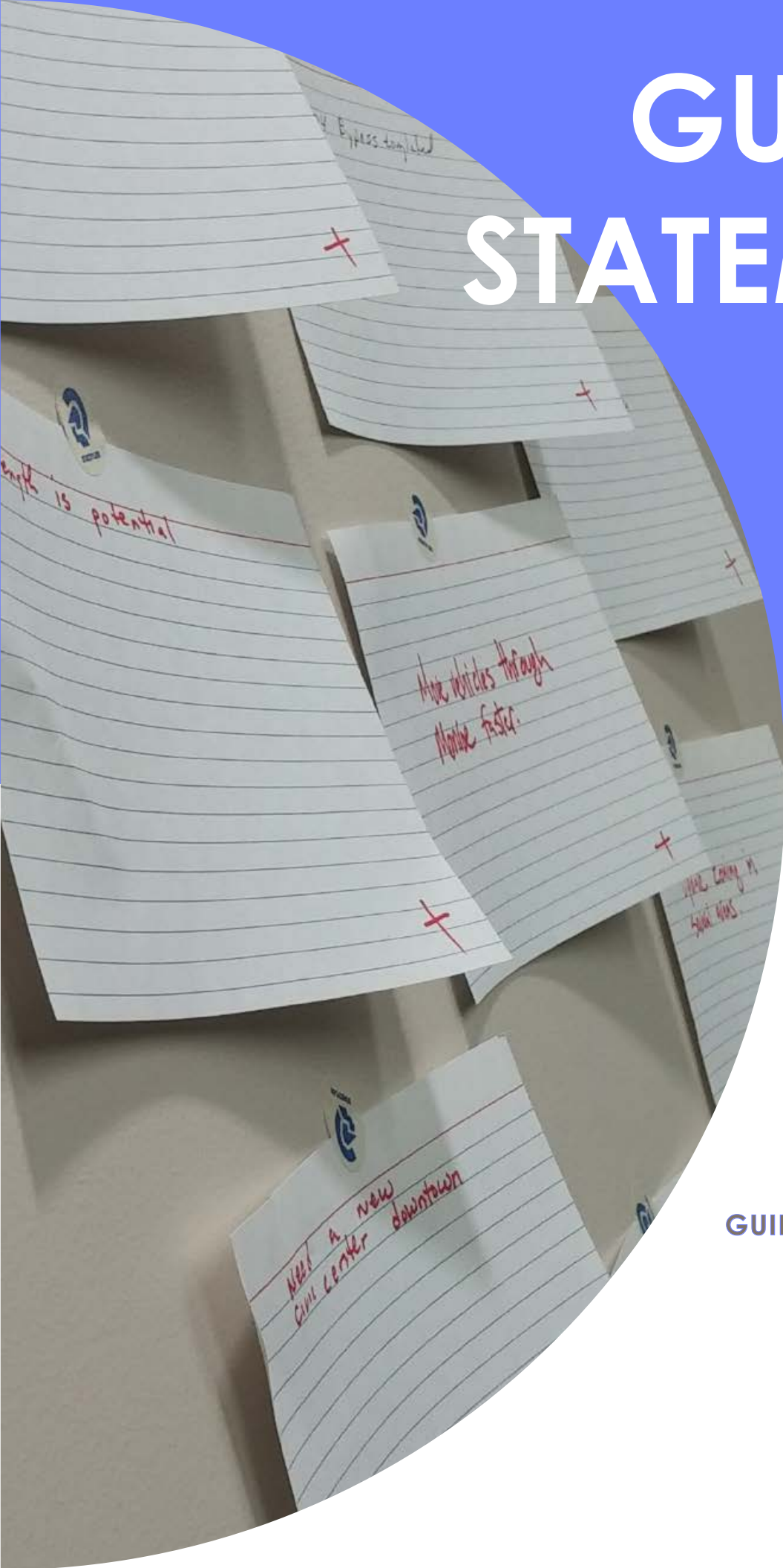


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INTRODUCTION

Creating a vision is a planning step that should not be taken lightly. For most communities, the opportunity to set forth a vision only comes every so often. The process requires a thoughtful approach to engaging the community and empowering its stakeholders. Community engagement was a critical part of Forward Monroe. Input from the public encouraged aspirational plans while giving an understanding of the potential tradeoffs inherent in each decisions made toward achieving those aspirations. In doing so, four fundamental questions were asked:

- **What challenges does Monroe face today and in the future?**
- **What does Monroe want to be...in 5 years and beyond?**
- **What assets can be leveraged to help achieve this vision?**
- **What steps do we need to take for Monroe to be successful?**

Asking these questions allowed the visioning process to generate a set of desired outcomes and a preliminary list of action items that align with community values. The questions were asked in a variety of ways at numerous events during the visioning phase.

