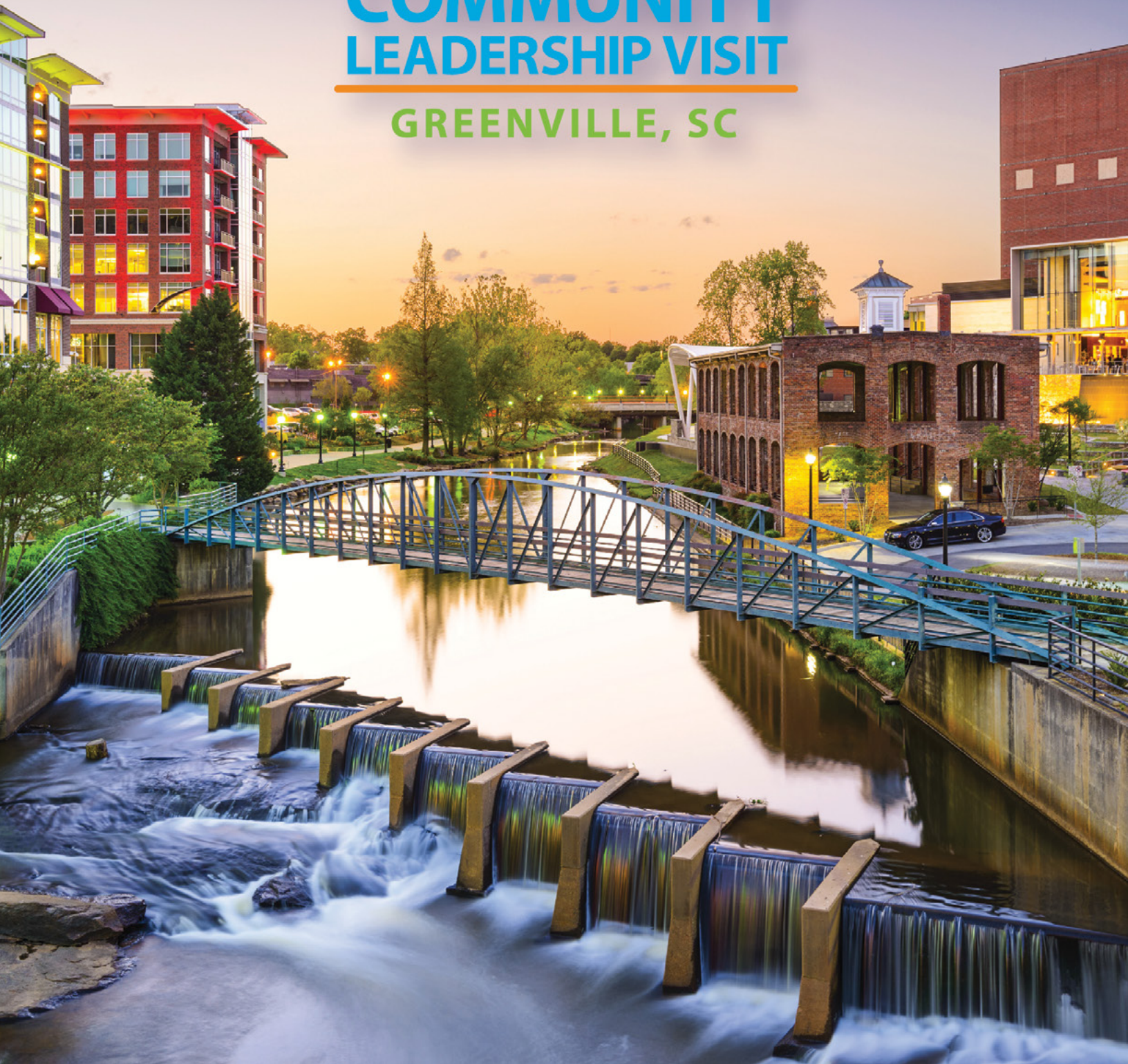




Springfield  
Area Chamber of Commerce

# 2016 COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP VISIT

GREENVILLE, SC





# Foreword: A Vision for the Future

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“Make no little plans; they have no magic to stir men’s blood and probably themselves will not be realized. Make big plans; aim high in hope and work ...”

