

Manager Hooper had previously asked the Board to narrow down a list of the 91 items on the Town's 2018 Comprehensive Plan into their most prioritized top twenty items to be discussed at the annual Board Retreat. Those items were further narrowed down to thirteen. Town Manager Hooper along with facilitators James and Scott will use this information from the day long retreat to establish work plans for himself, and the department heads.

Some of those top items to be discussed from the list are: partnering with the private sector to develop "Block 46" and areas surrounding historic downtown North Wilkesboro, working with property owners to revitalize downtown buildings, enforcing the adopted minimum housing standards in all residential neighborhoods and support a minimum housing program in areas of town containing deteriorated and dilapidated buildings.

The "Final Thirteen" items to focus on are:

- Work with the EDC in notifying businesses of the Town's programs and incentives and updating polices.
- Maintaining strong relationships- Joint meetings with both Towns and the County, with two meetings a year if possible.
- "Block 46" Review zoning codes- No mixed-use code currently in town. A rewrite has to be adopted by the board by the end of calendar year.
- Revitalize downtown buildings- Continue the current façade grant with a "match grant" 60-40 with a maximum \$4000. for improvements, a town code dedicated to buildings in need of repair, and study other options for façade grants.
- Improve public space downtown- Create a performance work plan. The Market Place Mural was mentioned as needing improvement. The Yadkin Valley Marketplace Mural has an estimated "all in" budget of \$15,000., with North Wilkesboro's contribution undecided. The Town is working with the North Wilkesboro Art Gallery on plans to complete this.
- Implement a housing study- Sponsor an EDC housing study and evaluate the completed housing study. Make development of affordable housing easier. Other towns are using "Opportunity Zone", driven by private investors.
- Enforce minimum housing standards- Call homeowners and landlords to discuss values and conditions of their properties. There may be a need for extra code enforcement. Current code enforcement is complaint driven. Out of town code enforcement officers work better since local resident code enforcement employees may possibly be seen as biased.
- Cooperation with N. Wilkesboro Housing Authority- There is a long waiting list for housing. The financial situation of the Housing Authority is in good shape. There is a program known as the Ross Program designed to help potential homeowners save and purchase their own property.
- Replace failing water and sewer infrastructure- A study has been done in the past year and tabled until budget season to discuss. This is the Euclid Avenue area. The town needs a grant from the state. CIP address and approve.
- Greenway Linkages/Centralized System- HCCOG works with greenways for greenways. Evaluate other connections. One area looked at is the Greenway "spur" from Euclid to Smoot Park. This would require a road crossing. Another is Euclid Avenue to Finley Avenue to Smoot Park. This tract would skirt the Town's Second Street property. This project may be in the two-year range.
- Policy based system- Work on framework of policies so there are consistencies- Review polices. Be more analytical and objective than political. Try to review three (3) policies a year.
- Strong customer service- A town survey could be conducted and presented at the Budget Retreat. Suggestions are to fill in website with survey information with things such as tips on recycling, etc. Make the website more accessible, possibly begin a blog. Make sure all employees are aware of what is being blogged. Add staff images and profiles to the website, including Department Heads. Build trust along with that accessibility.

- Organizational Excellence- Build a diverse and high performing employee base, create a more “user-friendly” performance evaluation system. Update employee job classifications and review pay and benefit levels with industry standards. Celebrate employee accomplishments and above average performance.

Retreat Facilitators Perry James and Bob Scott finished up the day-long event by thanking the Commissioners, Mayor, Town Manager and the rest of the support staff for coming and told the group that they were a very motivated group and the elected official were very complimentary of the support staff. Mayor Johnson said he felt very humbled and honored to attend the retreat. He said he had learned a lot and about how to make things happen. He thanked Perry and Bob for helping the group in working towards newer, better goals for the Town of North Wilkesboro.

No action by the Board was taken at this Retreat.

There being no further business to discuss, the North Wilkesboro Board of Commissioners Retreat adjourned at 4:00 p.m.

_____ TOWN CLERK _____ MAYOR

APPROVED: _____

**See North Wilkesboro Planning Director Meredith Detsch’s Board Retreat Notes for March 6, 2020 attachment for more comments and thoughts from the group including Optional Objectives.*

Board Retreat Notes March 6th, 2020

3-5 year strategic framework plan will be created today. Complimented the comp plan goals and policies.

