Some presuppose that they under-stand a community's will, and they act until their assumption is proven wrong. Others simply act without considering where the community wants to go, thinking only of where they want the community to go.

But community leadership is not about the knowledge, the action, or the direc-tion of a single person or organization. It is a collective process that cuts across

bers of the public respond only to the issues that are directly in front of them and "mobilize primarily in confrontation, seeking to stop initiatives in which they do not see personal gain."[2]

Communities without a shared vision risk falling behind in this time of rapid change. Change always has been a part of the public sector, but today the time available for local governments to react to change has greatly diminished. The dramatic economic and social changes experienced in North Carolina —such as loss of traditional industries, a growing immigrant population, and rapid growth in the state's urban crescent —all place significant pressures on local communities.

This article addresses how elected and appointed local government leaders can help develop an authentic and comprehensive community vision to steer their communities during times of upheaval or relative calm. We discuss community visioning and strategic planning as tools that help communities understand current realities and trends, articulate desired conditions for the future, and develop and implement strategies for achieving those conditions.

We begin by defining "community visioning," its relationship to strategic planning, and the place of these ideas in a broader stream of collaborative governance concepts. Then, drawing on the experiences of three North Carolina communities, we outline general principles of successful community change, highlighting how they specifically relate to community visioning and strategic planning. Finally, we suggest some issues for local government leaders to bear in mind as they consider how their community might benefit from visioning.

local governments, schools, businesses, churches, civic organizations, and more. Thus, if a community is to know where it wants to go, it must consider the perspectives of all its component organizations and groups. This jointly developed, collective sense of direction is called "community vision."

As a key decision maker and driving force in any community, a local government, in particular, needs a shared vision or a "clear sense of direction of where the community is headed and how it is to get there."[1] A familiar proverb states, "Without a vision, the people perish." In the absence of a shared vision, mem-

Community Visioning and Strategic Planning

Community visioning is a relatively new process of local government planning. Its genesis was in the "futures projects" of the 1970s, dubbed "anticipatory democracy" by futurist Alvin Toffler.[3] This movement shifted long-range planning in the public sector from quantitative forecasting to more qualitative, participatory approaches. Steven Ames, a pioneer in community visioning, explains that these early programs "varied widely in their design and effectiveness" and were mostly "one-time efforts." Through the 1980s and the 1990s, however, visioning evolved substantially and became an increasingly popular planning concept in local communities.[4]

By the mid-1990s, visioning had come to be widely recognized as an essential element of successful community leadership. The great transformation of Chattanooga, Tennessee, was widely attributed to Vision 2000, initiated in 1984, and ReVision 2010, initiated in 1993 after most of the goals of the original effort had been reached.[5] Some of the dramatic outcomes attributed to the city's visioning efforts are as follows:[6]

- Moving from being named the most polluted city in the nation in 1969 to being recognized on Earth Day 1990 as "the best turnaround story" in the nation. By that time the city was one of the few in the Southeast to be in compliance with all six national standards for air quality.

- Development of hundreds of projects serving more than 1.5 million people.

- Renovations of historic buildings and sites.

- Construction of a new river park, aquarium, and performance hall.

Chattanooga continues to receive accolades and is internationally known for the remarkable transformation stimulated by community visioning.[7]

What exactly is community visioning? How is it different from strategic planning? Ames explains the logic behind visioning as follows:

> *If we wish to create a better world, we must first be able to en-* *vision that world. Community visioning is simply a process through which a community imagines the future it most desires and then plans to achieve it. Through visioning,* *citizens come together to create a shared image of their preferred future; once this image has been created, they can begin working to achieve their goal. Visioning does not*

Example of a Vision Statement: Greater Wilson Community (April 2007)
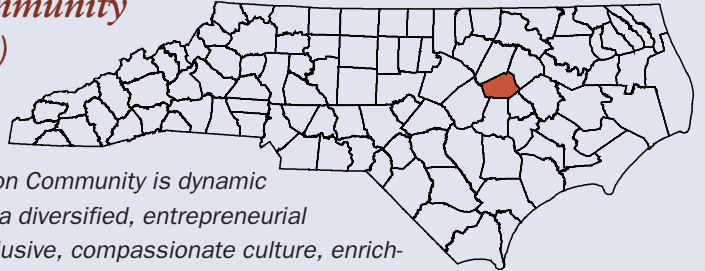
The Vision

The Greater Wilson Community is dynamic and vibrant, with a diversified, entrepreneurial economy and inclusive, compassionate culture, enriching all with an unparalleled quality of life.

We are a regional employment center. Our strategic location, transportation and information technology infrastructure, abundant water and land resources, and highly trained workforce sustain a diverse commercial and industrial base. We nurture new and existing business growth.

We carefully manage commercial, industrial, and residential growth in ways that preserve open space and our history and encourage investments across all parts of the community. Our vital, historic downtowns are hubs of cultural and commercial activity. Sidewalks, bikeways, and greenways connect our beautiful neighborhoods.

We are a community of educational excellence, with a culture that embraces life-long learning, providing opportunities for all. Our families, early childhood programs, K–12 schools, Barton College, Wilson Community College, business, faith-based, and other community organizations, work together to prepare students for a rapidly changing world.

We enjoy a rich variety of social, educational, cultural, and recreational activities for persons of every age and income. Our superb athletic facilities, parks, arts, cultural attractions, and other amenities make our community highly desirable for young adults, families, and retirees to call home and for tourists to visit.

We are a healthy community with a holistic view of wellness for all our citizens at all stages of life and socioeconomic status. Healthy lifestyles are supported by excellent health care professionals and facilities; comprehensive, caring, community-based wellness programs; and a clean environment.

We are "one" community that respects and celebrates our diversity with active efforts to assure justice, harmony, and understanding. We take pride in our beautiful, safe neighborhoods where civic engagement is strong and local leadership is developed.

We are a community that works together to support this shared vision. Our local governments and other community institutions cooperate extensively to create a friendly climate for home grown businesses, community betterment efforts, and excellent quality of life. We create and achieve our vision because we are a collaborative community.

