

MARKET ST



LIVE WORK GROW

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PROJECT OVERVIEW

Murray County, Georgia has grown from a predominately agricultural community to an economy now dependent on manufacturing for its vitality. In many ways, it is poised to take the next step in its evolution to become a more economically and commercially diverse community. The dynamics of that evolution are exactly what this *Strategic Vision Plan* process will be about. Murray County has partnered with *Market Street Services* to coordinate a visioning process for the County's residents, business and leadership. At the end of this effort, Murray will have a clear picture of what type of place it "wants to be" and a prioritized set of action areas to achieve this vision.

I. Economic & Demographic Snapshot

It was important that Murray County's visioning process began with a common understanding of the County's recent trends. This snapshot used official local, state, and national statistical data sources – as available – to conclusively analyze key economic and demographic indicators illustrating what has happened in Murray County and the Dalton, GA metropolitan area in the recent past.

II. Community Assessment

Market Street took a detailed look at Murray County's competitive position to accommodate "visionary" growth and development by analyzing the factors that determine its value as a place to live, work, and do business. Both quantitative and qualitative research was incorporated.

III. Community Input Process

To gather the perspectives of community members and project stakeholders several avenues were utilized, including individual interviews and focus groups. Information was gathered about various aspects of Murray's current competitiveness and quality of life, as well as information related to stakeholders' visions for its future development. Highlights from this process were incorporated into the *Community Assessment* and informed the *Strategic Vision Plan*.

IV. Strategic Vision Plan

This *Strategic Vision Plan* represents the culmination of all quantitative and qualitative research to date through the development of action items geared towards addressing challenges and capitalizing on opportunities for visionary growth. The *Vision Plan* serves as the tool unifying Murray County’s public and private leadership behind a consensus blueprint for the County’s future. It prioritizes development efforts that serve Murray County’s vision and provides goals and action steps needed to optimize local competitiveness and the conditions to achieve that vision.

V. Implementation Guidelines

Timely and effective implementation is critical to the ultimate success of Murray County’s *Strategic Vision Plan*. If the *Vision Plan* represents the “what” that Murray County needs to do, the *Implementation Guidelines* determine “how” that will be done. The Guidelines will enable the community to secure early implementation victories and continue to build momentum for overall activation of the strategy.

INTRODUCTION

The time for change in Murray County is now. If recent trends related to job loss, population loss, retail leakage, exodus of the County's "best and brightest," and other issues continue unabated, Murray County will cease to become a viable destination for businesses and talent. Though much must be done, the County does not have the existing capacity to effectively move forward with progressive, proactive community and economic development strategies. Being successful will mean that more resources must be generated to implement new programs and processes.

While this *Vision Plan* represents a challenging step forward in achieving Murray County's vision for the future, it is nevertheless an attainable vision. While residents and community leaders are clearly ambitious and optimistic about the County's future, the attainment of the County's vision is a process that cannot and will not happen overnight. To be effective and successful, the County's leadership must remain consistently focused on achieving a few core objectives that provide the most "bang for the buck." The County's focus on meeting these initial objectives is critical to the *Plan's* success, and will ultimately open the door for additional long-term strategies that will create a more comprehensive approach to achieving the County's vision. As conditions improve in Murray County, the more long-term strategies presented in this Plan will become more viable, more timely, and more likely to succeed. Consistency and continuity in implementation are to moving the County forward.

FUTURE RESULTS

The reality is that Murray County has much work to do in order to simply catch up in terms of economic competitiveness. This *Plan* presents a set of strategies that are viable today and in the near future. The County will be more effective "starting small" with a set of focused activities designed to begin reversing negative local trends. As these early steps are taken, only then will County leaders be able to leverage a stronger capacity to take on more aspirational strategies. A number of these aspirational strategies are included in the *Vision Plan* as "Long-term Opportunities." These actions can be engaged as progress is made on initial programs.

Two results in particular were cited often by Murray County stakeholders as being priorities: **attraction of big-box retail and growth in the healthcare sector.**

While *Market Street* acknowledges that these concerns are very important to Murray County's future, current realities are simply not conducive to achieving success in growing the local big-box retail or health care markets. Both sectors are dependent on achieving a critical mass of local population, business and wealth that does not currently exist in Murray. Despite the proven "leakage" occurring in the County's retail and health care economies, it is not sufficient to compel big-box retailers or major health systems to invest hundreds of millions of dollars in Murray.

However, as Murray County implements its *Vision Plan*, builds a stronger, more diverse economy and attracts increasing numbers of new residents, efforts to locate big-box retail and expand local health care businesses will have much greater chances for success. This *Plan* will target such conditions in the hope that a wider array of strategies and actions are viable for Murray County in the years to come.

STEERING COMMITTEE

A diverse Steering Committee was established to provide guidance and leadership over the planning process. The Committee was selected from both public and private sectors to provide broad representation from local constituencies. The group's oversight ensured that the development of research reports and the *Vision Plan* itself was reflective of Murray County's true competitive issues and opportunities.

Bernice Acuna, Murray County
Pete Adams, Retired Educator
Steve Anglea, Georgia Power
Mitchell Awad, Eton Business Owner
Jason Babb, Babb's Body Shop
Craig Brock, Precision Loopers
Elaine Butler, Murray County Family Support Council
June Callahan, Beaulieu Corporation
Billy Cantrell, Mayor, City of Eton
Barnett Chitwood, N. Georgia Regional Development Ctr.
Rev. Danny Cochran, Holly Creek Baptist Church
Lesla Downey, Appalachian Community Bank
Edward Dunn, Businessperson
Lamar Dunn, Leonard Insurance Agency
Karen Edmondson, Murray County Family Connection
Shelia Elrod, Business Owner
Joel Etheridge, BB&T
Floyd Franklin, Ft. Mtn. Homeowners Assoc.
Lloyd Frasier, N. Georgia Regional Development Ctr.
Merinda Silvers Frost, Social Services
Tyson Haynes, Mayor, City of Chatsworth
John Holt, Murray Medical Center
Alan Kendrick, Cohutta Banking Company

Olivier B. LeMaitre, Cohutta Springs Conference Center
Steve Loughridge, Murray County Schools
Nathan Leonard, Acree Jenright Accounting
Celeste Martin, City of Chatsworth
Kaye McCurdy, Murray County School Board
Heather McEntire, Realtor
Mickey McNeill, Murray Co. Schools Superintendent (ret.)
Steve Noland, USA Concrete
Tommy Parker, Murray County
Dan Penland, Cohutta Banking Corporation
Jimmy Petty, Petty Dairies
Phenna Petty, Murray County Schools
Dr. Vickie Reed, Murray County Schools
David Ridley, Commissioner, Murray County
Rusty Ridley, 1st National Bank of Chatsworth
Dinah Rowe, Chatsworth-Murray Co. Chamber of Commerce
Matthew Sanford, Murray County
Merinda Silvers-Frost, Angels at Heart Inc.
Tom Starnes, Murray County
Gary Tanner, Chatsworth Times
Rev. Roger Vest, 1st United Methodist Church
Jim Welch, Retired Commissioner

VISION STATEMENT

Leveraging the tremendous amount of community input gathered from focus groups, interviews, an online survey, public meetings, and visioning exercises, the residents of Murray County have demonstrated much consensus regarding their vision for the future. The **vision statement** that follows represents that consensus.

“The Murray County of tomorrow will remain an inviting and livable community in the foothills of the beautiful North Georgia Mountains - a community where superior academic accountability and an educated, engaged workforce support a business-friendly, entrepreneurial, and diversified economy. By working together, Murray County’s residents will enjoy a successful, sustainable future through a renewed sense of community pride and achievement.”

The vision statement represents the core ambitions for this *Vision Plan*. To emphasize its role as the guidepost for strategic development, the statement has been separated into three key phrases representing the overarching goals of the *Vision Plan*. Each goal area contains a set of objectives and action steps to achieve them. Primary objectives and long-term considerations are also presented for each goal.

"...a more business-friendly, entrepreneurial, diversified economy"

What: Murray County will aggressively and proactively shape its economic base to ensure that residents have access to plentiful job opportunities in a more diverse array of sectors. The County's leadership will work with local, regional, state, and federal partners to develop the County's infrastructure, recruit new business, leverage its potential as a tourism destination, enhance the retail and food service environment, and market the County's assets to potential investors.

Why: We live in an increasingly competitive, global economy. As competition for jobs continues to intensify, the most competitive communities will be those that are unyielding in their economic development effort. If the County's leadership does not become an aggressive agent for change, Murray County will fall further behind. While the carpet and floor coverings sector has generated a dedicated workforce with a specific set of skills, the County's strong reliance on this single sector puts it at tremendous risk. Further, the County's youth has indicated that they are unlikely to remain or return to Murray County unless there are more plentiful and more varied job opportunities for them to pursue.

