

**MARKET ST**



**LIVE WORK GROW**

730 PEACHTREE STREET SUITE 540 ATLANTA GEORGIA 30308 404 880-7242 FAX 404 880-7246

## **LIVE WORK GROW**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

As the pace of change in Cabarrus continues to accelerate, the Cabarrus Regional Chamber of Commerce is facing a series of decisions that will shape its future for years to come. The Chamber has made great progress over the last few years and stabilized its position as the “go to” organization in the County. Even though the loss of long time quality jobs has hit the community hard in 2007, the opportunities created by the North Carolina Research Campus hold transformational possibilities. Thus, the challenge for the Chamber is to evolve itself into the organization that the community will need to best leverage these opportunities as the future unfolds. Because of the Chamber’s recent success and the speed of change taking place in the County, there is no time to waste. External pressures and new opportunities will require greater capacity and program enhancement at the Chamber.

The Chamber’s Strategic Planning Work Group has worked closely with *Market Street Services* to develop these new directions. The research provided to the Work Group was an *Organizational Assessment*, which included an analysis of the Chamber’s structure and programming compared to other best practice chambers, as well as a SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) that identifies the key issues that need to be addressed.

This *Strategic Plan* is a starting point for decisions by the Chamber Board to be considered at the upcoming annual retreat. It provides a discussion of the current vision and mission statements, organizational changes, new or enhanced programs, benchmarks and performance measures, and guidelines for implementation. The purpose is to establish a clear framework and action steps for the Chamber's leadership and operations.

### **Strategic Planning Work Group**

*Market Street* acknowledges and appreciates the active participation of the Strategic Planning Work Group in guiding this process:

- Garth Alston, Philip Morris USA
- Jeff Austin, The Club at Irish Creek
- Tim Foley, Rowan-Cabarrus Community College
- Catherine Hicks, Charlotte Research Institute, UNC Charlotte
- Diane Honeycutt, Team Honeycutt, Allen Tate Realtors
- Sam Leder, Potter & Company, P.A.
- Carol Lovin, Carolinas HealthCare System

## COMMUNITY CONTEXT

The Cabarrus County community is continuing its transition to a more knowledge-based economy. The transition is a result of a number of significant local and regional impacts. The most prominent developments and trends that are affecting the local community and region include:

- Development of the **North Carolina Research Campus**, resulting in growth in population, jobs, and demand for local infrastructure. The Research Campus will bring fundamental changes to the underlying economy; the people it will bring will include different types of residents than are currently in the community.
- Outward **growth of the Charlotte metro area** along the I-85 corridor. With UNC-Charlotte's new research campus and plans to build light rail and bus rapid transit service outside of I-485, growth from Charlotte will continue to extend into Cabarrus County. Already, interest in higher-end housing in Cabarrus is growing.
- Strength of **motorsports and tourism** sectors. The combination of Concord Mills and Lowe's Motor Speedway brings large numbers of visitors to the area. The growing presence of racing teams and other motorsports businesses helps strengthen and diversify the local economy.

The changes that these developments and trends will bring are both challenging and exciting for the Cabarrus County area. In 2007, a number of events and announcements also have significant impacts on the local economy:

- NorthEast Medical Center's merger with Carolinas HealthCare System
- Phillip Morris' announcement to close its Concord facility in three years, resulting in a loss of 2,500 jobs
- Windstream's buyout of CT Communications, resulting in a loss of 150 jobs
- Great Wolf Lodge waterpark/resort's announced location in Concord
- Progress with the Research Campus
  - \$35 million M.U.R.D.O.C.K. study through Duke
  - County and City of Kannapolis agreement on TIF bonds
  - Research Campus new tenants – Red Hat, Biomarker Group, etc.

In the fall of 2006, *Market Street* completed an *Impact Analysis* and *SWOT Analysis* of anticipated effects of the North Carolina Research Campus. Just this development alone is expected to attract about 26,000 new residents and 13,000 jobs to Cabarrus County by 2032. In order to prepare for this growth, the community must focus on the following key issues:

- Improving K-12 education and preparing the workforce for new job opportunities
- Creating an entrepreneurial culture and the services to support new firms
- Preparing for growth and improving quality of life in terms of infrastructure, amenities, and government services

- Embracing the diversity of the new residents who will come to the community to work

The community is expected to add many jobs and new residents; the key will be managing this growth and capitalizing on opportunities. Keeping ahead of growth in terms of roads, schools, water and sewer infrastructure, and housing options are investments that need to be planned well in advance. The Research Campus and the outward growth of Charlotte are going to bring new types of residents, many of whom will be educated, diverse, and seek top quality schools for their children. To take full advantage of developing opportunities, the Cabarrus County community must be prepared to welcome these new residents and meet their needs.

Such community changes mean great opportunities for the Cabarrus Regional Chamber, in terms of bringing new and current community members together, shaping dialogue, and influencing public policy.

## REVIEW OF KEY FINDINGS

The *Organizational Assessment* identified the Cabarrus Regional Chamber's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, based on the research conducted (stakeholder input and comparison to other chambers). Strengths and weaknesses refer to the characteristics of the organization itself (internal factors), while opportunities and threats identify external factors that can impact the organization. This analysis helps clarify the key issues that need to be addressed in the Chamber's *Strategic Plan*.