Mayor- 3rd term, 5 four- year terms as commissioner- work well with the board, more businesses in downtown area, possibility of better housing. Work with businesspeople to develop block 46. Large industrial park owned for several years and to bring someone there to put a business there and create jobs.

Debbie- lived in N. Wilkesboro for 35+ years. 30 years ago, started as a Planning Board member. 15 years served and brought in NC Main Street Program. Interested in downtown area and concerned with decline in the area. Worked in healthcare and in the hospital. 4th term as Commissioner. Hope we can get better housing, new neighborhoods, infill and more density. Great downtown. Public investment in street scaping downtown has maybe helped private investments. Polish up parks, they are important for all age groups.

Angela- 20th anniversary as a business owner downtown. Bought business as downtown was part of the main street program. Met Debbie through downtown partnership- historic downtown board. Residential on main street 1st floor level came up and spoke against it at the commissioner meeting. Moved to N. Wilkesboro and ran for office. Do an overlay of town and do sidewalk revitalizing and street scaping. People come to attractive places. Lighting plan for downtown. Business loan make it more attractive. Strong relationships with surrounding areas (Wilkes Co and Wilkesboro). After retreat work with the County.

Michael- 35th year downtown business owner. Have seen significant changes in the area. The people and atmosphere very welcoming. Likes big ideas but understand the limitations. Accomplish address big ideas but done with financial responsibility. We do not have unlimited funding source- priorities are water infrastructure (10-15 years)- need action plan that we can afford and implement. Beautification on 9th street- our street.

Focus Areas/Goal Areas: *Ten top priorities to be determined.*

- Remove CIP water and sewer since it's being presented in a few weeks
- Block 46- marketable parcels but not a lot of movement and concern with filling it in. (economic development)
- Revitalize downtown buildings (main street program resources but not financial gains)
- Enforce minimum housing standards
- Support minimum housing program- what does that look like? Mayor- outside downtown (18 and surrounding areas) Housing loan program to be implemented. Prop in the ocean. Promotion of the loans, legal responsibility. Angela- what can the town do to assist residents like BROCC? Who do we use and money alignment, small changes for impact? Debbie- downtown program for façade grants, could develop a program for housing. Ex. Garbage cans at street. Mayor- rental properties. Enforcement to landlords that are absent. Code enforcement also. Angela would like to see if help the homeowner.
- Maintain strong relationships- Angela have Wilkesboro/North Wilkesboro board members to meet maybe quarterly and work closer together. Debbie- help us work together. No action was taken- set goals mostly and had a facilitator.
- Implement housing study- 2012 study. Didn't turn out as Debbie was hoping for. Don't have clear neighborhoods, numbers for districts instead. Make more of a neighborhood environment. Infill empty lots, more neighborhoods. EDC is doing a study in Wilkes County and will be a part of it. Old plan may not be beneficial. Hope EDC study will be more effective. Promote subdivisions, Taylorsville ex.
- Forecast Facility Buildout & Alternatives: Need high ceilings in buildings (Angela). Debbie- county and Wilkesboro are looking at a site to build a spec building/site ready pad. Would we want to partner in that?
- Improve Public Spaces downtown: Paving/maintain downtown. Public space definition. Angela- space between police station needs maintenance. Ruritan Park-(Debbie) take on park.
- Corporation with North Wilkesboro Housing Authority: We maintain the streets. Maybe a study should be done- facilitator recommends.
Surplus land may be a need for them? (Wilson) Also PPP may be an option.

- Greenway Linkages and Centralize System: Working with Yadkin River Greenway. Debbie-Pedestrian Plan had linkages identified. More paths in town and greenway is very influential to our area. Gary Daemer. sells community to new residents based on the greenway. Mayor- we have one of the best greenways based on other ones he has seen. Linked the two towns.
- Replace substandard infrastructure- CIP will also address it.
- Ensure businesses are aware of resources: Key to supporting downtown business owners (Angela) partner with new businesses (mentors?) Crystal has been working on it. Wilson- data about the market conditions in the area. EDC is limited with research. Inventory of buildings, car counts, market data investors want to see. Trends in retail spending, hard data we need to promote. Angela- retail study and identified retail needs. Help businesses, work with Laurie at the Community College, offer workshops? Debbie is a representative on our EDC board and the Mayor attends. Managers are meeting currently. (Debbie) Can the managers dispense the discussion? EDC is going to collect the market data and use real estate information. EDC is recruiter and supports existing businesses.

