

# ***The City of Cherryville***

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## **2012 City Strategic Planning Report**

Report facilitated and prepared by: Wesley D. Hutchins

## INTRODUCTION

### **City of Cherryville, North Carolina**

Strategic planning for the City of Cherryville was held on Monday, March 5, 2012 at the Cherryville Fire Department, Cherryville, North Carolina. Members present for the strategic planning session are listed below.

This leadership opportunity gives city leaders a chance to reflect upon lessons learned from past experience, and plan for the city's future direction. The following report documents the discussions, conclusions, and recommendations of the participants of the planning session.

The development of a strategic plan, as well as the development of annual performance plan, requires the leadership of the City of Cherryville to reflect upon the statutory mission of the city, reassess prior goals and objectives, and identify any new goals and objectives that will enable the city to meet its official mission. The plans also alert council members and management, as well as the stakeholders of key factors external to the city that may affect the city's ability to carry out its mandate.

The initial part of the strategic planning was spent indentifying the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) that may help guide the City of Cherryville in their goal of becoming a city of good government. Building on previous reports and information allows the City of Cherryville management and elected officials to build on goals and objectives. SWOT analysis allows for achievable goals or objectives to be set for the city of Cherryville and identifies the following:

- **Strengths:** characteristics of the city, or management team that gives it an advantage over others,
- **Weaknesses (or Limitations):** characteristics that place the city and management team at a disadvantage relative to others,
- **Opportunities:** *external* chances to improve performance (e.g. make greater profits or strides as a governing body) in the community,
- **Threats:** *external* elements in the city that could cause trouble for the city itself or the governing body.

### **PARTICIPANTS in ATTENDANCE**

<u>Cherryville Elected Officials</u>	<u>Cherryville City Management</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>❖ Mayor Bob Austell</li><li>❖ Council Member David Kiser (Ward 1)</li><li>❖ Council Member Brian Dalton (Ward 2)</li><li>❖ Council Member Rick Campbell (Ward 3)</li><li>❖ Council Member Malcolm Parker (Ward 4)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>❖ David Hodgkins – City Manager</li><li>❖ Cindy Cobb – Interim City Clerk</li> <li>❖ Wesley Hutchins - facilitator</li></ul>

The City of Cherryville operates under the Council-Manager form of government. Action is needed at both the council and administrative level to implement any strategic plan. Above all, it is hoped that the contents of this report will stimulate additional, continued thought, and positive discussion of these and other issues relevant making the *City of Cherryville* a community founded on good management, sound business practices, and outstanding city services.

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**Review of Cherryville Planning 2011**

The City of Cherryville Strategic Plan for 2012 sets forth the city's mission-focused goals, as well as the proposed objectives to meet those goals. The plan is designed to strengthen the capacity of the City of Cherryville, improve the quality of life for the citizen, and shorten the time it takes to be responsive to the needs of the citizen. The plan as fully implemented will enhance and accelerate the innovation and job growth needed to transform the City of Cherryville, foster competitiveness, and drive the creation and growth of the economy and services for the citizen living in the City of Cherryville. This plan has been completed with input from the City Council, City Management Department Heads, stakeholders, the public, and employees.

Participants briefly reviewed the purpose, goals, vision, issues and strategies of the 2011 planning/strategic report. The purpose of the review, made by City Manager David Hodgkins, was to validate the purpose of strategic planning, and to identify the status/progress of the 2011 goals and objectives. Tracking of progress, benchmarking, and overall strategic progression for this report will be the responsibility of the Manager and City Council members.

***Mission of the City (Council) of Cherryville identified (identified in 2011):***

- To improve the quality of life in the City of Cherryville.
- To help the city “progress”, increase means of revenue and improve the economy of those residing in the Cherryville corporate limits.
- To deliver services to the citizen in the most effective and efficient manner.
- To be good stewards of the taxpayer dollars for the City of Cherryville.
- To invest in, and improve the image of the City of Cherryville:
  - Bedroom community status.