### Strengths

The Chamber is doing a good or excellent job in the following areas:

- Proactive and aggressive approach to carrying out its mission
- Community leadership, business advocacy, public policy, membership growth, volunteer/membership participation, and member services
  - Networking events (particularly Business Before/After Hours), Leadership Cabarrus, Business Councils, Business Showcase, economic development, and public policy provide greatest value to members
  - Involvement in public policy issues, identifying the business issues that matter, and seeking dialogue and partnerships to address these issues
- Communicating information (especially to members), connecting people and businesses, and being a community leader
- Leadership development opportunities for members
  - Although need to bring in more diversity and engage Leadership Cabarrus graduates
- Quality of staff – both John Cox's leadership and the responsiveness of the rest of the staff
- Ability of Chamber, Convention and Visitor's Bureau (CVB), and Economic Development Corporation (EDC) to work together

### Weaknesses

The Chamber should seek to improve or enhance the following areas:

- Staff capacity/size
  - Potential need for "number two" person, and/or potential for more staff for governmental affairs
  - Potential need for more workforce development and education staff, and membership/marketing staff
- Potential to more effectively use the Chamber Foundation to raise private dollars for community initiatives

- Potential to increase membership base and revenue from membership dues and programs/services
- Potential to expand program offerings to better serve members and the community
  - Greater focus on education and workforce development issues and activities
  - Greater focus on minority and women-owned business development
  - Potential for lead-generation programs
  - Networking opportunities for specific groups, such as young professionals or biotechnology-oriented businesses
  - Expansion of types of offerings within the Leadership Cabarrus program
  - Member-to-member mentoring
  - Greater awareness of international trade issues and opportunities
  - More formalized government affairs programs
- Potential to have a stronger impact on public policy, especially in terms of “grooming” politicians and encouraging individuals to run for public office

### **Opportunities**

The following trends or situations present opportunities that the Chamber can capitalize on:

- The Chamber has the confidence/trust of the business community and has their backing to take a significant role in community issues
- The growth of Cabarrus County and the development of the Research Campus will bring new businesses, new jobs, and many opportunities for the Chamber to 1) attract new members and provide improved services, 2) influence the public policies and government actions taken to manage and prepare for this growth, and 3) position itself as a community leader and clear business advocate
- The Research Campus also brings the opportunity for the Cabarrus County area to establish itself as a hotbed for entrepreneurship – and the networks and resources to support such activity
- The Chamber is well-positioned to be the leader for improvements in education and workforce development

### **Threats**

The following trends or situations present a potential threat to the ongoing success of the Chamber:

- The success of the Chamber is largely dependent on one individual (John Cox)
- The larger community is not always aware of what issues the Chamber is working on to improve the business climate and quality of life. Sometimes smaller members are also not aware of the Chamber’s efforts in these areas

- Cabarrus County has few large employers of the type that often help lead and finance key Chamber and economic development activities in other similar-sized communities
- The growth of Cabarrus County and the development of the Research Campus bring to the community significant challenges that have long term consequences if not handled well. Key issues include improving K-12 education, improving the quality of the local workforce, managing growth in an attractive and sustainable way, and creating a culture that welcomes newcomers and their diversity
- Newcomers may not automatically be aware of or interested in Chamber membership, even though the work that the Chamber does is likely to benefit them

## **VISION AND MISSION STATEMENTS**

Vision and mission statements are lasting representations of what an organization strives to be and what its purpose for existence is. These statements should withstand changes in the organization's leadership, staff, and membership. They should provide a clear picture of what the organization is about to people who are new to the organization or community. While day-to-day operations and strategies may change over time, the vision and mission statements should serve as beacons around which the organization functions. However, organizations should review their vision and mission statements periodically to make sure they are still appropriate.

A vision statement defines what an organization is striving to be. It looks to the future and is idealistic, inspiring, and motivating. A mission statement defines the purpose of an organization – why it exists and what it does.

### **Review of Current Vision and Mission Statements**

The following are the Cabarrus Regional Chamber's current vision and mission statements.

**VISION:** The Cabarrus Regional Chamber will be known for its support of business and its leadership in improving the quality of life in the Cabarrus region by its work with businesses and governmental entities to solve critical issues.

**MISSION:** Actively serving members as an advocate, resource and catalyst for business success.

*Market Street's* assessment of the Cabarrus Regional Chamber's vision statement is that, while it mentions many of the key characteristics it strives to be, it is not particularly inspirational or motivational. The key characteristics that the vision statement mentions are: leadership, support of business, quality of life, and working with businesses and governmental entities. All these are important and true, but the vision statement seems to lack a loftier "big picture" element that encompasses the

local economy and community. The vision statement could also be stronger by using words that are more powerful.

A few Work Group members expressed similar concerns:

- “We need something more compelling and impactful such as the examples you have included there.”
- “Personally, my thoughts on our future Chamber should include words such as Leader, Leadership, Trusted, Respected, Vision, Voice of Business, Partner, Partnership, Information Central, Ideals, Values, Direction, Investment, Committed, Dedicated, Educated, Advocate and Conduit, just to name a few.”

The Chamber’s mission statement lacks specificity and does not emphasize many of the core functions and roles the Chamber is involved with, such as leadership and economic development.

Work Group comments regarding the mission statement included:

- “Our mission/vision is certainly the most cryptic I’ve ever encountered. I think we need more action language there and more detail about what we do/are doing... Economic Development and advocacy need to be highlighted, preparing for future economy needs to be there, helping the future develop in Cabarrus County or something, etc.”
- “The mission is too narrow and not inclusive – the Chamber does a lot more than that.”