Look at our Zoning Ordinance and compare Block 46. Commercial and housing maybe. Open up Zoning Code? - Wilson

Remove 39 (Shift focus) and 10 (delegate to EDC). (Debbie)

Other potential strategic focus areas and objectives:

Organization excellence- promote culture that values performance, provide needed resources, policy based system, maintain board oversight, perform customer service, maintain high performing employee base.

Optional Incentives-NCLM:

Objective 1: Financial regulations are getting stricter. Auditors and late audits are becoming an issue statewide. Internal controls also can be an issue and recommend a third party review. Establish monthly accountability practices. Monitor fund balance and ensure there is accountability. Timely meeting of all debt payments.

Objective 2: Accounting software can be outdated. Encumbrance system is available.

Objective 3: Policy based systems- make sure they are not outdated and being un-verified. Have a system, maybe look at 25% of them yearly. Local government can tap into resources and use to create policies. Templates should be used. Procedures separate and more in-depth than policies. Assign responsibility to review them regularly.

Objective 4: Maintain records, oversight with boards. Distribute monthly reports for each board member with department functions. Document monthly duties for the board members to achieve. Establish regular reporting for managers/financial officer to the board.

Objective 5: Customer service equitable to all and provide strong accountability and stewardship of community assets. Formal customer service training program to be established. Surveys online to find out where improvements are needed.

Objective 6: Maintain a diverse and high performing employee base. Update job descriptions offer employee training, job growth opportunities. Annual performance evaluation and actionable goals.

Wilson- Good management advice. Is it delegated to the manager? Or is one standing out to the board?

Debbie- focus on organization excellence

Objective 3- Utilize policy based system in governing and managing minor business requirements of the Town. (resonates strongly)

Outdated and jumbled policies- Angela

Wilson-Hard to provide good customer service if no policy is in place.

Debbie- Make sure you are fair to everyone- reason you made decision it keeps us out of lawsuits.

Michael- 3 objectives: #3 policies created= tangible plans, #5-customer service= present to community members, #6 maintain diverse performing employee base=training, appreciation, evaluations. Feels like we have the other policies in place.

Tourism and Cultural Resources: promote opportunities for entertainment and cultural activities.

Michael-MOU= starting document for us? Only on outdoor economy. Unsure of the investment in the project with other partners, outdoor economy.

Objective 1: Identify develop and cultivate opportunities for arts, cultural events, tourism.

- Designate one individual and have them there like 8-5
- Develop tourism vision incorporates heritage and historic nature
- Est funding source for art and cultural
- Strengthen partnerships

Objective 2: Focus on marketing and promotion of activities

- Develop marketing and tourism strategies
- Incorporate advertisement, signage, branding, marketable qualities
- Visually communicate the town's major tourism assets such as geography, people, commerce through key marketing strategies.
- Educate the local community of tourist and activities to help attract visitors from their family and friends.

Objective 3: promote and encourage opportunities for cultural activities to occur in non-conventional places

- Work with downtown businesses/restaurants to have music or cultural events
- Collaborate with artist groups to offer gallery exhibits in underutilized spaces
- Sponsor art walks
- Enhance public spaces to improve community reception- alleyways example, more art in the downtown, streetscape could have a holder, (sculptures or outdoor art?).

Objective 4: develop partnerships with other government entities, schools, private sector.

- Collaborate with area schools to utilize available fields or buildings for festivals
- Historical interest groups
- Obtain business marketing sponsorships for festivals or special events
- Utilize community non-profit organization to support town tourism

Objective 5: Improve community tourism and infrastructure

- Identify and assess the condition of community assets that have value to tourism
- Upgrades street and pedestrian areas that are important to attracting tourist
- Ensure natural resources are protected and well maintained with access that is clear to visitors
- Volunteer storefronts?

Objective 6: expand funding for tourism and cultural opportunities

- Explore federal, state, local and private funding opportunities
- Engage the town residents and businesses in planning and funding cultural programs.
- Utilize grant funding with opportunities to invest in tourism
- Consider utilization of contractual grant writing personnel to develop comprehensive application packages for significant competitive funding requests

Downtown partnership board- update economic positioning in the Fall. Mentor program (2-5 new business owners), Wilco ENG partnership (2x a month), New Years Eve event TBD, work with Planning Board to have a minimum non-residential code-request (**budget request for a code to be written- get a RFP Fiscal Year 2020-2021**)

- How do we know if we are marketing correctly? Hard to quantify it, dollars spent is returning. The longer we have a festival the better we do. Too many events can be tough, focus on the ones we want and knock it out of the park. Volunteers to poll events to measure success. Maintain and oversight with Crystal.

