CEDS 2017 Stakeholder Interviews Background

• Public input required as part of the CEDS process
• 8 Interview Questions
• Mix of Interviews (33 Total): One-on-One Interviews (30 Total)- Private Sector (10), Elected Officials (8), Education (4), EDCs (4), Chambers (2) Community Groups (2); Group Interviews (3 Total)-Regional Aging Advisory Committee/Senior Tar Heel Legislators, Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board, and Hickory Young Professionals/Greater Hickory Jaycees

• Date Created: Friday, February 13, 2017
• Date Ended: Friday, March 15, 2017
CEDS 2017
Stakeholder Interviews
One-On-Interviews
Q1: What is the biggest asset in the region that is not being utilized to its full potential?

### Top Response Topics Mentioned During One-On-One Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response Topics</th>
<th>Number of Interviews</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Geographic Location</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>23.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People/Workforce</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>23.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural Resources</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quality of Life</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Other Topics Mentioned During Interviews
- 2 Interviews
  - Airports
  - Downtowns
  - Economic Development
  - Vacant Buildings
- 1 Interview
  - Manufacturing Solutions Center

Note: a person being interviewed sometimes mentioned several topics when answering the question.
Q1: What is the biggest asset in the region that is not being utilized to its full potential? (Open Responses)

- **(Education)** The community college system. North Carolina has a great university and 4-year college system, but more funding should be allocated to the existing community system for updating their physical plants as well as technology-based resources. The system needs to rebrand and enhance marketing efforts for K-12 students and their future goals. Need training focused on technology. State needs to rebrand the entire community college system. Maximize the new location and operation of NCSSM.

- **(Geographic Location)** We sit very near to a number crossroads here with access to I-40, I-77, I-85, US 321 and even NC 16. The proximity of our 4-county region to great transportation corridors and to nearby larger cities. I don’t believe we are emphasizing this proximity enough to businesses we are recruiting to locate here.

- **(Geographic Location)** We could advertise to say “come to this region” where your commute is short compared to other regions in the nation. We can’t train enough local people to fill the open jobs and we need to recruit people to move here to take the available jobs.

- **(Downtowns) (Natural Resources)** Our downtowns and the lakes and rivers. We need to develop pedestrian friendly downtowns. Hickory is beginning to do some of this with its bond initiative. Morganton has done a good job with its downtown, but could do much more.
Q1: What is the biggest asset in the region that is not being utilized to its full potential? (Open Responses)

- **(People/Workforce)** It is the workforce. The human capital that exist here. When you look at the jobs being advertised, the majority only require a high school education. It would be better to see jobs that value a higher degree or certification. We are training people to leave this area and find jobs elsewhere.

- **(People/Workforce)** Inclusion of the senior experienced workforce. Those folks have had successful business careers and live or moved to here and we need to more fully utilize their knowledge and experience.

- **(Manufacturing Solutions Center)** Currently the Manufacturing Solutions Center is underutilized and soon to be underutilized is the NC School for Math and Science. I don’t think there is a good understanding or awareness of what they are doing. It is viewed as a “baby” of Conover and that creates some negative feelings. MSC leadership doesn’t do a great job of marketing what they do at the MSC. Regarding the NCSSSM, if you went to 1,000 people in our region, 998 would not know what it is or that it is coming to Morganton. They don’t know what it is or how it will help.
Q2: What are our barriers for economic progress as a four-county region? (Follow-up: What is the biggest barrier)

Top Response Topics Mentioned During One-On-One Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response Topics</th>
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<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Workforce Readiness</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Mix/Job Wages</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>23.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young People Leaving the Region</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>23.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception of the Region</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infrastructure</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Communication about the Region</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other Topics Mentioned During Interviews

- 4 Interviews
  - Availability of Shell Building/Business Parks
  - Education
  - Housing
  - Vacant Buildings