– Architect & urban planner Daniel Burnham (1907)

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The Chamber has led trips around the country for more than two decades, learning from the highs and lows of other cities and determining what best practices can be put to use here in Springfield. The landscapes differ greatly, from the mountains of Colorado Springs to the plains of Oklahoma City and the rolling hills of Huntsville. But there is one constant among all of these communities: vision.

Greenville, South Carolina, the 23rd destination in our annual Community Leadership Visit program, is a unique place, but the lessons it can teach echo what has been said before in other successful cities.

Greenville’s dramatic turnaround is at once miraculous and repeatable—what city leaders love to call its “30-year overnight success story.” The turnaround can only be attributed to a combination of hard work, commitment and just a hint of desperation.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the city, like many of its kind across the country, was at a crossroads. Historically strong industry (in Greenville’s case, textiles) was undergoing a transition. Businesses were moving out of the center city into the outer suburbs. Downtown, the heart of any thriving city, was dying.

To rebuild was not easy, and the process was multifaceted:

- Community leaders had a singular focus on the

future, and the courage to take the necessary risks to make that future a reality

- Greenville had a unique personality it could develop and use as a foundation for its growth
- The community made a concentrated investment in education and workforce development
- Private businesses were highly engaged and made the investment necessary to support big ideas

But throughout this ongoing process, one constant remained: vision. Government officials, heads of industry, young professionals, the not-for-profit sector... all saw the vision, and all bought in. Strong leaders stepped forward with the courage to carry the vision forward, even in the face of opposition from those afraid of the unknown.

And city leaders were involved at every step, ensuring the atmosphere was in place to turn vision into action.

“There are no silos here,” says Merl Code, a longtime Greenville attorney and business leader. “The Chamber works with the nonprofits, the United Way helps in education, business are involved in everything. We are one community.”

It is a community made stronger by its vision. And it can serve as an example for others – including Springfield.



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“You have to take reality head on, understand your community strengths and weaknesses, take time to listen to stakeholders and then forge a unified plan. It is essential to get buy in for the plan and to stay on course to make the plan a reality.”

– Debbie Shantz Hart, 2016 Chairman, Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce

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## Courage in Leadership

To understand Greenville’s miraculous transformation – from former textile hub to economically depressed city in decay to thriving center of business and culture – is to understand the courage of its leaders.

The post-World War II boom in Greenville saw the market flooded with saved money. While this was good news for the overall economy, it spelled trouble for the core of the city: its downtown.

Suburban retail centers and road widening and expansion projects drew business away from the center of the city. When the economy dipped again in the 1970s, vacancy levels and crime rates downtown both continued to climb. “When I moved here in 1970, it was rough; you wouldn’t go downtown after sundown,” Code says.

But a handful of business leaders, along with then Mayor Max Heller, had a vision for what the city could be. It was built on a combination of a vibrant, diverse downtown core supported by local, national and international businesses in a wide range of

industries (see sidebar page 4).

The construction of what is now Greenville-Spartanburg International Airport, completed in 1962, created a good start. But it was going to take more than an airport to spark a renaissance.

### Sticking to the Plan

The reimagined Greenville had to be one that the whole community could get behind. So Heller and his fellow business and community leaders held visioning sessions, inviting the community to offer their dreams for the future community.

“We’ve always had a bigger vision than you’d think for a town our size,” says businesswoman and community leader Minor Mickel Shaw. She and her father, Greenville business pioneer Buck Mickel, were heavily involved in that initial and subsequent visioning sessions. People were invited, as Code puts it, to “act like we’ve got the money” and think big.

Starting with the development of the downtown Hyatt Regency hotel and the downtown sidewalk

widening and landscaping project, government, business and community leaders worked together to develop an idea of what Greenville could be.

One of the keys to the success of the planning process, according to longtime developer Bob Hughes, was to have a vision that didn’t focus on the individual steps of the process as much as the end goals.

“A successful partnership is like a successful marriage,” he says. “One half may do things the other doesn’t understand, but they’re always working toward the same end goal.”

That also meant continued public support, in the form of investment in the necessary infrastructure and support from dedicated tax revenue. “The city invested in keeping downtown businesses thriving until they could support themselves,” Code says.

### Ignoring the Noise

As with any radical idea, there have been naysayers. But Hughes says that didn’t stop leaders from

pursuing the vision. The key is being able to separate the noise from real signals that you’re headed in the wrong direction. He points out that a recent survey about Greenville schools asked residents if any action the school board took would make them happy. Fifteen percent said no.

