

# Vision for City of Kinston

*“Kinston: A City which embraces beauty,  
positive people and new opportunity.”*

## Implementation of vision(s)

A vision statement implies that a person or a community is looking upward and outward towards a horizon beyond today’s reality; therefore, directional by nature. Generally, a vision is articulated broadly enough to accommodate some flexibility in pursuing personal or institutional behavior(s).

Perfection is not necessary to warrant God’s love.

Further, a vision, shared or otherwise, relies upon ways and means to achieve one or more goals insinuated by the words used to describe said vision.

Without infrastructure to support intent, vision words are little more than sweet chatter.

As been stated on several occasions, Kinston’s atmosphere is saturated with many good visions, being articulated by good and well-meaning people and institutions. Achievement of broad goals, or visions, however, has generally been left to undirected, serendipitous, or surprising circumstances.

There are several good examples of groups coalescing around visions.

I. The 12 organizations which comprise the Lenoir County Heritage Tourism Council came together in 2005 to finance a plan which led to the creation and appointment of the Lenoir County Tourism Development Director.

This collaboration for a specific vision was acknowledged and praised by the head of the GoldenLeaf Foundation at a ceremony in Kinston.

II. The Lenoir County Battlefield Commission, the Historic Preservation Group and the Kinston-Lenoir County Parks and Recreation Department and Kinston’s Exchange Club joined forces to acquire property from the State of North Carolina and to build the new tourism information center at the intersection of Highways 70 and 258.

III. Pride of Kinston joined with *hundreds* of Kinston and Lenoir County residents, the Lenoir County Center of the North Carolina Cooperative Extension, faculty and graduate students in the School of Design at North Carolina State University, through its Downtown Studio, and a special 32-member Kinston Waterfront – NOW! task force to develop during 2005-2006 a visionary plan for developments along Kinston’s stretch of the Neuse River.

Subsequently, the people of Kinston selected a proposed pedestrian bridge over the river to connect downtown Kinston with the popular Neuseway Nature Center as the first priority. The vision for the pedestrian bridge serves economic development, recreational, business, educational and artistic objectives for the community.

The pedestrian bridge has been selected as one of its top 10 priorities by the Lenoir County Transportation Committee, an influential body with representatives from the City of Kinston, Lenoir County, the Committee of 100, the Lenoir County Economic Development Board, the Town of LaGrange, Town of Pink Hill, the Kinston-Lenoir County Chamber of Commerce, the Lenoir County Manufacturers Association, the Global TransPark, the North Carolina Department of Transportation, the regional transportation planner housed with the EasternCarolinaCouncil, and members of the North Carolina General Assembly.

IV. The *CSS Neuse Gunboat Association* is another example of working with a host of others to acquire property to create a new downtown Civil War Museum, and to secure adequate private and public funding to move the remains of the original CSS Neuse to the new/proposed museum. To get where it is today in its “vision,” the Gunboat Association has partnered with the City of Kinston, Lenoir County, North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, Pride of Kinston, the Kinston-Lenoir Chamber of Commerce, private donors, and members of the North Carolina General Assembly.

V. The City of Kinston in 2006 was designated a Preserve America City by First Lady Laura Bush and the US Department of Interior. The basis for winning the award related to quality partnerships within the community to achieve mutually desired goals.

While the illustrations cited here make the point that productive partnerships on behalf of shared goals, or visions, have come pass and have been effective within our community, there is definitely room for improvement.

The driving force within government, business and civic enterprises over the past decade has been this: We need to do more with less.

One of the ways to achieve efficiency, if not productivity, is to create a mutually agreed upon destination illustrated by a vision *statement* applicable to some if not all compatible effort.

But such a statement, to have any chance at being *real*, ought to have some recommendations on how we might *do a better job* at attaining community goals.

Modern business throughout the world has shown the way. The two constants in the *international* world of private enterprise has been *reorganization and merger*....designed to “do more with less.” The result has been more and better products, not always cheaper, but always producing more options for more customers.

Therefore, I’ll take the plunge and make several organizational *suggestions* within the framework of several large community goals.

## Economic Development

The City of Kinston, along with LaGrange, Pink Hill, and Lenoir County should cooperatively and structurally pursue economic development objectives and activities. An old structure should be reactivated and expanded with an overarching objective to rebuild a diversified economy (as opposed to a singular focus on manufacturing), and pursue a strategy generally aimed at attracting and encouraging creative entrepreneurs, i.e. the “Asheville plan;” tourists; retirees, artists and craftsmen, and young entrepreneurs, i.e. web page designers, computer programmers; musicians, academic researchers...,in short people who can pursue their careers living anywhere...which accounts for MILLIONS of people.