- 3 Interviews
  - State Policies

- 2 Interviews
  - Lack of Amenities
  - Lack of Vision
  - Over Reliance on Manufacturing Industry
  - Region Slow to React to Problems

Note: a person being interviewed sometimes mentioned several topics when answering the question.
Q2: What are our barriers for economic progress as a four-county region? (Follow-up: What is the biggest barrier) (Open Responses)

- **(Lack of Vision)** Hickory and this region has great proximity and access to larger urban cities and their amenities, without the downside of traffic congestion, crime and other urban ills. But, when faced with new growth and development proposals, local officials seem to turn down these opportunities out of “fear” of losing their small town community atmosphere. The infrastructure is here we just need to look outside the box and open up to these potential endeavors.

- **(Young People Leaving the Region) (Availability of Shell Buildings/Business Parks) (State Policies)** Labor force participation rates. We have difficulty in attracting and retaining younger people. If something doesn’t change, we are going to have a very serious problem. Product development is a perennial problem. We have a shortage of ready buildings that are the desirable size. I don’t know why we didn’t learn the “Lincoln lesson” sooner. The cost of construction for adequate shell buildings is high. You can’t get companies to come look unless you have building ready. The state doesn’t really help develop shell buildings. The loan and carrying costs are difficult for communities.

- **(Workforce Readiness) (No Marketing Plan) (Lack of Vision)** Barriers include workforce readiness; having a single, cohesive, unified marketing plan that positions all the business attributes across the four-counties; poor work ethic among many newly hired workers. The biggest barrier is that visionaries are in short supply. We need more people who are innovators and a creative environment to help them flourish.
Q3: Are you originally from this region? If not, what brought you live and work here.

Total Responses: 30

- I am Originally from the Region, 13 Responses, 43%
- I am Not Originally from the Region, 17 Responses, 57%
Q3: Are you originally from this region? If not, what brought you live and work here. (Open Responses)

- Employment opportunity and the great location and tranquility.
- This is the fifth state I have lived in over the course of a 50-year career. Moved here from Georgia, after being recruited to an executive position in healthcare.
- Born in Florida. Followed job with social security.
- Florida. The area brought me here. Climate, mountains, seasons.
- North Carolina’s cache as a state. Progressive southern state.
- A job.
- Job as EDC Director. Work drew me here as a CPA.
- Job opportunity.
- Minnesota. Lived there for 30 years – left because of the snow & rain.
- Belgium; Lived in Canada, Charlotte, UNC-Chapel Hill, wife's family got here, lived here 8 years; Tons to do - not looked around, not a bad place to live; Good schools, but not perfect
- Job opportunity. Wanted to be close to the mountains. Values here are great.
- The morals and beliefs of this county match our families.
- Came here for job opportunity and raised my family here.
Q4: What Economic Opportunities are we missing out in this region?

### Top Response Topics Mentioned During One-On-One Interviews

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response Topics</th>
<th>Number of Interviews</th>
<th>%</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attracting High Paying/Diversified Jobs to the Region</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Industries/Industrial Parks</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>23.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving Communication about the Advantages of the Region</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>23.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investing in Education/Workforce</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Housing Development</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Other Topics Mentioned During Interviews
- 1 Interview
  - Agriculture
  - Airport
  - Attracting Small Business to the Region
  - Community Colleges
  - Healthcare
  - Local Based Philanthropy
  - Marketing Natural Resources
  - Professional Sports
  - Research Facilities
  - Retaining Young People
  - Technology
  - Tourism

Note: A person being interviewed sometimes mentioned several topics when answering the question.
Q4: What Economic Opportunities are we missing out in this region? (Open Responses)

- **(Attracting new retail/restaurants/breweries to the region)** I believe that new businesses, restaurants, breweries grocery stores etc. are needed, but local officials again fear greater problems with traffic, crime and other issues. Publix is a great get for Hickory, but what about an Ingles? Our proximity should be marketed more as an asset. We need to create more urban spaces out of the vacant areas that currently exist.