What if... ...Murray County continues with the status quo and fails to proactively diversify its economy? What if manufacturing layoffs continue and no new investment comes into the County? What will happen to poverty rates and child welfare? How will the community's families be able to recover in Murray County? A failure to act could have devastating effects on the County's workforce and its ability to provide employment opportunities for future generations.

Objective 1: Strategically position Murray County to be competitive in the pursuit of a Volkswagen Group of America parts supplier and future high-impact employers.

In addition to the strategies contained within this objective, the remaining strategies within this *Vision Plan* all contribute to developing a community that is more competitive for new business investment. This particular objective focuses on a series of tactical actions that will better position the County for outreach to Volkswagen Group suppliers and other prospective employers.

While there will be tremendous competition from surrounding counties, Murray County should aggressively pursue any and all opportunities that may arise from the location of a Volkswagen manufacturing facility in nearby Chattanooga, Tennessee. A large network of Volkswagen suppliers will be looking to relocate or expand operations within proximity to the new plant. While many have already found location and others are currently in the midst of the site selection process, the window of opportunity to capitalize on any opportunities and present Murray County as an attractive location is closing.

Murray County officials should reach out to the Georgia Department of Economic Development, as well as Georgia Power, the North Georgia Electric Membership Corporation and other local partners, to investigate the existing opportunities with respect to Volkswagen's supplier network. County officials will need to work with state and local partners to identify suppliers for the Volkswagen Group of America and determine if Murray County is capable of providing a site that would meet the needs of a prospect.

Throughout the process of engaging Volkswagen suppliers and other potential prospects, the County will need to pursue opportunities to provide targeted infrastructure improvements to support industrial development while developing new tactics and outlets to market the community.

Objective 1.1: Conduct site assessments and build a database of available properties in the County.

In order to support the attraction of potential Volkswagen supplier as well as other business development efforts, Murray County would benefit from building a database of existing sites, inclusive of available land and vacant properties. This site assessment will serve multiple purposes:

- ✓ The maintenance of an up-to-date inventory of available property with detailed information on specifications and infrastructure service.
- ✓ The identification of gaps and shortages in the available property mix within the County and the identification of gaps and needs in terms of infrastructure service at available properties.
- ✓ The identification of available lands which are best suited for industrial development in accordance with existing land use and zoning, and considering access to infrastructure and cost to conduct site preparation.

Actions	Sub-Actions	Lead Entity	Support Entities	Projected Cost	Potential Funding Source(s)	Model Program
<p>Identify all available vacant properties and available land in the County.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Conduct a parcel inventory of non-state and federally-owned property in Murray County. 2. Determine current ownership and land values. 3. Identify existing industrial facilities that are vacant. 4. Identify any barriers to occupancy or revitalization of brownfields sites. 					
<p>Gather critical information on all identified industrial buildings and available land.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Contact property owners and supporting entities to obtain information. 2. Gather any missing information first-hand. 3. Use all information gathered to build a property database of all developable – or redevelopable – parcels in the County. 					

Actions	Sub-Actions	Lead Entity	Support Entities	Projected Cost	Potential Funding Source(s)	Model Program
<p>Develop a searchable web-enabled, GIS mapping database of all property identified in the site assessment.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Leveraging the completed site assessment, develop a web-linked, consistently updated database with all relevant site information and specifications. 2. Ensure that the web tools are intuitive and user-friendly. 3. Partner with the Department of Community Affairs, the Northwest Georgia Regional Commission, Georgia Power, or another entity to incorporate the database into Geographic Information Systems (GIS) mapping software. 4. Reach out to local businesses with capabilities in database development and management, as well as web development, if internal/partner capacity is insufficient. 					

Objective 1.2: Prioritize sites for a Volkswagen parts supplier (and other key prospects), including the negotiation of targeted water and sewer extension to high-value, high-impact parcels.

The extension of sewer lines into unincorporated Murray County is vital to the County’s ability to attract new industrial development. Once the aforementioned site assessment database is complete, Murray County government officials should

revive discussions with Chatsworth Water Works and/or Dalton Utilities regarding the extension of water and or sewer service to prioritized areas for industrial development as identified in the site assessment.

While widespread extension of water and sewer to all of unincorporated Murray County is unlikely without reaching agreements with surrounding counties, extension to targeted areas should be viewed as a viable and necessary goal for Murray County. Without committed investment from a prospective employer, the Murray County Industrial Development Authority will likely need to support the extension of service through the issuance of bonds.

Because the Volkswagen plant in Chattanooga represents such a unique opportunity to attract employment to Murray County, it is prioritized in Objective 1.2. However, the preparation of Murray’s most marketable development sites will provide “shovel-ready” parcels to offer key prospects including – but not limited to – Volkswagen suppliers.

Actions	Sub-Actions	Lead Entity	Support Entities	Projected Cost	Potential Funding Source(s)	Model Program
<p>Identify available land that is best suited for industrial development.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Leveraging the completed site assessment, identify two to three parcels that are best suited for industrial development considering proximity to vital infrastructure (highways, rail line, and water/sewer). 2. Estimate costs and any existing barriers to the extension of water and sewer service to the identified parcels. 					

Actions	Sub-Actions	Lead Entity	Support Entities	Projected Cost	Potential Funding Source(s)	Model Program
Initiate extension discussions with potential providers.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ensure that officials from Chatsworth Water Works and/or Dalton Utilities are informed and involved throughout the process of identifying parcels that are best suited for industrial development. 2. Assemble a team of local advocates from the public and private sectors to convey the local imperative associated with targeted water/sewer extension to prepare shovel-ready sites. 3. Develop new or modify existing service delivery agreements. 					

Objective 1.3: Develop a website that markets available properties and promotes Murray County’s economic, workforce, and community assets.

In today’s competitive business development climate, every community, regardless of location or size, must have a presence on the internet to market itself and inform important audiences about the community’s strengths and assets with regards to economic development. Murray County is currently well behind the curve in this regard. Businesses, site selectors, real estate professionals and consultants often turn first to the internet to acquire basic information about a community, its economy, and its workforce. The lack of available information on the internet is detrimental to the County’s business development efforts. Furthermore, the lack of an internet presence may also signal that the County is not business savvy and would not offer the technological wherewithal to support a modern company. As a result, Murray County urgently needs to address this shortcoming.

In addition, to capitalize on the potential opportunities created by developing competitive industrial sites in Murray County, County leadership will need to effectively market its inventory of available properties and sites. This will require aggressive outreach and partnering with the regional real estate community, state economic development entities, and utility providers.

Actions	Sub-Actions	Lead Entity	Support Entities	Projected Cost	Potential Funding Source(s)	Model Program
<p>Collect all necessary information to be included on the County's economic development website.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Utilizing primary research included in the <i>Community Assessment</i> as well as other available data and information collected by County officials and partners, gather all valuable information to be used in marketing Murray County. 2. Conduct interviews with executives from the County's major employers as well as small business owners to include as testimonials on the website. 3. Work with state partners to develop a comprehensive list of all incentives available from the state of Georgia. 4. Gather recent news stories highlighting the County's assets and employers. 					

<p>Develop a County website to support economic development.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reach out to local businesses with capabilities in web development and include preference for local businesses in the selecting and awarding a contract. 2. Ensure that the County’s web-enabled GIS database of available sites and properties is incorporated into the website. 3. Ensure that a single individual is appointed responsibility for updating the County’s website with new information and news. 					
<p>Leverage the website to market properties to potential investors.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Partner with local and regional real estate firms to market County-owned sites and privately-owned properties to potential industrial development prospects and site selectors. 2. Ensure that regional and state partners possess up-to-date inventories of County sites for their own web-based databases. 3. Place links to Murray’s website on the Georgia Dept. of Economic Development and Georgia Power sites and those of regional, state and national ED organizations. 4. Market the provision of infrastructure as development incentives for top prospects. 					

Objective 2: Build coalitions and partnerships to support initiatives of regional significance.*Objective 2.1: Sustain and leverage Murray County's presence in the Northwest Georgia carpet cluster.*

Murray County's recent economy has been heavily concentrated in the manufacture of floor coverings. While greater employment diversification is a goal of this *Vision Plan*, it is also critical that Murray officials work to retain quality jobs already present in the County and utilize its workforce capacity in floor coverings to its best advantage. By engaging in proactive and ongoing conversations with economic development and private-sector partners in Dalton-Whitfield County related to Murray County's role in the growth of the regional carpet cluster, the County can ensure that any opportunities related to this sector will be captured. These opportunities could include:

- Working with Dalton-based executives from local employers such as Shaw, Mohawk, Beaulieu, and others to pursue expansions of their Murray County facilities, as viable.
- Partnering with state economic development officials and representatives from Georgia Power to ensure Murray County sites and available buildings are considered when prospects in floor coverings are looking to Northwest Georgia as an investment location.
- Engaging in joint-marketing programs with Dalton-Whitfield economic development organizations; these could include print and online advertising, websites, outreach to relocation prospects, and trips taken to external regions and sector-specific events like the SURFACES Expo and Conference.

