



Vibrant Communities – Robust Region

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News Release

Residents' Input Sought in Process to Plan for the Region's Rapid Growth

October 24, 2012, Monroe, NC - Residents will have a unique opportunity to attend an open house and provide their input in a process to build a planning framework to address the unprecedented growth in the region and ensure the vitality of local communities.

The "CONNECT Our Future" open house will be held on Thursday, Nov. 8 from 4 p.m. – 7 p.m. at the Union County Agricultural and Conference Center at 3230-D Presson Road in Monroe. Residents will be asked provide input on what they value about their community and region, and what they think are the biggest challenges faced by the region. They will be able to drop in anytime during the open house time period, view exhibits, talk to staff and provide their input.

Union County is one of the more than 100 local governments, businesses, and non-profits participating in the three-year "CONNECT Our Future" initiative to develop a regional framework for the growth of the 14-county region.

In the past decade, the region surrounding Charlotte has emerged as America's fastest growing region of any area with a population greater than 1 million people. Within 20 years, the population is expected to grow by 50 percent, and double by 2050, meaning the addition of more than 2 million people to the region.

The region is also one of the largest in the nation without a framework for growth. Building the capacity to accommodate the coming growth will be especially challenging given the cutbacks from federal and state resources.

About 30 open houses have been scheduled between November and February throughout the region that includes: Anson, Cabarrus, Cleveland, Gaston, Iredell, Lincoln, Mecklenburg, Rowan, Stanly and Union Counties in North Carolina, and Chester, Lancaster, Union and York Counties in South Carolina. These initial "needs and values" open houses will be followed next

year by community meetings to explore various options for meeting the challenges and opportunities of the anticipated growth.

Because residents throughout the region drive the same network of roads, breathe the same air and drink from the same water sources, the collaboration of communities working together across local boundaries can help to plan for healthy growth and avoid the negative consequences of growth.

Community input from this first set of open houses will be used to evaluate options for how the region should grow and will help ensure that the region can take advantage of opportunities to grow jobs, the economy and improve quality of life.

The three-year planning process to build a regional framework is funded by a federal grant. The framework will be built on existing community plans, public engagement, and local values. The framework will contain policies, strategies and tools for voluntary use and adoption by local governments, and will also create a network of relationships across the region to address the challenges faced by individual communities and the region as a whole. To learn more about this initiative, visit www.ConnectOurFuture.org.

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