

context

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THE PROGRAM ON PUBLIC LIFE

is a non-partisan organization devoted to serving the people of North Carolina and the South by informing the public agenda and nurturing leadership. The Program on Public Life is part of the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

For more than two years, the UNC Program on Public Life has collaborated with North Carolina's Eastern Region, one of the state's seven economic development partnerships, to consider the potential of a fresh perspective: viewing the future of the East as a metropolitan opportunity rather than a rural problem. This issue of Carolina Context both explains our findings and offers ideas for continued discussion and action in the 13-county economic-development region.

Our preliminary report, outlined in the form of a power-point presentation, already has contributed to lively conversations among citizens and leaders in several Eastern communities. Those conversations have enriched this fuller report, and we express our gratitude to all those who have taken time to listen and respond to our analysis and findings. (See the end-note for the origin and process of this study.)

The Eastern Region features a collection of cities and towns with proud histories and distinctive characteristics. Still, in today's globalized economy, the region's counties and municipalities would clearly grow stronger as a regional aggregation of assets. At a recent Emerging Issues Forum at N.C. State University, Bruce Katz of the Brookings Institution observed that the United States has "inherited 19th Century government structures" that serve to balkanize the country, its states and sub-state regions. In today's world, he said, independent government jurisdictions must collaborate to compete effectively, no where more true than Eastern North Carolina.

Here, then, are the principal findings that have emerged thus far from our inquiry:

- The Eastern Region needs the voice of young professionals. Organizations of young professionals have formed in several communities; now what's needed is a purposeful regional-wide effort to engage young professionals, across lines of gender, race and long-standing political boundaries, in a sustained conversation over the future of the communities and the region whose leadership many of them will soon inherit.
- The region suffers from a complex set of cultural clashes that amounts to a pervasive "disconnectedness." We heard concerns about disconnects between baby-boomers and people in Generations X and Y, between the sons and daughters of long-established families and newly arrived men and women, and — a legacy of our history — between whites and blacks. A regional effort to engage young professionals would provide a forum for addressing cultural clashes, as well as tap their energy and ideas for economic advancement.
- s a growing population center and the locale of East Carolina University, Greenville clearly provides the Eastern Region with its strongest metropolitan "hub" — poised to play a more catalytic role in both economic and cultural development throughout the region.
- The region should adopt a strategy of encouraging the development of small-business enterprises that provide lifestyle amenities, and build upon its assets for fresh- and salt-water recreation.

The Eastern Region has reached a compelling moment for an effort to realign the region and its assets to become a more competitive and equitable society that attracts fresh ideas and leadership as it expands opportunity.

— FERREL GUILLORY
Director, Program on Public Life

North Carolina's Eastern Region: Through a Metropolitan Lens

Note: Early drafts of this essay were written by Andrew Holton and Jennifer Weaver, when they served as the professional staff of the UNC Program on Public Life. Fiona Morgan and Aaron Nousaine, both recent recipients of master's degrees, contributed to revising and updating the text and data.

Two key questions guided our inquiry: What would we learn by looking at economic development opportunities in Eastern North Carolina through a “metropolitan” lens as distinct from the traditional “rural” lens? What steps should the region take to attract and retain young professionals?

We analyzed data about the region’s shifting population, its changing economy and labor force, its land use, and the extent of its natural resources and lifestyle amenities. We commissioned a region-wide telephone survey of residents, and we conducted face-to-face interviews with 70 young professionals to get a sense of what they see as the state of region and its direction for the future.

And we reviewed the perceptive and challenging “vision plan” prepared for the Eastern Region by a 65-citizen strategic planning committee with the assistance of the Center for Regional Economic Competitiveness, a nonprofit consulting organization affiliated with George Mason University in Virginia. Its analysis, prepared in May 2006, found that “young adults who earn a post-secondary degree (from a university or community college) are migrating from the region” and that “the region lacks sufficient amenities necessary to attract and retain young professionals.”

Just as the region no longer counts on tobacco as its preeminent economic mainstay, Eastern North Carolina cannot count much longer on its current corps of long-time leaders of the baby-boom generation. In the transition from one generation to the next, young professionals will inevitably form much of the muscle of the region’s business, civic and political leadership in the years ahead. Thus, a strategy of regional action, with a focus on retaining and attracting young professionals, appears to offer the prospect of stimulating the creation of businesses, an expansion of jobs and the connecting of people and places in distress to centers of economic activity.