Three main groups were identified and consulted throughout the planning process. The Technical Committee, Advisory Committee, and several key interest groups were targeted through outreach events. These outreach events are summarized on the pages that follow.

TECHNICAL COMMITTEE

The Technical Committee included staff from planning, engineering, economic development, and city management. The committee offered direction and input throughout the planning process.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The Advisory Committee, which included elected officials, board members, committee representatives, property owners, major employers, agency representatives, and other stakeholders, weighed in at major milestones, refined concepts, and confirmed direction toward final recommendations.

KEY INTEREST GROUPS

Key interest groups targeted and invited to participate in outreach activities include:

- ▶ Residents
- ▶ Elected officials
- ▶ City staff
- ▶ Agency representatives
- ▶ Neighborhood advocates
- ▶ Environmental groups
- ▶ Civic organizations and schools
- ▶ Charlotte Regional Transportation Planning Organization
- ▶ Union County Chamber of Commerce
- ▶ Downtown Advisory Board
- ▶ Economic development groups
- ▶ Major employers

WHAT WE HEARD

Throughout the *Forward Monroe* planning process, the community stepped forward to identify local challenges facing the city and the community assets that were most important to them.

In addition to ongoing dialogue with the Technical and Advisory Committees, three public workshops, an online survey, and ForwardMonroe.com allowed the community to participate in purposeful activities relevant to specific phases in the planning process.

An initial step for outreach was to offer the community the opportunity to provide input on a draft set of planning themes and comment on existing conditions to inform the creation of the plan's guiding statements.

These sessions brought forward several key themes that influenced the creation of the guiding statements and framework plans.

COMMON THEMES

The Forward Monroe outreach process included a variety of events to allow the public and targeted stakeholders opportunities to weigh in on existing conditions and establish future desires. This process yielded several common themes:

- ▶ While some people are embracing growth and others are apprehensive, most people agree that the City must prepare accordingly.
- ▶ Monroe aspires to be progressive and more vibrant without losing touch with its historic neighborhoods and unique role in the larger region.
- ▶ Creating a strong and sustainable local economy is critical to address broader community initiatives related to quality of life.
- ▶ Downtown Monroe and the historic neighborhoods that surround it should remain the center of the community.

PUBLIC WORKSHOP

June 6, 2015

The first *Forward Monroe* workshop occurred on June 6, 2015. The drop-in workshop allowed attendees to participate in a series of interactive stations. More than 50 people attended the workshop and provided input that was used to develop the project's planning themes.



One Word

The One Word activity captured existing sentiments and future hopes about the City of Monroe. Participants were asked to write down one word that describes Monroe today and one word that describes their vision for Monroe in the future. The following word clouds illustrate the responses, placing more emphasis on repeating themes.

MONROE TODAY



VISION FOR MONROE



Priority Pyramid and Thought Wall

The Priority Pyramid exercise asked participants to prioritize a preliminary list of seven planning themes. Participants were challenged to select the theme that they deemed most important, followed by a ranking of those they deemed less important.

In the Thought Wall, participants were given five pieces of paper and asked to write one issue or concern on each sheet. They then placed each sheet under the relevant planning theme.

Throughout both of these exercises, Economic Vitality was selected as the most important planning theme.



Arts and Culture



Downtown



Economic Vitality



Historic Preservation



Neighborhoods



Parks and Open Space



Transportation

PRIORITY PYRAMID



Economic Vitality



Neighborhoods



Downtown

THOUGHT WALL

- Gap between home ownership and rental properties needs to be addressed.
- Livability and quality of life would improve if more residents took more pride in their property and kept neighborhoods clean.
- More jobs and places to shop are needed in Monroe.
- Better transportation options needed (better sidewalks, safer bicycle facilities, and convenient public transportation).
- Transportation needs are most evident for youth, older adults, persons with disabilities, and those who simply cannot afford to own and operate a personal vehicle.

METROQUEST ONLINE INTERACTIVE SURVEY

June - October 2015

To broaden the range of perspectives on the plan, an interactive, web-based questionnaire was launched. Approximately 160 members of the Monroe community participated between June 2015 and September 2015. The customized survey yielded a robust dataset of community preferences, opinions, and issues that ultimately contributed to the development of alternative growth strategies.

160

PARTICIPANTS

247

WRITTEN COMMENTS

563

LOCATIONS NOTED AS STRONG AND WEAK PLACES IN THE COMMUNITY

2,456

INDIVIDUAL DATA POINTS

WHAT'S IMPORTANT?

Most important



Economic
Vitality



Downtown



Neighborhoods



Transportation



Arts & Culture



Historic
Preservation



Parks & Open
Space

Important

WHAT WOULD MAKE DOWNTOWN MORE VIBRANT?

