

## **Town of Candor Economic and Community Development Plan**

### **Introduction:**

Like many small towns in rural North Carolina, the Town of Candor finds itself at a crossroads. Agriculture and manufacturing, traditional sources of jobs and economic vitality, have been changing and are continuing to change. Traffic that once flowed up and down Highway 220 now runs along Interstate 73/74, just outside of town. Candor's once-vital downtown area suffers deterioration and multiple vacancies. While Candor is fortunate to retain significant manufacturing jobs, the Town knows that these industries, too, could move on.

The NC STEP process has provided the Town of Candor an opportunity to develop an Economic and Community Development Plan, something the Town has never had before. A diverse group of people, including representatives from the Brutonville Community (located just outside the town limits) met to assess the Town's assets, needs, and opportunities. Never before has such a diverse group met to discuss and plan for the future of their community. In the course of the work, people became aware of numerous assets, some of which they hadn't recognized before: vacant buildings, good transportation systems (interstate and railroad), plentiful land, and people who care about the community. Moreover, the Town of Candor and Brutonville worked as one community, and people who had never participated in any kind of planning process (which was almost everyone) learned the basic principles of community economic development and strategic planning.

The following plan is still a work-in-progress. The Leadership Team wishes to create and implement a comprehensive plan, and the stated vision and goals reflect that ambition. The vision and goals are long-range and comprehensive. At this time, though, the Town's leadership has chosen to launch two major strategies in their effort to revitalize the Town (Strategies 1 and 2, below). Attaining all the stated goals will require additional strategies, as well as further development of the second two strategies (Strategies 3 and 4). Nonetheless, effective implementation of the two strategies detailed below will make a good start toward achieving at least some of the Town's goals and creating significant positive impact on the community's future.

# **Town of Candor Economic and Community Development Plan**

## **Vision:**

The Town of Candor and the surrounding community will be a vibrant, attractive, safe place to live and work. Residents of all ages will choose to stay (or return) and contribute to community life, and a rich mixture of agricultural, industrial, and commercial enterprises will support a sustainable local economy and a growing population.

## **Goals:**

The goals of Candor's Economic and Community Development Plan include:

- A larger number of successful small businesses, especially, but not exclusively, in the downtown area
- Increased occupancy of downtown buildings
- More living-wage jobs in sustainable industries, employing a population with a diverse mix of skills and education
- A larger number of physical facilities and resources that support community life and development, including recreation and child care
- A larger supply of decent quality affordable housing
- A larger tax base for Candor
- Increased personal wealth for those who are economically disadvantaged

## **Economic Development Strategies**

1. Increase the community's capacity to fund and implement economic and community development.
2. Initiate a "cycle of development" by strengthening the local climate and infrastructure for small business growth and development:
  - a. Capture a greater share of tourist/traveler dollars from traffic on 73/74
  - b. Redevelop and revitalize the downtown area
  - c. Provide support services and information to current and prospective small business owners
3. Upgrade town infrastructure to support new and/or expanding industry
4. Increase job skills and literacy within the community's workforce.

## **Rationale for Economic Development Strategies**

### **Strategy 1: Increase the community's capacity to fund and implement economic and community development.**

Candor's economic future rests on its ability to support and retain existing industries and businesses and to attract and support the development of new ones. Retention and development of business and industry will require promoting and capitalizing on existing assets, effectively participating in county and regional economic efforts, developing and attracting entrepreneurial talent and skills, and raising additional resources for development activities. At this time, the Town's capacity to focus attention and effort on these kinds of activities is severely limited by its administrative and governance structure. With no administrative position in the Town's staffing structure, the mayor and the Council (all volunteers) must devote most of their energy to managing the Town. They have neither the time nor the expertise to devote to economic and community development. Additionally, there are no nonprofit organizations in the town to help with this work. Therefore, the first strategy is to increase the community's capacity to fund and implement economic and community development. The Town will use NC STEP funds to hire a consultant for one year to continue to develop and implement the community and economic development plan. This position will begin August 1, 2008. Following the first year, the Town will seek funding to support an administrator who would focus, in large measure, on development efforts. While recruitment of large industry is not the main focus of this plan, the administrator will work actively with the Montgomery Economic Development Corporation (MEDC), which is involved in industrial recruitment, to make sure that Candor's assets are recognized and promoted, and the administrator will seek funds, as needed, to support any infrastructure developments that might be required to attract or retain a major employer. Additionally, the Brutonville Community Development Corporation, which has been inactive for some years, will reactivate its charter, revitalize its Board of Directors, and rename itself the Brutonville/Candor Community Development Corporation. The mission and goals of the revitalized CDC will support Candor's development efforts, focusing primarily on affordable housing and workforce development. Building additional housing (which is sorely needed) will create construction jobs and opportunities for skills training.

