

Town of North Wilkesboro
North Wilkesboro STEP Leadership Team:
NC STEP Economic Development
Strategic Plan and Implementation Strategy

I. INTRODUCTION

The North Carolina Small Towns Economic Prosperity program (NC STEP) brings a comprehensive revitalization effort to communities, especially those challenged by economic hardships due to changes in the economy and/or natural disasters. It is part of a larger initiative of the North Carolina Rural Economic Development Center called the Small Towns Initiative. State leaders recognize that North Carolina's small towns serve a major role in the economic, social and cultural well being of the state as a whole. Even with the rapid growth of urban centers, North Carolina remains a state of small towns: over 475 towns have populations of fewer than 10,000 people, accounting for 86 percent of the state's municipalities.

The Small Towns Initiative and NC STEP are based on the belief that North Carolina's towns have the opportunity to embrace a new future that –

- Values the best of the past;
- Preserves and enhances important resources;
- Seeks out new economic opportunities; and
- Respects, involves and lifts up all the people who live in these towns.

The program has three primary goals:

- (1) Support economic recovery and revitalization through job creation, business activity and leveraged private and public investments;
- (2) Implement a comprehensive model of local leadership capacity building, technical assistance and grant making; and,
- (3) Provide vital information to develop public policies that support long-term investment in the economic vitality of North Carolina's small towns.

STEP towns are chosen based on level of economic distress, geographical distribution, population size and diversity, management structure, resource availability and degree of readiness. Towns must show an understanding of the importance of an inclusive community leadership team and demonstrate the potential for economic recovery and revitalization and economic transition.

By participating in the program, towns receive:

- (1) *Coaching assistance* to identify critical needs and community assets, develop potential economic development initiatives, prioritize projects and seek out technical and financial resources;
- (2) *Planning funds* (\$25,000) to use in the planning phase for assessments, feasibility studies, coordination and travel, and other pertinent activities;
- (3) *Implementation funds* (\$100,000) to implement priority projects developed through the planning process;
- (4); *Opportunities for training workshops* and shared learning; and,
- (5) *Priority consideration* in other Rural Center grants programs.

For more detail on the Requirements and Planning Process of participating in the STEP program, please refer to Appendix A.

II. TOWN PARTICIPATION – N. WILKESBORO BECOMES A STEP COMMUNITY

N. Wilkesboro entered the STEP program in June 2012 as one of ten sites in the fourth cohort of NC STEP towns. In its application, N. Wilkesboro summarized its desire to be in the program with this statement:

North Wilkesboro has historically been a hub of economic activity within northwestern North Carolina, and the Town believes that acceptance into the NC STEP Program will help facilitate economic growth within the new economy. As witnessed by the high unemployment rate, recent job losses, high poverty rate, unacceptable education levels, and vacant and underutilized storefronts, there is a clear need for a new direction. Nevertheless, because of the past planning efforts, history of entrepreneurship within the community, and public infrastructure investment, North Wilkesboro shows capacity to become a very successful model for future STEP Program participants. The Town believes that inclusion within the NC STEP program will foster an environment that will emphasize planning and help aid development within the community.

III. APPLYING THE STEP PROCESS – N. WILKESBORO ENGAGES

CREATING COMMUNITY ENTHUSIASM – KICK-OFF

The kickoff is an opportunity to celebrate and emphasize what makes the community special and engage its citizens in the STEP process. N. Wilkesboro held its Kick-Off event in conjunction with the Key City Cook-off at Memorial Park on Sept. 8, 2012. Several booths and vendors were set up, and members of the community visited among them. Many residents enjoyed the festivities and learned about STEP from volunteers who explained the program and asked community members questions from a simple

survey. Local elected officials welcomed community members and also invited them to engage in the STEP process.

BUILDING AN INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP TEAM

Ideally, the leadership team represents a cross section of the community reflecting the socio-economic, cultural and ethnic diversity of the town. Often this does not come naturally and creative methods are used to engage different constituencies. Some recruitment efforts include publicizing the program and meetings on local TV, radio, newspaper, a community newsletter, flyers, town and civic organization websites, etc. or, often, knocking on citizens' doors to invite them to participate and seeking out people at the local churches, schools and civic groups.

The community leadership team is the key to success of the NC STEP experience. In essence, it is the dynamic community-based problem solving and decision-making group that works to ensure the town's economic future through planning and implementation of economic strategies. The leadership team acts as stewards over the kickoff activities, data gathering, visioning, planning, strategy development and implementation processes. They affirm the best of what is possible within their community. They are also the group responsible for the success of the program in their communities and continue to work on improving their town after their formal tenure in STEP is complete.

Members of the North Wilkesboro leadership team are found in Appendix B.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR ROLE -- LEADERSHIP TEAM MISSION STATEMENT

The first step in the planning process was to insure that the Leadership Team and the community clearly understand both the Team's source of authority (the Town Council) and its responsibilities (to create an economic development strategic plan and implementation strategy). The Team developed the following mission statement:

North Wilkesboro Steps Up to improve the greater Wilkes community through recognition and promotion of REACH: Revitalization, Entrepreneurial Spirit, Assets, Culture, & Heritage -- for a brighter future.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR COMMUNITY -- COMMUNITY PROFILE

Part of the process of taking charge of a community's destiny is developing an understanding of its uniqueness and diversity. The community profile is designed to document a town's assets, opportunities, appearance and challenges in words and pictures. These are combined into a medium (often pictures and narrative, but could be a movie, brochure, power point presentation – variations are only limited by the imagination of those working on producing the profile) that present a clear picture of the town's defining characteristics.

The profile provides a “first look” of the town from the leadership team’s perspective and makes the group look at their town with a critical eye. In compiling the profile, leadership team members look for the answers to questions like:

- ❑ Who are we?
- ❑ What are our defining characteristics?
- ❑ What do we value in our small town?
- ❑ What are we proud of?
- ❑ What are our weaknesses?
- ❑ What would attract investment to our small town?
- ❑ What current situations, issues, policies or problems would discourage new investment?

N. Wilkesboro’s Community Profile is found in Appendix C.

UNDERSTANDING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Often, when a layperson thinks of economic development, they think of industrial recruitment; however, the Rural Center takes a much broader view of economic development. NC STEP includes aspects of what is commonly referred to as “place-based” or “asset-based” economic development and incorporates a more extensive understanding of the factors that make for a prosperous community. Early in the STEP planning process, leadership team members are taken through exercises to gain a better understanding of what is involved when thinking about the economic development of their community.