When participants were asked to select the top three things that would make Downtown Monroe a more vibrant place to live, work, and play, the top three chosen were:



**Restaurants
(32%)**



**Retail
(29%)**



**Community Events
(19%)**

WHAT IS OUR TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM'S MOST IMPORTANT NEED?

Participants said that one of the most significant transportation challenges in and around Monroe was traffic on major roadways. Participants also mentioned a need for transit service as well as sidewalk and bicycle facilities around the community.

Generally in Monroe:

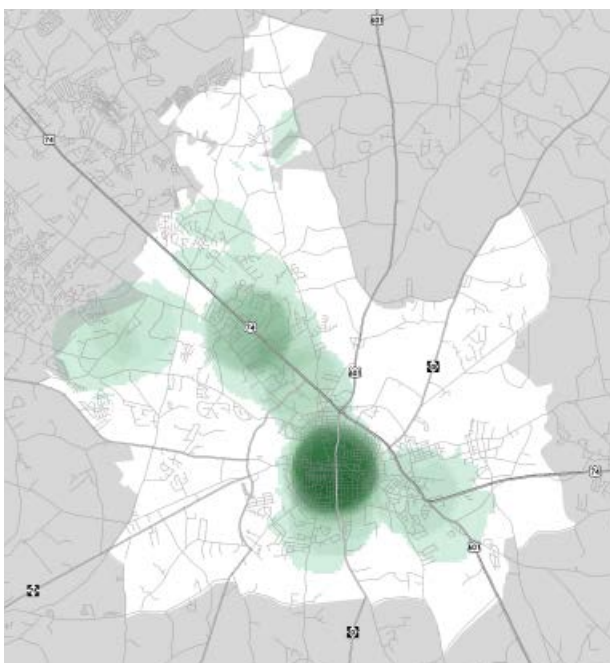
1. Expanded transit service
2. Better sidewalks and crosswalks
3. New greenway trails and multi-use paths

In Monroe's Downtown:

1. Parking
2. Traffic Improvements
3. Sidewalks

WHERE ARE MONROE'S STRONG AND WEAK PLACES?

Participants were asked to use an interactive web-based map to show specific locations of strong and weak places in the study area. Nearly 570 markers were placed on the map by 132 participants. The data was then used to create a "heat map" that shows locations with higher densities for strong and weak places.

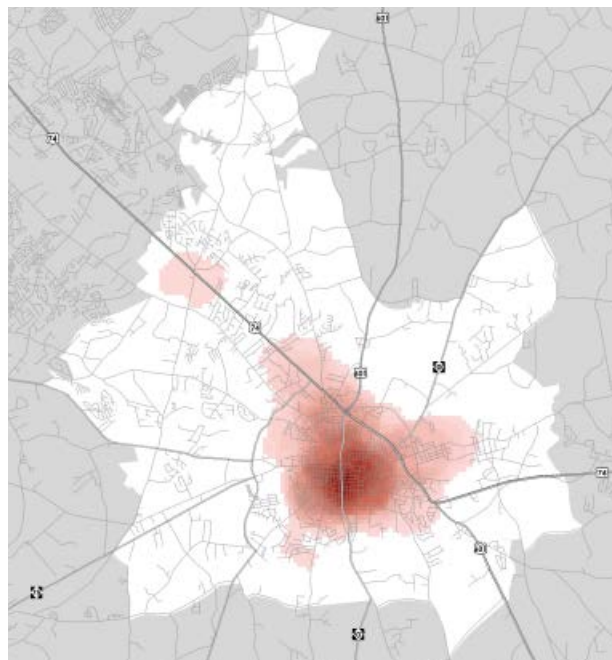


STRONG

Downtown Monroe and the US 74 corridor are viewed as strong anchors for the surrounding areas...

WEAK

...but many also viewed the historic core of Monroe as a weak spot. During the public workshop, many spoke about the need for the downtown to further establish an identity and become an exciting destination.



STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

February 2015

A series of stakeholder interviews were conducted as a deeper dive into some of the themes heard in earlier outreach events. The interviews confirmed that the residents value Monroe as a quiet, small town that is open to growth if properly executed. In general, comments centered on the following themes:

- **Neighborhoods:** The City should continue to invest in existing neighborhoods and create new neighborhoods that appeal to diverse demographics.
- **Transportation:** The City should create a balanced transportation system that makes it easier to move around the city.
- **Downtown:** The City should continue to find ways to make downtown a destination for residents and the larger region.
- **Schools:** The City should continue to focus on school performance as a way to retain residents and attract new jobs and households.
- **Parks and Community Events:** The City should continue to invest in local parks and offering events and activities for residents.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE WORK SESSION

April 2, 2015

At their first meeting, committee members participated in several activities to help identify issues and establish a preliminary list of planning themes. In one activity, they posted four thoughts on a wall, each categorized as a community opportunity or challenge.

