



ALLEGHANY COUNTY AND THE TOWN OF SPARTA



Strategic Economic Development Plan 2015-2020

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KEY

ASU *Appalachian State University*

BDC *Blue Ridge Business Development Center*

BREMCO *Blue Ridge electric Membership Corporation*

Chamber *Alleghany County Chamber of Commerce*

Cooperative Extension *NC Cooperative Extension Service*

County *Alleghany County*

K-12 *Alleghany County School System*

Skyline *Skyline Membership Corporation*

TBD *To be determined*

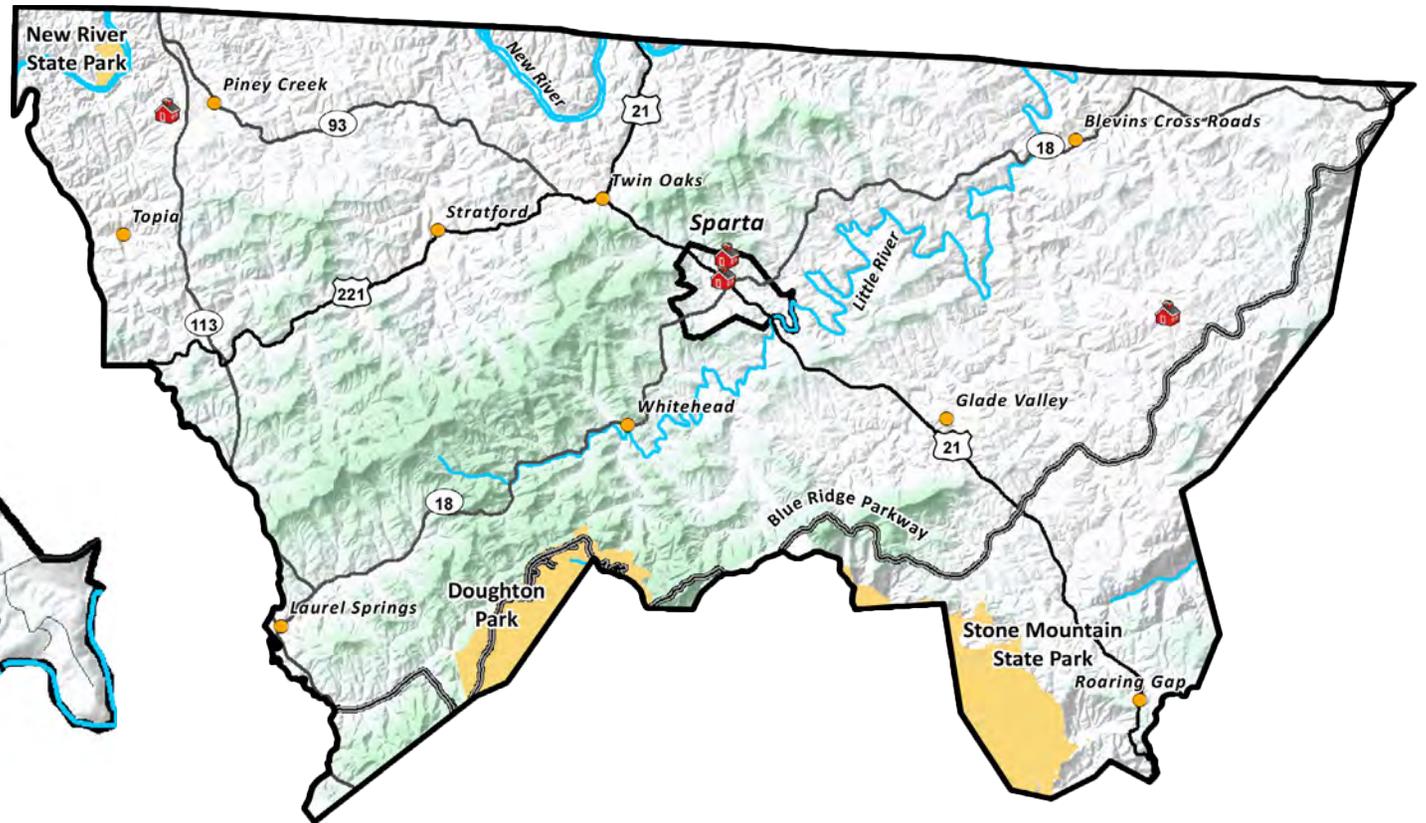
WCC *Wilkes Community College*

WDB *High Country Workforce Development Board*

MAP OF ALLEGHANY COUNTY AND THE TOWN OF SPARTA



ALLEGHANY COUNTY



TOWN OF SPARTA



MAP KEY



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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PROJECT SUMMARY

In the summer of 2013 the North Carolina Division of Community Assistance (DCA) and the High Country Council of Governments were invited to assist Alleghany County and the town of Sparta with development of a joint Economic Development Strategic Plan to serve as a guide to help direct the County and Town in creating an environment for economic vitality in the 21st Century and beyond. This effort has been endorsed by the elected boards of the County and Town and has been led by a Steering Committee comprised of government, civic and businesses leaders from all parts of the County. In addition to the Steering Committee's involvement, development of the plan has been a public process. This has included in depth interviews with various stakeholders, surveys of merchants, group discussions with young people and a community meeting of the citizenry. An overview of the public involvement can be found in the plan appendix.

The citizen involvement has been a significant part of this planning process since the ultimate objectives of the plan are to foster an environment for economic growth and vitality in the County. The primary purpose of the plan is for the elected bodies that sponsored this process to focus their economic development decisions more effectively and for the community as a whole to take part in working to implement the plan. It is recognized that success in improving economic conditions for the long term will mean that elected and governmental leaders as well as business, civic, volunteers and other citizens will all play an important role in carrying out the goals and strategies outlined in this plan.

VISION

