PLANNING FOR DEVELOPMENT IN RURAL AREAS: AN ASSESSMENT OF THE STRATEGIC PLANS FOR SOUTH CAROLINA'S ENTERPISE AND CHAMPION COMMUNITIES*

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Introduction

Urban America, under siege since the l950s, has been the recipient of considerable more public attention for creating communities of opportunity than has been rural America. Metropolitan areas have been the focus of urban practitioners and scholars, largely pertaining to social ills (Giloth 1995, 279-289) and to efforts to attract private investments into inner-cities (Porter 1995, 55-71; Judd and Swanstrom 1994; Goldsmith and Blakely 1992). More recently the problems of sprawl and managing growth in suburban communities (DeGrove and Metzger 1991 and Stein l993) have been scrutinized.

Yet the economies in many rural areas and small towns have plummeted and they are in crisis (Martin 1965, 6-13), but social and economic ills in the countryside tend to be less visible than the urban crisis. Many rural communities suffer from declines in population, jobs, and tax bases (Reich 1988, 3-8; Daniels and Lapping l988, 339-342; Reid and Sear 1992, 214-217). Indeed, improving the economic, physical, and social environment in small cities, towns, villages, and farming communities is increasingly gaining the attention of government and business leaders (Falk 1996, 104-109).

The emphasis on rural development, that is, "a multipurpose, comprehensive approach to making micropolitan (rural) areas a better place to live and work," (Tweenten and Brinkman 1976, 7) now rivals urban development on the public's agenda. Business and community leaders, combating eroding economies and rising poverty in rural communities, like their urban counterparts, are "looking for new or expanded employment opportunities for their citizens, expanded tax bases, and economies of size in the provision of services, and expanded markets for residentiary goods and services. The assumption is that this growth/development process leads to increased levels of general welfare" (Dillman 1987, 2)

The federal Empowerment Zone/Enterprise Community Program, enacted in l993, is designed to catalyze community economic development in impoverished communities so that the employment rate and income levels rise. This initiative, which targets rural and urban communities, is designed to support comprehensive strategies for achieving social, economic, and physical

development in distressed communities. Communities seeking disignation, in order to obtain financial and other assistance from the program, are mandated to engage in a broad-based community strategic planning process (Boyle l995, 207-211 and Thomas l995, 212-224).

The purpose of this study is to examine and analyze the strategic plans for community and economic development prepared by South Carolina's applicants for the first-round of the Enterprise Community initiative for rural communities. These plans represent grassroots efforts in creating customized approaches to community revitalization. The investigation consists of a comparative analysis of the problems, key issues, and strategies, gleaned from nine strategic plans. Common trends, themes, priorities in the analysis. Finally, the outcome of the process for South Carolina's applicants will be presented. Some attention is also given to efforts for assisting these communities as they pursue changes for realizing their desired futures. The study, however, begins with a brief overview of the Empowerment Zone/Enterprise Community Program, strategic planning, and the communities under examination.

Enterprise Communities and Strategic Planning

The federal Empowerment Zones and Enterprise Communities Programss are designed to assist leaders and grassroots citizens in distressed areas in identifying problems, setting priorities, and designing strategies for improving communities and the lives of residents. These programs are administered by the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) [urban projects] and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) [rural projects]. Communities applying for designation as an Empowerment Zone or Enterprise Community are mandated to engage in planning and a visioning process. They are challenged to seek participation from community residents and a wide range of community partners.

The strategic plan, a catalytic undertaking, is a purposeful document that calls upon a community to do something--to take a critical inventory and chart its future goals, including a realistic plan for action. Community residents, public officials, business leaders, and other stakeholders are involved in identifying and seeking solutions to an area's most difficult economic, social, and physical challenges. The ten-year strategic plan required by the Empowerment Zone/Enterprise Community Program is the blueprint for realizing the goal of effective sustainable community development--a vision for economic, physical, and social development.