The Chamber’s vision and mission statement need to be reworked. They are limiting and lack the breadth and depth needed to reflect the true impact that the Chamber has on the community. Based on the input received and review of statements from other chambers of commerce, *Market Street* suggests the following revisions:

**VISION:** The Cabarrus Regional Chamber is to become a community leader in positive change, while fostering prosperity and building a stronger economic future. As the trusted voice for all Cabarrus County businesses, it works with education, government, and non-profits to address the region’s current and future needs.

**MISSION:** To actively serve members as a trusted advocate, an excellent resource, and proactive catalyst for quality business and community service through economic development, public policy, and membership services.

The core values that direct the work of this Chamber are:

- Integrity
- Inclusiveness
- Excellence
- Leadership

## CABARRUS REGIONAL CHAMBER STRATEGIC PLAN

This *Strategic Plan* for the Cabarrus Regional Chamber is meant to be a high-level evaluation and realignment of the Chamber's organizational and functional areas over the next few years. It considers big-picture issues and sets the framework for the directions that the Chamber needs to take. This *Strategic Plan* is not meant to replace the Chamber's annual business plan; the annual plan is far more detailed in terms of specific activities that the Chamber is involved with. Rather, this *Strategic Plan* serves as the basis on which an annual plan should be developed.

### FOCUS AREAS AND GOALS

From 2003 to 2005, the Chamber's annual business plans were organized around three areas: 1) business and community development, 2) executive<sup>1</sup>, and 3) membership and marketing. The Chamber's 2006 business plan shifted its organization around four primary areas: economic development, membership services, public policy, and workforce development.

The Chamber has made significant progress in improving its finances and has continually strengthened its role in the community. *Market Street* believes that the focus areas for the Cabarrus Regional Chamber going forward should be the following slight modification from the 2006 business plan: economic development, public policy, and membership services. These are the areas where the Chamber can have the greatest impact for its members and the community. *Market Street* has included workforce development as part of the economic development focus area rather than a separate one. *Market Street* recommends the following goals for each focus area to guide subsequent operational activities.

#### Economic Development

- Strengthen and diversify the local economy
- Foster entrepreneurial culture and small business growth
- Build a quality workforce

#### Public Policy

- Improve the business climate
- Ensure a strong quality of life
- Prepare for growth

#### Membership Services

- Create value for members (facilitate business growth and promote relationships)

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<sup>1</sup> The executive focus area included work groups related to strategic development, finance, public policy, leadership, transportation, and workforce development.

- Expand and diversify membership base
- Develop community leaders

*Market Street* believes that the Chamber's Board of Directors will need to determine the degree to which the Chamber wants to be involved in education and workforce development. At the Chamber Board Retreat, the Board decided that workforce development should be part of the economic development focus area rather than part of public policy. In previous years, the Chamber had a Workforce Development Committee that brought together education and business leaders to address workforce issues. More recently, the Chamber determined that this committee overlapped with work that other groups (such as the Centralina Workforce Investment Board) were doing, and the Chamber's workforce committee has essentially been disbanded.

With the North Carolina Research Campus and the closing and layoffs of a few major employers, education and workforce development are critical issues for Cabarrus County going forward. Once the *Cabarrus and Rowan County Regional Workforce Development and Education Action Plan* is complete, the Chamber will need to determine the level of programming needed to serve the community.

## **PROGRAMS AND SERVICES**

The Chamber's programs and services should be aligned with the three focus areas. The following sections provide recommendations for each focus area to enhance existing programs and services, or to add new ones. There are rarely hard and fast lines between the focus areas; thus, many of the Chamber's activities can affect more than one focus area.

### **Economic Development**

The Cabarrus Economic Development Corporation is the primary entity responsible for economic development in Cabarrus County. The EDC staff share the same office, as well as the same President and CEO, with the Chamber. The two organizations are closely linked. The EDC's role is to work with current and prospective businesses; the Chamber supports the EDC through public relations and communications efforts, and working with local government on business climate and public policy issues. *Market Street* has observed that the Chamber/EDC model has been very successful for many other communities as well. Both public and private-sector participation in economic development is needed, and the Chamber/EDC partnership allows for more to be accomplished jointly than as completely separated organizations. In fact, in some communities, the EDC Board is essentially a task force or committee of the Chamber.

The Economic Development section of the Chamber's 2006 business plan includes the following primary activities:

- Business Advocacy – Small business development resources, including website
- Business Dialogue – Forums for members to discuss business issues and topics
- Business Showcase – Annual event to promote member businesses
- Small Business of the Year Award – Recognition of member businesses
- CEO Roundtable – Meets about twice a year
- Industry Councils – Motorsports Council; a Hospitality Council recently launched

A few of the events and activities could also fall under the Membership Services focus area, because they primarily benefit Chamber members. CEO roundtables and industry councils are important for raising economic development and business climate issues, and they also help support existing business clusters in the region. *Market Street* sees the value of the Chamber in its economic development involvement in two primary areas: 1) the “behind-the-scenes” work of relationship building and communications efforts, and 2) leading the implementation of the *Small Business and Entrepreneurial Development Action Plan*.

The relationship-building and communications work is very important in terms of positioning the Chamber in the middle of local economic development activity. This is made possible by the close working relationship between the Chamber and the EDC, as well as the fact that John Cox leads both groups.