Assessment of Resources for Sustaining and Growing Your Local Economy. This is a survey given to the leadership team at the beginning of the STEP planning process and introduces leadership team members to the multi-faceted aspects contributing to their local economy. It is designed to widen their perspective. Each question addresses an element of their town that relates to or touches what should be considered when thinking about the economic health and well-being of their community. Leadership team members are asked to “grade” each of these elements. Representative subjects include schools, workforce preparedness, adequacy of physical infrastructure, level of civic organizations, and leadership measures. This survey instrument not only serves as a self-analysis but also as a touchstone for larger group discussion.

A copy of the survey is in Appendix D. Note that this survey can (and should) be revisited periodically to gauge progress.

Twenty Clues For A Healthy Community

The Heartland Center’s Home Town Competitiveness program created “20 Clues for Rural Community Survival: An Annotated List” and Rural Center staff created a “Community Score Card” based on these 20 clues to use as a group exercise. This is a very useful tool to encourage understanding of community economic development.

The Clues are couched in the framework of what makes a healthy community and is a good approach to introducing economic development elements. These ingredients for a healthy community include community pride, participatory approach to community decision making, awareness of competitive positioning, leadership pipeline and diversity, education, health care, civic infrastructure, among others. With the leadership team members grading their community against these “clues,” they start thinking critically about their community and begin understanding that they can influence the quality and/or delivery of each of these elements.

The following is the Community Scorecard chart for N. Wilkesboro:

COMMUNITY SCORE CARD

NAME OF TOWN: N. WILKESBORO (8/2/12)

Below are elements of healthy, rural communities. Grade your community’s performance and health on these qualities. **“A” is excellent, “B” is good, “C” is fair and “D” is poor.**

Clue:	<i>Team 1</i>	<i>Team 2</i>	<i>Team 3</i>	<i>Team 4</i>	<i>Avg.</i>
Pride	A	D	C	A	B
Quality of Life	B	C	B	C	B
Investment in Future	B	D	C-	B	C
Participatory Decision Making	C	D	B	C	C
Cooperative Community Spirit	A	D	B	B	B
Future Opportunities	A	D	C	C	C
Competitive Positioning	A	D	C	A	B
Knowledge of Physical Environment	C	C	C-	C	C
Active Economic Development Program	B	D	C-	A	C
Younger Generation of Leaders	C	D	C	A	C
Diversity of Leadership Roles	C	D	D	D	D
Support for Education	C	D	B	B	B
Healthcare	B	C	B	A	B
Family Orientation	A	D	B	B	B
Traditional Institutions	A	C	A	B	B
Infrastructure	B	B	B	A	B
Fiscal Responsibility	C	D	C	B	C
Use of Technology	B	D	C	B	C
External Assistance	A	D	B	A	B
Self-Sufficiency	B	C	C-	B	B

COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT

The community assessment is an examination of the social, political, economic, demographic and environmental conditions within a community or region. This process involves economic development experts, local and regional community leaders, local businesses and residents. Dozens of development factors are considered and addressed. Economic “engines” and strategies evolve out of the assessment based on priorities of the community.

Planning in Context. An important step in this process is understanding that a town does not exist in a vacuum. As the town embarks on developing its economic development strategy, it needs to understand that it is *planning in context*. In North Carolina, at the least, a town resides in a county; is part of a regional economic development partnership; and is served by a council of governments. It could also be within the service area of a regional university’s community and economic development outreach office. All of these groups engage in strategic planning, and it is important for a town to know what kind of planning is going on around them, what these strategic plans contain and emphasize – and to be keyed in.

In N. Wilkesboro’s case the economic development director of Wilkes County, two representatives from the High Country Council of Governments and the vice president of AdvantageWest (their regional partnership) presented their respective strategic plans to the STEP Leadership Team in November 2012. Their presentations informed the leadership team, served as a foundation for future relationships and partnerships, and put N. Wilkesboro’s strategic planning into a broader context.

Economic and Demographic Scan. In order for members of the leadership team to make informed decisions on the economic development future of their town, they must gather and understand relevant, accurate and pertinent data about their community and their economy. The importance of collecting and analyzing reliable data cannot be underestimated. Good decisions are based on fact, not anecdotal evidence, outdated information or impressions.

The town leadership team received an Economic Scan Narrative and a power point presentation prepared by an economist engaged by the Rural Center as part of the Community Assessment phase of the STEP planning process.

The complete Economic Scan Narrative and the power point presented to the STEP leadership team are in Appendix E.

Paths to Sustaining and Growing the N. Wilkesboro Economy. Like any small town, North Wilkesboro is dependent on its relationship with the larger regional economy. However, given its distance from larger employment and retail markets, North Wilkesboro is more dependent than most small towns on what happens in the local (Wilkes County) economy.

In general, local prosperity and growth depends on producing more locally, bringing in outside income and reducing the rate of leakage of income from the community. The challenge for North Wilkesboro is to find ways to grow local income while reducing the proportion that leaks out to the larger urban markets, primarily Winston-Salem and Charlotte.

For local areas, there are generally six potential paths to sustaining and growing the local economy. The six paths are:

1. Retain and expand existing businesses.
2. Improve local linkages and reduce leakage of income out of the community.
3. Create new businesses through supporting entrepreneurship.
4. Increase earnings outside the community (commuting to work).
5. Capture more unearned dollars (attract retirees).
6. Attract more outside investment.

Each path involves increasing the income potential of the community or reducing the expenditure leakage from the community. The potential for growing the local economy through any of the six paths varies across small towns and rural communities depending on a number of factors, some of which the community can control and some of which it cannot control.

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Based on its assets and limiting factors North Wilkesboro must consider the potential of each growth path in attempting to establish some strategies for strengthening the local economy. A useful exercise for the Leadership Team involved considering each path and then assessing the community's assets and limiting factors relative to potential for growth. For example, North Wilkesboro has a history of growing entrepreneurial businesses that export to other areas. Does the town have an active program to nurture entrepreneurs and does the community have amenities to attract and hold entrepreneurial talent?

A realistic assessment of each path can result in identifying strategies and projects to reduce constraints and improve the ability of the community to bring new income into the community and reduce leakage of locally produced income to other areas.

Through the use of several exercises, the leadership team listed many assets and limiting factors describing their community. These exercises teased out their knowledge of their community and then their responses were matched with one or more of the Six Paths to Growing and Sustaining an Economy.