Developing a vision for a community entails "identifying the critical issues facing a community as it moves into the future" (Glass 1993, 138). Strategic planning focuses on identifying salient problems which must be addressed to bring about realistic change (Glass l993, 139). That is, "strategic planning requires broad yet effective information gathering and exploration of strategic alternatives, and an emphasis on furture implications of present decisions." (Bryson 1995, 5) The process of establishing and communicating a future community vision requires getting people involved in determining the community of tomorrow, especially initiating a process that will generate a consensus about the future and some notions about necessary steps to make the

vision a reality. In essence, strategic planning is a holistic approach to identifying critical community issues and developing action steps to guide the community toward identified goals (Glass, 1993, 141).

Nine strategic plans for the Enterprise Community Program are the heart of this undertaking. The plans contain a vision for change. Their objectives, as outlined by the Enterprise Community Program, are to promote economic and community revitalization through an adherence to the principles of economic opportunity, sustainable development, and community-based partnerships. Creating a positive and realistic vision for rural communities in the 21st century is the objective. To be sure, the Enterprise Community Program with an emphasis on poverty-stricken areas; encourages community empowerment and community organization; and the involvement of low-income people, government, business, community groups and others in planning for community economic development.

<u>South Carolina Communities</u>

As already mentioned, a combination of nine subcounty and multicounty areas in South Carolina sought designation in l994 as a rural Enterprise Community. Through strategic planning these communities developed procedures for enhancing human potential while effective sustainable community economic development would also be realized. The challenge for leaders in these communities is to link investments in social development or antipoverty

efforts and economic development in innovative ways to decrease dependency and achieve individual self-sufficiency. Local businesses, residents, and others are charged with creating partnerships for attracting investments in health care and social services, building an appropriate physical infrastructure, promoting the quality of neighborhood life (crime reduction, for example), offering access to investment capital, enhancing education and job creation, and linking the local community to the regional economy.

In South Carolina, a portion of fourteen counties applied for rural Enterprise Community designation. These counties are a mix of growing and declining areas. For example, population data reveal that between l980 and l990, two of the counties--Beaufort (32.2 percent) and Sumter (16.3 percent)--have population growth rates that are higher than the rate for South Carolina (11.7 percent). On the other hand, four of the counties--(Bamberg [-6.7 percent], Williamsburg [-3.7 percent], Lee [-2.6 percent], and Marion [-0.8 percent] loss population. The remaining counties had population growth rates between 0.2 percent (Hampton) and 9.6 percent (Allendale).

In general, during the period when the strategic process was undertaken and afterwards, unemployment rates in the counties were above the statewide level. In May l994, for example, only two of the counties--Beaufort (4.0 percent and Jasper (4.0 percent)--had unemployment rates below the statewide rate (6.5 percent). The unemployment rates in the other counties ranged from 7.6 percent (Sumter) to 12.7 percent (Marion). One year later in May of l995, Beaufort (2.8 percent) and Jasper (3.7 percent) were again the only two of the counties with an unemployment rate below the statewide level of 4.9 percent. The rate in the

remaining counties ranged from 5.2 percent (Sumter) to 10.8 percent
(Williamsburg).

Impoverished Census Tracts

The building blocks for these Enterprise Communities are census tracts, not the
county as a whole. These rural areas and small towns, consistent with the
Enterprise Community Program's guidelines, have high rates of poverty. In
some counties, Beaufort for example, the selected census tracts are pockets of
poverty in a relatively well-off county.

Below is a list of the census tracts which comprise the nine communities and
their 1990 poverty rates.

