



WHETTING APPETITE

November 16, 2003

A robust turnout at the Benton Convention Center heard Angelos Angelou, a consultant from Austin, Texas, and applauded. He and his firm deserved the applause, which was especially unrestrained when he expressed the hope that after more than \$4 million spent on regional studies, this area could move forward into implementation.

Angelou presented a vision for the future, which was a refreshing change from the content of so many studies, which told us what we had and didn't have. Did we need consultants for that?

As advertised, Angelou tied it all together with his recommendation that we exploit the talents we already have in this area to build a network of designers and designs across all industry segments. He urged a change in thinking to look at design not just as art but as an economy driver as well.

He went to some length to reassure those whose vision is concentrated on biotechnology and the downtown research park that he believed the park was critical to regional development and a sound investment for the future.

Angelou identified eight industries in which the eight-county Northwest North Carolina region could compete successfully.

They were logistics and distribution, hospitality with an emphasis on marketing the region, biotechnology, health care, materials fabrication (because we know how to make things), food processing, transportation equipment and design.

It was clear from his presentation that Angelou had done his homework. He spared his grateful audience the demographic abstract that led to his recommendations, except to say that his firm had talked to a lot of people.

He set five goal areas for the implementation of his recommendations. They were work-force development, the nurturing of entrepreneurs, the maintenance and enhancement of the region's special quality of life, the development of sites and infrastructure needed to attract business and a marketing plan for the region.

Angelou offered some intriguing examples of what the final report will contain, estimating that it would feature about 100 recommendations. For one thing, he urged that the region spend more effort on applying for the federal dollars that are available for development. He has said that he could see one to three deals a year relying on that source of funds.

If there was a theme to his presentation, it was about networking and cooperation among the region's various enterprises and political bodies. He envisions a design center in the research park; a collaborative group meeting monthly; and bringing designers from all industries together for discussions about their profession. The draft report will undergo one more editing pass to incorporate the comments and suggestions of the people who commissioned the report.

The final report is scheduled for release sometime in the next several weeks. Anyone who cares about the future of this city, Forsyth County and the entire region, including the Northwest North Carolina counties as well as all the rest of the counties in the Piedmont Triad, ought to read the report. It promises to be a motivating guide to the economic future, which, if the implementation is half as good as vision, promises to be bright.

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