



PHASE 2:

COMMUNITY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Submitted by Market Street Services Inc.
www.marketstreetservices.com

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STEERING COMMITTEE

A Steering Committee of community leaders from Greater Dalton's public, private, and non-profit sectors is guiding the Community and Economic Development Strategy planning process. The following individuals have generously volunteered their time to serve on the Steering Committee.

<u>Name</u>	<u>Title/Organization</u>
Mr. Chuck Dobbins (co-chair)	President & CEO; Dobbins Investments, LLC
Mr. Bryan Hair (co-chair)	President; Marketing Alliance Group
Mr. David Aft	President; Community Foundation of Northwest Georgia, Inc.
Mr. Mike Babb	Chairman; Whitfield County Board of Commissioners
Mr. Caleb Carnes	CPA; Carnes & Company, CPA
Mr. Kasey Carpenter	Owner; Oakwood Café and Walnut Hill Farm
Mr. Oliver Cobb	President, Oliver Cobb & Associates
Mr. Greg Dent	Director; Northwest Georgia Healthcare Partnership
Dr. Judy Gilreath	Superintendent; Whitfield County Schools
Mr. Kevin Harris	CPA; ArrowStar, LLC
Dr. Jim Hawkins	Superintendent; Dalton Public Schools
Ms. R. Lynette Laughter	Chairman-Elect; Whitfield County Board of Commissioners
Mr. Bryan Macon	President; Dorsett Industries, Inc.
Ms. Deanna Mathis	Supply Chain Business Solutions Manager; Shaw Industries, Inc.
Dr. Pete McDonald	President, Georgia Northwestern Technical College
Mr. Zab Mendez	Vice President-Retail Market Manager; Cohutta Banking Company
Mr. Dennis Mock	Mayor; City of Dalton
Mr. John Neal	The Anna Sue and Bob Shaw Foundation
Mr. Stuart Nelson	President; Brown Industries, Inc.
Mr. Curtis Rivers	Volunteer; The Emery Center
Mr. Julio Velazquez	Agent; ABC Insurance Services
Dr. Margaret Venable	President; Dalton State College
Mr. Joe Yarbrough	President; Carpet & Rug Institute

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The four-phase research and strategic planning process will last approximately eight-months, concluding in May 2017. A diverse Steering Committee comprised of representatives from the public, private, and non-profit sectors will guide the process and ensure that it lays the foundation that will allow people and businesses to thrive and wealth to accumulate in the community.

Phase 1: Interviews and Online Survey

The knowledge and opinions of stakeholders and the public at large are invaluable when identifying the assets to leverage, opportunities to seize, and challenges to overcome. This phase involved reaching out to as many community stakeholders as possible through an online survey and individual interviews. The findings from this public input is cited extensively in the Community Assessment and will inform all subsequent phases.

Phase 2: Community Assessment

This phase evaluated Greater Dalton's competitiveness as a place to live, work, and do business. The Community Assessment document is built around five "Scorecards" that show how Greater Dalton compares to nine similar communities on sets of common metrics that influence how external audiences perceive the community. Accompanying the Scorecards is a summary of past research processes and an analysis of the opportunities and the challenges it will face as it seeks to become a more prosperous, successful place and increase quality of life for all its residents.

Phase 3: Community and Economic Development Strategy

Success in the strategic planning process requires local leaders to come together around a consensus-based blueprint for action. The Community and Economic Development Strategy brings together findings from the first two phases of the process to create a holistic five-year vision for the Greater Dalton. Strategic recommendations are driven by research findings and feedback from local stakeholders. Examples of best practice programs, policies, and initiatives from communities around the country are included when relevant and appropriate to help inform strategic recommendations and their subsequent implementation.

Phase 4: Implementation Plan

The final step of the process is to work with community leaders and develop a roadmap to operationalize and activate the Strategy. The Implementation Plan will ensure that the "what" of the Strategy can become a reality by committing to "how" actions will be implemented. Market Street will work with the Steering Committee to prioritize actions, develop a realistic timelines for implementation, identify of "lead" and "support" organizations to advance efforts, review capacity and funding, and develop performance metrics that the community can use to track progress.

THE STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

Public, private, and non-profit leaders in Greater Dalton have come together around a comprehensive community and economic development initiative that will help the community achieve a more prosperous and successful future. This process has resulted in a Community and Economic Development Strategy that will guide the community's collective actions for the next five years. This consensus blueprint establishes what Greater Dalton must do to achieve its desired future. The remainder of this section describes how this Strategy was developed and outlines its structure.

HOW THE STRATEGY WAS DEVELOPED

The strategic planning process began with the development of the Community Assessment, a foundational research document that analyzed Greater Dalton as a place to live, work, and do business. The report concluded with a set of eight "Key Takeaways" that synthesized the most prominent themes to emerge from research and input. These Key Takeaways identify the fundamental issues that the community will seek to address through strategic action – an important exercise given the fact that resources are limited and Greater Dalton's public, private, and nonprofit leaders have expressed a strong desire for a focused community and economic development strategy. A summary of the Key Takeaways is provided in Appendix B of this report, and a brief description of each is provided below:

- ✓ The local economy remains heavily dependent on the carpet and flooring industry; rebuilding the "entrepreneurial ecosystem" offers a path to diversification.
- ✓ Very low educational attainment rates undermine economic competitiveness.
- ✓ A persistent "talent drain" further jeopardizes the community's workforce sustainability, fiscal position, and vibrancy.
- ✓ Enhancing quality of place, social offerings, and housing options are vital to retaining and attracting talent and Downtown Dalton represents a logical place to target investments.
- ✓ Poverty, especially childhood poverty, represents a serious threat to the long-term community success and individual outcomes.
- ✓ Dalton State College, GNTC, and innovative educational programs are key assets to leverage and support.
- ✓ Greater Dalton has a poor internal "self-image" that negatively impacts its standing with residents and outsiders alike.
- ✓ While Greater Dalton has a racially and ethnically diverse population, its diverse communities exist in "silos" with limited collaboration and interaction between groups.

The full range of strategic implications identified through research, public input, and the Steering Committee's guidance about the desired strategic direction for Greater Dalton directly informed the creation of this strategic framework.

THE STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

The research, public input, and Steering Committee feedback summarized on the preceding page and detailed in Appendix B led to the determination of a strategic framework that organizes the range of efforts that Greater Dalton will advance in the coming years. At the core of this framework are six **Community Goals** that restate the eight key takeaways identified in the Community Assessment. These Community Goals are aspirational, actionable, and measurable. They are, in no prioritized order:

- ✓ Raise levels of prosperity and wellness for all residents
- ✓ Expand and diversify economic opportunities
- ✓ Develop and retain talented and educated people
- ✓ Create vibrant, attractive, and livable places
- ✓ Actively promote inclusivity in the community
- ✓ Project a proud and positive image

Greater Dalton will further these Community Goals by advancing a set of six **Key Initiatives**. These are, in no prioritized order:

1. Create an Education Partnership to Align Greater Dalton’s Talent Pipeline
2. Sustain a Best-Practice Economic Development Program
3. Create a Scalable Physical Hub for Entrepreneurship in Downtown Dalton
4. Pursue a Competitive and Diverse Housing Stock
5. Establish Downtown Dalton as a “Destination District”
6. Launch a Campaign to Enhance Community Pride

Underneath each of the six Key Initiatives are a set of **Tactical Recommendations** that correlate to a specific action or program that will help advance the initiative and move Greater Dalton toward achieving its Community Goals. **For the purposes of clarity and organization, each Key Initiative and Tactical Recommendation is numbered, but it should be emphasized that the arrangement of the various elements in this strategy does not imply hierarchy or priority. The various elements of the Strategy are interdependent and connected. No single element of the strategic framework can in isolation advance Greater Dalton toward its desired future – they are all designed to work together and support one another.** The relationship between Community Goals and Key Initiatives is illustrated in the updated graphic on the following page.



Before proceeding, it should be acknowledged that a work is already underway in Greater Dalton related to some of these Key Initiatives. In some cases, this document explicitly or implicitly references these current or recent efforts. This is partially by design, as no community can or should start completely from scratch, and in many respects, Greater Dalton will be "jumping on a moving train" to leverage existing capacity. But more can always be done with adequate resources, committed leadership, and a spirit of cooperation. Additionally, there are other existing efforts that may advance one or more of the Community Goals identified in this strategic framework that fall outside the scope of these Key Initiatives. Their lack of inclusion in this document is not meant to suggest that this work is unimportant but is instead a necessary tradeoff inherent to developing a highly focused community and economic development strategy.

1. Create an Education Partnership to Align Greater Dalton's Talent Pipeline

In an increasingly knowledge-based economy, maintaining a quality workforce is vital to economic success. The availability of a skilled and educated workforce is the most important factor influencing location decisions for businesses – even those in traditionally “blue collar” fields such as manufacturing. Additionally, a wide variety of research shows that increased levels of educational attainment are strongly associated with higher levels of prosperity and a variety of better social outcomes at the individual level. Research revealed that educational attainment rates in Greater Dalton are alarmingly low. Among the 596 counties in the United States with at least 100,000 people, the community ranks 586th in the proportion of adults who have obtained at least an associate's degree. Stakeholders agree that addressing this issue is among Greater Dalton's most pressing concerns.

There are two ways in which communities can become more talented. The first is attracting talented new residents from outside the community. Research revealed that the number of individuals moving out of Greater Dalton far exceeds the number moving in. Greater Dalton must retain its best and brightest residents and encourage local workers to also live in the community; the initiatives in this Strategy both directly and indirectly support these aims. But the overall migration dynamics are such that Greater Dalton cannot rely on talent attraction and retention alone to significantly improve its workforce in the near future. The second way in which communities can improve skill and educational attainment levels is through producing and retaining “homegrown” talent. Greater Dalton has strong assets related to talent production. Stakeholders praised Dalton State College and Georgia Northwestern Technical College, and parents and recent graduates generally held favorable opinions of the quality of education provided in the community's two public school districts. But stakeholders also agree that levels of achievement must improve at all levels if the community is to achieve its desired future.

Creating an Education Partnership dedicated primarily to raising educational attainment and skill levels will help strengthen the local workforce, increase the community's economic competitiveness, and lead to improved individual outcomes. The Partnership would bring together education and training partners, businesses, non-profits, and service providers through a proven “collective impact” organizational model.