Census Tracts and Their 1990 Poverty Rates

	9605	35.0
	9608	38.0
Lee County:	9803	31.0
	9806	45.0
Sumter County:	1.0	37.0
	2.02	25.0
	5.0	34.0
Eastern Orangeburg County Enterprise Community		
Orangeburg County:	101	24.2
	102	29.2
	103	30.6
	104	35.7
Greater Orangeburg Enterprise Community Coalition		
Orangeburg County:	106	26.0
	108	25.7
	111	28.8
	112	37.9
	113	54.1
	115	29.7
Penn Center-St. Helena Island Enterprise Community		
Beaufort County:	11	27.0
Denmark Community Outreach Enterprise Committee		
Bamberg County:	9601	31.7
Williamsburg County-Lake City Enterprise Community		
Williamsburg County:	9702	25.0
	9704	29.3
	9705	36.8
	9707	28.5
	9708	34.8
	9709	28.7
Florence County:	2201	42.1
Source: The community strategic planning reports; see List of References.		

The Planning Process

Given the value of a bottom-up strategic planning process, this study identifies the central ingredients South Carolina's applicants decided will lead to enhanced economic and community development. These grassroots, community-based planning efforts were designed with holistic goals for reducing rural and small

town poverty through the provision of health and human services (antipoverty programs) in order to give residents in depressed communities an opportunity at succeeding in achieving economic self-sufficiency. The primary tenor of these strategies, according to the Enterprise Community Program, must be directed to expanding economic opportunities through investments in job creation and education so that incomes will rise for residents.

The examination of these strategic plans reveals that each of the applicants for Enterprise Community designation engaged in a community-based strategic planning process. Although a few communities began with a narrow base of citizens and broadened their citizen participation efforts shortly after the process began, all the planning groups disclose the involvement of community residents from the designated areas. The documents accompanying the strategic plans reveal that the steering committees, planning committees, task forces, and other committees sought and secured widespread and diverse citizen participation. The planning organization structure was buttressed with community meetings and public hearings in target neighborhoods and communities.

An outcome of the strategic planning process was the identification of community problems and opportunities. A key to achieving economic self-sufficiency among residents in impoverished communities is pursuing workforce preparation initiatives that are beneficial to residents by addressing the problems of poor education, unemployment, lack of child care, inaccessibility to health care, crime, alcohol and drug abuse, and teen pregnancy while simultaneously undertaking economic development by increasing access to investment capital, promoting and encouraging entrepreneurship, enhancing job creation, developing physical infrastructure, and providing job training and retraining. Strategic plans are the blueprints for integrating antipoverty and economic development approaches and guiding them in ways to achieve individual self-sufficiency for residents living in the target census tracts. Enterprise Community designation requires an over-arching focus on the linkage associated with community, economic, and human development.

THEMES IN THE STRATEGIC PLANS

Each of the community strategic planning initiatives followed a process of identifying problems, determining critical issues, and outlining strategies for achieving their preferred futures. Relying on each of the planning documents, broad categories of problems, issues, and strategies have been gleaned from the rich information in the documents.

Methods. The guiding decision rule in organizing the data is to create categories that best capture the trends and themes that cut across community plans. In a few instances, therefore, the groupings will differ slightly from those in some of the plans and in other cases some of the related issues in several plans have been combined in broader categories. Nonetheless, the classification scheme captures the core meaning of problems, issues, and strategies identified. For example, a few communities combined economic development, jobs, and infrastructure, others did not. In those instances, jobs and economic development have been combined and physical infrastructure stands alone. Some plans referred to quality of life concerns as a very broad concept covering

health, education, substance abuse, race relations, standard of living, cultural enrichment, and so on. For consistency purposes, a quality of life category has been retained, but where deemed appropriate, some qualify of life issues as defined in the plans have been combined with other categories. Decisions were made to maintain, collapse, or distribute original items to new categories based on the most appropriate way for focusing and sharpening the similarities and differences among the plans.

Problems. What are the problems facing residents in these South Carolina rural communities and small towns? Each of the planning efforts included an inventory of problems. Table 1 discloses common problems and areas of concerns, including some variation as well. For example, all community strategy plans, as expected, identified problems in the areas of education, jobs and economic development, and families and individuals living in distress. Large pockets of persons without a high school diploma, joblessness, high rates of residents receiving public assistance, and a scarcity of employment opportunities are among the leading problems. Further, excluding the Penn Center-St. Helena Island's community, health and environmental issues and crime and law enforcement (public safety) were also mentioned as common problems. Some problems exist because communities are underserved, such as in the provision of health care or due to rising crime, law enforcement coverage over large rural areas is inadequate.

