



ONE MACON! OUR VISION, OUR FUTURE.

COMMUNITY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Submitted by *Market Street Services Inc.*
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PROJECT OVERVIEW

The nine-month *One Macon!* strategic planning process includes stakeholder input, quantitative research, the development of strategic recommendations, the creation of an implementation plan, and the establishment of performance metrics to measure implementation success.

COMPETITIVE ASSESSMENT

The Competitive Assessment evaluated Macon-Bibb's competitiveness as a place to live, work, visit, and do business. The community's performance was measured by a variety of demographic, socioeconomic, economic, and quality of life indicators, and was benchmarked against four peer counties with which Macon-Bibb competes for jobs and workers. This quantitative data was complemented by qualitative stakeholder input gathered through focus groups, one-on-one interviews, and an online community survey. This research was synthesized to communicate the key stories that impact Macon-Bibb's competitiveness, which inform the initiatives to be outlined in the Community and Economic Development Strategy.

TARGET BUSINESS ANALYSIS AND MARKETING REVIEW

The Target Business Analysis identified those sectors of economic activity within Macon-Bibb County that should be strategically targeted by proactive economic development programs and policies in the years to come. The analysis of each target sector included a discussion of national trends, business sector composition, occupational composition, workforce demographics, export potential, and inter-industry linkages. The strategic implications of key findings were discussed for each target. This analysis was complemented by three other pieces of research that inform the Community and Economic Development Strategy. First, a Marketing Review examined the effectiveness of Macon-Bibb's current targeted marketing efforts. Second, an Incentives Review evaluated the range of local, regional, and state-level incentives that affect the community's ability to develop and market existing target business sectors. And third, a Site Assessment, performed by nationally renowned site selector J. Michael Mullis, examined the suitability of Macon-Bibb's existing industrial parks and sites.

ONE MACON! COMMUNITY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

The culmination of the first two phases of this process is an action-oriented, measurable Community and Economic Development Strategy for Macon-Bibb County's leaders. The strategy should unify the community's various organizations and institutions in the public, private, and non-profit sectors around a consensus blueprint to move the community forward. Its goals and action steps are grounded in reality as determined through the research gathered in the first two phases of the process, but also shaped by the vision of what Macon-Bibb "wants to be," as articulated by the Steering Committee and stakeholder input participants.

ONE MACON! IMPLEMENTATION GUIDELINES

If the Strategy represents **what** Macon-Bibb needs to do, the Implementation Guidelines helps identify **how** that will be done. These Guidelines will prioritize actions, examine funding capacity and sources, and identify the lead and supporting entities that will be charged with implementing individual recommendations. It will present detailed action plans for establishing early momentum and catalyzing support, and will include a set of performance metrics against which progress can be measured.

STEERING COMMITTEE

The strategic planning process is guided by a diverse Steering Committee of leaders from the public, private, and non-profit sectors. These individuals will oversee the entire planning effort, help identify Macon-Bibb's strategic priorities, build consensus, and serve as public advocates for the betterment of the community and its economic development.

Committee Member

Kathryn Dennis (tri-chair)
 Robbo Hatcher (tri-chair)
 Cliffard Whitby (tri-chair)
 Stephen Adams
 Virgil Adams
 Jonathan Alderman
 Ivan Allen
 Donald Bailey
 Leonard Bevill
 John Black
 Charles Briscoe
 Larry Brumley
 Isaac Culver
 Jason Delves
 Mike Dyer
 Roy Fickling
 Michael Ford
 Kirby Godsey
 Chairman Samuel Hart, Sr.
 Heather Holder
 David Lanier
 George McCanless
 Major General Robert McMahon (Ret.)
 Walter Miller
 Alex Morrison
 June Parker
 Billy Pitts
 Starr Purdue
 Mayor Robert Reichert
 Rudell Richardson
 Steve Rickman
 Josh Rogers
 Tony Rojas
 Ninfa Saunders
 Chris Sheridan
 Monica Smith
 Steve Smith
 Dan Speight
 David Thompson
 Pearlie Toliver
 Patrick Topping
 Stewart Vernon
 Thomas Wicker

Representing Organization

Community Foundation of Central Georgia
 H2 Capital; Macon Economic Development Commission
 Whitby Inc.; Macon-Bibb County Industrial Authority
 Macon-Bibb County Industrial Authority
 Adams & Jordan, P. C.
 Anderson, Walker, & Reichert, LLP
 Middle Georgia Technical College
 The Telegraph
 Macon Occupational Medicine, LLC
 Middle Georgia State College
 Coliseum Health System
 Mercer University
 Progressive Consulting Technologies
 BLC Hardwood Flooring, LLC
 Greater Macon Chamber of Commerce
 Fickling & Company, Inc.
 NewTown Macon
 Mercer University
 Bibb County Board of Commissioners
 College Hill Alliance
 BB&T Bank
 United Way of Central Georgia
 Twenty First Century Partnership
 GIGA Inc.
 Macon-Bibb County Urban Development Authority
 Macon Housing Authority
 The Mutual Financial Group
 Hutchings Funeral Home, Inc.
 City of Macon
 Richardson Tax & Accounting
 Macon Water Authority Board
 Historic Macon Properties, LLC
 Macon Water Authority
 Medical Center of Central Georgia
 Chris R. Sheridan & Company
 Macon-Bibb County Convention & Visitors Bureau, Inc.
 Bibb County Schools
 State Bank and Trust Company
 Piedmont Construction Group, LLC
 Macon Housing Authority
 Macon Economic Development Commission
 ASP Franchising, Inc.
 Georgia Power

COMPETITIVE ASSESSMENT: SUMMARY

The Competitive Assessment evaluated the competitiveness of Macon-Bibb as a place to live, work, and do business, with strengths, weaknesses, assets, and challenges highlighted and framed by nine “stories” that summarize the issues facing the community in 2013 and beyond. These nine stories and a selection of their key findings are as follows:

Race, Leadership, and Trust: Community input participants frequently cited long-standing racial tension among residents and community leadership, tension that has permeated many aspects of community life, particularly efforts to improve public education, revitalize neighborhoods, and enhance economic opportunity. An environment of distrust has resulted, stifling progress despite attempts at productive dialogue. Residents expressed hope that consolidation would bring a new era of collaborative, trustworthy, and harmonized leadership.

Growth Patterns, Fiscal Sustainability, and Workforce Sustainability: Macon-Bibb and the larger metropolitan area possess disadvantageous age dynamics relative to their southern peers. Absent a reversal of the persistent trend of net outmigration, Macon-Bibb’s workforce will necessarily shrink in the years and decades to come. Furthermore, out-migration is driving population stagnation, a trend that threatens the community’s tax base at a time when some of its most pressing challenges, such as public education and crime, require significant public investment. Consolidation is expected to bring greater efficiency, while Macon-Bibb has demonstrated that it can still attract sales tax revenue from outside the county as a regional center for health care and retail. However, a tremendous focus on talent development, retention, and attraction is critical if the region’s workforce is going to emerge as a strength that is capable of propelling growth and economic development.

K-12 Education: A Divided and Troubled System: Public education was unquestionably the most frequently cited challenge facing Macon-Bibb by residents who participated in the various phases of community input. Residents reported a divided education system along racial and socioeconomic, with a large and deeply entrenched set of private options pulling students from a public system with poor student outcomes. Graduation rates from Bibb County Schools are among the lowest in the state. As a result, one out of every five adult residents of Macon-Bibb has no high school diploma.

Higher Education: Immense Production, Limited Retention: Without question, the quantity, quality, and diversity of higher education options in Macon-Bibb are among its greatest strengths. More than 20,000 students are enrolled in Macon-Bibb institutions of higher education, yet the community’s limited employment opportunities, troubled school system, and limited appeal to some recent graduates has inhibited its ability to retain graduates and create a highly educated workforce.

Income and Poverty: Since the start of the new millennium, Macon-Bibb has experienced a period characterized by no real (inflation-adjusted) income growth, a surge in poverty rates, and a hollowing out of the middle class. At present, more than one-quarter of all adults and one-third of all children in Macon-Bibb live in poverty. Pervasive and generational poverty is intrinsically linked to other community challenges, including but not limited to public education, neighborhood vitality, and crime. Improvements

in adult educational attainment levels through dropout prevention and adult re-education will have the greatest long-term effects on the community's ability to reduce poverty and elevate the standards of living of its residents.

Recession and Recovery: Although Macon's economy actually weathered the Great Recession relatively well compared to its peers and the rest of the country, it experienced a more troublesome run leading up to the recession (from 2000 – 2007) and more sluggish and prolonged recovery since the official end of the recession in 2009. Since the turn of the millennium, Macon-Bibb's manufacturing has lost more than half of its jobs. However, other sectors, most notably finance and insurance, retail, and health care services have expanded, indicative of the community's strength as a regional center capable of attracting expenditures from surrounding counties.

Location, Location, Location: Macon-Bibb's strategic location was by far the community's most frequently cited strength by survey respondents. The community is centrally located in the state of Georgia, between the major markets of Atlanta and Savannah, and their corresponding infrastructure assets, Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport (the world's busiest passenger airport) and the Port of Savannah (the fourth largest and fastest-growing container port in the country). The community has strong interstate and rail connectivity, and abundant, high-quality water. Collectively, these assets should support a diverse and robust set of manufacturing, distribution, and logistics activities. However, despite many recent success stories, these assets have not been leveraged to their full economic development potential as other community challenges highlighted in this report have weakened Macon-Bibb's competitive as a place to live, work, and do business.

Health in Macon-Bibb: Strong Assets, Poor Outcomes: Very simply, the community is home to a strong and growing set of health care assets, but abundant health care services have not necessarily translated into a healthy community. Again, other community challenges – particularly pervasive adult and child poverty – have contributed to poor health outcomes and a heavy reliance on social services and other supportive community institutions such as schools, religious institutions, and providers of after-school programs to provide meals and recreational outlets for children.

Quality of Life and Community Attachment: Many residents praised the community's musical and cultural heritage, available amenities including festivals, limited traffic congestion, low cost of living, and notable recent improvements in areas such as downtown loft-living and College Hill when discussing quality of life in Macon-Bibb. However, others expressed continued concerns about crime while young professionals were less likely to be satisfied with the community's social, entertainment, and recreational offerings. According to a study by the Knight Foundation that examined community attachment in a variety of communities nationwide, social offerings, aesthetics, and openness are the three most critical components of a community that lead to resident attachment. Knight found that just 19.2 percent of residents in Macon are "attached" to the community, the lowest among peer communities of similar size and density. This is one of many contributing factors to the aforementioned trends of outmigration that threaten the community's future competitiveness and sustainability.

The full Competitive Assessment includes a more detailed discussion of the various trends, issues, and aspects of community input that have shaped each of the aforementioned nine "stories."

TARGET BUSINESS ANALYSIS: SUMMARY

The economic development strategy of targeting certain clusters of economic activity has become increasingly widespread as local and regional economies attempt to capitalize on their competitive advantages. With ever-increasing competition for jobs, investment, and talent, local and regional economic development organizations are finding it increasingly sensible and necessary to focus limited resources – a process commonly referred to as “targeting” – on developing those business sectors that possess the greatest potential to create new jobs, raise incomes, and generate wealth. The most successful communities are those that recognize both their strengths and their limitations, and, in turn, strategically target those economic activities that can provide the greatest return on investment. The historical growth of clustered economic activity in areas such as the Silicon Valley, Route 128 in Massachusetts, and the Research Triangle Park (RTP) in North Carolina are oft-cited and well developed case studies for other regions across the nation as they strive to develop similar agglomerations of related businesses.

These agglomerations – or “**clusters**” – represent groups of interrelated businesses that choose to co-locate for one reason or another. Clustering can occur among competing or cooperative firms with a variety of different catalysts supporting these agglomerations. A group of suppliers may choose to locate in proximity to a major manufacturer for research and development efficiencies and reduced transportation costs. Other firms may co-locate in a specific area in order to take advantage of a specialized labor pool or to be in close proximity to specific infrastructure. The competitive advantages derived by these firms often result in comparatively high potential for employment growth and wealth creation. Due to limited economic development resources, it is sensible for regions to strategically target those sectors with the greatest potential to create new jobs and raise incomes.

Even so, many communities and economic regions choose to strategically target sectors of economic activity that may not currently be characterized by a cluster of related businesses. A targeted sector – or simply a “**target**” – is any type of business activity that is strategically pursued by an economic development organization and its partners for growth and development. That is to say, a “target” is an area where financial and staff resources, and the programs and policies they support, are specifically focused. “Targets” are ideally those segments of an economy where competitive advantages exist, prospects for future growth are greatest, and return on investment is likely highest. A “target” can be a single business sector with high growth potential or a cluster of businesses in related sectors.

The Target Business Analysis identified those sectors of economic activity within Macon-Bibb County that should be strategically targeted by proactive economic development programs and policies in the years to come. The full Target Business Analysis provides a detailed discussion of each target and its associated strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges.

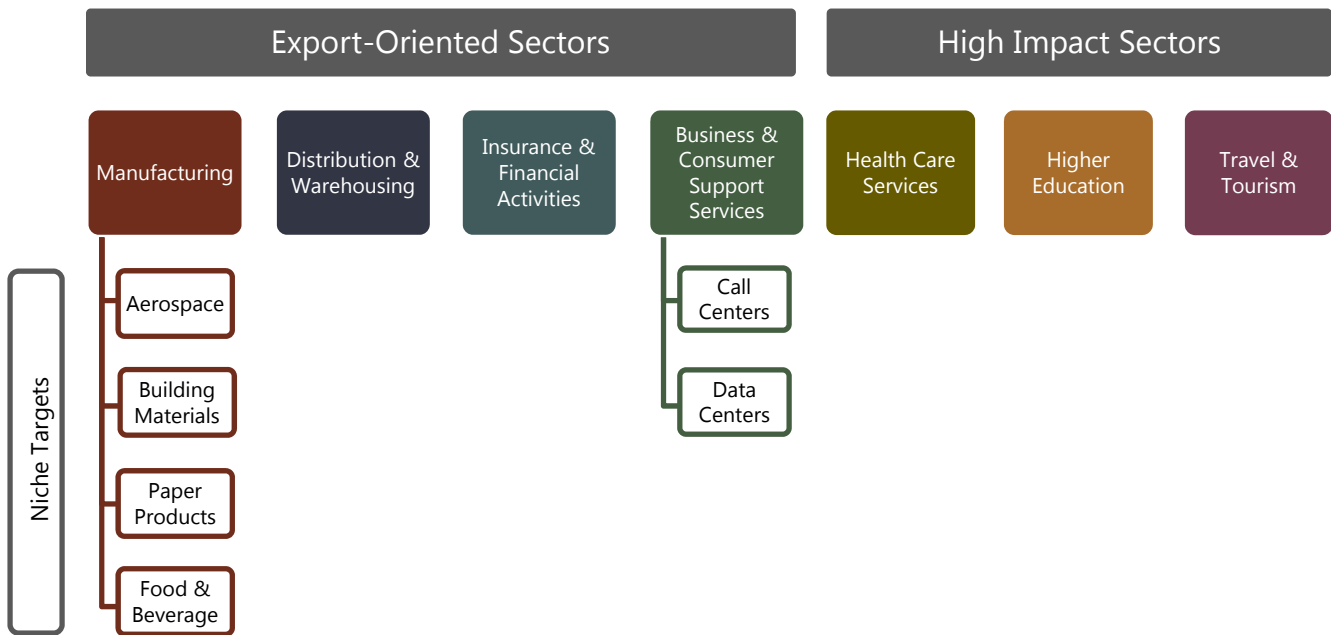
MACON-BIBB'S STRATEGIC ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT TARGETS

Market Street Services has identified four **export-oriented sectors** and three **high impact sectors** that merit strategic targeting of resources in Macon-Bibb County.