- **(Improving Communication about the Advantages of the Region)** Economic opportunities missing include: Tell our story. "We have to do a better job telling our story;" Our attitude in Conover was to build a manufacturing center when we lost manufacturing jobs; Turn the pages - "Celebrate our successes;" RTP-Durham is not better than us, just promotes more.

- **(New Industries/Industrial Parks) (New Housing Development)** There is a large amount of vacant land held out of the market by which could be used for new business and housing development.

- **(Attracting High Paying/Diversified Jobs to the Region)** We are missing some opportunities for some advanced manufacturing because we are still perceived as a low-tech manufacturing area due to our history with furniture, etc. We are still at the same skill level with our workforce as years ago. We are not diversified enough with our workforce skills for higher manufacturing.
Q5: How do we fundamentally improve our workforce? What ideas do you have to improve our workforce?

### Top Response Topics Mentioned During One-On-One Interviews

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response Topics</th>
<th>Number of Interviews</th>
<th>%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improve Community College Education/Training Opportunities</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>43.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve Quality of K-8/High School Education</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>23.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve Work Ethic/Soft Skills</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>23.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Show Students that a 4-Year Degree is Not Needed to Get a Good Job</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Other Topics Mentioned During Interviews

- **3 Interviews**
  - Create Appealing Workplace Atmosphere
  - Pursue K-64 Initiative

- **2 Interviews**
  - Better Availability/Marketing of Internships/Apprenticeships
  - Better Housing Choices
  - Better Promotion of the Area
  - Improve Quality of Life

- **1 Interview**
  - Challenge Best Students More
  - Employer Cooperation
  - STEM
  - Support L-R University Programs

Note: A person being interviewed sometimes mentioned several topics when answering the question.
Q5: How do we fundamentally improve our workforce? What ideas do you have to improve our workforce? (Open Responses)

- **(Improve Community College Education/Training Opportunities)** (Show students that a 4-year degree is not needed to get a good job) (Improve Quality of K-8/High School Education) Pre-K, investing in early education. K-12 keep building curriculums that would be helpful to employers. We need to continue trying to build and educate strong workers. We need a clear focus from the community to determine what courses and curriculums to achieve those local needs. Need to prepare students to go where they want to go for future education and training, not just college.

- **(Show students that a 4-year degree is not needed to get a good job)** Our recent study about public attitudes about manufacturing talked to hundreds of people. It showed we have the training programs but we don’t have the students. The parents and students are not getting the right info to make the best decision about their education. Right now we have 58% of students seeking education beyond high school and we need 70-80% for our area. We have a skills gap because we have an interest gap. We are about to start a 5 year informational campaign about hammering the points home about the opportunities. Young people need a basic tech knowledge that can be built upon as their career and technology progresses.

- **(Improve Community College Education/Training Opportunities)** Promote career training for work in the area, but it currently takes too long to train the workforce.
Q6: (Part One) Where do you think our leadership will come from?

- **Total Responses: 30**

- **Inside the Region, 1 Response, 3%**
- **Outside the Region, 3 Responses, 10%**
- **Young Professionals, 13 Responses, 43%**
- **Not Sure, 3 Responses, 10%**
- **Mix of People Inside and Outside the Region, 10 Responses, 34%**
Q6: (Part Two) Will your children or grandchildren be staying here for a career after high school and college?