Seven of the community strategic plans identified the need to expand or improve the physical infrastructure (Marion, Santee-Lynches, Allendale-Barnwell, Greater Orangeburg, Eastern Orangeburg, Denmark, and Williamsburg-Lake City) as their most pressing problem. The lack of affordable and decent housing (Marion, Santee-Lynches, Lowcountry, Greater Orangeburg, Denmark, and Williamsburg-Lake City) also rank high as a major area of concern. Recreational needs for youth and adults (Marion, Santee-Lynches, Lowcountry, Greater Orangeburg, and Williamsburg-Lake City) were mentioned in five plans. The lack of centralized water and sewer services in the targeted communities, the lack of affordable and decent housing, and programs for youth were among the leading problems mentioned. These impoverished rural communities also identified low educational attainment, low job skill levels, lack of jobs and economic development, families in economic distress, inaccessible and inadequate health care, and crime and law enforcement to be among their leading problems. Not surprisingly, problems which hinder social, economic and community development, the bridge to economic self-sufficiency, are major concerns in these poverty-stricken communities.

Several community plans identified additional problems, they too are directed toward human, comunity, and economic development. For example, four plans (Santee-Lynches, Lowcountry, Greater Orangeburg, and Williamsburg-Lake City) mentioned transportation needs (especially road improvements and public transit services), minimal entrepreneurship (Santee-Lynches, Allendale-Barnwell, Denmark, Penn Center-St. Helena Island), and inadequate community cohesion and leadership between the community and the rest of the county/region (Santee-Lynches, Greater Orangeburg, Eastern Orangeburg, and Denmark) as among their leading concerns. Racial relations and the general

quality of life surfaced as problems in Marion, Allendale-Barnwell, and Denmark. In two communities, Santee-Lynches and Greater Orangeburg, the lack of access to new technologies and the related infrastructure (fiber optic lines, for example) necessary to access the information superhighway and to enable the area to become more attractive to computer and technology-based firms merit attention. Single communities listed a negative community image and self-perception (Santee-Lynches), inadequate postal service (Greater Orangeburg), and encroachment of suburban development (Penn Center-St. Helena Island) as major problems facing their communities.

Key Issues and Problems.

To gain a sharper focus on the problems and issues that the planning process in these rural communities unearthed, an examination is made of those problems that are identified as key or crucial for strategically promoting individual self-sufficiency while also advancing areawide economic and community development. Table 2 discloses that a lack of jobs and the need to promote and attract industry in order to expand the economic base and raise earnings are critical issues for all the communities. Excluding the Penn Center-St. Helena community, all the areas also identify education, job training and retraining, and health care and environmental concerns, and public safety as issues that will be driving forces for the future well being of these communities and their residents. Clearly, an environment that fosters economic and human development, particularly an educated, well-trained, and healthy workforce in a safe community, is believed to be the key for strategically planning for the future.

Several other community plans identified additional aspects of community economic development as also being among their foremost concerns. For example, seven communites explicitly identified physical infrastructure (Marion, Santee-Lynches, Allendale-Barnwell, Greater Orangeburg, Eastern Orangeburg, Denmark, and Williamsburg-Lake City) as a top priority. Improving housing quality (Marion County, Santee-Lynches, Lowcountry, Greater Orangeburg, Denmark, and Williamsburg-Lake City) was also said to be paramount for advancing community development. Clearly, providing the appropriate physical support for growth and improving housing quality stand out for attention among these communities.