CONNECTIONS TO COMMUNITY GOALS

- ∠ The Partnership's primary aim would be improving educational attainment and skill sets
- ∠ Educational attainment is strongly linked to better individual outcomes and better living standards
- ∠ Programming would reach all residents, especially those from traditionally underserved groups
- ∠ A highly visible Partnership could positively impact the community's image among young families

TACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

1.1 Establish an Education Partnership “backbone” entity modeled on a proven collective impact model

Greater Dalton has strong education and training assets and several initiatives dedicated to improving educational outcomes. Ensuring that these organizations and efforts are working cooperatively and collectively can help maximize their impact and improve education and skill levels in the community. There are multiple proven models that communities around the country have adopted to align their “talent pipelines” and advance existing and new initiatives.¹ These include Alignment USA and StriveTogether, which were pioneered in Nashville and Cincinnati, respectively, and have evolved into national networks of local partnerships. Greater Dalton leaders may be familiar with the StriveTogether model discussed as part of the Thrive 2055 initiative.

These “collective impact” models bring together government entities, non-profit organizations, and the private sector to work together on a common agenda – in this case aligning and improving the educational and training services with which individuals interact from early childhood into adulthood and careers. In Greater Dalton, these partners should include PK-12 school districts, Dalton State College and Georgia Northwestern Technical College, non-profits, social service providers, faith-based groups, representatives from the business community, and others. Partners work collectively through a “backbone” committee or entity that is responsible for aligning the existing efforts of its various members and identifying ways in which services can be improved. Critically, this backbone committee should be supported by at least one professional staff person charged with ensuring the efficient and collaborative operation of the Partnership, managing day-to-day operations, communicating with partners and investors, and guiding initiatives related to talent development. Accordingly, the Education Partnership itself must be sustainably resourced to ensure its successful launch and effective operation.

BEST PRACTICE #1: Strive Partnership (Cincinnati, OH)

¹ These partnerships are sometimes called “cradle to career” initiatives due to their focus on improving programs and services for children of all ages. Partnerships that also address workforce development for adults might be labeled “cradle *through* career.”

1.2 Task the Partnership with developing focus areas and initiatives that enhance and align the pipeline

In most cases, the backbone entity of a collective impact education partnership will include multiple sub-committees dedicated to a specific issue or set of issues – e.g. dropout prevention or early childhood education. The first task for the Education Partnership in Greater Dalton should be to inventory and evaluate existing programs and identify needs and gaps to develop a set of focus areas. These focus areas should cover the full spectrum of the talent pipeline – early childhood through careers. A subcommittee comprised of representatives from relevant partner organizations would then be assigned to each focus area. This subcommittee would be responsible for designing programming and ensuring its effective implementation.

Based on findings from research and public input, an initial set of potential focus areas and programs could reasonably include:

- ∟ Early childhood (including services for expectant mothers, newborns, and toddlers)
- ∟ Kindergarten readiness (Best Practice #2)
- ∟ Introducing career possibilities to children at an early age and developing “career pathways” – especially useful for addressing a lack of awareness about high-quality careers in manufacturing (Best Practice #3)
- ∟ Leadership skills development for younger students (Best Practice #4)
- ∟ Mentoring services for at-risk students and dropout prevention (Best Practice #5)
- ∟ College and career preparedness (Best Practice #6)
- ∟ Engagement of students and parents from Spanish-speaking households (Best Practice #7)
- ∟ Workforce development, including adult and continuing education
- ∟ Convening business leaders, HR professionals, and education and training providers to ensure that available programming is supportive of economic growth and important fields such as health care
- ∟ Explore opportunities for expanded shared services agreements between school districts

In some cases, existing programs may address one of these potential focus areas – for instance, the Readers 2 Leaders program is dedicated to ensuring that every student is reading at grade level by third grade. In other cases, new or expanded initiatives may be required. A collective impact partnership is well-suited to ensure that new and existing programs are collaborative and complimentary and that efforts are not duplicated, leading to greater overall efficiency.

Another potential focus area for the Education Partnership is community health. Research revealed that many Greater Dalton residents are in poor health. Health plays an important role in one’s ability to excel at school or work. If a large number of its residents are in poor health, a community’s workforce and economic competitiveness could be weakened. Education providers, and their partners are often well-positioned to deliver health services and education to children (and their families) at critical stages of development.

Accordingly, many collective impact education partnerships include health initiatives as focus areas. The backbone committee should evaluate whether and how health initiatives should be included in the Education Partnership's scope and actively engage all relevant partners such as Hamilton Health, the Northwest Georgia Healthcare Partnership, the Northwest Georgia United Way, and the Whitfield County Health Department.

The community must also work through the Education Partnership to ensure that existing, expanded, and new programs and initiatives are adequately and sustainably funded. All members of the Education Partnership should evaluate their role in implementation within the context of existing budgets, and all opportunities to refocus current funding should be assessed and pursued before seeking to develop new resources. In the event that new resources are required, the Education Partnership and its members should work with all relevant partners to pursue a range of funding options, including competitive grants, philanthropic resources, local public funding, and other public-private models such as social impact bonds.²

BEST PRACTICE #2: Kindergarten Readiness Program (Marin County, CA)

BEST PRACTICE #3: Dream It Do It (Oklahoma)

BEST PRACTICE #4: The Leader in Me, Decatur City Schools (Decatur, AL)

BEST PRACTICE #5: Cincinnati Youth Collaborative (Cincinnati, OH)

BEST PRACTICE #6: Financial Aid Saturdays (Austin, TX)

BEST PRACTICE #7: Parent University (Mesa, AZ)

1.3 Use student data to optimize programming and measure progress while safeguarding privacy

An important role of the Education Partnership and its various subcommittees is to constantly optimize programming. To do so, the Partnership should utilize on-the-ground observations and local expertise in combination with student-level data that can help determine whether actions are leading to improved outcomes. Accordingly, all relevant partners in Greater Dalton should work together to develop protocols for utilizing student data to measure the impact of programming, guide decision-making, and track overall progress. Whenever student data is utilized, the privacy of students and their families is paramount. Organizations such as StriveTogether have prepared guidelines that cover how data can be shared and utilized with community organizations while strongly safeguarding privacy.³ It should also be noted that the Implementation phase of this process will develop a broad list of metrics to track direct and indirect progress related to the Community Goals and Key Initiatives of this Strategy. The student data program is included here as a Tactical Recommendation due to the careful planning and work that such an effort requires relative to other types of metrics.

² A social impact bond allows private investors to work with governments and philanthropic funders to provide up-front financing for social programs and other services; investors are repaid only when the desired social outcomes are achieved. Source: "Social Impact Bonds: Helping state and local governments fund critical social programs." Rockefeller Foundation. Retrieved from: <https://www.rockefellerfoundation.org/our-work/initiatives/social-impact-bonds/>

³ http://www.strivetgether.org/sites/default/files/StriveTogether_Student_Data_Privacy_Best_Practices.pdf

2. Sustain a Best-Practice Economic Development Program

Greater Dalton suffered a sharp economic downturn during the Great Recession, as the collapse of the housing bubble and construction activity had a devastating impact on the carpet and flooring industry. But in recent years, conditions have improved. Sustaining this success is crucial, as increasing the availability of quality employment opportunities is the primary way in which communities can increase prosperity and improve quality of life for all residents.

Greater Dalton must address issues such as workforce and quality of place to increase its long-term competitiveness, and other Key Initiatives in this Strategy directly address these areas. But the community must also ensure that it is operating a best-practice economic development program to help grow the type of jobs that the community can support within the next five years.

For decades many communities and their economic development organizations have exclusively associated “economic development” with “business recruitment.” While the recruitment of new companies is an important component of an economic development program, it is only “one leg of the stool.” In fact, employment growth is overwhelmingly driven by the other two legs – existing businesses and entrepreneurs.

This Key Initiative focuses on the components of a best-practice economic development program that are best-suited for Greater Dalton. The Greater Dalton Chamber of Commerce, the Dalton Whitfield Joint Development Authority, and their partners are already engaged in many of these activities through the Grow Greater Dalton economic development initiative. The following Tactical Recommendations should serve as a general best-practice blueprint for these partners to follow.

Another important economic development consideration for Greater Dalton is diversification. Stakeholders understand the importance of the carpet and flooring industry, but drawing on lessons from the Great Recession, they also expressed a desire to see a more diverse local economy that would insulate the community from a future economic downturn or industry shock. Realistically, Greater Dalton faces numerous headwinds in its pursuit of economic diversification, workforce foremost among them. But a best-practice economic development program will provide the community with its best short-term opportunity to attract new types of businesses, likely within the manufacturing sector. Additionally, sustaining a formal, collaborative BRE program can also help ensure that the carpet and flooring industry continues to thrive in Greater Dalton while also assisting local firms across a variety of sectors.

CONNECTIONS TO COMMUNITY GOALS

- ∠ A best-practice program would seek to increase economic growth and diversity
- ∠ Expanding employment opportunities directly influences individual and household prosperity
- ∠ A stronger economy leads to more community wealth and resources to address a variety of needs

TACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 Maintain a formal business retention and expansion (BRE) program to help local firms thrive

Business retention and expansion (BRE) is about more than economic development organization maintaining positive relationships with local employers. A successful program requires a formal, collaborative program. No single organization can by itself address the needs and challenges of a business. Effective BRE must leverage the staff expertise and resources of multiple organizations and partners that can influence the business climate. This section focuses on the components of an effective program, which are well-established across many high-performing organizations. A BRE program should seek to:

- ∟ Understand the challenges and opportunities facing existing businesses
- ∟ Alleviate burdens and barriers to competitiveness
- ∟ Support expansion plans and identify businesses poised for a potential expansion
- ∟ Prevent existing businesses from relocating elsewhere
- ∟ Identify relocation prospects based outside the region through relationships with local businesses

An effective program should be built around professional economic development staff conducting in-person interviews with local employers. In Greater Dalton, all businesses meeting a certain employment threshold (potentially 100 or more employees) should receive at least one visit per year. If feasible, it would be beneficial to conduct quarterly meetings with the community's handful of very large carpet and flooring firms given their importance to the local economy. But outreach should not be limited to firms in the manufacturing and distribution sectors. For instance, given the important role the health care sector plays in providing high-quality jobs within the community, the BRE program should maintain a regular dialogue with large health care services providers to ensure that their workforce needs are being met through local training pipelines and the talent attraction effort. Smaller firms can be contacted if time allows or a need arises, and all businesses in the community should be welcomed to participate in an annual online survey.

Specialized software (such as Synchronist or ExecutivePulse) should be considered to track BRE activities, and the collaborative team should develop protocols for follow-up actions modeled after best-practice BRE programs from around the country. With these tools and protocols, the collaborative team should be able to identify and reach out to firms at risk of closing, downsizing, or relocating and identify specific ways in which community, economic, and workforce development partners can help employers increase their competitive positions and remove barriers to growth. A community's BRE program should in no way be tied to member recruitment efforts for an organization supporting economic and business development.