Participants in a new structure would be:

- Lenoir County
- City of Kinston
- Global TransPark
- Committee of 100
- Economic Development Board
- Chambers of Commerce
- Lenoir County tourism development department
- EasternCarolinaCouncil
- NC Eastern Region
- Pride of Kinston

Creation of an *Economic Development Institute* to be housed at Lenoir Community College would be an entity to inform members of the new structure as to *business and economic trends* which do/will affect our region’s economic development objectives.

We often bemoan the fact that tobacco, textiles and manufacturing in general left Kinston and Lenoir County over time resulting in declining populations, lost jobs, and high unemployment rates.

Acknowledging that the community made a huge investment to attract and build the Global TransPark coinciding with the downward trends, it is still a legitimate question: Didn’t somebody raise a hand and say ‘should we put all our eggs in one basket?’ Who was doing the community thinking about Kinston and Lenoir County’s economic future? Where were those who do ‘trends analysis’ for the town and county?

An *Economic Development Institute* would be charged with trends analysis, forward thinking, business review to give local policy and decision makers with up-to-date regional, national and international trends which will play out in Eastern North Carolina.

Participants in this local “think tank” would be:

- Faculty (and students) in LCC business department(s);
- Office of Economic Development, East Carolina University
- NCSU County Extension Office
- Southern Growth Policies Board
- EasternCarolinaCouncil
- NC Eastern Region
- UNC Department of Economics & NC Dept. of Commerce

## **Cultural & Historic Resources**

**A unitary structure to support and encourage local cultural resources is desirable. Such a body, either as a part of local government or as a nonprofit empowered by local government to carry out public policy, would be charged with:**

- **Advocacy**
- **Coordination**
- **Information sharing**
- **Audience building**
- **Resource accumulation**
- **Strengthening the “cultural economy”**

**The agency would work for and act on behalf of:**

- **Historic Preservation Commission**
- **Community Council for the Arts**
- **Members of the Heritage Tourism Council\***
- **LaGrange Art Center**

**\*Caswell Center Museum, CSS Neuse II, CSS Neuse/Richard Caswell State Historic Site, Cultural Heritage Museum, Firemen’s Museum, Heritage Genealogical Society, Historic Preservation Group, Lenoir County Battlefield Commission, Lenoir County Historical Association, Mitchelltown Historic District, Pride of Kinston, Tyndall’s Tractor Museum.**

### **A Community Cultural Foundation**

**As a companion to the new “agency,” a community cultural foundation would be created to serve as a central pool which would collect private, foundation and government funds as catalysts for local cultural efforts and activities. Funding of the non profit cultural economy has been a critical factor ever since the “American System” of supporting the arts was created two hundred or so years ago.**

**There are two other general community efforts which need refined attention:**

## **Education**

**An umbrella organization to pull together those interested in improved quality education might help. Participants in such a new structure:**

- **Lenoir County public schools and Board of Education**
- **Private Schools & their boards of trustees**
- **Students**
- **Parents**
- **The Kinston-Lenoir County Chamber of Commerce Education Foundation**
- **Committee of 100**
- **Lenoir Community College**
- **East Carolina University school of education**
- **UNC School of Education & related “think tanks.”**

## Health

The health condition of a population is an indicator of economic health. The poorer people are the sicker they are. They go hand in glove.

An overall health awareness and support agency could help. Participants would include:

- Lenoir Memorial Hospital
- Caswell Center
- Lenoir County Dept. of Health
- Community Health Center
- Social Services
- Kinston Housing Authority
- Lenoir-Greene United Way
- ECC Brody School of Medicine and new dental school
- NC Department of Health

## The End

Communities are made up of people. The streets can be wide and clean. The buildings beautiful. Trees and grass green. The waters pure. And the air clean. And a vision statement nailed to every corner.

But it's the people that count. Are the people healthy, happy and hopeful? Or are they sad, sick and in deparir?

It is not unusual for editorialists, columnists, policy wonks and other do-gooders to wish round people would fit in round holes, and that square people would fit in square holes. Unfortunately for the do-gooders, people are slightly more complex. They can be sad and happy, sick and healthy...both poets and accountants....all at the same time.

For a vision to become action, many complex people for complex reasons have to buy into the "idea" that the vision or visions represent. The "buying in" doesn't have to be perfect, doesn't have to be agreeable, nor does it have to be instantly accepted.

What counts is how *and when* the "idea" grabs hold of imagination, and how imagination informs behavior, over time.

In my way of thinking, it's not the vision statement that is the most important. What's most important is how we get there, who gets it, and does it change *personal* behavior once it's "got?"