From our conversations with young adults, we found strong family and emotional attachments to the region. Many young professionals who live in the East want to stay, but they feel they need more — in economic, educational and social assets — in order to do so. Even as they lauded the small-town atmosphere that has long pervaded Eastern North Carolina, young professionals expressed a willingness to see their small cities grow into metropolitan proportions so as to attract the community amenities they desire.

A SCAN OF THE EASTERN REGION

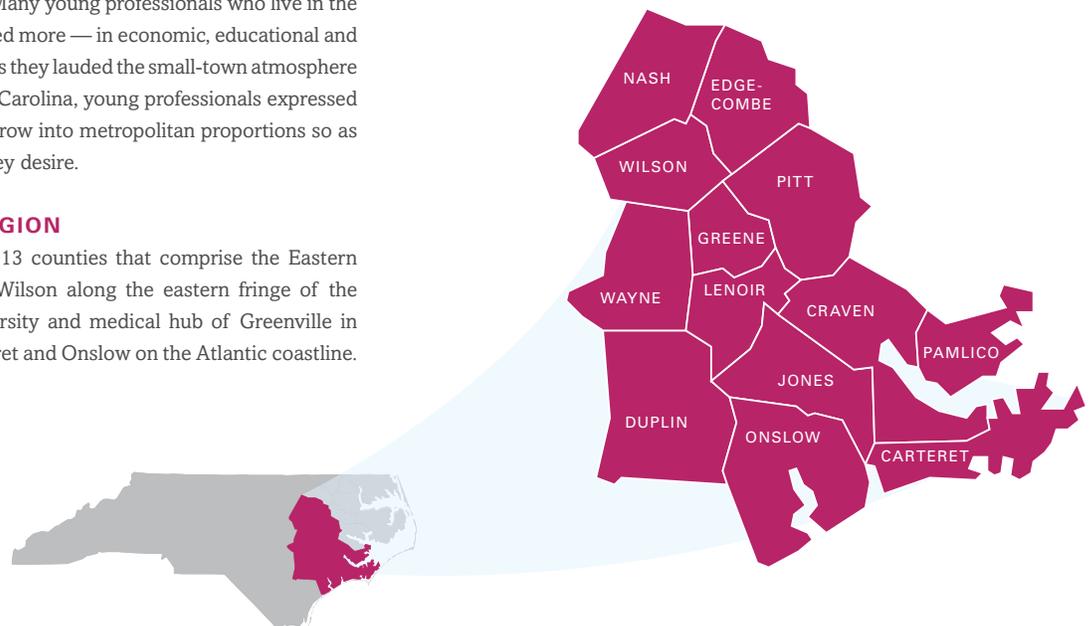
Nearly 1.4 million people live in the 13 counties that comprise the Eastern Region. It stretches from Nash and Wilson along the eastern fringe of the Research Triangle, through the university and medical hub of Greenville in Pitt County, to Craven, Pamlico, Carteret and Onslow on the Atlantic coastline.

While these counties are bound in partnership, the region is a diverse collection of communities. Three counties have military installations — Wayne is home to an Air Force base, Onslow houses a Marine Corps base, and Craven has a Marine Corps air station. Three counties long associated with tobacco production and marketing — Nash, Edgecombe and Wilson — find themselves increasingly connected to the labor markets of the Research Triangle to the west and Greenville to the east. Pamlico, Craven and Carteret are defined largely by their proximity to river, sound and ocean.

The Eastern region contains 13% of the state’s land, 18% of its municipalities, and somewhat more than 10% of the population. Slightly more than six out of 10 residents are white, slightly fewer than three out of 10 are black, approximately 1 out of 10 is Hispanic or Latino, and the rest are American Indians and a few of other racial or ethnic groups.

Of the 13 counties, two — Jones and Lenoir — experienced population loss over the past decade. Most counties grew, but below the state average of 18.5 percent. Onslow grew nearly that much, 18.2%. Duplin grew by 19%, with Hispanics accounting for nearly half of its new residents. Pitt County’s population jumped by 26 percent, the most robust growth in the region; and most of the growth came in Greenville, now North Carolina’s 10th largest city.

Historically, family-farm agriculture defined the East. With its poultry, hog, tobacco, soybeans, and cotton production, the Eastern Region ranks second among the state’s economic partnership regions in total crop land, with nearly 1 million acres. Today, there are fewer than 5,000 farms in the region; there has been a shift from small to large farms, from family farming to corporate-style agriculture. The Eastern Region ranked second in the amount of farm cash receipts, but sixth in the amount of net farm income, i.e., receipts after costs.