Through the Grow Greater Dalton initiative, the Greater Dalton Chamber of Commerce, the Dalton Whitfield County Joint Development Authority (JDA) and their partners should assess their current outreach methods to ensure that they are following best-practice standards. If necessary, these partners should then allocate needed staff capacity and resources, identify companies to contact in face-to-face meetings, develop an interview questionnaire and online survey, and establish protocols for sharing information. To help local

manufacturers improve their competitiveness, product base, and profitability, the BRE program could also seek to identify promising small- and mid-sized firms – especially those not involved in carpet and flooring – to connect to services through the Georgia Manufacturing Extension Partnership (GaMEP). Finally BRE efforts should help inform efforts by the Education Partnership to ensure that education and training programs are supportive of economic growth (see Tactical Recommendation 1.1).

2.2 Position Greater Dalton to attract new businesses and investment

Existing businesses and new startups account for the bulk of job creation within most communities, but as the three-legged stool metaphor suggests, business recruitment is an integral component of a balanced approach to economic development. The most important factor in attracting outside jobs and investment is a community's "product" – that is, its workforce, existing sector composition, location, and place-based assets. In previous decades, factors such as labor costs and proximity to Interstates were considered the most important site location factors. But in recent years, site selectors and prospective companies increasingly view the availability of skilled workers and a community's quality of life as paramount. As research and public input revealed, Greater Dalton must improve in these areas. Other Key Initiatives in this Strategy address these critically important issues.

Communities also seek out new jobs and investment through various marketing activities including but not limited to: websites, social media, advertisements, press releases, public relations, direct mail, inbound marketing events to host site selectors and other key decision-makers, outbound marketing events such as trade shows, etc. Most of these activities are expensive and it is difficult to stand out in a very crowded marketplace. Accordingly, for communities similar to Greater Dalton in terms of size and asset base, many marketing activities are not likely to produce an acceptable ROI. Instead, these communities can have success by developing close working relationships with the professional staffs of organizations that have large marketing budgets and "funnel" potential projects to local communities – namely state and regional economic development entities and large utilities or utility consortiums.

Through the Grow Greater Dalton initiative, the community's professional economic development staff should maintain strong working relationships and build trust with staff from the Georgia Department of Economic Development and other partners that are "upstream" in the project pipeline. Professional staff should make frequent visits to Atlanta to meet with these partners in person and host these individuals in the community, potentially through an annual "inbound" special event.

2.3 Develop research capacity to inform community and economic development efforts

Data is extremely important to a holistic community and economic efforts. For instance, economic development organizations frequently respond to requests for qualifications (RFQs) from site selectors or other economic development partners. These requests typically ask the local organizations to produce demographic and economic data about their community. As another example, the number of individuals in a community who are qualified to work as a computer numerically controlled (CNC) machinery operator would be of interest to a local manufacturing firm considering an expansion or a higher education institution evaluating whether to develop new workforce training programs. Additionally, a successful community and economic development effort must also track a variety of data points to measure the community's progress

and communicate ROI to investors and the general public. The Greater Dalton Chamber, the JDA, and their partners should ensure that the community has the necessary staff capacity and software subscriptions to fulfill a wide variety of data needs.⁴

2.4 Advocate for policies that support economic development and strategic priorities

Many aspects of community and economic development are closely intertwined with matters of public policy at the local, state, and federal levels. Organizations such as chambers of commerce typically work to develop public policy agendas that support economic growth. These agendas are frequently drafted in close cooperation with local government officials, state legislators, and federal Congressional delegations to ensure that the community presents a united voice of advocacy. It is especially important to advocate for needs that cannot possibly be fulfilled without funding or enabling legislation at the state or federal level. For example, many segments of the “talent pipeline” – including early childhood education and higher education – require strong public support from outside the community. The Greater Dalton Chamber of Commerce develops policy positions and annual legislative priorities. Continuing this important work and ensuring that these positions align with the priorities identified in this document and other strategic needs will be an important factor for the community’s future prosperity. As part of policy discussions, partners should also evaluate additional opportunities for shared services agreements between local governments.

2.5 Inventory underutilized industrial properties to aid redevelopment and blight reduction efforts

During the public input process, stakeholders identified underutilized industrial properties – particularly those that are inactive, unsightly, or in disrepair – as a significant issue in Greater Dalton. While many of these participants raised this issue in the context of its negative effect on the community’s aesthetics, others expressed a desire to see these sites redeveloped to aid economic development efforts or reused for some other purpose. Redeveloping a site that has been previously used for an industrial purpose can be a complex undertaking. For instance, ownership of a site may be opaque, with shell LLCs obscuring the owner-in-fact. Some buildings are likely to have outlived their functional lifespans and cannot accommodate modern operations. And many are considered “brownfields” due to potential environmental contamination at the sites left over from previous industrial uses. Brownfields typically require environmental remediation, which combined with other costs can make redevelopment uneconomical for private, for-profit investors.

That said, some underutilized industrial properties could be reactivated, adaptively reused, or redeveloped. Greater Dalton can help encourage private investment by developing an inventory of these properties and highlighting those with the highest potential for re-use. Economic development professionals can work together with partners such as private businesses and property owners, real estate professionals, local governments, and relevant state and federal agencies, to determine a property’s owner-in-fact, previous uses, likely brownfield status, and potential for re-use. For sites with high redevelopment potential, economic development professionals and partners can work together to market sites to potential users and investors. Consideration can also be given to utilizing public funds to redevelop or clear sites in high-profile areas and/or those that have a disproportionately impact on community aesthetics.

⁴ Software subscriptions could include EMSI, ESRI Community or Business Analyst, etc.

3. Create a Scalable Physical Hub for Entrepreneurship in Downtown Dalton

Research and public input revealed that the entrepreneurial climate in Greater Dalton is underdeveloped. Levels of self-employment and new business formation are relatively low, and small business owners and entrepreneurs who took the online survey generally gave poor ratings to various aspects of the community's entrepreneurial support systems.

Stakeholders attributed Greater Dalton's lack of entrepreneurial capacity to a phenomenon seen in many "mill towns" around the country and in the Southeast. The carpet industry initially flourished in Greater Dalton as a result of innovation and an enterprising culture. Workers in the community came to rely on steady, quality employment opportunities created directly or indirectly by this cluster of economic activity. At the same time, the natural process of industry maturation slowed the pace of new business formation and began leading to consolidations and closings. According to stakeholders, these conditions led to the current reality where many residents simply do not see starting their own business as a realistic option. Many input participants expressed a strong desire for Greater Dalton to rebuild a culture of entrepreneurship.

Creating a fully realized entrepreneurial "ecosystem" is a time- and resource-intensive process that cannot be accomplished within the span of a five-year plan. Competition is also intense. As noted in the Community Assessment, nearby regions such as Atlanta and Chattanooga possess more robust ecosystems and many other attractive qualities for prospective entrepreneurs. And even they are chasing a select few regions like Silicon Valley that are still dominant in terms of capital and talent availability.

But Greater Dalton must begin establishing critical building blocks of an ecosystem in order to seed potential for future growth and embrace a truly holistic approach to economic development. This can realistically be accomplished in the near term by convening public and private partners to create a physical hub for entrepreneurship in Downtown Dalton. This professionally staffed facility would provide basic entrepreneurship support services that the community lacks and/or are not provided on a full-time basis at a Greater Dalton location. The hub would ideally be "scalable" – over time, programming could be expanded to include more advanced programming such as a business incubator or makerspace.

CONNECTIONS TO COMMUNITY GOALS

- ∟ A physical hub for entrepreneurship would add to the vibrancy of Downtown Dalton
- ∟ Entrepreneurship support services help build wealth for local residents
- ∟ Even small side businesses generating supplemental income help create a more vibrant economy
- ∟ Expanding programming (e.g. by adding an incubator) could help drive more rapid job growth

TACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 Establish a coalition of partners and create a development plan for the hub

The first step to building entrepreneurial capacity is to establish a coalition of relevant public and private partners. While there is no one-size-fits-all model, this collaborative approach makes sense for Greater Dalton given its size and specific needs. In larger metro areas, entrepreneurial services can be more segmented, with universities, government, and the private sector each fulfilling separate and distinct roles. But in smaller communities where resources are more limited, combining the efforts of multiple partners into one initiative improves efficiency and can lead to better results. And as previously discussed, stakeholders wish to see an improved entrepreneurial spirit in Greater Dalton. Accordingly, a partnership approach is especially important, as involving multiple entities can help encourage an enterprising culture across the community rather than within a single organization.

Greater Dalton's entrepreneurship efforts would ideally be led by Dalton State University and the Greater Dalton Chamber of Commerce. Other partners could include Georgia Northwestern Technical College, the City of Dalton, the Downtown Dalton Development Authority (DDDA), the state programs such as the University of Georgia Small Business Development Center (SBDC), private firms, and others. This list of potential partners could grow as the initiative evolves and expands. With the initial coalition in place, the partners should work together to devise a development plan for the hub. This plan should:

- ∠ Inventory existing programs and capacity
- ∠ Establish a range of desired initial programming and potential opportunities for expansion
- ∠ Assess physical space and resource needs
- ∠ Identify potential locations and examine options to purchase, lease, or assume control of the space
- ∠ Develop an initial budget
- ∠ Determine partner commitments and create a resource development strategy

When formulating the plan, partners may benefit from conducting site visits to other successful entrepreneurial hubs in the Southeast. With respect to programming, the initial effort will likely require the development of basic entrepreneurial support services. At present, Greater Dalton has relatively few locally based resources for entrepreneurs. The Grow Greater Dalton Initiative maintains a website, the Greater Dalton Small Business Network, which provides a small business guide and various links. The Northwest Georgia Regional Commission operates NGCDC, Inc., a nonprofit certified to deliver 504 Loans from the U.S. Small Business Administration. Services from the Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE) and SBDC are available to area residents, but neither organization maintains an office in Greater Dalton. Accordingly, initial services could reasonably include business plan assistance, facilitating connections to existing resources such as SCORE, NGCDC, and other sources of capital, and establishing connections to other local firms to help small businesses grow their customer bases. The effort should offer services in both English and Spanish to ensure that all members of the Greater Dalton community can utilize the services.

A range of other volunteers and professionals can also lend support and enhance programming. For instance, the initiative might leverage the faculty of the School of Business at Dalton State College to mentor entrepreneurs and provide “entrepreneurial education” classes that can help individuals with initiative and ideas learn business skills and principles. If deemed appropriate, the College might also develop academic coursework with a focus on entrepreneurship that leverages the programming and physical space of the hub.

BEST PRACTICE #8: The Burson Center (Carrollton, GA) – example of strong partnerships and evolving programs in a smaller Georgia community; physical setting/space differ from Tactical Recommendation 3.3.

3.2 Retain an experienced full-time director for the hub

Professional staff capacity is critical to the success of a physical hub for entrepreneurship. While the coalition of partners described in Tactical Recommendation 3.1 can provide resources and support to the effort, the initiative must be led by a full-time director to oversee and implement programming, work directly with entrepreneurs and aspiring business owners, and manage day-to-day operations of the hub. This individual should be an experienced entrepreneur and/or have significant experience operating an entrepreneurial program such as a successful incubator or accelerator. This director should be retained early in the process of creating the hub in order to provide input and expertise to the development plan.