"Export-oriented sectors" represent those sectors that bring significant new income into the region by exporting products and services to businesses and consumers around the country and the world. These four sectors – Manufacturing, Distribution & Warehousing, Business & Consumer Support Services, and Insurance & Financial Activities – either currently exhibit clustered economic activity or have the potential to cluster in the region based on Macon-Bibb's and Middle Georgia's distinct attributes. The Manufacturing and Business and Consumer Support Services targets contain multiple **niche targets** within them, representing the highest-value opportunities that align with the region's key strengths and assets.

The "high impact sectors" – Health Care Services, Higher Education, and Travel & Tourism – are not traditional economic development targets in the sense that they are not nationally or globally export-oriented sectors in Macon-Bibb, and/or they do not lend themselves to geographic clustering. However, they represent a tremendous portion of the local economy. Health Care Services alone represents roughly 18 percent of private employment in Macon-Bibb. Higher Education supports all other clusters through its production of talent and research; it also has a tremendous economic impact on its own, irrespective of its impact on other business sectors. Like Health Care Services, Travel & Tourism is a *regionally* export-oriented sector, as Macon-Bibb primarily draws travelers from across the Southeast. In 2012, more than \$300 million in traveler expenditures supported nearly 3,300 jobs in Macon-Bibb. Accordingly, these three sectors deserve strategic attention from economic and workforce development professionals.

Strategic Economic Development Targets



ONE MACON! OUR VISION, OUR FUTURE. COMMUNITY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Two key research phases reviewed in the preceding sections have informed the creation of the *One Macon!* Community and Economic Development Strategy. The Competitive Assessment identified the various strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges facing the community today. The Target Business Analysis identified those business sectors for which Macon-Bibb is currently most competitive, and accordingly, which can drive job and wealth creation in the immediate future. **While this five-year strategy seeks to address the challenges identified in the Competitive Assessment and support the development of key business sectors identified in the Target Business Analysis, it must also position Macon-Bibb for greater economic diversification beyond existing target business sectors through investments in areas that currently impede Macon-Bibb’s competitiveness for such economic diversity. As a result, this strategy focuses not only on short-term priorities, but also long-term investments that are critical to creating a more vibrant and prosperous community for the next generation.**

The aforementioned research phases – inclusive of qualitative and quantitative input – indicated that Macon-Bibb requires a comprehensive approach to community and economic improvement. At the foundation of this approach are three pillars of the community: quality **schools** to educate our youth, abundant **jobs** that match the skills of our residents, and vibrant **places** that are attractive to diverse populations. Collectively, these three pillars should be the source of pride for Macon-Bibb’s existing and potential future residents. This strategy seeks to reinforce these pillars, unifying the community behind a consensus blueprint for the future of Macon-Bibb – unification that can only be achieved through two attributes that are essential to effective implementation: **collaborative leadership** and **engaged residents**.



As these three pillars are the foundation of the community, so too are they the foundation of its strategy. Accordingly, the recommendations contained within this strategy are organized in three sections corresponding to each pillar. Within each pillar are a set of **strategic objectives** that guide the development of specific **tactical recommendations**, and provide context for ongoing refinement and modification of these tactical recommendations by the Steering Committee and its implementation partners in the years to come. In order for this strategy to create meaningful change in Macon-Bibb County, it must be a “living document” – one that is frequently revisited to ensure that it is relevant and mindful of new issues, challenges, and opportunities that emerge throughout the community. Therefore, it is necessary and appropriate to re-evaluate strategic recommendations and priorities on a regular basis.

Each tactical recommendation is supported by the following subsections:

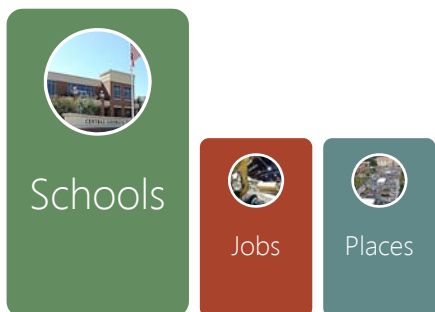
- ✓ a statement of **justification** for the recommendation,
- ✓ a brief discussion of the appropriate **actions** to take in implementation, and
- ✓ the identification of **best practices** when relevant.

Best practices are programs, initiatives, or policies that have proven successful in other communities around the country facing similar challenges as Macon-Bibb or seeking to capitalize on similar opportunities. *Market Street Services* is constantly studying what has worked in our other client communities – and what has not – as well as successful efforts from other communities in order to provide our clients with examples that could aid their own implementation efforts.

The following pieces of information are included for each recommendation in the Implementation Guidelines that accompany this strategy:

- ✓ implementation partners supporting the recommended action,
- ✓ potential implementation cost for the recommended action,
- ✓ potential funding sources for the recommended action, and
- ✓ the timeline for implementing the recommendation.

It must be noted that, while specific organizations may have been referenced throughout this strategy when defining the justification and associated actions for certain recommendations, these references to specific organizations are by no means an exhaustive or exclusive list of the many organizations that can and should be engaged as partners in facilitating collaborative implementation. The *One Macon!* Implementation Guidelines that accompany this strategy include a more comprehensive list of the various partners that can and should be engaged in supporting the implementation of each individual recommendation. These Implementation Guidelines also include a discussion of the various volunteer leadership structures that are necessary to support effective implementation, as well as augmentations to staff capacity at key community organizations that will assume a leading role in the implementation effort. In addition the Implementation Guidelines provide a timeline for implementation, a discussion of potential implementation costs and funding sources, and a set of performance metrics for evaluating success and return on investment.



"...the **public school system** produces a significant portion of Macon-Bibb's future workforce...Graduation rates from Bibb County Schools are among the lowest in the state. As a result, one out of every five adult residents...has no high school diploma. (However), Macon-Bibb has an impressive mix of **post-secondary education options.**"

- Competitive Assessment

1. Schools

EXCERPTS FROM THE COMPETITIVE ASSESSMENT

"In the 2011-12 school year, **the graduation rate in Bibb County Schools was 52.3 percent. This was the fifth-lowest among the state's 179 traditional school districts** and 17.5 percentage points below the state average (69.7 percent)...(However) parents noted that there are many bright spots within the system that are easy to miss when looking at the district as a whole."

"...the impact of the K-12 education system on Macon-Bibb's economy stretches far beyond direct workforce concerns. **The quality of local public schools is an increasingly important consideration in the site selection process for a diverse array of business sectors, meaning Macon-Bibb will be at a competitive disadvantage to attract new businesses to the community.**...(In addition) research has consistently shown that school quality is tied to property values (and associated tax revenues)."

"**Macon-Bibb has an impressive mix of post-secondary education options – both public and private...(but) they have not translated into a more educated populace.** Between 2001 and 2011...the percentage of adult residents age 25 and over with a bachelor's degree or higher (declined) from 21.3 percent to 21.2 percent. During this same time period, the proportion of the United States' population with a bachelor's degree increased by 4.1 percentage points (to 28.5 percent). The relative lack of college-educated residents significantly inhibits the community's ability to attract new jobs in sectors that rely on an abundant supply of knowledge workers."

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

The following statements represent broad objectives that should guide the development and ongoing refinement of tactical recommendations that support the first pillar in our approach to community and economic development: our **Schools**.

Significantly elevate graduation rates from our community's public schools.

Prepare secondary and post-secondary students for careers in target business sectors.

Implement best practice programs that provide student choices and new learning models.

Engage parents to best support student learning.

Elevate adult educational attainment levels.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS: SUMMARY

The following strategic recommendations are to be pursued by the *One Macon!* Implementation Committee in support of the aforementioned strategic objectives. Strategic recommendations are not organized by objective as many will support multiple objectives. The following pages provide additional detail on each recommendation, its justification, and the relevant actions.



- 1.1 *Establish a Business Education Partnership (BEP) in Macon-Bibb.*
- 1.2 *Work with the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education (GPEE) and the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) to evaluate recommended best practice programs and identify other best practices from around the state of Georgia and the Southeast.*
- 1.3 *Work with the Macon Promise Neighborhood (MPN) collaborative to identify potential pilot programs from this Community and Economic Development Strategy that align with MPN objectives, while supporting the attainment of sustainable funding for MPN implementation.*
- 1.4 *Work with colleges and universities to develop new certificate and degree programs that support target sectors.*
- 1.5 *Challenge the business community to develop summer internships and apprenticeships that expose high school and college students to career opportunities in target sectors.*
- 1.6 *Implement the “Leader in Me” program in all elementary schools in Macon-Bibb.*
- 1.7 *Coordinate and conduct annual “Reach Out to Dropouts” walks to re-enroll recent dropouts in public schools.*
- 1.8 *Develop a “Financial Aid Saturdays” program to educate and assist families with financial aid applications.*
- 1.9 *Seek sustainable funding solutions to re-establish an Early College partnership in Bibb County Schools.*
- 1.10 *Launch a comprehensive and collaborative program – Macon Grads – between Bibb County Schools, independent schools, and higher education institutions that supports on-time graduation for at-risk students.*
- 1.11 *Integrate new coursework into the “Parent Academy” at Bibb County Schools.*

Schools: Strategic Recommendations



1.1 *Establish a Business Education Partnership (BEP) in Macon-Bibb.*

Justification: At present, there is no formal partnership to promote dialogue, interaction, and support between the private sector in Macon-Bibb and the Bibb County School District, yet the school system has identified greater engagement of the business community (including but not limited to mentorship) as a priority. Private employers have a vested interest in the quality of public education in the community, and have much to contribute to the improvement of student outcomes through input, volunteerism, and financial support for public schools. A strong, formal partnership between the business community and public education that can support the implementation of collaborative educational improvement initiatives – many of which are outlined in this strategy – could be incredibly beneficial Macon-Bibb.

Actions: Assemble a group of private sector leadership, along with key elected and appointed public school leadership, to serve on an inaugural Board of Directors for a new Business Education Partnership (BEP). Ensure that the board is geographically inclusive and includes representatives from the various neighborhoods and schools within the community. In partnership with existing community foundations, evaluate the need to pursue 501(c)(3) status to facilitate the receipt of tax-deductible contributions from the private sector. Develop a mission statement that aligns with strategic objectives outlined in this strategy. Inventory existing volunteer opportunities and identify gaps and opportunities. Develop a first-year action agenda that clearly identifies the initiatives that the BEP would like to support, including but not limited to specific recommendations outlined in this strategy. Ultimately, the BEP should serve as the primary coordinating body for the implementations of recommendations in this pillar of the strategy.

1.2 *Work with the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education (GPEE) and the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) to evaluate recommended best practice programs and identify other best practices from around the state of Georgia and the Southeast.*

Justification: While a newly-formed BEP (see Recommendation 1.1) can and should support the implementation of a variety of new initiatives between the private sector and the public school system, the BEP and the Steering Committee (see “A Note on Implementation” at the end of this strategy) will need to work with a variety of other partners at the local and state level to evaluate which programs and initiatives recommended within this strategy can and should be implemented, and the manner in which they should be implemented. Simply put, there are many elements within the process of developing a plan for implementing such best practice programs that are beyond the scope of this strategy, including but not limited to the identification of the appropriate school(s) for implementation and the ability to secure necessary funding. GPEE and SREB have a strong history of working with communities across the state to identify and evaluate best practice programs and policies that have a proven record of success.

Actions: Reach out to GPEE and SREB leadership and extend an invitation to attend initial BEP meetings. Familiarize GPEE and SREB staff with the strategic planning process and its outcomes. Develop a timeline for GPEE and SREB review of recommendations and identification of other best practice programs from around the state of Georgia. Work with GPEE and SREB leadership to develop the aforementioned BEP action agenda (see Recommendation 1.1) and coordinate a tour of state programs/school systems for BEP board members and other relevant community and education leaders in Macon-Bibb.

1.3 *Work with the Macon Promise Neighborhood (MPN) collaborative to identify potential pilot programs from this Community and Economic Development Strategy that align with MPN objectives, while supporting the attainment of sustainable funding for MPN implementation.*

Justification: Many of the recommendations contained within this pillar of the strategy align with MPN objectives and could potentially be implemented as components of the MPN program. However, budget cuts in 2013 at the federal level have eliminated U.S. Department of Education funding for a new round of implementation grants necessary to make many of the proposed MPN programs a reality.

Actions: Once BEP and GPEE evaluation has been conducted and an initial BEP action agenda has been developed (see Recommendations 1.1 and 1.2), the BEP should work with the MPN Advisory Board and Executive Board to define areas of overlap in objectives and seek to identify specific recommendations that are a component of the BEP agenda that could be implemented as pilot programs in MPN “Schools of Promise” (Ingram Pye Elementary, Matilda M. Hartley Elementary, Ballard-Hudson Middle, and Southwest High). Once potential pilot programs are identified, collaborative sources of funding, including but not limited to BEP funds, should be developed to launch pilot programs in MPN schools. Concurrently, the BEP should work with MPN leadership to assist with the development and maintenance of sustainable funding for MPN program implementation.

1.4 *Work with colleges and universities to develop new certificate and degree programs that support target sectors.*

Justification: The Target Business Analysis revealed that while there are a number of academic programs at area college and universities that are producing a surplus of talent for employers in Macon-Bibb (such as many medical and health-related certificates and degrees), there are a few key programs that are missing that could help develop the talent pipeline necessary to attract new businesses in target sectors and further diversify the community’s economy.