“The noise ratio is always around 15 percent,” Hughes said. “If more than that start disagreeing with you, check what you’re doing ... and if you’re doing the wrong thing, stop.”

Successfully following the signal means continually listening to the community, which means continued visioning sessions. City leaders have held multiple sessions since that initial meeting, and both the attendance and the scope of ideas continues to grow.

### Developing New Ideas & Leaders

Shaw says that listening to everyone’s ideas is only natural – it comes from the city’s inclusive nature. “We’re very welcoming and open to new people, and we pride ourselves on being an international

community," she says. "We have open arms for people who want to move into our community, if they're willing to give back to the community as well."

That also means helping to find and develop the next generation of leaders to keep the vision growing and moving forward. The Greenville Chamber helps in that effort with programs like Pulse Young Professionals, aimed at those younger than 40 who want to connect and be engaged in the community.

"The city is very intentional about looking for young people to be leaders," says Hank Hyatt, the Greenville Chamber's vice president of economic competitiveness. "We try to make sure there are

multiple voices at the table." The program has been wildly successful since its founding in late 2005, growing to become the largest young professionals group in the state.

"We are doers; we like to get in and roll up our sleeves and get things done," says Ebony Austin, the Chamber's events and leadership development coordinator, who runs the program. "We love having the chance to connect with our community's biggest investors – they serve as mentors to us."

It's no surprise to Code; he says the focus on keeping young leaders involved is intentional. "Everyone can participate if you have the desire to participate," he says. "Our stated goal is to build a place where our children would want to move back."



## The Rebirth of Downtown Greenville

When the business flight to the suburbs in the 1950s and 1960s had taken its toll on Greenville's downtown area, initial attempts were made to encourage downtown building owners to spruce up their buildings to attract businesses.

But it would take more than a change in façade to begin downtown's rebirth. It took a two-pronged development plan. The first prong, a significant anchor, came in the form of the Greenville Commons, a downtown development anchored by the Hyatt Regency built in 1982.

That project, like all of the initial downtown redevelopment efforts, was spurred by a public-private partnership, according to Greenville Director of Economic Development Nancy Whitworth. "We had to determine what assets we had downtown," she says. "The first step was creating anchors and keeping them vibrant through constant reinvestment."

The area now boasts numerous projects built on a combination of public and private investment. From restaurateur Carl Sobocinski's bold decision to open new downtown eateries when the region was a near ghost town, to anchor projects like the Hyatt, The Peace Center for performing arts and the Fluor Field sports and residential complex, dozens

of impressive developments have taken hold. But those are blended with the second prong of the approach, a unique feel.

"Downtown was revitalized first by restaurants and entertainment venues," Sobocinski said. "The success requires very strong relationships and personal connections, along with a shared idea of what the city could be."

In Greenville's case, that meant going against conventional wisdom – narrowing downtown streets to widen sidewalks and plant trees. When combined with a focus on festivals and events, it made downtown a vibrant area well after 5 p.m.

"We wanted a pedestrian-friendly environment with outdoor dining, retail and residential development," says Mary Douglas Hirsch, the city's downtown development manager. "That led to an economic transformation, and that success spread to other areas of the city."



## Finding Your Waterfall

For Greenville Mayor Knox White, decisions about the city's planning and development often come back to a simple set of questions. "What makes Greenville unique and authentic? What is our personality?"

Many aspects of the city's long-range vision are based on the foundational idea of creating and reinforcing a "sense of place." That means identifying what makes the city different and building on those strengths. Sometimes it involves rediscovering forgotten assets like the waterfall that now forms the center of the Riverplace development (see sidebar page 7). In other instances, it means highlighting the things that are plain to see and taking pride in them.

### Existing Assets

Much like Springfield, one of Greenville's strengths is its natural environment. The city is bordered by numerous sources of natural beauty and

entertainment, from the Blue Ridge Mountains to the north and west to the numerous streams and rivers, including the Reedy River that formed the basis for the city's textile past and runs right through the heart of town.

The city's Trails & Greenways Master Plan spells out plans for 128 miles of linear parks, funded through a combination of state and federal funding and a dedicated tax revenue source at the city and county level.

"We have great access to natural resources while still enjoying an active city life," says Ty Houck, director of greenways, natural and historic resources for Greenville County Parks, Recreation and Tourism. He added that the community's dedication to its natural resources does not go unnoticed by citizens and visitors: "There's a vibrancy and energy in the community."