3.3 Establish the hub at a scalable location in Downtown Dalton

A physical “center of gravity” is often the cornerstone of an entrepreneurial ecosystem. A hub can play many important roles, including increasing the visibility of entrepreneurship in the community and serving as a networking and social hub for local entrepreneurs, with programming and special events to create additional opportunities for connections. Greater Dalton should establish such a hub in Downtown Dalton to take advantage of the neighborhood’s compact design and emerging density of amenities and social opportunities. Locating the facility in Downtown Dalton would increase the overall vibrancy of the area (see Key Initiative 5). It would also establish a Downtown presence for Dalton State College, which many stakeholders identified as a top priority for the neighborhood and the community as a whole. The hub should include clear signage and branding to publicize Dalton State’s presence in the neighborhood.

To create a physical hub, partners must acquire and outfit a physical location, which can be a capital-intensive process. But startup costs can be mitigated in a number of ways. For instance, there are numerous examples of entrepreneurship hubs (including the Burson Center highlighted in Best Practice #8) that have located in donated buildings or in spaces that are leased out at below-market rates. Partners in Greater Dalton could pursue such an arrangement and/or work with the Downtown Dalton Development Authority (see Tactical Recommendation 5.1) to develop a hub. Additionally, the hub could begin as a relatively simple “storefront” entrepreneurial support office that can serve as a highly visible focal point. If possible, this storefront should be located in a building that will allow the facility to “scale up” over time to accommodate meeting rooms, common areas, and co-working spaces and/or new program elements such as an incubator or makerspace (see Tactical Recommendation 3.4).

BEST PRACTICE #9: Business Innovation Group (Statesboro, GA) – example of a downtown entrepreneurship facility in a smaller Georgia community

3.4 Examine possibilities to expand entrepreneurship programming

The programming, professional staff capacity, and physical hub described in Tactical Recommendations 3.1 to 3.3 represent the basic building blocks of an entrepreneur assistance program. As these elements begin to come online, partners in Greater Dalton should explore additional opportunities to further expand programming in order to create a more robust ecosystem. Specifically, these stakeholders should evaluate whether a makerspace and/or business incubator would be viable additions to the entrepreneurship hub – potentially with the assistance of an outside institution or organization with expertise in establishing and operating such facilities.

Many communities around the country have embraced “makerspaces” or “fabrication labs” that utilize technologies such as 3-D printing and other production tools to allow inventors and entrepreneurs to innovate, tinker, and develop tangible prototypes and products. The model has been advanced formally by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) with its global network of “Fab Labs” and by countless other independent facilities. Such a facility could be a good fit for Greater Dalton due to the community’s strong manufacturing workforce that includes many engineers, industrial mechanics, and other individuals who may be drawn to such a space.

Another option for expansion would be working with Dalton State College to engage the Advanced Technology Development Center (ATDC) to evaluate whether a business incubator concept would be feasible in Greater Dalton. ATDC is an initiative of Georgia Tech. The organization has an extensive track record of helping high-tech startups in Georgia with coaching, access to capital, connections to customers and markets, etc. Since 1981, it has graduated more than 170 companies. In recent years, ATDC has been expanding its presence around the state, with locations in Athens, Augusta, Savannah, and Metro Atlanta.

While Greater Dalton’s existing talent base is not well-suited to traditional high-tech startup activity, the community could leverage the carpet and flooring industry (potentially through the Alliance for Innovation and Sustainability) and/or Dalton State’s pending status as a Hispanic Serving Institution to arrive at a viable concept.

4. Pursue a Competitive and Diverse Housing Stock

The Community Assessment found that Greater Dalton is struggling to attract and retain residents. Each year, more people are moving out of Greater Dalton than are moving in, and data shows that many of the highest-paying jobs in the community are held by individuals who live elsewhere. As discussed earlier in this document, combatting these trends will be vital if the community is to improve its talent base and ensure a more competitive, successful economic future. And while many factors influence individual location decisions, stakeholders in Greater Dalton consistently identified a major issue that puts the community at a competitive disadvantage for talent: housing.

Looking only at topline measures, housing in Greater Dalton is relatively affordable. But stakeholders lamented that many single-family homes and multifamily housing units are of low quality while others are surprisingly expensive, with very few “mid-tier” options in between. According to input participants, this “missing middle” phenomenon leaves few options for early-career professionals and workers such as teachers and other public servants who must look outside Greater Dalton for a quality for-sale or rental property that they can afford. Stakeholders also said that the community’s housing stock lacks certain elements such as multi-family units near downtown. Overall, nearly 30 percent of survey respondents rated the community’s quality of housing options as “very poor or below average,” more than double the proportion who rated the factor “above average or excellent.”

A community’s housing stock – in terms of total supply, product type, affordability, quality, and so on – is influenced to a large degree by market forces. Building permit data shows that relatively few new housing units have been permitted in Greater Dalton since 2009, a sharp contrast to the pre-recession years of the mid-2000s. This is consistent with the finding that many individuals are leaving the community for other places, thereby depressing demand for housing. Accordingly, it is unlikely that market demand alone will be sufficient to drive a significant amount of new construction or refurbishments of existing properties. Spurring new development will require making a “business case” for new housing development in Greater Dalton and – potentially – utilizing incentives and other forms of public investment to help make specific projects economically viable. Given the complexity of the issues at hand, Greater Dalton should begin by commissioning an in-depth housing market study to determine the appropriate course of action.

CONNECTIONS TO COMMUNITY GOALS

- ∠ High-quality housing at affordable prices would drastically aid talent attraction and retention efforts
- ∠ A diverse range of housing options can make Greater Dalton attractive to a wide variety of consumers
- ∠ Better housing options can significantly enhance quality of place
- ∠ Encouraging more workers to live in the community can increase economic vitality and local pride

TACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Commission a housing market study to establish current conditions, future demand, and next steps

Stakeholders in Greater Dalton recognize the importance of housing quality, diversity, and affordability to the community's competitiveness for talent. Because market demand alone is unlikely to result in significant improvements in the near-term, the community may need to take proactive steps to catalyze new investments. But prior to taking such steps, leaders in Greater Dalton must first ensure that they are acting based on the best possible information.

Greater Dalton should commission a housing market study to evaluate current and projected future needs for various housing types with a goal of ensuring that quality housing options are available for the community's current and prospective future residents at all incomes levels. This assessment should be conducted by an independent real estate services or community planning firm from outside the Greater Dalton area. Ideally, the study should blend data analysis with qualitative input about market conditions and perceptions derived from individual interviews with local investors, developers, and stakeholders and outside real estate and development professionals. (A more extensive public input process may also be considered.)

Specific components of the analysis could include an assessment of existing conditions and historical market trends, a projection of future needs and demand based on multiple growth scenarios, and specific examinations of the market potential for product types and price points that might appeal to young professionals. The analysis should also examine the potential for additional housing in Downtown Dalton – including "second-floor" units and adaptive re-use and new-build opportunities. These findings should directly inform the Downtown Action Plan (see 5.2).

The study should develop a set of actionable recommendations that Greater Dalton can pursue in order to improve its housing stock. Specifically, the report should evaluate strategies to incentivize private investments in new housing developments and redevelopments of existing homes and multifamily buildings. This could include the activation of Tax Allocation Districts (TAD), creating a privately capitalized fund or identifying other non-traditional sources to provide gap financing for projects, providing small loans or grants to individual homeowners to upgrade their properties, enacting a community land bank, and so on.

4.2 Advance efforts that improve the local housing stock

Based on the recommendations of the housing market study (see Tactical Recommendation 4.1), public and private leaders in Greater Dalton should work collaboratively to improve the quality, diversity, and affordability of the local housing stock. If public incentives or tools are to be utilized to catalyze new developments, building community support will be critical. Elected and appointed officials, economic developers, marketing professionals, and the private sector should work together to develop messaging for a multi-media awareness campaign communicating the need for public investments in housing and the importance of quality of place to the community's overall competitiveness and success. For specific investments, key stakeholders should work together to clearly communicate the expected return on investment – both from a financial and quality of life standpoint. This outreach could make use of the multi-platform marketing capacity developed through Tactical Recommendation 6.1

5. Establish Downtown Dalton as a “Destination District”

As discussed earlier in this Strategy, a skilled and educated workforce is the most important factor for determining a community’s future economic success. And now more than ever, talented individuals are placing a strong emphasis on quality of place when determining where to live.

During the public input process, stakeholders in Greater Dalton noted that the community has significant room for improvement when it comes to quality of place. Input participants frequently lamented a lack of “everyday” places for residents of all ages to socialize, and on the online survey, 84 percent of respondents rated the community’s nightlife options for adults as below average or worse. And as discussed in the previous Key Initiative, housing is a significant concern.

Like housing, many other quality of place considerations such as the prevalence and diversity of restaurants and bars are influenced by market forces. But many communities around the country have successfully leveraged public investments and developed enhanced programming to attract new private developments and business activities that help make vibrant and attractive places. Because resources are limited, these types of investments must be targeted, and many communities have focused their efforts on revitalizing their historic downtowns due to their abundance of existing infrastructure, walkable character, and relative density.

Greater Dalton has already made some progress in this regard. For instance, many important public development tools are already in place or enabled through the appropriate ordinances or legislation. Recent events such as Taste of Dalton, Screen on the Green, and Beer Fest 2016 have also helped energize the area. But the community has an opportunity to take these efforts to the next level to create a vibrant district that can be a destination for a wide variety of individuals such as existing residents, tourists travelers passing through on Interstate 75, and employees of local firms who live elsewhere but who could be enticed to shop, dine, or even live in a more dynamic Downtown Dalton.

CONNECTIONS TO COMMUNITY GOALS

- ∟ Progress in Downtown would have a significant, direct impact on quality of place in Greater Dalton
- ∟ A more vibrant Downtown would improve the community’s image and help attract and retain talent
- ∟ Downtown housing would be a major factor in talent attraction efforts
- ∟ Downtown Dalton can be a focal point around which the entire community can gather for events.

TACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Catalyze development through the Downtown Dalton Development Authority

Stakeholders contacted during the public input process viewed Downtown Dalton as one of the community's biggest assets and believe the neighborhood has significant untapped potential. Input participants noted that the district has excellent "bones." That is, its street grid, architecture, and built environment are conducive to supporting a thriving live-work-play district. Stakeholders also expressed optimism and excitement about recent developments in Downtown Dalton that have expanded dining and social opportunities in the area.