THE EASTERN REGION *contains 13%* of the STATE'S LAND, *18%* of its MUNICIPALITIES, and *somewhat more than 10%* of its POPULATION

Approximately 19% of residents over age 25 have a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to the state average of approximately 26%. In mid-2011, unemployment in most Eastern Region counties was near or above the North Carolina rate of 9.7 percent. The poverty rate in 2009 was nearly 20%, averaged across the 13 counties, and in seven counties it exceeded 20%, compared to about 16% statewide.

As of May 2011, the East's civilian labor force was composed of 460,608 people, of whom 414,670 were employed. More than 54,000 were employed as office and administrative workers, earning on average \$29,000 a year. More than 37,000 worked as cashiers, retail sales clerks and in other sales occupations, earning an average of \$27,000 a year overall. Nearly 35,000 worked in food preparation and related service occupations, earning less than \$19,000 annually, on average. Despite the image of the East as an agricultural region, fewer than 1,600 worked in farming, fishing, or forestry, with average annual earnings under \$23,000. Fewer than 4% of those employed worked in management occupations, the only professional category in which the average annual wage is over \$75,000.

SURVEY OF RESIDENTS' ATTITUDES

The Program on Public Life commissioned Public Policy Polling, a Raleigh-based survey firm, to measure attitudes of residents of the Eastern Region, especially on their assessment of quality of life. The poll was taken by telephone on June 12–15, 2009. While the poll results of two years ago came at the end of a major recession, we have confidence that they reflect enduring attitudes.

In analyzing the poll results, we looked particularly at attitudes by age. Thirty-eight percent of the respondents were in Generations X and Y (18 to 44 years old), 46 percent were Baby Boomers (45 to 64) and 16 percent were mature adults 65 and older.

Here are major findings:

- Fully 60 percent of the residents surveyed said that Eastern North Carolina is on the wrong track. By contrast, only 15 percent of Research Triangle residents, in a survey taken at the same time, considered their region on the wrong track.
- More older adults expressed satisfaction with the region's quality of life than younger adults. About eight out of 10 adults over 45 years old rated Eastern North Carolina excellent or good as a place to live, while about six out of 10 younger adults rated the region excellent or good..
- Seven out of 10 young adults felt that their community's recreational activities fell short of what they desired.
- Among both younger and older adults, more than six out of 10 rated "easy access to the ocean, rivers and other water" as important or very important to their quality of life.

- Not surprisingly in light of the severe recession, jobs ranked first when residents were asked to name the most important issue facing the East. Barely more than one out of 10 respondents rated their community excellent or good in terms of career opportunities for young people.

- More than half of those surveyed said that quality of education in elementary, middle and high schools was a "big problem" facing their community. About half also said that getting people involved in community affairs was a big problem. About one-third rated racial and ethnic relations as a big problem, while two-fifths put the matter as at least a "small problem."

- Seven out of 10 older adults said they were happy and planned to stay in Eastern North Carolina. Barely half of young adults said the same thing. Nearly two out of 10 young adults said they were unhappy and planned to move.

DISCONNECTEDNESS, ALONG WITH HOPE

Through the spring and summer of 2009, staff and interns of the Program on Public Life conducted face-to-face interviews with 70 young professionals, ages 25 to 45, working in the region. An additional 15 interviews were conducted with young adults who had left the East to live elsewhere in North Carolina. Our interview pool was drawn principally from Goldsboro, Rocky Mount, Kinston, Greenville, Wilson and New Bern. We interviewed young professionals identified by local chambers of commerce, economic development directors, and civic and political leaders. We used the interview responses to supplement the poll findings in assessing how people think about their region, why they choose to live there (or to leave), and ways the region could change in order to attract more young professionals.

The responses we got from these interviews reflected three main themes: 1) disconnectedness at multiple levels; 2) equal feelings of hope and concern about progress in the region; and 3) an appetite for cultural amenities and access to natural resources.

Young professionals identified what they saw as obstacles to civic participation, challenges to professional development, and unproductive rivalries: old vs. young; segregation vs. inclusion, married-couple families vs. the young and single. There was a strong sense that competition among local governments had become an endemic mindset that stands in the way of regional partnerships.

Three societal cleavages emerged over and over again in the interviews — between generations, between races, and between old guard and new guard.