Delegated objectives to Downtown Partnership and let them take it. Quantify the value of marketing and visitors during the festivals. Minimal amount of info from visitors can help quantify.

Performance Measure for Action Items

#2 Ensure Business Aware of Resources

Action items:

- Wilkes EDC- working with EDC director specific opportunities/incentives
- Small business incentives policy- currently it's an open ended request. Update our policy and post it in relative places. Economic toolkit...Marketing benefit too. Eligible businesses will be certain of incentives.

Performance Measures:

- Updated policies
- Number logistics

#3 Maintain Strong Relationships

Action Items:

- Joint meetings between Town and County Officials, 2 x a year
- Hometown strong program this year (follow up with day to day), establish a relationship with the Dept. of Commerce- (more of a regulatory agency) MerleFest could be an opportunity to develop relationships
- COG relationship is strong

Performance Measures:

- Continue meetings

#18 Block 46 Development

Requirements for a developer to build multi-family units. Current zoning requirements are strict with detail site plan. Board of Adjustment reviews plan? Entire site plan is tied to the zoning. Developer has to change site then back to the board. Developers are frustrated. Current owner is frustrated with Multi-family zoning district. Need to re-word zoning ordinance to make sites less restrictive.

Action Items:

- Review zoning ordinances- need a mixed use district. Currently updating zoning ordinance per state statues. (maybe make more zoning districts allow multi-family, make CUP's less restrictive)

Performance Measures:

- Approve Zoning Ordinance changes

#32 Continue to work with property owners to develop downtown properties

Town funded façade grant improvement- 60/40 grant match. Could we use a revolving loan fund, it could fund any façade improvements and is town wide? Minimum standards for downtown buildings needed (non-residential building code). Three ways to enforce-fire, building code, non-residential. Going through the Zoning Ordinance to update for the state statues may be a good exercise to see what we need to update. Touch up the downtown landscaping, small improvements. Façade grant district- ex. Salisbury, NC could be a great opportunity. BID- Business Incentive District (Gastonia/Salisbury). Public Works crews could implement some of the small items.

Action Items:

- Continue Façade grant-diverse funding opportunities
- Evaluate non-residential/commercial buildings
- Study façade grant districts, study needs

Performance Measures:

- Budget funding for façade grant
- Reporting a study report

#33 Improve Public Space Downtown

Action Items:

- Murals downtown, decorative benches (planters and garbage cans) downtown?

#37 Implement Housing Study

Action Items:

- Sponsor the Housing Study that the EDC is conducting
- Evaluate completed housing study

Performance Measures:

- Board action on funding

#38 Enforce Adopted Minimum Housing Standards

Substandard housing in the area (rental). Bring in the landlords and speak with them? Do we have code enforcement more? Complaint driven but residents are fearful. Current code enforcement contract explained.

Action Items:

- Explore staffing needs
- Proactive vs. complaint driven

Performance Measures:

- Evaluate

#44 Cooperate with the Housing Authority

Housing Authority is in good shape? Covered WTA waiting location. Have turn-key programs for residents. ROSS program helps residents buy their own house.

Action Items:

- Shelters for WTA
- Response from Housing Study

Performance Measures:

- Building of shelters

#49 Replace Deteriorating W&S Infrastructure

Euclid Avenue proposal in the CIP. Board's priorities. State funding has shifted priorities, want a collaborative effort community wide before approving new funds. Services subscribe to for CDBG funds (Major audit/regulatory heavy).

Action Items:

- Approve CIP
- Apply for state assistance on Euclid Avenue
- Rate study

Performance Measures:

#72 Greenway Linkages- Centralized Systems- proposed Euclid Avenue connection to Smoot Park but road crossing would be a challenge. Also a transportation option. It could go all the way to Finley Avenue and open up Finley Park. Skirts our 2nd street property and would make it more desirable.

Action Items:

- Current projects be part of the Greenway connection project
- Euclid Avenue project
- COG Assistance

Performance Measures:

- 1-2 year range

Policy Based System: Organization Excellence #3 Policy Based System

Action Items:

- Traffic calming policy
- Real Estate policy
- Policy update schedule

Performance Measures:

- Review three policies per year
- New written policy as approved