But stakeholders also noted that significant work is still required in order to leverage Downtown Dalton as a true "destination district" capable of attracting and retaining talent and serving as a quality of place asset for the entire community. First and foremost, input participants noted that there are relatively few options that are both affordable and appealing to young professionals including apartments and other product types in or within walking distance of Downtown Dalton. As discussed in the previous Key Initiative, many young professionals who work in Greater Dalton must live elsewhere as a result. Stakeholders also expressed a strong desire for even more restaurants, bars, amenities, and social opportunities in Downtown and noted that there are many empty storefronts that could accommodate new businesses.

Historic downtowns throughout the country have been revitalized in recent decades. This is partially a result of shifting lifestyle preferences and increased market demand, but many successful communities have also adopted a proactive, organized, and professional approach to downtown revitalization. Greater Dalton is fortunate to have a robust entity – the Downtown Dalton Development Authority (DDDA) – that is capable of advancing just such an approach. The DDA is a constitutionally established development authority with the ability to levy taxes, issue bonds, and buy, hold, and sell real estate, among other powers. Greater Dalton should further utilize the DDDA to expand housing options, redevelop historic properties, enter into partnerships with highly qualified private developers, and carry out beautification efforts and infrastructure improvements, and facilitate many other potential activities. Undertaking an ambitious program of downtown revitalization will almost certainly require public investment; the DDDA is capable of raising new revenues or receiving other funds. And by utilizing a carefully planned and incremental approach and identifying opportunities to leverage private investment with public money, the DDDA and Greater Dalton can achieve meaningful results in a fiscally responsible manner.

5.2 Create a Downtown Council to Complement the DDDA and support a vibrant Downtown Dalton

While the DDDA possesses many important development tools, Greater Dalton stakeholders also recognize that a broad coalition of partners must work together to promote development and redevelopment in Downtown Dalton. Accordingly, the community should create a Downtown Council to complement the DDDA and support a vibrant, live-work-play destination district in Downtown Dalton. This council would bring together a range of stakeholders, including elected and appointed officials, property owners, private businesses, non-profits, key institutional stakeholders such as Dalton State College, and other important partners to work on behalf of Downtown Dalton. Potential roles for the Council could include:

- ∠ Supporting the work of the DDDA through advocacy, strengthening and expansion of networks, promoting events, coordinating volunteer efforts, etc.
- ∠ Working with the DDDA to develop the Action Plan (see Tactical Recommendation 5.3), potentially in the capacity of a steering committee
- ∠ Evaluating and potentially administering community-driven revitalization efforts such as a Better Block program (see Best Practice #10)

The Council would also serve an advisory role in administering a non-profit fund to support Downtown Dalton. This fund would be established within an existing 501(c)(3) non-profit organization and could receive tax-deductible donations, grants, and other private monies to support development, which the DDDA cannot do. This fund could support event programming and beautification efforts, make small loans for property improvements to business and property owners, fund elements of the Action Plan (see Tactical Recommendation 5.3) and so on.

BEST PRACTICE #10: Better Block Program (New Kensington, PA)

5.3 Develop an Action Plan to establish a dynamic vision for Downtown Dalton and guide actions

In order to guide the new investments and redevelopments discussed in Tactical Recommendation 5.1, Greater Dalton should commission an Action Plan for Downtown Dalton. As its name suggests, this plan would create a set of actionable recommendations that can further the transformation of Downtown Dalton into a thriving, live-work-play destination district. Importantly, it would also establish a powerful vision for the future that can help inspire potential investors and the general public. The plan would establish a new blueprint inclusive of potential uses, streetscape guidelines, multimodal transportation connectivity plans, and so forth. Greater Dalton should retain a highly qualified planning firm with significant experience in urban design, downtown redevelopment, and public engagement to develop the Action Plan. The plan should be developed with extensive consultation from key stakeholders in Downtown Dalton and the broader community and should consider recent past work such as the 2010 Dalton Bicycle & Pedestrian Facilities Analysis and existing commercial design guidelines for the Downtown Dalton Local Historic District. It should also take into account the entrepreneurial hub (see Key Initiative 3) and leverage findings from the housing market study (see Tactical Recommendation 4.1) to identify opportunities for the addition of new residential offerings in downtown.

BEST PRACTICE #11: Macon Action Plan (Macon, GA)

5.4 Expand and promote event programming in Downtown Dalton

DDDA, the Dalton Convention & Visitors Bureau, and other partners provide an array of event programming in Downtown Dalton, including a summer Friday concert series, an annual beer festival, and a farmers market. In order to enhance the vibrancy of Downtown Dalton, the community should continue to support these successful fixtures and identify opportunities for new programming – especially events that will activate the district in the evenings after business hours. Additionally, the relevant partners should work to ensure that these events are well-promoted through all relevant channels (see Tactical Recommendation 6.1).

6. Launch a Campaign to Enhance Community Pride

During the public input process and subsequent conversations with the Steering Committee, Greater Dalton's image emerged as a competitive concern. Stakeholders said that the community is sometimes viewed in a negative light by both outsiders and its own residents. Greater Dalton's "self-image" emerged as a particular concern. Input participants and Steering Committee members said that the community as a whole too often focuses on its shortcoming and challenges while shortchanging positive developments.

This is not an uncommon frustration. Many other communities must grapple with morale issues to some degree. For instance, input participants frequently lament what they perceive to be an undue emphasis on negative news in the local discourse. Internal perceptions about a community can be influenced in a variety of ways. Each of the six Key Initiatives in this Strategy can help positively influence Greater Dalton's self-image. In Market Street's experience, even acute self-image issues can begin to turn around when a community demonstrates incremental yet meaningful progress. By advancing downtown development and taking steps to improve its housing stock, Greater Dalton can communicate that it is actively shaping its own future, which can in turn significantly improve morale. The Strategy that results from this process will provide the community with a blueprint for beginning a "virtuous cycle" of success where early wins can build into sustained momentum.

But Greater Dalton's leaders also recognize that more deliberate action is needed. Specifically, stakeholders expressed concerns that pervasive low morale in the community may be driving away current and future residents – contributing to the net out-migration the community has experienced in recent years. To address these issues, Greater Dalton can adopt a sustained and internally focused campaign to foster community pride and improve resident perceptions.

Stakeholders also noted that many outsiders often have poor or misinformed perceptions of Greater Dalton. But beginning with a focus on the community's internal self-image makes sense for several reasons. External marketing campaigns are expensive and the competition for attention is intense. Greater Dalton would have a difficult time standing out in a crowded marketplace, and its limited resources could be better deployed elsewhere. Additionally, a community's own residents are its best ambassadors. The way in which Greater Dalton residents talk about their community can have a significant impact on the perceptions of their neighbors and visitors who may be prospective residents, employers, or investors.

CONNECTIONS TO COMMUNITY GOALS

- ∠ The primary purpose of the initiative would be to directly improve the community's image; but the campaign could also help amplify and accelerate progress toward other Key Initiatives (and ultimately other Community Goals) by building community support and highlighting successes
- ∠ Engaging young professionals with new opportunities can directly aid talent attraction efforts

TACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Create a multi-platform strategy to communicate positive developments and news in Greater Dalton

Public input revealed that a significant contributing factor to Greater Dalton's low morale is that many people are simply unaware of the positive things that are already going on in the community. To address this issue, Greater Dalton should develop capabilities to communicate news about positive developments and community events to residents and workers.

Greater Dalton should convene key stakeholders including the Greater Dalton Chamber of Commerce, YPONG, HR professionals, real estate professionals, and local stakeholders with expertise in marketing and communications to develop an internal marketing plan. The strategy should have two key components. First, the community should develop "owned media" channels such as websites, social media accounts, and unified e-mail distribution lists to reach various target audiences – especially civic leaders and key influencers who can help spread messages via word of mouth. Second, the community should pursue an "earned media" component to help seed positive coverage of Greater Dalton in local and regional media outlets. The core audience for these efforts would be existing residents and individuals who work in Greater Dalton and live elsewhere who might be persuaded to relocate. The effort may also reach former residents of the community who still monitor local news and/or remain connected to current residents via social media networks.

Professional staff capacity will be required to manage feeds, develop original content, and measure performance – potentially in addition to other marketing duties. While a more extensive discussion of metrics will be included in implementation phase of this process, professional staff should utilize analytics tools to measure engagement with specific campaigns monitor social media conversations about Greater Dalton to gauge "buzz" about various initiatives and events, and track outcomes such as attendance at events, participation in programs, etc.

6.2 Engage young professionals in Greater Dalton with leadership, volunteer, and social opportunities

Stakeholders believe that Greater Dalton must do more to appeal to talented young people, and just 21.4 percent of online survey respondents agreed that the community is an "attractive and desirable" place to live for young professionals. A significant portion of the work required to attract and retain young professionals involves improving the community's "product" – especially the availability of housing and social offerings in and around Downtown Dalton (see Key Initiative 5). But stakeholders also noted that there is an opportunity to attach young professionals to Greater Dalton through enhanced opportunities to get involved and socialize in the community. Stakeholders said that the community would especially benefit from better engaging young salaried employees of large firms who work in Greater Dalton but do not live in the community.

Greater Dalton should work proactively to connect young professionals who live and/or work in the community with opportunities to volunteer, socialize, and grow into leadership positions in the community. Specific programming could include:

- ∠ Special social events for young professionals who work but do not live in the community
- ∠ Increased promotion of existing events, particularly in downtown (see Tactical Recommendation 5.3)
- ∠ Participation in Leadership Dalton-Whitfield
- ∠ Opportunities to volunteer through a variety of local efforts

As discussed in the Community Assessment, extensive survey work by the Knight Foundation and Gallup revealed that “openness” – the ability for all types of people to build networks and thrive – is one of the most important aspects influencing community attachment. Additional research suggests that issues of openness are particularly important to members of younger generations. Accordingly, this effort should place a strong emphasis on inclusion and seek to engage a group of people that reflects Greater Dalton’s diversity on factors such as race and ethnicity, gender, orientation, national origin, etc.

Potential partners such as YPONG, the Greater Dalton Chamber of Commerce, and non-profit and service organizations should work with large employers and their HR departments to coordinate opportunities for outreach to young professionals. Additionally, any positive new developments or implementation successes related to downtown redevelopment, housing, PK-12 education, and other relevant topics should be promoted to these groups via appropriate channels (see Tactical Recommendation 6.1).

6.3 Create a volunteer initiative focused on community beautification

Public input revealed that many residents in Greater Dalton do not feel a strong sense of attachment to their community. Stakeholders also noted that issues such as overgrown properties and litter harm the community’s self-image. A targeted volunteer initiative would address both of these issues. Volunteering is an excellent way for individuals to feel greater pride and “ownership” of the place they live. A large-scale and ongoing volunteer initiative focused on beautification would help engage residents and enhance the community’s aesthetic appeal, thereby increasing community pride.