necessarily replace other forms of community planning, but rather provides a broader context from which to approach those activities.[8]
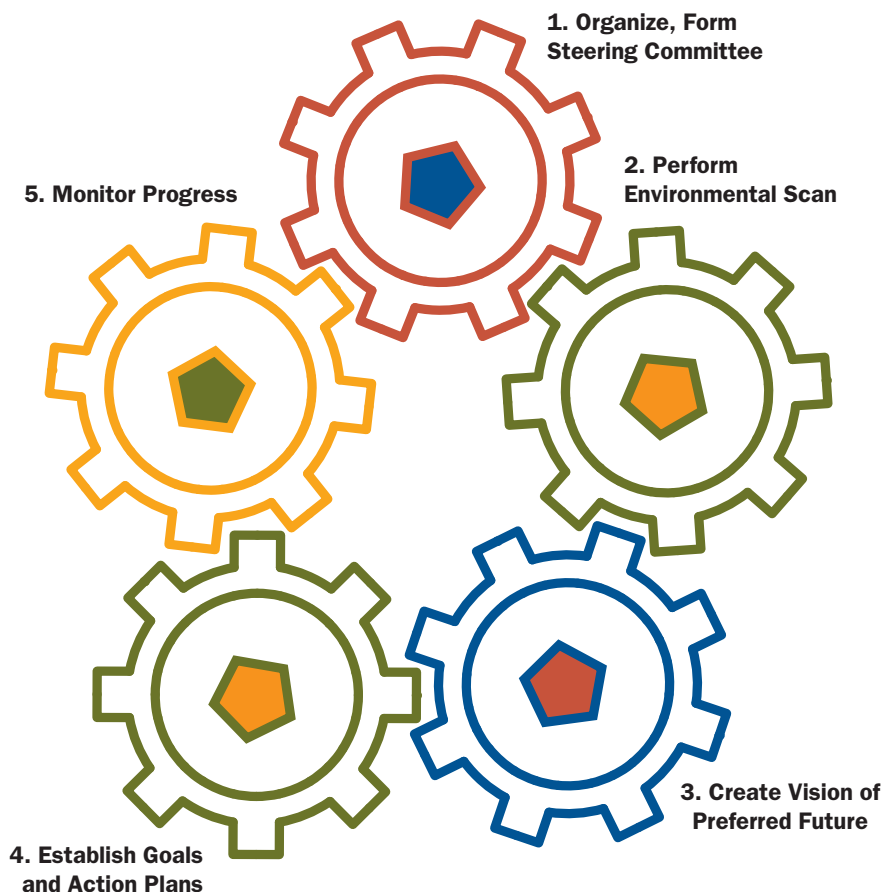
Visioning refers to both a process and a product. The process is a broad-based, collaborative effort in which members of a community come together to "build consensus on a description of the community's desired future and on actions to help make goals for the future a reality."[9] The product is a community "vision statement" and usually an accompanying plan of action.

The theory of community visioning rests on a few key assumptions. One is that a community can in fact develop and articulate a common vision. A community vision is not something that exists and awaits discovery. Rather, it is new knowledge created by a community through dialogue and deliberation. Although all visions do not meet this criterion, the theory of community visioning is based on a certain faith in citizens being able to come together and create consensus on the direction their community should take.

A second assumption of community visioning is that a vision can be a useful policy tool, that its benefits are evident and meaningful. This speaks to the product of visioning, the vision statement. A true community vision "may be used to assess the compatibility of new initiatives and programs with the residents' ideas." Also, most visioning programs lead to specific strategies and initiatives that can be implemented and monitored to gauge success. Opportunities continually arise, of course—new businesses, road projects, or government programs, for example. "But it is up to residents to determine if these opportunities will either hinder or help their community achieve its vision for the future."[10]

A third assumption is that the process is inherently valuable, that the effort creates unquantifiable and potentially unintended benefits of great worth. Community visioning provides a structure "for people to have a meaningful coming-to-grips with the issues—even though [they] do not know the answers and have no perfect models."[11] A visioning process "serves as a vehicle

Figure 1. **Typical Phases of Community Visioning Programs**

1. Organize, Form Steering Committee
2. Perform Environmental Scan
3. Create Vision of Preferred Future
4. Establish Goals and Action Plans
5. Monitor Progress

for articulating community-wide values" and makes a "significant contribution to transforming political culture," turning "skeptics into citizens who believe their efforts will make a difference."[12] For many, the most important aspect of visioning is "its ability to engender civic dialogue and discourse."[13] Further, because the process is broadly inclusive and emphasizes dialogue and consensus building, it "paves the way for future cooperation and collaboration among a community's diverse stakeholders."[14]

What does a visioning project look like? Realistically, each visioning effort is as unique as the community it serves. Several models of visioning are available online for downloading (see the sidebar on page 21). Generally these models view visioning as a broader planning effort that complements local comprehensive and/or strategic plans.

Also, "community" in many cases is broader than a single jurisdiction. Many visioning efforts represent collaboration among cities, towns, and their encompassing counties.[15]

Some visioning programs are general, beginning with no particular emphasis or area of focus. Others are more specific, as in the emphasis of so-called strategic visioning programs on economic development.[16]

Despite different starting points, successful visioning efforts address all aspects of a community, recognizing the interrelatedness of land use, economy, community health, and so forth. Indeed, one of the important contributions that visioning can make to local governance is its holistic approach. By working together to develop a preferred vision of the future, community members necessarily touch on and wrestle with the ways in which different community problems are intertwined.

Although there certainly are differences across approaches, they are minor. A generic model of visioning drawn from the wide variety of visioning programs and materials consists of five

primary steps or phases (see Figure 1; page 23). First, a steering group of diverse community stakeholders is formed. This group provides leadership and coordination for the project. It is important that the steering committee include representatives from the key community institutions (local governments, schools, chambers of commerce, community-based organizations, and so forth). The leadership group should reflect the diversity of the community, and its deliberative process should be open and transparent—and be seen as such.[17] Often a small group of community leaders initiates the effort, but project guidance through a steering committee or a task force should be broadly inclusive, lest it become perceived as elitist or otherwise closed to the community at large. Some kind of stakeholder analysis is typically employed to ensure that representation on such a committee includes key groups and organizations in the community and generally reflects its diversity.[18]

Second, in a public gathering of some kind, the stakeholder committee and (often) a broader group of citizens assess where they are now, performing an environmental scan of the community as a whole and exploring trends and forces that shape the community's current state and possible future. This phase may examine quantitative and qualitative indicators as well as data from interviews or focus groups. Many communities use the National Civic League's Civic Index to assess current realities and the capacity for change.[19] A SWOC analysis (an examination of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges), a popular element of strategic planning, also is useful in this phase.[20]

The third phase is creation of a community vision that clearly states how the community sees itself in the future. Creation of a vision may involve articulating a mission, goals, and values, as a group does during strategic planning, but the key component is the articulation of a desired future state often 15–20 years out. The vision statement is what unifies and guides the collaborative work that follows. The key issues and themes identified in the environmental scan should help inform the issues and themes addressed in the statement. Additionally,

Re-Visioning Roxboro
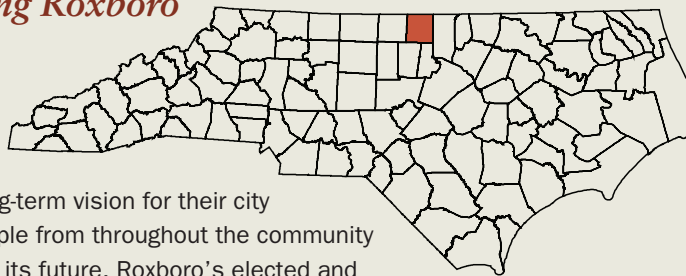
To develop a long-term vision for their city and engage people from throughout the community in strengthening its future, Roxboro's elected and appointed officials, with the assistance of staff from the UNC at Chapel Hill School of Government's Public Intersection Project, undertook a strategic planning process in late 2005. This was the first strategic planning process in which the city had ever engaged.

The process that was ultimately chosen and undertaken was guided by input from the city council and the newly hired city manager. Although council driven, it took other community members' and employees' viewpoints into consideration, ultimately leaving the decision making and the priority setting to the council with input from senior city staff. To aid city officials in their deliberations about what kind of process would be best for the city at that point, School of Government consultants developed much of the decision-making framework that is presented under the heading Gauging the Value and the Level of Participation in this article.