- Age, senior and younger population (provide for that segment of the population).
- An image from the greater geographical area has the City of Cherryville as an isolated area with limited access due to inadequate roads and highways. A DOT study with input from the Central Carolina Council of Governments has road plans identified through 2015.

**STRENGTHS, WEAKNESS, OPPORTUNITIES, and THREATS IDENTIFIED**

**STRENGTHS:**

- Community Schools – Education in the City of Cherryville is important and the need to develop and educate young people is a priority. Community schools are both a place and a set partnership between the school and community resources. Local community school initiatives that share a common set of principles including: fostering strong partnerships, sharing accountability for results, setting high expectations, building on the community’s strengths, and embracing diversity and innovative solutions are a definite strength for the City of Cherryville as a whole.
- Churches and other religious institutions – The City of Cherryville recognizes the importance of the religious entities within the corporate limits of Cherryville.
- Volunteers.
- Other community support groups (civic organizations).
- Public safety and welfare.
- Infrastructure – The City of Cherryville supports infrastructure investment that promotes economic and employment opportunities. The provision of water, sewer, electricity, and access roads are critical to attracting new development and supporting the expansion and economic health of Cherryville’s existing business sector.
- Geographical location in the region.

**WEAKNESSES:**

- Loss of jobs – the Cherryville City Council, Mayor, and Manager fully understand that job loss is emotionally traumatic - and ranks among the highest of all stress-causing situations. The goal of the city’s government is to closely monitor the economy and stay current with jobs and economy within the city.
- Cost of Living – the Cherryville City Council, Mayor, and Manager are well aware that the cost of living is a weakness faced by the citizen and the city. The City Leadership is well versed in their attempts to be mindful to keep their resident’s cost of living as low as possible at this time.
- Access to the City of Cherryville via major highways.
- Finances and debt.

**OPPORTUNITIES:**

- Road improvements and access to the City of Cherryville.

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- Appearance of the overall City of Cherryville.
- Financial sustainability and planning (3 – 5 year plan).
- Growth in the retail sector (especially in the grocery/food store segment) – to be successful in the development world, the City of Cherryville needs to be a community with a good reputation that is known for being true to the promises it makes and being pro-development has a head start in the recruitment of various retail sectors of the city.

### **THREATS:**

- Utility bills of the citizen – as advocates for the citizen, the council members and management of the City of Cherryville needs to closely monitor the services and associated billing to the end user, the citizen.
- Lack of growth, slower growth.
- The economy - With falling revenue from sales and income taxes, and property-tax declines looming, the City of Cherryville should closely monitor the economy and the impact on its operation. Public officials should maintain the posture that it may be a struggle to balance their budgets.
- Anti-government sentiment – lack of trust.

### **GOAL 1**

***Work to build stronger relationships with the citizens of the City of Cherryville through more effective lines of communication.***

From the strategic planning session, the overall goal is to enhance the quality of life for the citizen of Cherryville and make the community a desirable place to live, work, and play. *Identified during the planning session was the need to develop more effective communication. Communication is the cornerstone of any professional or interpersonal relationship. The goal is to strengthen public perception and trust in elected and administrative positions of leadership.*

Cherryville will pursue the following objectives in support of Goal 1.

**Goal 1, Objective 1:** Council/Manager communication comprises internal and external communication. The Council and Manager are aware that external communication refers to the sharing of information about the products and services of the city to consumers. With its external communication, the council, manager, and mayor will provide information to the citizen, stakeholders and investors, about the performance of the City of Cherryville on a timelier basis.

**Goal 1, Objective 2:** Reach out to the organizations within the corporate limits of Cherryville to seek input on how the city government can become a partner and play an active role in their connection to community life.

**Strategy 1:** The council and manager will work to develop good listening skills and improve frequency of internal and external communication.