The program should involve a range of partners including the City of Dalton, Whitfield County, the business community, service organizations, neighborhood groups, faith-based organizations, and others. Working together, these groups should identify areas most in need of beautification and form teams of volunteers to engage in regular cleanups (e.g. quarterly or twice yearly) at each location. Efforts could also be paired with enhanced code enforcement efforts to ensure responsible upkeep of private properties. Successful cleanups should be publicized through all relevant channels (see Tactical Recommendation 6.1).

BEST PRACTICE #12: Watch Muskegon (Muskegon, MI)

6.4 Develop a grassroots community brand identity to serve as a focal point of community pride

In community and economic development, the strongest “community brand” identities are those that form organically over time and reflect a deep association with a place – the “Research Triangle” or the “Music City” of Nashville. Contrived community brands tend to have little impact. In recent years, however, some places have engaged in grassroots, “open-source” efforts to develop a brand that the community can embrace as its own. Prominent examples include Richmond’s “RVA” brand and Omaha’s “We Don’t Coast” tagline. A strong, locally generated brand identity would provide a powerful focal point around which residents of Greater Dalton can express pride in their community.

Greater Dalton should convene a range of stakeholders from the Greater Dalton Chamber of Commerce, Young Professionals of North Georgia (YPONG), the Dalton Convention & Visitors Bureau, the Downtown Dalton Development Authority, higher education institutions, arts and cultural organizations, human resource departments, and other key organizations in addition to professionals with experience in marketing. Together, this group could facilitate the creation of a locally generated, open-source brand identity. This process could include surveys, contests, brainstorming and design sessions, etc. The resulting identity should then be used across all relevant communications channels (see Tactical Recommendation 6.1) when promoting Greater Dalton internally.

BEST PRACTICE #13: RVA Creates (Richmond, VA)

BEST PRACTICE #14: “We Don’t Coast” (Omaha, NE)

APPENDIX A: BEST PRACTICES

#1: STRIVE PARTNERSHIP (CINCINNATI, OH)

strivetogether.org

“Every Child, Every Step of the Way, from Cradle to Career.” This motto drives the Strive Partnership, composed of a collection of early childhood advocates, district superintendents, college and university presidents, community funders, business leaders, and service providers. The Partnership serves as a catalyst for working together across sectors and along the educational continuum to drive better results in education, so that every child is prepared for school, is supported inside and outside of school, succeeds in school, enrolls in some form of postsecondary education, graduates and enters a career. The Partnership promotes data-informed decision making and measures its success around eight outcomes: kindergarten readiness, 4th grade reading proficiency, 8th grade math proficiency, high school graduation rates, ACT scores, postsecondary enrollment, and retention and completion. In order to achieve successful outcomes, the Partnership has targeted six strategic priority areas which include early childhood education, teacher and principal excellence, linking community supports to student achievement, postsecondary access and success, advocacy and funding alignment, and promoting data-informed decision-making.

#2: KINDERGARTEN READINESS PROGRAM (MARIN COUNTY, CA)

The Marin Community Foundation’s focus on early childhood learning stemmed from the realization that fewer than one in five of Marin County’s African American or Latino high school students were prepared for a post-secondary education upon graduation. As part of a multifaceted effort, the Marin Community Foundation developed the kindergarten readiness program to increase the number of low-income and children of color who were prepared for academic success. Though the foundation has assets that far exceed those of many other community foundations, its initiatives can work at a variety of scales. Accessibility is a cornerstone of the program. The Marin Community Foundation ensures that its kindergarten readiness program is accessible to low-income and children of color through three primary initiatives:

- ✓ **Reading on Ranches:** With the assistance of family advocates and volunteers, the Reading on Ranches program provides children in remote, rural, and underserved areas in Marin County with rich literacy experiences over the summer to ensure they retain their literary skills by visiting children at their home.
- ✓ **Home Visit Program:** Similar to Reading on Ranches, the Home Visit Program engages home visitors who provide a preschool experience to children who would have otherwise not had the opportunity to attend preschool before their kindergarten enrollment. Home visitors visit two families a day, five days a week with a maximum caseload of six families.

- ✓ **Families Learning and Growing (FLAG):** The FLAG program is a year-round preschool-on-wheels that travels throughout Marin County providing free early learning services to underserved families whose children are not currently enrolled in preschool. The preschool-on-wheels provides 75 minute-long classes which include circle-time, interactive stories, art projects, and various other school readiness activities.

The Marin Community Foundation encourages and applies philanthropic investment to help improve the human condition, embrace diversity, promote a humane and democratic society, and enhance Marin County's quality of life.

#3: DREAM IT DO IT (OKLAHOMA)

dreamitdoitok.org

Developed by OK2Grow, the Dream It Do It program cultivates the next generation of makers, builders, and manufacturing workers by showcasing career opportunities available in the manufacturing sector. Through classroom visits, internships, job shadowing, educator and student tours of manufacturing facilities, career fairs, and collaborative training programs, Dream It Do It alter negative perceptions of manufacturing careers held by many students, parents, and educators. Along with providing direct experiences through factory tours, internships, and job shadowing programs, Dream It Do It provides supportive materials aimed at educating students about the real manufacturing workplace environment. Such instructional materials include lesson plans covering manufacturing in the 21st century, designing and building a robot, and designing and building a shoe along with practical, non-manufacturing specific lesson plans on professionalism, teamwork, problem solving, and critical thinking.

In 2016, nearly 16 students across nine school districts participated in "signing day" where local companies provide paid internship opportunities to rising juniors and seniors during the semester. Local public partners are highly engaged in "signing day," the city of Tulsa employed 15 students at its municipal garage in 2016.

#4: THE LEADER IN ME, DECATUR CITY SCHOOLS (DECATUR, AL)

theleaderinme.org

In 1989, Steven Covey released the best-selling book *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. In 1999, A.B. Combs Elementary in Raleigh, North Carolina was struggling with low academic performance and lack of engagement among faculty and parents. Administrators and teachers began searching for a solution, including learning principle-based leadership skills and *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. The lessons learned by teachers were taken back to the classroom, integrated into curriculums, and passed on to students.

A.B. Combs formalized its leadership initiative to blend leadership training and character education into every facet of a school's curriculum and culture. While teachers integrate the Seven Habits into classroom lessons, the Leader in Me is not a specific curriculum or set of lesson plans. It is a model for transforming a school by integrating the Seven Habits into all aspects of the child's experience at school. Students are taught that

“leadership is a choice, not a position” and are equipped with the self-confidence and skills that complement their academics. Students are taught how to set goals and track those goals throughout the year. In addition, students are taught public speaking skills and social etiquette, in an effort to prepare them to face the world head on. The Seven Habits identified by Dr. Covey (and the associated concepts as applied to elementary learning) that are central to the Leader in Me model are as follows:

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

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

In 2008, Covey released a new book, The Leader in Me – How Schools and Parents Around the World Are Inspiring Greatness, One Child at a Time, which details the successes at A.B. Combs Elementary. Other schools around the country are beginning to adopt similar approaches and in many cases see even greater benefits than those observed at A.B. Combs. In Decatur, Alabama, the program operates as a public-private partnership between the Decatur-Morgan County (Alabama) Chamber of Commerce, Decatur City Schools, and local government and business entities. All elementary schools in Decatur have incorporated components of the Leader in Me program. In Alberta, Canada, Joseph Welsh Elementary is reporting that parent satisfaction with what children are being taught has increased from 67 to 98 percent. In Adams County, Illinois, documented improvements in academic success at Dewey Elementary captured the eye of the United Way, which is now working to ensure that all 10,000 students in the county receive the same opportunity. Reported disciplinary incidents have declined by as much as 85 percent in some schools following the implementation of the Leader in Me. In 2017, 285 schools have completed the Leader In Me program with nearly 3,000 schools undergoing in the two-year process throughout the globe.

#5: CINCINNATI YOUTH COLLABORATIVE (CINCINNATI, OH)

cycyouth.org

For over 30 years, the Cincinnati Youth Collaborative (CYC) has actively engaged the business community, the Cincinnati Public Schools, and local organizations and governments to take a collaborative approach to tackling dropout rates and empowering children and young adults to succeed in education, career, and life. The program offers one-on-one mentoring for students as young as second grade and continues on through high school. Mentors are expected to meet with their mentees once a week for at least year. They also offer tutoring services, college advisors, and career specialists in an effort to keep students in school and on the pathway to success. In 2014, CYC had 40 dedicated staff members, 1,300 volunteers, and 59 corporate partners. Overall, 2,900 students were served, and the program had tremendous success. Reports show that 96% of senior students in CYC programs graduated from high school and 88% of seniors successfully transitioned to college, career, or military.

#6: FINANCIAL AID SATURDAYS (AUSTIN, TX)

austinchamber.com/education-talent/college-ready-now/financial-aid-saturdays

The Austin Chamber recognized that much of the region's highly-educated population was the result of immigration for high-technology sector jobs and University of Texas–Austin enrollment. In addition, while higher education enrollment increases were keeping pace with overall population growth in the Austin metro, degree attainment would need to be double in order to fill current and future demands for educated workers. With the support of three local school districts, six higher education institutions, and 12 community organizations and companies, the Austin Chamber developed the 20,010 by 2010 program to boost local higher education enrollment by 30 percent over 48 months. The goal was to grow total regional enrollment in institutions of higher education by 20,010 by 2010.

Financial Aid Saturdays continued the legacy of the 20,010 program by providing free assistance to Central Texas high school seniors, prospective and current college students, and parents and guardians needing help to complete federal and state financial aid applications. The Chamber organized and trained volunteers to make calls, answer questions, and walk students and their families through the process of applying for financial aid in face-to-face events held on Saturday. In the first phase of the program, the Chamber's more than 200 volunteers assisted over 500 families in filing FAFSA applications. A series of Financial Aid Saturdays events are now held annually during the college-application season.

Due to the success of Financial Aid Saturdays, the Austin Chamber created the Direct-To-College Achievement plan, a multi-chamber, multi-school district, and multi-business compact that seeks to enroll 70 percent of Central Texas' Class of 2016 directly in a higher education institution. The Chamber estimates that approximately 88 percent of the student body enrolled in nine school districts participating in the program will need to submit a financial aid application in order to achieve their goal.

#7: PARENT UNIVERSITY (MESA, AZ)

mpsaz.org/parentu/

With the philosophy that parenting is a continuous learning process and that the foundation for a child's education is laid at home, the Mesa Public School system launched a Parent University program in 1987.⁵ The diverse offering of sessions and workshops, held in junior high school auditoriums and other local school sites, now boasts attendance rates of 4,000 parents annually. Programming is offered in both English and Spanish. The program is publicized through radio announcements, target fliers, brochures sent home with every student, and announcements in the monthly district newsletter. Topics for sessions are relevant, often specifically requested by parents, and led by local and national speakers and experts. In 2016, Parent University offered approximately 46 courses during its fall semester.

