

Sustainable Communities Planning Project (SCPP)

Summary of First Round of Civic Forums

“Strengthening Our Communities”



1. **Summary** – 12 forums held in 11 counties between January 31 and March 15, 2012.

Total attendees: 292 attendees, plus 25+ coordinators and facilitators.

Top Strengths:

- Excellent Higher Education
- Productive Farmland/Viticulture
- Accesss to Excellent Healthcare
- Scenic and Recreational Resources
- Small Town Charm

Top Challenges:

- Lack of Transportation Options
- Living in the New Economy
- Abandoned Job Centers
- Capitalizing on Assets
- Lack of Healthy Community Design

Top Other Issues:

Strengths –

- volunteer, charity and religious organizations

- road and water infrastructure
- central location

Challenges –

- lack of sidewalks and bike lanes
- access to food
- energy issues

2. **Date and Location of Forums** –

January 31 – Davie County, County Library, Mocksville – 34 attendees

January 31 – Guilford County, Central Library, Greensboro – 35 attendees

February 7 – Surry County, Community College/Viticulture Ctr, Dobson – 32 attendees

February 9 – Guilford County, Culler Senior Center, High Point – 14 attendees

February 9 – Montgomery County, Econ Dev Corp Offc, Troy – 0 attendees (session cancelled)

February 16 – Caswell County, Municipal Building, Yanceyville – 7 attendees

February 20 – Rockingham County, Agricultural Center, Wentworth – 12 attendees

February 21 – Forsyth County, Central Library, Winston-Salem – 35 attendees

February 21 - Randolph County, City Public Works Facility, Asheboro – 14 attendees

February 23 – Stokes County, King YMCA, King – 41 attendees

February 28 – Yadkin County, YVEDDI Headquarters, Boonville – 16 attendees

March 12 – Alamance County, Elon University, McKinnon Hall, Elon - 38 attendees

March 15 – Davidson County, Comm College Conference Ctr, Thomasville – 14 attendees

STRENGTHENING OUR COMMUNITIES – ALAMANCE CIVIC FORUM

Facilitators: Julie Hunkins, April Durr, Jesse Day, Eric Henry

Session date: March 12, 2012, 4-8 pm

Session Location: McKinnon Hall, Elon University, Elon, NC, Alamance County

Approximate # of Participants: 38 attendees, plus 9 staff and volunteers

Session Results:

STRENGTHS -

- Excellent higher education opportunities (27)
- Productive farmland (19)
- Small town charm (15)
- Scenic & recreational resources (9)
- Access to excellent healthcare (6)
- Other:
 - Use faith community to get the word out
 - Access to healthcare is linked to higher education
 - Ability to work together
 - Water and road infrastructure
 - Voluntarism, central location, mild climate

CHALLENGES -

- Lack of transportation options (24)
- Living in the new economy (14)
- Lack of healthy community design (14)
- Abandoned job centers (12)
- Lack of affordable housing (7)
- Increasing diversity (4)
- Other:
 - Help transitioning population (from prison, homeless)
 - Get people from rural areas engaged
 - Access to local foods is an issue
 - Abandoned job centers lead to crime; reuse lowers crime and rebuilds community
 - Lack of broadband access
 - Lack of quality K-12 education
 - Crime, business support, awareness of challenges, manuftrg jobs, sprawl

STRENGTHENING OUR COMMUNITIES – CASWELL COUNTY CIVIC FORUM

Facilitator #1: Bob Powell **Facilitator #2:** Dick Hails, Megan Cogburn and Elise Bielen

Session date: Feb 16, 2012, 6-8 pm

Session Location: Municipal Services Building,
Yanceyville, Caswell County

Approximate # of Participants: 7 participants, plus 4 staff and volunteers.

What worked: Diverse group, including minorities. Exercises seemed to go well, citizens were engaged and enjoyed the exercises, made many comments, stayed on schedule. Good room and host, who provided refreshments. Many attendees were community leaders, including a town council member, the town manager of Yanceyville, a county staffer, two members of the PTRC and RPO boards, etc.