The close working relationships of the Chamber, CVB, and EDC enhance the strength of the community’s economic development program. For example, the Hospitality Industry Council has been launched with the participation and coordination of all three organizations. The ability of the three organizations to work together effectively puts the community far ahead of many similar-sized communities that have more fractured and disparate economic development entities. Continued collaboration among the organizations will be crucial for a comprehensive approach to economic development as the local economy changes.

The economic growth and opportunity areas for Cabarrus County include the North Carolina Research Campus as an anchor on one end of the County and Concord Mills and the Lowe’s Motor Speedway on the other end. Local economic development groups, government officials, and others must recognize the value of existing businesses and industries in Cabarrus County. At the same time, small business and entrepreneurship represent a strong source of growth for the community.

Up until now, entrepreneurial activity in the community has been fairly limited. The North Carolina Research Campus is expected to bring many opportunities for small business start-ups and attract biotech-related entrepreneurs. Entrepreneur and small business development needs to be a major part of the economic development

activities of the community. The recently completed *Small Business and Entrepreneurial Development Action Plan* presents a framework for creating a strong and coordinated entrepreneur support system and for developing a culture of entrepreneurship. It recommends the creation of the Cabarrus-Rowan Area Entrepreneurial Council to serve as a “go-to” resource for small businesses and entrepreneurs in the region. The Council will work with key partners to cover six service areas:

- Assistance – Provide answers and referrals
- Education – Refer entrepreneurs to available instruction
- Capital Formation – Facilitate access to capital
- Networking – Strengthen networks and mentoring relationships
- Youth – Build a pipeline of entrepreneurial talent
- Culture – Foster an environment that values entrepreneurship

The Cabarrus Regional Chamber will need to play a lead role in the creation of the Entrepreneurial Council. (In funding the *Small Business and Entrepreneurial Development Action Plan* through the EDC, it has already taken an important first step.) There are many start-up activities, and implementation will require working with other partners, such as the Rowan Chamber, Rowan-Cabarrus Community College, and the Small Business and Technology Development Center. The work will involve communicating the importance of entrepreneur and small business development, identifying and developing sources of funding for the Council, and assisting with organizational tasks. Entrepreneur and small business development will be a key component in maximizing the impact of the North Carolina Research Campus investment; it is too important of an opportunity for the Cabarrus Regional Chamber not to take a lead role.

Although workforce development has been considered one of the Chamber’s focal areas, its current involvement is rather limited. The Chamber’s role in workforce development has been mostly that of a facilitator, linking businesses to the education and training resources available, and maintaining relationships with local education institutions. The Chamber does very little programming in terms of training and K-12 initiatives.

However, education and workforce development were identified as major issues that need to be addressed as the community prepares for the North Carolina Research Campus. Concerns include the quality of the K-12 systems, preparation of the current workforce for higher-skilled jobs, and the need to create an environment that attracts highly educated professionals and entrepreneurs.

*Market Street* believes that the Cabarrus Regional Chamber will need to place greater emphasis on workforce development, particularly given the structural changes in the local economy from manufacturing towards an economy that is more knowledge-based. Many other chambers across the country are much more involved in education

and workforce development. For example, the Northern Kentucky Chamber (as discussed in the *Organizational Assessment*) has separate 501(c)3 entities to raise funding and receive grants for education and workforce initiatives. Its K-12 activities include workshops on financial literacy, work ethic programs, and a science/computing competition. Its workforce programs include an annual Health Care Summit, human resources workforce forums, job fairs, and awards to college seniors.

The Chamber is a partner in pursuing the creation of a *Cabarrus and Rowan County Regional Workforce Development and Education Action Plan* to address workforce and education needs in preparation for the Research Campus. The Chamber will need to take an active role in the implementation of such a plan. Additional staffing and resources will be required to expand the Chamber's workforce and education programming.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- ✓ Continue developing relationships with businesses and others key partners in the region, including those associated with the North Carolina Research Campus
- ✓ Continue to increase collaboration and strengthen relationships among the Chamber, CVB, and EDC.
  - Identify additional joint initiatives that maximize resources and the effectiveness of the organizations
- ✓ Play a lead role in the establishment of the Entrepreneurial Council and provide guidance and assistance for start-up activities
- ✓ Move events-type activities to be under the purview of Membership Services
- ✓ Proceed with the creation and implementation of the *Cabarrus and Rowan County Regional Workforce Development and Education Action Plan*.
  - Add staff capacity and other resources as needed.

### **Public Policy**

Many members see the real value of the Chamber as being its public policy work. The Chamber's focus has been on developing leaders, strengthening relationships with elected officials, and supporting policies that benefit members and the local/regional economy. The Chamber has a number of organized activities that support its public policy work:

- Legislative Breakfast – meet with local officials
- State of the Region Summit – annual economic outlook
- Governmental Affairs Committee – advises on policy recommendations and Chamber positions, coordinate meeting with elected officials
- Transportation and Land Use Committee – advises on policy for transportation and planning issues, meets with key leaders and partners
- Candidates' Forum – forum for candidates to present positions

- U.S. Chamber – Grass Roots Network; Federation Partnership; attendance at annual Governmental Affairs Conference; CEO’s participation in Committee of 100
- N.C. Chamber – growing relationship as a result of their reorganization

The Chamber also publishes an annual Legislative Agenda that states its policy positions at the local, state, and federal levels on various key issues. The 2007 Legislative Agenda included standing policy positions related to economic development, education, environment (air and water quality), health care, and transportation. It also addressed specific actions for the North Carolina General Assembly to take regarding annexation, interbasin water transfer, transportation, and education.