The process began with a facilitated conversation with the council to set the stage for undertaking a long-term plan. In the first meeting, the council determined its vision for Roxboro, the city government's role and support for accomplishing that vision, and principles that the council sought to uphold in conducting its work.[1] The conversations included all members of the council plus the city manager. Key senior staff members (the management team) were brought in periodically to provide background information and to help evaluate priorities.

In the next step, the council developed a list of key issues facing the community. Although the list was developed without input from the larger community, the issues were a combination of new initiatives, continuing work, and mandates posed by other organizations. They also represented areas in which the council might have direct influence—such as planning for water and sewer extensions or making upgrades to city employees' information technology needs—or more opportunities to build partnerships—such as through economic development, planning for growth, or beautification.

In many cases, the actions that the council listed supported multiple goals and objectives. For example, "Adding another staff person to complete the unified development ordinance" also supported plans for annexing adjacent territory, updating the land use plan, and providing greater code enforcement to upgrade problem properties.

and perhaps more important, "the vision statement must be reached by consensus and encourage the commitment of diverse community members."[21]

Vision statements vary from a few sentences to several paragraphs. The statement of the Greater Wilson Community features a short sentence on overall vision, accompanied by thematic subparagraphs (see the sidebar on page 22). It is a good example of a statement created by consensus that speaks directly to the issues and the themes identified in an extensive public-engagement campaign during the environmental scan.

After creating a vision, participants establish goals and strategies for achieving it. This phase involves identifying

After grouping issues in like categories and ranking and prioritizing the issues, the School of Government consultants used this list to gather feedback and reactions from both employees and citizens. Two employee focus groups were held, with a total of twenty-one employees participating, to gather additional ideas and test their reaction and support of the council-developed goals and objectives. Three citizen focus groups, with twenty-four participants altogether, provided similar feedback that was shared with the council and senior staff members in a later session.[2]

The council members observed that the feedback and ranking data from these focus groups did not differ substantially from their own priorities but did have implications for many of the activities or for the emphasis applied to the overall goals. For instance, as they considered how to apply stricter code enforcement, the number one criterion for deciding which properties to target first was the threat the properties presented to public safety. This supported and addressed the concern raised in the citizen focus groups about drug use and related activity. Furthermore, as a result of the focus group feedback, the council incorporated some additional strategies to communicate more effectively with citizens.

Finally, the council and the staff agreed to revisit this work regularly. They scheduled specific review sessions (an annual update was done in spring 2007), and in the year following the plan's initial adoption, they devoted every other management team meeting to implementation of the strategic plan. In essence, Roxboro has obligated the time and the effort to the review, committed itself to making necessary adjustments, celebrated and shared accomplishments, and added new goals as appropriate.

Notes

1. The council's operating principles: (1) We value and strive for a team approach to governing that includes the perspectives, skills, and abilities of council, staff, citizen, and other potential partners. (2) We always serve others in a courteous, professional, and fair manner. (3) We want to make a positive difference in the lives of our residents by making decisions that consider the greater good of our community. (4) We appreciate and encourage a diversity of viewpoints; therefore, we listen with respect, respond promptly to all inquiries, and consider all input. (5) We expect to be fully informed in our decision making and will not govern by anecdote. (6) We are passionate in our discussions, yet maintain a respect for each other. (7) We are willing to compromise.

2. Questions for employee and citizen groups: (1) Do you see this as an important issue for the city to focus on? (2) Do you agree or disagree with the way the council has suggested the city can move toward each goal (the objectives)? Why, or why not? (3) What suggestions can you offer for achieving this goal? (4) Recognizing that all these are long-term goals, which two do you think need the most immediate attention in the next 3–5 years? (5) *For citizens:* What might compel you to get more involved with planning for the future of this community?

goals that flow out of or support the vision statement, selecting key performance areas, and drafting action plans to meet the goals. The key is to identify clear goals, measurable objectives (desired outcomes), and concrete strategies to meet those objectives, and to set timelines and assign responsibility for implementing strategies.

Finally, most flourishing visioning endeavors create formal and standing systems to monitor implementation and evaluate outcomes. Some communities have formed a monitoring committee or a new organization whose sole focus is to oversee implementation of the vision. Identifiable and measurable indicators of progress help demonstrate success and track goal achievement as the community progresses.

"Community" Strategic Planning

Many practitioners use the terms "community visioning" and "strategic planning" interchangeably or together, implying that they are synonymous.[22] Both processes entail roughly the same steps (shown in Figure 1), yet it is important to distinguish between the two and understand them as related but different processes. The key distinctions relate to the user of the vision and the plan of action, the ability to influence the planned outcomes, and the degree of engagement or participation by others outside the primary organizing group. (For a summary of the distinctions, see Table 1, page 23.)

If the plan is for a single organization, such as a municipality, then it is more appropriate to speak of a strategic plan. Strategic planning is an important tool in the larger toolbox of strategic management. Organizations can be managed and guided by a strategic vision and plan, but the community, as a collective entity, cannot. On the other hand, a community vision—a shared statement of values and direction for the entire community—can serve as a guide to the various organizations in that community, including its key institutions of governance.

A local government's strategic plan might be termed a "community strategic plan" because its goals and objectives are intended for the betterment of the community demarcated by the jurisdictional boundaries. Budgetary decisions and other policies of the local government are used to implement the plan. Although these decisions may affect the entire community, they are made by just one organization.

Strategies outlined in the action plan component of a community vision, on the other hand, are implemented collaboratively by organizations, groups, and individuals across the community. This is another key distinction between the two processes.

There also are differences in community engagement. For a visioning process truly to be of, by, and for the entire community, it must be broadly and extensively participatory. Nongovernmental representatives do not participate merely to

give input to the government's plan. Rather, they are co-creators and co-owners of the product.

On the other hand, a single-organization local government's strategic plan can be created with varying degrees of public input. In fact, such a plan can be developed in a board or staff retreat with no public input whatsoever. However, if it is to be guided by a community vision—one that truly reflects the community—the best advice is that the process of creating it be broadly participatory, including stakeholders beyond the organization's decision makers.[23] Whereas most community visioning efforts are likely to cross jurisdictions as well as sectors, the local government strategic plan is for one jurisdiction and might engage only jurisdictionally based stakeholders.