All of this information was organized into the following matrices:

NORTH WILKESBORO NC STEP – MARCH 7, 2013

Table 12. Matrix of Community Assets and Resources for Sustaining and Growing the Local Economy

Asset or resource identified	Retain and Expand Existing Businesses	Improve Local Linkages and Reduce Expenditure Leakages	Create New Businesses through Entrepreneurship	Increase Earnings Outside the Community (Commuting to Work)	Capture more Unearned Dollars	Attract more Outside Investment
New movie theater (chance for varied movies, chance to keep gas and dining purchases in the area.)	X	X		X	X	
Library	X		X	X	X	
Non profits doing Downtown Music Series and Gallery Crawls	X	X		X	X	
Pretty downtown area. Good walking traffic.	X			X	X	
Have downtown art, theater, events	X	X		X	X	
GoWilkes – free adv. to 100,000/week	X	X	X			
CashMob – retail relationships	X	X				
Melting pot/good work ethic	X		X			X
There is a big increase in home based / micro businesses (1-5 employees) We have around 5000 of these in Wilkes. (?)	X		X			
Broadband downtown & throughout the town	X	X	X	X	X	X
Plenty of businesses in Wilkes that could bid for local government, non-profit, etc jobs	X	X	X			
GATE program at JobLink	X		X			
Small business assistance network via agencies and govt.	X	X	X			
Have a few good small retail biz	X	X				

Table 12 (Cont'd). Matrix of Community Assets and Resources for Sustaining and Growing the Local Economy

Asset or resource identified	Retain and Expand Existing Businesses	Improve Local Linkages and Reduce Expenditure Leakages	Create New Businesses through Entrepreneurship	Increase Earnings Outside the Community (Commuting to Work)	Capture more Unearned Dollars	Attract more Outside Investment
Chamber of Commerce (650 members)	X	X	X			
Gov't cooperation among towns and county	X	X				X
Word of mouth, church, non-profit, business collaboration		X				
Buy Local campaign – merchants seeing more traffic	X	X				
Small Biz Saturday campaign	X	X				
Manufacturers use local company for “widgets”		X				
Market products made by micro businesses (fairs, events, etc.)		X	X			
Supplies become available		X				
Good customer service in small businesses over big box	X	X		X	X	
APP technology exists for advertising	X	X				
Ethnic supplies not available locally		X	X			
Wilkes Community College Small Business Center	X	X	X			
Wilkes Community College: Continuing Ed. Dept.	X		X	X	X	X
Chamber of Commerce: Small Business Committee	X	X	X			
Entrepreneurial Spirit “scrappy factor” (underground economy)	X	X	X			
Music: Strong Cultural Roots		X	X	X	X	
Arts, Crafts, & local Products		X	X	X	X	
Agricultural resources: Farms, Coop. Ext.		X	X			
Town Staff	X		X			X
Downtown North Wilkesboro Partnership	X	X	X			
Wilkes EDC	X	X	X			X

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Transportation Infrastructure: US-421, NC-268, & NC-18				X	X	X
Water & Sewer Infrastructure	X		X	X	X	X
Wilkes County School System (K-12)				X		X
Wilkes Community College	X		X	X	X	X
Rural atmosphere, relaxed pace of life / safe				X	X	X
Lincoln Heights-Old School Bldg. A Rosenwald School				X	X	
Lower cost of living				X	X	X
Good supply of existing homes				X	X	X
Wilkes Regional Medical Center; Sufficient medical facilities: doctors' offices, medical parks, private practitioners etc.		X	X	X	X	X
Close proximity commutable distances to NC largest cities: Charlotte, Greensboro, Raleigh, Winston-Salem				X	X	X
Agriculture (vegetables, cattle, poultry)		X	X	X	X	
Climate: 4 distinct seasons				X	X	
Religious organizations (Bible belt)				X	X	
Recreational opportunities abound		X	X	X	X	X
Nice art gallery				X	X	

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Moderate climate attractive to people looking for four seasons, but not too extreme				X	X	X
Riverfront and lakefront properties that make attractive retirement homes				X	X	X
Health care infrastructure		X	X	X	X	X
Adult Day Health Care for working caregivers				X	X	
Strong community college for “lifelong learning”	X			X	X	X
Senior center for active adults				X	X	
Greenways				X	X	X
Safe, with low violent crime rate	X			X	X	X
Tier 1 in terms of poverty level, making it eligible for many Appalachian Regional Commission and Rural Development Center type grants, probably federal grants as well	X		X		X	X
Independent living center that is attractive and well-run for seniors of means; new senior housing for lower income families.		X	X	X	X	X
Walkable downtowns in both North Wilkesboro and Wilkesboro				X	X	X
Many family-centered events, including Apple Festival, Arts Crawls, Friday night open air markets, etc				X	X	X
Strong church community				X	X	X
Active VFW branch and large veteran population					X	

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Art instruction—classes in creativity		X	X	X	X	
Community theater				X	X	X
Growing restaurant presence, including some fine dining, down-home country cooking, barbecue	X	X		X	X	X
Low taxes	X		X	X	X	X
Low Unionization Rate	X		X			X
Right to work state	X		X			X
Airport						X
Available water	X			X	X	X
Construction assets—wood (timber), labor	X	X	X			X
Riverfront-Lakefront housing options				X	X	X
Mountain views—general aesthetic of community				X	X	X
Heritage Skills and Survival Skills—“lost arts” that could be taught						X
Farmland				X	X	X
People who know craft of furniture manufacturing	X		X			X
Retirees with skills and wisdom to be tapped, as well as money to invest in the “right” ideas and people			X		X	X
Community college willing to train workers	X		X			X

Table 12 (Cont'd). Matrix of Community Assets and Resources for Sustaining and Growing the Local Economy

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Real Estate/ Land Use Png:						
Long range vistas /views. Lots of room for a Target. ☺ Variety of land, Large county Neighborhoods & developmt			X	X	X	X
Wilkes Industrial Park Block 46 Zoning regulation in towns Planning Board & Department Towns willingness to work with zoning Empty buildings	X		X			X
People/Workforce:						
Entrepreneur spirit Manufacturing Skilled Skills match community needs JobLink / ESC Wilkes Community College Wilkes County School System High Ctry W/F Dev. Board SmartStart/Lincoln Heights- daycare etc Friendly and welcoming Independent / Hardworking Large available workforce	X		X	X		X
Recreational Activities / Entertainment:						
W. Kerr Scott Dam / Reservoir Yadkin & Reddies Rivers & Greenways Parks, YMCA Soccer Complex Softball Fields Baseball Fields Smoot Park pool Biking Trails (paved and unpaved) Leatherwood Mountain Stone Mountain				X	X	X