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“What impresses me most is the ongoing sense of excitement and community pride Greenville has. There’s always something new coming out of the ground, and it’s because they’ve figured out what makes them unique and they’re capitalizing on that.”

- John Wanamaker, BKD, LLP

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### Yeah, That Greenville

Natural wonder alone doesn’t necessarily make the city unique, so Greenville has made a concerted effort to develop those strengths while creating new ones. From Liberty Bridge to the Peace Center, the city has been willing to invest in facilities and programs that help to develop culture, the arts, entertainment opportunities and a true sense of place.

“Our diversity and depth of cultural offerings brings people in,” says Kerry Murphy, executive director of Greenville’s annual Artisphere festival, which brings in artisans and craftspeople from across the country in late spring. She notes that both the city and county support cultural programs with dedicated tax dollars. “City events have strengthened our culture, and Greenville does them very well.”

According to Katy Pugh Smith, executive director of the Piedmont Health Foundation, such events speak to the city’s personality. “I’m struck by how many different people you see at events or while you’re walking downtown,” she says. “There’s a real sense of pride in ownership, without the need for large outlay of money by citizens.”

It also works toward Code’s “stated goal” of making the city attractive to young people in a number of ways, including encouraged development of upscale clubs and restaurants in the city’s downtown.

“It’s not about alcohol; it’s the social connection,” says Ryan Johnston, publisher of the Upstate Business Journal. “Business isn’t always conducted around a conference table.”

Greenville’s personality is best summarized by the city’s social media brand tagline. It’s a line that references both the common confusion with the city of the same name in neighboring North Carolina (along with the other 45 Greenvilles in the U.S.) as well as the common surprise from outsiders unaware of all the city has to offer: “Yeah, **THAT** Greenville.”

Everything refers back to the idea of having a sense of place. With funding through its hospitality and accommodations taxes, the city has been able to invest in public art, green spaces, trails and visual cues to the city’s personality. “Making a place look good doesn’t make things happen,” Whitworth says. “But it’s a good start.”



## Creating Riverplace

When it comes to Greenville’s proclivity for finding strengths and building on them, nothing tells the story better than the Riverplace development.

With the creation of the interstate highway system in the 1950s and 60s, a bridge was built over the Reedy River to facilitate traffic in and out of the city. While the bridge served its purpose, it wasn’t much to look at ... and it covered a naturally occurring waterfall on the river.

The waterfall was long-forgotten by most in the city, but a few city leaders saw the potential. They pushed to have the bridge relocated and reopen the waterfall in the hopes it would spur development. While many in the community were skeptical about the plan, city leaders stuck to their vision. The \$4.5 million Liberty Bridge project – funded by the city’s hospitality tax – was completed in the early 2000s.

The results speak for themselves: In addition to an award-winning new bridge, the newly visible waterfall spurred more than \$150 million in private investment in the first year.

For Bob Hughes, the developer of Riverplace, the project is just one example of what communities like Greenville can do when given the chance. “Our job is to offer the right-sized and right-designed buildings for what people need,” he says. “But buildings are just the infrastructure; Greenville is what’s in the buildings.”





# Workforce from the Ground Up

“During our visit to A.J. Whittenburg elementary school, it was inspiring to observe the positive impact of implementing innovative concepts such as project-based learning, technology integration and teaching specific interpersonal skills—some of the same strategies we’re deploying in Springfield. It reinforces that we’re heading in the right direction.”

– Denise Fredrick, President, Springfield Public Schools Board of Education

It’s no surprise that one of the top issues for businesses is finding, developing and retaining skilled workers. It’s an issue in Springfield, and it’s an issue in Greenville.

But Greenville is addressing the issue head-on, both in the public sector and in private businesses.

## Starting Early

The effort begins in the schools – and it begins earlier than you might expect. The Greenville County School District, the largest in the state, works closely

with higher education institutions. Eighth graders get the chance to choose one of 16 career tracks to focus their studies and offers a career fair for seventh graders.

Superintendent W. Burke Royster says the district’s goal is to create college - and career-ready students who “have already started their journey down their chosen path.”

He says a key part of the process is acknowledging that success means different things for different

students. One example: the manufacturing track, which is one of the least popular among the 16 options for students. “We’re working to develop apprenticeships at an earlier age (to increase interest),” Royster says. “But we have to change perceptions through information and earlier training.”