Thus because a strategic plan is for an organization and not an entire community, there is no need to make the participation as extensive as in a community visioning project. Strategic planning by a local government can take on many

Table 1. A Comparison of Community Visioning and Strategic Planning

	Community Visioning	Strategic Planning
Locus of Practice	Coalition (public-private partnership)	Single organization (e.g. city government)
Starting Point	Scan of current environment SWOC analysis	SWOC analysis
Implementers	Multiple implementers	Single implementer
Approach to Implementation	Through action teams, work groups (collaboration)	Mostly through budget and policy decisions of organization
Level of Community Involvement	Broad-based, extensive	Range (none to some)
Long-Term Vision	Yes	Ideally, but not necessarily
Time to Develop	Months to years	Weeks to months

Table 2. A Comparison of Planning Processes: Roxboro City, Wilkes County, and Wilson County

	Re-Visioning Roxboro	Wilkes Vision 20/20	Wilson 2020 Community Vision
Start	December 2005	Fall 1998	October 2006
Initiators	Public sector City council	Private sector Chamber of commerce	Private and public sectors Cross-sector collaborative group
Governance	City council City manager Management team	Chamber board of directors Steering committee Foundation teams	Management committee Steering committee Action teams
Input	Some outreach to employees (21) and citizens (24)	Large numbers, extensive: town hall meeting (400)	Large numbers, extensive: community forums (630); survey (900); summit (150)
Ongoing Oversight	City of Roxboro City government	Wilkes Vision 20/20 Nonprofit organization	Management committee Cross-sector collaborative group
Follow-through	Ongoing and regular review, integration, implementation, and revisions of plan by council, management team, and employees	Ongoing and regular review, integration, implementation, and revisions of plan by committees Paid staff	Ongoing and regular review, integration, implementation, and revisions of plan by committees Paid staff
Consultants	Public: UNC School of Government[1]	Private: Luke Planning Inc.	Public: UNC School of Government[2]
Cost	$17,000[3]	$53,500[4]	$40,000[5]

Throughout this article we provide examples of strategic planning and community visioning projects from the Roxboro, Wilkes, and Wilson communities. Two of these efforts began relatively recently. The third has been under way for nearly a decade. Just as each community is unique, each planning process is distinctive to fit local circumstances. These examples purposely provide variations along a spectrum of options and approaches so that readers can consider what elements might be adapted to their own situations.

1. School of Government staff from the Public Intersection Project, www.publicintersection.unc.edu, consulted on the Roxboro strategic plan.

2. School of Government staff and faculty from the Public Intersection Project and the Community and Economic Development Program, www.sog.unc.edu/programs/cednc, consulted on the Wilson 2020 Community Vision project.

3. This figure includes the cost of initial plan development in 2005–6, work with the management team on incorporating the strategic plan into departmental work plans, and first-year review of the plan in 2007.

4. Henry Luke, of Luke Planning Inc., Jacksonville, Florida (www.lukevision.com), facilitated the process at an initial fee (quoted in 1998) of $44,000 for Phase 1 and provided first-year oversight in Phase 2 for $9,500. Travel and other expenses were additional.

5. This figure represents the cost of the School of Government contract. Significant additional costs were covered by several community organizations, including Barton College, the City of Wilson, and Wilson County. The effort continues to be funded by public and private dollars.

Wilkes Vision 20/20
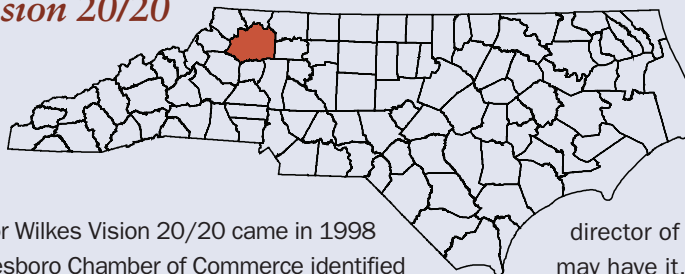
The impetus for Wilkes Vision 20/20 came in 1998 when the Wilkesboro Chamber of Commerce identified a need for a long-range planning process for the community. The process did not arise from an immediate threat. Rather it began as a way to identify needs, elevate causes, and envision the future without demeaning the present.

After hiring a private consultant, the community solicited input through a community summit and formed a 150-person task force, whose job was to organize all community input into working areas (education, economic development, government, quality of life, infrastructure, and private-sector leadership) and develop a draft long-range plan.[1]

The Wilkes Vision 20/20 plan was presented for additional community comment in spring 1999 and completed later that year. Since then, committees focused on the working areas have formed and meet regularly to implement, evaluate, and add to the plan.

Practical Challenges of an Inclusive Planning Process

With the benefit of hindsight, Wilkes Vision 20/20 participants identified five challenges that they faced:[2]

- **Overcoming issues of trust.** Sometimes, people can be distrustful or suspicious of others who work in a business or a field that they do not understand. "The process has helped us get through that by recognizing shared responsibility and shared vulnerability," said the Reverend Nelson Granade. "We've developed trust."

- **Sustaining momentum.** Vision takes energy, and in most communities, large and small, a small percentage of the population seems to do most of the work. Carrying such a load can lead to burnout. Also, once things start moving and some positive changes occur, it is easy to stop. When people start behaving more collaboratively, leaders may congratulate themselves on the good job that they have done, and forget that there is another step: renewal. They must keep renewing themselves and the plan. "It's like faith," said Fran Evans,

director of Wilkes Vision 20/20. "You may have it, but if you don't feed it, you become complacent."[3]

- **Avoiding turfism.** Everyone has his or her own interests, and often the interests compete. Finding common ground can be a struggle. According to Linda Cheek, a Wilkesboro Chamber of Commerce employee with a long history of involvement in the visioning process, Wilkes Vision 20/20 was able to meet this challenge by integrating varied opinions into the plan. "Make sure diverse voices are heard," she said. "Even if their issue doesn't get prioritized as most important, there is validity in hearing their opinion and having them understand why other issues may take higher precedence for action."[4]

- **Being realistic.** It is important to examine the realities of what is working and what is not working in the community. The community must compare itself with other communities. The visioning effort must raise the anxiety level enough to get action and motion but not so much that it generates overreaction or pessimism.

- **Keeping people informed.** If the visioning process is to sustain itself, there must be effective communication and partnerships. The Wilkes Vision 20/20 director sends out a newsletter to more than 1,200 people ten times a year, sometimes as an insert in the chamber of commerce newsletter.

Notes

1. *See* Wilkes Vision 20/20, www.wilkesncvision.org.
2. Ken Noland, Wilkesboro town manager, telephone interview by Lydian Altman, August 14, 2007; Nelson Granade, pastor, First Baptist Church, telephone interview by Lydian Altman, September 11, 2007; Linda Cheek, employee, Chamber of Commerce, and Fran Evans, director, Wilkes Vision 20/20, telephone interview (conference call) by Lydian Altman, October 18, 2007.
3. Evans, interview.
4. Cheek, interview.

elements of a broader community visioning effort, though—including developing a community vision—by involving a variety of community stakeholders. Roxboro's recent strategic planning effort illustrates such a participatory process (see the sidebar on page 24).

As mentioned, in practice the two processes overlap considerably. Ideally, self-defined metacommunities that span multiple jurisdictions (like the Greater Wilson Community) create shared visions that connect to component organizations' strategic plans. A local government doing a strategic plan (including a vision) should seek consistency with a broader community vision if one exists. If one does not exist, the plan's vision would be the community's vision and have the potential for impact beyond the local government. In such a case, the local government's strategic plan might take on more visionlike elements. The visioning/strategic planning comparison may be thought of more as a continuum of practices than as distinct choices. Every community is unique. Thus the most appropriate model for community visioning will vary.