An important component of the Chamber’s public policy focus is the less formalized work of building relationships and strengthening communications with elected officials, the media, and other key stakeholders. This is the “behind-the-scenes” work that is less tangible and less obvious to members, but is still a critical part of the Chamber’s public policy efforts. John Cox is the primary staff person at the Chamber to fill this role, with the support of the Governmental Affairs Committee.

The North Carolina Research Campus and other growth in Cabarrus County will put strains on local and regional infrastructure. Chamber members raised concerns about the effect of this growth on the quality and capacity of the school systems, transportation infrastructure, water, and greenspace. The way in which these issues are addressed has long-term implications and affects the quality of life and business climate in the community. Growth is therefore a critical area where the Chamber can (and needs to) influence public policy decisions. It has already been involved with such issues, with the annual Legislative Agenda and through meetings and events with elected officials. Specifically, the Chamber can take a leadership role in working on the issues of managing growth, paying for growth, and educating the public about what to expect.

Leadership Cabarrus is the Chamber’s formalized leadership development program for members. Many input participants agreed that it is a good program, but a few pointed out that graduates need to be immediately engaged afterwards rather than be allowed to walk away. Also, the program is open only to Chamber members. Although this is common in many chambers of commerce, opening it up to non-members, including non-profit, education, and government organizations, is a way to broaden the participation and potentially bring in more revenue. As businesses and people come for the North Carolina Research Campus, they may not be aware of or interested in Chamber membership. But it is still important to get them engaged in the community. Many leadership development programs in other communities have additional tracks for youth and alumni; these are other ways to broaden participation.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- ✓ Continue to play a proactive role in public policy, keeping in line with the Chamber's mission and vision
- ✓ Communicate to the public the importance of planning for and managing growth, and how it will affect the community
  - As appropriate, coordinate these messages with those from local governments and other entities
- ✓ Continue to work with local government entities to make policy changes that prepare for growth
  - Advocate for long-range thinking that promotes sustainable growth and improves quality of life
- ✓ Emphasize the importance of economic diversity to the health of the local economy, including a need for balance between residential and business development
- ✓ Add a candidate development component to the Governmental Affairs Committee to help identify and encourage business people to run for public office
- ✓ Open Leadership Cabarrus to non-Chamber members and seek broader participation
  - Consider offering scholarships to attract applicants to whom cost is a barrier
- ✓ Consider expanding the types of offerings within Leadership Cabarrus to include youth and a more formalized alumni program
- ✓ Develop opportunities for Leadership Cabarrus graduates to enter immediately into volunteer activities upon completing the program

**Membership Services**

Membership services include a broad range of activities that are meant to provide direct benefits to Chamber members and their businesses. While many members believe the value of the Chamber is in the “big picture” work of public policy and economic development, there are other members who want to see a more immediate return on their membership investment. Chamber membership to some people is more about opportunities to grow their businesses, get information and advice about business operations, and to find people to provide professional and other services, and less about the overall health of the economy.

The Chamber holds many events each year that provide opportunities for members to network with each other. The Ambassadors Council helps to keep the leadership informed about membership issues and is another avenue for members to get involved. In addition, the Chamber provides opportunities for exposure through its marketing materials and publications. The Chamber also has a number of initiatives focused on membership retention and recruitment.

The Chamber has eight local Business Councils that meet quarterly. Each meeting includes a networking component as well as a topic for presentation, such as customer service, permitting, candidates for elected office, and tax increment financing. Stakeholder input on the effectiveness of the Business Councils was mixed. While several participants noted that the Business Councils were valuable to them, interviews with Chamber leadership and staff during the Customized Chamber Program's 2006 review of the Cabarrus Regional Chamber raised some concerns. These were related to low turnout, poor organization, loose structure, and the need for community-improvement initiatives (not just networking). The purpose and efficacy of the Business Councils should be re-examined. It may be that a community the size of Cabarrus County may not need to have Business Councils.<sup>2</sup>

The Cabarrus Regional Chamber needs to continually show its value to small businesses, an issue that is common to many chambers. While this issue primarily concerns effective communication about what the Chamber does behind the scenes, it is still important to identify new program offerings that better serve small businesses. Other chambers offer lead generation programs, networks for specific types of businesses, and member-to-member mentoring. These are additional ways to engage members and may generate additional revenue.

While Leadership Cabarrus is a structured program, there are many opportunities for leadership development within the Chamber itself. Serving on committees or in other volunteer capacities allow members to have a better understanding of the work that the Chamber is doing and to establish relationships with other members. A few input participants noted that members who hold leadership roles are viewed in high regard and have subtle community influence.

More generally, the Chamber should seek to expand and diversify its membership base as the community grows and becomes more diverse. It will need to create additional sources of revenue as it cannot depend on major employers in the community. The influx of new people to the North Carolina Research Campus presents an opportunity for the Chamber to establish new and different connections.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- ✓ Consider the creation of other programs and services as a way to engage members and generate revenue. Ideas include:
  - Lead-generation programs
  - Networking opportunities for specific groups, such as young professionals, biotech-oriented businesses, and women
  - Member-to-member mentoring

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<sup>2</sup> Traditionally, the purpose of business councils is for large chambers to keep in touch with and serve members in various geographic areas – and ultimately, to prevent the prospect of these businesses forming a separate chamber on their own.