**Strategy 2: Initiate a “cycle of development” by strengthening the local climate and infrastructure for small business growth and development by: attracting more people to downtown Candor, redeveloping and revitalizing the downtown area, and providing support services and information to current and prospective small business owners.**

Small business growth and development is a key element of Candor’s plan, and it is inextricably linked with downtown revitalization and drawing more people downtown. To be successful, new and developing businesses need (at least) a critical mass of customers, good locations, capital, employees with the appropriate skills, and sufficient management expertise. The Town must do all that it can to identify and/or create a climate that supports business by helping to meet these needs.

Customers: Attract more people to downtown Candor. The Town and its supporting community are small, therefore the immediate customer base is small, and most kinds of businesses need customers from outside the immediate community to be successful. Traffic that used to pass through the Town no longer does so (because of the new interstate). However, many vehicles pass by on 73/74 every day (estimated 17,000). Additionally, Southern Pines and Pinehurst are not far away, and some people from those communities already travel to Candor to attend the Catholic Church, to buy peaches, etc. Currently, there is little development on the 73/74 interchanges between Asheboro and Myrtle Beach. While it may not have the assets (at this time) to be a “destination,” Candor does at least have the opportunity to establish itself as a “stopping place.” Travelers need places to stop for rest and refreshment, and people who travel the same routes regularly tend to stop in the places where they have stopped before. Also, semi-local people (such as those in Pinehurst) often are looking for new and interesting things to do that aren’t too far way from their home. At this time, the Candor interchange has three gas stations and two restaurants. To create a greater flow of customers, the Town can do several things:

1. Create a unique “attraction” to draw people off the interstate: An outdoor, open-air market (the Candor Marketplace) with a rotating mix of vendors could draw local, semi-local, and traveler interest. Historically, beach traffic has stopped along Route 220 at the multiple farm stands that line that route. As more and more of 73/74 opens the farmers need a way to reach the traffic they have depended on for the past four decades. Locate the Candor Marketplace downtown, advertise it heavily to increase the chances that visitors will get to the downtown area, and use it to provide information about other businesses or places of interest in Candor. Locating it near the existing park also provides opportunities for travelers to picnic. Building on the successful Peach Festival, use the Marketplace as a venue for outdoor events like a summer music series.
2. Locate the renovated Depot in close proximity to the Candor Marketplace. Make the Depot a hub of activity, including a Visitor’s Center (possibly for the region), museum of local history, a coffee shop/ restaurant, a realtor, and space for community activities such as “Family Movie Night.” Another potential use for the Depot would be to offer live craft demonstrations (some of these also could happen at the Candor Marketplace). For example, Montgomery Community College offers unique gunsmithing and taxidermy programs, and it might be possible to create a demonstrations focused on those crafts in the Depot. Such demonstrations could draw customers of the popular hunt club (located just north of

town) into town, as well as pull additional traffic off the interstate and provide a customer base for hunting-related businesses.