Actions: Leveraging the findings from the Target Business Analysis, identify specific certificate and degree programs that are currently absent from local and regional institutions of higher education that could support the growth of target sectors. Building upon these findings, conduct a survey of local and regional businesses to identify the existing programs that support their workforce, as well as programs and skill sets that they are often forced to recruit from outside the region. Conduct outreach to area colleges and universities to circulate findings and build a case for new program development to support the community’s economic and workforce development objectives. Cluster councils (see Recommendations 2.1 and 2.2) could lead and coordinate efforts. For example, programs supporting the Insurance and Financial Activities target could include bachelor’s degrees in finance or risk management.

1.5 *Challenge the business community to develop summer internships and apprenticeships that expose high school and college students to career opportunities in target sectors.*

Justification: The quantitative and qualitative input phases identified a wide variety of factors that contribute to Macon-Bibb’s challenge in retaining young people, particularly college graduates. Job opportunities and the relative lack of connection to the community – a feeling of “attachment” – were frequently cited as common obstacles. Said one participant: “Most of Middle Georgia State College students stay here because they are from here and they know the community. Can we get other students to reach a similar level of connection?” Internships are an effective way to help retain college graduates

and prevent the community's next generation from relocating elsewhere to start their careers. They help establish professional networks, develop ties to potential full-time employers, and create new experiences for the student as a professional and resident of the community. A 2010 survey of nearly 900 businesses conducted by the National Association of Colleges and Employers indicated that more than 50 percent of all interns accept full-time employment with the company where they completed their internship.

Actions: Work with regional institutions of higher education to expand or establish cooperative education programs. Issue a challenge to all regional employers to develop internships and/or apprenticeships for both high school students and college graduates. Begin outreach by seeking commitments from large employers to develop multiple internships and/or apprenticeships prior to publicly launching the challenge. Internships and apprenticeships should preferably be paid and part-time, but unpaid internships with small stipends upon completion may be the only viable option for some companies. If funding is determined to be a barrier to effective program development, consider providing small (\$500 - \$1,000) grants to local companies to incentivize their participation and help cover the cost of paid internships and/or apprenticeships. Once an inventory of available internships and apprenticeships is developed, inclusive of existing opportunities, launch a website promoting all available opportunities and publicize the programs aggressively in partnership with high schools and higher education. Engage the Macon-Bibb Workforce Investment Board to determine if there are any lessons learned from previous Summer Work Experience/In-School Youth programs supported in recent years that could be applied.

1.6 Implement the "Leader in Me" program in all elementary schools in Macon-Bibb.

Justification: The challenges facing Bibb County Schools in terms of student outcomes are well documented in the Competitive Assessment. Unfortunately, many students develop bad habits at an early age that influence their future performance, including behavioral, attendance, and studying habits. Communities across the country have seen tremendous benefits from this single proposed program that has transformed elementary schools and student outcomes by targeting such habits through classroom integration of the "Seven Habits of Highly Effective People" (based on Steven Covey's 1999 book). The adoption of such a program in Macon-Bibb can have lasting effects on students long beyond elementary school as the program instills confidence, self-awareness, and responsibility for one's own learning.

Actions: Through the BEP and in collaboration with GPEE and SREB (see Recommendations 1.1 and 1.2) work with elementary school administrators and school system officials to study the resources and case studies that are available online at theleaderinme.org. Engage those individuals that have been involved in a preliminary evaluation of the Leader of Me program recently undertaken by the school system in 2013. Ensure that representatives from recently-approved charter schools are also engaged as they could potentially serve as pilot sites. Consider taking an inter-city visit with relevant education, political, community, and business leadership to one of the cited best practice communities that has effectively implemented the Leader in Me program. Develop a plan for integrating the Leader in Me principles into all elementary schools in Macon-Bibb. Such plans should be inclusive of necessary training for all teachers and administrators, as well as a community outreach plan to educate parents about the positive impact that the Leader in Me can have on their children, and the ways in which they can best support the initiative and its principles.

BEST PRACTICE: THE LEADER IN ME, A.B. COMBS ELEMENTARY (RALEIGH, NORTH CAROLINA) AND DECATUR CITY SCHOOLS (DECATUR, ALABAMA)

In 1989, Steven Covey released the best-selling book *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. In 1999, A.B. Combs Elementary in Raleigh, North Carolina was struggling with low academic performance and lack of engagement among faculty and parents. Administrators and teachers began searching for a solution, including learning principle-based leadership skills and *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. The lessons learned by teachers were taken back to the classroom, integrated into curriculums, and passed on to students. A.B. Combs formalized its leadership initiative to blend leadership training and character education into every facet of a school's curriculum and culture. While teachers integrate the Seven Habits into classroom lessons, the Leader in Me is not a specific curriculum or set of lesson plans. It is a model for transforming a school by integrating the Seven Habits into all aspects of the child's experience at school. Students are taught that "leadership is a choice, not a position" and are equipped with the self-confidence and skills that complement their academics. Students are taught how to set goals and track those goals throughout the year. In addition, students are taught public speaking skills and social etiquette, in an effort to prepare them to face the world head on. The Seven Habits identified by Dr. Covey (and the associated concepts as applied to elementary learning) that are central to the Leader in Me model are as follows:

1. Be Proactive (You're in Charge)
2. Begin with the End in Mind (Have a Plan)
3. Put First Things First (Work First, Then Play)
4. Think Win-Win (Everyone Can Win)
5. Seek First to Understand, Then Be Understood (Listen Before You Talk)
6. Synergize (Together is Better)
7. Sharpen the Saw (Balance Feels Best)

In a short amount of time, end-of-grade test scores improved dramatically. In just over one year, average end-of-year passing grades for students jumped from 84 to 94 percent. Discipline problems dropped significantly. Parents began reporting incredible shifts in their children's attitudes and behaviors. Students began problem solving and engaging in more positive ways with each other. The school saw significant and sustained increases in students' self-confidence and impressive increases in teacher and administrator job satisfaction. Today, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* has become completely integrated into the curriculum at A.B. Combs, and the school is widely recognized for its focus on leadership development. The school has gone from threatened closure by the school board in 1999 to receiving the Dr. Ronald P. Simpson Distinguished Merit Award in 2006 from Magnet Schools America, an honor recognizing the top magnet school in the United States.

In 2008, Covey released a new book, *The Leader in Me – How Schools and Parents Around the World Are Inspiring Greatness, One Child at a Time*, which details the successes at A.B. Combs Elementary. Other schools around the country are beginning to adopt similar approaches and in many cases see even greater benefits than those observed at A.B. Combs. In Decatur, Alabama, the program operates as a public-private partnership between the Decatur-Morgan County (Alabama) Chamber of Commerce, Decatur City Schools, and local government and business entities. All elementary schools in Decatur have incorporated components of the Leader in Me program. In Alberta, Canada, Joseph Welsh Elementary is reporting that parent satisfaction with what children are being taught has increased from 67 to 98 percent. In Adams County, Illinois, documented improvements in academic success at Dewey Elementary captured the eye of the United Way, which is now working to ensure that all 10,000 students in the county receive the same opportunity. Reported disciplinary incidents have declined by as much as 85 percent in some schools following the implementation of the Leader in Me. As of 2013, the Cobb County School District in Georgia has recently implemented the Leader in Me in multiple elementary schools.

1.7 Coordinate and conduct annual “Reach Out to Dropouts” walks to re-enroll recent dropouts in public schools.

Justification: The graduation rate in Bibb County Schools was 52.3 percent in 2011-2012. This was the fifth-lowest graduation rate among the state’s 179 traditional school districts and 17.5 percentage points below the state average (69.7 percent). Community input participants frequently identified the high dropout rate as one of the greatest challenges facing Bibb County Schools and the community at large. Aggressive outreach and intervention techniques in other communities have proven successful in re-enrolling students that have recently dropped out at the beginning of a new school year.

Actions: Study the “Reach out to Dropouts” model, gathering information on the “Expectation Graduation” initiative of the Houston Independent School District. Consider meeting with representatives from Houston and other Texas communities that have successfully implemented Reach Out to Dropouts walks. Through the BEP (see Recommendation 1.1), conduct outreach to all administrators and elected officials representing Bibb County Schools to educate them about the initiative and its success in other parts of the country. Secure commitments from teachers, administrators, and a wide array of community leaders to support the initiative and help develop volunteer teams for each high school, including administrators, counselors, social workers, and other necessary staff required to support the re-enrollment process on the day of the walk. Assign Team Coordinators (ideally school staff with volunteer support) to each high school. Develop a plan to launch the walks in Macon-Bibb County, inclusive of outreach protocols for volunteers and follow-up protocols for administrators and volunteers to ensure that students remain re-enrolled. Recruit and train volunteers. Identify students that recently dropped out of school in the previous school year, as well as those that have not re-enrolled in the first week of the new school year. Organize volunteer teams for each school and implement the Reach Out of Dropouts walk.

BEST PRACTICE: REACH OUT TO DROPOUTS, HOUSTON INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT (HOUSTON, TEXAS)

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 the 2008 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 in 2009. 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 in Fort Bend County, visited 65 homes, spoke with 37 families, and re-enrolled 26 students.

The initiative has since been expanded to 13 school districts in the Houston metropolitan area, with many other Texas communities joining in recent years, including but not limited to Dallas, Fort Worth, El Paso, and San Antonio. Similar efforts have been coordinated in Des Moines, Iowa and other parts of the country.

1.8 *Develop a “Financial Aid Saturdays” program to educate and assist families with financial aid applications.*

Justification: Macon-Bibb’s poverty rate was 25.4 percent in 2011, nearly ten percentage points higher than the national average (15.9 percent). Macon-Bibb’s poverty level is in the 11th percentile among all counties nationwide, meaning that 89 percent of U.S. counties have a lower poverty rate. For children (ages 0-17), the situation is even worse. Macon-Bibb’s child poverty rate is alarmingly high at 35 percent. According to input participants, the challenges of poverty and economic stagnation run deep in Macon-Bibb. Said one participant: “We have generations of under-educated families. It’s hard to break that cycle.” Some participants said this cycle is self-reinforcing due to a prevalent attitude of negativity and despair, often coupled with low expectations for educational attainment. The cost of tuition coupled with a lack of understanding about available forms of financial aid can be pervasive yet manageable deterrents for many families whose children have the potential to attend college and therefore greatly increase their lifelong earning potential.

BEST PRACTICE: FINANCIAL AID SATURDAYS, AUSTIN CHAMBER (AUSTIN, TEXAS)

While the Austin metro area has one of the most educated workforces in the nation, the Greater Austin Chamber recognized that much of the highly-educated population was the result of in-migration for high-technology sector jobs and University of Texas - Austin enrollment. With the support of three local school districts, six higher education institutions, and 12 community organizations and companies, the Greater Austin Chamber worked in the first phase of its “20,010 by 2010” program to boost local higher education enrollment by 30 percent over 48 months. The goal is to grow total regional enrollment in institutions of higher education to 20,010 by 2010.

A component of this effort was a program called Financial Aid Saturdays. In order to help meet increased higher education enrollment goals, the Chamber provided support to Austin, Round Rock, and Manor Independent School Districts (ISDs) to increase FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) submission by 15 percent for students graduating in 2007. The Chamber organized and trained volunteers to make calls, answer questions, and walk students and their families through the process of applying for financial aid. In the first phase of the program, the Chamber’s more than 200 volunteers assisted over 500 families in filing FAFSA applications.

Actions: Develop a program modeled after the Austin Chamber’s successful “Financial Aid Saturdays” initiative to provide students and their families with free, hands-on assistance in filling out financial aid applications. Study successful elements of the Financial Aid Saturdays program in Austin and develop a plan for implementing the initiative in Macon-Bibb with support from the business community via the BEP (see Recommendation 1.1). Gain commitments from counselors, administrators, teachers, social workers, and other members of the community (including BEP members and the business community) to volunteer their time on select Saturdays each month to educate families about financial aid opportunities and help them complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), among other forms of financial aid. Implement the program on varying Saturdays at different locations (ideally schools) throughout the community. Develop a system to track families and students assisted, measuring their receipt of financial aid, college choices, and college success.

1.9 *Seek sustainable funding solutions to re-establish an Early College partnership in Bibb County Schools.*

Justification: Early Colleges are either standalone schools or “schools within a school” that provide students with the opportunity to earn a high school diploma as well as an Associate’s Degree or up to two years of college credit towards a Bachelor’s Degree in five years or less. This is accomplished by offering students a challenging high school curriculum along with college courses through a partnering college or university. Early College can be attractive to students who may not be well served by traditional high schools, supporting them through what effectively becomes their first two years of college, often considered the most vulnerable period for students from low-income families. The early colleges also lift the financial barrier students and families often face when considering college. Students get two years of college credit without paying tuition. Georgia’s Early Colleges were developed as a partnership between one or more Georgia Public School Systems and a University System of Georgia college or university. The Early College program in Bibb County School, a partnership with Macon State College, was eliminated shortly after it started by the Bibb County school board in 2009 due largely to state budget cuts. At the time, 55 students were enrolled in the program at Hutchings Career Center.

Actions: Via the BEP (see Recommendation 1.1), work with officials from the Bibb County School District to evaluate their interest in re-establishing an Early College program. Evaluate barriers to program establishment and maintenance, including but not limited to funding, and help identify funding solutions including but limited to local and national charitable foundations that support Early College objectives.

1.10 *Launch a comprehensive and collaborative program – Macon Grads – between Bibb County Schools, independent schools, and higher education institutions that supports on-time graduation for at-risk students.*

Justification: Despite the high costs of private school and the negative impacts associated with underperforming public schools, input participants described a “two-tiered system” as “entrenched”. “It’s a generational issue,” one input participant said. Another participant was skeptical of whether the system could ever be fully changed, saying: “People will never pull their kids out of private schools. Accept the fact that you’ve got a good private system and turn your attention to improving public schools.” Residents and educators frequently acknowledged that the challenges facing the public school system – particularly high dropout rates – were intrinsically tied to widespread and often generational poverty in many of Macon-Bibb’s neighborhoods. Many participants viewed the higher education system as a tremendous resource for comprehensive school improvement initiatives and lauded their involvement in initiatives such as the Macon Promise Neighborhood. A relatively new yet highly successful partnership in Durham, North Carolina is bringing together the public school system, a local private school, and area universities to implement a comprehensive program targeting at-risk students with the goal of ensuring that all participating students graduate high school on-time and have the necessary support to pursue their college aspirations. A similar partnership could do wonders in Macon-Bibb, bringing together two historically fractured systems (the public and private K-12 systems), higher education institutions, and other community organizations to target one of Macon-Bibb’s greatest challenges: graduation rates of at-risk students.