Total Responses: 30

- Did Not Answer the Question, 15 Responses, 50%
- Don’t Know if Children will Stay in the Region, 3 Responses, 10%
- Children Have Not Stayed or Will Not Stay in the Region, 7 Responses, 23%
- Children Have Stayed or Will Stay in the Region, 5 Responses, 17%
Q7: If you had a magic wand, what would you change about our community?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Top Response Topics Mentioned During One-On-One Interviews</th>
<th>Number of Interviews</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improve Education System</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of Life Improvements</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change the Perception of the Region</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other Topics Mentioned During Interviews

- 2 Interviews
  - Affordable/More Housing Choices
  - Improve Communication
  - Improve Political Leadership
  - Increase Enthusiasm about Our Community
  - Ready to Move-Into Industrial Buildings
  - Reduce Poverty/Higher Incomes

- 1 Interview
  - Better Relationships between Local Governments
  - Change the Past
  - Get Rid of Drug Addiction
  - Higher Educational Attainment
  - Improve Motivation/Work Ethic
  - Increase Industry Diversity

Note: A person being interviewed sometimes mentioned several topics when answering the question.
Q7: If you had a magic wand, what would you change about our community? (Open Responses)

- **Better Relationships between Local Governments** A more functional and operational relationship between city and county government. They don’t really work against each other, but they seem to work separately.

- **Merge Local Governments** I would merge as many local governments as possible. There is no reason why some of these smaller towns should exist. West Hickory and Highland ran their course and were absorbed.

- **Improve Education System** Encourage measured risk in education, government, and incentivize it in business. Experiment, test, tune, fail.. refine.. iterate.. succeed. Transformative push in Public Schools. Aggressively invest from existing County Budgets, Public Fund Raise for Commercial skin in the game... learn from the successes our neighbors in the North East US have learned – investing heavily in schools and universities pays dividends to public and private organizations alike.

- **Increase Retail Shopping Opportunities** (Affordable/More Housing Choices) I would increase the retail shopping in my county and in the region. I would increase the medium price range housing for multi-family development and single-family homes. We need more housing for middle-income people and families.
Q7: If you had a magic wand, what would you change about our community? (Open Responses)

- **(Improve Education System)** I think it all starts with a solid educational system. Wave the magic wand and have an unbelievable work force. Your workforce is a magnet to businesses. Your education system is a magnet for attracting families with children. One feeds the other. You’ve got to have all the counties in the area focused on education. It is not just finding the best school in an area, the community must support a goal of all the schools being high achievers and creating that reputation. Some things in education seem simple to me. What is the leading indicator in student success? Student to teacher ratio, so fix it! If you fix elementary education then your high school students get better, they become better college students and they all may not return right away but the area is still their home.

- **(Quality of Life Improvements)** More parks, pools, walking areas (Not enough sidewalks)

- **(Reduce Apathy/More Public Engagement)** There needs to be more people that are engaged in fabric the community. Reduce the amount apathy that exists in the community.

- **(Increase Enthusiasm about our Community)** Quit looking at ourselves as backwards. If you think that way, you are dead; Quit trying to be everywhere else; Woe is me has to stop.

- **(Improve Education System)** Need to develop a young women’s mentoring program in the community.
Q8: Is there a comment or observation you would add to the discussion that we have not already covered?

### Other Topics Mentioned During Interviews

- 1 Interview
  - Festivals/Events
  - Merging Government Functions
  - Regional Leadership
  - Tourism
  - Transportation
  - Workforce

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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regional Economy</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural Resources</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
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</table>

Note: A person being interviewed sometimes mentioned several topics when answering the question.
Q8: Is there a comment or observation you would add to the discussion that we have not already covered? (Open Responses)

- **Regional Leadership** The region needs more of a sense of being together. Leadership of the four counties needs to be more developed and working together.
- **Merging Government Functions** Explore merging as many systems (economic development, utilities, police fire, solid waste, etc.). Look at examples for Fulton County, Georgia for examples and find other examples for our region.
- **Workforce** To reinforce the basics, if you want a strong workforce you must have a strong education system, it is as simple as that. That is what is needed to attract new businesses to the area.
- **Festivals/Events** Other comments included: Octoberfest; Recognize Hmong culture, as well as other cultures; Latino-Hmong festivities; Multi-cultural events; September is Latino month - embrace the culture.
- **Regional Economy** I think we are on the brink of something really big happening here. If we could measure it over the next 10 years, it would be huge.
- **Housing** We need more multi-family (market rate) housing. We need to capitalize on our great downtowns and the NC School of Science and Math. We are drawing labor from the rustbelt now or from outside the United States. We have to make ourselves attractive to not people that are here but people that are moving from outside the region.
CEDS 2017
Stakeholder Interviews
Group Interview: Regional Aging Advisory Committee and Senior Tar Heel Legislators (21 People in Attendance)
Q1: What is the biggest asset in the region that is not being utilized to its full potential?