Table 12 (Cont'd). Matrix of Community Assets and Resources for Sustaining and Growing the Local Economy

Asset or resource identified	Retain and Expand Existing Businesses	Improve Local Linkages and Reduce Expenditure Leakages	Create New Businesses through Entrepreneurship	Increase Earnings Outside the Community (Commuting to Work)	Capture more Unearned Dollars	Attract more Outside Investment
Near Boone and entertainment cities				X	X	X
Natural Resources:						
Land area, clean water Stone Mtn. Natural beauty Four Seasons (no harsh winters) Birding Trails Over Mountain Historical Trail				X	X	X
Cultural Resources / Arts:						
Handmade products Liberty Theatre Community Bands Benton Hall Playmakers Taupe Gallery Wilkes Art Gallery & murals Cultural Arts Council Local Produced items (arts, crafts, etc) Wilkes Heritage Museum Whippoorwill Academy Library St. Paul's Episcopal Fresco Walker Center for the Performing Arts The Record Park Gospel & Jazz music William Vance Nichols, Kevin Aita, Ward Nichols & other local artists		X		X	X	X
Festivals / Celebrations:						
Light-Up Downtown ChickenFest & American Day Singing in the Foothills Brushy Mtn. Apple Festival MerleFest Shine to Wine Festival Wilkes County Cruisers Christmas & July 4 Parades			X	X	X	

Table 12 (Cont'd). Matrix of Community Assets and Resources for Sustaining and Growing the Local Economy

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Educational Opportunities:						
Library Wilkes County Schools SBC, Chamber of Commerce Wilkes Community College Proximity to ASU	X	X	X	X	X	X
Lincoln Heights – Smart Start, CIS schools, Circles of Care, Wilkes Literacy Grp., 4-H, homeschool grps, private & Christian schools, Goal Progam w/WCC, ASU, Gardner Webb, Business- Industry Education Forum	X	X	X	X	X	X
Medical Facilities:						
West Park Urgent Care Wilkes Reg. Medical Center West Park Dr's Medical Park Wilkes Health Foundation Public Health Dental Clinic Ruby Perdue Blackburn Adult Day Care Wilkes County EMS/First Responders		X		X	X	X
Safety / Crime Control:						
Quality of public safety force NW Fire & Police Department Wilkes County Sheriff Crime Stoppers Wilkesboro Police Department Relatively low crime rate (violent)	X			X	X	X
Business Variation / Restaurants:						
Big Box Small Business Major chain restaurants Local Restaurants Wineries (4 in cty.)	X	X	X	X	X	X

Table 12 (Cont'd). Matrix of Community Assets and Resources for Sustaining and Growing the Local Economy

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Leadership / Political Vision/ Commitment:						
Two Party System Active leaders Lots of folks involved Two towns work together often on many projects to save money Variety of values and opinions View of & planning for the future	X		X	X	X	X
Civic Organizations:						
Lions Rotary Kiwanis Fraternal Orders- Masonic/Elks/Moose				X	X	X
Infrastructure:						
Yadkin Valley Rail Service Good water & sewer infrastructure Natural Gas pipelines DOT highways, roads Duke Energy lines & service Wilkes Telecommunications service CenturyLink fiber & service Wilkes County Airport	X		X	X	X	X
Misc.:						

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Table 13. Matrix of Constraints and Limiting Factors for Sustaining and Growing the Local Economy

Constraint or Limiting Factor identified	Retain and Expand Existing Businesses	Improve Local Linkages and Reduce Expenditure Leakages	Create New Businesses through Entrepreneurship	Increase Earnings Outside the Community (Commuting to Work)	Capture more Unearned Dollars	Attract more Outside Investment
No entertainment, bars	X	X		X	X	
Websites are not designed locally	X	X	X			
Wal-Mart “chain” store mentality	X	X	X			
Liberty Theater has to change& target for diversity	X			X	X	X
Library: Ongoing budget cuts, reduction in hours and services	X		X	X	X	X
No communication about events. No collaboration. People don’t know about them, they don’t attend.	X			X	X	
Too many vacancies in buildings that take away from the vibrancy.	X			X	X	X
Low attendance and low interest on some events	X			X	X	
Businesses need employees, but can’t find qualified staff that will work.	X		X			X
Cash Mob: Not enough people paying \$	X					
Latinos and Blacks don’t think they are welcome in many businesses.	X		X	X	X	
Micro businesses: Feeling of not getting support or recognition, no EDC support, no capital	X		X			
Downtown broadband: Discussions on this for several yrs. but no action	X	X	X	X	X	X

Table 13 (Cont'd.). Matrix of Constraints and Limiting Factors for Sustaining and Growing the Local Economy

Constraint or Limiting Factor identified	Retain and Expand Existing Businesses	Improve Local Linkages and Reduce Expenditure Leakages	Create New Businesses through Entrepreneurship	Increase Earnings Outside the Community (Commuting to Work)	Capture more Unearned Dollars	Attract more Outside Investment
Lack of awareness for business to bid, lack of organizations getting local bids	X	X	X			
Lack of a small business incubator	X		X			
Recruiting people is difficult. People “go it alone” Need a “how to get started kit” easily available to anyone at several locations.	X		X			
Bus. Assistance: Hard to get the word out. Lack of awareness	X	X	X			
Retail: No advertising to draw people in. Too many go out of business.	X	X	X	X	X	X
Going to Winston Salem, Hickory, or online to get ethnic supplies/goods	X	X	X			
IT work outsourced		X				
Hard to get merchants coordinated	X	X	X			
Buy Local: Hard to keep people excited. Needs more marketing.	X	X	X			
Lack of strong links between raw material and manufacturers	X	X				X
Lack of outlets for micro businesses (cattle sale)		X	X			
Non-linked, unorganized local bidding processes		X				

