Focused 'Vision' sees CLEAR RESULTS

Plan that gave Greenville notable attractions halfway done



NEXT ON THE LIST FOR VISION 2025

- Develop City Central Park, a 125-acre site behind the Kroc Center featuring a 40-acre meadow, dog park, skate park and 5,000-seat outdoor amphitheater.
- Foster transportation improvements, including mass transit from Charlotte to Atlanta and from Clemson to GSP.
- Beautify corridors into Greenville, such as Poinsett Highway and Wade Hampton Boulevard.
- Create more trails, greenways and healthy initiatives.
- Forge ahead with a vibrant economy to support the quality of life and raise per capita income by creating high-paying jobs with quality companies, small and large.

Source: Greenville Forward

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At the dawn of this century, a group of community leaders set a vision for Greenville County in 2025 that featured new schools, a downtown park around the Reedy River, a children's museum and dozens of other projects.

Today they report that the county is more than halfway to achieving that vision.

"It's pretty impressive," Greenville Forward executive director Russell Stall told GreenvilleOnline.com. "It's because as a community, compared to other places, we are more willing to work together."

TAKE A LOOK

See the plan by going to the link with this story at GreenvilleOnline.com.

The nonprofit Greenville Forward, which works to improve the quality of life in the region, on Thursday assessed the progress of the plan, called Vision 2025, at a celebration at the Greenville Downtown Airport.

"We have much to celebrate," said David Shi, the immediate past president of Furman University who was at the launching of Vision 2025.

"One of life's great pleasures is to envision a future and to see it come to fruition," he said. "This was a grassroots effort of over 1,000 Greenville residents ... with scores of goals. And it all happened during the Great Recession."

At the same time, Greenville Forward announced the launch of a membership campaign that would enable individuals, businesses and others to support the group and its goals.

"We've done fairly well based on gifts from unselfish people, foundations and corporations,"

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Stall said. "But now we're doing memberships, which not only helps us financially, but gets more people involved in what we're doing."

Memberships will range from $50 for individuals to $250 for small-business level and $2,500 for corporations, he said, though larger gifts are welcome.

"This is a new direction because this is the way we're going to be sustained," Stall said. "It's a much longer-term way of looking at things."

Greenville Forward was created in 2006 to help Greenville achieve Vision 2025. Its board of directors includes members of the business community, local government and area nonprofits and other community members.

Among the Vision 2025 projects finished so far, or near completion, is the Swamp Rabbit Trail, a popular greenway from Travelers Rest to downtown Greenville used by bicyclists, runners and hikers.

Also on the list are the Upcountry History Museum and the Children's Museum of the Upstate, the Reedy River Falls Park and the Lake Conestee Wildlife Preserve, and the Greenville Main Street Trolley and a minor league baseball team.

"Until you see a list like this, you can't appreciate how far we've come as a community in just a decade," Stall said. "Communities from all over the country are looking at Greenville as the benchmark for community revitalization."

But other projects are yet to be tackled or are still incomplete, he said. Many revolve around transportation, education and the environment.



The Swamp Rabbit Trail, which is popular with cyclists, walkers and runners, is one of the successes that has grown out of the Vision 2025 plan, Greenville County's blueprint for new schools, parks and other community enhancements. HEIDI HEILBRUNN/STAFF

and an International Center of the Upstate building.

"Transportation is really key ... and it's not just buses," he said. "The trollies have shown that mass transportation can work in Greenville."

Now the county needs to focus on other areas, such as getting workers who can't afford a car to jobs on Woodruff Road, he said, and an east-west connector from Clemson to GSP.

Greenville also needs to foster a culture that values learning, to reduce the number of high school dropouts and increase the number of people with college degrees, he said.

"That's a key way to address poverty in Greenville," he said.

Shi said that while there is still work to be done, Greenville is a "dynamic community on the brink of greatness ... alive with possibilities" and that the community's can-do spirit will help to realize the rest of the vision.

Greenville, he said, is an uplifting story whose best chapters are ahead.

"With the vision we have collectively," he said, "let us resolve to let Greenville assume its rightful place among the nation's most dynamic communities."

While Greenville Forward has had a place at the table, Stall credits people in the community with the progress that's been made.

"We have a very philanthropic community, an unselfish spirit and a belief that as citizens we can have an impact," he said. "I'm proud that Greenville is a place where people are willing to step up and get involved instead of just letting other people do it."

They include a 125-acre park in the center of Greenville, high-speed rail through Greenville between Charlotte and Atlanta, beautifying corridors into Greenville, more greenways and health initiatives, and economic improvements that would mean good jobs, he said.

Others include more statewide and regional mass transit, a second runway at Greenville-Spartanburg International Airport,