The SURFACES Expo and Conference is the largest floor covering conference and expo in the world. It is held annually in Las Vegas and attracts thousands of key decision makers in the floor coverings sector. In 2009, the Expo included more than 370,000 square feet of exhibit space, occupied by more than 700 exhibitors. Nearly 24,000 retailers, distributors, manufacturers, installers, and builders attended the 2009 show.

Actions	Sub-Actions	Lead Entity	Support Entities	Projected Cost	Potential Funding Source(s)	Model Program
<p>Reach out to regional partners.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Contact officials in Dalton and Whitfield County regarding the potential to partner on marketing and development efforts in the floor coverings sector. 2. Ensure discussions with regional partners are ongoing. 3. Provide consistently updated information to regional partners on Murray County development assets and resource planning. 4. Work to secure a Murray County presence at existing carpet industry meetings and local shows in Dalton-Whitfield County. 5. Determine the feasibility of forming a regional delegation to attend the SURFACES Expo and other floor covering-related marketing events. 					

<p>Reach out to state partners.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Engage state development partners to position Murray County as a relocation destination for prospects in the floor coverings sector. 2. Work with state officials – as necessary – to structure incentive packages needed to retain and/or expand existing carpet manufacturing employment. 3. Pursue opportunities for Murray officials to accompany state officials on state-funded trips to floor covering events/meetings. 					
<p>Reach out to local employers.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Regularly contact executives from the County’s largest floor coverings employers to set up face-to-face meetings to discuss competitive issues and potential growth/expansion opportunities. 2. Ensure visits and discussions are coordinated with regional economic development partners. 					

Objective 2.2: Initiate regional and bi-state discussions to build a coalition to advocate for the widening of Highway 411.

Highway 411 is the primary north-south thoroughfare through Murray County, connecting the County to Interstate 75 and the Atlanta metropolitan area to the south and Tennessee and the Cleveland area to the north. Along its entire length, however, irregular road surfaces, varying speed limits, and single-lane congestion inhibit the highway’s potential as a rapid

connection for personal and commercial travel. Local officials should initiate an effort to develop a coalition with representation from Murray, Gordon and Bartow Counties in Georgia, and Polk and Bradley Counties in Tennessee, to formulate a plan to realize the eventual four-laning of Highway 411 from I-75 in Bartow County in Georgia to I-75 in Bradley County, Tennessee (via U.S. Highway 74). A high-capacity route parallel to I-75 through Northwest Georgia and Southeast Tennessee could relieve significant shipping congestion through this stretch of interstate while also opening up tremendous economic development possibilities in the “coalition counties.” Working with state and federal elected and transportation officials in Georgia and Tennessee, the coalition can work towards long-term goals of funding and constructing an I-75 bypass through the four-laning of Highway 411.

Actions	Sub-Actions	Lead Entity	Support Entities	Projected Cost	Potential Funding Source(s)	Model Program
<p>Establish a formal coalition to advocate for Highway 411 expansion.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Initiate contact with officials from municipal and county governments in Georgia and Tennessee that could benefit from Highway 411 expansion. 2. Develop a signed Memorandum of Understanding to guide coalition partners in the pursuit of Highway 411 expansion. 3. Work with coalition partners to develop a cohesive business case for expansion, potentially including coalition-funded impact studies and cost analyses. 4. Reach out to state and federal elected and transportation officials to obtain commitments to support the long-term expansion of 411. 					

<p>Determine a timeline for action on highway widening.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Based on state and national economic conditions, develop a realistic timeframe for pursuit of lobbying for highway widening. 2. Consider pooling resources to contract with a professional lobbyist to advocate for the four-laning of Highway 411 in legislative sessions. 3. Use to coalition to maintain consistent and forceful advocacy to keep Highway 411 expansion moving forward during successive state and federal administrations. 					
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Objective 3: Support the growth of mountain tourism through aggressive marketing and the development of a more diverse retail and food service environment.

Many local residents frequently cite the potential for developing a stronger tourism economy by leveraging the tremendous natural resources in Murray County. Many were quick to note that much of the potential tax revenue and economic impact that could be generated from mountain tourism is lost to surrounding counties that possess more hotel and restaurant variety. Traditional business recruitment strategies are not nearly as effective when applied to the hospitality and food service sectors. These sectors are purely demand-driven, and firms primarily choose locations based on demographics and density. However, the County can take a number of steps to encourage more plentiful and diverse retail and food service environment. The enhancement of the retail and food service offerings in the County benefits existing residents and provides amenities that visitors often seek when determining where to stay on vacation. The County can also pursue more traditional marketing strategies to elevate the presence of the County’s natural assets.

Objective 3.1: Establish a retail incubator in Murray County.

Small business incubators are an effective way of providing the comprehensive support – including affordable rental space, business coaching, and technical services – to entrepreneurs requiring assistance in launching their business. Retail incubators have been successful in a variety of communities nationwide and are particularly popular in communities wishing to revive their downtowns. Retail incubators often subsidize rent for new businesses to help them gain their footing while providing similar business coaching services as “traditional” business incubators.

The presence of such an incubator could be a catalyst for more locally-owned retail, food service, and arts and crafts establishments in a community that lacks a variety of such options. Without such small business support services, the County’s existing and potential future entrepreneurs are at a tremendous disadvantage as compared to many surrounding locations in North Georgia. Often, retail incubators can become actual retail destinations, with resident businesses opening for customers during designated periods.

Actions	Sub-Actions	Lead Entity	Support Entities	Projected Cost	Potential Funding Source(s)	Model Program
<p>Identify and secure a physical location for the incubator.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Determine the potential to have a building donated or leased at a low cost to the County to serve as a retail incubator. 2. Alternatively, identify a building for purchase or lease as a retail incubator – potentially as a component of a private multi-use downtown development project. 3. Source funds to build-out, equip and staff the incubator. 					

Actions	Sub-Actions	Lead Entity	Support Entities	Projected Cost	Potential Funding Source(s)	Model Program
<p>Develop co-located support capacity for incubator companies.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Consider retaining a small-business support person on-site at the incubator. 2. Create informational materials and development guides to inform potential clients on the dynamics of starting a small-business. 3. Determine the potential to launch a small-business mentorship program to connect new entrepreneurs with established small-business people. 4. Eventually consider the potential co-location of Murray County economic development functions on-site at the incubator. 					
<p>Assess the most viable retail opportunities in Murray County.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Work with existing economic development and tourism-related businesses to determine priority retail needs in the County. 2. Consider an attempt to poll County residents on their perspectives of local retail needs, perhaps through an online survey or a questionnaire distributed along with utility bills. 					

Actions	Sub-Actions	Lead Entity	Support Entities	Projected Cost	Potential Funding Source(s)	Model Program
<p>Formalize a process to provide initial support to incubator graduates.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Work with graduates to identify and secure retail space to launch their businesses. 2. Determine the capacity to support graduates through the provision of incentives such as façade-improvement grants, historic preservation tax credits, or short-term tax abatements. 					
<p>Provide marketing support for incubator graduates.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Partner with existing hospitality businesses and attractions to promote local businesses to tourists and visitors. 2. Determine the potential to open the incubator for customers for designated – and well publicized – periods. 					

Objective 3.2: Enhance existing efforts to encourage residents to think local and buy local.

Murray County loses hundreds of millions of dollars in potential retail and food service expenditures to surrounding counties each year. The County recently purchased a billboard reminding Murray County residents how much they spend outside the County each year. Additionally, the Chatsworth-Murray County Chamber of Commerce has partnered with the Chatsworth Times to promote “Think Murray First”. The Chatsworth Times supports this campaign by printing coupons and special offers by local businesses, as well as advertisements and editorials that encourage residents to think local and buy local. This program is undoubtedly a step in the right direction, but City and County officials should consider the viability of enhancing existing efforts by formalizing a County-wide incentive or rewards program to support local

businesses. County officials could reach out to retail and food service owners and franchise operators to gauge their interest in participating in a “Murray Rewards” program (MurRewards) whereby residents are eligible to receive small discounts on their purchases from County businesses while accumulating points that can be redeemed for various benefits such as gift cards and free meals. There are a number of ways to structure such a system and local businesses should participate in the process of determining the appropriate system.