**Strategy 2:** The council and manager will develop creative communication strategies. Using clear, creative, and inclusive communication strategies will help reach people at all levels of the city, and promote widespread trust. The strategy will include, but not be limited to the following:

- group meetings
- person-to-person conversations
- municipal newsletters
- communication boards
- on-site presentations on select topics
- more frequent updates with council and manager

**End Note to Goal 1:** Your strategies should respect the cultural, linguistic and racial diversity of the city as well as the culture of the municipality itself.

**Priority:** Immediate need.

**Person/Committee responsible:** Mayor, manager, and council members.

**Discussion:**

- The need to reach out to a larger segment of the population.
- Building partnerships is important for the vitality of the City of Cherryville; the citizens are an asset.
- The need to continue to sponsor the Cherryville Citizens Academy, with a goal of producing ambassadors as advocates for good city government was a topic of discussion and needs to be evaluated.
- Web site and electronic communication needs revising and updating (evaluation is in progress).

**GOAL 2**

*Work to improve the perception of city government and establish positive relationships with the citizens of the City of Cherryville, being more transparent. Transparency in government is often credited with generating government accountability.*

From the strategic planning session, the overall goal is to enhance the quality of life for the citizen of Cherryville and make the community a desirable place to live, work, and play. *Identified during the planning session was the need to strengthen ties with the citizens of the City of Cherryville and focus on trust and awareness.*

Cherryville will pursue the following objectives in support of Goal 2.

**Goal 2, Objective 1:** In this second goal, the leadership group noted that Council/Manager communication is an important part of good government operations and processes. The objective is to improve the overall approval of the city leadership by the citizen of the City of Cherryville.

**Goal 2, Objective 2:** Reach out to the various organizations within the corporate limits of Cherryville, to seek input on how the city government can become a partner and play an active role in their connection to the community.

**Strategy 1:** The council and manager will work to develop good listening skills, showing a genuine interest to the citizen of the City of Cherryville is attributes of a successful communicator.

**Strategy 2:** The council and manager will develop creative communication strategies: Using clear, creative, and inclusive communication strategies will help reach people at all levels of the city, and promote widespread trust.

These strategies will include, but not be limited to the following:

**Building a Municipal Ethical Framework**

- Work to adhere to a code of conduct for senior local government leadership.
- Build awareness to the public and to staff of good government stewardship.
- To be viewed as an effective and respected leadership group.
- Ensure that the local government leadership is committed to ethical principles all areas.
- Earn the public respect for the work of the local government.

**Municipal Budgeting**

- Work to ensure that the local government budgeting process is well publicized and open to the citizen.
- Strive to include the public actively and directly, letting them know they are vital in shaping local government budget priorities.

**Audit Procedures**

- Communicate that the local government accounts are regularly audited by independent auditors.
- Communicate the internal audit process in an effective and timely manner.
- Work to ensure that internal results are the results made public in a timely and effective manner.
- Strive to communicate the results of internal audits, and communicate that action taken to rectify systems and practices.

**GOAL 3 (carry over and priority from 2010 report)**

***Work toward and maintain an 18% unrestricted Fund Balance reserve to sustain the city's financial strength, which will enhance the possibility of future economic development, incentives, and considerations.***

From the strategic planning session, the overall goal is to enhance the quality of life for the citizen of Cherryville and make the community a desirable place to live, work, and play. *Identified during the planning session was the need to continue to stabilize the unrestricted fund balance of the city.*

Cherryville will pursue the following objectives in support of Goal 3.

**Goal 3, Objective 1:** Reach consensus from the Manager and Council on supporting an eighteen (18%) percent unrestricted fund balance in the city's financial standing.

**Goal 3, Objective 2:** Build the level of available reserves consistent with the Local Government Commission (LGC) guidelines for cities comparable to the City of Cherryville, promoting good stewardship and financial stability.

**Strategy 1:** Reach consensus within the council and manager's office on the unrestricted balance number of 18% while maintaining city services across the board.