Actions: Conduct outreach to key leadership at the Bibb County School District, area private schools, institutions of higher education, and various community foundations to form a “Working Group” within the BEP (see Recommendation 1.1) that is tasked with studying the Student U program from Durham,

North Carolina. Consider scheduling an inter-city visit to the Triangle region of North Carolina to meet with program leadership, coinciding with the inter-city visit to neighboring Raleigh to visit A.B. Combs Elementary (home to The Leader in Me program; see Recommendation 1.6). Evaluate successful elements of the Student U program and determine if there is support from various members of the community to pursue a similar initiative in Macon-Bibb. If support exists, transition the working group into a Board of Advisors and begin developing program components. There are likely many lessons to learn from the existing Mercer Youth University programs that could be applied to new partnership targeting at-risk students. Students at the Tift College of Education could be ideal instructors.

BEST PRACTICE: STUDENT U (DURHAM, NORTH CAROLINA)

Across the country, many young students with strong academic potential are at risk of “disconnecting” from the school system due to demographic and socioeconomic factors such as poverty at home or speaking English as a second language. In Durham, North Carolina, a non-profit is engaging and empowering these students to take ownership of their education and develop the skills necessary to exceed in college and life. Formed in 2007, Student U is a collaborative effort involving Durham’s public school system, a prestigious local private school, and area universities.

The organization supports two programs, one each for middle and high school students. Each program features a blend of “summer enrichment” and “year-round support.” In the summer, students entering grades 6 through 10 participate in six-week academic enrichment programs that focus on a variety of core and elective subjects. Students in grades 11 and 12 have the opportunity to intern at local non-profits and businesses that align with their interests. Students at all grade levels also receive tours of colleges within North Carolina and beyond. By their senior year, Student U participants will have visited at least 20 colleges throughout the Mid-Atlantic and the South. During the school year, students return to their Durham Public Schools but continue to receive personal and academic support in the form of tutoring sessions, mentoring, bi-weekly phone calls from Student U advisors to families, and other means.

In 2012, its programs served 285 students, 88 percent of whom qualify for free or reduced price lunches. Sixty-three percent are black, 32 percent are Hispanic, and 83 percent will be the first in their family to attend college. Student U has a retention rate of 92 percent, and to date, none of its participants have dropped out of Durham Public Schools. Student U participants score much higher on standardized tests, miss fewer days of school, and demonstrate less “summer learning loss” than their peers in Durham Public Schools.

Student U is notable not just for its success but for the network of partners it has formed in support of its efforts. It has just six staff members, founder Dan Kimberg, a 2007 Duke graduate, and five part-time workers. Classes are taught by student teachers from three local universities – UNC Chapel Hill, North Carolina Central, and Duke – who are paid for their time. Student U teachers and staff work with guidance counselors and teachers from public schools throughout the year to provide support for students. Public school teachers and counselors also nominate rising sixth graders to apply for the program. A prestigious local private school, Durham Academy, makes its facility available for the summer sessions and provides in-kind donations of \$250,000 annually. As of 2012, the program raised \$640,520 in actual revenue, less than \$20,000 of which came from government grants. Just one quarter of program expenses went towards administration.

1.11 Integrate new coursework into the “Parent Academy” at Bibb County Schools.

Justification: During public input sessions, some educators and administrators noted constant struggles to get parents more engaged, not only in the classroom, but more importantly, with students at home. The current “Parent Academy” within the Bibb County School District offers coursework that helps parents gain basic skills that could help them personally (in terms of their own education) as well as help them support their child’s studies. This includes courses covering basic reading, writing, mathematics, and computer skills (Microsoft Word, internet use, etc.), as well as content-specific courses such as U.S. History. However, the Parent Academy does not currently offer any courses focused on parenting skills such as parent-child communication, discipline tactics, and study support and standardized test preparation – skills that can help ensure that children have a positive family and learning environment outside of the classroom. The Macon Promise strategic plan identified a “parent training program” as a key strategy, one that focuses on helping parents ensure that their children “build strength of character and are college ready.” Simply put, the existing program should be expanded in scope, consistent with national best practices and the objectives outlined in the district’s strategic plan.

Actions: In partnership with district officials, GPEE, and SREB (see Recommendation 1.2), study best practice parenting programs from around the state and country, including but not limited to the Parent University at Mesa Public Schools in Arizona. Identify resource needs to expand current programming. Seek in-kind contributions (meeting space, instructional resources, volunteers, etc.) that could support new coursework. Survey parents to determine what topics appeal to them. Develop course content and course schedules, and publicize the expanded program.

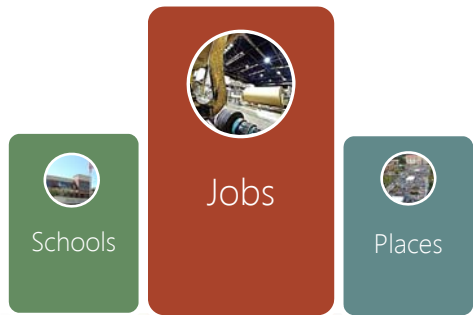
BEST PRACTICE: PARENT UNIVERSITY, MESA PUBLIC SCHOOLS (MESA, ARIZONA)

With the philosophy that parenting is a continuous learning process and that the foundation for a child’s education is laid at home, the Mesa Public School system launched a Parent University program in 1985. The diverse offering of sessions and workshops, held in junior high school auditoriums and other local school sites, now boasts attendance rates of 4,000 parents annually. The program is publicized through radio announcements, target fliers, brochures sent home with every student, and announcements in the monthly district newsletter.

Topics for sessions are relevant, often specifically requested by parents, and led by local and national speakers and experts. The most popular areas of instruction are discipline and communication. Participant feedback concludes each workshop, where parents are asked to identify what they liked about the session, what they learned, what actions they will take, what improvements are needed, and what else they would like to learn about. Given the presence of a relatively large Hispanic population, many courses are also available in Spanish.

Courses in 2013 include but are not limited to: Ten Steps to Positive Discipline, Master Your Emotions, Motivate Your Teen to Read, Setting Limits Without Guilt, Raising a Successful Teen, One Family/Two Different Parenting Styles, Dads of Children with Special Needs, The Critical Path to College, and How to Stay Calm When Your Kids – and Life – Push Your Buttons.

Parent University is funded through a small registration fee for participants, in addition to grants, partnerships with local nonprofit agencies like Mesa United Way. Scholarships are available for those parents with financial need.



"In addition to investment in education, the primary means by which wealth creation is achieved is via **the creation of jobs** – either through relocations, expansions, or entrepreneurship."

- Competitive Assessment

2. Jobs

EXCERPTS FROM THE COMPETITIVE ASSESSMENT

"Economic development is a multi-faceted exercise that involves a variety of entities working as a team on varied projects and exercises. But underpinning all of these activities is...**the central tenet of holistic economic development: enhancing the opportunity for all individuals to create wealth.**"

"...**the memory of Brown & Williamson's departure led many input participants to ask 'What would happen if we lost another major employer like that?'**"

"...**the community possesses a strong set of competitive advantages:** an abundant supply of water that exceeds the community's current needs...excellent road and rail connectivity...proximity to the Port of Savannah (and) Hartsfield-Jackson...the presence of Middle Georgia Regional Airport (and) Robins Air Force Base, (and a) central location within the state of Georgia. (However, from an economic development standpoint) **some of Macon-Bibb's challenges – such as workforce sustainability and public education – are significant enough to offset the community's significant location and infrastructure advantages.** If this is the case, no amount of economic development marketing effort or expense could overcome these barriers – these issues must be addressed in a more comprehensive fashion, as is being done in this process."

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

The following statements represent broad objectives that should guide the development and ongoing refinement of tactical recommendations that support the second pillar in our approach to community and economic development: our **Jobs**.

Market the community's assets to support new business development.

Develop sites and infrastructure supporting job creation in target business sectors.

Retain existing businesses and enable their growth.

Support efforts to improve the entrepreneurial climate and small business support system.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS: SUMMARY

The following strategic recommendations are to be pursued by the *One Macon!* Implementation Committee in support of the aforementioned strategic objectives. Strategic recommendations are not organized by objective as many will support multiple objectives. The following pages provide additional detail on each recommendation, its justification, and the relevant actions.



- 2.1 *Establish the Middle Georgia Logistics Council to promote the region as a premier destination for distribution in the Southeast and host an annual Logistics Summit.*
- 2.2 *Establish other cluster councils to support target sector development efforts.*
- 2.3 *Utilize information on inter-industry expenditures to identify import substitution opportunities and recruitment targets that can eliminate expenditure leakage and elevate the economic impact of target sectors.*
- 2.4 *Conduct targeted existing business visits to companies headquartered outside of Macon-Bibb to support retention and expansion of major employers.*
- 2.5 *Implement a comprehensive Export Promotion Initiative that fosters new international trade relationships for existing businesses by improving utilization of existing export assistance programs and developing new export promotion programs.*
- 2.6 *Support the implementation of the Middle Georgia Regional Airport master plan.*
- 2.7 *Pursue joint-use designation for Robins Air Force Base.*
- 2.8 *Advance the implementation of critical transportation infrastructure projects that improve the viability and competitiveness of Macon-Bibb as a logistics hub and inland port.*
- 2.9 *Invest in site-specific improvements to the community's industrial parks to increase their attractiveness to prospective new investments.*
- 2.10 *Work with regional partners to develop a new "mega-site" that can accommodate a major new investment.*
- 2.11 *Optimize Macon-Bibb's general economic development marketing, communications, and public relations efforts.*
- 2.12 *Aid the advancement of the College Hill Alliance's entrepreneurship initiative and the subsequent implementation of recommendations and pilot programs.*
- 2.13 *Improve basic resources for small businesses to complement the College Hill Alliance's implementation of more aggressive and innovative improvements to the entrepreneurial ecosystem.*

Jobs: Strategic Recommendations

2.1 *Establish the Middle Georgia Logistics Council to promote the region as a premier destination for distribution in the Southeast and host an annual Logistics Summit.*



Justification: When asked to identify the community's greatest strength, survey respondents overwhelmingly mentioned Macon's strategic location.

The community's central location in the state of Georgia with proximity to the Port of Savannah and Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport is complemented by strong interstate connectivity and access, Class I and short-line rail, and an abundance of other infrastructural advantages from water to land that make the region a premier destination for the manufacture and distribution of goods. Macon-Bibb and the larger Middle Georgia region would benefit greatly from a deliberate, cooperative, and business-driven effort to advance the area's competitiveness as a location for distribution activities. When organized properly and meeting frequently, such a council can nurture the development of networks among and between businesses and other entities that influence cluster competitiveness. They can provide leadership in advancing strategic initiatives, inform the efforts of economic development practitioners, identify workforce concerns, inform legislative agendas, and assist with a wide variety of initiatives that support a targeted approach to economic development.

Actions: Work with key leadership from the region's transportation, warehousing, wholesale, manufacturing, distribution, and logistics business community to assemble an initial Working Group tasked with formulating the Middle Georgia Logistics Council. The Council should be formed in partnership with business and community leadership in areas surrounding Macon-Bibb and leveraging the existing partnerships that supported by the Middle Georgia Economic Alliance. Consideration in forming the Council should be given to the following issues and components:

Membership and Directors: The Council should include executive representation from private businesses of all sizes, institutions of higher education, utilities, policymakers, and other key economic development and industry professionals. Professional economic development staff should be assigned to the Council. Co-chairs should be elected, guiding a group of 20 - 25 "Council Directors." Other entities and individuals can join the Council and become "members" at no cost.

Mission and Agenda: The Council should craft its own mission statement, defining its desired role in target sector development efforts, and must establish its own agenda, potentially including but certainly not limited to the following roles and responsibilities:

- ✓ Serve as community and target sector "ambassadors"
- ✓ Facilitate networking and development opportunities for existing companies
- ✓ Assist with the identification of potential recruitment targets
- ✓ Travel with professional economic development staff on targeted marketing missions
- ✓ Attend industry events with professional economic development staff
- ✓ Identify policy priorities at the local, state, and federal level, informing legislative agendas
- ✓ Identify talent issues and appropriate solutions (new training and degree programs)
- ✓ Advance collaborative solutions to site and infrastructure development
- ✓ Provide guidance on optimal media and messages to prioritize marketing and advertising efforts
- ✓ Advance political, financial, and resource support for strategic initiatives

Meeting Schedule: The Council should meet at least quarterly and potentially monthly, depending on the established agenda and individual perceived needs of the Directors and members.

Logistics Summit: The Middle Georgia Logistics Council could develop an annual Logistics Summit as a cornerstone of its operations. The Summit would bring together state and local economic development professionals, business development staff from relevant utilities, key transportation officials (DOT, railroad, airport, etc.), industry experts, and business leadership including the full membership of the Council, to hold forums on the key strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats facing the future of distribution activities in the region. The Summit could also include an inbound tour of the region's key assets, each year targeting a different audience (prospective companies, site selection consultants, media from logistics/distribution publications). Each year, a report on the Summit's outcomes could be produced and key findings could be integrated into the Council's program of work. The inaugural Summit could focus specifically on opportunities to expand air cargo capacity (see Recommendations 2.6 and 2.7).

BEST PRACTICE: MEMPHIS REGIONAL LOGISTICS COUNCIL (MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE)

The Memphis Regional Logistics Council (RLC) was established in 2004 by the Memphis Regional Chamber as a way to strengthen both the Memphis metro area and the tri-state region as a whole. By addressing Memphis' ever-growing, ever-changing role in global distribution and logistics, the council works to establish the Memphis region as a leader in the industry, and to better tap into its role as "America's Distribution Center."

The RLC is comprised of logistics and distribution professionals who lend their insights to the city's myriad logistics and distribution issues. Members include trucking and drainage companies, freight forwarders, steamship lines, railroads, air carriers, contractors, developers, barge lines, warehouses, and distributors.

At meetings, professionals are encouraged to share their ideas and expertise regarding how to improve Memphis' ability to be a logistics center. The council includes four main committees: infrastructure, marketing, workforce development, and strategic alliances. The infrastructure committee recently helped execute the contract for the city's first ever regional infrastructure plan which examines how air, rail, road, and water converge in Memphis to move goods in and out of the city. The marketing committee works to brand the community and promote Memphis' assets and support the Chamber's ongoing marketing efforts, including but not limited to the targeted in-house publication HUB Magazine with a circulation exceeding 20,000; hosting editors of major logistics and supply sector trade publications for the Logistics Tour of Memphis; full advertising supplemental section to Inbound Logistics; and the maintenance of a frequently updated and interactive website promoting regional logistics capabilities. The workforce development committee focuses on promoting the city's economy by improving the quality of its workforce. The strategic alliance committee works to develop partnerships critical to logistics growth.