The Steering Committee and many public participants provided input into the economic vision for Allegheny County. This input is reflected in the economic vision for Allegheny County which is as follows:

- Promote an environment where the economy can grow by fostering job creation that will nurture and support opportunities for our citizens throughout Allegheny County.
- Promote the retention and expansion of existing businesses, recruitment of new businesses, development of the tourism and agricultural industries and provide opportunities for our youth, families, and community to succeed.



The Allegheny County and Town of Sparta Steering Committee members at work.

HISTORY

Alleghany County (population 11,237) located in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Northwest North Carolina was formed out of Ashe County in the 1858-1859 legislative session of the North Carolina General Assembly. According to the United States Census the County has a total area of 235.06 square miles with 47.5 people per square mile. This compares to the state average of 196.1 persons per square mile. The seat of government for the County and only incorporated municipality is the town of Sparta (population 1,770).

Alleghany County's economy is typical of rural Appalachia. Agriculture dominated the economy until the latter part of the 20th century, when relatively low-skill manufacturing provided more full-time employment. During the early 2000s, major employers in the County (Bristol Compressors, Spring Ford Industries, Carolina Narrow Fabric Company, and VF Knitwear) closed, resulting in high unemployment. Alleghany retained a manufacturing base, due to technological innovations and specialized industries. These existing manufacturers include NAPCO, Magnolia Manufacturing, Tri-State Components, Tru-Line Truss, Pioneer Eclipse, and International Pipes. Agriculture and tourism have remained important to Alleghany County, both in terms of employment and taxable sales. Public-sector jobs and healthcare-related jobs are also a key part of the County's employment base.

Alleghany County's location, size of workforce, lack of natural gas service, and lack of direct interstate access limits its ability to attract large industry. The County has worked to mitigate these factors by placing an emphasis on small business assistance, and promoting assets such as improved telecommunications infrastructure and outdoor recreation opportunities. Additionally, the County continues to promote tourism, and is looking for ways to expand the agriculture industry sector.