**Strategy 2:** Be persistent on setting the policy to promote the unrestricted fund balance objectives (18%) and stay the course. **Note:** Current fund balances have increased to 12%.

**Strategy 3:** If at all possible acquire no more long-term debt, control spending and review current debt ratios.

**Priority:** Immediate need, high priority.

**Person/Committee responsible:** Manager and Council.

**Discussion:**

- Raise the 16% goal to 18% and curb spending, and enhance revenues, to reach the goal identified.
- Increase revenues to support city services.
- This goal and strategy is closely co-dependent on others contained in this report.

**GOAL 4**

*Continue to focus on improving the city infrastructure with a concentrated effort on the City of Cherryville beautification.*

From the strategic planning session, the overall goal is to enhance the quality of life for the citizen of Cherryville and make the community a desirable place to live, work, and play. *Identified during the planning session was the need to enhance the overall appearance of the City of Cherryville.*

Cherryville will pursue the following objectives in support of Goal 4.

**Goal 4, Objective 1:** Assess the downtown area of the City of Cherryville with a focus on beautification and accessibility.

**Goal 4, Objective 2:** Build citizen awareness of the need to enhance and adequately maintain the city's appearance and entryways to the City of Cherryville

**Strategy 1:** Reach consensus from the council and manager's office, based on department head recommendations for maintenance and enhancements.

**Strategy 2:** Be persistent on making the City of Cherryville a pleasant and attractive place for citizens, businesses, and visitors.

**Strategy 3:** Seek grant opportunities to help fund various projects to make the City of Cherryville an attractive venue.

**Priority:** Immediate need, high priority (3 – 5 year plan).

**Person/Committee responsible:** Council Member Parker, City Manager, and public works staff.

**Discussion:**

- Water quality is important to the city and end user.



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- The current systems (water/sewer) could benefit from continued improvements.
- Other utilities are equally as important and productivity and efficiency across the scope of city utilities and maintenance are important.
- Bonds are not an option, given today's current economy.
- City entrance ways on major thoroughfares exist, but could stand some improvement.

### **GOAL 5**

*Seek better ways to market the City of Cherryville and continue to focus on the need for better road and highway access to the City of Cherryville.*

From the strategic planning session, the overall goal is to enhance the quality of life for the citizens of Cherryville and make the community a desirable place to live, work, and play. *Identified during the planning session was the need to continue to seek ways to market and enhance the retail segment of the City of Cherryville. The council and manager will continue to monitor and lobby the North Carolina Department of Transportation promoting the plans and strategies for roads and highways into and out of the City of Cherryville.*

Cherryville will pursue the following objectives in support of Goal 5.

**Goal 5, Objective 1:** The Manager and Mayor will continue to monitor NCDOT plans and schedules for Transportation Improvement Projects.

**Goal 5, Objective 2:** Aggressively stress the need for better access to and from the City of Cherryville, focusing on regional DOT plans for Highways 279 and 150.

**Goal 5, Objective 3:** Continue to seek commitment from a regional/national grocery chain to locate in City of Cherryville corporate limits.

**Strategy 1:** Aggressively lobby NCDOT for better highway access to Cherryville.

**Strategy 2:** Consistently review the marketing and publications of the City of Cherryville.

**Strategy 3:** Seek ways for recruitment and retention of businesses within the corporate limits of the City of Cherryville.

**Priority:** Immediate need, high priority.

**Person/Committee responsible:** Economic Development Director, Manager, Mayor, and select council members.

#### **Discussion:**

- This goal is important to the vitality and sustainability of Cherryville.
- Lobby Gaston County Economic Development Commission (EDC) for assistance with local, regional, state, and federal funding streams.
- Poor highway access has limited the economy and growth of the city of Cherryville.
- N.C. DOT plays an important role in placing transportation priorities on the improvement list; Cherryville is connected to the key players.