2.2 Establish other cluster councils to support target sector development efforts.

Justification: Just like the Macon Logistics Council (see Recommendation 2.1) cluster councils could benefit economic and workforce development efforts for other target sectors in Macon-Bibb. Such volunteer-led councils would be a complement to staff-led existing business retention and expansion (BRE) outreach programs, providing critical and ongoing input to professional economic and workforce

development staff regarding the specific challenges and opportunities facing businesses in the community's target sectors. Councils could help advance collaborative solutions to challenges and opportunities that they identify, as well as those identified in the Target Business Analysis.

Actions: Work with key leadership in each of the community's target business sectors to evaluate the potential benefits of establishing a cluster council to guide target sector development efforts. Outreach to key organizations and partnerships such as the Macon-Bibb Workforce Investment Board and the Middle Georgia Economic Alliance will be necessary to evaluate need and determine if an existing committee or working group is already addressing the needs of a specific target business sector. Consideration should be given to similar factors as those outlined for the recommended Middle Georgia Logistics Council (see Recommendation 2.1). Potential councils and their potential area(s) of focus could include but are not limited to:

- ✓ **Health Care Council:** A new Health Care Council could potentially focus a variety of issues. This could encompass economic and workforce development objectives such as talent development, attraction, and retention, as well as marketing efforts to expand non-resident health care expenditure in Macon-Bibb. The council could also focus on initiatives that target improvements in the equity of health care access and community health outcomes. Ideally, a Health Care Council would engage a diverse group of leaders from the community's health care service delivery system in addition to members of the academic community that support talent development and embark on new research endeavors.
- ✓ **Aerospace and Aviation Council:** An Aerospace and Aviation Council could potentially focus on the following core issues: supporting BRAC initiatives to preserve operations at Robins Air Force Base; identifying necessary training strategies to prepare the next generation of aerospace and aviation workers to replace impending retirees; and, developing and supporting implementation of recommendations to improve necessary infrastructure that increase competitiveness for cargo and commercial aviation traffic, and expanded aerospace assembly, manufacturing, and aviation maintenance, repair, and operations (MRO).
- ✓ **Manufacturers Council:** A Manufacturers Council could potentially assist with: marketing key resources (water, land, location, etc.) that are attractive to manufacturers; identifying buyers and suppliers that could be potential relocation targets; identifying local alternatives to non-local suppliers of intermediate inputs; supporting the re-employment and re-training of displaced workers from layoff events; and promoting interest in manufacturing careers among middle and high school students.

2.3 Utilize information on inter-industry expenditures to identify import substitution opportunities and recruitment targets that can eliminate expenditure leakage and elevate the economic impact of target sectors.

Justification: Research in the Target Business Analysis revealed that certain subsectors of the community's strategic economic development targets purchase a relatively high amount of their inputs (goods and services) from establishments located outside the region. More specifically, research revealed that Food and Beverage manufacturers in Macon-Bibb County purchased more than \$1.7 million of converted paper products in 2012 (largely packaging materials, a strong subsector within Macon-Bibb's Paper Products target). However, just 10.4 percent of these expenditures stayed within the community,

going to converted paper product manufactures located in Macon-Bibb. This high rate of expenditure leakage illustrates that there are opportunities to create better synergy between firms in two of the community's manufacturing niches. Specifically, opportunities exist to promote import substitution by working with existing Food and Beverage manufacturers in Macon-Bibb (and surrounding counties) to identify local alternatives to suppliers of food and beverage packaging. Pactiv and Graphic Packaging are large producers of packaging materials for the food and beverage industry. In addition, opportunities exist to better focus recruitment efforts on suppliers of packaging that are currently located outside the region. Meanwhile, firms within the Aerospace niche purchase nearly \$30 million of goods from other manufacturing firms, but 81.9 percent of these expenditures go to firms outside Macon-Bibb. This is to be expected given the complex, global supply chains endemic to aerospace manufacturing; but there still may be similar opportunities to expand local sourcing within certain operations. Notably, a relatively high proportion of expenditures by local manufacturers on professional and technical services (legal services, accounting, marketing and advertising, computer systems design, etc.), stays within the community. In 2012, 38 percent of manufacturers' expenditures on such services went to local providers (lawyers, accountants, etc.) as compared to 32 percent in Columbus-Muscogee and just 22 percent in Augusta-Richmond. This may in part be explained by the fact that the average manufacturing establishment in Macon-Bibb is considerably smaller (35 employees) than the average manufacturer in Columbus and Augusta (48 and 51 employees, respectively); smaller manufacturing establishments are more likely to be locally-owned and operated and less likely to have existing relationships via corporate headquarters to providers of professional services outside the region.

Actions: Develop sector specific strategies to support the reduction of expenditure leakage within niche manufacturing targets, potentially via the Manufacturers Council (see Recommendation 2.2):

- ✓ **Food and Beverage; Paper Products:** Work with Food and Beverage companies to identify their suppliers of paper packaging products and determine if local producers of food packaging could be viable alternatives to their current suppliers located outside the region.
- ✓ **Aerospace:** Work with Aerospace companies to identify suppliers of key inputs into the assembly and manufacturing process that are located outside Macon-Bibb but could benefit from co-location and therefore be viable recruitment targets.
- ✓ **Building and Construction Materials:** Work with local manufacturers of Building and Construction Materials to map supply chains and identify if there are any raw materials that could potentially be sourced locally or regionally rather than imported (limestone, kaolin, timber, etc). Identify suppliers of intermediate inputs that could benefit from co-location and therefore be viable recruitment targets.

2.4 Conduct targeted existing business visits to companies headquartered outside of Macon-Bibb to support retention and expansion of major employers.

Justification: In October 2003, it was announced that one of Macon-Bibb's largest employers, Brown & Williamson, would merge with R.J. Reynolds and relocate its operations to Winston-Salem, NC. The impact of this merger on Macon-Bibb was profound. Thousands of workers lost their jobs which, according to the Census Bureau, paid an average annual wage of \$62,352 in 2001. The impact of the Brown & Williamson relocation on the Macon-Bibb economy highlights the importance of business retention efforts that seek to identify core business challenges early on, and aid local businesses in alleviating those challenges so

that they can thrive and prosper in the community for many years to come. Without question, there are circumstances (such as mergers and acquisitions) that are outside a community's control; nonetheless, the memory of Brown & Williamson's departure led many input participants to ask "What would happen if we lost another major employer like that?"

Actions: Assemble a delegation of 15-20 key business, community, and elected leaders that can serve as "community ambassadors" and represent Macon-Bibb on a series of business retention visits to meet with key management of companies that are headquartered outside of Macon-Bibb but have major operations in the community. Each trip should include 3-6 carefully selected "ambassadors" within some familiarity of the company's existing operations in Macon-Bibb. Trips should seek to identify any key management concerns about operations in Macon-Bibb and/or expansion plans that can be supported by the community and its economic development partners. Trips should be coordinated with other relevant travel such as outbound marketing and recruitment trips that seek to develop new business relationships with prospective firms and site selectors.

2.5 Implement a comprehensive Export Promotion Initiative that fosters new international trade relationships for existing businesses by improving utilization of existing export assistance programs and developing new export promotion programs.

Justification: Manufacturing firms in Macon-Bibb County exported \$1.68 billion in goods in 2012. While this far exceeded the level of exports in competing Columbus-Muscogee (\$569 million), it was less than half the manufacturing export level observed in Augusta-Richmond (\$3.57 billion). With President Obama's administration aggressively promoting a new National Export Initiative that seeks to double the level of American exports between 2010 and 2015, there is a tremendous amount of investment in export assistance programs; Macon-Bibb's manufacturers should leverage these available forms of assistance. In addition, a concerted effort to expose international delegations to the community's assets can have both short-term and long-term benefits for both export promotion and foreign direct investment in Macon-Bibb County.

Actions: Develop an Export Promotion Initiative that contains two core components: exposure to available state and federal support services and the development of a reverse trade mission.

- ✓ **Trade Development Day:** Develop a day-long program in collaboration with state and federal officials to educate existing businesses about export assistance programs and connect them to appropriate contacts at the state and federal level that can support the develop of company-specific export promotion plans and facilitate new business relationships. The first half of the day's agenda should include presentations and panels from state and federal officials regarding available programs, including executives from existing businesses in Georgia that can share their success stories based on assistance received from state and federal partners. The second half of the day's agenda could include short windows (15-20 minutes) allowing representatives from existing Macon-Bibb employers to meet with state and federal officials, discuss their broad objectives, and schedule a time for further consultation and assistance. The following aspects of federal and state programs should be promoted:
 - **Federal programs:** Work with state representatives of the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) and the Export-Import Bank of the United States (Ex-Im Bank) to educate manufacturers about available forms of assistance and promote greater

utilization of existing services offered such as the SBA's International Trade Loan program, the Ex-Im Bank's guaranteed term financing for international buyers of U.S. exports. The International Trade Administration (ITA) also frequently helps companies negotiate the removal of barriers to exporting, often involving changes to international regulations that impact market access. The ITA's U.S. Commercial Service operated Regional Export Assistance Centers (located in Atlanta and Savannah in the state of Georgia) helps U.S. companies develop customized export promotion plans and then facilitate meetings with international delegates and key business connections in foreign countries.

- **State programs:** Representatives from the Georgia Department of Economic Development's (GDECD) International Trade Team (ITT) are tasked with assisting Georgia companies with export promotion. Representatives are located in ten countries around the world, including Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, Germany, Israel, Japan, Korea, Mexico, and the U.K. and Ireland. These representatives help make business connections and facilitate trade missions that are hosted frequently throughout the year in various countries and targeting different types of economic activities. Locally, the state publishes "trade opportunities" bulletins every two weeks highlighting specific products and services demanded by business contacts in foreign countries. The state also maintains a Georgia Export Directory that profiles companies and the products and services that they offer. Macon-Bibb companies should be informed of all available state services and proactively encouraged to utilize these services, including participation on international trade missions. Representatives from the ITT should be invited to speak to local companies alongside U.S. Department of Commerce officials at a coordinated event.
- ✓ **Reverse trade mission:** The second component of the Export Promotion Initiative would be the development of a reverse trade mission. Some communities have worked with their state and federal partners to organize reverse trade missions, hosting foreign trade commissioners and consuls to expose them to existing businesses and their export potential as well as the community's assets that can attract new foreign direct investment. Many communities have found that such reverse missions can be more cost-effective and provide greater exposure for local companies and the community as a whole. With an abundance of trade commission offices and consulates located in Metro Atlanta, a reverse trade mission coordinated with the state of Georgia and the Governor's Office could prove beneficial for Macon-Bibb.

2.6 Support the implementation of the Middle Georgia Regional Airport master plan.

Justification: While Macon-Bibb is fortunate to be located just 80 miles from the nation's 14th busiest cargo airport (Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport), perhaps the community's greatest weakness from a logistics and distribution standpoint is its relatively limited local air cargo capacity. Opportunities exist to improve air cargo capacity by implementing planned improvements at Middle Georgia Regional Airport – improvements that can help increase the attractiveness of the airport and surrounding industrial properties. Investments supporting expansion of air cargo capacity can have many other benefits including but limited to improved competitiveness for maintenance, repair, and operations (MRO) activities, aerospace and aviation manufacturing and assembly, and other distribution opportunities.

Actions: Through the recommended Middle Georgia Logistics Council (see Recommendation 2.1), advance discussions regarding the necessary procedures and investments to increase air cargo capacity at Middle Georgia Regional Airport. First and foremost, efforts to promote additional cargo capacity at Middle Georgia Regional Airport should be consistent with the airport's long-term master plan. Potential exists to expand capacity at the airport to support larger aircraft and additional cargo flights. The two primary challenges facing the expansion of cargo operations at Middle Georgia Regional Airport are the runways' existing cargo load capacity (or pavement classification) and runway length. Recent investments have upgraded the weight rating/pavement classification by adding additional asphalt, while investments to extend the main runway from roughly 6,500 feet to roughly 8,000 feet were delayed by opposition to the Regional Transportation Referendum (also known as the regional TSPLOST). Continued investment in the runways could help attract new air cargo-intensive operations and industries to Macon-Bibb and support development at adjacent properties and industrial parks.

2.7 Pursue joint-use designation for Robins Air Force Base.

Justification: While Macon-Bibb is fortunate to be located just 80 miles from the nation's 14th busiest cargo airport (Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport), perhaps the community's greatest weakness from a logistics and distribution standpoint is its relatively limited local air cargo capacity. Opportunities exist to improve air cargo capacity by pursuing joint-use designation for Robins Air Force Base, allowing both military and civilian aircraft to use the airfield. Investments supporting expansion of air cargo capacity can have many other benefits including but limited to improved competitiveness for maintenance, repair, and operations (MRO) activities, aerospace and aviation manufacturing and assembly, and other distribution opportunities.

Actions: Through the recommended Middle Georgia Logistics Council (see Recommendation 2.1), advance discussions regarding the necessary procedures and investments to increase air cargo capacity at Robins Air Force Base. With support from the United States Air Force, the Federal Aviation Administration, and a wide variety of government partners at the federal, state, and local level, potential may exist to establish Robins Air Force Base as a joint-use airport. Joint-use facilities are simply shared facilities at which both military and civilian aircraft make shared use of the airfield. There are currently 23 military joint-use airfields, of which 12 are located at Air Force bases. The closest joint-use facility to Macon is located at Fort Stewart. Given the nature of operations at Robins – which is heavily oriented towards maintenance and contains relatively little flight traffic/missions as compared to other Air Force bases – joint-use may be a viable option for enhancing air cargo capacity in the region. This effort could be complemented by the assembly and development of land adjacent to the Base's runway for industrial and commercial uses. Such an effort would require collaboration between local governments and the Base to facilitate land acquisition, site assembly, and infrastructure improvements; this could potentially be facilitated through a joint development authority (JDA).

2.8 Advance the implementation of critical transportation infrastructure projects that improve the viability and competitiveness of Macon-Bibb as a logistics hub and inland port.

Justification: As previously mentioned, the strategic, central location of Macon-Bibb in the state of Georgia, and its access to key rail and interstate infrastructure between the Port of Savannah and Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport make the region a highly-competitive location for a variety of manufacturing, distribution, and logistics operations. However, there a multiple investments in the

community's and region's transportation infrastructure that can further improve its competitiveness and viability as an inland port. While all face varied funding obstacles today, many of these key projects would have been supported by the regional transportation special purpose local options sales tax (TSPLOST) that was not supported at the polls in 2012. Regardless, these projects (and many others) remain critical to the community's short-term and long-term economic competitiveness, and complement external factors such as port-deepening in Savannah that may increase the amount of cargo transported to Macon-Bibb via truck and rail. With adequate demand, Macon-Bibb could establish itself as an inland port, allowing cargo to be processed through customs at the inland port.