Parent University is funded through a small registration fee for participants, grants, partnerships with local nonprofit agencies like Mesa United Way. Scholarships are available for those parents who are unable to meet the registration fee.

#8: THE BURSON CENTER (CARROLLTON, GA)

bursoncenter.com

Since 2006, the Burson Center has been a catalyst for small business creation and development in Carroll County. Founded through the partnership of several public and private agencies, the Burson Center offers a twist on the familiar business incubator model: along with providing services to startup businesses, it also serves as a resource center for businesses of any age. Housed in a 24,000 square foot facility that was donated to Carroll Tomorrow, the county's public-private economic development organization, the facility contains 23 leasable, furnished offices that are available to startups and small businesses. It also contains conference rooms, administration offices, a break area, and 5,000 square feet of office space. For startup entrepreneurs, the Center offers a variety of services typically found in business incubators including business plan development, counseling and coaching, industry and market research, networking, and mentoring. Since its founding, the Center has incubated 84 businesses operating in the Center's four focus areas: information technology, advanced manufacturing, healthcare, and business services.

In 2016, the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) awarded a \$250,000 grant to Carroll Tomorrow to fund an innovation laboratory space dubbed The Tinker's Box. The makerspace will feature workstations, computer kiosks, and laboratory tables open to robotics, electronics, and computer applications makers and inventors in the Center's service area. The development and programming of the Tinker's Box was not without support. With the assistance of Carroll Tomorrow staff, the Burson Center impaneled 21 technology and engineering professionals, students, economic developers, and business leaders to ensure that that the Tinker Box's offerings met the needs of innovators within the community.

⁵ Mesa Public Schools. "History of Parent University" Mesa Public Schools. 2016. Accessed December, 6th 2016 at: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B3vu91yYQEP-S2hmd0tBN01QeWs/view>

The Burson Center is owned and operated by Carroll Tomorrow who received initial investment from a private donor as well as approximately \$300,000 from the Appalachian Regional Commission to fund its initial startup costs and the first year of operation. Supporting partners including the University of West Georgia, West Georgia Technical College, SBDC, and Georgia Tech.

#9: BUSINESS INNOVATION GROUP (STATESBORO, GA)

coba.georgiasouthern.edu/big

Georgia Southern University's Business Innovation Group (BIG) was founded in 2014 through inter-departmental collaboration between the Small Business Development Center, Bureau of Business Research and Economic Development, and Center for Entrepreneurial Learning and Leadership. BIG's core mission is to provide students and the community with the skills and training to understand basic business principles, to experience how businesses operate, and to successfully launch a new business enterprises. Georgia Southern's College of Business Administration operates BIG.

BIG is headquartered at Georgia Southern University's City Campus. The Campus is a joint venture between the City of Statesboro and the University located in Downtown Statesboro. The Campus is intended to serve as a catalyst for economic development and in 2011 received the Georgia Downtown Association's Best Commercial Redevelopment Activity Award.

BIG recently launched their FabLab and Innovation Incubator in 2016. The FabLab is a joint venture between Georgia Southern University, the Downtown Statesboro Development Authority, the city of Statesboro, Statesboro Arts Council, and the Economic Development Administration. FabLab is part of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Global FabLab network.

#10: BETTER BLOCK PROGRAM (NEW KENSINGTON, PA)

betterblock.org

Borrowing from core principles developed by the Better Block Foundation, community residents of New Kensington held their first Better Block event in May 2015. The inaugural event hosted a wide array of activities including live entertainment, pop-up shops, food and street vendors, and special events in existing commercial space. According to Better Block New Kensington, approximately 2,000 individuals visited the downtown area of New Kensington during the inaugural event. While the event is held on a single day of the year, Better Block New Kensington has had a lasting impact on the city's downtown area. Since its first event in 2015, 10 new businesses have opened in downtown storefronts, attracted by the renewed excitement and attention that downtown New Kensington received due to the Better Block program.

The Better Block Foundation is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization dedicated to educating, equipping, and empowering communities and their leaders to reshape and reactivate built environments in order to promote healthy and vibrant neighborhoods.

#11: MACON ACTION PLAN (MACON, GA)

maconactionplan.com

Public and private leaders in Macon, GA have been working for more than two decades to revitalize the community's historic downtown with significant progress to show for their efforts. In July 2014, the community took another step forward by creating an updated, comprehensive, and community-driven plan that envisions the future for downtown Macon and the surrounding neighborhoods. The Macon Action Plan (MAP) was facilitated by the Macon-Bibb Urban Development Authority, Macon-Bibb County, and their partners, with funding from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation and the Peyton Anderson Foundation. The community engaged Interface Studio, a Philadelphia planning and design firm to guide the process, which concluded in October 2015.

The MAP process began with an extensive public engagement process that included surveys, interviews and focus groups, an open house, an active social media presence, and design charrettes. The master planning process also included a comprehensive analysis of housing, transportation and parking, land use, open space, infrastructure, etc. The resulting plan represents an exciting, dynamic, and actionable vision for Macon's core. Goals and strategies of the MAP include improving the use of underutilized spaces and storefronts in the downtown area, improving gateways into downtown, encouraging more housing and mixed-use developments in the core, and improving multi-modal transportation options.

#12: WATCH MUSKEGON (MUSKEGON, MI)

watchmuskegon.com

Watch Muskegon is a county-wide, privately funded campaign launched in 2015 that was spearheaded by the Muskegon Lakeshore Chamber of Commerce. The campaign seeks to improve the image of the Muskegon area to both internal and external audiences, though the model could easily be adapted to primarily target local stakeholders. The goal of the three-year campaign is to improve the overall image of the Muskegon area, share positive changes that have taken root in the community, and educate residents about the community's assets. The 14-point community image campaign is primarily focused on three pillars: 1) marketing, 2) beautification, 3) and community education (leadership training, familiarization tours, and so on). The county-wide initiative was influenced by public input, and over 100 community groups have signed onto an "Image Campaign Stakeholder" pledge that affirms their willingness to help promote the community as an attractive place to live, work, and play. Initial activities related to beautification centered on a neglected stretch of Sherman Boulevard, a prominent east-west thoroughfare. Across multiple days in July 2017, multiple volunteers including local residents and groups from West Michigan Works!, the Muskegon Heights Summer Work Program, My Brother's Keeper, Fresh Start, and Catholic Heart Work Camp worked to pick up trash and clear overgrown lots along the avenue. A local landscape architecture firm also designed a beautification plan for the corridor consisting of pocket parks, street furniture, murals, public art, textured crosswalks, wayfinding signage, and upgraded sidewalks. Implementation of the plan will be funded through public and private contributions.⁶

#13: RVA CREATES (RICHMOND, VIRGINIA)

RVA Creates is an initiative in Richmond, Virginia to develop and deploy an "open-source experiment in identity and creativity" that would result in a brand that the community can embrace and own. However, it is described by the various project partners as "sort of a brand, without the catchy slogans and formal rules that accompany most brands."

RVA Creates is the brainchild of Venture Richmond, Richmond's downtown development organization. Through a partnership with various community entities – The Martin Agency, VCU Brandcenter, West Cary Group, J H I, Elevation and The Hodges Partnership – Venture Richmond and the City of Richmond developed the aforementioned "experiment" to engage the community and advance "RVA." In 2009 and 2010, Venture Richmond worked with these partners and others to discover that the acronym RVA, a longstanding identifier for the region, was a concise and effective moniker for the area. The partners wanted to provide residents with an opportunity to make the RVA moniker and brand reflect their sense of place. ITO do so, they advanced an open-source platform that allowed residents to upload images and customize their version of a simple RVA logo. To support mass adoption of the RVA brand an initial order of 5,000 RVA stickers was placed. By the end of 2011, more than 50,000 stickers had been printed and distributed throughout the

⁶ Barrett, Malachi. "First outing of Sherman Boulevard beautification project aims to create community pride." MLive.com. July 27, 2016.

region based on surprising demand. Another open-source element – a contest soliciting submissions for a television advertisement promoting downtown Richmond – was deployed in 2012.

The RVA brand is widespread today with stickers and a variety of other merchandise visible throughout the region, the state, and wherever the area’s residents travel, promoting the region’s brand around the world. Numerous organizations and businesses have adopted the RVA acronym in their name, marketing materials, advertisements, or other attributes and operations. By providing a basic level of ownership and input into shaping the brand identity, and by investing in resources (stickers) that would help disseminate the brand by way of the area’s residents, RVA Creates was able to create a successful branding initiative that reinforced pride and sense of place among those who can be a region’s greatest ambassadors: its current residents.

#14: “WE DON’T COAST” (OMAHA, NEBRASKA)

Largely to overcome Omaha’s “flyover” community perception, the Greater Omaha Chamber launched a regional brand and image initiative based upon extensive research showing that Omaha ranks highly against other metro areas across the country but lacked an identity. The Chamber convened thousands to create a cohesive, recognizable brand that sought to communicate the region’s attributes, character and “can do” spirit. We Don’t Coast was launched as a multi-faceted campaign to use across the region to share greater Omaha’s story; positively communicate its character; and grow, retain, and attract business and talent. The campaign was presented a 2015 ACE: Award of Excellence by the Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives. Though it is not exclusively an internal brand, the We Don’t Coast initiative in Omaha was nevertheless intended to serve both an external and internal awareness-building purpose to positively communicate the attractiveness and distinctiveness of the greater Omaha region.

APPENDIX B: RESEARCH SUMMARY

The Community Assessment is the foundational research document for this strategic planning process. The Assessment evaluated Greater Dalton as a place to live, work, and do business. As a starting point for new research efforts, Market Street evaluated findings from more than a dozen reports and studies that had been conducted in Greater Dalton and Northwest Georgia during the previous decade. An extensive public input process provided on-the-ground insights into conditions in the community. Market Street conducted approximately 20 in-person and phone interviews with individuals from the community’s public, private, and non-profit sectors in August, September, and October in 2016. Additionally, an online community survey was open to the public for roughly five weeks in September and October 2016. A total of 2,220 residents, workers, and business leaders responded to the survey.