- Local Community Colleges
- Church facilities/ Churches Getting Out into Their Communities
- Libraries
- Senior Centers
- Quality Affordable Real Estate
- Transportation
- The Council of Governments
Q2: What are our barriers for economic progress as a four-county region? (Follow-up: What is the biggest barrier)

- Money/Funding
- Bureaucracy
- Jobs – pay that brings people back to the community after they have left (i.e. college graduates).
- Lack of a Trained Workforce
- Lack of Qualified Workers
- Attitude – seeing more people that do not want to better themselves (Complacency)
Q3: Are you originally from this region? If not, what brought you live and work here.

Meeting Attendance: 21

Those not from the region moved for the following reasons:

- Employment
- Spouse Employment
- Parents Employment
- Grandchildren
- Marriage
- Affordable Real Estate and Farm Land for Horses

I am Not Originally from the Region, 12 Responses, 57%
I am Originally from the Region, 9 Responses, 43%
Q4: What Economic Opportunities are we missing out in this region?

- Tourism – people use to come to the area for the furniture.
- Natural Resources – the beauty and affordability of this area has not been properly advertised.
- Employment
- Technological Opportunities – employment that relies on the use of technology.
Q5: How do we fundamentally improve our workforce? What ideas do you have to improve our workforce?

- Utilization of Community Colleges
- Utilization of the High Schools in the Region
- Working with middle school students to broaden their horizon at a younger age to get them eager about the things they can do.
- Incentives to stay in the area
- Education – Starting when children are young to show them that hard work pays off.
Q6: (Part One) Where do you think our leadership will come from? (Part Two) Will your children or grandchildren be staying here for a career after high school and college?

Total Responses: 21

Answer to Part One:
- Future leadership will be those who have stayed in the region.
Q7: If you had a magic wand, what would you change about our community?

- Welcoming/Well Received Atmosphere for all Newcomers
- Plenty of Employment for Everyone
- Equal Opportunity of Everyone (you get jobs based on your qualification and not for who you know)
- Improved Healthcare for Seniors (Medicare only covers so much)
- Large Centrally Located Senior Center in Catawba County
- Cheesecake Factory!!!!!!!!!!
Q8: Is there a comment or observation you would add to the discussion that we have not already covered?

- County government being more open to change and new programming or opportunities.
- Making the Region a Great Place to Age (more attention is placed on how to attract the younger generations to the region, and not so much on those who are already here and aging)
CEDS 2017
Stakeholder Interviews
Group Interview: Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board (26 People in Attendance)
Q1: What is the biggest asset in the region that is not being utilized to its full potential?

- Recreation – More Potential for Businesses
- Workforce – Has potential but a lot of work to be done
- Some College – Associates graduates are under utilized in the workforce
- Level of Education Needs to Be Utilized
- High Percentage of Manufacturing Jobs Underutilized
- Manufacturing
- Community College – Needs to have a bigger effort where individuals can obtain
- Higher Education Opportunities Need to Be Utilized
- Vacant Buildings Could Be Utilized
- Diversity in all Counties
- Young People
Q2: What are our barriers for economic progress as a four-county region? (Follow-up: What is the biggest barrier)

- Drug Use – Opiates are at the core of issues in the region
- Behavioral – Need more resources to help people with problems. Lack of mental health physician
- Access to Healthcare
- Branding & Marketing of Region to Attract 25+ Age Group
- Entertainment for 25+ Age Group - Lack of entertainment for this age group
- Need to Get Back to Basics in Education System
- Fix Rail system(s) in the Area
Q3: Are you originally from this region? If not, what brought you live and work here.