Actions: Continue collaborative efforts to develop a comprehensive plan to establish Macon-Bibb as an inland port. Working with the full spectrum of necessary partners at the local, regional, state, and federal levels, support the advancement of key transportation infrastructure projects, including but not limited the following projects that will help improve the prospects of developing a viable inland port and reinforcing Macon-Bibb's position as a logistic hub.

- ✓ **Interstate-16/Interstate-75 interchange**
- ✓ **Sardis Church Road extension**
- ✓ **Export-Import Highway:** The Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) has developed plans to fund improvements along key freight corridors in the state. Much of this work is prompted by the forecasted surge in freight traffic on Georgia's highways and interstates that will result from port deepening in Savannah. Among the projects identified by GDOT, a truck bypass around Atlanta that runs west from Macon to LaGrange and north to I-75 around the Georgia-Tennessee is one of the least expensive but most impactful according to economic impact estimates) among the proposed freight corridors. The corridor would also improve connectivity to the West Point/LaGrange region that is home to Kia Motors and its suppliers.

2.9 Invest in site-specific improvements to the community's industrial parks to increase their attractiveness to prospective new investments.

Justification: The Site Assessment conducted by J. Michael Mullis, a leading site location consultant, identified a number of site-specific improvements that could increase the attractiveness of existing sites and industrial parks to prospective companies.

Actions: Pursue the following upgrades to existing sites and parks, their surrounding areas, and their corresponding marketing materials, consistent with the Site Assessment:

- ✓ **I-75 Business Park**
 - Covert the Park's main entrance to the access point on Sardis Church Road.
 - Reserve land at the southern end for improvements in landscaping and signage.
 - Market the southern portion of the Park for commercial development.
 - Work with owners at the northern entrance to maintain clean and attractive properties.
 - Better identify and delineate available parcels in marketing documents.
- ✓ **Ocmulgee East Industrial Park**
 - Develop a new Park maintenance plan to improve aesthetics.

- ✓ Sofkee Industrial Park
 - Work with local government and non-profit partners to beautify the corridors (particularly Highway 247) that provide access to the Park via clean-up and landscaping.
- ✓ Airport South and Airport Industrial Park
 - Better identify and delineate available parcels in marketing documents.
- ✓ Cumberland & Western Resources Complex/Former Brown & Williamson Facility
 - Continue to work with property owners to support enhanced marketing efforts.

2.10 Work with regional partners to develop a new “mega-site” that can accommodate a major new investment.

Justification: While Macon-Bibb has numerous sites and buildings that are appropriate for a wide variety of manufacturers, it has few if any sites that could support the largest manufacturing projects. MEDC, the Macon-Bibb County Industrial Authority, and their regional partners in economic development will need to constantly evaluate options to assemble and prepare larger sites in close proximity to I-75 and I-16 – potentially in collaboration with partners in neighboring counties – to ensure that Macon-Bibb remains “in the conversation” for the largest manufacturing projects.

Actions: Engage regional partners in neighboring counties to evaluate specific properties could potentially be assembled to jointly develop a new mega-site, preferably in excess of 500 acres and continuous to or in close proximity to one of the two interstates. Working through the Central Georgia Joint Development Authority would permit joint ownership and development, as well as the extension of the maximum job tax credit to any company locating on the site. Work with relevant partners to develop a conceptual development plan including costs and timing of all related site acquisition and preparation activities, including infrastructure improvements.

2.11 Optimize Macon-Bibb’s general economic development marketing, communications, and public relations efforts.

Justification: The Marketing Review component of the research phase evaluated a wide variety of economic development marketing activities as carried out by the Macon Economic Development Commission (MEDC) and its partners throughout the community. As competition for economic development projects and new corporate investment increases, economic development organizations (EDOs) such as MEDC must continually assess the characteristics and strategic components of their marketing programs. The EDOs that succeed in marketing their communities build comprehensive programs developed with a number of platforms, priorities, and clear focus areas. MEDC and its partners have developed some highly effective components of a comprehensive marketing effort, but there is always room for improvement; the Marketing Review highlighted the areas that could use additional attention and investment.

Actions: Implement the following changes to the community’s economic development marketing, communications, and public relations efforts:

Community and Organizational Branding:

- ✓ Ensure that any branding elements – such as “Macon Works” tagline and MEDC logos – are incorporated into all marketing efforts.

- ✓ Develop an improved, recognizable “square” logo for use on social media, etc.

MEDC Website:

- ✓ Build upon the recently updated website look to streamline and package content in a more easily navigable fashion, as described in the Web Presence section of the Marketing Review.
- ✓ Ensure that all data included on the website is the most current information available. Create an update schedule based on a data release calendar and regularly update the website accordingly.
- ✓ Make all data available in downloadable spreadsheets, the preferred format for site selectors.
- ✓ Redefine target sectors based on the Target Business Analysis and develop customized and informative webpages for each target sector that profile existing businesses, describe the relevant assets that support each target sector (infrastructure, education and workforce, small business resources, etc.), promote applicable data, and make the case for Macon-Bibb as a preferred and competitive location for such economic activities.
- ✓ Integrate new information that is currently missing or difficult to find on the MEDC website (tax rates, recent announcements and news, etc.) as identified in the Marketing Review.
- ✓ Consider repositioning elements from the “Why Macon Works,” “Labor Market,” and “Incentives” sections into the following new tabs: Doing Business in Macon, Living in Macon, and Data Center.
- ✓ Revise the “Contact Us” tab to “About Us” including annual reports and key investor communications.
- ✓ Eliminate the “Learn More” left-hand navigation that is redundant with top-level navigation.

Print Collateral:

- ✓ Update all print (and downloadable) marketing collateral to reflect the current MEDC brand identity (colors, logos, fonts, etc.) and the community’s redefined target sectors. Evaluate the feasibility of outsourcing design work to improve overall quality and reduce demands on MEDC staff time. Potential for reduced price or in-kind services from an MEDC investor or Greater Macon Chamber of Commerce member may exist.

Social Media:

- ✓ Create a more “active” presence on social media, particularly Twitter. Update these sites more frequently (at least once per day on Twitter), and view the use of these tools as an opportunity to directly engage target audiences both internally and externally, and spread awareness of news, announcements, and events.

Public Relations and Earned Media:

- ✓ Increase MEDC’s use of press releases to announce project wins, milestones, and other newsworthy events (such as inbound marketing successes). Distribute these press releases via e-mail to a defined list of media and influencers, and post an electronic version of each of these press releases in the News & Press section of *maconworks.com* to create a complete, publicly accessible archive of MEDC’s success.
- ✓ Continue to use targeted newsletters to reach external audiences, including members of the site selection community. Update the look and feel of these newsletters to be consistent with a broad brand strategy, and focus content on regional advantages and data, project wins, and economic development news that is relevant to those outside the community.

- ✓ As Macon-Bibb enters a new era of consolidated government, and as this Community and Economic Development Strategy is implemented, it will be important to tell the story of the community's success to a wide audience. MEDC should evaluate the feasibility of partnering with other organizations such as the Chamber to engage a public relations firm capable of generating media coverage of positive developments within the community.

Marketing the Region's Water Resources:

- ✓ The Macon Water Authority, in partnership with the MEDC, currently operates an aggressive marketing program that seeks to develop leads and generate new business opportunities that can benefit from the sustainability and quality of the region's water supply. Existing efforts should continue, and consideration should be given to forging new partnerships with the state (GDECD and the Governor's Office) to conduct joint business development trips to specific markets, share costs in attending trade shows and other industry events, and best position Macon-Bibb within state-level economic development marketing efforts for manufacturing sectors that are high water users.

2.12 Aid the advancement of the College Hill Alliance's entrepreneurship initiative and the subsequent implementation of recommendations and pilot programs.

Justification: Given recent contraction in business sectors such as manufacturing and concerns about a reliance on a few major employers, input participants also suggested that there needs to be a greater focus on entrepreneurship. Said one participant, "Macon's leaders see economic development as 'just industrial.'" Another noted a community culture that can be complacent with too few risk "risk-takers" and "business-hungry" people. Whatever the source, many agreed that there should be an increased emphasis on supporting small businesses, promoting innovation, and opening up access to capital. Such an emphasis on entrepreneurship could help create more opportunities to Macon-Bibb residents at all income levels and engage student and young professional populations. Beginning in 2012, the College Hill Alliance has facilitated the development of a new vision and plan for the entrepreneurial ecosystem in Macon-Bibb, the goal of which is to support startups and existing small businesses, and advance a shift in community and business culture towards support for entrepreneurship. Supported by a \$2.3 million grant from the Knight Foundation, the initiative was aimed at identifying and implementing appropriate pilot programs to advance the development of an entrepreneurial culture and place entrepreneurship at a more prominent position within the community's approach to economic development. Since the onset of this Community and Economic Development Strategy planning process, it has been the intent that this process will support and not supersede this entrepreneurship initiative, but rather, integrate its recommendations as part of the larger Community and Economic Development Strategy. As a result, this Community and Economic Development Strategy does not introduce any large-scale, transformative actions related to the entrepreneurial ecosystem; instead, it presents a set of small-scale and relatively low-cost improvements to basic small business resources (see Recommendation 2.13).

Actions: The Steering Committee and its subsequent implementation efforts should be coordinated with the College Hill Alliance to support its initiative in every way possible and integrate recommendations into the Community and Economic Development Strategy's priorities and implementation timeline once these recommendations are developed, approved, and made public.

2.13 Improve basic resources for small businesses to complement the College Hill Alliance's implementation of more aggressive and innovative improvements to the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Justification: While the College Hill Alliance's entrepreneurship initiative will result in a comprehensive new strategy to develop the region's entrepreneurial ecosystem, Macon-Bibb County's community and economic development leadership can begin making improvements to basic small business support services and resources in advance of new initiatives identified in the Alliance's new regional plan for entrepreneurship. Some of these basic improvements will be necessary once the City of Macon and Bibb County consolidate in late 2013.

Actions: The following actions are basic improvements that can be implemented without superseding a more comprehensive entrepreneurship strategy being developed by the College Hill Alliance:

- ✓ **Proactively identify all small businesses in Macon-Bibb County:** Utilize databases such as Dun & Bradstreet, ReferenceUSA, and other regional business contact databases to identify all small businesses in Macon-Bibb.
- ✓ **Develop a web-based business assistance request form:** Create a form on government and Macon Economic Development Commission websites to provide small business owners with a place to request assistance.
- ✓ **Develop a web-based and downloadable guide to starting a business in Macon-Bibb:** The new consolidated government will need a comprehensive guide to starting a business that is available online at government and MEDC websites.
- ✓ **Identify and contact new small businesses through business license applications:** Develop processes with business license and permit offices to provide regular updates on new companies locating/opening in Macon-Bibb County. Conduct outreach to all new businesses to ensure that they are aware of available startup support services.
- ✓ **Integrate small businesses into business retention and expansion (BRE) outreach efforts:** Develop an online survey that targets small business owners in Macon-Bibb that seeks to identify their individual concerns and barriers to expansion. Utilize findings to inform ongoing efforts to improve the climate for existing businesses in Macon-Bibb. Efforts should seek to engage small business owners that may not have previously been engaged by the small business support system, including but not limited to the Greater Macon Chamber of Commerce, MEDC, the Small Business Development Center (SBDC), SCORE, and others.
- ✓ **Develop a network of local companies willing to offer free or reduced-cost services to small businesses in Macon-Bibb:** Professional service firms (lawyers, accountants, tax preparers, financial advisors, etc.) could be recruited to serve in a network that offers discounted or no-cost services (up to a limited number of hours) for local entrepreneurs and small business owners. Small incentives could be developed to encourage participation.
- ✓ **Identify barriers to the utilization of SBDC, SCORE, and other existing support services:** Work with existing providers of small business support services to evaluate historical utilization of their services and identify barriers to awareness and utilization of available services.



"When asked to identify what Macon-Bibb needs to do better to attract and retain young professionals, survey respondents...emphasized improvement in **place-based attributes** such as downtown, housing options, and entertainment outlets..."

- Competitive Assessment

3. Places

EXCERPTS FROM THE COMPETITIVE ASSESSMENT

"A community's most attached residents have strong pride in it, a positive outlook on the community's future, and a sense that it is the perfect place for them...According to the 2010 Soul of the Community report from the Knight Foundation and Gallup...just 19.2 percent of (Macon residents) are 'attached'...a majority, 56.2 percent, are 'not attached.' The three most important factors that attract and attach people to a community are: social offerings (such as entertainment venues and places to meet); aesthetics (physical beauty, green spaces, etc.); and openness (the ability for all kinds of people to build networks and thrive)."

"Just 14.2 percent of survey respondents said they visited downtown for shopping and services. The most commonly cited reasons for visiting downtown Macon were dining options (65.4 percent), special events (64.3), cultural amenities (51.0), and work (41.6)."

"...young professionals also highlighted concerns related to social offerings and aesthetics...Input participants of all ages also described numerous "eyesores" and other aesthetic concerns that negatively impact the community. Vacant lots and boarded up buildings that give the impression that **the 'town is closed up and empty – not alive.'** Participants also described a 'dirty' city with pervasive litter and trash, and **highways and gateways into the city that do not 'send a welcoming message.'**"

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

The following statements represent broad objectives that should guide the development and ongoing refinement of tactical recommendations that support the third pillar in our approach to community and economic development: our **Places**.

Develop a vibrant downtown that serves as a place to live, work, visit, and do business.

Beautify our most visible places – our corridors, neighborhoods, and activity centers.

Develop amenities and recreational spaces that are attractive to all ages.

Increase resident and business engagement in community improvement initiatives.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS: SUMMARY

The following strategic recommendations are to be pursued by the *One Macon!* Implementation Committee in support of the aforementioned strategic objectives. Strategic recommendations are not organized by objective as many will support multiple objectives. The following pages provide additional detail on each recommendation, its justification, and the relevant actions.