It is also important for Murray residents to be informed of what their local purchase options are. If the local perception is that there is “nothing to buy” in Murray, then even a local rewards program will not be successful in capturing more spending dollars in the County.

Actions	Sub-Actions	Lead Entity	Support Entities	Projected Cost	Potential Funding Source(s)	Model Program
<p>Reach out to local businesses to gauge interest.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Contact local business owners to gauge their interest in participating in a County-wide rewards program. 2. Discuss their willingness to participate in various types of programs, from discounts to “reward points” accumulation. 					

<p>Examine options for managing the rewards program based on the type of system selected.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Consider electronic systems for managing points accumulation (through credit/debit card registry). 2. Consider a single card allowing the consumer to receive discounts at all participating establishments. 					
<p>Publicize the County rewards program and the variety of locally available good and services.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reach out to local media outlets to publicize the new rewards program. 2. Develop marketing materials (flyers/signs/decals) to advertise the rewards program in participating establishments. 3. Consider modifying the billboard on retail “leakage” to include a reference to the County rewards program. 4. On the Chatsworth-Murray County Chamber website (or the site that provides information on MurRewards) provide a list of participating retailers and the goods/services they offer; include links to participating businesses as available. 					

Objective 3.3: Support the adoption of “liquor-by-the-drink” in Murray County and the City of Chatsworth.

While the adoption of liquor-by-the-drink in Murray County is a potentially contentious issue, its economic benefit would likely be dramatic, both in terms of attracting chain restaurants to the County as well as resorts and meeting/event spaces. Numerous residents of Murray County noted that they wanted more dining options and lamented the fact that they had to drive to neighboring Whitfield County to go to a steakhouse.

Most national chains incorporate liquor sales into their business model and therefore will not even consider locations where liquor-by-the-drink is not legal. Approval of liquor-by-the-drink would remove one of the constraints to attracting national restaurant chains, allow existing business to expand their revenue streams, potentially lead to greater dining options for residents, help retain expenditures in Murray County, and boost government revenues. A number of individuals also cited the lack of attractive family dining as a reason why many visitors to Murray County elect to stay in Dalton or other surrounding communities during their trips. Ultimately, the aforementioned potential benefits will also lead to greater job creation in the County. Lastly, the potential to develop a mountain tourism sector in Murray is significantly compromised by the inability to serve liquor-by-the-drink in the County. Many resorts depend upon the attraction of meetings, conferences, conventions, weddings and other engagements to support their business models. Reportedly, certain previous conferences and meetings held in Murray County would bring their own alcohol, thus preventing the County from receiving taxes from the sales of these beverages.

County officials should carefully consider the process and message for gaining approval of liquor-by-the-drink in Chatsworth and unincorporated Murray. Expediency should be measured with the need to engage all key local constituencies in constructive dialogues related to the benefits and risks of liquor-by-the-drink. If necessary, public forums could be held to gauge interest in putting liquor-by-the-drink on an upcoming ballot. These forums should be used as an opportunity to discuss potential benefits of the initiative while being receptive to the concerns of all residents over allowing liquor-by-the-drink. Because liquor-by-the-drink is already legal in Eton, leaders from the town should be strongly engaged in the discussion of the expansion of the law into Chatsworth and unincorporated Murray County.

Actions	Sub-Actions	Lead Entity	Support Entities	Projected Cost	Potential Funding Source(s)	Model Program
<p>Coordinate with Chatsworth City and Murray County elected officials.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Meet with Chatsworth City Council members to discuss the potential for including a liquor-by-the-drink referendum an upcoming city ballot. 2. Reach out to the Murray County Commissioner to gauge interest on putting liquor-by-the-drink to the voters in a county-wide election. 3. Consistently leverage private-sector partners as advocates in these discussions. 					
<p>Conduct public outreach to advocate for the passage of the referendum.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reach out to local religious and community leaders and their constituents to discuss the economic rationale for liquor-by-the-drink legislation. 2. Consider contracting for an economic impact study to quantify the potential benefit from legalization of liquor-by-the-drink. 3. Reach out to local media outlets to report on these potential benefits. 4. Seek commitments of these key leaders to endorse passage of liquor-by-the-drink legislation. 					<p>Scott County, Kentucky</p>

<p>Solicit community input to ensure that residents concerns and opinions are heard by County leadership.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ensure that residents are able to provide their input in a public forum or through a series of meetings with local leadership. 2. Provide residents with information on chain restaurants that had inquired about locating in Murray but did not because of liquor-by-the-drink laws. 3. Based on public feedback, develop an “issue statement” responding to each key concern. 					
<p>Push for the inclusion of a liquor-by-the-drink referendum in upcoming Chatsworth and Murray County elections.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Support the Chatsworth City Council in voting for the inclusion of a liquor-by-the-drink referendum on an upcoming Chatsworth ballot. 2. Include a liquor-by-the-drink referendum on an upcoming Murray County ballot. 					
<p>Ensure passage of liquor-by-the-drink policy is marketed to potential investors.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. After liquor-by-the-drink is approved by voters, ensure that potential investors are aware of its passage. 					

Objective 3.4: Promote Murray County as a tourism destination.

In order to effectively market the County’s tourism assets, economic development officials should create a promotional message and website that advertises the region’s natural assets while allowing potential visitors to find information on the County’s parks, cultural resources, and recreational opportunities. In order for this effort to be effective, the message must be compelling and there must be amenities for visitors once they arrive in Murray. While these amenities will take time to realize, existing attractions should be strongly promoted. Efforts conducted at the retail incubator should be capitalize on opportunities to provide local visitors with locally made crafts, food products, gifts, artworks and other unique items. Communities also frequently advertise in targeted publications to support economic development efforts. Murray County should consider advertising itself as a tourism destination in local and regional newspapers and magazines. Eventually, the campaign could be broadened to national press and online media.

Actions	Sub-Actions	Lead Entity	Support Entities	Projected Cost	Potential Funding Source(s)	Model Program
<p>Formulate a compelling message promoting Murray County tourism.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Leverage local expertise to conduct a process resulting in the development of an effective promotional message marketing Murray’s tourism assets. 2. Ensure that tourism-supporting assets developed through efforts like the retail incubator are integrated into marketing efforts when feasible. 3. Seek pro-bono development of a logo, tagline and marketing materials for the tourism effort. 4. Ensure local businesses prominently feature promotional materials. 					

Actions	Sub-Actions	Lead Entity	Support Entities	Projected Cost	Potential Funding Source(s)	Model Program
<p>Develop a stand-alone Murray County tourism website or microsite.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Design and fund a website –or a microsite on the main economic development portal – promoting Murray County’s tourism amenities. 2. Offer special coupons and multi-attraction discounts on the website for potential visitors. 3. Invest in search-optimization capacity to ensure that the website is prioritized in searches for tourism in North Georgia. 4. Feature all local hospitality establishments (including rental units such as cabins) and ensure that new developments are consistently added. 					
<p>Partner with state and regional tourism organizations.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ensure that Murray County destinations, resorts, attractions, events, etc., are actively and consistently promoted by the Georgia and Tennessee tourism departments and the Dalton Convention and Visitors Bureau. 					

Actions	Sub-Actions	Lead Entity	Support Entities	Projected Cost	Potential Funding Source(s)	Model Program
<p>Advertise in print publications.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Evaluate the cost effectiveness of marketing the County as a tourism destination in various local and regional newspapers and magazines. 2. Consider eventually broadening the campaign to national tourism, recreation, and outdoors-focused publications and websites. 3. Reach out to local businesses with expertise in graphic design and marketing to provide in-kind advertisement and marketing design services. 					

LONG-TERM OPPORTUNITIES: “...A MORE BUSINESS-FRIENDLY, ENTREPRENEURIAL, DIVERSIFIED ECONOMY”

This section includes suggested opportunities that may be considered once significant effort and progress has been expended in starting and successfully implementing the priority objectives for this goal area. The timeframe for initiation of these actions is dependent on progress related to *Vision Plan* implementation. As such, they could be engaged within two years, five years, or longer based on advancement of initial strategic priorities.

Pursue long-term arrangements for more widespread extension of water and sewer infrastructure to accommodate all types of development and land uses.

If discussions regarding the extension of water and sewer infrastructure to prioritized industrial sites are productive and successful, Murray County officials should continue to work with Chatsworth Water Works, Dalton Utilities and/or other regional providers to negotiate the extension of water and sewer to other areas of the County that are likely to be attractive locations for commercial, residential, and other industrial development. While targeted extension is likely the most appropriate, impactful, and expedient option for supporting industrial development in the short- and medium-term, more widespread extension of water and sewer infrastructure is going to be vital to the long-term growth prospects for all types of development in Murray County.