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Constraint or Limiting Factor identified	Retain and Expand Existing Businesses	Improve Local Linkages and Reduce Expenditure Leakages	Create New Businesses through Entrepreneurship	Increase Earnings Outside the Community (Commuting to Work)	Capture more Unearned Dollars	Attract more Outside Investment
Need more marketing and promotion	X	X	X	X	X	
APP technology not profitable		X				
No advertising to draw people in. Too many go out of business.	X	X	X	X	X	
Lack of links b/t suppliers, mfgers/end users		X				
Limited (soft) skills to secure loans coupled with desperation for income may force hasty decisions on starting a business			X			
Youth drain from our community to larger cities with greater job opportunities			X			
Chamber: Lack of local small business owners involved in mentoring and training of potential small business owners	X	X	X			
Low wages, lack of starting capital			X			
Untapped prospects for many small businesses			X			
Lack of a place to display / lack of marketing strategies	X	X	X			
Declining number of farmers (age factors)			X			
Declining population: age group 18-30	X		X			X
Drug use and culture	X		X	X	X	X

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Constraint or Limiting Factor identified	Retain and Expand Existing Businesses	Improve Local Linkages and Reduce Expenditure Leakages	Create New Businesses through Entrepreneurship	Increase Earnings Outside the Community (Commuting to Work)	Capture more Unearned Dollars	Attract more Outside Investment
Lack of acceptable credit ratings for some persons seeking to start a business / Lack of down payment or owner cash infusion			X			
Lack of county wide sewer; extension of county wide water is incomplete	X		X	X	X	X
K-12: Poor post-graduation preparation--- Limited alternative learning curriculum	X		X	X		X
WCC: Slow expansion and development of curriculum reflecting new career areas	X		X	X		X
Limited social outlets; lack of variety				X	X	X
Lincoln Heights: Non-acceptance of historical value and community significance, bldg. not utilized to its fullest potential; Bldg. grossly under-funded				X		
Limited planning for land development outside (ETJ) areas	X		X	X	X	X
Depressed housing prices reflect poor housing market				X	X	X

Table 13 (Cont'd.). Matrix of Constraints and Limiting Factors for Sustaining and Growing the Local Economy

Constraint or Limiting Factor identified	Retain and Expand Existing Businesses	Improve Local Linkages and Reduce Expenditure Leakages	Create New Businesses through Entrepreneurship	Increase Earnings Outside the Community (Commuting to Work)	Capture more Unearned Dollars	Attract more Outside Investment
Regional Med. Center: Limited marketing strategies outside of Wilkes / Low influx of medical professionals starting practices in Wilkes County		X		X	X	X
Limited economic, social & political diversity -- People choosing to live in extended metro areas over rural towns	X		X	X	X	X
Christian domination -- -general nonacceptance of religious diversity				X	X	
Lack of VA hospital or outpatient VA center here					X	
Riverfront/lakefront houses: Best kept secret—getting the word out				X	X	X
Possible limits on doctors accepting Medicare patients	X	X			X	X
Competing with many other communities with similar assets			X	X	X	X
Geographically somewhat isolated—nearest major airport 1.5 hours away				X	X	X
Lack of multi-plex theater (now)				X	X	
No major shopping centers/malls/lack of competitive pricing	X	X		X	X	X

Table 13 (Cont'd.). Matrix of Constraints and Limiting Factors for Sustaining and Growing the Local Economy

Constraint or Limiting Factor identified	Retain and Expand Existing Businesses	Improve Local Linkages and Reduce Expenditure Leakages	Create New Businesses through Entrepreneurship	Increase Earnings Outside the Community (Commuting to Work)	Capture more Unearned Dollars	Attract more Outside Investment
Some developers pulled out of building planned communities during economic downturn				X	X	X
Family-centered and church-centered, so can be difficult to find a community “fit”				X	X	X
Moral strictness; intolerance or conservatism			X	X	X	X
Many grants require larger populations to sample data—so grants go to larger rural communities					X	
Lack of openness to new people “not from around here”			X	X	X	X
Fewer church alternatives for non-Baptists.				X	X	X
People need opportunities to bond				X	X	
Some people raised in closed environment, creating racial intolerance or fearfulness			X	X	X	X
Local resistance to development	X		X	X	X	X
Low educational attainment of workforce	X		X			X
Lack of workforce for “middle jobs” that require keyboarding or special higher level thinking skills	X		X			X

Table 13 (Cont'd.). Matrix of Constraints and Limiting Factors for Sustaining and Growing the Local Economy

Constraint or Limiting Factor identified	Retain and Expand Existing Businesses	Improve Local Linkages and Reduce Expenditure Leakages	Create New Businesses through Entrepreneurship	Increase Earnings Outside the Community (Commuting to Work)	Capture more Unearned Dollars	Attract more Outside Investment
Low number of prime-age workforce, as the educated are migrating out	X		X			X
Geographically isolated			X	X	X	X
“laziness” or low work ethic	X		X			X
Loss of Lowes, which meant attracting other related businesses here	X	X	X			X
People with skills related to furniture manufacturing dying out.						X
CAVE People—citizens against virtually everything	X		X	X	X	X
Lack of large middle class			X	X	X	X
Lack of collaboration—large enough groups to work together	X	X	X			X
Low per capita income discourages new retail, restaurants, etc.			X	X	X	X
Comm. Col. classes don't always transfer if not accredited	X		X			X
Real Estate / Land Use Planning:						
Lack of countywide water and sewer Lack of available industrial buildings Lack of available sites for industry Lack of countrywide zoning	X		X			X

Table 13 (Cont'd.). Matrix of Constraints and Limiting Factors for Sustaining and Growing the Local Economy

Constraint or Limiting Factor identified	Retain and Expand Existing Businesses	Improve Local Linkages and Reduce Expenditure Leakages	Create New Businesses through Entrepreneurship	Increase Earnings Outside the Community (Commuting to Work)	Capture more Unearned Dollars	Attract more Outside Investment
Zoning regulations Price of land and buildings is too high Dilapidated buildings old & unkempt Low tax base & declining tax values Neg. impacts on rivers/environment Too far from US-421 Not enough downtown living opportunities Low income housing downtown is bad			X	X	X	X
People/Workforce:						
High salaries expected High School education Career Readiness Lack of work ethic Perception of our workforce--Low education, no drive, lazy. Drug culture Must have jobs for the workforce Lack of transportation to jobs Lack of childcare, daycare Low skill level of workforce Perceived cycle of dependence on public assistance "dependent society" Poor soft skills	X		X	X	X	X
New jobs pay so much less even after retraining	X					

Table 13 (Cont'd.). Matrix of Constraints and Limiting Factors for Sustaining and Growing the Local Economy

