

Sumter County Renaissance: A strategic plan for revitalization, renewal & redevelopment

"Sometimes all it takes is a little imagination, sometimes just a change of perspective; and all of a sudden you can see a whole new horizon of possibilities. The secret is not to ask 'what it is', but rather ask 'what it could be'."

Purpose: To provide the foundation and framework for an economic renaissance in Sumter County that leads to job and population growth, new investment, renewed and sustained economic vitality, quality living for all citizens, and full participation in the global economy.

Strategies:

Infrastructure & Site Selection

1. Identify needs and implement plan for identifying new and upgrading and/or expanding all industrial and commercial sites, especially use of fiber and broadband, and marketing of available sites to key site selectors at state and regional levels.
2. Insure availability of all utilities, including expansion of natural gas availability.
3. Develop and implement plan for broadband and technology connectors and expansion in Sumter County and the Black Belt region to connect to the global economy, meet the needs of investors, and enhance the livability for all citizens.
4. Advocate and support enhancements of U.S. Highway 17, U.S. Highway 11, AL 39, and all highway connectors appropriate or required to expand industrial and commercial investment.
5. Enhance and beautify all gateways into Sumter County along with improved signage.
6. Develop and implement solutions for upgrading and expansion of 911 system and Google mapping to insure GPS applications.
7. Establish new regional economic development website along with other effective social media to promote industrial and commercial recruitment, marketing and image building.
8. Develop and maintain complete catalog, applications and understanding for all incentives for industrial and commercial development available at local, state and federal levels.
9. Develop assessment and identification of state's targeted and emerging industries and leverage for industrial, commercial, small business, entrepreneurial and job development in Sumter County and the Black Belt.
10. Plan and implement Alabama Summit on Rural Technology for April 2018.
11. Explore I-59/20 corridor development opportunities connected to expansion of the international portal at the Port of Mobile, including distribution, warehousing, logistical support and trucking.

Education & Workforce Development

1. Actively support establishment and implementation of University Charter School
2. Utilize innovative strategies and best practices learned from UCS to share with and contribute to improvements in all Sumter County and Black Belt public schools.
3. Develop county-wide goals, regional benchmarks and annual measurements for improvements at all grade levels to raise expectations and outcomes.
4. Support expansion and marketing of Alabama Career Center with the goal to become a full-time center for employment and job opportunities.
5. Maintain and leverage status as an Alabama Community of Excellence.
6. Sustain status of as an ACT work ready community, NCRC and expanded utilization of Work Keys throughout Sumter County and the Black Belt region.
7. Actively partner with and support expansion and marketing of the UWA Center for Workforce Development, including identification of growth opportunities in current and future workforce training needs, Ready to Work, and apprenticeship programming.
8. Expand and utilize effective marketing, promotional and recruitment strategies for the UWA Center for Workforce Development.
9. Identify gaps in workforce development and develop strategies to address, especially in the areas of unemployment, under-employment and out-migration.
10. Establish a one-stop entrepreneurial & small business development center that is built on a partnership among public, business and education sectors in Sumter County.

Livability

1. Leverage cultural assets to enhance economic vitality and to encourage a more inclusive, connected and blended community.
2. Market and leverage the outdoor, recreational and rural environment of Sumter County.
3. Market the livability and cultural events of Sumter County through local, regional and state partnerships, utilizing all marketing avenues available through social, print and broadcast media.
4. Establish and maintain a presence at Alabama welcome centers.
5. Develop, produce and sustain new, bold and creative marketing collateral materials for promotion and image-building for Sumter County and the Black Belt region.
6. Develop, support, encourage and execute downtown revitalization plans, especially for Livingston Alive and Downtown York through public-private partnerships. Especially focus on opportunities to create 'gathering place' in the downtown areas; and enhance "town-gown" partnerships, providing an expanded base for commercial and hospitality investment.
7. Develop and execute a public-private partnership to address health care needs in Sumter County and contiguous counties, including identified need for a financially feasible, cost-effective, sustainable critical access health care facility.

8. Develop and utilize a tourism marketing initiatives and promotion of regional events in partnership with other Black Belt counties. Encourage expansion of regional tourism (Example: Alabama Mountain Lakes Association).
9. Aggressively pursue Federal designation for the Black Belt region as a National Heritage District.
10. Explore opportunities at the Port of Epes for expanded recreational uses.

Leadership Development & Civic Engagement

1. Once finalized and adopted by the Economic Development Leadership Academy participants, advocate, encourage adoption by all appropriate local public, business and educational entities, along with timetables, assignments for implementation, benchmarks and measurements for success. Insure that all sectors are connected to the implementation process.
2. Explore development of a Black Belt regional leadership development to grow a new generation of rural Alabama leaders.
3. Encourage and sustain Leadership Sumter, and identify and engage other civic engagement programs to build the next generation of community leaders that will shape Sumter County's future and create a renaissance for the community.
4. Support and advocate the role of the University of West Alabama as the premier university in America for rural education and rural development.
5. In partnership with the UWA Division for Economic Development and local governments, encourage the restructuring, and redirection of the Sumter County Chamber of Commerce as the Economic Partnership of West Alabama, a high-impact, regional economic development agency through public-private partnerships, along with development of a comprehensive financial plan for implementation and sustainability.
6. Leverage Alabama's Bicentennial during 2018-2019 to provide economic and community development opportunities for Sumter County. Consider a county-wide homecoming initiative that identifies economic and educational leaders from throughout the nation to 'come home' and experience "Renaissance Sumter County", thus establishing a renewed 'sense of place'.
7. Design and implement an annual scorecard and vitality index to measure progress and create accountability of all partners. At least annually, hold a county-wide 'renaissance summit' to bring together citizens in the ongoing implementation process.

"Our goals can only be reached through the vehicle of a shared plan, in which we fervently believe, and upon which we vigorously act. There is no other route to success." – Pablo Picasso