ISSUES, GOALS, AND ACTIONS

The following pages define Goals and Strategies under eight focus areas. Page 13 includes a key to acronyms used in the tables.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Issue 1: Workforce Development

Goal 1: Enhance the workforce to meet local, regional and global needs

Background: The Allegheny County Economic Development Plan contains 11 strategies under this goal. Many of the strategies target Allegheny High School students. Many strategies under **Issue 1** are closely related to strategies under **Issue 2**, Youth Retention. Allegheny High School has a Career and Technical Education (CTE) Program. The Wilkes Community College (WCC) Allegheny County Campus offers a variety of curriculum classes, Adult High School and Adult Basic Education programs, and individualized industry training. Additionally, job-skill development courses and small business seminars are available at WCC. The High Country Workforce Development Board (HCWDB) provides policy guidance and independent oversight for a wide array of workforce development services both for the business community and for the emerging, transitional, and incumbent workforces in the seven-county High Country region. The HCWDB serves as a forum where private and public sector leaders jointly consider the workforce skill needs of our communities. The HCWDB also oversees operation of the Allegheny County Workforce Center (One-Stop JobLink Career Center). Allegheny County has three representatives on the HCWDB.

ECONOMIC STRATEGIES	KEY PARTIES	IMPACT/COSTS	TIMEFRAME
1-a. Support Pathways to Prosperity	WCC, K-12 , WDB	High/High	Medium
1-b. Educate teachers and guidance counselors on needs and opportunities for internships	BDC, businesses, industries	High/Low	Short
1-c. Hold a Job Fair	BREMCO, Skyline, WDB, WCC	Low/Low	Short
1-d. Work with high school and Wilkes Community College (WCC) to ensure career training is tied to local job opportunities	K-12, WCC, Child Development Centers, WDB	High/Low	Short
1-e. Develop apprenticeship program	BDC, employers	High/High	Medium
1-f. Develop healthcare curriculum in high school	High School, ASU, Allegheny Memorial Hospital, Allegheny County Health Dept., WCC	High/High	Medium
1-g. Develop and promote on the job training and mentoring programs	WDB, businesses, industries	High/High	Medium
1-h. Conduct annual analysis of training compared to available jobs	BDC, WCC, employers	High/Low	Short
1-i. Provide appropriate response to employer training needs	WCC, WDB	High/Low	Short
1-j. Develop job description and select industry champion to promote internship and mentorships for high school students	BDC, businesses, High School	High/Low	Short

ISSUES, GOALS, AND ACTIONS

1-k. Assist individuals in obtaining Career Readiness Certification	Businesses, industries, WCC	High/Low	Short
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Implementation: Implementation of the strategies under **Issue 1** will require more collaboration between private-sector employers, Alleghany High School, Wilkes Community College, and Town and County government than exists currently. Pathways to Prosperity (P2P) is a project of Harvard University that recommends school reform focused on career-driven alternatives to a four-year degree. The North Carolina State Board of Education has supported the P2P project, and will lead implementation of the recommendations in North Carolina.

ISSUES, GOALS, AND ACTIONS

YOUTH RETENTION

Issue 2: Youth Retention

Goal 2: Increase opportunities for youth to become involved in the community

Background: Creating opportunities that allow high school and college graduates to remain in Allegheny County is a goal expressed by the Allegheny County Economic Development Plan Steering Committee, stakeholders, and the general public. There are existing youth leadership programs in the County, but are operated by private groups. Many of the strategies listed below involve enhancing existing youth leadership programs through coordination of different programs, involvement of private-sector businesses, and development of internships and apprenticeships.

ECONOMIC STRATEGIES	KEY PARTIES	IMPACT/COSTS	TIMEFRAME
2-a. Create leadership development and training programs	BDC, Town, County, H.S.	High/Low	Short
2-b. Involve business owners in youth development programs	BDC, businesses, Chamber	High/Low	Short
2-c. Develop program in High School that connects students to internships with local businesses	WDB, High School, BDC	High/High	Medium
2-d. Encourage local companies to expose youth to careers through internships and apprenticeships	BDC, WDB, High School	Low/Low	Short
2-e. Coordinate and promote youth engagement resources	BDC, K-12, Skyline, BREMCO, Rotary, Lions Club, 4-H	Low/Low	Short
2-f. Hold a career day	High School, businesses, Chamber	Low/Low	Short
2-g. Conduct tours of local businesses for students, teachers, and guidance counselors	Businesses, K-12	High/High	Medium
2-h. Reinstate summer jobs programs	WDB, BDC, businesses	High/High	Medium
2-i. Educate school system on needs and opportunities for internships and apprenticeships	WDB, K-12, BDC, businesses	High/Low	Short

Implementation: Implementation of the strategies under **Issue 2** will also require increased involvement from private-sector businesses. Many of the strategies will require identification of an individual and/or group to lead implementation.