Constraint or Limiting Factor identified	Retain and Expand Existing Businesses	Improve Local Linkages and Reduce Expenditure Leakages	Create New Businesses through Entrepreneurship	Increase Earnings Outside the Community (Commuting to Work)	Capture more Unearned Dollars	Attract more Outside Investment
Recreational Activities/ Entertainment:						
Lack of promotion of assets Linkages between service providers weak Lack of a strategic marketing plan Many links to trails and many different groups marketing tourism in different ways. No night time entertainment Yadkin River's perception as unattractive & unhealthy Negative attitude towards bringing nightlife and entertainment for adults Dilapidated & unused speedway Need coordinated wayfinding signage	X	X	X	X	X	X
Natural Resources:						
Streetscaping needed No sellable or marketable natural resource (oil or minerals) Public areas must be better maintained	X			X	X	X
Cultural Resources / Arts:						
Not a community calendar of events Many events going on at same time. Need a venue to purchase (store, website) items.		X		X	X	

Table 13 (Cont'd.). Matrix of Constraints and Limiting Factors for Sustaining and Growing the Local Economy

Constraint or Limiting Factor identified	Retain and Expand Existing Businesses	Improve Local Linkages and Reduce Expenditure Leakages	Create New Businesses through Entrepreneurship	Increase Earnings Outside the Community (Commuting to Work)	Capture more Unearned Dollars	Attract more Outside Investment
Lack of musical & artistic diversity Lack funding for cultural resources/art Lack of cooperation b/t art entities Lack of promotion/marketing Strong focus on Bluegrass in the area which doesn't appeal to everybody Need more multi-cultural activities		X		X	X	
Festivals/Celebrations:						
Need more temporary festivals Hotels not full during Apple Festival-How do we have tourist spend the night?(Heads in Beds) MerleFest we need more events to place heads in beds. More events that are longer Monthly downtown events	X	X				X
Educational Opportunities:						
How do you prepare first generation college students for college/career? Out migration of youth 18-20 yrs. old -2,208 in 2010 & -2,755 for 21-24 yrs.) Lack of soft skills	X	X	X	X		X

Table 13 (Cont'd.). Matrix of Constraints and Limiting Factors for Sustaining and Growing the Local Economy

Constraint or Limiting Factor identified	Retain and Expand Existing Businesses	Improve Local Linkages and Reduce Expenditure Leakages	Create New Businesses through Entrepreneurship	Increase Earnings Outside the Community (Commuting to Work)	Capture more Unearned Dollars	Attract more Outside Investment
Medical Facilities:						
Hard to recruit doctors & nurses Streamline service to reduce wait time Ongoing perception of WRMC in the past continues to affect usage of local medical facilities Lack of # of EMS Lack of medically insured or employed	X	X		X	X	X
Safety / Crime Control:						
Economic and unemployment rates Drugs: Meth, Crack, Weed, etc. Relationship b/t law enforcement & community Lack of # of police officers	X		X	X	X	X
Business Variation / Restaurants:						
Downtown Businesses close at 5 pm Lack of businesses catering to youth Lack of restaurant diversity Need more shopping options Local businesses don't advertise Rest. either high end or low end—need middle class dining	X	X		X	X	X

Table 13 (Cont'd.). Matrix of Constraints and Limiting Factors for Sustaining and Growing the Local Economy

Constraint or Limiting Factor identified	Retain and Expand Existing Businesses	Improve Local Linkages and Reduce Expenditure Leakages	Create New Businesses through Entrepreneurship	Increase Earnings Outside the Community (Commuting to Work)	Capture more Unearned Dollars	Attract more Outside Investment
Leadership / Political Vision / Commitment:						
Lack of working towards the good of the whole Hidden agendas More educated candidates for public office to complement current ones Not enough opportunity for younger people to get involved in leadership roles	X		X	X	X	X
Civic Organizations:						
Aging memberships Duplication and overlap Lack of a local civic org that is not tied to a national brand to bring more youth Jaycees disbanded due to low participation				X	X	X
Infrastructure:						
Need more infrastructure in WIP; Need water & sewer extensions (NC-115 & US-421) Lack of sidewalk extensions Lack of easily attainable funding Lack fiber extensions in key areas Lack natural gas pipeline in key areas Outdated water and sewer lines NC-268 and NC-115 are not 4-laned Lack of maintenance downtown	X		X	X	X	X

VISION STATEMENT FOR THE TOWN

A strategic plan must have a vision statement. After completing the Community Assessment phase of the NC STEP planning process and identifying assets and constraints around the Six Paths to Growing an Economy, N. Wilkesboro was prepared to visualize its future.

Thus, the leadership team was tasked to visualize the desired and possible future for the N. Wilkesboro community by asking the question, ‘*What do you want the community to be like 10 to 20 years from now?*’ Several dimensions were taken into account —such as the physical appearance of the downtown, mix of businesses, population size and mix, income levels and sources of income, public facilities, recreation opportunities and infrastructure, and any other aspects of the community considered important -- and distilled into a concise affirmation.

Fundamentally, the vision statement is the ideal description of the essence of the town – it is the “North Star” that guides subsequent strategic planning. It is a broad statement that describes the best of what the community can be. This vision statement, in turn, guided the identification and development of economic development strategies for the town.

The N. Wilkesboro Leadership Team drafted the following vision statement:

Nestled in the Yadkin Valley, North Wilkesboro is the key to the Blue Ridge Mountains. A unique heritage, thriving economy, and vibrant downtown offer cultural and recreational activities for a diverse population of all ages.

BRAINSTORMING STRATEGIES AND REACHING CONSENSUS

As noted above, the matrices summarizing community assets and constraints were developed as part of the Community Assessment phase of the STEP planning process. These matrices served as the springboard for brainstorming possible economic development strategies for the town.

The Team was asked to look for commonalities and overlapping themes that stood out to them and identify any broad strategies or themes from their insights. From this analysis, they determined their economic development strategies.

To help members of the leadership team think about the viability of potential strategies, several questions were put to them:

- ❑ What’s possible and/or doable --under your present circumstances and with the resources you have -- for the town and the leadership team to accomplish?
- ❑ What are the opportunities presented by the strategy and what assets are already in place to support it?
- ❑ What are the weaknesses of it (i.e., what barriers constrain it)?

- ❑ Who is the **target audience**? [A very important element: On whom do you want to focus? Do you want to attract a certain demographic? What and to whom are you marketing?]
- ❑ What are the goals of this strategy – what is it supposed to accomplish?
- ❑ Hypothetically, if you were to move to this town, what would you look for? [Is this a place to raise a family, find a job, or find a job nearby? How are the schools? How do people spend their time here? Is this an attractive town?]
- ❑ What community development and civic engagement initiatives need to be in place or happen to reach your target audience(s)?