What was challenging: Not a large group, many new issues posted on white sheets.

Session Results:

STRENGTHS -

- Small Town Charm (5)
- Economic Opportunity (5)
- Scenic and Recreational (5)
- Other:
 - Diversity of places – mix of urban and rural with the best of both worlds
 - Location [near many things] and land area [lots available]

CHALLENGES -

- Lack of Transportation Options (5)
- Living in the New Economy (4)
- Other:
 - Quality affordable housing
 - Loss of farmers (80% farmland unproductive)
 - Skilled workforce needed
 - Lack activities for young adults and youth
 - Loss of local businesses and lack of entrepreneurial spirit

Issue Grouping Discussion:

All of the strengths and challenges were grouped into three categories, with an overall “hub” issue:

1. Hub Issue: Diversity is a strength - the mix of urban and rural is the best of both worlds.

2. Quality of Life: Scenic and Recreational Resources, Small Town Charm, and Lack of activities for young adults and youth.
3. Economic Development: Economic Opportunities, Loss of farmers, loss of local businesses and lack of entrepreneurial spirit, quality of affordable housing, and lack of skilled workforce.
4. Infrastructure: Lack of Transportation Options, location and land area, Living in the New Economy.

Comments on Note Cards Collected (3):

1. 80% of county's farmland goes un-harvested.
2. There is a meat processing facility in Caswell County – Matkins Meat Processing; processes meat for farmers in the region for small fee; private/public partnership. Contact Joey Knight.
3. Want to be able to view the posters from the meeting online soon.
4. Ice Breaker Discussion on "What do you like": peace and quiet, know everybody, family connections, personal relationships.

STRENGTHENING OUR COMMUNITIES – DAVIDSON COUNTY CIVIC FORUM

Facilitator #1: Russ Smith

Facilitator #2: Hanna Cockburn

Session date: March 15, 2012, 4-6 pm

Session Location: Davidson Co. Community College
Conference Center, Thomasville, NC, Davidson County

Approximate # of participants: 14 attendees, 3 others.

What worked: great space, no material problems, no participant problems.

Session Results:

STRENGTHS –

- Access to excellent healthcare (11)
- Small town charm (8)
- Productive farmland/viticulture (8)
- Excellent higher education opportunities (6)
- Scenic and Recreational Resources (5)
- Economic Opportunities (5)
- Other:
 - Water resources, highways
 - Strong volunteer, charity, religious institutions
 - Central location

CHALLENGES –

- Abandoned job centers (12)
- Lack of transportation options (9)
- Living in the new economy (7)
- Increasing diversity (6)
- Loss of farmland (5)
- Capitalizing on Assets (4)
- Proximity of housing to job centers (2)
- Lack of affordable housing (2)
- Other:
 - Urban sprawl – tied to farmland loss and abandoned job centers

STRENGTHENING OUR COMMUNITIES – DAVIE COUNTY CIVIC FORUM

Facilitator #1: Bill McNeil (discussion leader) **Facilitator #2:** Martha Hodge (exercise leader)

Session date: Jan 31, 2012, 4:00-5:45 pm **Session Location:** Davie Co. Library, Mocksville, NC, Davie County

Approximate # of Participants: 34 participants, plus 4 staff and volunteers, 1 elected official (Mayor of Coolemees), many other planning board members; people representing Mocksville, Bermuda Run, Coolemees and Davie County

What worked: Presentation went quickly and attendees were eager to participate in the exercises. Some citizens commented about cross-cutting strengths and challenges.

What was challenging: It took some tables a few minutes to “catch on” to the exercise. Once they understood, participation seemed high.