3. Identify and develop additional attractions, such as the Dinner Train. Currently the Dinner Train event is reserved as a fundraiser for the Old Depot renovation, but the train could potentially become an attraction drawing visitors from nearby population centers like Southern Pines.
4. Work with private developers who are looking at constructing recreational playing fields (soccer, softball, etc.) in and/or near Candor. There is a great need for additional recreational space in the County, and the area is most suitable around Candor (because it is flat). If these fields were developed, sporting events and even regional tournaments could draw additional traffic to Candor.
5. Work closely with Central Park NC, a regional organization focused on developing and marketing a seven county area. Candor is a “gateway” to the Central Park NC region, and the Town needs to ensure that its assets are well represented in Central Park’s literature and overall development plans. For example, the Depot could potentially become a “visitor center” for the whole area. Central Park NC has identified lodging as a key need for tourism development in the area, and they will support entrepreneurs who want to start inns or bed and breakfast lodgings with technical assistance and marketing.
6. Work closely with the Forest Service, which plans to develop the forest immediately to the west of Candor for recreational purposes. When this happens, Candor will become a gateway to this recreational area, and the town will be able to recruit businesses that support whatever recreational activities are available. For example, horseback riding would create an opportunity for businesses related to riding and horses, hiking would suggest another set of business possibilities, etc.

An increased flow of customers will help the Town recruit additional businesses that cater to travelers, especially restaurants, lodging, and specialty businesses targeting the developing recreational opportunities in the area. A larger flow of customers could also help the Town recruit a grocery store, a business sorely needed by local residents.

#### Good locations: Redevelop and revitalize the downtown area

Businesses, except those that are home-based, need appropriate locations and structures. Candor’s downtown has an ample supply of vacant buildings, many of which could be available for business and/or residential use. Improving the appearance of downtown (both streetscape and the buildings themselves) will help support an upward spiral of energy and reinvestment in Candor. Creating an accurate inventory of existing buildings, their owners, features, etc. will make it easier for the Town to recruit new business and/or property owners and to work with the Montgomery County Economic Development Corporation in their recruitment efforts. Additionally, improving the landscape/streetscape will help residents and potential business owners see that the Town is serious about its “renaissance,” provide an emotional lift for residents, and inspire them to contribute their energy to revitalizing the community. Staging the landscape/streetscape improvements to coordinate with property owners’ improvements will provide an incentive for owners to improve their buildings and a foundation for public/private partnership, which can then be expanded into a matching grant program for building façade improvements. Work is currently in process to identify a “core group” of property owners willing to commit to participating in the improvement effort. There also is potential for a historic district or individual historic buildings in Candor. Work done on the inventory to date has identified 14 vacant buildings,

of which at least four are one hundred years old (or close to it), and almost all of the buildings are at least fifty years old. Determining value and feasibility of historic designations will take additional time and research; clearly the potential is there.

Business support: Provide support services and information to current and prospective small business owners

Starting and growing a successful business is a difficult proposition. The Town can help by providing a variety of support services and information, including (but not limited to):

1. Promote the Candor Marketplace as a place for local small-scale producers (of crafts, produce, and value-added food products) to launch their businesses and/or reach additional customers;
2. Market data (ESRI is one source) to help determine the potential viability of particular kinds of businesses;
3. Information about key community needs, such as a grocery store and child care center;
4. Information about developments in the local travel and tourism industry, such as the Forest Service's plans to develop the nearby section of state forest.
5. Information about business planning and management education such as the NC REAL program at Montgomery Community College and the Small Business Center there;
6. Information about loan and grant programs available through the Rural Center and other state and federal sources.
7. Information about available buildings (as described in "good locations," above);
8. Connections to the Montgomery Makes! Program of the Montgomery Economic Development Corporation, a new program funded by the Department of Commerce to help support small business and industry in Montgomery County.
9. If warranted and feasible, a local revolving loan fund for business expansion and/or start-up.

It will be the job of the consultant and the new administrator to work with the NC STEP Leadership Team in implementing the integrated "cycle of development" strategy and to involve an increasing large number of residents in their community's renaissance.

The following charts provide additional details on strategies, funding and implementation.

**STRATEGY ONE**

**Increase the community’s capacity to fund and implement economic and community development projects**

**DESIRED RESULTS**

- More economic and community development initiatives are funded and implemented

**RATIONALE**

- Currently Candor does not have the staff capacity to carry out significant community or economic development work
- There is no nonprofit organization focused on Candor’s economic or community development
- MEDC must cover the whole county and cannot focus on Candor, but is willing to be in active partnership with Candor’s efforts
- Financial resources and support services are available from multiple state sources, but taking advantage of them requires significant human resources