"City leaders are old and traditional. They aren't willing to try new things or change the status quo."

— Married white male, age 28.

"What makes Eastern North Carolina so charming is what holds it back"

— Married white female, age 40.

“Young professionals want to develop the urban life in Greenville, but the older people fight it.”

— Single black male, age 24.

The young professionals we interviewed see the older generation — who still hold most leadership positions in the region — as stuck in old ways of running governments and conducting business. They feel the older generation, while well-intentioned, is fearful or mistrustful of change. Thus, the status quo reigns, and the younger generation remains frustrated at the pace of change.

A married black woman in a city government, for example, noted that even basic communication stymies cooperation between generations. Younger workers will often hash out differences and/or obstacles to a task prior to a meeting via email, texting, or instant messaging, she said, but then find themselves talking everything out again when they meet with a larger group containing older leadership and are unable to accomplish as much as they had hoped.



“Older white men run this town.”

— Married white female, age 40.

“There is a good-old-boy network that fosters racial tension and the wealthy white residents and business owners really work to segregate their employees and customers.”

— Married white female, age 38.

“All the professional firms...are segregated. There are black professionals and white professionals that don't interact.”

— Single white female, age 30.

Our standard list of interview questions queried respondents about the state of race relations in their town, but many offered that race relations remain a problem without prompting. The degree to which old racial tensions were perceived as still playing a dominant role varied from town to town. Most often, racial divisions were spoken about in terms of the public schools. Whereas overt tensions might not be high, some respondents said, schools,

business, and social networks were largely segregated, preventing eastern communities from feeling more modern.

“Natives have given up on improving the city”

— Married white female, age 30.

“Unless you are ‘Old Rocky Mount,’ there is not a lot of opportunity professionally or in civic life.”

— Married white male, age 34.

Many respondents expressed frustration with an in-group versus out-group mentality governing the towns in which they lived. They reported that a small group of families and their close acquaintances in each town have held primary positions of leadership in professional and civic circles for many years. Residents who are newer to the area, or not part of this inner circle, feel excluded from the decision-making processes guiding their towns' future.

“The towns in the East don't work together and try too hard to compete with one another.”

— Single black male, age 24.

There is widespread agreement among economic development professionals that increasingly regional approaches to economic and community development make sense for both rural and metropolitan areas. The very division of North Carolina into economic development regions reflects a commitment to this approach by state leaders.

In our face-to-face interviews, however, people identified most strongly— if not exclusively — with their particular town, and they felt a sense of competition with other towns. With the scarcity of jobs and metro-like amenities in every town, each locale often pits itself against its neighbor, rather than working together to create a rising regional tide to float local boats.

AMENITIES: KEY TO FUTURE

“I hate all the chain restaurants and how they make the town look.”

— Single white female, age 31.

“Single people can't stand living here, while it is a great place for married couples.”

— Married white male, age 25.

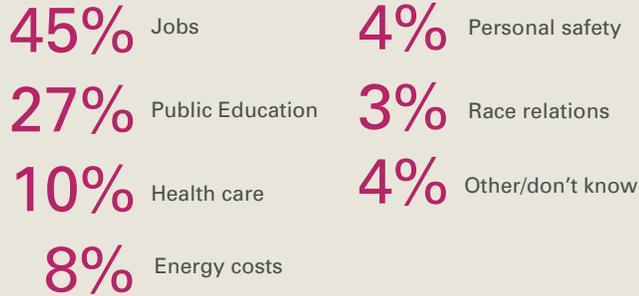
“It's extremely difficult to find a husband or wife ... everything is geared toward college students or older people.”

— Single white female, age 31.

The young professionals we interviewed repeatedly mentioned a dearth of metro amenities, as well as social and recreational opportunities, as a major quality-of-life concern. Not only did a lack of these resources greatly diminish their own satisfaction with life in the region, but they seem to have

POLL*

Of these six issues, which do you think is the most important issue facing Eastern North Carolina?



this concern crystallized in their minds as a major hindrance to other young professionals being willing to move in.