ISSUES, GOALS, AND ACTIONS

INFRASTRUCTURE

Issue 3: Infrastructure

Goal: Enhance infrastructure system that supports current and future needs

Background: The following strategies under Goal 3 do not contain specific water, sewer, or transportation projects, however, strategy 3-g, when implemented, will result in specific individual water and sewer project recommendations. The Town of Sparta is the only public water and sewer service provider in the county. The golfing communities in the Roaring Gap community operate private water and sewer systems. Specific transportation project recommendations are included in the 2012 Allegheny County Comprehensive Transportation Plan. Skyline Membership Corporation received federal funding to install fiber telecommunications infrastructure throughout Allegheny County. As a result, 97% of Skyline’s customers have access to high-speed internet service. No natural gas service is available in the county.

ECONOMIC STRATEGIES	KEY PARTIES	IMPACT/COSTS	TIMEFRAME
3-a. Continue expansion of Crouse Park	Town, County, BDC	High/High	Long
3-b. Continue development of Veterans Park	Town, County	High/Low	Short
3-c. Implement Town of Sparta Streetscape Plan	Town, County, SRC, BDC, Chamber, Skyline, BREMCO, NCDOT	High/High	Long
3-d. Take advantage of existing Blue Ridge Electric Membership Corporation (BREMCO) and Skyline Telephone telecommunications service	BREMCO, Skyline, BDC, Chamber, NC Commerce	Low/Low	Short
3-e. Complete County Park and Recreation Plan	County and Town	High/High	Short
3-f. Lobby NC Utilities Commission for extension of natural gas service	County and Town, industries, Frontier Natural Gas	Low/Low	Short
3-g. Develop Capital Improvement Plan for Town	Town	High/High	Short
3-h. Support continued funding for the US Highway 21 improvements	County, RPO, NCDOT	Low/Low	Short
3-i. Update County Land Development Plan	County	High/High	Long

Implementation: Implementation of **Strategy 3-g** will require the services of a professional engineer. An update to the Allegheny County Land Development Plan (**Strategy 3-i**) should include the Town of Sparta, and should address infrastructure needs. Various state and federal grant and loan funds are available for certain infrastructure projects. Many grants for infrastructure are tied directly to private-sector job creation/retention.

ISSUES, GOALS, AND ACTIONS

SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

Issue 4: Small Business Development

Goal: Support and develop small businesses

Background: The Blue Ridge Business Development Center (BDC) is the primary provider of small business support in Alleghany County. The BDC offers tailor-made training, business counseling services, incubation space and flexible physical space. The BDC also houses the Alleghany County Workforce Center JobLink, and the Alleghany Campus of Wilkes Community College (WCC). WCC also provides business support services through its Small Business Center. Small business loans are available through a variety of sources, including the US Small Business Administration (locally operated by the Region D Development Corporation and private banks); the NC Rural Center; and the Miles J.O.B. Fund (available only to Alleghany residents).