Prepare shovel-ready site(s) to accommodate industrial development prospects.

The availability of shovel-ready sites for industrial projects is vital in today’s incredibly competitive marketplace. The current reality is that Murray County is at a competitive disadvantage in this competition for potential projects. The preparation of shovel-ready site(s) is absolutely vital if the County wishes to become a viable destination for such investment. Shovel-ready sites are parcels of land which have been adequately prepared such that prospects can begin construction of buildings immediately upon acquiring or leasing the land. Nearly every competitive community that is marketing itself for new industrial development has multiple shovel-ready sites.

Once targeted site(s) have been identified and water/sewer agreements have been reached, the County should begin to examine funding options to support the preparation of targeted site(s) including the acquisition of land, master planning,

extension of water/sewer service, grading, and potential wetlands assessments/delineation. The Industrial Development Authority may issue bonds to finance such improvements, although additional sources of financing will likely be necessary. Federal, state, and non-profit sources should be explored.

Prepare and incentivize parcels for development of mountain resort and/or vacation housing.

While the market for second homes has undoubtedly deteriorated in recent years with the collapse of the housing market and the erosion of household wealth during the current recession, this market will rebound in the years ahead as wealth is re-accumulated and an abundance of retirees emerge. When searching for second homes (vacation homes), families typically seek one of two environments: the beach or the mountains. Families want to relax in a beautiful setting and often in a quiet community. With a relative abundance of land and surrounding natural resources, Murray County is ideal location for those considering vacation homes as well as a location for retirement. The development of a specific community targeting vacation housing would be more marketable than an assortment of undeveloped sites that are likely lacking the infrastructure that will be desired by vacationers and purchasers of second homes or retirement living.

Consider hosting an international delegation of executives from global floor coverings manufacturers and a delegation of suppliers to existing floor coverings manufacturers.

When attending the SURFACES Expo and Conference in Las Vegas, every attempt should be made to connect with manufactures and distributors of floor coverings from outside the United States. Consultants can help identify potential prospects outside the United States that may have interest in expanding operations or locating new operations within the United States. Such prospects will be attracted to Dalton region and its high concentration of workers skilled in carpet and floor coverings manufacturing processes.

In addition, suppliers to existing firms in the region should also be targeted as potential prospects for relocation or expansion. County leaders, in cooperation with existing employers, can develop supply chain maps to help identify the suppliers that may benefit the most from relocating operations to Murray County. The Cohutta Springs Conference Center is a great asset that could be used to display the community's character and natural beauty to potential prospects.

Pursue alternative financing mechanisms to support the County's entrepreneurs and small businesses.

Revolving loan funds (RLFs) are gap financing measures typically used for the support of entrepreneurs and the expansion of small businesses. They are self-replenishing pools, with new loans utilizing the repayment of principal and interest on old loans. RLFs are a relatively flexible source of capital that can supplement potentially insufficient private sector financing.

The County should examine the feasibility of establishing and managing a revolving loan fund (RLF) to provide alternative financing to entrepreneurs and small businesses pursuing ventures that will serve the community, help retain expenditures by Murray County residents, and diversify the County's economic base. The County will need to examine funding sources for initial capitalization of the RLF. Capitalization is often supported by a combination of public, private and philanthropic sources.

In addition to RLFs, the Small Business Administration's 504 loan program is another option to provide important financial support to the County's small businesses. The 504 program is a long-term financing tool to support economic development projects within a community which provides small businesses with long-term, fixed-rate financing to support the acquisition of physical assets (land, buildings, machinery, equipment, etc.) to support expansion or modernization. A typical 504 loan project includes a loan from the private sector that covers up to 50 percent of the project costs, as well as a loan secured from a Certified Development Company (CDC) which is backed by and guaranteed by the Small Business Administration.

“...superior academic accountability and an educated, engaged workforce”

What: Murray County will embark on new efforts to elevate educational attainment levels, increase high school graduation rates, prepare students for higher education, and improve parental involvement.

Why: Based on a measure of college-degree attainment, Murray County currently possesses the least educated population in the state of Georgia and one of the least educated in the nation. Only one county in Georgia has a higher percentage of its population with no high school diploma. As the world has transitioned into an increasingly knowledge-intensive economy, education is more paramount than ever. Degree attainment and acquired skills are now at or near the top of site selectors lists; the ability to provide a low cost environment for operating a business is no longer sufficient to compete. Further, educational attainment is the single most reliable predictor of an individual’s earning potential. If Murray County fails to elevate the educational attainment of its youngest generation, the County will undoubtedly fall further behind in the competition for jobs and investment.

What if... ...students continue to drop out of high school at high rates and fail to pursue higher education? Very simply, the County’s efforts related to business recruitment, small business development and economic diversification will be severely compromised. The County’s existing competitive disadvantage may become overwhelming and lead to devastating socio-economic impacts related to poverty, out-migration and ongoing budget deficits. Recent improvements in student performance on end-of-grade testing are a sign that positive momentum is building. This momentum must be sustained if Murray County is to move forward economically.

Objective 4: Enhance ongoing efforts to reduce high school dropout rates in Murray County.*Objective 4.1: Develop a “Reach Out to Dropouts” program modeled after national best practices.*

The number of students dropping out of high school was frequently cited by community input participants as one of Murray County’s greatest challenges to sustainable growth and preparedness for the 21st century economy. Many individuals, including educators, noted that an even greater number of students have dropped out in the last two years as a result of financial hardship within their households. These actions have lasting effects and damage the income-earning potential of the dropout for an entire lifetime. Many noted that the County was subject to a culture that failed to discourage dropping out. Reversing this trend is vital to the long-term development of a more educated workforce capable of attracting higher wage and more diverse employment to the County.

While the County’s school system has recently targeted the elevation of graduation rates in its most recent three-year strategic plan, more work can be done by members of the community to support the attainment of high school diplomas by the County’s youth. The Houston Independent School District first implemented a program in 2004 that sought to re-engage students who had recently dropped out of high school. This program – **Reach Out to Dropouts** – has been tremendously successful in its short history and has been adopted by other surrounding communities in Texas as well as other school districts nationwide. The program is supported by volunteers from throughout the community (concerned citizens, teachers, administrators, business leaders, and the United Way) who walk door-to-door in teams to visit the families of students that have not re-enrolled in school within the first few weeks of a new school year or failed to graduate the previous year for a variety of reasons. During last year’s walk in Houston, nearly 1,200 volunteers made contact with more than 680 students or parents, and 60 students began the re-enrollment process on the day of the walk. Many more re-enrolled in the following days with subsequent follow-ups by volunteers. The Fort Bend Independent School District replicated Houston’s program last year. With only one participating high school, 68 volunteers visited 106 homes, contacted 72 students or parents, and re-enrolled 20 students. The Lamar Consolidated Independent School District, also located in Fort Bend County, visited 65 homes, spoke with 37 students or parents, and re-enrolled 26 students.

With adequate support from volunteers in Murray County, and a detailed understanding of the successful tactics used in the aforementioned model programs, the Reach Out to Dropouts program could have significant and lasting impacts on the lives of many students in the community.

Actions	Sub-Actions	Lead Entity	Support Entities	Projected Cost	Potential Funding Source(s)	Model Program
<p>Gather information on model programs and develop a plan for implementing a similar program in Murray County.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reach out to high school administrators and leadership from the United Way of Northwest Georgia to secure their commitment to such a program. 2. Contact administrators from schools currently implementing the program to discuss their experiences and gather pertinent information. 3. Formalize a plan for launching the program in Murray County. 					Reach Out to Dropouts
<p>Recruit volunteers to participate in the Reach Out to Dropouts walk.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reach out to key community stakeholders in all constituencies to inform them of the program and ask for their assistance in recruiting volunteers. 2. Leverage the Murray County Volunteer Network recommended in Objective 7.1 to help source volunteers. 3. Train volunteers in the appropriate processes and protocols for the day of the walk. 					

<p>Implement the Reach Out to Dropouts Walk.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify students that have not re-enrolled in high school or failed to graduate the previous year. 2. Design strategies to speak with specific children, as necessary. 3. Ensure that a representative from the County's schools system (administrator, teacher, or counselor) is a member of each team. 4. Conduct the walk, and ensure that County administrators and social workers are on hand at the school on the day of the walk to meet with students and parents interested in re-enrollment. 5. Develop a follow-up process to ensure that re-enrolled students are remaining in school. 					
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Objective 5: More effectively support the pursuit of higher education by Murray County's high school graduates.

Objective 5.1: Increase the capacity at Murray County and North Murray County High Schools to provide college counseling services for local students.