Meeting Attendance: 26

Those not from the region moved for the following reasons:

- Moved with Family (5 responses)
- Employment (4 Responses)
- Moved Due to a Relationship (3 Responses)
- Change of Environment (1 Response)
- Commutes to Region for Work (1 response)
- Good Place to Raise a Family (1 response)
Q4: What Economic Opportunities are we missing out in this region?

- Recreation
- Entertainment
- Construction & Housing (more housing needed)
- Marketing/Branding – Show what Job Wages are
- Employers Finding Skilled Workers
- People not Employable Due to Not Passing Drug Tests/Background Checks
- Young People – need to focus more on young people
Q5: How do we fundamentally improve our workforce? What ideas do you have to improve our workforce?

- Population is Going Down – How do we attract young people to our community?
- Individuals in Small Businesses (Entrepreneurship)
- More Resources to Improve Drug Problems (Individual & Services)
- Substance Abuse/Mental Health Issues (Schools/Parents)
- Reach Out to Younger People Sooner (Elementary School)
- Children Need to Be Made Aware of What It Takes to Earn a Living
- Gatekeeper – A lot of manufacturing jobs available
- Furniture Industry – Children need to see
Q6: (Part One) Where do you think our leadership will come from? (Part Two) Will your children or grandchildren be staying here for a career after high school and college?

Total Responses: 26

Answer to Part One:

- Future leadership will come from the outside
- Future leadership will be recruiting people back those that left the region

- Have Children Who Have Left the Region, 5 Responses, 19%
- Have Children Who Have Stayed in the Region, 1 Response, 4%
- Split (Some Stayed/Some Left), 3 Responses, 12%
- Did Not Answer the Question, 17 Responses, 65%
Q7: If you had a magic wand, what would you change about our community?

- LR Blvd
- Public Transportation
- More Risk Taking – try things more freely
- Make More United for Prosperity
- Common Goals
- Inclusion
- How People Perceive Manufacturing
- Fill Vacant Buildings
- More Energy Like Lake Norman (Recreation & Entertainment)
- Have Pride in Community
Q8: Is there a comment or observation you would add to the discussion that we have not already covered?

- Would like to see more young people involved with the decision making process with employers & community.
- Diversity has come. Growth areas make us a more diverse community.
- Community Colleges in the area are underutilized.
CEDS 2017
Stakeholder Interviews

Group Interview: Hickory Young Professionals and Greater Hickory Jaycees (65 People in Attendance)
Mix of Individual and Small Group Responses
Q1: What is the biggest asset in the region that is not being utilized to its full potential?

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<tr>
<th>Response Topics</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
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</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lake Hickory</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>37.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geographical location (proximity to Winston, Asheville, Boone, Charlotte)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>34.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lenoir-Rhyne University</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>32.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empty Commercial Buildings</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real Estate</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Downtown Square</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climate</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note: A person/small group being interviewed sometimes mentioned several topics when answering the question.
Q1: What is the biggest asset in the region that is not being utilized to its full potential? (Other Responses)

- Arts Community – 4 responses
- Google – 4 responses
- Natural Resources – 3 responses
- CVCC – 3 responses
- Professional Groups – 3 responses
- Interchanges off of I-40 – 1 response
- Skilled Manufacturing Workforce – 1 response
- Social Networks (Churches, etc) – 1 response
- Leveraging Big Business partnerships – 1 response
- Partnership University City Commission – 1 response

Note: A person/small group being interviewed sometimes mentioned several topics when answering the question.
Q2: What are our barriers for economic progress as a four-county region? (Follow-up: What is the biggest barrier)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response Topics</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Young People Moving Away for College and Not Returning</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Night Life Entertainment</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug Problem</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration Amongst Counties vs. Competition</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population Figures (Lack of Growth)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Responses Turned in: 43