After much discussion, debate and analysis, the N. Wilkesboro leadership team reached a consensus on the strategies to pursue in its NC STEP Economic Development Strategic Plan. These strategies form the foundation of the strategic plan. By choosing appropriate strategies, the town is poised to capitalize on its assets, overcome barriers and reinvigorate itself.

STRATEGY AND PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

The N. Wilkesboro STEP Leadership Team adopted four (4) economic development strategies. The process involved Team members dividing into subcommittees to frame each strategy, including the strategy's issues for implementation to create a strategy narrative, and to identify, develop and propose projects designed to fulfill the goals of their respective strategy.

Each subcommittee vetted its projects among themselves, and those projects with the most promise were brought before the full Leadership Team at its monthly meeting for further development and discussion. The viable projects meeting the approval of the complete Team comprised the projects for STEP funding or in some cases partial STEP funding. [Note that these strategies are inter-related and projects to support one strategy may also support another.]

Because community development and quality of life issues often fall within and overlap strategies, each subcommittee had the option include projects in these areas. Projects within the scope of education and workforce development, not-for-profit organization building and expansion, recreation and entertainment, and physical infrastructure, attractiveness and appearance could have evolved out of any of the subcommittees.

N. WILKESBORO'S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES AND PROJECTS

The strategies, their descriptive narrative and summaries of their supporting projects follow. Detailed project templates are found in Appendix F.

STRATEGY #1: Create an Entrepreneurial Community and Support Local Business.

Narrative: Good jobs are at the core of bringing value to individuals in all economic sectors. The focus of this initiative for North Wilkesboro is to create a culture and setting that supports entrepreneurial growth resulting in new jobs and prosperity for our town. That same support is equally if not more important for our existing business entities as they seek increased profitability, which can offer them the opportunity for also adding jobs. It is not difficult to understand the value added aspects to an area's population when good jobs are available. They add to the tax base, more dollars are spent with local businesses, the sense of community pride increases and on a personal level individuals can begin to establish and increase real net worth.

North Wilkesboro is not unlike any other small rural town in North Carolina. We have had our share of good times with economic growth and we deem that our work ethic is good. It is well documented the many business enterprises have originated here. So, entrepreneurship is not new to us and it is certainly not dead. Given the challenges of today's reality and the current economic climate however, it has been difficult to attract or grow excitement around expansion. We continue to see our youth leave like other small cities. Will more jobs tend to make them stay? Who is to say, but it can't hurt. Unlike other towns in N. Carolina we have beautiful lake, mountain vistas and a mighty river. Some would say what more do you really need!

Taking risks is at the very heart of entrepreneurial thinking. This initiative requires that WE all have to take that risky step. The WE refers to the collective body of entities and individuals here. It requires the support from our town administration and all elected officials, our partners like the Chamber, the EDC, all downtown associations, existing business and merchants and every individual who has an interest in making a difference, to name a few. It will take time, money, resources, commitment and most importantly ideas from everyone being properly vetted and determined to be in the best interest of the town and its people.

STEP projects addressing this strategy are:

1. N. Wilkesboro Trail Town.

STEP Funds: \$8,000

2. Business Plan Competition.

STEP Funds: \$10,000

Certificate Program for Completion of Small Business Seminar Series.

STEP Funds: 0 (Funds coming from other sources)

3. Revolving Loan Pool.

STEP Funds: \$10,000

4. Business Certificate and Intern.

STEP Funds: 0 (Funds coming from other sources)

5. Virtual Incubators providing physical space and limited services at partner locations to start-up companies.

STEP Funds: \$6,300

6. Youth Entrepreneurship Program

STEP Funds: \$9,400

STRATEGY #2: Capitalize on Natural Resources as an Economic Engine.

Narrative: The strategy implementation purpose for these initiatives is to create a more active and inviting downtown for the Town of North Wilkesboro. Through the utilization of the natural resources, including the two rivers (Reddies and Yadkin), acres of open property available for future development and multi-use, and the overall charm and attractiveness of the downtown will certainly enhance opportunities to bring greater economic growth and a greater interest of citizen engagement into the area. The multiple manmade attributes such as the existing Yadkin River Greenway, B Street Park, Smoot Park, and Memorial Park are significant features that are attractive to both businesses and individuals.

The strategy is to build upon the natural resources and other amenities to provide greater chances for future small business growth and add value to the quality of life for citizens in North Wilkesboro, Wilkesboro and the overall region. Utilization of current unused parking decks and undeveloped land, while creating new and inviting marketing and event space for hosting multiple activities, is a wonderful way to attract entrepreneurship as well as bring additional citizens and visitors/tourists into the Town of North Wilkesboro. Plans to increase the existing trails, gardens, and public parks will play a

significant role in transforming our downtown into a more vibrant and exciting location for everyone to enjoy, do business, and create lasting relationships for years to come.

STEP projects designed to support a natural resources strategy are:

1. Yadkin Valley Market Place & Multi-Use Vendor Structure. The Farmers Market began on the former parking deck site around 1988 and then later moved their location to Smoot Park due to growth. Currently the Wilkes Farmers Market is in need of a larger structure in a more central downtown location. This project is identified within the Downtown Masterplan (2010) as a project chosen by town citizens. The project is expressly commissioned by the Wilkes Farmers Market due to the need for a larger space for growth. The concept is for a multi-use structure to be constructed on town-owned property known as the *Yadkin Valley Market Place*. This facility is to be used as a farmers market, pocket park, and for downtown festivals, special events, and potentially an artist market and/or vendor space for locally made products. The Yadkin Valley Market Place will offer green space featuring trees and other foliage to enable residents and visitors a convenient downtown location to enjoy the outdoors.

The subject property is in downtown/town and will serve as a cultural hub for many Wilkes County citizens. Bathrooms and Wi-Fi will be implemented into this downtown facility, much needed additions as identified by the STEP leadership team members.

STEP Funds: \$50,000

2. Yadkin Valley Greenway Access. Cooperate with the Yadkin Valley Greenway and their expansion efforts to create greater Greenway access. Create additional river access points and stream crossings at various points along the Reddies and Yadkin rivers.

STEP Funds: 0 (Funding TBD).

STRATEGY #3: Develop/Create N. Wilkesboro as the Cultural Hub of the Region.