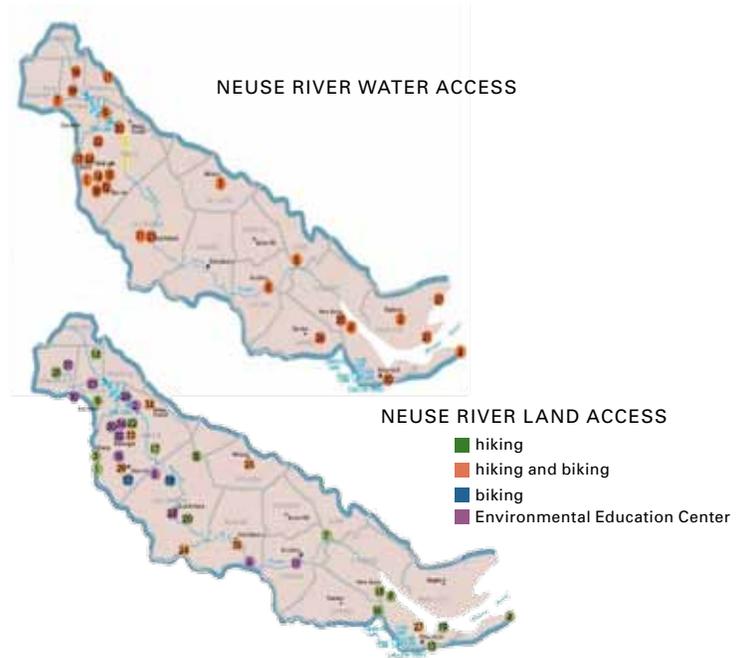
Frequently mentioned was a desire for somewhere other than chain restaurants to eat, especially for a nice night out. People expressed this desire in terms of both wanting non-chain food to eat and wanting to support local businesses.

Young professionals want places to meet other people like them, for socializing and dating, for sharing ideas and making business connections, but see few options for where to do that. Greenville residents, for example, noted that there were many places in the city for college students and older residents, but not for young professionals. Similar sentiments were expressed in Goldsboro, in terms of not wanting to go to the places usually dominated by personnel at the air base.

Our participants were also keenly aware that the lack of amenities presents a formidable roadblock to enticing other young professionals to move to the region, and for bringing back college graduates who grew up there. Cultural and outdoor amenities would not necessarily be the driving factor in choosing whether to live in the region, but, as several respondents phrased it, if a person had a job offer in the Eastern Region and a similar offer in an area with more amenities, that difference could

become a factor in pushing a job-seeker to another locale.

Again and again, respondents spoke about how important water is to them. Most have one or two particular beaches they frequent, and in many towns there is a distinct absence of people on the weekends when those who can afford it flock to the coast. The region is blessed with rivers; a river runs through every town in which we conducted interviews. Many respondents cited riverfront development as a civic initiative that they could get excited about. Most couched "riverfront development" in terms of restaurants and shops on the water and/or riverfront parks.



Source: N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Office of Environmental Education

Despite residents' strong sense of connection to the outdoors, particularly to the water, the Eastern Region could do more to provide expanded recreation areas. Among the state's economic development regions, the East ranks fourth in the number of acres of recreational land available; still, 232,000 of its 266,000 acres are part of the three national preserves: Cape Lookout, Croatan National Forest and Roosevelt Natural Area. Set aside these three federal areas, and the Eastern Region has the least local- and state-funded recreational area of any economic development region.

The state's map of access points to the Neuse River demonstrates untapped potential. Though much of the Neuse's beauty is at the southern end, the majority of its access points are in Wake and Johnston counties.

EDUCATION: THE ULTIMATE AMENITY

In today's economy, there is no sustainable economic development without sustained improvement in public education. As our Eastern interviewees saw it, without exactly phrasing it this way, schools are the ultimate amenity.

POLL*

All things considered, do you think your county is on the right track, or the wrong track?



* Note on polling: The UNC Program on Public Life commissioned Public Policy Polling of Raleigh to conduct a survey on attitudes and perceptions of quality of life in the Eastern Region. While it polls for Democratic candidates in North Carolina, Public Policy Polling has built a national reputation for reliability in political circles. In this survey, and a companion survey in the Research Triangle region, the staff of the Program on Public Life designed the questionnaire, which contained no questions on electoral politics or of a partisan nature.

The survey was conducted June 12-15, 2009. PPP uses an automated telephone method, with respondents hearing a recorded series of questions and asked to respond by entering an answer on the key pad. This survey had 1,874 respondents, spread out through the counties of Onslow, Pitt, Wayne, Craven, Nash, Wilson, Lenoir, Edgecombe and Duplin. Of the respondents, 53 percent were women, 47 percent men; 61 percent whites, 36 percent blacks, only 2 percent of other racial or ethnic backgrounds. In one demographic category, the poll appears out of sync with the population of the Eastern Region – more poll respondents said they had a professional degree or some college than the actual attainment levels of the region. It is possible, therefore, that the poll results skew toward the views of people with post-secondary education.

