



RICHMOND 2010

*A Civic Index for
Richmond County, North Carolina
October 2004*

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Introduction



What is a “Civic Index”?

In the mid-1980’s the National Civic League formulated a community strategic planning process, which came to be known as the “Civic Index”. This process addresses community issues, or indices as organizing elements guiding a year long study of a community’s past, present and future as well as the strengths and weaknesses of an area.

The Civic League recommended ten indices as part of the process: Community Information Sharing, Intergroup Relations, Citizen Participation, Cooperation and Consensus Building, Community Leadership, Government Performance, Civic Education, Volunteerism and Philanthropy, Intercommunity Cooperation and Community Vision and Pride.

Richmond County’s first Civic Index

In 1990, a group of Richmond County leaders chose to undertake the Civic Index process to develop goals and recommendations for the future of the County. With the financial assistance of a grant from the Cole Foundation, this group contracted with the University of North Carolina Charlotte’s Urban Institute to facilitate the process using the recommended indices of the Civic League as a guide.

Completed in mid-1991, Richmond County’s Civic Index resulted in ten goals or recommendations for the following decade:

1. County-wide toll-free telephone access
2. Establish a Richmond County Human Relations Council
3. Enhance economic development opportunities
4. Initiate a comprehensive strategic planning process
5. Institute an adult leadership development program
6. Institute intercommunity visits
7. Address illiteracy in the workplace
8. Establish a clearinghouse for volunteers
9. Establish a community foundation
10. Develop a program to build citizens’ pride

This Civic Index was a significant step forward for a community that had never before undertaken a comprehensive strategic planning process. Three years following the release of the study, participants in the process again assembled to review progress and celebrate successes. In the years following the release of the report, the community has seen a number of successes including the establishment of a community leadership program and a human relations organization among others.

Richmond 2010

During the decade following the completion of the 1991 Civic Index, Richmond County witnessed a drastic change in the economy of the region. In the 1990’s the County lost

more than 9% of its jobs as a result of the globalization of the manufacturing sector and the subsequent closing of a number of industries in the area. As a result, the community was faced with new and different challenges for the future of the County.

Recognizing these, a group of leaders from the original study began to consider a new Civic Index. In the spring of 2003, these leaders set in motion the steps to initiate a new comprehensive strategic plan, modeled after the 1991 Civic Index. To organize a new study, the Richmond County Development Team, a newly formed economic development advisory board, appointed co-chairpersons to lead the effort.

Chosen for these important roles were Dr. Diane Honeycutt, President of the Richmond Community College and Kenneth Robinette, Chairman of the Richmond County Board of Commissioners. Both of these individuals were veterans of the first study, and were viewed as natural choices considering their leadership positions in the community. These co-chairs immediately assembled a grant application and were awarded a grant from the Cole Foundation to fund the new Civic Index. Additionally, the chairpersons chose a group 15 individuals to serve as members of a Steering Committee for the study.

One of the first tasks of the Steering Committee was to devise a set of indices to guide the new study. Using a combination of issues from the original Civic Index and new issues facing the community, the group chose seven specific areas of interest to be addressed. At this time the Steering Committee sought to develop a name for the final report. The group chose Richmond 2010, representing the target date for completion of the goals and recommendations of the report.

The Process

In order to insure an accurate assessment of the County, the Civic Index Process was designed to include the views and perception of all elements of the community. To accomplish this important task, the Steering Committee set out to choose 100 “Stakeholders” to participate in the process.

Special attention was paid to include representation from every ethnic, racial, age and socioeconomic group in the county. The Steering Committee was even careful to include representation from the different geographic areas of the community.

Once the Stakeholders were chosen, the Steering Committee divided them into groups defined by the seven indices of the study. Stakeholders were not assigned to committees based on their expertise in any given area. Conversely, Stakeholders were assigned to groups which they may have little or no knowledge or predetermined ideas about a particular issue.

Once the Stakeholders were in place and assigned a committee, a kick off dinner was held on September 30, 2003 at the Cole Auditorium on the campus of Richmond Community College. At this event, Dr. William McCoy of UNC-C’s Urban Institute and staff presented an overview of Richmond County and a brief history of the previous civic index and its accomplishments.

Over the course of the next three months, these Stakeholders met to discuss one of the overall indices assigned to their committee and to develop recommendations for the final document. These Stakeholder meetings were well attended and resulted in a very thorough and thoughtful analysis of the issues at hand. In late 2003, the committees submitted their analysis and recommendations for their group.