ECONOMIC STRATEGIES	KEY PARTIES	IMPACT/COSTS	TIMEFRAME
4-a. Support local businesses efforts to utilize crowd funding	Town, County, businesses, BDC	High/Low	Short
4-b. Replicate the Virginia Foundation for Agriculture, Innovation and Rural sustainability (VA Fairs) program in Alleghany County	Cooperative Extension, Town, County, Blue Ridge Women in Agriculture, Farmland Preservation Advisory Board	High/High	Medium
4-c. Conduct biannual agri-preneur workshops	Cooperative Extension, WCC, Farmers Market, Farmland Preservation Advisory Board	High/Low	Medium
4-d. Promote existing small business loan funds	BDC, RDDC, Miles J.O.B.S. Fund, Cooperative Extension, banks, NC Rural Center	High/Low	Short
4-e. Develop and publicize clearinghouse of business support services	BDC, WCC Small Business Center	High/Low	Short
4-f. Conduct feasibility studies and develop business programs for new agricultural ventures	Department of Agriculture, GoldenLEAF Foundation, NC Tobacco Trust Fund Commission, Agricultural Advisory Board	High/Low	Short

Implementation: Long-term results from the strategies related to small business development are difficult to measure. During development of the Alleghany County Economic Development Plan, much of the input on **Issue 4** related to the agriculture industry.

ISSUES, GOALS, AND ACTIONS

BUSINESS RECRUITMENT

Issue 5: Business Recruitment

Goal: Bring new business to Alleghany County

Background: Alleghany County does not currently have a formal program to recruit new business.

ECONOMIC STRATEGIES	KEY PARTIES	IMPACT/COSTS	TIMEFRAME
5-a. Develop a marketing strategy to recruit outside businesses	TBD	High/High	Medium
5-b. Align targeted industries with educational system	WCC, High School, businesses	High/Low	Short
5-c. Obtain Work Ready Certification for Alleghany County	WCC, champion industry (to be identified)	High/High	Long
5-d. Develop available sites and buildings	County, Town, NC Commerce, NC Economic Development Board, AdvantageWest	High/High	Long
5-e. Recruit new businesses that can support existing agricultural activity	Cooperative Extension, BRSOC	High/High	Long
5-f. Obtain input from existing businesses on potential support businesses	BDC, WCC	High/Low	Short
5-g. Promote assets of Alleghany County in recruitment efforts	BDC	High/High	Medium
5-h. Target small and technology-based businesses for recruitment	BDC, BREMCO, Skyline, County, Town	High/Low	Medium

Implementation: The Alleghany County Economic Development Plan Steering Committee determined that **Strategy 5-a** is the highest priority strategy under **Issue 5**, and will provide guidance for many of the other strategies. NC Department of Commerce and AdvantageWEST provide assistance to local government recruitment efforts.

ISSUES, GOALS, AND ACTIONS

HEALTHCARE

Issue 6: Healthcare

Goal: Sustain a healthcare system that meets local and regional needs

Background: The healthcare sector is a large and growing employer in Allegheny County. In June 2013, 566 people worked in health care/social work in the County. Allegheny Memorial Hospital is an asset in tourism promotion and business recruitment. Allegheny County has subsidized operation of the hospital in the past.

ECONOMIC STRATEGIES	KEY PARTIES	IMPACT/COSTS	TIMEFRAME
6-a. Educate local leaders and public on healthcare issues	Health Dept., Hospital, businesses	High/Low	Short
6-b. Work with Allegheny Memorial Hospital staff Board and Health Department on physician recruitment	County, Health Dept., Hospital, Town	High/High	Medium
6-c. Communicate concerns with healthcare regulation (Medicare/Medicaid, etc.) exchanges with State and Federal elected officials	League of Municipalities, County Commissioners Association, County, Health Dept., Hospital, Town, businesses	Low/Low	Short
6-d. Examine Health Sciences curriculum at the local High School	High School, ASU, Allegheny Memorial Hospital, Allegheny County Health Dept., WCC	High/High	Long
6-e. Maintain healthcare curriculum at WCC	WCC	High/Low	Short

Implementation: Economic sustainability of private healthcare businesses is not typically addressed by local governments. The strategies under **Issue 6** are those that the Allegheny County Economic Development Plan Steering Committee determined feasible to be implemented with local resources.