Project/Activity	Indicators of Project Success	Required Resources	Timeline
Add a position focused on community and economic development to the Town of Candor’s administrative staff	The position is filled with an excellent candidate.  Projects and activities defined in the Town of Candor Economic and Community Development Plan are successfully funded and implemented	\$20,000 from NC STEP funds to support a contracted position August 2008-July 2009. Seek funding for administrator position starting summer of 2009	1. Define position (including compensation) 3/1/08 2. Board approval 3/15/0 3. Fill position to start 7/1/08  Seek administrator through Local Government Service Corps program
Seek additional funding (possible CDBG and other) to support strategies in this plan	More funds for economic and community development projects	Staff time	At least one application complete by September 2008
Revitalize the existing Brutonville CDC	CDC secures funding for and implements projects aligned with Candor’s Community and Economic Development Plan	Volunteer time until funding secured	Form Board of Directors (done) Submit charter to the State

## STRATEGY TWO

Initiate a “cycle of development” by strengthening the local climate and infrastructure for small business growth and development:

- a. Attract more people to downtown Candor
- b. Redevelop and revitalize the downtown area
- c. Provide support services and information to current and prospective small business owners

### DESIRED RESULTS

- More money spent in Candor: Increased tax revenue.
- A larger number of successful small businesses, at the interchange and downtown
- Increased occupancy of downtown building
- More jobs in the commercial sector
- Increased activity downtown
- Improved quality of life for Candor residents (more products and services available locally)

### RATIONALE

- Traffic on 73/74 is increasing and will continue to increase; currently estimated at 7,000 vehicles per day during winter and 17,000 per day during beach season. Most interchanges nearby do not offer a great variety of products/services for travelers. In fact, other than Asheboro, there is little to stop for between Greensboro and Myrtle Beach, and Candor is about halfway between.
- An outdoor market could draw traffic with good signage and promotion.
- Many semi-local people (e.g. Pinehurst) are looking for things to do nearby
- Continued development of State forest to the west of town could help bring more traffic directly through Candor
- Candor has some historic structures of potential interest
- People already come to the area to hunt, and MCC offers vocational programs related to hunting (gunsmithing and taxidermy)
- Candor residents currently must go elsewhere for many services and products
- There is an ample supply of commercial space
- Lack of good landscaping makes downtown buildings look less desirable and more deteriorated.
- Existing buildings could be key assets if appearance improved and properly marketed.
- Improving the appearance of downtown is a quick way to show positive change and inspire more residents to get involved.
- Improving downtown appearance is a key factor for increasing the number of businesses located downtown

Project/Activity	Indicators of Project Success	Required Resources	Timeline
<p><b>Develop an outdoor market: “Candor Marketplace”</b></p> <p><b>Develop marketing and promotion plan for Marketplace, including special events.</b></p> <p><b>Purchase LCD sign as core of advertising strategy</b></p> <p><b>Hire part-time Market manager</b></p> <p><b>Co-locate renovated Depot</b></p>	<p>Increasing number of vendors</p> <p>Increasing number of customers</p> <p>Increasing sales volume</p>	<p>Site under consideration can be purchased by Town for \$9,000</p> <p>\$112,000 NC STEP funds for demolition and construction,</p> <p>\$10,000 NC STEP funds for signage</p> <p>\$13,000 NC STEP funds for part-time market manager, possibly supplemented with another \$3,000-\$5,000 from the Town</p>	<p>Business plan complete by May 30, 2009</p> <p>Hire manager June 2009</p> <p>Building complete by July 30, 2009</p> <p>Market open August 2009</p>
<p><b>Make the renovated Depot a hub of activity, including a Visitor’s Center, a museum of local history (including live craft demonstrations,) a coffee shop/ restaurant, a realtor, and space for community activities such as “Family Movie Night.”</b></p>	<p>Increased traffic; successful businesses located in Depot.</p> <p>Community activities well attended</p>	<p>Total estimated cost of Depot relocation and renovation is \$200,000. Local fundraising already in progress.</p> <p>Potential for Rural Center Building Re-use grants when space leased to businesses</p>	<p>The goal is to raise the money and move the building by 2011.</p>