Some of that effort comes through specialized curricula at schools like the A.J. Whittenberg Elementary School of Engineering (see sidebar page 11). But the schools also are looking to help with a gap in “soft skills” through focus on the Essential 18 skills for students, which covers skills such as making eye contact when talking, respecting others’ ideas, being honest, saying “please” and “thank you” and greeting people by name.

“We want to develop students into good citizens,” Royster says. “It’s important to develop skills and characteristics to let students succeed as adults.”

## Creating Their Own Workforce

Greenville’s schools aren’t attempting to solve the workforce puzzle alone. Private industry, along with higher education institutions, are stepping in to help. Many of the area’s largest employers, such as BMW, Michelin and GE, are in the manufacturing sector, and they acutely feel the need for skilled workers.

GE carries a large workforce in Greenville, including

1,400 employees working at the local facility and another 2,000 who support the company’s worldwide operations. “We need to introduce workers to our company, both to familiarize them with our brand and show them what skills we need,” said Matt Krause, the GE plant manager. “We need to develop skills not just for today but for the future as well.”

So companies like GE and others have stepped in to develop their own workers. Greenville Technical College President Dr. Keith Miller says more than 30 companies have set up apprenticeship programs at his school, paying for tuition, fees and books for students. Some participants also get stipends to participate.

“Federal access to student aid is being dramatically tightened, and hundreds of students have quit our school because of funding issues,” Miller says. “Meanwhile, there are 550 manufacturers in the region facing a widening skills gap.”

That means also teaching students – as well as their teachers – that tracks other than a four-year degree are valuable and worthwhile options.

“We have to change,” Miller says. “Addressing new challenges by doing more of the same doesn’t work anymore.”

## BMW Scholars

For BMW, recruiting interested workers with the right skills is a constant battle – the company’s Greenville plant is its largest worldwide. So the company has responded with the BMW Scholars program. BMW works with community colleges in the region to find students studying certain fields of engineering and management.

“Our German plants have had apprenticeship programs for years,” said Werner Eikenbusch, BMW Group’s Greenville-based head of talent management. “So it only made sense to develop one here.”

The comprehensive program offers numerous benefits for students, including an associate degree with tuition assistance from the company, paid internship opportunities at the company while attending school and consideration for full-time BMW employment after graduation. In return, BMW is able to create a pipeline of students trained in the areas where the company has the highest need; the program accepts at least three dozen students each year.



Eikenbusch says a big part of the challenge is helping students understand what the industry is – and what it isn’t.

“We have to overcome the stigma associated with manufacturing, that it’s a dirty and low-paying field of work,” he says. “We also have to overcome the idea that everyone’s goal should be a four-year degree. Scholar tech graduates can make more money and have a more secure job than those that graduate with a four-year degree.”



“Greenville has recognized the power of understanding that we are designed to live in relationship and community. Communities are groups of relationships that thrive when they share a common goal that is much larger than any individual or small group could possibly imagine or accomplish on their own.”

– Bill Hammitt, Amprod Holdings, LLC

## Supporting Success

Greenville’s government and civic leaders have gone well beyond what leaders in many communities would be willing to do in order to help grow the community. But not every issue can be adequately handled with public funds and leadership.

Thankfully for Greenville, private businesses and nonprofit organizations have stepped in to carry the ball in several ways.

### Framework for Growth

One of the most common ways for businesses to engage in any community is through public-private partnerships. For Greenville, partnerships have been the backbone of the city’s renaissance. Several of the city’s landmark projects have made use of the public-private partnership structure, including the Hyatt Regency, Peace Center and Fluor Field. The city even traces the beginnings of its rebuilding effort to one specific early partnership: the airport. “Public-private partnerships have been a driving force in Greenville’s history,” Shaw says.

But partnerships go beyond just the flagship structures downtown. They also stretch into the residential development that has infused life into the downtown district. In many cases, the city has

purchased undeveloped or blighted property to sell to residential developers, who have built traditional homes, rental properties and affordable housing in accordance with neighborhood master plans.

“We’ve worked hard to transform many of those neighborhoods,” says Ginny Stroud, the city’s community development administrator. “We’ve used public investment to leverage economic development, focusing on investments that are centrally located and use them as catalysts.”

### A Class in Partnerships

But one of the most remarkable public-private partnerships can be found in the school district.

The Building Equity Sooner for Tomorrow (BEST) plan allowed the school district, through a complicated bonding structure funneled through a nonprofit organization, to rebuild every school building in the district over a six-year period.