## Benefits of Using a More Inclusive Planning Process

Community visioning is one of many emerging "collaborative governance practices" that emphasize "diversity and interdependence, processes that support dialogue and deliberation, the building of trust and ongoing capacity to collaborate in the face of continuing uncertainty and change, and the search for solutions that embody good outcomes for the public."[24] It is an ongoing process of investing time, energy, and resources in the development of a community's capacity for leadership; creating a new level of civic engagement; and plotting and regularly updating the vision of a community's future. To engage the community continually and meaningfully in developing, implementing, and overseeing change, the benefits of which may not be apparent for years or make headline news, is hard work. Yet the payback of stronger community connections and involvement can have lasting impact on how a community presents itself to others.

As noted by Ken Noland, manager of Wilkesboro, whose community is nearly ten years into a visioning process,

The visioning process and resulting plan has positioned us to better respond to rapid change. We are much more adaptable and able to understand what the potential change might mean for all our community. We realize that change doesn't affect just our own entity but multiple entities, target groups, and stakeholders. When we lose a factory providing 1,000 jobs, it is not just the city's tax rate that's facing problems. All of us have to deal with the issues. Doing that together gives us the advantage of a think tank approach to community problem solving, and positions us to respond to change quickly and comprehensively.[25]

Wilson 2020 Community Vision
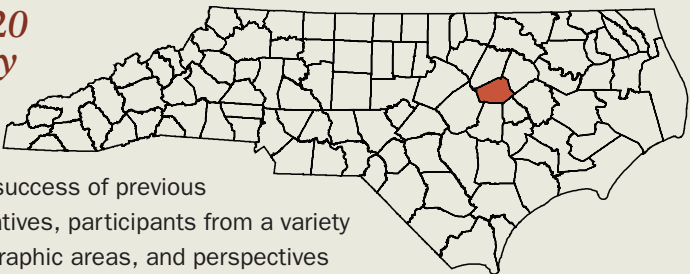
Building on the success of previous countywide initiatives, participants from a variety of sectors, geographic areas, and perspectives shaped and guided the most recent effort to engage the entire Greater Wilson Community in mapping its future and building the capacity of its leadership to guide and sustain change. Representatives from local governments, businesses, nonprofits, health care organizations, the media, the faith community, and primary, secondary, and higher education institutions all became involved. The sixteen key community leaders who made up the original management committee served as the primary planners and overseers of the organizational structure, financial resources, consultants, and logistics of what became Wilson 2020 Community Vision.

As the planning process began, the management committee recruited and engaged important stakeholder groups and additional community members from across the county to form a fifty-member steering committee. That committee rallied community support for the work; determined, tested, and approved various strategies to engage the community; facilitated community forums; and guided the integration of different data sources.

The Wilson 2020 Community Vision visioning process, begun in fall 2006 and continuing today, has followed a four-phase model (see Table A).

Table A. **Overview of the Wilson 2020 Community Vision Visioning Process**

	Building Infrastructure	**Gathering Information**	**Visioning/Holding Summit**	**Action Planning and Implementation**
Purpose	Develop community engagement strategy	Identify trends, patterns, perceptions for directing change	Come to agreement about future vision and identify issue areas	Compile action plan and implementation steps
Activity	Groundwork Interviews with steering committee members Community scan	Community engagement activities Community analysis Development of draft vision	Community-wide summit Formation of action teams Development of and work on recommendations In each issue area	Refinement of action plan by action teams Implementation of action plans, continued dialogue, and projects in each issue area

Recognizing impending changes that could and would affect his community, one local business leader began to rally financial and human resources in the private sector to support a comprehensive and community-led visioning process to better position the Wilkes County community to shape and respond to its future. As the process and the project expanded, they encompassed public-sector, faith-based, and community-based leaders and institutions as well. The benefits to the community and the local governments that participate have been extensive:[26]

- There is greater collaboration and less competition among local governments. No longer does each town solely work toward what is best for it. "If an issue falls within the scope of our vision plan, then we take it to the visioning group to ask them to convene all the elected and appointed officials to discuss it. This creates a different sounding board," said Manager Noland. "These less affluent communities in North Carolina can't afford overlapping services."[27]

- The overall needs of the community are addressed because ideas and issues are not hindered by jurisdictional boundaries. In some cases, visioning groups recommended a more expensive but politically viable alternative because it might result in a win-win scenario and make the difference between the success or the failure of the project. "Some in Wilkes County joke that there are three political parties in the county: Republicans, Democrats, and Vision 20/20," said Nelson Granade, pastor of the First Baptist Church.[28]

- More ideas get considered because they are raised by a politically neutral and collaborative body. Often, dealing with an issue is difficult from the start if just one entity has introduced it.

- There is better buy-in from the public as a result of a more open and deliberative process. "During our deliberations about lowering the high school dropout rate, citizens kept asking elected officials, 'How are we going to get there?'" said the Reverend Granade.[29] This challenge by citizens prompted action and demonstrated the community's commitment to change.

- The visioning has developed a sense of community by bringing people together around a cause. As the Reverend Granade put it, "Cause creates community. You can get people together without it, but it is easier for communities to form around a cause."[30] This sense of community has long-lasting benefits. As a result of the visioning process, said Linda Cheek, a chamber of commerce leader, "there is an amazing spirit here of optimism, even when times are tough."[31]

Various data-gathering methods were employed during the gathering-information phase. They were designed to help leaders better understand how citizens viewed the community and to give them an opportunity for input and involvement.

Specifically, the building-infrastructure and gathering-information phases had four primary components:

- **Telephone and in-person interviews** (41), which assessed the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges (SWOC) in the Greater Wilson Community and recorded phrases and ideas that represented the ideal vision for Wilson.

- **Community forums** (39), which gave about 630 people an opportunity to express their views about the current and future state of the Greater Wilson Community. These sessions, which were facilitated by both School of Government consultants and School of Government–trained steering committee members, generally reflected the racial, ethnic, and gender composition of the county.

- **Online survey**, which drew more than 900 responses on the Wilson 2020 Community Vision website.

- **The community scan document** (available data on community indicators, such as demographic profiles from the U.S. Census Bureau and economic data from the North Carolina Department of Commerce), which provided a factual snapshot of the community.

The steering committee used the large body of data generated to craft a unified vision and set of goals. The vision statement (see the sidebar on page 22) and the seven issue areas that emerged served as the foundation for developing action teams during and after the community summit.

About 150 people gathered in a community summit at Barton College in April 2007 to extend the visioning process to an ever-widening circle of participants and involve them in responding to the strategic vision and goals drafted previously. As of August 2007, action teams were continuing to expand their membership to reflect the resources needed on each team; refine outcomes to make them measurable, succinct, and meaningful; and develop a mix of strategies, both short- and long-term. This work will be refined, documented, tracked, and evaluated as it proceeds.

In the remainder of the action-planning-and-implementation stage, the management committee will coordinate the work of the teams and set priority areas for action. This will result in a final action plan to be shared with the entire community. For more information, visit www.wilson2020vision.org.