Many students with the potential to continue their education beyond high school may not receive the guidance, support, or encouragement that they need from their parents to recognize their full potential. In addition, many students who may not be able to afford college may be eligible for scholarships and loans but are simply unaware of their availability. College counselors can help identify students early in high school that are performing at a level capable of gaining admission to four-year institutions of higher learning. They work with students throughout their latter years of high school to help identify

schools that are good fit for their financial, academic, and personal needs. The County's school system currently offers college counseling services to students in a variety of ways. Primarily, students are paired with a counselor from 9th grade to 12th grade. This counselor serves a role as both a college counselor and a personal/behavioral counselor. Counselors ensure that students have taken the required standardized tests (PSAT and SAT) while monitoring student progress and administering diagnostic tests to determine if students will need remediation courses. Counselors will assist with applications during each student's senior year.

In addition to the counselors on staff, the school system has supported teachers as advisors, ensuring that they are engaged in the college counseling progress. While these efforts demonstrate a commitment to college counseling and improving the County's college matriculation rates, the County should constantly evaluate the success of its efforts and consider potential enhancements to the provision of college counseling services.

Another possible enhancement is the separation of college counseling from behavioral/personal counseling. The County's school system should consider launching a College Counseling Office staffed with at least one full-time professional to provide support for high school juniors and seniors interested in attending a two- or four-year college or university. A number of regional and national nonprofit organizations support local education initiatives through grants, providing an alternative method for financing such an enhancement should public financing be viewed as unsustainable.

Murray County schools could also potentially leverage the existing Graduation Coach program to enhance one-on-one counseling for all high school students as funds are sought to build the district's counseling capacity.

Actions	Sub-Actions	Lead Entity	Support Entities	Projected Cost	Potential Funding Source(s)	Model Program
<p>Assess existing district capacity to provide college counseling services.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Conduct a thorough review of existing counseling functions to determine potential for optimizing student-support systems. 2. Based on this review, identify potential funds that can be sourced or redirected towards college-counseling services. 3. Determine how existing Graduation Coaches can best be leveraged to also enhance college-counseling capacity. 4. Seek grants – as available – to provide capacity to create a staffed College Counseling Office. 5. Augment staff capacity in preparation for including a comprehensive college counseling program in the 2010-2011 academic year. 					

<p>Incorporate the College Counseling Office into the Murray County Public Schools Strategic Plan.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Design the work plan and performance expectations for the Office. 2. Ensure that plan components include: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> A) Proactive identification of students in ninth and tenth grades that are performing at a level that would qualify them for college admission; B) Identification of students who may be capable of qualifying for admission with additional effort; C) Assistance with financial aid applications; D) In-person meetings with parents; E) Assistance with identifying colleges and universities that students may be admitted to based on qualifications, as well as colleges and universities that support the interests of the student. 3. Officially incorporate the College Counseling Office work plan into the Murray County Schools' Strategic Plan. 					
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Objective 5.2: Implement the Gateway to College program (or a modified equivalent) in Murray County.

The Gateway to College program is a national model first developed by Portland Community College in Oregon. The program is a partnership between a local school system and a community college that provides high school dropouts with access to college courses, facilities, and support services. The program allows dropouts between the ages of 16 and 21 to work towards gaining a high school diploma while simultaneously earning college credit. It is a free program that has been supported by grants from large non-profits including the Walmart Foundation. The program would complement existing Murray County efforts to address performance issues of at-risk students ages 16 to 21 through the recent development of an evening high school program at Murray County High and an alternative school for middle and high school students who need a different type of learning environment. Gateway to College would also address one of the school system’s principal three-year strategies, namely to “Support 16-19 year olds who are not in school and not working, or those at high risk, to get an education and become employable by offering them non-traditional schooling, training, and life skills development opportunities geared to their age and life situations.” Thus, the *custom-tailoring* of Gateway to College for Murray County, incorporating existing efforts and allowing for the County’s unique situation of not having a dedicated two-year college within its borders will be *absolutely critical*.

Actions	Sub-Actions	Lead Entity	Support Entities	Projected Cost	Potential Funding Source(s)	Model Program
<p>Form a Program Committee to pursue development of a Gateway to College program.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Initiate a partnership with Dalton State College to collaborate on the development of the program with Murray County Schools. 2. Determine the viability of holding courses on-site at Murray County High with faculty from Dalton State working in tandem with Murray County faculty. 3. Utilize existing grant writers to pursue state, federal or foundation funding to launch and sustain the program. 					<p>Gateway to College</p>

<p>Customize a Gateway to College program for Murray County.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Investigate national Gateway to College models, including the founding program in Portland, to determine applicable components for Murray County. 2. Partner with the Murray County Chamber and business leaders to ensure that students are directed to degrees applicable to the local workforce and economy. 3. Formalize the program for implementation in Murray County. 					
<p>Promote the program to potential students.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Coordinating with other local dropout prevention, drug counseling, and teenage pregnancy education efforts, compile a list of potential students ages 16 to 21 for inclusion in a pilot program. 2. Determine if any existing students at the evening high school or alternative school would be strong candidates for Gateway to College. 					

<p>Pursue integration of the Georgia Work Ready program into Gateway to College implementation.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Partner with local employers to compel them to create Work Ready job profiles for open positions and hire only Georgia Certified Work Ready candidates.¹ 2. Work with Gateway to College participants to direct them to Georgia Northwestern Technical College in Rome to receive their Work Ready Certification. 3. Initiate discussions with the Georgia Governor’s Office of Workforce Development to provide Work Ready program access closer to Murray County. 					
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Objective 6: Encourage greater parental involvement in students’ academic performance.

Objective 6.1: Develop a parental involvement initiative modeled after the Parent Institute for Quality Education.

Murray County has launched efforts to better engage local parents in their children’s education. The i-Parent program is one example of this in which parents can go online to track their child’s academic performance. There are “family nights” in which parents can come on campus and learn about ways to better support their children. Family engagement is also one of the major focus areas of the Murray County Family Connection collaborative, a key partner of Murray County Schools. The school district is also planning a strategic focus on issues such as teen pregnancy and drug use that can contribute to a student’s lack of academic achievement, dropping out of school, and failing to pursue a higher degree.

¹ To create a Georgia Work Ready job profile, employers must contact the certified job profiler at Georgia Northwestern Technical College or the Governor’s Office of Workforce Development’s business development representative.

Two of the Murray County Schools' principal three-year strategies involve family-related issues:

- Strategy: Ensure that vulnerable families improve their stability by having access to early education opportunities and support services.
- Strategy: Support 10-14 year olds who are at high risk of engaging in risky behavior (i.e. early sexually activity) by offering an array of opportunities to learn new life skills geared to their age and life situations

Despite these current and planned parental- and family-involvement strategies, numerous stakeholders commented in a public input process that lack of parental involvement was one of the key factors impairing local academic performance, college matriculation and issues such as teen pregnancy, crime and drug use.

A proven program launched in California can serve as a model for a more comprehensive, coordinated and impactful parent-involvement effort in Murray County. The Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE) began in California in 1987 when Reverend Vahac Mardirosian (retired pastor and community activist) and Dr. Albert Ochoa (San Diego State University professor) engaged parents to discuss social conditions, the school system, and persistent problems of low academic achievement in their community. The initial session was so successful and attractive to parents that the program evolved into eight different sessions. At the end of this initial process, Dr. Ochoa took the lessons from these eight sessions and developed a formal nine-week curriculum for workshops targeting K-12 parents.

The Parent Institute for Quality Education was born and quickly spread to school districts throughout California. The workshop is offered by certified instructors trained by PIQE, and educates parents on a variety of topics including motivation, communication, discipline, school system organization, college preparation, and overcoming obstacles in child learning. The program is typically supported in part by the school system (leveraging Title I, Title III and No Child Left Behind funds) with contributions from charities and grants. The program is offered free of charge to parents and is typically offered in morning and evening sessions to accommodate various schedules. Since starting in California, PIQE has spread to other regions of the country including the Washington D.C. metropolitan area and communities throughout Texas, Arizona, and Minnesota. As of 2009, over 375,000 parents have graduated from PIQE's parent involvement training classes in California alone.

Murray County would be the first jurisdiction in Georgia to launch a PIQE program.