- 3.1 *Support the process of developing an Urban Core Master Plan.*
- 3.2 *Aid in the implementation of the new Urban Core Master Plan.*
- 3.3 *Advance critical components of the NewTown Macon Strategic Action Plan.*
- 3.4 *Develop a contest to solicit ideas from residents for community improvement initiatives.*
- 3.5 *Expand the City of Macon's "5x5 program" to the entire community and develop a volunteer component that engages residents and connects them to available beautification resources that can help maintain the targeted areas.*
- 3.6 *Promote travel and tourism by developing new tourism product, enhancing existing product, and supporting the implementation of the Macon-Bibb County Convention and Visitors Bureau's (CVB) Vision 2017 Strategic Plan.*
- 3.7 *Develop a corporate-sponsored community beautification competition and a matching neighborhood beautification grant program.*
- 3.8 *Create a Redevelopment Opportunities database and website.*
- 3.9 *Launch a proactive initiative to recruit new retail investment in the community's key activity centers.*
- 3.10 *Work with area colleges and universities to expand the presence of higher education in downtown Macon.*
- 3.11 *Develop a comprehensive volunteerism initiative – Macon's Million Hour Challenge – that encourages and rewards volunteerism in Macon-Bibb.*
- 3.12 *Develop a strategy to acquire blighted or otherwise vacant parcels throughout the community, either returning the land to productive, revenue-generating uses or developing passive neighborhood parks.*
- 3.13 *Establish a Residential Renovation Grant and Loan program to encourage the redevelopment of properties for residential use in downtown Macon.*
- 3.14 *Support the expansion of Ocmulgee National Monument in keeping with the recent boundary study and ultimate pursuit of a change in status to a National Park*

Places: Strategic Recommendations

3.1 Support the process of developing an Urban Core Master Plan.

Justification: Macon-Bibb County's growth and development around its urban core is currently guided in part by a variety of different plans and strategies, including but not limited to the College Hill Corridor Master Plan, the Second Street Master Plan, the NewTown Macon Strategic Action Plan, and the Main Street Macon annual workplans. Each of these planning efforts are focused on specific areas of the community – either a few city blocks or a specific corridor – and are not comprehensively linked by a single plan for the larger downtown or “urban core.” The Macon-Bibb County Urban Development Authority (MBCUDA) has recently solicited proposals from qualified firms to develop a new Urban Core Master Plan to achieve this objective, developing a roadmap to help the community bridge different neighborhoods, property uses, and strategic plans into a single cohesive vision for urban core. The Implementation Committee can and should be actively engaged in the strategic planning process and wholly supportive of its subsequent implementation.

Actions: The Implementation Committee should work with the MBCUDA to identify ways in which it can best support the master planning process, potentially including but not limited to:

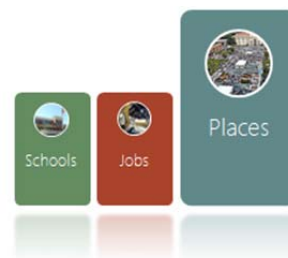
- ✓ Providing strategic guidance to the consultant team as it relates to larger community improvement objectives outlined in the *One Macon!* strategy;
- ✓ Attending and participating in public input sessions such as design charrettes;
- ✓ Helping to publicize and promote the process throughout the community, and;
- ✓ Building support among organizations and institutions that are critical to the master plan's subsequent implementation.

3.2 Aid in the implementation of the new Urban Core Master Plan.

Justification: Macon-Bibb County's growth and development around its urban core is currently guided in part by a variety of different plans and strategies, including but not limited to the College Hill Corridor Master Plan, the Second Street Master Plan, the NewTown Macon Strategic Action Plan, and the Main Street Macon annual workplans. Each of these planning efforts are focused on specific areas of the community – either a few city blocks or a specific corridor – and are not comprehensively linked by a single plan for the larger downtown or “urban core.” The Macon-Bibb County Urban Development Authority has recently solicited proposals from qualified firms to develop a new Urban Core Master Plan to achieve this objective, developing a roadmap to help the community bridge different neighborhoods, property uses, and strategic plans into a single cohesive vision for urban core. The Implementation Committee can and should be actively engaged in the strategic planning process and wholly supportive of its subsequent implementation.

Actions: The Implementation Committee should work with the MBCUDA to identify ways in which it can best support the implementation of the Urban Core Master Plan, potentially including but not limited to:

- ✓ Building community support for the plan's recommendations;
- ✓ Identifying and pursuing necessary funding mechanisms for plan implementation, and;
- ✓ Updating the *One Macon!* strategy to accurately reflect the consensus vision for downtown.



3.3 *Help advance critical components of the NewTown Macon Strategic Action Plan.*

Justification: While this strategy includes a variety of new recommendations that impact downtown Macon and other neighborhoods and activity centers throughout Macon-Bibb County, the NewTown Macon Strategic Action Plan is a very well developed roadmap for critical initiatives that align with many of this strategy's core objectives. If successfully and fully implemented, the NewTown Macon Strategic Action Plan will be a truly transformative piece of Macon's history, with both immediate and long-term impacts on residents, businesses, and visitors. While the NewTown Macon Strategic Action Plan will ultimately be incorporated into a larger Urban Core Master Plan for the entire downtown area (see Recommendations 3.1 and 3.2), it currently contains a strategic focus on a handful of key amenities that were frequently mentioned by residents as among the community's greatest "opportunities" and among the most frequently mentioned items when asked what they would like to see different about the community in 2020.

Actions: Work with representatives from NewTown Macon to identify the ways in which the Steering Committee and its collaborative leadership can most effectively support the timely implementation of the NewTown Macon Strategic Action Plan. While all initiatives have merit, particular attention should be paid to projects that can help catalyze further development and investment. Such priorities include but are by no means limited to:

- ✓ **The Transitional Property Fund:** The Strategic Action Plan proposes the establishment of a fund to help stabilize vacant properties in various states of disrepair through direct purchase and incremental improvements. The goal of the fund is to allow NewTown Macon to serve as a short-term (two year maximum) catalyst for redevelopment before re-introducing the improved properties to the market or transferring title to the Macon-Bibb County Urban Development Authority. The Steering Committee can assist with the identification of priority projects, the identification of potential private partners to support redevelopment efforts, and the perhaps most importantly, the capitalization of the fund.
- ✓ **Business Incentive Fund:** The establishment of a business fund supporting job creation in downtown can help increase daytime population, the viability of other businesses (particularly restaurants and retail) that depend upon daytime traffic, and potentially help incent the development of new (or redevelopment of existing) office space in a market that currently lacks an abundance of high-quality office space and professional services employment.
- ✓ **Capricorn Studios redevelopment and the construction of an adjacent amphitheater:** The addition of a new amenity for community gatherings is consistent with feedback received by input participants that expressed a desire for more outdoor venues for music and events, while redevelopment of these city blocks will also help fill in an area where greater density can and should be encouraged along an already well landscaped and pedestrian-friendly portion of Martin Luther King Junior Boulevard.
- ✓ **Riverfront mixed-use project and the Ocmulgee Heritage Trail-Ocmulgee Blueway:** The Ocmulgee riverfront is likely one of Macon's best kept secrets and underdeveloped assets. Continued trail developments in terms of connectivity and aesthetics should encourage greater use, and will be complemented tremendously by a new mixed-use development adjacent to downtown that will appeal to those that seek waterfront living, dining, and employment. Riverfront developments have proven to be catalytic projects in communities around the country.

In addition to support for the implementation of the existing Strategic Action Plan, the community and NewTown Macon should begin the process of developing a new master plan for downtown Macon, evaluating potential funding sources for plan development, a timeline for issuing a request for proposals from qualified planning firms, and a timeline for completing plan development that aligns with other organization and strategic objectives.

3.4 *Develop a contest to solicit ideas from residents for community improvement initiatives.*

Justification: A community's residents often have an abundance of untapped and underdeveloped ideas for improving the place that they call "home." Such ideas emerged from the hundreds of residents that participated in online surveys, interviews, and focus groups throughout this process, and have made their way into this strategy. However, many other residents that were not engaged in the community input process have tremendous ideas – large and small – that could transform the community. By providing a forum for residents to submit ideas, discuss these ideas, and vote on the ideas submitted, residents can be empowered to facilitate change in their community.

Actions: Develop a web-based system to solicit ideas for community improvement projects – from public art to streetscaping to new amenities – from residents of Macon-Bibb. Consider utilizing a technology such as MindMixer – an online town hall that enables residents to share and vote on ideas – to facilitate the content. Other similar tools include but are not limited to UserVoice and IdeaScale. Once the technology has been adopted, publicize the contest and begin soliciting resident ideas. Paper surveys or public forums could complement online technologies to allow those without computers or internet access to provide input. Establish Citizen Selection Committees to review the various ideas, with committees organized by either geography (neighborhood) or subject area (type of project). Task the committees with developing a short list of the most viable and impactful suggestions. Once the short list has been developed, solicit votes from residents on the various projects and allow the public to select one project from a variety of categories (potentially geography, subject area, or award size). Selected projects could be funded by public-private funds, with local government and an area foundation each providing 1:1 grants up to a certain level to complement monies donated by the public and raised via crowdfunding using a technology such as Kickstarter, Crowdrise, Crowdfunder, or IndieGoGo.

3.5 *Expand the City of Macon's "5x5 program" to the entire community and develop a volunteer component that engages residents and connects them to available beautification resources that can help maintain the targeted areas.*

Justification: The City's 5x5 program is an initiative whereby enhanced city services are targeted to a five block area for five weeks to beautify the community's neighborhoods and support revitalization. Numerous departments are involved in the collaborative effort, including the Mayor's Office, the Police Department, the Fire Department, Inspection and Fees, Engineering, Public Works, Parks & Recreation, Central Services, Economic and Community Development, and Emergency Management. The program already engages residents by soliciting their input on the specific areas that need services, and encouraging their involvement in clean-up efforts. In Ward I, the program helped remove 18,000 pounds of debris and solid waste, paint more than 8,000 feet of curbs and 200 feet of crosswalks, install 52 new signs, and fix potholes and sidewalks that required patching. The program has been a success and other communities have inquired about its implementation.

Actions: Extend the program to encompass Macon-Bibb County following consolidation. Develop and promote complementary programs that encourage volunteerism and provide funding for ongoing beautification and maintenance in areas that receive targeted services to ensure that the 5x5 program has long-term impacts in the areas that it serves. This could include but is not limited to leveraging the establishment of volunteer Action Teams (see Recommendation 3.11) and the development a community beautification competition and complementary matching grant program (see Recommendation 3.7).

3.6 *Promote travel and tourism by developing new tourism product, enhancing existing product, and supporting the implementation of the Macon-Bibb County Convention and Visitors Bureau's (CVB) Vision 2017 Strategic Plan.*

Justification: Travel and tourism is beginning to pick up once again as the country emerges from the Great Recession; families are resuming vacations with greater discretionary spending and meetings and conventions are returning to pre-recession attendance levels. According to the Georgia Department of Economic Development, traveler expenditures in Macon-Bibb County totaled \$311 million in 2012. This level of expenditure supported nearly 3,300 jobs in the community and produced nearly \$8.8 million in local tax revenues. With various cultural and historical assets (museums, theaters, Ocmulgee Heritage Trail/Ocmulgee National Monument, etc.), existing festival (Cherry Blossom Festival, Bragg Jam Arts and Music Festival, Macon Film Festival, etc.) and emerging college sports programs (particularly Mercer University football), key tourism assets have the potential to not only support economic diversification and generate economic impact, but also provide important recreational outlets for existing residents. Community input participants, particularly young professionals, frequently mentioned the desire for “more to do” in Macon-Bibb.

Actions: In partnership with the CVB, identify the ways in which the community can best support the implementation of the Vision 2017 Strategic Plan. Support should align with the “core values” identified in the plan (community pride, empowerment, stewardship, and hospitality) and promote the specific initiatives outlined in the plan. This includes but is not limited to:

- ✓ **Sustainable funding for tourism promotion:** CVBs and other destination marketing organizations (DMOs) are facing significant funding challenges as most budgets are tied to hotel/motel room tax collections – revenues that are highly susceptible to cyclical economic fluctuations, and are occasionally tapped for other uses besides destination marketing. The community can help the CVB identify new public and private sources of revenues to ensure that the community's best resource for tourism promotion remains well-funded and competitive with other DMOs around the state and country.
- ✓ **Assist with the attraction of meetings and conventions:** Economic development practitioners should partner with the CVB to identify professional associations/conferences, corporate meetings, and conventions that align with the interests of target sectors. The business community should help the CVB attract new events by providing referrals for events that may consider Macon a viable and attractive location.
- ✓ **Macon Arts Calendar:** The Macon Arts Calendar was identified by steering committee members as a key resource that needed to be maintained and enhanced in terms of its visibility and usage by both residents and visitors.

- ✓ **Ocmulgee Heritage Trail and the Ocmulgee National Park and Preserve Initiative:** The potential expansion of the Ocmulgee National Monument into the Ocmulgee National Park and Preserve could be a catalytic event for the travel and tourism sector in Macon-Bibb and Middle Georgia. Continued development of the Ocmulgee Heritage Trail is also critical; it supports a variety of community objectives from recreation to health to beautification.
- ✓ **Developing new tourism packages:** As the community's tourism product grows and diversifies, there will be a greater set of offerings that can hopefully support more overnight stays in Macon-Bibb. Ultimately, overnight stays in local hotels are necessary to maximize the economic impact of travel and tourism. The CVB and various organizations managing tourism product should develop new collaborative promotions/packages that seek to keep visitors in town overnight. Out of town visitors to Mercer University football games represent a new audience for such packages.
- ✓ **Expansion of existing events:** Input participants and steering committee members often praised the community's existing events (most notably the Cherry Blossom Festival, Bragg Jam, and the Macon Film Festival, in addition to others) but also felt that these events had the potential to be expanded in either scale or scope to attract a wider audience from outside the region. The community should work with the CVB and event organizers to conduct market research – inclusive of resident and visitor surveying – to evaluate ways in which the economic impact and recreational appeal of existing events can be maximized.
- ✓ **Establish a mini-grant program to encourage the development of new community events, festivals, and gatherings in Macon-Bibb County:** The community could encourage the development of small scale events (similar to Second Sunday or Big Screen Movie Nights) in various neighborhoods and activity centers by providing mini-grants to organizations and associations seeking to develop and host events that open to the public and promote family gathering in Macon-Bibb. Identify an appropriate non-profit entity to manage the grant program. Establish eligibility and evaluation criteria and develop an application. Define award sizes (potentially ranging from \$100 - \$500) and establish a process for post-event evaluation leveraging surveys of event organizers and attendees, and potentially including an estimation of economic impact for much larger events. Begin publicizing the program. Consider implementing the initiative as a pilot program in a targeted area or neighborhood to evaluate use and effectiveness before extending community-wide.

3.7 Develop a corporate-sponsored community beautification competition and a matching neighborhood beautification grant program.

Justification: While residents responding to the online survey and participating in focus groups often praised the natural beauty of certain parts of Macon-Bibb, many more complained that the community was by-and-large unattractive and in need of significant community beautification efforts. The community is fortunate to have an exemplary chapter of Keep America Beautiful – The Keep Macon-Bibb Beautiful Commission – and the support of numerous community foundations and local governments that are constantly supporting revitalization and community beautification initiatives. Better engagement of the business community and various neighborhood/homeowner associations can complement existing efforts.