Session Results:

STRENGTHS -

- Small Town Charm (20)
- Excellent higher education opportunities (17)
- Access to excellent healthcare (15)
- Productive farmland (15)
- Scenic & Recreational Resources (9)
- Economic opportunities (6)
- Other:
 - Workforce
 - Increasing elderly population
 - Large number of native Davie Co residents
 - Broadband and wireless access
 - Highway infrastructure

CHALLENGES -

- Abandoned Job Centers = 12 votes
- Capitalizing on Assets = 13 votes
- Lack of Healthy Community Design = 8 votes
- Living in the New Economy = 16 votes
- Loss of Farmland = 9 votes
- Other:
 - Bicycle infrastructure
 - Telecommuting/airport size/passenger rail
 - Increasing elderly population

Other feedback:

- 1) Sign-In table should be manned by at least 2 people and there should be at least 2 separate sign-in locations in order to better move people through the door. With a static start time, everyone shows up within the same 10-15 minute window of time. Sign-in quickly got backed up and people were thus left with less time to read the posters and other background material we had prepared, and less time to mingle/meet the project team once they got passed sign-in.
- 2) Make sure all facilitators and project team members attending the forum are aware of what their roles will be prior to arriving at the forum. This will allow forum facilitators to be better prepared and set-up will thus be more efficient.
- 3) Facilitators and other forum staff should be ready for an “all hands on deck” situation when the group exercise first begins; I found that each table needed at least a few minutes on one-on-one attention from a staff member to facilitate their understanding of the exercise.
- 4) Attendees mixed up all of the Strength and Challenge cards in the envelopes after the exercise was complete. This needs to be addressed somehow – either staff should ensure forum attendees are reassembling the cards in the designated envelopes, or staff should be prepared to go through each envelope before or after each forum.

STRENGTHENING OUR COMMUNITIES – FORSYTH COUNTY CIVIC FORUM

Facilitators: Russ Smith, Darren Rhodes, Meisha McDaniel

Session date: February 21, 2012

Session Location: Forsyth Co Central Library,
Winston-Salem, NC, Forsyth County

Approximate number of participants: 35, plus 7 other facilitator, staff

What worked: room & table size fine, facilitators worked well, exercises went well, good range of folks attending – public, private, working group members, new folks.

What was challenging: During report back presentations, several folks said the comments did not reflect the broad input of the group. Also, it would have been nice to have had some rural/small town folks.

Session Results:

STRENGTHS –

- Excellent higher education opportunities (36)
- Access to excellent healthcare (25)
- Scenic and recreational resources (24)
- Cultural events/arts & crafts (7)
- Increasing diversity (7)
- Productive farmland/viticulture (5)
- Economic opportunities (5)
- Small town charm (4)

CHALLENGES –

- Lack of healthy community design (29)
- Lack of transportation options (26)
- Abandoned job centers (14)
- Proximity of housing to job centers (12)
- Living in the new economy (6)
- Capitalizing on assets (5)
- Loss of farmland (5)
- Increasing diversity (5)

STRENGTHENING OUR COMMUNITIES – GUILFORD COUNTY (GREENSBORO)

CIVIC FORUM

Facilitator #1: Dick Hails & Jesse Day (discussion leaders) **Facilitator #2:** both

Session date: Feb 9, 2012, 5:30-7:30 pm **Session Location:** Culler Senior Center, High Point, Guilford County

Approximate # of Participants: 14 attendees, plus 9 staff and volunteers, 1 elected official

What worked: Diverse group, including minorities and a tea party member. Exercises seemed to go well, citizens were engaged and made many comments, stayed mostly on schedule. Good room.

What was challenging: Not as large a group as anticipated, many new issues posted on white sheets, some tables had trouble functioning as one group discussion.

Session Results:

STRENGTHS -

- Higher Education (8)
- Productive Farmland (7)
- Access to Health Care (6)
- Small Town Charm (4)
- Economic Opportunity (4)
- Rich History (3)
- Other:
 - 3 strengths linked (viticulture, scenic resources and productive farmland)
 - Vacant stores are an opportunity for inner-city revitalization
 - Family connections
 - Valuing history
 - Increasing diversity
 - Higher education comment

CHALLENGES -

- Abandoned Job Centers (8)
- Lack of Healthy Community Design (6)
- Living in the New Economy (4)
- Loss of Farmland (4)