Project/Activity	Indicators of Project Success	Required Resources	Timeline
<b>Inventory existing downtown buildings</b>	Data base in use Plan and process for updating implemented	Staff and/or volunteer time Contractor to develop GIS mapping of building attributes and add to website \$2,000 NC STEP funds for contractor	Transfer data to GIS database Develop a photo portfolio of existing buildings Work already in process. Complete by August 2008
<b>Actively recruit tenants and/or new owners for existing space</b>	More buildings occupied	Staff time NC STEP Funds for materials, as needed	Initial contact with owners (in process) Set up central property information location/website Complete by August 2008 Put lease/contact information on buildings
<b>Create and implement a landscaping plan for downtown (including benches, tables)</b>  <b>Tie implementation to improvements made by building owners</b>	Increased building occupancy Increased activity downtown	Plan created by professional landscaper already exists \$30,000 NC STEP funds for implementation of Phase One	March/April 2008-July 2008
<b>Create a data base of existing businesses</b>	Data base in use	Staff and/or volunteer time to locate, document, and enter data into data base	Data base and process/plan for updating complete by June 2008

Project/Activity	Indicators of Project Success	Required Resources	Timeline
<b>Actively recruit businesses that match community needs (i.e., grocery and child care) as well as those that serve travelers (restaurants and lodgings)</b>	Increased number of successful businesses	Staff time (new town position)	Begin July 2008 and on-going
<b>Acquire market data (ESRI) to support targeted business recruitment and successful startups/expansions</b>	Data provides clear guidance regarding potentially successful businesses	\$500 NC STEP funds to purchase data	April 2008
<b>Facilitate connection of entrepreneurs and potential entrepreneurs (including those who speak Spanish) to local, county, regional, state, and federal resources, including entrepreneurship education (NC REAL) at MCC</b>	Increased business start-ups Reduced rate of business failures Increased rate of business expansion	Staff and/or volunteer time to work out details and coordinate with MEDC programs Link to regional Entrepreneurship Development System effort Materials as needed	Begin July 2008 and on-going
<b>Work with Central Park NC and MEDC to ensure Candor's tourism assets are identified and promoted</b>	Candor's assets appear in all regional and county publications, including websites	Staff time (new town position)	Start immediately and ongoing
<b>Work with Park Service to develop plan for recreation in adjacent National Forest</b>	Park Service development enhances traffic through downtown, increases customer volume, and suggests new business opportunities	Staff time (new town position)	Start immediately and ongoing

Project/Activity	Indicators of Project Success	Required Resources	Timeline
<b>Establish a public/private partnership to create and fund downtown improvement</b>	Larger pool of funds for downtown improvements	Buy in, cooperation, and investment from property and business owners  Staff and volunteer time to build relationships and create the partnership	Work already in process to engage core group of property and business owners.
<b>Offer matching grants for downtown renovation/façade and/or signage</b>	Downtown appearance improved  More buildings renovated and occupied or ready for occupancy	Staff time to develop details of program and to run program  Examples of similar programs for model  Seek grant funds	Start developing criteria and guidelines July 2009
<b>Research possibilities for use of historic buildings and/or establishment of historic district</b>	Historic structures identified and developed as additional attractions	Staff and/or volunteer time to conduct research and locate resources: Possible TA from Dept of Cultural Resources and/or Preservation NC	Begin July 2008 and ongoing
<b>Upgrade sidewalks</b>	More people walking on sidewalks	Town to assess needs for sidewalk repair and addition  Town to assess needs for additional sidewalks	Within 5 years

<b>Town of Candor NC STEP budget Revised May 2009</b>	<b>Amount</b>	<b>Date needed</b>
Town landscape/streetscape improvements	\$40,000	April 2008
GIS mapping/website development	\$2,000	May 2008
Procure market data (ESRI)	\$500	April 2008
Town of Candor NC STEP contract position	\$20,000	July 2008
Supporting materials	\$2,500	June 2009
Promotional materials at Market		
Materials for business support and recruitment		
Support on-going activities of Leadership Team		
Construct open-air marketplace		
Demolition	\$32,000	June 2009
Construct new open-air market (arbor)	\$80,000	June 2009
LDC sign	\$10,000	June 2009
Market manager (part time)	\$13,000	June 2009
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$200,000</b>	