Opportunities

- Monroe has a **small town feel** with access to big city amenities.
- The community's **diversity** should be viewed as an asset not a liability.
- With more investment (public and private), **downtown can thrive.**
- A **diversity of housing** can accommodate existing and future residents.
- Monroe's economy includes a **variety of industries.**

Challenges

- Monroe needs more balance in its **home ownership rate.**
- A **lack of transportation options** makes it difficult to move around the city.
- The City needs to **protect downtown** and **rescue older neighborhoods.**
- It needs to be **easier to invest** in the City for private developers.
- Monroe needs **more housing and cultural resources.**

GUIDING STATEMENTS

A common theme in the planning process is the community's understanding that the physical environment of the city—its neighborhoods, buildings, streets, utilities, and natural resources—have a far-reaching impact on economic vitality and cultural heritage. *Forward Monroe* is taking shape around a set of guiding statements that aim to leverage physical assets to achieve a common vision.

VISION

Forward Monroe led the community through a process that explored growth options and identified a preferred strategy. As options were evaluated and supplemented with supportive transportation measures, it was important to establish a vision based on direct input from the community. The vision for *Forward Monroe* is aspirational and intentionally broad and non-limiting.

Monroe will be a dynamic and progressive city that promotes growth that boosts our economy, protects our neighborhoods, and enhances our downtown. Our vibrant community will be a great place to live and work, highlighted by safe and attractive neighborhoods, quality parks and open spaces, and transportation options that make it easy to travel throughout the city.

COMMUNITY THEMES

Forward Monroe includes six Community Themes to recognize that implementation of the plan must be balanced, integrated, and multi-disciplinary. The influence of the Community Themes is seen throughout the Plan as they shape many of the individual policies and projects. The six themes (presented alphabetically) reinforce Monroe's vision and serve as *Forward Monroe's* overall goals. These themes are drawn from initial outreach events (e.g. Advisory and Technical Committee meetings, Community Workshop #1, interactive online survey, and stakeholder interviews) summarized in the previous section. The Community Themes reflect the key challenges facing the city as well as the opportunities and assets that can be leveraged in a competitive marketplace. The six themes reinforce the core issues and needs that the community and stakeholders have identified to be addressed during the *Forward Monroe* planning process.

COMMUNITY CULTURE



DOWNTOWN VIBRANCY



ECONOMIC VITALITY



HEALTHY NEIGHBORHOODS



PARKS & RECREATION



TRANSPORTATION & MOBILITY





COMMUNITY CULTURE

VISION STATEMENT

Monroe will preserve and promote its history and culture as defining characteristics that contribute to what makes our community unique and desirable.

OBJECTIVES

- Protect and promote the community's history and historic places.
- Celebrate and elevate the diversity and culture of Monroe.
- Increase accessibility to community features that highlight arts, history, and culture.



DOWNTOWN VIBRANCY

VISION STATEMENT

Monroe will encourage quality growth downtown and in turn reinforce the city's core as a local destination with regional recognition.

OBJECTIVES

- Retain and recruit a variety of businesses and services within downtown.
- Promote a mixture of uses with strong connections to surrounding neighborhoods.
- Make downtown more attractive through public and private investments and partnerships.



ECONOMIC VITALITY

VISION STATEMENT

Monroe will embrace innovation and promote economic opportunities through programs, policies, and investments.

OBJECTIVES

- Grow the local economy through recruitment and entrepreneurship.
- Encourage reinvestment in underperforming commercial sites
- Facilitate strategic industrial growth that builds on Monroe's competitive advantages.



HEALTHY NEIGHBORHOODS

VISION STATEMENT

Monroe will be a city of distinctive, safe, and attractive neighborhoods.

OBJECTIVES

- Preserve and enhance established residential neighborhoods.
- Promote a diversity of quality housing and home ownership.
- Enhance the connection between and within neighborhoods and promote the creation of quality places.



PARKS AND RECREATION

VISION STATEMENT

Monroe will promote health and quality of life through an integrated system of parks and open spaces.

OBJECTIVES

- Connect parks, neighborhoods, schools, and other activity centers through a coordinated system of safe on-road facilities and protected off-road trails.
- Offer a variety of recreation, athletic, social, and education programs.
- Maintain parks and facilities in a way that ensures long-term attractiveness and full use of the asset.



TRANSPORTATION AND MOBILITY

VISION STATEMENT

Monroe will enhance mobility through a transportation system that promotes safe and attractive transportation choices within and through the city.

OBJECTIVES

- Make the best use of existing streets to efficiently move people and goods.
- Ensure the transportation network provides mobility for all travel modes and accommodates the needs of a diverse population.
- Integrate land use and transportation decisions to reduce congestion and improve mobility through compact and connected places.