- Other:
 - 3 challenges linked (lack of transportation options, proximity to housing/jobs and affordable transportation)
 - Reuse of Vacant Property
 - Revitalize the Metropolis
 - Loss of Farmland and the New Economy comment
 - Demolish abandoned buildings comment

Comments on Note Cards Collected (5):

1. Increase the number of shelters at PART stops to increase ridership.
2. For starters, how can we get more people to be involved in your process?
I, personally, apologize for the attendance. Mocksville had more than we of High Point have given.
3. Location for more Farmer's Markets – Kernersville Town Hall and High Point at the Culler Senior Center.
4. Challenge – Entitlement programs. [federal]
5. Challenge – Government regulation and licensing fees.

STRENGTHENING OUR COMMUNITIES – GUILFORD COUNTY (HIGH POINT) CIVIC FORUM

Facilitator #1: Dick Hails & Jesse Day (discussion leaders) **Facilitator #2:** both

Session date: Feb 9, 2012, 5:30-7:30 pm

Session Location: Culler Senior Center, High Point, Guilford County

Approximate # of Participants: 14 attendees, plus 9 staff and volunteers, 1 elected official.

What worked: Diverse group, including minorities and a tea party member. Exercises seemed to go well, citizens were engaged and made many comments, stayed mostly on schedule. Good room.

What was challenging: Not as large a group as anticipated, many new issues posted on white sheets, some tables had trouble functioning as one group discussion.

Session Results:

STRENGTHS -

- Higher Education (8)
- Productive Farmland (7)
- Access to Health Care (6)
- Small Town Charm (4)
- Economic Opportunity (4)
- Rich History (3)
- Other:
 - 3 strengths linked (viticulture, scenic resources and productive farmland)
 - Vacant stores are an opportunity for inner-city revitalization
 - Family connections
 - Valuing history
 - Increasing diversity
 - Higher education comment

CHALLENGES -

- Abandoned Job Centers (8)
- Lack of Healthy Community Design (6)
- Living in the New Economy (4)
- Loss of Farmland (4)

- Other:
 - 3 challenges linked (lack of transportation options, proximity to housing/jobs and affordable transportation)
 - Reuse of Vacant Property
 - Revitalize the Metropolis
 - Loss of Farmland and the New Economy comment
 - Demolish abandoned buildings comment

Comments on Note Cards Collected (5):

1. Increase the number of shelters at PART stops to increase ridership.
2. For starters, how can we get more people to be involved in your process?
I, personally, apologize for the attendance. Mocksville had more than we of High Point have given.
3. Location for more Farmer's Markets – Kernersville Town Hall and High Point at the Culler Senior Center.
4. Challenge – Entitlement programs. [federal?]
5. Challenge – Government regulation and licensing fees.

STRENGTHENING OUR COMMUNITIES – RANDOLPH COUNTY CIVIC FORUM

Facilitators: Ed Lewis, Martha Hodge

Session date: February 21, 2012, 6-8 pm **Session Location:** City Public Works Facility,
Asheboro, NC, Randolph County

Approximate # of Participants: 14 attendees, plus 5 staff and volunteers

Session Results:

STRENGTHS –

- Scenic & recreational resources (8)
- Productive farmland (7)
- Small town charm (6)
- Access to excellent healthcare (4)
- Economic opportunities (3)
- Excellent higher education opportunities (2)
- Other:
 - Road infrastructure
 - Central location
 - Arts and cultural resources

CHALLENGES –

- Living in the new economy (12)
- Capitalizing on assets (7)
- Lack of transportation options (6)
- Abandoned job centers (3)
- Lack of healthy community design (3)
- Increasing diversity (2)
- Other:
 - Changing skillset needs for new jobs
 - Regional cooperation

STRENGTHENING OUR COMMUNITIES – ROCKINGHAM COUNTY CIVIC FORUM

Facilitator #1: Bob Powell

Facilitator #2: Paul Kron

Session date: February 20, 2012

Session Location: Ag Center, Wentworth, NC,
Rockingham County

Approximate # of participants: 12 attendees, plus 4 staff and volunteers

What worked: good space and refreshments, good discussion, broad representation – county leaders, newcomers, elected and appointed officials, and some diversity.