ISSUES, GOALS, AND ACTIONS

TOURISM

Issue 7: Tourism

Goal: Increase Tourism in Alleghany County

Background: In 2013, Tourism generated \$22.00 million in direct spending; produced \$3.84 million in worker income; generated \$2.48 million in combined state and local taxes and supported over 180 jobs. Alleghany County has an occupancy tax that generated approximately \$53,000 in 2013. Most tourism promotion is conducted by the Alleghany Chamber of Commerce and the Tourism Development Authority. Annual events in Alleghany County include: The Mountain Heritage Festival, The Blue Ridge Mountain Arts & Crafts Fair and The Fiddler’s Convention. The Choose and Cut Christmas Tree industry is well established.

ECONOMIC STRATEGIES	KEY PARTIES	IMPACT/COSTS	TIMEFRAME
7-a. Develop tourism marketing plan	County, Town, Chamber, TDA	High/High	Medium
7-b. Advertise in major markets	Chamber, TDA	High/High	Medium
7-c. Utilize billboards for marketing Alleghany County	Chamber, TDA	TBD/High	Short
7-d. Develop marketing materials for current visitors	Chamber, TDA	High/Low	Short
7-e. Identify events to attract visitors, including additional events at Mountain Heritage Festival	TDA, Chamber, SRC, Town, County	High/High	Medium
7-f. Develop marketing materials to encourage choose and cut customers to visit Alleghany County during other times of year	Chamber, TDA	High/Low	Medium
7-g. Further promote outdoor recreation opportunities, including river access in Town	County Parks and Recreation, Town, NC Wildlife Resources Commission	High/Low	Short
7-h. Develop tourism packages	TDA	High/High	Medium
7-i. Promote agri-tourism	TDA, Cooperative Extension	High/Low	Short
7-j. Implement Town of Sparta Streetscape Plan	Town, County, SRC, BDC, Chamber, Skyline, BREMCO, NCDOT	High/High	Long
7-k. Develop web presence for local businesses	Chamber, County, BDC	Low/Low	Short
7-l. Study lodging market for opportunities	ASU	Low/Low	Short
7-m. Complete and implement County Parks and Recreation Plan	County Parks and Recreation	High/High	Long

Implementation: The Alleghany County Economic Development Plan Steering Committee determined that Strategy 7-a is the highest priority strategy under Issue 7, and will provide guidance for many of the other strategies.

ISSUES, GOALS, AND ACTIONS

AGRICULTURE

Issue 8: Agriculture

Goal: Expand and support agricultural activity

Background: The most recent US Census of Agriculture data is dated 2007. In 2013, Alleghany County developed the Alleghany County Farmland Preservation Plan. The Farmland Preservation Plan was the source of many of the strategies below (8-f through 8-o). Alleghany County has a Voluntary Agricultural District (VAD) Program. The Alleghany Farmers Market has operated in various locations in the Town of Sparta. Efforts are underway to develop a permanent location adjacent to Crouse Park. Blue Ridge Seeds of Change (BRSOC) is a regional organization, funded by Heifer International, whose mission is to develop local food systems. Two representatives from Alleghany County are on the BRSOC Board.

ECONOMIC STRATEGIES	KEY PARTIES	IMPACT/COSTS	TIMEFRAME
8-a. Expand Farmers Market	Cooperative Extension, Agricultural Advisory Board, Town, County	High/High	Medium
8-b. Develop feasibility/marketing study for locally grown food	Cooperative Extension, Agricultural Advisory Board	High/High	Medium
8-c. Develop feasibility/marketing study for value added agricultural products	Cooperative Extension, Agricultural Advisory Board	High/High	Medium
8-d. Develop community garden as educational tool for growing food	Cooperative Extension, Agricultural Advisory Board	High/Low	Short
8-e. Expand Wellness Center's community garden	Wellness Center, Cooperative Extension	Low/Low	Short
8-f. Advocate for Alleghany County and rural North Carolina in efforts related to agriculture and forestry at all legislative levels	Town, County	High/Low	Short
8-g. Expand participation in the Voluntary Agricultural District Program	Cooperative Extension, Agricultural Advisory Board, County	High/Low	Short
8-h. Adopt the Enhanced Voluntary Agricultural District Program	Cooperative Extension, Agricultural Advisory Board, County	High/Low	Short
8-i. Develop an instrument for land prioritization for preservation	Cooperative Extension, Agricultural Advisory Board	High/Low	Medium
8-j. Increase the number of acres that are under an active forest management plan	Cooperative Extension, Agricultural Advisory Board	High/Low	Medium