• The community is better positioned to respond to rapid change because a team is in place and used to working together. "When we were competing with a neighboring county for a state construction project," said Manager Noland, "we had a forum and process already developed that enabled us to put aside individual interests and band together as a county to win the project. That would not have happened ten years ago."[32]

A specific example of progress through the visioning process is the high school graduation rate, which has gone from 52 percent to 72 percent since the subcommittee responsible for working on this portion of the community plan came into existence. Several of the programs developed to keep young people in school have come from this group, including graduation partnership programs and infrastructure improvements at schools. Said Manager Noland,

> *It's hard to pin down those successes to the work of that one [visioning subcommittee] group, but it has provided us the venue to be out in the community and get people talking together. I can't say those things the visioning group did were solely responsible for that change, but they certainly were supplemental, complementary, and contributed to the overall success in improving the high school graduation rate.[33]*

Principles of Successful Community Change

Many examples of successful (and unsuccessful) community visioning projects exist. The reasons for their success or failure can be complex and varied. Each community is unique in its strengths and assets, makeup and leadership, history and geography, politics and outside influences. These distinctions demand that each community carefully consider strategies that fit its needs rather than adopt a cookie-cutter approach to planning and visioning. Furthermore, each community must consider how much public or cross-sector participation is desirable. Choosing a more participatory, boundary-spanning approach will pose challenges and call for trade-offs.

We present a set of general principles that communities might consider before undertaking a community change effort. The principles draw on our experience and that of our colleagues.[34] They are supported by a review of relevant literature and best practices.[35] Each principle is followed by suggested practices and several examples from the experiences of the three North Carolina communities that we are highlighting. These examples represent equally valid but significantly different approaches to planning. (For more details on the communities' processes, see Table 2 and the sidebars on pages 24, 27, and 28.)

1. Value and seek broad community recognition of and support for the civic importance of work on community change.

• Obtain formal and true support or buy-in (that is, not just lip service; for example, formal resolutions of support, or endorsements) from existing governing institutions, civic organizations, and other important entities.

• Collect, share, and use community-wide indicators to measure progress.

• Adopt the vision, the values, and the philosophy on a community-wide and personal basis.

Once the vision and the goals of Wilson 2020 Community Vision were adopted, the steering committee sent an informational summary to more than 100 organizations, officials, and education and community leaders announcing the upcoming summit, inviting their impressions of the vision and the goals, and asking for their endorsement of the vision statement. Thirty-five responses were received, nearly all positive.

At the start of the Wilkes Vision 20/20 process, organizers spent time gathering data and indicators. A series of articles appeared that raised awareness and challenged the community to question its status relative to other places with questions like these: What is our pay compared with the rest of North Carolina? How does our high school dropout rate compare? What is the poverty rate among senior adults? This advance work was partly responsible for galvanizing public support for the visioning effort and brought more than 400 community members to the kickoff town hall meeting.

2. Structure and formalize the leadership and management functions of the community change effort.

• Adhere to regular meeting times, arrangements, and documentation.

• Routinely share information between meetings.

• Recruit, inform, and orient new leaders.

• Dedicate staff and professional support to the effort (through direct hires, job sharing, assignment of responsibilities to existing positions, contracts, rotation of responsibilities or functions, and so forth).

The Roxboro management team sets aside every other meeting to discuss ways in which it can implement the strategic plan and integrate or improve service delivery to support implementation. In the first few months after adopting their initial strategic plan, city officials did the following:

• Posted major changes to the website

• Purchased and installed new software to allow intracity information sharing

• Offered training in team building to foster a collaborative governance approach

• Rewrote individual performance objectives for the manager and the department heads in support of the plan's objectives

• Hired a public information officer

A big challenge: true buy-in, not just lip-service support.

3. Emphasize shared responsibility between the public and private sectors.

- Contribute local and existing assets or resources to implement strategies.

- Weave together the comprehensive and strategic planning efforts of both sectors and integrate them into the community vision and goals.

- Undertake joint pilot programs.

- Plan for, seek, and leverage outside resources together.

Initial funding for the Wilkes Vision 20/20 effort came entirely from private corporations. Contributions from local government have come more recently. Original pledges were for five years. They have been renewed for another five years.

4. Intentionally build on local assets to increase civic capacity and leadership.

- Focus community development and planning efforts on what the community does well (its assets) rather than on what it lacks (its needs).

- Recognize and value methods and practices that emphasize the processes of leading, not just the products, thereby creating a stronger civic infrastructure. Equipping community members to be "process literate" enhances a community's ability to mobilize, manage, and sustain effective working relationships.

Using feedback from the community and its own sense of what building the community's capacity would take, the Wilson 2020 Community Vision Steering Committee chose two of its seven goals to emphasize collaboration and community. Specific strategies to support those goals included leadership development programs and other ways to build civic infrastructure, such as local government sponsorship of forums about the local political process and strengthening of neighborhood and community association through greater coordination, education, and communication.

5. Continually seek pertinent and valid information and the input and the perspective of the community as community change is planned, organized, and executed.

- Ensure that planning efforts mirror community intent by checking in with community members and incorporating community involvement in all phases, stages, and strategies.

- Periodically revisit existing feedback and material generated during the community visioning stage for continuing integration.

Recognizing that change is inevitable and that planning too far into the future is impractical, the Roxboro City Council decided to treat its final document as a work in progress, subject to continual review and revision in order to adapt to changing conditions, circumstances, partners, and opportunities. The final document is intentionally brief, and its format intentionally user-friendly, to encourage sharing, discussion, and understanding of the document by a variety of community organizations and citizens.

In 2006, Wilkes Vision 20/20 brought together a diverse group of people to brainstorm possibilities, prioritize options, and work toward consensus on emerging community issues. In addition, organizers asked, "Is the Vision 20/20 process still relevant? Do we need to exist?" According to Fran Evans, Vision 20/20 director, "The answer was a resounding yes!"[36]

6. Focus on achieving visible results that get the community closer to the vision and stimulate continued commitment.

- Choose a mix of short- and long-term priorities, and concentrate on some early results.

- Develop a successful collaborative effort early, even if it is on a relatively small or insignificant project.

- Report progress to the community on an ongoing basis.

- Celebrate accomplishments.

The comprehensive nature of Wilson 2020 Community Vision required a continuous flow of messages to the greater Wilson community. This outreach was especially important for the success of the various strategies of community engagement. Early on, a website was developed and was subsequently housed and maintained by Barton College. The *Wilson Daily Times* supported the project with newspaper coverage throughout the process and extensive advertising of project-related events. Additionally, a marketing subcommittee kept a steady stream of advertising, radio spots, and stories running. A videographer was used at the community summit, and segments from the event were put together in a twenty-minute video to publicize the visioning effort. Shortly after the summit and the refinement of action plans, the management committee identified short-term, "low-hanging fruit" strategies and long-term, "stretch" strategies. Some have already been accomplished, such as development of a comprehensive community calendar, hosted on the *Wilson Daily Times* website.

7. Continuously monitor the process and the products (outcomes), and evaluate them against the action plan.

- Use group critiques and self-critiques to improve effectiveness.[37]
- Update initial indicators using new information.
- Set up an evaluation system for integration across teams, projects, collaboratives, and partnerships.

Self-evaluation is continuous in Roxboro city government. Elements of the final draft of the strategic plan, especially those that require changing policies or procedures and strengthening or developing relationships, were factored into the annual work plans for the council, the manager, department heads, and other staff. In this way, the plan became a tool and a guiding force for holding all personnel accountable for their work.