Session Results:

STRENGTHS –

- Small town charm (11)
- Productive farmland/viticulture (9)
- Scenic & recreational resources (9)
- Economic opportunities (6)
- Increasing diversity (1)
- Other:
 - Low crime rate (2)
 - Vineyards, breweries, distilleries

CHALLENGES –

- Capitalizing on assets (11)
- Living in the new economy (9)
- Loss of farmland (6)
- Abandoned job centers (4)
- Other:
 - Too much negative (not enough positive) (3)
 - Need a hotel (2)
 - Lack of unity
 - Sell Rockingham Co to its own citizens
 - Educate citizens on caring for aging population

STRENGTHENING OUR COMMUNITIES – STOKES COUNTY CIVIC FORUM

Facilitator #1: Bill McNeil (discussion) **Facilitator #2:** Martha Hodge (exercise)

Session date: February 23, 2012, 4:00-5:45 pm **Session Location:** YMCA, King, NC, Stokes County

Approximate # of Participants: 41 attendees, including at least 2 elected officials (Mayor of King, Stokes County Commissioner), many other planning board members; people representing varied parts of the county.

1. What worked:

Presentation allowed time for questions and some discussion before exercise. People had a little difficulty getting into the Strengths, but caught on. Some group discussion about the clustered strengths and challenges. Several people suggested new strengths. Food provided by the King Chamber was a big hit, provided by Thai Café, whose owner participated in the forum.

2. What was challenging:

Some people raised issues during the presentation, asking “who’s plan is this?” They were clearly in a minority, and others did not share their skepticism. Toward the end of the session, one participant spoke out with a warning of “government intervention.” In the final review of issues, one person spoke about there being no divisions within the county, other than geographic separation by the Sauratown Mountain. Another person disagreed, and they argued about it. They were asked to continue the discussion after the meeting.

Session Results:

STRENGTHS –

- Scenic & recreation resources (21)
- Productive farmland (18)
- Excellent healthcare (12)
- Small town charm (10)
- Higher education (8)
- Arts & crafts (7)
- Rich history (5)
- Other:
 - Greatest strength perceived as source of division
 - Churches
 - Available workforce
 - People
 - Patriotism
 - 3 day getaway in Stokes Co

CHALLENGES –

- Capitalizing on assets (19)
- Living in the new economy (13)
- Proximity to job centers (11)
- Lack of transportation choices (7)
- Abandoned job centers (5)
- Loss of farmland (4)
- Lack of healthy community design (3)
- Other:
 - Divisions within the county and region
 - Lack of broadband
 - Govt intervention into free market
 - Affordable childcare
 - Proximity of county to jobs
 - Lack of infrastructure
 - Make sure schools are not left behind
 - Childhood hunger
 - Need licensed kitchen to promote small businesses

Comments on Note Cards Collected (2):

- 1)** on the challenge of government intervention,
- 2)** asking for attention to the schools and youth

Other feedback:

- 1) Set-up team arrived early, but needed a power cord and more namebadges.
- 2) We should have asked a local official to introduce ahead of time, rather than pressing Mayor Warren of King into service right before the 4:00 pm start.
- 3) We needed more green sheets for each table.
- 4) Facilitators should ask participants to list added Strengths and Challenges as they are presenting our pre-determined list.
- 5) King YMCA was a very good facility. Clearly Stokes residents showed up.

STRENGTHENING OUR COMMUNITIES – SURRY COUNTY CIVIC FORUM

Facilitator #1: Bill McNeil

Facilitator #2: Darren Rhodes

Session date: February 7, 2012

Session Location: Surry Community College,
Dobson, NC, Surry County

Approximate # of Participants: 32 attendees, plus 7 staff and volunteers

What worked: presentation smooth, some arrived late, exercises and discussions good, new issues brought up and put on wall.

What was challenging: audience interrupted for definition of new economy and healthy community.