Market Street also conducted an in-depth analysis of demographic, socioeconomic, economic, and quality of life indicators to uncover the community’s key strengths, weaknesses, assets, and challenges. Much of this data is presented in a series of tables called “Scorecards” that demonstrated how Greater Dalton compares to nine other communities with which it shares certain characteristics and/or competes for talent, jobs, and investment. Collectively, this information provided an overview of conditions in the community as they presently exist and helps identify areas that may warrant strategic attention. An example of a scorecard is shown below:

	Whitfield, GA	Morgan, AL	Bartow, GA	Floyd, GA	Hall, GA	Lee, MS	Catawba, NC	Davidson, NC	Randolph, NC	Bradley, TN
Unemployment Rate (Jul 2016)	5.2%	5.2%	4.7%	5.9%	4.0%	5.4%	4.4%	4.5%	4.4%	4.2%
Rank	7	8	6	10	1	9	4	5	3	2
Peak Recession Unemployment (Dec. '07 - Jun. '09)	13.4%	11.7%	12.2%	10.9%	9.6%	11.1%	14.5%	12.9%	11.5%	10.1%
Rank	9	6	7	3	1	4	10	8	5	2
5 Yr. Establishment Change (2010-2015)	-2.9%	-2.1%	7.1%	-0.8%	7.1%	0.1%	-2.3%	-2.3%	-3.1%	10.1%
Rank	9	6	2	5	3	4	7	8	10	1
Gross Metropolitan Product (GMP) Per Worker (2014)	\$84,804	\$95,754	NR	\$80,623	\$96,013	NR	NR	NR	NR	\$82,740
Rank	3	2	NR	5	1	NR	NR	NR	NR	4
5 Yr. GMP Per Worker Change (2009-2014)	8.2%	13.8%	NR	7.4%	14.4%	NR	NR	NR	NR	8.8%
Rank	4	2	NR	5	1	NR	NR	NR	NR	3
Total Exports, \$ Millions (2013)	\$8,464	\$9,308	\$6,204	\$5,467	\$10,914	\$5,744	\$10,608	\$5,522	\$6,000	\$5,481
Rank	4	3	5	10	1	7	2	8	6	9
Value of Exports Per Worker (2013)	\$152,166	\$183,496	\$176,665	\$130,083	\$134,247	\$106,201	\$121,734	\$116,874	\$122,319	\$119,942
Rank	3	1	2	5	4	10	7	9	6	8
Exports as a % of Supply (2013)	81.0%	77.0%	81.0%	77.0%	73.0%	74.0%	77.0%	77.0%	81.0%	77.0%
Rank	1	4	1	4	10	9	4	4	1	4
Best Performing Cities (BPC) Ranking (2015)	127	169	NR	124	27	NR	NR	NR	NR	98
Rank	4	5	NR	3	1	NR	NR	NR	NR	2
1 Yr. BPC Ranking Change (2014-2015)	44	-27	NR	16	62	NR	NR	NR	NR	-83
Rank	2	4	NR	3	1	NR	NR	NR	NR	5

The nine comparison geographies utilized in the Scorecards were:

1. Morgan County, AL (Decatur)
2. Bartow County, GA (Cartersville)
3. Floyd County, GA (Rome)
4. Hall County, GA (Gainesville)
5. Lee County, MS (Tupelo)
6. Catawba County, NC (Hickory)
7. Davidson County, NC (Lexington)
8. Randolph County, NC (Asheboro)
9. Bradley County, TN (Cleveland)

The Assessment is structured into five primary sections, each of which deals with a topic that influences Greater Dalton's success and prosperity:

1. **Economic Performance:** This section deals with a community's economic health and well-being, focusing on key indicators such as total private employment, employment growth in key economic sectors, and per capita income.
2. **Workforce Dynamics:** A community's workforce competitiveness is primarily determined by its ability to meet regional businesses' demand for qualified talent and its capacity to attract new residents and retain its existing population.
3. **Innovation and Entrepreneurship:** The capacity to generate new ideas and new businesses is a core component of economic development. An "entrepreneurial ecosystem" can be quantified by examining self-employment, new startup growth, minority-owned business growth, and so forth.
4. **Business Climate:** While factors such as talent and location are among the most important in business location and expansion decisions, a favorable "business climate" – infrastructure, utility availability and cost, tax structure, etc. – also plays an important role in driving economic growth.
5. **Quality of Life:** Quality of life and quality of place are crucial to retaining and attracting talented individuals. While it is difficult to quantify a community's culture and "feel," crime, walkability, and health outcomes can provide objective insight into a community's desirability as a place to live.

The Assessment concluded with a set of Key Takeaways that summarize the most important findings and themes to emerge from this research and input. These Key Takeaways are presented on the following pages.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

The following key takeaways synthesize the most prominent themes to emerge from research and input:

- ✓ **The local economy remains heavily dependent on the carpet and flooring industry; rebuilding the “entrepreneurial ecosystem” offers a path to diversification.** While sectors such as health care have been growing in recent years, Greater Dalton’s economy is still highly concentrated in the carpet and flooring industry. Ensuring firms in this sector have the workforce and support they need to continue thriving in Greater Dalton is vital to the community’s future. To help insulate the community from a future economic downturn or disruptive change, economic developers in Greater Dalton are also working to attract and retain businesses in other sectors, though the community’s low educational attainment levels and lack of large sites ideally suited for certain uses limit options. One potential path to economic diversification involves ensuring that entrepreneurs can start and grow small businesses in the community. Stakeholders noted that Greater Dalton as it exists today was essentially built by entrepreneurs, but a wide variety of data and public input suggests that the community’s “entrepreneurial ecosystem” – inclusive of networking opportunities, access to capital and technical assistance, and other support services – is underdeveloped. Stakeholders expressed a strong desire for Greater Dalton to rekindle the entrepreneurial spirit that once invented an industry and turned the community into a global hub.
- ✓ **Very low educational attainment rates undermine economic competitiveness.** Greater Dalton’s educational attainment rates are among the lowest in the nation. Among the 596 counties with at least 100,000 people, the community ranks 586th in the proportion of adults with an associate’s degree or higher. The availability of a skilled and educated workforce is now the most important factor influencing location decisions for businesses in a wide variety of sectors, even traditional blue-collar fields such as manufacturing. Greater Dalton must take urgent steps to increase its educational attainment rates by producing “homegrown talent” and ensuring the community is competitive as possible for retaining and attracting talented residents.
- ✓ **A persistent “talent drain” further jeopardizes the community’s workforce sustainability, fiscal position, and vibrancy.** While Greater Dalton’s population is growing, this is primarily due to natural change (births minus deaths) masking an underlying threat. Data tracking migration patterns reveal that the community is losing a net average of hundreds of residents a year to other places. Many do not go far and commuting data suggests many continue to work in the community. Nearly two thirds of the jobs based in Greater Dalton that pay at least \$40,000 per year are held by individuals who live outside Whitfield County. If the status quo holds, however, this “talent drain” could begin to put a significant strain on the community’s workforce, place a significant strain on local property and sales tax revenues, and reduce the community’s overall vibrancy and civic capacity. Quality of life and place enhancements can help slow or reverse this trend.
- ✓ **Enhancing quality of place, social offerings, and housing options are vital to retaining and attracting talent and Downtown Dalton represents a logical place to target investments.** Quality of place is increasingly among the most important factors that talented people, particularly young professionals, consider when evaluating where to live. Research from the Knight Foundation also

suggests that how attached a resident feels to a community is heavily influenced by how a place looks and what there is to do. During the public input process, stakeholders in Greater Dalton said the community's quality of place needs significant improvement. Specifically, residents noted that Greater Dalton has relatively few "everyday" places for residents of all ages to socialize. For instance, just three percent of survey respondents viewed the community's nightlife options for adults as being above average or better compared to 84 percent who felt they were below average or worse. And while housing is affordable overall, stakeholders also lamented a lack of quality housing options – particularly "mid-tier" and mixed-use options that can appeal to young professionals. According to real estate professionals and others familiar with conditions in the community, market forces alone are in the short-run unlikely to deliver the type of quality of life and quality of place amenities that Greater Dalton's stakeholders desire (and that the community needs to better attract and retain talent). Accordingly, near-term enhancements to quality of place will require a combination of private and public investment. Because resources are limited and demand is relatively low, targeting these investments in Downtown Dalton makes sense, as it provides the opportunity to leverage existing assets such as historic buildings and walkable infrastructure.

- ✓ **Poverty, especially childhood poverty, represents a serious threat to the long-term community success and individual outcomes.** Nearly 30 percent of children under 18 in Greater Dalton live in a household that is below the poverty line. This has significant implications for the community's long-term health. Research suggests that children who grow up in poverty will be at an increased risk to struggle academically, socially, and economically over their lifetime. And given that Greater Dalton is not attracting new residents from other places in great numbers, the children growing up in the community today will likely represent a very large share of its future workforce. Many service providers are working diligently to provide services to the community's most in-need residents, and expanding economic and training opportunities will ultimately be paramount. But Greater Dalton can take steps to mitigate the impact of childhood poverty by supporting services such as early childhood education.
- ✓ **Dalton State, GNTC, and innovative educational programs are key assets to leverage and support.** Greater Dalton's stakeholders widely viewed Dalton State College, Georgia Northwestern Technical College, and K-12 programming such as the Advanced Manufacturing and Business Academy as among the community's best assets. In 2014 alone, for instance, Dalton State produced nearly 600 bachelor's and associates degree completions according to data from EMSI. For perspective, slightly fewer than 13,000 adults aged 25 and over in Greater Dalton have at least an associate's degree. Continuing to support these institutions and programs – and taking steps to ensure that the students who graduate from them remain in the community – can help strengthen the community's homegrown talent pipeline and support a deeper and more skilled workforce.
- ✓ **Greater Dalton has a poor internal "self-image" that negatively impacts its standing with residents and outsiders alike.** During the public input process and subsequent conversations with the Steering Committee, Greater Dalton's image emerged as a competitive concern. Stakeholders were particularly concerned that the community tends to focus too much on its challenges while shortchanging positive news. The way in which Greater Dalton residents talk about their community can have a

significant impact on the perceptions of their neighbors and visitors who may be prospective residents, employers, or investors. Accordingly, stakeholders in Greater Dalton believe the community must work proactively to improve its self-image. In Market Street's experience, even acute self-image issues can begin to turn around when a community demonstrates incremental yet meaningful progress. By simply advancing issues such as downtown development, Greater Dalton can communicate that it is actively shaping its own future, which can in turn significantly improve morale. The Strategy that results from this process will provide the community with a blueprint for beginning a "virtuous cycle" of success where early wins can build into sustained momentum.

- ✓ **While Greater Dalton has a racially and ethnically diverse population, its diverse communities exist in "silos" with limited collaboration and interaction between groups.** Research from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation and Gallup revealed that "openness" – the degree to which all types of people can build networks and thrive – is an important factor in community attachment. Public input revealed that Greater Dalton faces challenges in this area. Among online survey participants, non-white respondents were less likely than white respondents to agree with the statement "Opportunities, communities, and networks in Greater Dalton are accessible and open to a diverse range of people and cultures." And in response to the prompt, "Greater Dalton is an inclusive place" just 41 percent of respondents of all races and ethnicities agreed or strongly agreed. Like the United States as a whole, Greater Dalton is becoming a more diverse place. Stakeholders expressed a desire to see Greater Dalton take a more proactive approach to embracing and leveraging its diversity to create a stronger, more prosperous community.