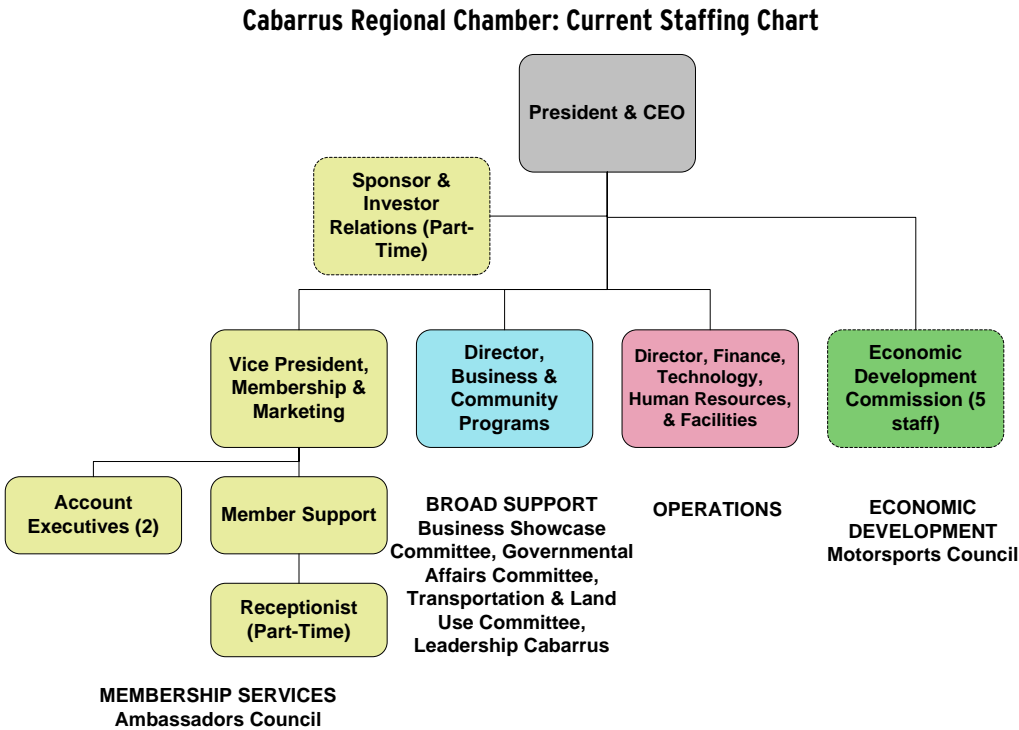
- ✓ Assess the effectiveness of the Business Councils and reasons for low turnout. Modify guidelines and work with leadership to raise the quality of the Business Councils and ensure that they provide value to members
  - Help identify projects that Business Councils can choose to work on that would have a greater community impact
  - Consider discontinuing the Business Councils if members do not feel that they are necessary or valuable
- ✓ Aggressively seek to diversify the Chamber's membership, attracting more young people and minorities
  - Vary the location of Chamber events to attract a wider range of participants
  - Engage multiple segments of the religious community to assist with these efforts
- ✓ Be a visible and vocal leader in the cultural transition of the community as new and different types of people arrive
  - Promote an attitude and image of welcoming diversity, and assist in educating the community about people of different backgrounds and cultures
- ✓ Create an attractive relocation information packet and online information for newcomers
  - Work with realtors to provide information on various types and styles of housing, including temporary housing
  - Strike a balance between advertisements and information
  - Emphasize the community as a place that is welcoming and open
- ✓ Consider the creation of a "welcoming committee" with Chamber volunteers who personally contact newcomers
  - These volunteers provide a personal introduction to the community, and should offer help in finding services or information, and can provide an overview of the Chamber's activities
  - Provide volunteers with training to ensure that a consistent message is presented to newcomers
  - Host periodic events to invite newcomers and allow them to meet new and current community members

## **ORGANIZATION AND STRUCTURE**

The *Organizational Assessment* showed that the Cabarrus Regional Chamber has limited capacity relative to other comparable chambers. For example, the Naperville Chamber in Illinois has a Senior Vice President who oversees a number of program areas. Creating such a position at the Cabarrus Regional Chamber to take care of operations and programs would free John Cox to focus more on high-level issues and developing relationships. The Arlington (TX) and Northern Kentucky Chambers have at least one dedicated staff person who works on government affairs issues. At the Cabarrus Regional Chamber, John Cox handles most of the relationship development work, although there is a volunteer committee to support him.

The Chamber membership and leadership feel that John Cox is doing an excellent job of leading the Chamber and is able to bring people together, encourage teamwork, and develop strong relationships. Many believe that his leadership is the reason that the Chamber is now very proactive within the community. However, there is some concern about the sustainability of the Chamber’s current momentum and success being dependent on a single individual. Part of the organizational adjustments that should be considered are ways to replicate John Cox’s assets through the organization.

The following organizational chart describes the Chamber’s current staff structure. It is a relatively flat organization, with limited staff capacity to support increased programming.



The Cabarrus Regional Chamber’s budget also reflects a lean operation, while the \$1 million debt on the Chamber building makes it financially difficult for the Chamber to increase its staff capacity or dedicate resources to additional or expanded programming. With the closing and layoffs of some major employers in the community, the Chamber will need to identify new and alternative sources of revenue over the next few years. The development of the North Carolina Research Campus may provide some opportunities to do that.