ISSUES, GOALS, AND ACTIONS

8-k. Develop a mentor program for beginning farmers	Cooperative Extension, WCC, High School	High/High	Medium
8-l. Educate young people about agriculture and farming as a career	Cooperative Extension, WCC, High School	High/Low	Short
8-m. Support a multi-county “buy local” campaign	Chamber	High/Low	Medium
8-n. Offer continuing education programs for farmers and agribusiness owners	Cooperative Extension, BDC, WCC	High/Low	Medium
8-o. Set aside percentage of back taxes collected in loss of Present Use Tax Valuation for assistance with Farmland Preservation	County, Agricultural Advisory Board	High/Low	Medium

Implementation: The Allegheny County Farmland Preservation Plan includes details on implementation of **Strategies 8-f** through **8-o**. The recently-formed Agricultural Advisory Board will be instrumental in implementing most of the strategies. 2012 US Census of Agriculture data is expected to be released in 2014.

KEY

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Chamber *Allegheny County Chamber of Commerce*

Cooperative Extension *NC Cooperative Extension Service*

County *Allegheny County*

K-12 *Allegheny County School System*

Skyline *Skyline Membership Corporation*

TBD *To be determined*

WCC *Wilkes Community College*

WDB *High Country Workforce Development Board*

IMPLEMENTATION

Issue: Economic Development Plan Implementation

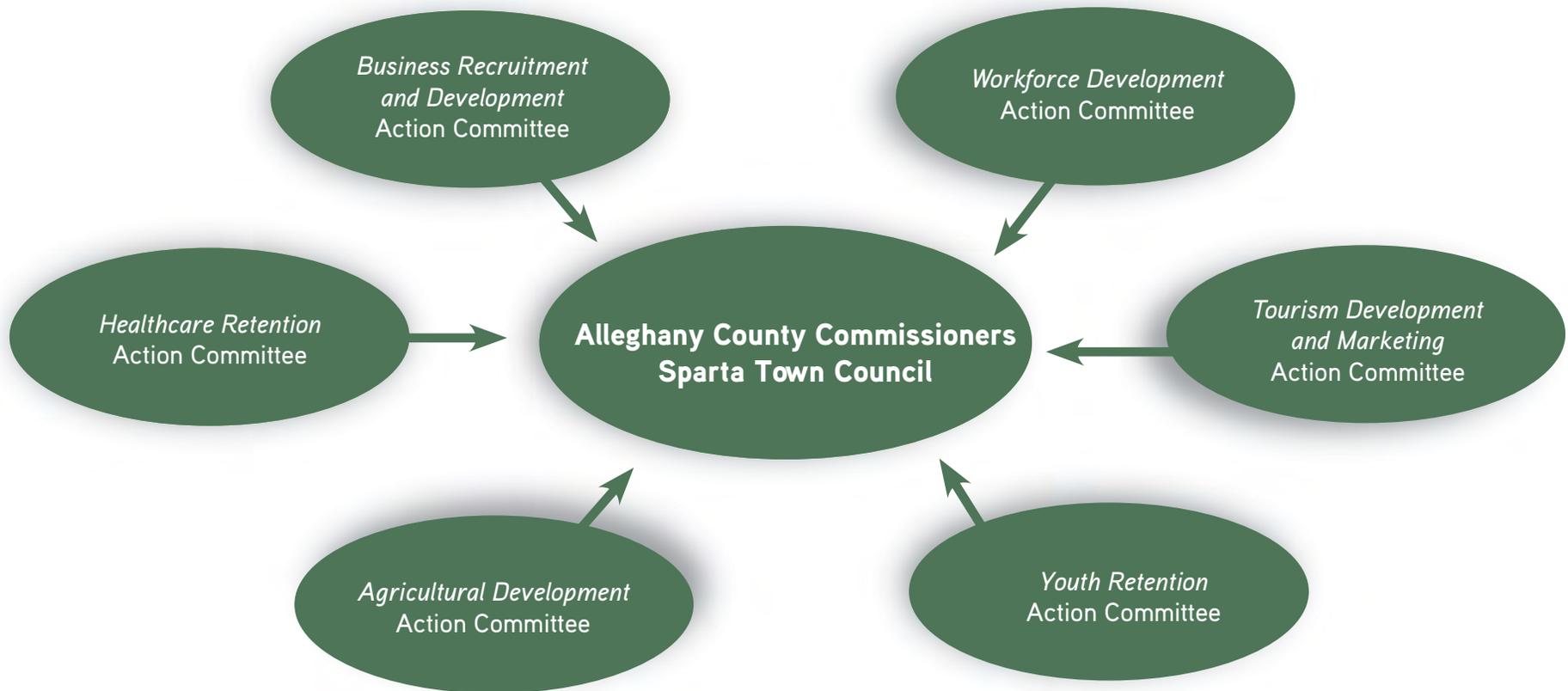
Goal: To implement the majority of the Plan over the next 5 years