And yet, almost every person we interviewed cited public schools as one of the major obstacles preventing progress in the region. Those with children worried over the education their children were getting. Those without children wondered if they should move to another area with better schools when they started a family.

“The public schools are terrible and a lot of people are moving to the Red Oak area for this reason.”

— Single white female, age 34, referring to a suburb of Rocky Mount.

“The public schools are a real problem. All my kids went to public school and did fine, but my husband and I were very active in our kids lives.”

— Married black female, age 32.

Numerous respondents spoke of the schools specifically in economic development terms: Without decent public schools, it is very hard to entice new businesses to the area. Indeed, there is no effective economic and community development strategy that does not include persistent efforts to reform and upgrade public education.

JOBS, JOBS, JOBS

“City leaders ... mainly aren’t trying to attract white-collar industry ... The city only tries to attract low-paying jobs.”

— Married white male, age 28.

“Everyone ... is either very well-off or poor. The middle-class is the one that moves.”

— Married white male, age 34.

The loss of farm and traditional manufacturing blue-collar jobs in Eastern North Carolina is well-known and documented. But our interviewees were focused on white-collar jobs. Many reported that it was hard to find white-collar work without a connection to a family business. In addition, many felt that local leaders focus on attracting blue-collar industry at the expense of building up the young professional class.

And yet, many, perhaps most, of the young professionals we talked to said they wanted to stay in Eastern North Carolina. Repeatedly, we heard these phrases:

“Great place to raise a family.”

“Laid back way of life.”

“Friendly people.”

Despite the numerous problems they identified, most of the young professionals we interviewed feel rooted in the region. They may not think of

it in a regional sense, and they may focus more heavily on the negatives when prompted, but overall people generally want to stay if they can find a way.

For some, inadequate schools or lack of employment will force a decision to move to a place with more opportunities and more amenities. By and large, however, moving is not the first choice. Those who choose to stay — for now — then must consider whether to stick around hoping things will improve, or to take part in making things improve.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

The purpose of this study was to examine the economic prospects of the 13-county Eastern Region using a metropolitan lens. The study was not designed to produce a formal economic development plan or strategy. Rather, our intent, going forward, is to offer analysis and foster conversation among public officials, civic leaders and residents around our core findings.

As identified in our inquiry and interviews, the region has significant assets — miles and miles of coastline and riverfront property, 11 community colleges, two military installations and related communities, and East Carolina University, the state’s third-largest public university by total student head-count, second-ranked in undergraduate enrollment. The challenge that emerges from our study is how to take fuller advantage of these assets to expand business opportunities, to provide more jobs for residents, to lift personal income and to enhance the quality of life.

And yet, we found that barriers anchored in history continue to inhibit economic vitality and progress. Barriers include lingering racial attitudes and intra-community rivalries. Still, we found residents of the region eager to talk about their aspirations and the course of their communities.

As conversations proceed over the future of the Eastern Region, we would encourage continued exploration of three interlocking concepts:

1) Regional collaboration — A significant body of research over the past two decades argues that the region is the “decisive, strategic platform for economic success and quality of life” in an increasingly globalized economy. Those quoted words come from a recent report of the Council on Competitiveness, an organization of CEOs, university presidents and labor leaders.

“The problem is rarely that the less successful regions lack sufficient assets,” says the council’s report. “Instead these regions seem to lack the ability to think, plan and act regionally.”

In one of its State of the South reports, MDC Inc. of Chapel Hill observed that “regionalism means actively encouraging communities to band together to achieve economies of scale,” and it saw a state role in forging “rural/urban links (that) are a promising way to create regional vitality.”

2) Regional hub — The Eastern Region of North Carolina contains four metropolitan areas and four smaller micropolitan areas, as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau. A metro region features a core city, with its neighboring suburbs and associated swaths of rural land. Metropolitan areas are economic and cultural entities that usually cross political jurisdictions.