The Chamber's Board of Directors has 24 representatives with rotating three-year terms; currently, one of these seats is vacant. Board members represent mostly private-sector businesses from a range of sizes and industry sectors, such as health care, banking, and hospitality. A few educational and non-profit institutions also serve on the board, including the Kannapolis City Schools, Rowan-Cabarrus Community College, UNC-Charlotte, and the Cannon Memorial YMCA. *Market Street* believes the Chamber Board size is appropriate, although as the community grows, the Board could reasonably increase to about 30 members if greater representation is needed. It is important to try to reflect both the diversity of the Chamber membership and the community on the Board. This means having a mix of geographic, gender, racial, industry sector, and business size representation to promote the inclusion of a range of key viewpoints and to help the Chamber increase its credibility in the community. As the community continues to grow and change, the Chamber needs to continue to meet the challenge of diversity on its Board. The faith community can serve as a valuable resource and should be engaged in the diversity issue.

The Chamber's Executive Committee consists of seven members – a Chair, Chair-Elect, Past Chair, Treasurer, and Vice Chairs for Public Policy, Membership, Workforce Development, and Economic Development.<sup>3</sup> This group provides guidance on the Chamber's operations, finances, and strategic direction. In some chambers of commerce, the Executive Committee meets more frequently than the full Board of Directors. In other chambers, a smaller Executive Board meets monthly to make timely decisions, and a larger Board of Directors meets bimonthly to approve policy and budget issues. The Cabarrus Regional Chamber can consider this option if it desires a smaller decision-making group, although the need to keep up with the enhanced program of work that results from this *Strategic Plan* should be taken into consideration as well. At the Chamber Board Retreat, the Board decided to maintain its current structure and meeting schedule.

The Chamber's volunteer committees, with staff support, carry out the annual business plans and other key Chamber activities. The following lists the currently active committees and how often they meet:

- Ambassadors Council – monthly, plus Special Events Committee
- Business Showcase Committee – monthly
- Executive Committee – monthly
- Governmental Affairs Committee – every other month, even months
- Leadership Cabarrus – every month
- Motorsports Council – quarterly
- Total Resource Campaign – monthly, then weekly during campaign
- Transportation and Land Use Committee – every other month, odd months

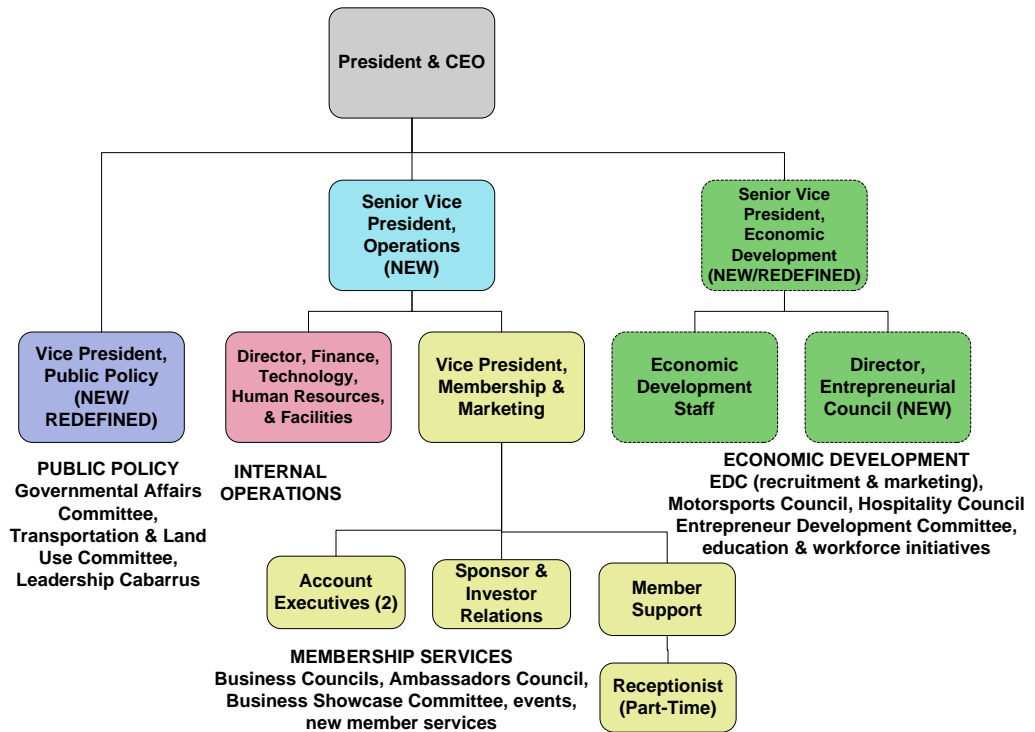
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<sup>3</sup> Currently the Chair-Elect is also the Vice Chair for Economic Development.

These volunteer committees are currently not very well aligned with the staff structure. One staff person (Director of Business and Community Programs) essentially supports most of the committees. The committees and the staff structure should be aligned to provide each committee with the staff support to accomplish what they set out to do. Based on the recommendations for each focus area, *Market Street* also sees the need for a committee to assist with the creation of the Cabarrus/Rowan Area Entrepreneurial Council.

The following graphic provides a visual representation of the recommended organizational changes. Ultimately, staffing of the Chamber is the CEO's decision. *Market Street* suggests the creation of one new position (Senior Vice President of Operations), and the redefinition of two existing positions (into Vice President of Public Policy and Senior Vice President of Economic Development). If the Chamber chooses to take a lead role in the creation and staffing of the Entrepreneurial Council, it will need to add new staff in this area. These positions reflect the maturing of the organization and allow the Chamber to go to the next level. Even with these changes, the Cabarrus Regional Chamber will continue to be a fairly lean organization from a staff perspective.

