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**Final Angelou report: Northwest Piedmont should embrace design, regionalism**

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Receiving a standing ovation at the culmination of what was often a contentious process, economic developer Angelos Angelou told a large group of Northwest North Carolina leaders gathered in Winston-Salem for Friday's presentation to embrace the area of design and work together to make the region stronger.

Angelou, whose firm has studied the state's Fifth Congressional District for most of the past year, presented several implementation ideas in the final presentation of the Comprehensive Economic Development Study for the region. The completion of the study allows the region to apply for certain federal grants through the Economic Development Administration of the U.S. Department of Commerce.

Early on, word of the study met with criticism, as leaders in Winston-Salem feared that biotech, the new emphasis in the region, would be overlooked. But Angelou made references in his Friday remarks to biotechnology and called Wake Forest University and the Piedmont Triad Research Park "the greatest assets this community has. This is not about biotechnology versus design or design versus biotechnology," he told the crowd. "This is about what biotechnology can do for design and what design can do for biotechnology."

Winston-Salem in particular is already jumping on Angelou's design bandwagon, a sector that can range from software and biotechnology design to animation. Mayor Allen Joines referenced the sector in a speech to the National Association of Industrial and Office Properties on Thursday. That was the same day that Winston-Salem Business Inc., the region's primary business recruitment effort, said it had commissioned a study on the sector.

Bob Leak, president of Winston-Salem Business, said he was impressed by Angelou's report.

"I think with any study, you look for the key strategies that you can grab and move forward with," he said. "I see those in this study. We believe in the design concept and it is expanding our biotech opportunities."

Aside from target industries, which also included distribution and logistics, hospitality, health care, materials production, food processing and viticulture, Angelou stressed that the region must market itself as one.

Though the study did not include Guilford County or the eastern Triad because of political dividing lines, Angelou said many of his implementation recommendations could be shared with Greensboro, and he hoped that part of the region would be included in steps going forward.

"From the start, the study has been handicapped because it's been on political borders, not along the economic reality (of the region)," Angelou said. "But a lot of these economic recommendations can go to other counties."

As far as steps that can be implemented, Angelou had very specific goals he thought would serve the area well. Among them were:

- Create a National Design Center that could serve as a hub for all kinds of design issues and attract conferences of the sector's most influential leaders.
- Attract the N.C. School of the Arts' digital design program, which is currently being talked about for a Charlotte location.
- Locate a Forsyth Technical Community College campus in the research park to allow it to foster cooperation with NCSA in some of its programs.
- Invest in education, including K-12 schools, encouraging entrepreneurship at a young age.
- Continue important infrastructure projects, such as the US 421/I-77 interchange and the expansion of Interstates 73 and 74.
- Leverage the growing strengths of the Yadkin Valley viticultural region.
- Embrace diversity and promote tourism, especially heritage tourism.
- Market the region as a whole, under one slogan, such as "Designing tomorrow."
- Work as a region, hosting regional economic events and celebrating and informing citizens of success stories, especially those involving entrepreneurs.

"I believe we have brought some changes in your hearts and minds and enlarged your vision," Angelou said. "This should be the last time you study this region. Now it's time to consider implementing the things you have been told. We have begun to dream for you, we hope it's a dream you can make happen for yourselves."