Of the four larger metro areas in the Eastern Region — centered on Greenville, Goldsboro, Jacksonville and Rocky Mount — Greenville has emerged as the strongest “hub” for a regional approach to advancement of both rural and city economies. The city grew by 40 percent since 2000, and it now represents half the population of Pitt County, the

MOST POPULOUS CITIES IN NORTH CAROLINA: 2000 AND 2010

| POPULATION RANK | | | POPULATION | | CHANGE, 2000 TO 2010 | |
|-----------------|-----------|---------------------|-------------------|---------------|----------------------|-------------|
| 2010 | 2000 | | 2000 ¹ | 2010 | Number | Percent |
| 1 | 1 | Charlotte | 540,828 | 731,424 | 190,596 | 35.2 |
| 2 | 2 | Raleigh | 276,093 | 403,892 | 127,799 | 46.3 |
| 3 | 3 | Greensboro | 223,891 | 269,666 | 45,775 | 20.4 |
| 4 | 5 | Winston-Salem | 185,776 | 229,617 | 43,841 | 23.6 |
| 5 | 4 | Durham | 187,035 | 228,330 | 41,295 | 22.1 |
| 6 | 6 | Fayetteville | 121,015 | 200,564 | 79,549 | 65.7 |
| 7 | 7 | Cary | 94,536 | 135,234 | 40,698 | 43.1 |
| 8 | 9 | Wilmington | 75,838 | 106,476 | 30,638 | 40.4 |
| 9 | 8 | High Point | 85,839 | 104,371 | 18,532 | 21.6 |
| 10 | 13 | Greenville | 60,476 | 84,554 | 24,078 | 39.8 |
| 11 | 10 | Asheville | 68,889 | 83,393 | 14,504 | 21.1 |
| 12 | 14 | Concord | 55,977 | 79,066 | 23,089 | 41.2 |
| 13 | 12 | Gastonia | 66,277 | 71,741 | 5,464 | 8.2 |
| 14 | 11 | Jacksonville | 66,715 | 70,145 | 3,430 | 5.1 |
| 15 | 15 | Rocky Mount | 55,893 | 57,477 | 1,584 | 2.8 |
| 16 | 16 | Chapel Hill | 48,715 | 57,233 | 8,518 | 17.5 |
| 17 | 17 | Burlington | 44,917 | 49,963 | 5,046 | 11.2 |
| 18 | 18 | Wilson | 44,405 | 49,167 | 4,762 | 10.7 |
| 19 | 24 | Huntersville | 24,960 | 46,773 | 21,813 | 87.4 |
| 20 | 21 | Kannapolis | 36,910 | 42,625 | 5,715 | 15.5 |

¹Census 2000 counts are as published in Census 2000 reports and thus do not include any changes published subsequently due to boundary changes or to the Count Question Resolution program.
 Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Redistricting Data (Public Law 94-171) Summary File, Table PL1, and 2010 Census Redistricting Data (Public Law 94-171) Summary File, Table P1.

most populous county in the region. Greenville has accumulated key elements that position it to strengthen its own appeal to creative professionals and to serve as economic driver, offering the prospect of job opportunities, for a wide circle of rural communities.

In particular, the presence of East Carolina University in downtown Greenville, along with the Brody Medical School on the outskirts of the city, solidifies Greenville’s posture. ECU’s strategic plan identifies “economic prosperity in the East” as one of its core objectives. With a current enrollment of nearly 28,000 students, ECU was projected to grow to 33,000 by 2017, though recession-induced budget cuts may temper anticipated growth. Still, not only does ECU draw talented students and faculty, but it also provides research, engagement and cultural offerings, the combination of which bolsters Greenville and ripples through Eastern North Carolina.

The question is how to develop a purposeful “hub” strategy, as well as to encourage regional collaboration. In a paper for the state Department of Commerce, four of our UNC colleagues at the School of Government examined case studies and found the need for “patient recurring investments” for five years or more to encourage regional economic development around metro hubs. Clearly, there is a need for serious conversation and leadership both in state government and in communities in the Eastern Region.

Regional leadership — In the course of this study, we focused on the attitudes and aspirations of young professionals because they will inevitably form much of the muscle of the region’s business, civic and political leadership in the years ahead. Studies of economic advancement often point to the benefits of the presence of a vibrant “creative class,” as Richard Florida termed it.

By encouraging efforts to attract and keep young professionals in the East, we do not intend to elevate a new elite at the expense of working people and farmers, the elderly and poor, residents of communities in distress. Rather, because young professionals are likely to aggregate in metro hubs, regional neighbors would likely benefit from a strategy of developing small business, amenity-type enterprises: boutiques for clothing; white-tablecloth restaurants that feature locally grown produce; venues for music and other entertainment; establishments that cater to people seeking water recreation; and coffee shops, night clubs and marketplaces where people can gather to buy things and enjoy each other’s company.