**STRATEGIC MONITORING and VISIONING**

The Cherryville City Council and Manager's Office agreed to monitor the following and incorporate these items into future strategic planning and visioning. Monitoring will occur on an as needed basis, addressing these points as needed:

- Communicate the positives about the city to the citizens, businesses, and employees of the City of Cherryville.
- Make strategic attempts to retain, enhance, and grow the retail/services business in the City of Cherryville.
- Explore technology (Wi-Fi) venues for the City of Cherryville; focus will be on the downtown area.
- Consistently review the revenue and costs associated with city government, including finance/budgeting (manager will make reports on an as need basis – monthly reports are in progress).
- Continue to build strong community partnerships with schools within the corporate limits of the City of Cherryville, namely in the sharing of recreational areas of the city.
- Seek ways to recognize outstanding citizens of/in the community (recognition of accomplishments, new businesses, citizens, and key leaders is important).
- Continue to foster positive relationships among citizens, elected officials, and city employees.
- Closely monitor the overall appearance of the entire City of Cherryville (emphasis will be on thoroughfares, downtown areas, and prominent venues of the city).
- Monitor and report issues and updates associated with the city owned cemetery properties.
- Seek to improve the appearance of city owned properties, promote good government, enhance city services, and promote goodwill within the confines of city government and the citizens represented.

## **STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS**

The City of Cherryville, in concert with strategic planning and visioning should consider the following to solidify the planning and vision process. A good strategic plan has a life of one year or less. The leadership for the City of Cherryville should plan to reconvene the leadership team for another planning session in a year.

- Pick a time, at least monthly, for progress updates – keep a written record of these updates. Adjust the completion date only after serious discussion with the champion. Satisfy yourself that the change is completely justified. When changes are made, annotate them on all copies of the plan. The leadership may want to include a short statement explaining the change to the plan.
- Perform regular “SWOT” analysis – the City of Cherryville needs to regularly look at the city’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT). This assessment will strengthen the purpose of strategic planning and visioning. This will provide continuity for the citizens, employees, and elected officials of the City of Cherryville.
- Live the plan – this is vital to success. It doesn't do any good for the leadership to be advocates for the benefits of a strategic plan, then set it aside because something else comes up that is more urgent. The City of Cherryville leaders must constantly show they take the plan seriously. One of the best ways to do this is to hold those responsible for goals accountable for their goals and publicly recognize them for success, leadership should be prepared to discuss their progress and each month have a status report for the Mayor, Manager, and Council. When you visit the various areas of your city, ask questions about the plan and what part a particular individual plays in its success. This not only shows your interest but gives you an opportunity to evaluate how well your strategic plan is working.
- Do not keep the strategic plan secret from the citizen – it is important to make your plan as public as possible. The citizen of the City of Cherryville should know the key points of your plan.
- Create a contingency plan – applied strategic planning is based on events that are likely to happen in the future and that would greatly affect the City of Cherryville. Contingency plans will help Cherryville develop a tracking system to provide early warning signs of changes, both inside and outside the city that would seriously affect the operation of city government.
- Articulate a vision – although the City of Cherryville planning usually focuses on a one or two-year time span, it is important to have a vision of what might be accomplished over a much longer time span. This vision might be focused five (5) or more years in the future.

- Implementation and follow through – the payoff for the strategic planning and visioning is in its application. This plan will accomplish little, if anything, if it lies unattended and the governing body for the City of Cherryville does not make an honest and thorough comprehensive review on regular intervals. Every elected official and employee should feel involved, because the success of the reports and initiatives depends on the cooperation of the entire City of Cherryville.
- Put accountabilities in place – it is not enough to have a timeline; there must be accountabilities attached to them. That means the people who are responsible for performing those tasks are clearly identified. For by whom and by when each goal and task is to be done. For this strategic plan to work properly there needs to be a follow-up mechanism to ensure that these vital goals are achieved.