**Cabarrus Regional Chamber: Proposed Staffing Chart**



**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- ✓ Create a Vice President of Public Policy position to provide additional staff capacity to handle public policy and growth management issues

- This could be a redefining of the current Director of Business and Community Programs position
- ✓ Over time, consider adding additional staff support for public policy activities
- ✓ Include workforce development and talent recruitment/relocation initiatives to the responsibilities of the Vice President of Public Policy
  - To balance the workload, shift responsibilities of other committees to Membership Services and Public Policy
  - Periodically re-evaluate the need to resurrect a Workforce Development Committee to work on education and workforce initiatives
  - Also consider the need to hire a dedicated staff person to handle education and workforce programs. This position can either be part of the Public Policy focus area or the Economic Development focus area
- ✓ Create a Senior Vice President of Operations position to oversee membership and operations
  - This position takes some pressure off John Cox to manage day-to-day details
- ✓ As needed, the Sponsor and Investor Relations position can become full-time
- ✓ Adjust the work plans of the committees to reflect changes in direction as suggested in this *Strategic Plan*
- ✓ Create a Senior Vice President of Economic Development to oversee the activities of the EDC
  - This could be a redefining of current EDC positions
- ✓ Create an Entrepreneur Development Committee to advance the creation of the Cabarrus/Rowan Area Entrepreneurial Council
  - The EDC should manage the committee
  - Once it is up and running, the Council will need at least two staff positions; consideration should be given to these staff being Chamber employees
- ✓ Explore the potential of using the Chamber Foundation as an entity to raise funds for economic development and related programs
  - Communities like Austin (TX) and Nashville (TN) have had great success using such a funding vehicle
- ✓ Continue to identify ways to raise new revenue for the Chamber
  - Consider a variety of methods – expanding membership, raising dues structure, applying for grants from foundations, offering new services, expanding advertising revenues, securing in-kind contributions, and seeking corporate sponsorships of events and other activities

## **COMMUNICATION**

An important part of what the Cabarrus Regional Chamber does relates to how it communicates with its members and the greater community. The vast majority of respondents to the online survey felt that the Chamber does a good or excellent job in

communicating what it does to its members, but they were somewhat less positive about the Chamber's communication with the community. Lunch with the CEO, emails, and monthly mailings appear to be effective ways to keep members informed about the Chamber's activities. Capturing the attention of some members to show them the Chamber's behind-the-scenes and public policy work is likely to be a constant challenge. Greater use of technology may help overcome this barrier, and may also help appeal to different types of Chamber audiences. For example, "new media" tools such as podcasts and blogs could help engage young professionals, as has been done at the Wichita (KS) Metro Chamber.

Successfully implementing this *Strategic Plan* will require an effective communications approach with both members and the community. Messages about the need to manage and plan for growth and the need to nurture an entrepreneurial culture are part of executing the Chamber's plan. If done effectively, the community will continue to see the Chamber as a leader in proactively addressing these types of issues.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- ✓ Emphasize the priorities reflected in this *Strategic Plan* throughout Chamber marketing materials, messages, and publications
- ✓ Work with the media to get more exposure to the Chamber's work, and consider a CEO column in the local newspapers
- ✓ Work with the EDC and CVB to ensure that the business community speaks with one voice
- ✓ Provide continually updated news and content through the Chamber's website that reflects the Chamber's priorities and successes
- ✓ Consider the use of "new media" approaches and other technology to help deliver information and provide greater value to members
  - Use of podcasts, blogs, and downloadable videos to highlight certain Chamber initiatives may help engage tech-savvy members or those who may not have time to attend scheduled events and meetings
  - Simpler approaches, such as links to relevant articles on newspaper websites, can help members stay abreast of Chamber activities
- ✓ Consider launching separate websites for certain initiatives, such as a young professionals network, or one that focuses on relocation to the area
  - These allow the Chamber to deliver specific messages and relevant information for certain target groups

## **CHAMBER BOARD RETREAT**

At the Chamber Board Retreat on November 1-2, 2007, the Board had the opportunity to review and comment on the previous draft of this *Strategic Plan*. Those comments have been incorporated in this document. This plan is designed to be a living document, and should be revised and updated as needed.

When *Market Street* asked Board members what the first priority should be for the Chamber to take action, the responses were the following:

- Implement the *Small Business and Entrepreneurial Development Action Plan* – 8 votes
- Add staff capacity (in operations, public policy) – 7 votes
- Develop a communications approach with a single message and voice – 7 votes
- Increase revenue (through larger investments and more members) – 4 votes
- Remove debt on the Chamber building – 3 votes
- Put education and workforce under economic development – 3 votes
- “CHARGE!” – 1 vote
- Make the strategy a living document – 1 vote
- Ensure diversity in leadership – 1 vote

## **CONCLUSION**

This *Strategic Plan* provides recommendations for aligning the Chamber’s programs and services, its organizational structure, and its communications efforts around its mission and vision statements. The recommendations are centered on the Chamber’s three focal areas of economic development, public policy, and membership services. This provides a strong foundation to adapt the *Strategic Plan* to the Chamber’s annual business plan. Given the degree of change and the exciting opportunities that face the community, the Chamber is well situated to take its operations to the next level and continue to raise its profile as a leader and business advocate within the Cabarrus County area.