Quality of life matters (Marion County, Santee-Lynches, Allendale-Barnwell, and Demark), transportation and road problems (Santee-Lynches, Lowcountry, Greater Orangeburg, and Williamsburg-Lake City), and recreation and tourism issues (Marion County, Lowcountry, Greater Orangeburg, and Williamsburg-Lake City) round-out the leading barriers to economic self-sufficiency. Although one or two communities identified additional key issues or problems (see Table 2), economic development, education and training, infrastructure and transportation, health care, housing, and crime are urgent problems in these rural communities. Salient issues and the priorities discovered through the community strategic planning process reflect the chief concerns about what rural residents, community leaders, and other stakeholders believe must be done in order to undertake inclusive community economic development strategies.

Strategies for Community and Economic Development.

The problems and crucial issues identified through the strategic planning
process shape expectations for the future and encourage visions of economic
self-sufficiency through a combined strategy of economic and human
development. Table 3 discloses that all nine community strategic plans advocate
promoting and expanding economic development as a leading strategy.
Business retention, attraction, and expansion are major pillars in this endeavor.
Yet physical and human development are critical elements as well. For
example, four communities (Marion County, Santee-Lynches,
Allendale-Barnwell, and Williamsburg-Lake City) give special attention to
creating and upgrading the physical infrastructure, particularly a centralized
water and sewer for impoverished areas. Interconnected with the economic
growth strategy is a human development approach, including an explicit vision
for expanding and enhancing the delivery of health and human services
(exceptions are Eastern Orangeburg and Penn Center-St. Helena) as well as a
desire to enhance education quality and job training (exceptions are Greater
Orangeburg and Penn Center-St. Helena).

Not to be overlooked, as Table 3 also illustrates, are the differences among the
plans in conceptualizing similar strategies with differing terminology. Some of
the plans approach human development in an organizational and interdependent
way. For instance, some communities concluded that the promotion of
community development, particularly the establishment of a commuity
development corporation (Allendale-Barnwell, Greater Orangeburg, Eastern
Orangeburg, Penn Center-St. Helena, and Williamsburg-Lake City), should be a
leading strategy in pursuing economic and human development. Further, most
of the communities stressed the importance of a safe environment, especially
expanding and improving public safety--law enforcement, fire fighting services,
and emergency medical and rescue services--and providing affordable and
decent housing opportunities as major ingredients in their community and
economic development efforts.

As expected, the strategic plans for these small towns and rural communities,
consistent with the requirements of the Enterprise Community Program, focus
on designing strategies that bring economic growth to their communities and
simultaneously offer opportunities for a brighter future among poor and
low-income residents. The plans envision an integrated strategy for attracting
economic investment and developing human capital in the ways that spur
community restoration and individual self-sufficiency.

Supporting Community Change

These plans for community restoration and development represent the thinking
of residents at the grassroots level, business leaders, public officials, and major
stakeholders. All of the communities envision improving the quality of life of
residents by correcting low capital investment, plus unemployment, crime,
poverty, inadequate health care, and the like. These communities, through a
bottoms-up-approach, now have plans for meaningful change.

The Williamsburg-Lake City community, however, was the only one of the nine

applicants selected to become an Enterprise Community. The Williamsburg County-Lake City Enterprise Commuity will receive a $2.95 million grant. Its strategic plan is designed to empower community residents and leaders with the means for offsetting barriers to self-sufficiency. By the year 2004, The Williamsburg-Lake City Enterprise Community envisions the following outcomes:

a. a sound economic base which attracts new industries, encourages local enterpreneurship and the influx of new residents, supports a decrease in the current and comparatively high property taxes for the region;

b. an economic state which fosters a more effective utilization of the area's natural resources, the

expansion of established industries, an increase in jobs and salaries, more opportunities for youth on-the-

job training programs and leadership training for adults and youth, increased financial support for the

development of small businesses, and participation in the Community Development Corporation;

c. an educated and highly skilled citizenry that contributes to the economic growth of the community;

d. the existence of more medical professionals, more mobile health clinics, the availability of rural clinics,

telemedicine, and improved water supply in rural areas, and affordable health care;

e. an infrastructure which lends itself to the development of a better highway system, an improved airport for private and industrial needs, an improved water/sewer system, and improved commercial transportation system, and an improved telecommunications system--all of which to improve the living conditions of citizens and to attract industry;

f. a community which has a focus on crime prevention and fire protection in all areas, a fully operational Emergency Services System (E-911), a Neighborhood Watch Program in all areas, and neighbor-based police protection;

g. the development and operation of a state park which serves greatly to enhance the community's economic base.