Note: A person/small group being interviewed sometimes mentioned several topics when answering the question.
Q2: What are our barriers for economic progress as a four-county region? (Follow-up: What is the biggest barrier) (Other Responses)

- No Public Access to Lake Hickory (Shops & Restaurants on the Lake) – 5 Responses
- Skills Gap – 5 Responses
- Lack of Promoting Parks and Current Amenities – 4 Responses
- No Student Discounts – 4 Responses
- LRU Too Small (Needs More Bachelors Degree Options) – 3 Responses
- Lack of Newer Housing – 3 Responses
- Lack of Downtown Living Spaces – 3 Responses
- Parking – 3 Responses
- Lack of Educational Levels – 3 Responses

Note: A person/small group being interviewed sometimes mentioned several topics when answering the question.
Q2: What are our barriers for economic progress as a four-county region? (Follow-up: What is the biggest barrier) (Other Responses)

- Need Younger Leadership - City Leaders and County Leaders – 2 Responses
- Airport Not Utilized – 2 Responses
- People Leaving the Labor Force – 2 Responses
- Not Connecting Youth to Community Early Enough – 2 Responses
- Closed Mindset – 2 Responses
- Athletic League - 1 Response
- Outdated Infrastructure - 1 Response
- Educators Not Educated on What Catawba Valley Has to Offer - 1 Response
- Generalized Area for Young Professional Involvement - 1 Response
- Hickory Carries the Region - Are Other Areas Supported? - 1 Response

Note: A person/small group being interviewed sometimes mentioned several topics when answering the question.
Q3: Are you originally from this region? If not, what brought you live and work here.

Total Responses Turned in: 43

Those not from the region moved for the following reasons:

- Job (13 Responses)
- Family (6 Responses)
- College (3 Responses)
- Good Place to Raise Kids (2 Responses)
- Ability to Own Land (1 Response)
- Cost of Living (1 Response)
- Easy Traffic/Commute (1 Response)

Note: A person/small group being interviewed sometimes mentioned several topics when answering the question.
Q4: What Economic Opportunities are we missing out in this region?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response Topics</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Downtown/Arboretum Style Living</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertising Outdoor Recreational Activities</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More Outdoor Entertainment (Trails, Watersports, Vineyards - Capitalize on Proximity to the Mountains)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Friendly Activities</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural Resources</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Responses Turned in: 43

Note: A person/small group being interviewed sometimes mentioned several topics when answering the question.
Q4: What Economic Opportunities are we missing out in this region? (Other Responses)

- More Diversified Economy – 3 Responses
- Lake Related Business Opportunity – 3 Responses
- Market Location (Proximity to Bigger Cities) – 3 Responses
- Downtown Festivals – 3 Responses
- Shopping – 3 Responses
- Beer Related Opportunity – 2 Responses
- Employment Opportunities for Young Professionals – 2 Responses
- Revamp Old Buildings – 2 Responses

Note: A person/small group being interviewed sometimes mentioned several topics when answering the question.
Q4: What Economic Opportunities are we missing out in this region? (Other Responses)

- Move-in Ready Homes – 2 Responses
- Catering to Incoming Population – 2 Responses
- Technology Companies – 2 Responses
- Higher Paying Industry -1 response
- Infrastructure -1 Response
- Recognizing that Other Areas of Community Development (Health) Can Influence Economic Development -1 Response
- Do Research on the Most Common Majors of Graduates and Having Jobs They Can Come Here For -1 Response

Note: A person/small group being interviewed sometimes mentioned several topics when answering the question.
Q5: How do we fundamentally improve our workforce? What ideas do you have to improve our workforce?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response Topics</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advertise our Location</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasizing Training in Specialized Skills</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Selling/Perspective of Skilled Labor (Well-Crafted)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-Educate People Who Want to Work and Change Careers</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affordable Local College</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible Work Schedules</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total Responses Turned in:** 43