Session Results:

STRENGTHS –

- Access to excellent healthcare (22)
- Excellent higher education opportunities (13)
- Small town charm (12)
- Scenic & recreation resources (8)
- Productive farmland (8)
- Economic opportunities (6)
- Other:
 - Faith-based community (5)
 - Accuracy in this project's recording (2)
 - Highway infrastructure
 - Natural resources/healthy environment
 - Educated workforce (% with 4 yr degree)
 - Tourism and wine/grape industry
 - Freedom

CHALLENGES –

- Abandoned job centers (16)
- Lack of transportation choices (10)
- Capitalizing on assets (9)
- Living in the new economy (9)
- Increasing diversity (4)
- Lack of healthy community design (4)
- Lack of affordable housing (4)

- Proximity of housing to job centers (3)
- Loss of farmland (3)
- Other:
 - Poor written communication skills in the workforce
 - Access to local, affordable, healthy foods
 - Skills gap in the workforce
 - The push toward globalism
 - Federally funded healthcare being cut
 - Too many government regulations
 - Get real input; don't pre-print the answers you want to hear.
 - Work ethics in the workforce
 - Job loss

Comments on Note Cards Collected (4):

1. People took time out of their work schedule and are leaving the presentation not knowing what sustainable communities are. You would think that after 2 hours it would at least be defined.
2. Define sustainable development.
3. Use actual pictures taken in the region, especially in regard to the housing photo.
4. This is not a good thing. It is coming from Agenda 21, which was started by the UN to take more of our freedoms away. You are misleading people – using nice fuzzy word, but what is happening is not good for nation or Surry County. The Republican Party has come out against Agenda 21 and Sustainable Development, and I pray it is not too late to stop it.
5. I think we should have kept going on ranking strengths and challenges. For example, transportation and housing is the least important, but there were other strengths that need to be recognized and ranked.
6. Todd Tucker would like electronic copies of the posters.

Other Feedback (comments):

- Call for extra ideas on strengths and challenges earlier. Then have participants to talk about them, rate and rank, before posting on the wall.
- Need to publicize the forum more aggressively, using radio and other media.
- Publicize more through towns.

STRENGTHENING OUR COMMUNITIES -YADKIN COUNTY CIVIC FORUM

Facilitators: Kyle Laird and Cari Hopson

Session date: February 28, 2012, 6-7:30 pm **Session Location:** YVEDDI Headquarters,
Boonville, NC, Yadkin County

What worked: Very engaged group. Many knew each other. A diverse group, including a farmer, elected officials, town managers and YVEDDI staff. No citizens under 50 years old present. No minority citizens present.

Session Results:

STRENGTHS –

- Productive farmland (10)
- Viticulture (7)
- Small town charm (6)
- Healthcare (6)
- Scenic & recreational resources (3)
- Arts & crafts (3)
- Education (3)
- Other Issues:
 - Higher education (2)
 - Hospitality and friendliness

CHALLENGES –

- Living in the new economy (10)
- Abandoned job centers (8)
- Loss of farmland (6)
- Proximity of housing to job centers (4)
- Capitalizing on assets (4)
- Other Issues:
 - Lack of transportation options (2)
 - Loss of farmland
 - Proximity of housing to job centers
 - Healthy community design
 - Protect natural resources

'Clustering of Issues' Comments:

Strengths:

- Productive farmland + viticulture
- Small town charm + scenic/recr resources + arts/crafts
- Education
- Healthcare

Challenges:

- Living in the new economy (most important)
- Proximity of housing to job centers + abandoned job centers (twice) + lack of transportation options (twice)
- Capitalizing on assets + healthy community design
- Loss of farmland (twice) + protect natural resources

Comments on Note Cards:

- The card about affordable housing needs to be analyzed in that we have affordable housing.... It is accessibility to affordable housing that is the challenge....i.e. rental deposit and rent money, down payment for a home loan, etc. [Danny Haire, YVEDDI ExDir]
- PART needs to provide food for these meetings.