Background: For the vision and goals of this plan to become a reality local leadership- in government, the private sector and civic groups will need to work to achieve the various strategies included in this plan. The following lays out how the implementation of this plan is to be structured to insure the greatest degree of success.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES	KEY PARTIES	IMPACT/COSTS	TIMEFRAME
Adopt Plan as the primary policy document for the County and Town Economic Development Program(s)	County Commissioners Town of Sparta	High/Low	Short
Appoint Leadership Body and Action Committees (6) to lead Plan implementation efforts	County Commissioners Town of Sparta	High/Low	Short
Allocate/budget money and resources for implementation efforts	County Commissioners Town of Sparta, Public & Private Resources	High/High	Medium
Present a semi-annual report on progress of Plan implementation.	County Commissioners, Town of Sparta, Action Committees	High/Low	Medium
Present plan to Key Parties and seek partnerships in implementing relevant strategies	Action Committees	Low/Low	Medium

IMPLEMENTATION

IMPLEMENTATION SUMMARY



The Allegheny County and Town of Sparta Economic Development Strategic Plan for 2014-2019 represents the best efforts, direction and vision of the community. It identifies the issues, goals and actions to be implemented on both a long term and short term basis. Implementation is the main focus of the plan which will be achieved through the assignment of key community representatives and organizations to "Action Committees". These "Action Committees" will coordinate their activities and recommendations with the County and Town.

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION AND COMMUNITY INPUT

The following Interviews and Focus Group discussions were held on September 23-24, 2013

Stakeholder Interviews

- Stakeholder interviews were held at the Blue Ridge Business Development Center (BRBDC) Teams from the North Carolina Department of Commerce and High County Council interviewed more than 30 Community Stakeholders were interviewed on to gather opinions and information on economic development opportunities in the county.
- Stakeholder represented business, civic, non-profit sectors and governmental sectors and geographical areas of the county as well.

Merchant Surveys

- Survey were completed by downtown business operators.
- Half of those interviewed were new businesses and half businesses in existence for more than 20 years.
- 43% owned their building and 57% leased.
- **Key findings:** Parking is accessible, downtown is safe, most would be interested workshops and training for businesses, most would recommend starting a downtown business in Sparta.

Youth Discussion

- Group consisted of high school technology classes.
- Half lived in Sparta and half lived in county.
- 8 Out 10 plan to go to college but many said they would like to move back some day.
- Almost half said the community fits their lifestyle.
- 60% has a family member who operates a business locally.

Community Meeting (held on November 7, 2013)

- Held at Sparta Elementary.
- Close to 50 people in attendance.
- Meeting had two objectives; 1) Provide information to citizenry on local economic sectors (*i.e. Workforce Development, Physical Infrastructure, Small Business and Industry, Youth Development & Retention, Agriculture, Government Services and Tourism*) and 2) Gather information on what people think.

Detailed information on results of the Citizen Participation and Community Input is available.