The region can no longer count on tobacco and small-shop manufacturing as its economic foundation. Likewise, Eastern

North Carolina can no longer count on its current crop of long-time leaders of the baby-boom generation, many of whom will surely age out of their leadership roles after many years of service. Discussions of the region’s future often turn to the need for fresh leadership. Young professionals in the East appear less invested in old rivalries between towns and more concerned with building communities that work for themselves and their children. Thus, local and regional governments, businesses, nonprofits and schools should create mechanisms to engage young adults in informed conversations on the future of the region.

END-NOTE

In October 2008, the UNC Office of Economic and Business Development announced a request for proposals for an initiative on Community Economic Development Research. In response Andrew Holton, then-associate director of the Program on Public Life, developed a proposal to work in collaboration with North Carolina’s Eastern Region. The idea to work with the Eastern Region stemmed from a series of conversations Ferrel Guillory had with Al Delia, former President/CEO of the Eastern Region partnership who is now on the staff of Governor Bev Perdue, about how metropolitization has affected that region. While the research grant was approved during Delia’s tenure with the region, the project proceeded in partnership with John Chaffee, the current President/CEO of North Carolina’s Eastern Region partnership.

Our inquiry was divided into four parts:

- 1) Conversations with UNC faculty, officials of the state Department of Commerce, and board and staff of the Eastern Region partnership. We reviewed previous studies, including the 2006 Vision Plan for North Carolina’s Eastern Region, and several papers on “hubs of economic activity” produced or commissioned by the state Department of Commerce.



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- 2) Person-to-person interviews with 70 young adults who live in the region's cities, as well as several former residents who now live in the Research Triangle region.
- 3) A public opinion survey.
- 4) A review of economic development strategies in four metro areas of comparable size.

Our interviews and the survey were conducted in the spring and summer of 2009. Along with Holton, Jennifer Weaver, then the program's assistant director for research, supervised our graduate-student interviewers and assembled the results. We had four students on the project: Robert Jessup and Caitlin Carson, then in the Law School; Todd Brantley, then a master's student in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication; and Ben Houck, a graduate student in City and Regional Planning.

In addition to these former students, we have several colleagues and advisers to thank: Jesse White, the retired director of the Office of Economic and Business Development; Will Lambe, director of the community-campus partnership in the UNC School of Government; Nichola Lowe, assistant professor of city and regional planning; Thomas A. Stith III, program director for economic development at the Kenan Institute of Private Enterprise; Nicholas M. Didow Jr., associate professor in the Kenan-Flagler Business School, who has an abiding interest in Eastern North Carolina. Also consulted were Jim Fain, former state secretary of commerce; Stephanie McGarrah, assistant commerce secretary for policy, research and strategic planning; and Phillip Horne, a former associate vice chancellor at ECU and now vice president for strategic partnerships at MDC in Chapel Hill.

The results of our study were initially released in a powerpoint presentation. Later in 2009, state funding, and thus staff, of the Program on Public Life were terminated as part of university budget cuts. Work on the Eastern Region project resumed in mid-2010 when the General Assembly appropriated \$33,000 for the Program on Public Life to complete the report and sustain conversations among emerging leaders. We thank, especially, former state Sen. A.B. Swindell, who represented Nash and Wilson counties, for his initiative in securing the appropriation.

With that appropriation, we formed a partnership with James W. Kleckley, director of the Bureau of Business Research at East Carolina University. Jim and his students will soon publish a fresh analysis of the Eastern Region based on the 2010 Census. In addition, we received gracious assistance from H.L. Stephenson III, a Greenville lawyer and civic leader, who has played an important role in convening young professionals for discussions of our findings.

In addition, we secured two graduate students to assist in completing the project: Fiona Morgan, who recently received her master's in public policy from Duke University, and Aaron Nousaine, who received his master's in city and regional planning from UNC-Chapel Hill. Their research and writing contributed to the published report.

We also give special thanks to President/CEO John Chaffee and his colleagues Leonard Kulik and Kathy Howard on the staff of North Carolina's Eastern Region — and to the Eastern Region Development Commission. They have enabled, encouraged and enhanced this project.

And while all of those we have thanked and recognized in this end-note contributed to our work, they may or may not agree with our findings. The findings and analysis are the responsibility of the Program on Public Life, and we trust that the conversations will continue.