Most of Wilkes Vision 20/20's indicators of progress are qualitative rather

Table 3. Levels of Citizen Involvement in Developing a Vision or a Plan

Telling	"We've got to do this. It's our vision/plan. You be excited about it." *Governing body imposes vision.* People don't get voice.*
Selling	"We have the best answer. Let's see if we can get you to buy in." *Governing body develops vision, enrolls people in it.*
Testing	"What excites you about this vision/plan? What doesn't?" *Governing body gauges acceptance, support, and relevance of its vision. If there is not sufficient community support, governing body goes back to drawing board. Success depends on people's willingness to be truthful and realistic.[†]*
Consulting	"What vision/plan do other stakeholders recommend that we adopt?" *Governing body engages people in designing vision. They consider ramifications of their choices.[†] Governing body plays role of judge in accepting/ignoring what people say. Governing body determines content of vision and decides how to begin moving in direction of vision.*
Co-creating	"Let's create the culture we individually and collectively want." *Every step involves discussion and shared choice by both governing body and community members.[†]*

* "Governing body" refers to any formal group leading the planning effort, be it a local government board, a collaborative leadership team, or some other body that has ultimate responsibility for the vision or the strategic plan.

† The governing body will have to consider whether various stakeholders know enough about the roles and the responsibilities of city government to be able to make these judgments or understand the ramifications of their decisions. If not, community participants will have to be educated in using this approach.

than quantitative. Each indicator is periodically reviewed by the appropriate committee to see if it is still relevant, if the related activity is on target, and what else may have changed in the community. "For example, one goal of the infrastructure committee was to have the highway widened and install natural gas," said Manager Noland. "All that has happened, so now that group has folded into a support group for the government committee."[38]

Issues for Local Government Leaders to Consider

Gauging the Value and the Level of Participation

Assuming that a community wants to include a broad range of stakeholders, how does it decide how much participation is desirable? As one local government official said, "The biggest issue we're wrestling with is the scope of the project. We're wondering whether a large-scale, time-consuming project would yield significantly better results than a less ambitious strategy."[39] As elected and appointed officials wrestle

with this basic dilemma, they might ask themselves these questions:

- What are our motivations for undertaking a planning effort?

  __ To develop a comprehensive approach to services that can guide staff and elected officials in preparing budgets?

  __ To explore ways to increase the local resources available to undertake community problem-solving efforts?

  __ To minimize citizen opposition to decisions?

  __ To engage people from throughout the community in guiding their shared future?

  __ To build an open community in which people trust and care about one another?

- What do we hope to gain by involving citizens? What do they need to know? What do we need to know from them?

- How will we decide what approach is right for our community? Who will make the decision?

• What are the added financial implications of involving citizens?

Every approach has its trade-offs. Chief among the elements to consider are time, community commitment and support, costs, and information. Community planning processes that are highly citizen-driven are extremely time-intensive and often expensive. The challenge for a community is to balance the competing considerations of efficiency and cost-effectiveness while building in mechanisms to encourage community involvement in decision making.

A community can choose from a range of approaches in undertaking a community planning project (see Table 3). These can be seen as stages, if the ultimate goal is a broadly inclusive effort that will yield a shared vision. Alternatively, in preliminary conversations to design the scope of work, a community can use the table to assess and discuss the trade-offs of the approach

it chooses. In this way, it can ensure a shared understanding among those involved before it gets started or if confusion arises in the midst of work.

Addressing Political Considerations

There is value in having elected officials participate in the planning without dominating it or tainting it with political overtones. Community planning processes provide an arena for raising issues of value to the community. Therefore all voices must be counted and heard. By encouraging broad participation and input, community leaders create the expectation that the perspectives of people who often are marginalized or are out of the mainstream are considered on equal footing with all others. Yet how priorities are ultimately chosen and implemented can unintentionally (or intentionally) exclude these voices in an effort to strive for efficient or expedient decisions, avoid politically sensitive or

uncomfortable situations, or simply deny the existence of opposing viewpoints. Elected officials must be fully aware of the impact that they can have on a visioning effort.

Measuring Progress

Community indicators are an important accountability component for community development efforts. Before the visioning process even began, the leaders of Wilson 2020 Community Vision recognized a need to have a specific set of indicators that could be kept and updated continually, both to monitor progress and to facilitate future planning. Part of the implementation phase of Wilson 2020 Community Vision is to determine which indicators will be used to monitor progress. In making this determination, two kinds of indicators are important to consider. First, there are several global indicators that are readily obtainable and easily compared across counties and
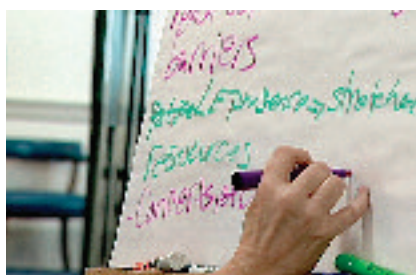
Scenes from the Wilson 2020 Community Visioning Summit, held April 16, 2007, at Barton College.

from county to (at least) state—for example, high school graduation rates, unemployment rates, homeownership rates, and household incomes. The North Carolina State Data Center is a good resource for many of these indicators.[40]

The second category of indicators is more specific to a community's vision. Each thematic action area should include a set of goals, outcomes (or objectives), and strategies. Ideally, each outcome would have associated with it at least one measurable indicator. Some of these indicators may be found in the list of global indicators. However, most indicators specific to a stated desired outcome or objective are likely to be more community-specific and thus may need to be collected locally. An excellent resource for understanding how measuring results fits into vision-driven, collaborative governance is the book *Results That Matter*.[41] The authors argue that "advanced community governance" entails alignment of "getting things done" with engaging citizens and measuring results.

Maintaining Accountability

As communities engage a broad range of stakeholders in designing, planning, and developing their future, the interactions among potential partners increase, and so do the opportunities for misinformation, miscommunication, or misunderstanding. Often the visioning partners are exploring innovative ways to address broad public problems and new ways of working together to do so. They are not sure what specific activities will be successful, so their agreements are in terms of general services or outcomes, such as improved quality of life. This represents a change in the way people traditionally view accountability, with a focus on restraints and reports. Measures that have customarily defined successful programmatic outcomes and relationships may not be appropriate for new ways of working together.

The traditional lines of control and accountability are blurred and may no longer be appropriate to the new partnerships and collaborative efforts. Yet visioning participants can design new accountability patterns if they are willing to share decision making, take time to deliberate and experiment, and respect the different perspectives of the various organizational representatives. Given community visioning's focus on product, process, and creation of new relationships, accountability measures used in community visioning projects must be flexible enough to accommodate expanded collaboratives.[42]

Conclusion

Local governments in North Carolina face a sea change that will affect their communities in immediate and real ways. The trends toward outsourcing of jobs and population shifts are key drivers of change. More and more people are able to choose where they want to live on the basis of what type of lifestyle and location appeals to them the most. As a result, quality-of-life issues are becoming at least as important as traditional forces of economic development. Quality-of-life issues span the spectrum, so they cannot be adequately addressed by just one sector. Shaping the multitude of community characteristics that determine quality of life requires cross-sector relationships and contributions.

Visioning entails citizens creating a shared sense of direction for their community. It is both a product and a process, built on the common ground discovered in the journey. The product provides tangible results, often an action plan that identifies strategies for achieving the goals expressed in the vision statement. The process itself, one of broad-based citizen engagement, is meant to extend beyond the specific activities and contribute to building the overall civic capacity of communities and regions.