Note: A person/small group being interviewed sometimes mentioned several topics when answering the question.
Q5: How do we fundamentally improve our workforce? What ideas do you have to improve our workforce? (Other Responses)

- Promote Trade School and Community College – 3 Responses
- Tax Incentives – 3 Responses
- Education - K-64 View – 3 Responses
- Start Younger - Get Community Excited About Growth/Chambers – 3 Responses
- Learn a Trade in High School – 2 Responses
- Pre-K Education – 2 Responses
- Solve/Correct Drug Problem – 2 Responses
- Incentive Innovation – 2 Responses

Note: A person/small group being interviewed sometimes mentioned several topics when answering the question.
Q5: How do we fundamentally improve our workforce? What ideas do you have to improve our workforce? (Other Responses)

- Furniture Businesses Coming Back/More Technical Skill Jobs – 2 Responses
- Invest in Higher Paying Jobs- 1 Response
- More Rigorous Education - 1 Response
- Make Jobs Easier to Find (Run by Local Government) - 1 Response
- Professional Development - 1 Response
- Small Groups - 1 Response
- Groups and Clubs to Connect Small Businesses - 1 Response

Note: A person/small group being interviewed sometimes mentioned several topics when answering the question.
Q6: (Part One) Where do you think our leadership will come from? (Part Two) Will your children or grandchildren be staying here for a career after high school and college?

Total Responses: 43

Answer to Part One:

- Current Young Professionals (12 Responses)
- Educated Youth (7 Responses)
- Progressive Employers Who Support Economic Development (2 Responses)
- Outside the Region (2 Responses)
- From Within the Region (2 Responses)
Q7: If you had a magic wand, what would you change about our community?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response Topics</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Downtown Redevelopment/Nightlife</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>25.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity in Food, Thought and Mindset</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clean Up Exits 125 and 126</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organized Activities/Events</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support Small Local Businesses</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Responses Turned in: 43

Note: A person/small group being interviewed sometimes mentioned several topics when answering the question.
Q7: If you had a magic wand, what would you change about our community? (Other Responses)

- Less Poverty/Homelessness – 2 Responses
- Better Education – 2 Responses
- Lenoir Rhyne Blvd – 2 Responses
- Get Drugs Out – 2 Responses
- Newcomers Groups – 2 Responses
- Walkable – 1 response
- Number of Mattress Outlets - 1 Response
- Free Wi-Fi - 1 Response
- Land Development - 1 Response

Note: A person/small group being interviewed sometimes mentioned several topics when answering the question.
Q7: If you had a magic wand, what would you change about our community? (Other Responses)

- Clean-Up side of Roads/Beautification - 1 Response
- Re-Strengthen Furniture/Trade Industries - 1 Response
- The Way Individuals View Manufacturing Specific Jobs - 1 Response
- Dredge the Lake through Downtown to Make a NC Venice - 1 Response
- Public Transportation at Night - 1 Response
- Young Philanthropist Group (Greenville, SC as a model) - 1 Response
- More Participation from Young Professionals in the Area - 1 Response
- Increase in Manufacturing to Create Lower-Level Hour Jobs for Teens - 1 Response

Note: A person/small group being interviewed sometimes mentioned several topics when answering the question.
Q8: Is there a comment or observation you would add to the discussion that we have not already covered? (Open Responses)

- None of this works unless?
- Job website listing all local jobs to make it easier to find a job (multiple websites, even free ones, make the search daunting).
- If we are wanting it to still feel small town, it will not [be] soon.
- Promoting current activities
- Invest in future people. Don't wait for them to come here. "If you build it they will come."
- There is a need for new housing opportunities for young professionals.
- More opportunities to connect.
- Spanish speaking at public places.
- Ask the people from here "Why do you stay in this area?"