The Williamsburg-Lake City Enterprise Community's strategic plan also identified several barriers which must be overcome if the outcomes are to be accomplished. Williamsburg County, the perennial leader in the highest unemployment rates in South Carolina, lost its largest employer, a manufacturing firm, to Malaysia. Several other major employers have either

closed down or relocated outside the area. Retaining and attracting jobs in order to lower the unemployment rate to acceptable levels is a persistent problem.

The loss of existing firms and the accompanying rise in umemploymnet is compounded by attempts by the town of Hemingway, the most affluent section of Williamsburg County, to secede from the county. Hemingway's secession would have a negative impact on the county tax base, causing arduous budgetary problems for county government. Secession would also include the transferal of three public schools to neighboring Florence County, displacing students from the rest of the county who currently attend Hemingway's schools. County officials argue that new school facilities will be needed, but the county lacks the economic base for generating local revenues for new construction. The Enterprise Community designation provides resources and support to empower local residents and community leaders to pursue strategies that will enhance the area's economic position.

Enterprise Community designation means assistance from several federal agencies for the Williamsburg-Lake City area. The Enterprise Zone/Enterprise Community Social Services Block Grant (administered by the Department of Health and Human Services), the source for the $2.95 million grant, may be used for a variety of economic and social development activities as determined by community residents and contained in their strategic plan. The Department of Agriculture will also make funds available for housing and community facilities, business development, and water and sewer systems. In addition, the Small Business Administration has developed an innovative program to create One-Stop Capital Shops to aid small businesses by providing needed capital. The Department of Treasury will make tax-exempt bond financing incentives available to businesses that qualify an operate in the Enterprise Community.

The other eight communities are designated Champion Communities. Although they did not obtain Enterprise Community status, they will receive special recognition from federal and state agencies (state assistance is also available for the Enterprise Community) for implementing priority strategies in their plans. Champion Communities are not guaranteed financial and other support, but they receive precedence over other communities in obtaining aid and support. Champion Communities, with their strategic plans in-hand, also buttress their efforts for designation during the second-round of Empowerment Zone/Enterprise Community competition.

Assisting for Collaborative Local Action

In mid-l995, the National Rural Development Partnership and the Empowerment Zone/Enterprise Communities Program entered into a memorandum of agreement to formalize a relationship for assisting empowerment zones, enterprise communities, and champion communities. The National Rural Development Partnership, an intergovernmental and private sector alliance, is dedicated to facilitating collaborative approaches to assisting rural communities in community and economic development. At the state level, State Rural Development Councils are organized to determine the most efficient and effective ways for assisting communities benefiting from the Empowerment

Zone/Enterprise Community Program, including the Champion Communities. State Rural Development Councils may assist these communities by:

a. providing assistance in identifying and connecting a wide variety of actors through their comprehensive intergovernmental, public-private networks;

b. helping the partners that developed the strategic plans work in collaboration, or assisting champion communities in maintaining their initiative;

c. working with communities in identifying available resources and how to access them in order to develop and carry out strategies and action plans.

The South Carolina Rural Economic Development Council's mission is to bring together federal, state, and local government officials and representatives of the private sector and community-based organizations to address the economic development needs of rural communities. For Enterprise and Champion Communities, the Council provides technical and other assistance to help them make the transition from strategic plans to program development and implementation. Based on this analysis of the strategic plans, the following recommendations are offered to the South Carolina Rural Economic Development Council, with special attention suggested for the Champion Communities:

1. Assist the communities in pursuing change--The need to balance and focus simultaneously on reducing poverty and expanding the range of economic opportunities in impoverished areas will require innovative funding and tax incentives to break away from traditional methods. Help communities make sense out their priorities and secure leadership for developing a holistic approach to human and economic development.