Today's multitude of economic and social forces can be viewed as a tumultuous sea on which a ship (the community) is operated by a diverse crew (the various community groups and organizations). For the ship to sail effectively and in the right direction, all crew members must work in synchrony toward the desired destination. Too often, ships are tossed around by the sea, become directionless, and drift under the force of the wind or the waves. A shared vision serves as a beacon, guiding the crew to work together to steer the ship in the desired direction.

Local governments are in a prime position to catalyze efforts to create such a vision. In North Carolina, many local governments are stepping up to the challenge of engaging their communities in new ways to develop visions that not only help government leaders know which way to go, but also enable the direction to be shared with other key community partners.

Notes

1. Norman Walzer, preface to *Community Strategic Visioning Programs,* ed. Norman Walzer (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1996), at xi.

2. William R. Potapchuk and Jarle P. Crocker Jr., "Exploring the Elements of Civic Capital," *National Civic Review* 88 (1999): 180.

3. Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock* (New York: Bantam Books, 1970).

4. Steven C. Ames, "Community Visioning: Planning for the Future in Oregon's Local Communities" (paper presented at the national conference of the American Planning Association, San Diego, CA, April 5–9, 1997), 5; Robert Shipley and Ross Newkirk, "Visioning: Did Anybody See Where It Came From?" *Journal of Planning Literature* 12 (1998): 407–16.

5. Bruce Adams and John Parr, *Boundary Crossers: Case Studies of How Ten of America's Metropolitan Regions Work* (College Park, MD: James MacGregor Burns Academy of Leadership Press, 1997).

6. Derek Okubo, ed., *The Community Visioning and Strategic Planning Handbook* (Denver, CO: National Civic League Press, 2000), 6.

7. For links to numerous articles on Chattanooga, *see* www.chattanooga-chamber.com/GetToKnowUs/americastalking.asp.

8. Ames, "Community Visioning," 6.

9. David E. Booher, "Collaborative Governance Practices and Democracy," *National Civic Review* 93 (2004): 36.

10. Center for Rural Pennsylvania, *Planning for the Future: A Handbook on Community Visioning* (3d ed.) (Harrisburg, PA: Center for Rural Pennsylvania, 2006), www.ruralpa.org/visioning3.pdf, 6.

11. Ames, "Community Visioning," 10.

12. Potapchuk and Crocker, "Exploring," 180; William R. Potapchuk, "Building Sus-

Choose clear indicators to monitor progress. Consider using both global and specific indicators.

tainable Community Politics: Synergizing Participatory, Institutional, and Representative Democracy," *National Civic Review* 85 (1996): 57.

13. Christopher L. Plein, Kenneth E. Green, and David G. Williams, "Organic Planning: A New Approach to Public Participation in Local Governance," *Social Science Journal* 35 (1998): 519.

14. Carl M. Moore, Gianni Longo, and Patsy Palmer, "Visioning," in *The Consensus Building Handbook: A Comprehensive Guide to Reaching Agreement*, ed. Lawrence Susskind, Sarah McKearnan, and Jennifer Thomas-Larmer (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1999), 561.

15. Two of the cases in this article (Wilkes Vision 20/20 and Wilson 2020 Community Vision) are multijurisdictional.

16. *See* Walzer, *Community Strategic Visioning Programs*.

17. An alternative but related approach is to maintain a small, more exclusive leadership team that appoints a large group or task force to participate in the visioning process. Instead of broadly engaging the whole community, the team pulls together a large, representative group that represents the broader community. The large group may then complete the visioning process over a shorter period, possibly in a retreat setting. This approach may have the advantage of being more focused and taking less time. However, it may seem more exclusive and not engage the whole community as effectively as a broadly participatory approach.

18. John M. Bryson, *Strategic Planning for Public and Nonprofit Organizations* (3d ed.) (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004). *See* Resource A.

19. National Civic League, *The Civic Index: Measuring Your Community's Civic Health* (2d ed.) (Denver, CO: National Civic League, 1999).

20. Bryson, *Strategic Planning. See* chapter 5.

21. Okubo, *The Community Visioning and Strategic Planning Handbook*, 36.

22. The National Civic League guide is for "community visioning and strategic planning." No distinction is made between the two terms. Consultant Henry Luke calls the facilitated portion of visioning "community strategic planning," implying that strategic planning is part of a broader visioning effort. *See* Luke Planning Inc., Community Strategic Planning, www.lukevision.com/strategic.htm.

23. Bryson, *Strategic Planning*.

24. Booher, "Collaborative Governance Practices," 34.

25. Ken Noland, Wilkesboro town manager, telephone interview by Lydian Altman, August 14, 2007.

26. Noland, interview; Nelson Granade, pastor, First Baptist Church, telephone interview by Lydian Altman, September 11, 2007; Linda Cheek, employee, Wilkesboro

Chamber of Commerce, and Fran Evans, director, Wilkes Vision 20/20, telephone interview (conference call) by Lydian Altman, October 18, 2007.

27. Noland, interview.

28. Granade, interview.

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid.

31. Cheek, interview.

32. Noland, interview.

33. Ibid.

34. Ricardo S. Morse et al., *Wilson 2020 Report and Recommendations* (Chapel Hill, NC: School of Government, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2007).

35. Suzanne W. Morse, *Smart Communities: How Citizens and Local Leaders Can Use Strategic Thinking to Build a Brighter Future* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004); David D. Chrislip, *The Collaborative Leadership Fieldbook: A Guide for Citizens and Civic Leaders* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002).

36. Evans, interview.

37. Following are examples of the self-evaluation questions for Roxboro's council, staff, employees, and citizens: What improvement in work processes can you suggest to meet the goals outlined in the city's strategic plan? What products, events, or projects have your strategic planning efforts produced so far? What unanticipated opportunities or challenges also required your attention during the evaluation of this session or the planning process?

38. Noland, interview.

39. David Leonetti, management intern, City of Hickory, e-mail to Lydian Altman, August 3, 2007.

40. North Carolina State Data Center, http://linc.state.nc.us/.

41. Paul D. Epstein, Paul M. Coates, and Lyle D. Wray, *Results That Matter: Improving Communities by Engaging Citizens, Measuring Performance, and Getting Things Done* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005).

42. Accountability relationships are viewed as processes—ways of interacting—around the expectations created in answering four questions: *Responsibility*—Who is expected to carry out which actions or produce what results for whom? *Discretion*—Who is expected to invoke, interpret, or alter those responsibility expectations? *Reporting*—Who should provide what information to whom about how responsibilities are carried out? *Reviewing and revising*—Who is expected to use what information to make decisions about the future of the relationship?

How the answers to those questions are put into practice constitutes accountability. Who answers each of the questions and how those answers are developed in large part determine whether accountability is an adversarial process, focused on punishment, or a collaborative process, focused on improving

the quality of public life. For a full discussion of this concept, *see* Lydian Altman-Sauer, Margaret Henderson, and Gordon P. Whitaker, "Developing Mutual Accountability in Local Government–Nonprofit Relationships," *Popular Government*, Fall 2003, 5–6.