



## OFFICIALS READY TO SEE WHAT PROJECTS MIGHT FUEL FUTURE ECONOMY

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By: Richard Craver

Expectations are high that an eight-month economic study of Northwest North Carolina will offer recommendations that can become community rallying points and yield federal grants.

AngelouEconomics, a consulting firm based in Austin, Texas, will present its report at 10 a.m. Friday at the Benton Convention Center in Winston-Salem. The session is free and open to the public.

The counties involved in the \$280,000 study are Alleghany, Ashe, Davie, Forsyth, Rockingham, Stokes, Surry and Yadkin.

Angelos Angelou, the founder of the firm, will make the presentation. Also scheduled to speak are U.S. Rep. Richard Burr, R- 5th, and David Sampson, the U.S. assistant secretary of commerce for economic development.

The firm has been assessing the region's economic strengths, weaknesses and opportunities as it makes the transition from a manufacturing employment base to technology, health and life sciences and services.

"We believe there is a good chance for at least one project a year, and perhaps two, to be funded in the region through these economic-development grants," said Matthew Dolge, the executive director of the Northwest Piedmont Council of Governments. The council and the Mount Airy Chamber of Commerce have served as the sponsors of the study, which was drawn along congressional-district lines.

"We wanted this study to be unique from all the other studies, and we believe they have delivered with recommendations that will challenge people," Dolge said.

"Our community leaders want ... investment in their communities, but they want the investments to be sound ones," he said.

AngelouEconomics already has identified five industry clusters for the region - biotechnology and life sciences; design and software technology; logistics and distribution; hospitality and tourism; and transportation equipment. Angelou said that he would make recommendations for eight industry sectors.

"The plan is multifaceted for the entire region and will not rely on any one sector of the economy," Angelou said. "Every one of our recommendations calls for federal funding. It's going to require some lobbying, some good grant-writing and local matching money because the projects are unique."

Angelou said that the recommendations would cover infrastructure needs in industrial and research parks and highways, as well as the biotechnology sector and the N.C. School of the Arts.

"Our recommendations will impact and expedite the full development of the Piedmont Triad Research Park and promote design because it is playing a bigger role in about every industry," Angelou said.

Allen Joines, the mayor of Winston-Salem, said he is expecting to hear viable recommendations in the final report for Forsyth County and the region as a whole.

"We look forward to the recommendations on how the region can move forward with design technology in graphics, computers and biotech and how the visual arts can play a role," Joines said. "The study also has served to validate efforts already going forward here, such as the Piedmont Triad Research Park, biotechnology and financial services.

"Our challenge as a community will be to carry the recommendations forward instead of just putting them on a shelf and letting them gather dust like other studies," he said.

The region could be slow to embrace the recommendations because the study has drawn criticism from community and economic-development officials.

The firm apologized in July for a draft report that failed to understand the role of economic-development groups in Forsyth County. Angelou's comments that the region needs to broaden its search for niches in biotechnology and life sciences initially was criticized by supporters of biotech initiatives already in place.

The consulting firm began the study in February with the assessment that the region was in an employment crisis because of the hemorrhaging of manufacturing jobs.

Since then, the region has been shaken by several manufacturing restructuring moves, including R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Holdings Co., Pillowtex Corp., Unifi Inc., Thomasville Furniture Industries Inc., Hooker Furniture Corp. and Pine State Knitwear Co. Inc. There have been about 4,487 manufacturing jobs eliminated in the region since February, according to data from the N.C. Employment Security Commission .

"Part of the study is to look at a Northwest North Carolina economic future that would have a smaller manufacturing-employment base and suggest educational and work force adjustments to keep our residents gainfully employed," said Ron Morgan, the economic-development director for Stokes County.

Some officials said that the biggest challenge facing the recommendations is that the study doesn't include Guilford County and other parts of the Triad Metropolitan Statistical Area. Angelou said that many of the recommendations would apply to - and likely depend upon - other parts of the Triad.

Don Kirkman, the president of the Piedmont Triad Partnership, said that the threshold question of the study is how well will the recommendations lend themselves to regional collaboration.

"If the recommendations can be aligned with the economic boundaries of the Triad, and not just this congressional district, there is a greater likelihood of implementation and success," Kirkman said. hout a quality job."