Actions	Sub-Actions	Lead Entity	Support Entities	Projected Cost	Potential Funding Source(s)	Model Program
<p>Build consensus on the benefits of and need for a PIQE program in Murray County.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Determine the potential to invite an administrator from an existing PIQE school system to Murray County to discuss the program and the dynamics of its launch and operation. 2. Consider the potential to incorporate existing local parent-and family-outreach efforts into a PIQE curriculum. 3. Assess potential funding sources to implement PIQE such as Title I funds, grants and donations. 					
<p>Develop a PIQE curriculum for Murray County.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Form a planning committee to study successful PIQE models to determine elements that are transferrable to Murray County. 2. Craft a PIQE curriculum customized to Murray County issues, including teen pregnancy, value-of-education, drug abuse, high dropout rates, etc. 3. Identify and train educators to lead the parental involvement training workshops. 					<p>Parent Institute for Quality Education</p>

<p>Formalize a graduation protocol from PIQE.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Partner with Dalton State and other colleges and universities in Georgia and Tennessee to offer guaranteed placement to children of PIQE graduates. 2. Work to provide loans, stipends, and tuition-forgiveness support to children of PIQE graduates. 3. Compel program graduates to promote PIQE in the County and volunteer in curriculum development and teaching efforts. 					
<p>Develop an outreach program to attract local parents to participate in PIQE.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Work with Murray County Schools, local media, faith-based representatives, social services providers, local governments and other key partners to develop an outreach campaign to promote PIQE involvement. 2. If feasible, develop promotional materials and distribute them at city and county offices, local retail establishments, the Chatsworth-Murray County Chamber, local churches, etc. 3. Integrate discussions of PIQE with local parents during other engagement opportunities such as the drop-out reduction visits, parent-teacher nights, Rotary Club meetings, church sermons, etc. 					

LONG-TERM OPPORTUNITIES: “...SUPERIOR ACADEMIC ACCOUNTABILITY AND AN EDUCATED, ENGAGED WORKFORCE”

This section includes suggested opportunities that may be considered once significant effort and progress has been expended in starting and successfully implementing the priority objectives for this goal area.

Standardized Testing Preparation

While performance in the classroom is vital to a student’s prospects of pursuing post-secondary education, performance on nationally-accepted standardized tests (primarily the SAT Reasoning Test) is also vital to a student’s ability to gain admission to a college or university. As educational performance continues to increase and more students see the pursuit of a college degree as achievable, a formal program could be developed to provide comprehensive preparation and instruction services to students slated to take a standardized college-placement examination. Such a program could include PSAT and SAT courses offered on weekends or incorporated into existing curriculum for gifted students. However, it is important to ensure that all students are given equal access to preparatory services. The County currently provides a computer-assisted study program for SAT preparation, as well as the College Board SAT preparation software that is provided free through the state.

Technical College Branch Campus

Murray County is currently in the Dalton State College service area within the Technical College System of Georgia but has no two-year degree, career certificate, or flexible training capacity inside the County. Northwestern Technical College, Chattahoochee Technical College, and North Georgia Technical College provide service in surrounding counties. Murray County officials should continue to reach out to the Technical College System of Georgia and its member institutions regarding the potential expansion and establishment of a branch campus to meet the needs of Murray County’s residents and businesses. The location of a branch campus of Dalton State College would presumably reduce the demand for two-year degrees and career certificates at the Dalton campus, allowing the excess capacity at the campus to be utilized for expansion of existing four-year programs and the resources to accommodate the development of new four-year degree programs. For this reason, the location of a branch campus of Dalton State College in Murray County would likely be the most desirable scenario, as it not only will help improve access to technical training within the County, but also allow for expansion of bachelor’s degree programs at the region’s only four-year institution.

"...a successful, sustainable future through a renewed sense of community pride and achievement"

What: Murray County will initiate a long-term effort to change attitudes and expectations of local residents about their County so that they eventually become Murray's strongest advocates for potential residents and businesses. This effort will begin small – increasing volunteerism, celebrating success stories and improving local aesthetics – and eventually expand into a broader program to transform local perceptions of Murray as a place to live, work, visit and start a business.

Why: If existing residents and businesses are not passionate about Murray County's present and future, it is nearly impossible to attract quality investment to the community. Prospects often visit a community anonymously prior to making a relocation decision; if they are met by indifference or outright disdain about the County from those that call it home, they will abandon any plans to establish operations there. The same is true for talented workers and entrepreneurs of all ages who might be interested in Murray as a future destination.

What if... ...local attitudes remain soured on Murray County's prospects for economic and population growth? Quite simply, a community without hope for the future soon becomes a community without a future. Too many people love and care about Murray County to allow that to happen, but positive voices were said to be increasingly drowned out by the negative. This must change if Murray is truly to become a destination-of-choice for future generations.

Objective 7: Maintain a charming, attractive, and prideful community by encouraging volunteerism, promoting social welfare and celebrating achievement.

Throughout the community input phase, residents of Murray County were quick to note that they enjoyed the neighborly, small-town feel of the community. A number of individuals spoke of their deep pride for the place they call home. However, many also felt that there were attributes of the community that they were not proud of; in many regards, this *Vision Plan* addresses a variety of those concerns. While the responsibility for executing and implementing the majority of the strategies contained within the *Plan* will lie within the various leadership structures of the community and its partners, the residents of Murray County can and need to be an active participant in shaping the County's future. Volunteerism is a tremendous vehicle for such action.

Objective 7.1: Establish a Murray County Volunteer Network.

The establishment of a formal volunteer network will help ensure that the County gains momentum quickly and maintains this momentum behind volunteerism for the foreseeable future. The network should coordinate and schedule volunteers for a variety of projects that are submitted and evaluated by the managing entity. Potential projects could be submitted by businesses, other non-profits, local governments, and families. Examples of projects could range from County-wide trash removal efforts to the clean-up of a flood-damaged residence to assistance with government beautification initiatives like planting trees and flowers. Murray County officials should reach out to non-profit organizations to gauge their interest and ability to manage the volunteer network for the County.

The United Way of Northwest Georgia currently operates a Volunteer Center and is a viable partner. However, it is also important that the Murray County Volunteer Network is operated locally. Therefore, the United Way office in Dalton could assist a Murray County organization, department or office with the launch and management of the Volunteer Network and then provide support as needed during launch and program operation.

Actions	Sub-Actions	Lead Entity	Support Entities	Projected Cost	Potential Funding Source(s)	Model Program
<p>Assess existing efforts.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reach out to all local public organizations, departments and private-sector partners to determine existing formal efforts related to volunteering in Murray. 2. Develop an ongoing list of existing volunteer programs, rosters and volunteer-ship opportunities. 3. Inform all partners of the goal of developing a formal Volunteer Network in Murray County. 					
<p>Build a volunteer and project database.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Work with regional partners to identify a lead agency for managing the Network. 2. Seek the support of the United Way office in Dalton to help launch the Murray Network and train the identified lead agency in program management. 3. Input all existing rosters of events, volunteers, and opportunities to donate time and effort into a master database, potentially on the managing partner's website. 4. Develop a system for updating the Network database with all new volunteer candidates and events. 					

Actions	Sub-Actions	Lead Entity	Support Entities	Projected Cost	Potential Funding Source(s)	Model Program
<p>Establish a process for publicizing volunteer opportunities.</p>	<p>I. Reach out to the Chatsworth Times regarding the possibility of partnering to promote the Volunteer Network, the website connecting volunteers with opportunities, and the potential to leverage the Network for creation of new volunteer events.</p>					

Objective 7.2: Continue comprehensive, coordinated efforts to promote social welfare in Murray County.

Numerous public input respondents commented on the many efforts underway in Murray County to address challenges faced by the local population related to homelessness, teenage pregnancy and drug use. Indeed, as a recognized county in need, Murray is eligible for significant state and federal funding for programs addressing these issues. Dozens of professionals and volunteers are working every day to implement programs designed to support youth and adults to make better choices about their futures.

It is contingent on those agencies, departments, organizations, churches and other entities working to support Murray County's population to ensure efforts are supportive and collaborative. By engaging in a holistic partnership to eradicate social pathologies in the County, these program operators can better determine areas where more resources and support are needed to be effective.

Actions	Sub-Actions	Lead Entity	Support Entities	Projected Cost	Potential Funding Source(s)	Model Program
<p>Formalize regular discussion sessions among all key partners.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Leverage an existing group – or create a new mechanism – to enable community and social services partners in Murray County to meet regularly to discuss shared issues and programmatic opportunities. 2. Ensure partners are aware of all local resources in order to refer clients to the most appropriate source for support. 3. Assess programmatic gaps and work collectively to launch programs to address them. 					
<p>Determine the potential to utilize a professional grant writer to support Murray County organizations.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review existing capacity and budgetary constraints to determine the efficacy of funding a joint grant writer for Murray County social service and community organizations. 2. If viable, develop a protocol for the use of the grant writer and a funding formula to fairly assess each organization according to its ability to compensate the position. 					

Objective 7.3: Support efforts to publicly celebrate individual and organizational achievements.