Final Report

During 2004, the Richmond 2010 Steering Committee met with UNC-Charlotte to review the recommendations of each committee and to create a summary of their work. Each committee submitted a list of several recommendations, all pertinent to the indices originally assigned to each group.

The Steering Committee reviewed all of these suggestions and, working with UNC-Charlotte, selected seven recommendations best summarizing the work of the Stakeholders. Dr. McCoy and the UNC-C staff then compiled this information into a cohesive final document to be Richmond 2010.

Where do we go from here?

On October 18, 2004 Richmond 2010 was presented to Stakeholders and interested members of the community. In the coming months, interested citizens will assemble once again to begin to implement the recommendations offered in the study.



RECOMMENDATION 1

Participants in the Civic Index process strongly believe that a positive future for the county is tied directly to the improvement of educational outcomes by all of the agencies and organizations in the county that share the responsibility for educating the youth as well as the adults. The Civic Index program encourages excellence in education by advocating the development of strong community partnerships among all education entities in the county. All educational providers need to educate the community about their needs and to promote their goals and successes, while consciously pursuing the goal of increasing the role of citizens in decision-making.

To these ends, the Civic Index process has determined that the following are important goals for the educational groups to pursue cooperatively:

- 1) Continue to incorporate new ideas and visionary leadership into the Richmond County School System and Richmond Community College. Publicize these efforts so that the people of Richmond County can understand and take pride in the accomplishments of the school system and the community college.
- 2) Recommend that the Richmond County School Board review and implement the best practices from other school systems as well as its own existing efforts regarding accountability to its ultimate customers: the citizens of Richmond County.
- 3) Continue to identify and implement methods to retain the services of the best teachers in the system and to recruit excellent teachers when vacancies occur.
- 4) Seek alternative models to educate students who do not perform well or have behavioral issues in the traditional education setting.
- 5) Improve programs that place current technology programs in the Richmond County School System and Richmond Community College. Provide necessary staff training opportunities to maximize the utilization of the current technology programs.
- 6) Encourage business leaders to develop stronger relationships with schools by implementing a business leader/student partnership program. The School System, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Economic Development Commission should take the lead in implementing this program.

An important element in these educational goals is having agreement on how the citizens of Richmond County feel about the educational opportunities available in the community and about how effective the educational organizations are in providing those

opportunities. Through the Civic Index process, differences of opinion about the effectiveness of the educational organizations became obvious. Therefore, it is also recommended that the Committee of 100 working with the leadership of educational providers commission a scientific survey of the citizens of the county using a random selection process on the topics of perceptions and feelings about the educational programs and program providers.

The overall implementation of the education recommendation rests with the Committee of 100 working in cooperation with the education program providers in the county.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Develop and implement a strong internal and external marketing and public relations campaign based on the theme of community pride.

This plan should emphasize developing Richmond County into a destination. A good and effective marketing and public relations campaign around this theme will not only develop and bring more tourism to the community but will also build pride among the citizens of the county as they become aware of people coming to the community to visit attractions.

The Committee of 100 working with the Richmond County Tourism Development Authority and its parent agency the Richmond County Chamber of Commerce is charged with implementing this recommendation.

The specific goal that the Civic Index Steering Committee advocates is that prior to June 30 each year the Tourism Authority working with the Chamber and Committee of 100 develop a plan for the next year that would further this recommendation by building on the successes of the previous year and by taking action steps to remedy the problem areas that surfaced during that year. This plan should be widely discussed in the community.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Develop a comprehensive and holistic beautification plan for Richmond County. The beautification plan should address directly the following issues: litter control, gateways and signage, billboards, demolition of unsafe and unsightly buildings, and removal of automobiles, trucks and mobile homes that are no longer functional. This list should be viewed as items of immediate concern but should not be viewed as exhaustive. This recommendation is really an extension of recommendation 2. Richmond County cannot become a viable destination for tourism or new business as long as what one sees when visiting the county is unattractive.

The Committee of 100 is charged with implementing this recommendation, although it should eagerly solicit the assistance of educational institutions, faith institutions, and civic organizations in the pursuit of this goal. Community buy-in is essential for this to

be a successful pursuit. A good place to start with this partnership building is with the already existing Keep Richmond County Beautiful group.

RECOMMENDATION 4

Create a business incubator to encourage and help local entrepreneurs. The currently existing small business and technology support services will co-locate at the physical space provided for the incubator.

The Richmond County Commission, the Richmond County Economic Development Office and the Richmond Community College are designated the lead agencies in the planning and implementation of this recommendation.

RECOMMENDATION 5

Establish a Community Calendar.