Actions: Consider establishing a community beautification competition that is supported by a matching grant program:

- ✓ **Competition:** A community beautification competition could challenge businesses and neighborhood associations to “adopt a space” – a park, street, intersection, yard, or other area – for various beautification projects. Businesses (representing their corporate stewardship) and associations could support projects through private monies and employee volunteerism (see Recommendation 3.11), potentially complemented by existing and potential new grant monies. Businesses and associations that elect to participate in the challenge could be recognized with tasteful signage at the location they have adopted. Residents could vote each year on the project(s) that they perceive to have the greatest impact on community aesthetics, with multiple categories to recognize different investment levels in terms of dollars and/or volunteer time. Winning companies and associations could receive larger grant monies to replicate their efforts in subsequent years in other parts of the community.
- ✓ **Grant program:** A small matching grant program could incent and reward neighborhood associations and private businesses to participate in the competition and raise money for specific beautification projects that improve both public and private spaces. Eligible projects could include landscape architecture for public space and parks; planting trees, flowers, and other foliage; installing community benches or other infrastructure in accordance with government plans; or maintaining medians. The program could grant matching funds via some ratio (1:1 or 2:1) based on the money raised by the business or association, and up to a specific level (potentially \$500 or \$1,000). Keep Macon-Bibb Beautiful could help encourage participation in the program and facilitate appropriate and efficient uses of grants. Other grant programs with similar eligible uses are already in place – such as the Knight Neighborhood Challenge grant – but a new grant program would encompass all areas of Macon-Bibb.

BEST PRACTICE: TULSA BEAUTIFICATION FOUNDATION MATCHING GRANT PROGRAM (TULSA, OKLAHOMA)

Established in 2009, the Tulsa Beautification Foundation Matching Grant Program aids neighborhood and homeowners’ associations with funding beautification programs. The program provides a dollar-for-dollar match to locally-raised funds. The program is intended to incentivize local groups to raise money, engage in partnerships with businesses, and encourage a culture of local volunteerism.

In order to be eligible a project must improve or beautify a neighborhood or public space; involve neighborhood and community residents; have long-standing and sustainable benefits; have a plan before work begins; and provide a maintenance plan for upkeep of the project. Further, in addition to locally-raised money, the program allows for 35 percent of the match to be volunteer hours, which are valued at \$16.19 per hour. The program requires projects to be completed within a 90 day timeline.

One of the grants in 2010 was made to the Shadow Ridge Homeowners Association (SHRA). The SHRA received \$2,800 to beautify the entrance to their neighborhood, which included new trees, lighting, and a Memorial Tree to honor neighborhood residents who had passed away.

3.8 Create a Redevelopment Opportunities database and website.

Justification: While the community has been aggressive in its attempts to enforce codes and demolish tax-delinquent, abandoned properties, the community cannot possibly address every property. Meanwhile, there are numerous properties – residential, commercial, and industrial – that are vacant but current on taxes and ideal for redevelopment. The community can encourage redevelopment opportunities by creating a comprehensive, web-based, searchable database of properties that are suitable for redevelopment.

Actions: Utilizing existing real estate databases and information from key partners (governments, utilities, real estate community, etc.) begin developing a comprehensive list of all vacant and blighted properties across Macon-Bibb. Develop a web-based, searchable database that includes detailed information about each property, including but not limited to zoning, future land use, acreage/square footage, photos, traffic counts, and full property descriptions of condition, accessibility, etc. Establish a schedule to ensure that the inventory is maintained and updated regularly (ideally weekly) with new information and sites. The database and website should be specifically positioned to promote redevelopment – as opposed to greenfield development – opportunities and available incentives.

3.9 Launch a proactive initiative to recruit new retail investment in the community's key activity centers.

Justification: Just 14.2 percent of survey respondents said that they visited downtown for shopping and services. More than 87 percent of survey respondents indicated that retail was not walkable or bikeable from their home. Focus groups participants also lamented the relative lack of retail in close proximity to other residential areas and activity centers. The retention of a specialized retail analytics and site selection firm could help improve the availability of certain types of retail and food service establishments to populations in specific submarkets of Macon-Bibb, potentially supporting other objectives such as revitalization.

Actions: Consider hiring a retail analytics and site selection firm to conduct research that evaluates areas of retail leakage and surplus in specific submarkets within Macon-Bibb, and assist with the proactive identification of retailers that are best suited to meet the needs of residents in specific submarkets. There are multiple research firms and consultants that specialize in matching retailers to appropriate markets. This expertise assists private sector clients in the identification of ideal locations for new retail establishments, but also helps assist communities identify specific retailers that may be a strong fit based on a wide variety of retail analytics. The community should consider engaging a specialized retail analytics and site selection firm to help identify specific retail targets for various submarkets and neighborhoods, leveraging analysis that profiles consumer purchases and identifies areas of expenditure leakage, then matches retailers to areas based on these attributes.

3.10 Work with area colleges and universities to expand the presence of higher education in downtown Macon.

Justification: Many communities benefit greatly from the presence of higher education in their downtowns, even when this presence is not an entire campus but simply one or two buildings housing a few programs. Downtown Macon is already home to the Mercer University's Walter F. George School of Law and Georgia College's Macon Graduate Center. An expanded presence of higher education from

areas institutions, both in terms of instructional space and residential living, could have significant impact on the vibrancy of downtown. Such a presence could bring new employment and student populations to the area, potentially increasing demand for residential housing (such as loft development) as well as increased demand for services, retail, dining, and entertainment options.

Actions: Reach out to area colleges and universities – public and private – to introduce the concept and make the case for the development of new instructional and/or residential space in downtown. Utilizing property information maintained by NewTown Macon, identify a few priority buildings and sites that could be strong matches for either redevelopment or new construction. Seek commitments from one or more institutions to evaluate downtown as a location for future expansion, understanding that such physical expansion is relatively infrequent. Study other communities that have successfully attracted a higher education presence to their downtowns, potentially taking one or more inter-city visits.

BEST PRACTICE: RIVERPARK CAMPUS, COLUMBUS STATE UNIVERSITY (COLUMBUS, GEORGIA)

Columbus State University in Columbus, Georgia is home to nearly 7,000 undergraduate students. The University's main campus is located roughly six miles from Downtown Columbus, but the University has undoubtedly been the greatest catalyst for downtown redevelopment in Columbus in recent decades. Columbus State intended to develop new facilities to support its performing arts program, and realized that Downtown Columbus - outside of its main campus - could be a potential location for new facilities. After much planning, the University developed its RiverPark campus in Downtown Columbus and relocated the University's Art, Music, Theatre, and Communications Departments. The University acquired vacant space in Downtown Columbus and redeveloped much of the area – often preserving existing façades – to include student apartments for up to 400 students. Investments also included a collaborative effort to develop the city's RiverCenter for the Performing Arts, which is home to the University's Music Department. Downtown business has thrived with many new coffee shops, bookstores, restaurants, and nightlife opening and flourishing, in part due to the influx of college students. The University operates a shuttle between the main campus and its RiverPark campus.

3.11 Develop a comprehensive volunteerism initiative – Macon's Million Hour Challenge – that encourages and rewards volunteerism in Macon-Bibb.

Justification: Volunteerism is an effective way to not only increase community attachment and pride, but also can be a useful vehicle to promote interaction between and exposure to different parts of the community and build community cohesion through collaborative problem-solving. Building volunteer capacity within Macon-Bibb can support a variety of community initiatives. A comprehensive volunteerism initiative that challenges and rewards every adult resident to volunteer at least eight hours each year – for a cumulative one million volunteer hours – could help achieve the objective of community cohesion and pride while also supporting a diverse array of community improvement initiatives.

Actions: Develop a comprehensive volunteerism initiative that is inclusive of the following components:

- ✓ **Macon's Million Hour Challenge:** Working with relevant partners such as Volunteer Macon, the United Way of Central Georgia, and other non-profits, aggressively publicize a challenge to all adult residents to volunteer at least eight hours each year within the community.

- ✓ **Macon's Million Hour Days:** Designate one weekend day each quarter in which residents and businesses are encouraged to set aside time for volunteerism.
- ✓ **Youth Action Teams:** Volunteers of America and the Major League Baseball Players Trust came together in 2003 to encourage high school students to become more involved in their communities. Schools work with interested students to establish Youth Action Teams, led by a Team Captain, to carry out volunteer projects. Teams receive support and materials from Volunteers of America. Bibb County Schools and area private schools should consider establishing Youth Action Teams in each of their high schools.
- ✓ **Community Action Teams:** Challenge local organizations (businesses, homeowner and neighborhood associations, places of worship, student organizations, etc.) to form Community Action Teams and seek commitments from each team member to volunteer at least eight hours each year, fulfilling their portion of the Macon Million Hour Challenge.
- ✓ **Rewards and Recognition:** The community should develop a variety of methods to recognize and reward volunteerism, potentially including but not limited to:
 - Work with area institutions of higher education to establish scholarships for one or more high school students that exhibits outstanding volunteer leadership in Macon-Bibb via Youth Action Teams or other methods of community involvement.
 - Recognize organizations whose employees make outstanding contributions to the community via volunteerism by organizing Community Appreciation events that could include food, live music, and takeaways provided by corporate and community sponsors.
 - Develop a scholarship program, potentially inclusive of a stipend to cover child care and other expenses, for low-income parents seeking continuing education that make outstanding contributions to the community via volunteerism.
 - Develop Volunteer Appreciation Days that coincide with the Macon's Million Hour Days. Seek commitments from area businesses to offer specialized discounts or promotions of some form to all residents on Volunteer Appreciation Days to support participation in the challenge. Special community events could also be organized to show appreciation.
- ✓ **Soliciting New Volunteer Opportunities:** Work with relevant partners to solicit new volunteer opportunities from organizations throughout the community, helping to further populate Volunteer Macon's HandsOnMacon web-based directory of volunteer opportunities.

3.12 Develop a strategy to acquire blighted or otherwise vacant parcels throughout the community land either returning the land to productive, revenue-generating uses or developing passive neighborhood parks.

Justification: When asked to identify specific redevelopment and revitalization needs in neighborhoods throughout the community, survey respondents frequently mentioned the development of more parks and greenspace. More than two-thirds of all survey respondents indicated that there was not a public park within a reasonable walking or biking distance from their home. The Macon City Council recently approved a resolution to allow residents and organizations to plant and maintain community gardens on

vacant public properties. A natural extension of this effort as well as initiatives to acquire and demolish tax delinquent properties would be to deliberately convert certain parcels – or portions of acquired parcels – to public use for small, passive parks. Parks are valuable pieces of the community fabric, elevating nearby property values, serving as a gathering place for residents to socialize, and providing valuable environmental and health benefits. They also contribute to a sense of place that supports community attachment and neighborhood pride among residents. When passive parks are not consistent with neighborhood needs or vision, properties should be reused for tax revenue-generating purposes that are consistent with adjacent uses and existing community or neighborhood plans.

Actions: Evaluate existing household access to public parks via walk-time and drive-time radii and determine areas of the community that should be prioritized for passive park development. Ensure consistency with existing future comprehensive plans, and specific parks and recreation development plans. Acquire parcels as available and begin conversions to greenspace. Seek community involvement in the maintenance and beautification of passive parks (see Recommendations 3.7 and 3.11).

3.13 Establish a Residential Renovation Grant and Loan program to encourage the redevelopment of properties for residential use in downtown Macon.

Justification: Across the country, many communities are seeing a repopulation of their urban cores driven by renewed interest in living in mixed-use, walkable, center cities. NewTown Macon and various partners have worked diligently to encourage loft development in downtown to take advantage of this trend, increase the residential population in downtown, and help build critical mass for revitalization efforts. However, the costs associated with renovating space in downtown may be driving away potential investors, particularly individuals that may be interested in redeveloping a single unit. A Residential Renovation Grant program could help incent such activity and operate in a similar fashion to more common façade grant programs that target commercial spaces. If successful, the program could accelerate the rate of residential redevelopment, improve affordability of downtown living for individuals at all income levels, and elevate property values and associated tax revenues.

Actions: Evaluate the viability of establishing a Residential Renovation Grant that provides grants, potentially in addition to low interest loans, to support renovations and modernizations to the interior and exterior of existing buildings in downtown Macon. Such a program could potentially include the following elements and eligibility criteria:

- ✓ Provide grants requiring a property owner match at some ratio (2:1 or 3:1 owner investment to grant amount) for certain eligible projects (plumbing, electrical work, air conditioning, structural improvements, façade improvements, etc.) up to a certain level (\$2,500, \$5,000, \$10,000 etc.).
- ✓ Consider restricting eligibility for grants to a certain household income threshold or creating a separate grant program specifically targeting low-income households. Such a program would be an eligible use for federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Home Repair funds.
- ✓ Consider establishing a complementary low-interest loan program that targets households and/or developers interested in making large-scale renovations to one or multiple units in downtown.

3.14 Support the expansion of Ocmulgee National Monument in keeping with the recent boundary study and ultimate pursuit of a change in status to a National Park

Justification: The Ocmulgee National Monument is already a prime tourist attraction in the middle Georgia community. Expanding the venue and ultimately achieving National Park status would give middle Georgia the **only** National Park in the State of Georgia further expanding the number of tourists attracted by the site. Development of a national level tourist site will directly grow one of Macon-Bibb's High Impact sectors - tourism – adding to hospitality jobs, community bed-tax revenues, and increased local spending by outside visitors.

Actions: Support the efforts of the Ocmulgee National Park & Preserve Initiative including:

- ✓ Advocating for the expansion of the existing monument site to include all property in the new boundary study.
- ✓ Lobby for expansion of the existing National Monument to be upgraded to National Park status.

CONCLUSION

The research phase of this process has demonstrated that Macon-Bibb has a number of valuable assets – assets that are envied by many communities large and small – but the ability of these assets to support community vitality and economic development is inhibited by a set of very serious challenges. That being said, it is important to emphasize that Macon-Bibb is not alone; numerous communities across the South have encountered similar challenges of racial tension, poor student outcomes, pervasive poverty, and economic stagnation. Many have succeeded in addressing these challenges and have emerged as stronger, more vibrant, and highly competitive communities. While some have confronted discord and distrust head on, others have found harmony through collaborative efforts to combat other issues of common interest and importance, just as this strategy proposes in the creation of quality **schools** to educate our youth, abundant **jobs** that match the skills of our residents, and vibrant **places** that are attractive to diverse populations.



Macon-Bibb can join these communities by studying the best practices included in this Strategy, and by charting its own course in the implementation of innovative new programs. That is precisely what this process is intended to support; the **collaborative leadership** embodied in the Steering Committee, coupled with **engaged residents**, can and should propel Macon-Bibb toward this end.