2. Compile a listing of the resources available for these communities through individual Council members and other agencies, then assist the communities in identifying the opportunities and barriers associated with garnering the institutional and financial resources necessary for pursuing strategies--Each of the plans contains letters of endorsement and commitment from institutions and organizations for assisting in implementation, yet the capacity of each entity to assist, at what level, and at what cost must be realistically determined.

3. Encourage the creation of meaningful partnerships--Partnerships among community-based organizations, local governmental entities, and with federal and state governments, businesses, and nonprofit organizations should focus resources through permanent alliances, a forum for identifying resources and pursuing action for implementation.

4. Assist in facilitating dialogue and coordinating problem-solving--Groups at the grassroots level, government officials, business leaders, and other stakeholders should be coordinated and integrated to assure that community economic development is inclusive and tackled on a rather broad basis. Provide a setting for the emergence of natural leadership.

5. Assist the local coordinating agency in removing barriers to economic development and individual self-sufficiency--Respond to the strategic plans by helping to identify federal, state, and local government rules and regulations that are impediments to implementation of the plans. Provide technical assistance based on the needs of the community for tackling government rules and regulations.

6. Wherever feasible, encourage and offer incentives to communities which form community economic development alliances with each other rather than acting alone--Bring communities with common interests together and offer assistance in building regional community economic development alliances.

7. Assist communities in attracting business investments from outside South Carolina and retaining the industries currently in the area.

8. Serve as a catalyst and create assistance programs and institutional arrangements that facilitate entrepreneurship.

9. Offer challenge grants and technical assistance to facilitate the implementation of strategies which combine social and economic development projects.

10. Endorse projects and encourage agencies and organizations that are not Council members to assist in

implementation.

11. Concentrate resources of constituent agencies through the creation of a few demonstration projects. These projects should be win-win endeavors for the local area and also serve as pilots for employing resources in other areas. Some projects to consider include:

a. assist those communities such as Penn Center-St. Helena with the financial, management, and technical assistance for creating and operating a community development corporation;

b. select a relatively small community such as Denmark and offer assistance for refining thestrategic plan, setting priorities, and action steps; followed by a marshaling of resources for implementation;

c. provide forums countywide in places such as Orangeburg and Marion for facilitating communications and collaboration between towns, impoverished communities. and county officials;

d. select a multicounty area such as the Lowcountry and provide assistance for refining the strategic plan, setting priorities, and action steps, along with the financial resources and technical assistance for implementing regional strategies.

12. Form focus groups in each of the communities for the purpose of gaining a common definition for the meaning of "quality of life" and its related indicators, then create an instrument for monitoring and evaluating the quality of life in

these communities over time.

Conclusion

The Enterprise Community Program, particularly its strategic planning component, provides citizens, government and business leaders, and stakeholders in impoverished rural communities with a unique tool for community planning and identifying strategies for community economic development. The strategic plans reveal that economically depressed rural communities have common problems such as lack of jobs and economic development, inadequate education and job training, lack of health care and environmental services, indequate public safety, lack of affordable and decent housing, and a lack of physical infrastructure. The strategic planning process equips rural communities with a means for designing achievable steps for improving the standard of living. The bottom-up planning process in the communities identified key problems and recommended strategies for integrating human and economic development.

Yet the capacity of communities to turn the expectations that emerged during the planning process into programs and services that improve the quality of life will be determined during the implementation process. Only one the communities, the Williamsburg-Lake City area, has been designated an Enterprise Community. The others are Champion Communities, meaning they should receive perference from governmental agencies in financial aid and other support for carrying out their plans. All of these communities will need assistance, financial and otherwise, in making the transition from expectations to program implementation to their desired future.

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