Much of the information that would be included in a community calendar is already public via newsletters, Cable Access Channels, websites, meeting agendas, minutes of meetings, announcements by civic and faith organizations, and other methods of informing the public used in the community. Therefore, the task is not so much finding the information but consolidating the information in one place and making it known to the public. In this age, community calendars are increasingly web-based, and this option should be fully considered by those working on this recommendation.

The Richmond County Chamber of Commerce is designated as the lead agency for planning and implementing this recommendation.

RECOMMENDATION 6

Establish a Multi-Sports Complex that will serve the needs of the local community as well as serve as a venue for regional, state-wide and southeastern United States youth sport tournaments. Having appropriate facilities for youth sport tournaments supports developing Richmond County as a destination for travel and tourism.

The City of Rockingham, with the support of county government, other municipalities, and foundations, is taking the lead position in pursuing this recommendation.

RECOMMENDATION 7

Create a Committee of 100.

The purpose of the Committee is to provide oversight and implementation in the successful continuation of the Richmond County Civic Index process. It also is to serve

as sounding board for assessing citizen needs and the community responses to those needs; for raising critical community issues as it sees fit; for providing opportunities for civic engagement; for improving the level of civic discourse in the community; and, for celebrating community successes.

Once commissioned and appointed, the Committee of 100 will need to quickly develop appropriate by-laws for its internal governance. The group should consider the distinct possibility of becoming a 501(c) 3 nonprofit agency as these by-laws are developed.

The responsibility for implementing this recommendation rests with the Civic Index Steering Committee.

Other Civic Index Recommendations



In the process of reviewing and prioritizing the recommendations for inclusion in the final report, some excellent suggestions from the Task Forces had to be omitted because of the need to concentrate on a relatively small number of topics, of the feeling that the recommendation was already underway, or that other action items were more important. In this section of the report some of those suggestions are listed with the hope that they may spur some organization or some group of people to take on the recommendation and move to implement it. Following is a list of additional recommendations resulting from the task force consideration.

- 1) Develop an organization to serve as a clearinghouse for all volunteer activities in the county.
- 2) Provide grant writing/administrative assistance for non-profit organizations in the county.
- 3) Develop our natural resources for recreational purposes in a safe and environmentally friendly manner.
- 4) Develop alternative uses for the Speedway and Drag Strip.
- 5) Develop sites of historical/cultural interest and lost history trail sites.
- 6) Ask the County Commissioners to move their mid-month meeting to evening hours and meet at each of the community centers or fire stations in the county.
- 7) Encourage voting at the high school and community college levels.
- 8) Local non-profits and government human services agencies need to have an interagency council.
- 9) Leaders of all local government bodies should meet at least quarterly.
- 10) Visit and study communities similar to ours that have managed to succeed despite lean economic times.
- 11) Richmond County should move deliberately to reinforce and exploit our unique cultural heritage in the areas of railroads, textile manufacturing and agriculture.
- 12) Current youth arts programs need to be continued, strengthened and better coordinated.
- 13) Highlight indigenous regional artists (performing and visual), artisans and performers. Showcase their products and abilities. Educate on the county's heritage.

14) Promote the small town environment with a first step of working toward continued revitalization of the downtowns of the cities and the towns in the county.

15) Promote a Twin Cities concept where the traditional competition between Hamlet and Rockingham is gradually replaced by a cooperative spirit.

These additional recommendations can be found in the specific reports from the task forces, and those reports often include additional comments about how these suggestions could be implemented.

Conclusions



The year long Richmond County Civic Index produced both the primary and secondary recommendations found in this report. For the primary recommendations, the suggested implementation strategy is incorporated in the narrative regarding the recommendation. In addition, one of the primary recommendations proposes the formation of a Committee of 100 with its foremost charge being to oversee the implementation phase of the Civic Index.

Richmond County has faced and continues to experience difficult economic conditions. This strategic plan does not solve that problem. However, it does propose an agenda, that if accomplished, has the potential to improve the economic situation, enhance the quality of life in the county, engage the citizenry in improving the county, promote Richmond County in the region and state, improve opportunities to excel by the young people of the county, and develop pride among its citizens in regard to living, working and playing in Richmond County.

The process that produced this plan indicated how strongly citizens of the county feel about the need to make this place they call home better for them, their children and their grandchildren. Now with this plan in hand, the leaders of this community need to harness this enthusiasm and optimism in building a better Richmond County tomorrow.



Participants in Richmond 2010



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Kenneth Robinette – Co Chair

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Abbie Covington – Cultural Affairs

Richard Daniel – Cooperation and Consensus Building

Laura Daskal - Recreation

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