Narrative: The obstacles to developing North Wilkesboro as a cultural hub for the region are primary related to a lack of organization. While we have many artists and craftspeople in the county, they are often not united in guilds or clubs, making collaboration and planning more difficult. There are businesses that provide materials for those artisans, and/or support artistic events and venues, but again, the artisans and supporters are not always in touch. Similarly, there is no single location which art supporters and artisans can go for information, classes or exhibits. Since local art and event calendars are not coordinated, residents and visitors have to check multiple sites to get a good picture of what is available.

North Wilkesboro holds the “key” to opening the door to cultural adventures for travelers driving into the Southern Appalachians, as well as local residents. From rolling foothills to mountain vineyards, North Wilkesboro and surrounding communities are rich with

heritage and traditional artists. These visual, literary and performing artists make their livelihood through their art and craft. These artists want to share their work and excite visitors and residents with performances, demonstrations, events and shopping opportunities. The culture of North Wilkesboro includes outdoor activities which also attract visitors and locals; fishing and hunting, hiking and biking. North Wilkesboro is a culturally rich place to live, and can be a major destination for travelers and for those in search of a beautiful and inspiring place to live.

North Wilkesboro already hosts well established festivals such as the Brushy Mt. Apple Festival & Americana Day and the area also boasts MerleFest and Singing in the Foothills, among others. Every year new events are created. The development of a coordinated calendar will help manage the flow of events and offer statewide marketing. An on-line Artist's Gallery related to that events calendar gives exposure, and potentially income, to our local talent.

Purpose: Build support for the culture of North Wilkesboro and surrounding areas to draw people to the area to visit or to live here and enhance life for current residents. Increase local event traffic through a timesaving, shared web site that promotes cultural and business events that links Wilkes County and throughout the state; bring attention to local artisans and allow on-line tours and sales of their wares. Tourism and local attendance would increase at cultural events, and local artists would have a venue to share their work on-line to visitors passing through and art supporters in the area. Increasing the visibility of artists and events makes North Wilkesboro a better place to live, visit and work.

STEP Projects related to this strategy include:

1. Wilkes Connect.

STEP Funds: \$6,300

STRATEGY #4: Increase Housing Options.

Narrative: The purpose of this strategy is to bring back a “community feel” to North Wilkesboro. By doing this we can increase economic development potential by making our neighborhoods more attractive resulting in increased options for current and future residents. Due to our old housing stock, we feel this strategy could potentially bring more investment into the neighborhoods.

Our housing stock is aging and we need to be able to offer current and future residents something special. We believe our neighborhoods should be an intricate part of North Wilkesboro's economic development strategy. This can be done with a grassroots effort. Neighborhood associations can be created and can begin to communicate with elected officials in order to ask for help with the improvement of neighborhoods.

We also feel that we need more housing options in town. Workforce housing and mixed income housing is lacking in town and would provide people with more options. These ideas also lead to housing renovations and infill development in town. We also feel that this could easily lead to a more pedestrian-friendly atmosphere and provide a connection with the central business district. Realtors can show defined neighborhoods to potential residents. They can even explain to them how North Wilkesboro's neighborhoods were transformed from what they are today to what they have become in the future. The "new" neighborhoods provide something for everyone.

STEP projects addressing this strategy include:

1. Architectural Drawings for Benton Hall Neighborhood.

STEP Funds: 0 (Funding TBD)

2. Residential Drawings on Reddies River. These drawings will be used to market properties on the Reddies River to potential real estate developers. The town owns five acres in the Block 46 development and drawings of potential residential uses would begin there.

STEP Funds: \$15,250 (STEP Planning Funding)

3. Complete Streets Rendering of D Street Connector w/ Hwy. 115.

STEP Funds: 0 (Funding TBD)

IV. IMPLEMENTATION

The Rural Center allows a STEP community a year to a maximum of a year and a half from the approval of its economic development strategic plan and implementation strategy and contract date to complete its projects.

Implementation involves the following:

- ❑ Monthly reports must be completed and received by the Rural Center in a timely fashion.
- ❑ If problems, issues or concerns arise, it is the responsibility of the town to notify the Rural Center STEP staff as soon as possible.
- ❑ Accurate fiscal management is the responsibility of the town and will be monitored closely.
- ❑ The Leadership/Implementation Team continues to meet on a monthly basis to share information, update each other on project progress, and to maintain momentum.
- ❑ A facilitator is responsible for calling the meetings and developing an agenda; a recorder will take minutes.
- ❑ New members are always encouraged to join and contribute to the team.
- ❑ Once the initial projects funded through the STEP program are completed, the STEP community continues to work its economic development strategic plan, develop new projects and strive to realize its vision.

STEP IMPACT AND EVALUATION:

As projects are initiated and completed, the town must monitor their impact. The NC Rural Center will be tracking economic development indicators to evaluate the effectiveness of the program in the community.

Thus, STEP towns should keep in mind these questions as they implement their projects, develop additional projects, and document their results:

- ❑ Have members of the Leadership Team stepped up their leadership role in the community and are making a difference?
- ❑ Have new jobs and businesses resulted from these strategies and projects?
- ❑ Are new private and public monetary investments coming into the town?
- ❑ Are more dollars being spent in the community? Are people patronizing local businesses? Have any existing businesses expanded as a result of STEP?
- ❑ Are residents seeing improvements in their community and letting local officials and citizen leaders know that they're noticing a difference? and like it?
- ❑ Is there more hope and energy in your community?
- ❑ Are young people engaged in carrying out any of the STEP projects and offering ideas for additional projects?

- ❑ Have new partnerships been formed? Is the town working more with the county or state government offices on economic development issues? Has the town engaged more with the regional council of governments? Have any town/private business partnerships formed around a particular opportunity or to solve a particular problem?
- ❑ Has the town sought resources or assistance from regional organizations such as the community college or regional university?
- ❑ Have any non-profit organizations in the community stepped up to tackle town issues or meet a need?
- ❑ Does the town look better? Are more people aware of the town's participation in the STEP program and see the correlation?

Through STEP, the Leadership Team has learned a process to vet new ideas, find resources and execute projects and initiatives. Over time, it is anticipated that the STEP process will continually evolve -- that the Leadership Team will create new projects to be developed and implemented, and that the economic development strategies will be re-evaluated as progress is made and circumstances improve.

This North Wilkesboro Leadership Team is expected to continue after STEP funds have been spent, these initial STEP projects described in this economic development strategic plan are completed, and the STEP program relationship with the Rural Center has lessened. With consistent and expanded leadership and the ability to bring more resources to the community, the town will increase its chances for prosperity and will see an improved quality of life for its current and future residents.