



REGION SHOULD FOCUS ON DESIGN, STUDY SAYS ; CONSULTANT: SECTOR TOUCHES MANY INDUSTRIES IN NORTHWEST N.C.

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By: Richard Craver

Northwest North Carolina can build the foundation for a viable future if it embraces an economic-development strategy primarily focused on the design sector, a consulting firm told about 450 regional officials yesterday.

Since February, AngelouEconomics has been conducting a \$280,000 economic assessment for Alleghany, Ashe, Davie, Forsyth, Rockingham, Stokes, Surry and Yadkin counties.

The essence of its report is that economic developers should pursue federal and local funding for eight industry clusters, with design being "the common thread" that could sew up a united regional approach.

"There is not one single industry that will be a cure for all," said Angelos Angelou, the founder of the firm. The targeted industries involve biotechnology, design, food processing, hospitality and tourism, logistics and distribution, customized materials production, value-added services and viticulture.

Yet Angelou described design as "the region's most distinguishing characteristic."

"Design touches many fields of business across Northwest North Carolina, from biotechnology to engineering to software development to fine crafts," Angelou said. "Design-oriented activities can help transition traditional values and skills in the region's workers to new economy ideas and new-economy businesses and inspire young folks to dream about design job possibilities."

The presentation served as a rally to drum up regional support for the final report, which Angelou said would include more than 100 recommendations but won't be released for at least two more weeks.

Although Angelou spoke about the five goals that emerged from the study - transitioning the work force, promoting entrepreneurship, enhancing quality of life, improving infrastructures and developing marketing tactics - the presentation did not include specific projects for federal and local funding.

In a final draft report for Forsyth County, the firm has recommended finding up to \$26 million for four projects related to the Piedmont Triad Research Park in downtown Winston-Salem.

David Sampson, the assistant secretary for the U.S. Commerce Department, challenged the economic-development officials to identify two or three potential projects to present for federal funding.

"I assure you we give high priority to those grant applications that reflect strong regional support and are designed to advance regional economies and create regional economic competitiveness," Sampson said.

Angelou said that although biotechnology, in particular the research park, will be the key economic driver for the region, it doesn't have to be in a competition with design or other industries for attention or funding.

Resources can be shared, he said, such as a biotechnology- training initiative at Forsyth Technical Community College and a proposed visual-arts and design program at the N.C. School of the Arts that could be placed in the research park.

The study showed that the region is on the right track in some areas and provided guidance for additional areas that it can concentrate on, said Allen Joines, the mayor of Winston-Salem and the president of the Winston-Salem Alliance, an economic- development group

"We have to analyze this study and, more importantly, to embrace it and to develop an implementation mechanism that works for the entire region," Joines said.

Keith Vest, the president of Pave Advertising & Design in Winston- Salem, said that he was impressed not only that the study recommended a design cluster, but also that it didn't try to pigeonhole it into just graphic arts.

Vest said that it was natural for the study to be geared toward the young and whom he called the "creatively bent" worker and entrepreneur.

"But we can't forget displaced workers," Vest said. "We have to help them match their skills to find jobs in design, as well as the other targeted industries."

U.S. Rep. Richard Burr, R-5th., said that the study needs to be seen as a blueprint for a region, instead of individual counties, to make sure that it has an effect on its future and that it affects everyone.

Angelou said that the region should feel as empowered about its economic future as it ever has, but cautioned that the recommendations will wilt if they are under-funded from federal or local sources.

"You guys have spent \$4 million-plus studying this region. I think this ought to be the last time you study this region," Angelou said, which drew a round of applause.

The region must begin an immediate campaign to embrace and build upon the recommendations for its work force, Angelou said, "because you can't have quality of life without a quality job."