Throughout the community input process, residents noted that there was little celebration of achievement in the community, which contributed to low self-esteem and a lack of community pride. Around the country, chambers of commerce and other organizations frequently select and profile small businesses of the month while newspapers often profile members of community on a regular basis.

The Chatsworth Rotary Club is currently in the process of launching a program to recognize local achievements and individuals for promotion of community-serving efforts. The Club should be provided the full support of all public and private community partners in this endeavor. Opportunities to enhance or expand the program should be pursued as viable under the auspices of the Rotary Club. Annual awards that could be considered include: citizen of the year, business person of the year, young person of the year, etc. The Club should also be cognizant of recognizing achievements from across the breadth of Murray County. Local media should always be key partners in promoting the Club’s first Recognition Dinner in 2010 and all subsequent events.

Actions	Sub-Actions	Lead Entity	Support Entities	Projected Cost	Potential Funding Source(s)	Model Program
<p>Partner with the Chatsworth Rotary Club to best support their Recognition efforts.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Work with Club leadership to receive regular briefings on Recognition plans and dinners. 2. Determine how local organizations and officials can most effectively support the Club’s efforts. 3. Assess the potential for expansion of the Recognition events to include the identification and presentation of awards in multiple categories. 					

Actions	Sub-Actions	Lead Entity	Support Entities	Projected Cost	Potential Funding Source(s)	Model Program
<p>Develop a process for soliciting and evaluating nominations for the Club's recognition awards.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ensure the Rotary Club works with the Chamber, the school system, and other local partners to establish a process for soliciting and generating nominations for Recognition award winners from across Murray County. 2. Determine if non-Club representatives should play a role in evaluating nominations and selecting award winners. 					
<p>Identify a channel for publicizing award recipients.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reach out to the Chatsworth Times and other local/regional media to secure commitments to publicize and profile award winners. 					

Objective 8: Enhance efforts to improve local aesthetics and formal outdoor spaces in Murray County.

The Volunteer Network recommended in Objective 7 has potential to greatly assist with an existing Murray County effort that could benefit from greater resources: Keep Chatsworth/Murray County Beautiful (KCMCB). KCMCB is a chapter of Keep Georgia Beautiful, the first state affiliate of Keep American Beautiful. Residents reported that the program has already been quite successful in reducing the amount of litter around the County. However, it was noted that the program is essentially a “one person operation.” By connecting KCMCB with the newly-established volunteer network, KCMCB will have a group of volunteers to leverage for larger, County-wide efforts. The chapter could also benefit front grant writing assistance to help obtain funding from the Keep Georgia Beautiful Foundation and other foundations.

Murray County Parks and Recreation has also done a tremendous job in recent years enhancing the County’s public realm. The Department has built community facilities that provide a safe environment and recreational opportunities for children, teenagers, and adults. Veterans Park and its community recreation center is a tremendous asset to the County.

Continuing to develop this asset while providing new amenities throughout the County will contribute to improving the charm and appeal of Murray County to existing and potential future residents. Such amenities have the potential to enhance community pride, provide a place for gathering and social events, and serve as a visible example of what can be achieved through cooperation and community spirit.

Objective 8.1: Expand efforts to beautify public spaces in Murray County.

Actions	Sub-Actions	Lead Entity	Support Entities	Projected Cost	Potential Funding Source(s)	Model Program
<p>Partner with KCMCB to prioritize local improvement projects.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Work with KCMCB’s Director to engage in a public process to identify beautification efforts determined to be local priorities. 2. Formalize the list into an Action Agenda for Murray County beautification to be managed by KCMCB. 					
<p>Enhance KCMCB’s capacity.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Fully leverage the Murray County Volunteer Network for projects on KCMCB’s Action Agenda. 2. Solicit volunteers with grant writing experience to submit grant applications to the Keep Georgia Beautiful Foundation and other foundations to support priority local projects. 					

<p>Consider efforts to launch an annual Keep Chatsworth-Murray County Beautiful Day.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Following national models, determine the viability of developing an annual Beautification Day. 2. Work with partners and leverage the Action Agenda to develop a project list for the event. 3. Reach out to local businesses, governments, organizations and media to widely publicize the Beautification Day. 					
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Objective 8.2: Complete the build-out of Veterans Park.

Veterans Park has already proven itself a valuable investment for the community. The Park’s facilities host a number of recreational sporting leagues for children and adults while providing a free space for children and adults to exercise. As evidenced throughout the community input phase of this visioning process, the facilities are also capable of hosting large groups for community events. The County should continue to invest in these facilities as planned while considering new opportunities to provide unique opportunities for recreation in a community that lacks privately-owned recreational facilities such as skating rinks and bowling alleys.

Actions	Sub-Actions	Lead Entity	Support Entities	Projected Cost	Potential Funding Source(s)	Model Program
<p>Proceed with planned expansions of the park's outdoor facilities.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify any existing barriers to financially supporting the planned expansion of the park's fields and identify funding mechanisms to cover any shortfalls. 2. Ensure that development is of the planned expansion of the park's baseball and soccer fields is expedited to accommodate additional enrollment in the County's recreational leagues and expand capacity to support tournaments that drawn visiting teams from around the state. 					
<p>Gather community input on desired additions to Veterans Park.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Hold a series of public forums and develop questionnaires for those who currently use the park's facilities to gather input on desired amenities. 2. Solicit input from those who do not currently use the facility to determine the types of amenities. 3. Gauge interest in a few specific amenities including an outdoor walking trail that winds around the entire facility, a skateboard park, and a public pool. 					

Actions	Sub-Actions	Lead Entity	Support Entities	Projected Cost	Potential Funding Source(s)	Model Program
<p>Develop a plan for park expansion to add new amenities.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Internally assess available land to support potential addition of new amenities. 2. Ensure that all community input is considered in developing a plan for park expansion. 3. Solicit proposals for developing new amenities. 					
<p>Leverage the Park to attract regional sports tournaments to Murray County.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Integrate the potential of the Park as an attractor of regional (and, potentially state or out-of-state) sports tournaments to Murray. 2. Ensure that the Park is included in all tourism and economic development-related efforts. 					

LONG-TERM OPPORTUNITIES: “...A SUCCESSFUL, SUSTAINABLE FUTURE THROUGH A RENEWED SENSE OF COMMUNITY PRIDE AND ACHIEVEMENT”

This section includes suggested opportunities that may be considered once significant effort and progress has been expended in starting and successfully implementing the priority objectives for this goal area.

Comprehensive Internal Marketing Program

Many jurisdictions invest considerable time, efforts and funds to, essentially, “sell” residents and businesses on their own communities. Whether the methods include advertising campaigns on television, radio or the Internet, or inspirational billboards, posters or mailings, these “internal” marketing programs seek to convert local populations into effective advocates and “salespeople” for their community. As trends in Murray County improve and the economy is revitalized, County leaders might consider investing in a comprehensive, grassroots internal marketing program to leverage the momentum generated by Murray County’s improvement for long-term benefit.

CONCLUSION

The current economic downturn has hit Murray County especially hard. Many jobs have been lost and incomes depleted. Local tax receipts are down, poverty is up, and families are struggling to get by with less. Some have been forced to move away from the community in search of employment. During times of difficult change, it is often challenging to remain positive and see a brighter future beyond the gloom. However, Murray County has much to be hopeful for. It serves as one of the principal gateways to the North Georgia mountains, features a beautiful natural setting, close proximity to Atlanta, Chattanooga and Interstate-75, and a labor force well-trained in the manufacture of goods. It is a prideful place, but this pride has been strained by a succession of economic hardships it was ill-prepared to address.

This *Strategic Vision Plan* provides Murray County the opportunity to succeed in a permanently altered economic landscape. As Harvard professor Rosabeth Moss Cantor famously wrote, “Change is debilitating when done **to** us, but exhilarating when done **by** us.” Thus must Murray County capture change and prosper from it. The area’s historical economy and way of life is not sustainable; but the building blocks are there for a new Murray County to emerge from the Great Recession a stronger, more optimistic, wealthier and forward-thinking community.

The Plan detailed in the preceding pages contains the first steps necessary to climb out of recession and onto economic higher ground. This climb will be long and arduous; local leaders and constituents must always keep an eye on the summit. This vision and the cooperative, collaborative and consensus process needed to achieve it will be Murray County’s great challenge in the coming years. Change will not happen overnight, nor will it be without sacrifice, hard work and perseverance. Much greater levels of investment – both of time and money – will be necessary. But today’s Murray County leaders – public and private – must remain steadfast if future generations are to live in a more dynamic and prosperous community.

The *Vision Plan* is only the “end of the beginning” of realizing Murray County’s preferred future. The “real” work begins once strategies in theory become strategies in practice. The community has found its vision; now it must embrace it or risk a future in which the County’s best days are those in the past.