

The Guilford County Strategic Planning Process

In January 2006, the Guilford County Board of Commissioners took the step towards giving county staff the direction to create a countywide strategic plan. The plan is being created as a tool to help guide decisions within the County involving a myriad of issues (i.e. budget development or policy). Recognizing the need to establish a clear direction for the future, the Board of Commissioners started the process to create a strategic plan by creating the “Guilford County Strategic Alliance: Building Tomorrow, Today” a planning committee. This committee, led by county staff, was then tasked with developing a thoughtful, comprehensive, and inclusive plan for the County’s future.

Because government *exists to serve its citizens*, and *because success is determined by its citizens*, the Strategic Alliance Committee first chose to solicit input and guidance from Guilford County residents. In partnership with elected officials, the committee organized several community forums and focus groups, each with a variety of stakeholders in attendance. An online community survey was also deployed to enhance access to the process. Each method proved successful, with feedback provided by over 1,100 residents. *Reports on the county’s focus groups and community forums can be viewed online at <http://www.co.guilford.nc.us/strategic.php>.

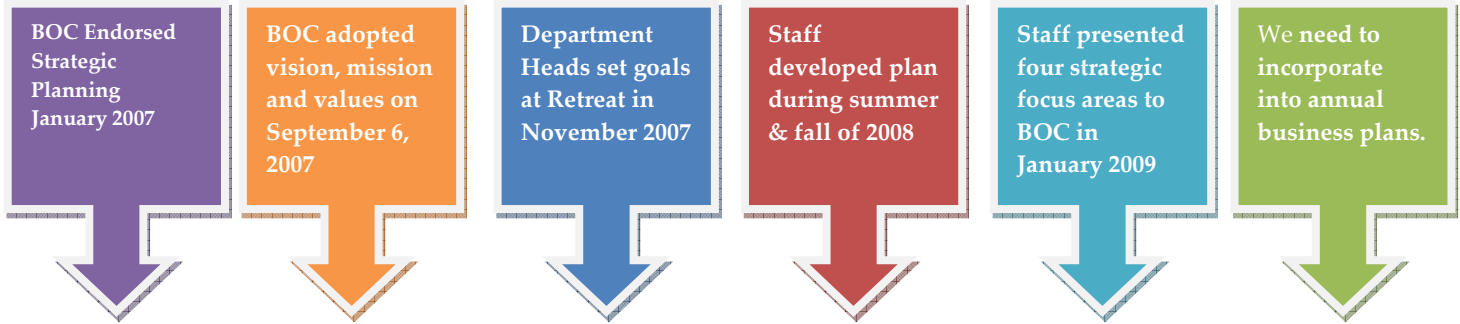
Citizen input revealed several common ideas and concerns throughout our diverse community. This feedback guided the formulation of the themes and concepts that would later be expressed in Guilford County’s adopted vision, values, and mission statements. Using these direction statements, County departmental leaders then crafted the following draft goals, representing extensions of the vision statement, to further guide plan development:

- Creating Prosperity
- Providing Educational Opportunities
- Embracing Diversity
- Improving Safe and Healthy Communities
- Fulfilling our Mission of Efficient Effective and Responsive Government
- Valuing Economic Growth and Quality of Life

In the summer of 2008, the Strategic Alliance Committee entered the plan development phase. Committee members briefed more than forty (40) employees on the strategic planning process and divided them into six (6) cross-functional subcommittees, each facilitated by members of the Strategic Alliance Committee. Subcommittees convened regularly throughout the summer, fulfilling their respective missions to examine trends and issues; develop strategies, and identify specific programs, projects or activities that define and advance each goal over the course of next three to five years.

Subcommittee reports again revealed shared trends, issues, and actions, confirming the interconnected and difficult nature of the opportunities and threats facing Guilford County. Committee subgroups were then tasked with organizing the subcommittee findings into a direct, performance-based plan that will guide future budget development and facilitate ‘management for results.’

Guilford Strategic Alliance: Building Tomorrow, Today Timeline



Assessment

Community Needs

Strategic Plan Committee members distributed a community wide survey and joined County Commissioners to gather community input through nine public forums, sixteen stakeholders meetings. They asked for perceptions about the current state of the county and how to improve the quality of life.

Summary of Public and Focus Group Input

Strengths Identified / What We Do Well

System of higher education
Emergency services
Healthcare systems
Parks and recreation
Natural resources
Size of cities
County social services
Infrastructure, roads, etc.

Those surveyed said that Guilford County is a good or excellent:

Place to live (83%)
Place to raise children (74%)
Place to work (73%)

Threats Identified / Areas that Need Improvement

Uncontrolled growth in rural areas, adversely impacting the natural resources and character
Uncontrolled economic growth overtaxing the infrastructure (roads, emergency services, etc.)
Failure to manage the county's tax base, tax rates and finances efficiently as we grow
Not addressing crime in our schools (drugs, violence, etc.)
Perception of being very or somewhat unsafe:
From property crimes (44%)
In public parks after dark (57%)
In downtown areas after dark (40%)

Other Frequent Concerns

Uncontrolled Growth in Rural Areas
Environment
Public Schools Quality and Safety

Weaknesses Identified / Areas that Need Improvement

Lack of...Coordination between government entities
Regionalism among counties/communities/governments
Cohesiveness among county commissioners
Uncontrolled growth and its impact on the environment
Public transportation access
Access to public libraries
Investment in secondary educational school system
Emphasis on crime prevention/education/resolving jail overcrowding

Moderate or Major Problems

Crime (81%)
Drugs (85%)
Taxes (64%)
Homelessness (64%)
Unsupervised Youth (60%)
Access to Public Transit (50%)
Slow income growth (76%)
Limited job growth (73%)

Opportunities Identified / Partnerships

Better land use (government owned and blighted structures) for economic or community use
Preservation of land to protect historic sites
Use of incentives to promote higher paying jobs
Government and citizen collaboration in solving community issues