This \$1 billion project offers multiple advantages for the district. Better facilities attract more teaching candidates, which leads to better educational opportunities for students. The new facilities mean schools can be built to offer more customized programs (see sidebar). And in workforce

development, newer schools with more variety of offerings are attractive to young parents, helping to both attract and retain coveted young professionals.

The idea for the unique bond structure came from business leaders like developer Bob Hughes. He says the key to creating a community primed for growth is to think of every decision in terms of how it can help increase opportunities for everyone.

“Greenville is not a ‘slice of the pie’ town,” he says. “It’s a ‘size of the pie’ town.”

### Philanthropy & Entrepreneurship

Growing businesses and a flourishing local economy have allowed the community to address other issues in and around Greenville. Philanthropic efforts have increased dramatically in recent years. Piedmont Health Foundation Executive Director Katy Pugh Smith says the community donates between \$38 million and \$40 million to charitable efforts each year. Additionally, Greenville County set a state record for United Way campaigns by raising more than \$16.7 million in 2015.

In the same spirit as the aforementioned public-private partnerships, the Greenville Philanthropic Partnership was created to get those numerous charities to do something they often don’t think to do: work together.

“We have three objectives: networking, education and collaboration,” Smith says. “Once we started talking to each other about what we’re working on, the potential for collaboration has exploded.”

That same collaborative spirit is also on display in the community’s support for entrepreneurship. The NEXT program, created by the Greenville Chamber, offers entrepreneurs facilities to develop their ideas, as well as the ability to interact with established business leaders for advice and counsel.

The portfolio of companies that have come through the program is worth more than \$100 million, and while not all of those companies have remained in Greenville, the program itself speaks volumes about the region’s approach to growth. NEXT led to a 60,000-square foot innovation center and helped spur the creation of the Upstate Carolina Angel Network, or UCAN.

“There’s something unique about Greenville,” says Peter Barth, a software developer who moved to Greenville in 2006 and helped with the creation of both NEXT and UCAN. “The community is all moving in the same direction; there’s a sense of vision and pride in the community. If you’re on board with the vision, doors open very quickly.”

### A.J. Whittenberg Elementary School of Engineering

For evidence of Greenville’s innovative approach to education, look no further than the A.J. Whittenberg Elementary School of Engineering. Even the name of the school indicates its forward-thinking attitude; Abraham Jonas Whittenberg was a civil rights pioneer best known for his stand on the integration of the Greenville County school system.

As one of the new facilities built through the BEST plan, the school offers a unique curriculum based on engineering in all subjects. The school’s mission is to “create a culture of respect and highest achievement, uniquely aligned with engineering principles, that best prepares a diverse group of learners to succeed in the 21st century.” And the building itself is a learning tool; its LEED certification teaches students about recycling and resource conservation.

The focus on engineering principles and how they can be



put to use is no accident: Those principles directly support the problem-solving skills employers say they need for successful employees as adults.

“Major employers in this area are heavily involved with the schools,” says Norman King, vice president of purchasing with Michelin North America. “If we’re talking about the need for students to be trained with specific skills, we should help develop the programs to offer that training. It’s an effort to really put our money where our mouth is.”

# Moving Forward

"The secret to Greenville's success wasn't really a secret. It was planning. It was implementing. It was bringing people together who believed. It was listening to those who didn't believe. It was changing people's minds. It was about creating a vision and making it happen. ... The challenge is to keep trying and promoting new ideas. Once something works, other cities will steal it. We've seen it locally. You just can't stay still. We have to keep doing things that will be a success."

– Greenville Mayor Knox White

So with all these valuable lessons in hand – some new, some reinforcing what we've already known – what happens next?

First, we should take pride in our strengths. From the variety of industries in our local economy to the strength of our education system and our courage to face ongoing challenges, Springfield has a wealth of positives from which to build.

However, now is also the time to act – when there is enthusiasm and energy is high for movement. Leaders are looking ahead to how we can make

plans now to shape our future. The Chamber can serve as a "trusted convener" and bring everyone to the table to create a plan for tomorrow. Let's use our strengths as a foundation for continued growth that can help both address our issues and build an even brighter tomorrow.

Springfield has the tools and the people to make our community a true beacon for the region and the country. Let's be the people Daniel Burnham talked about. Let's make big plans and aim high. We can get there together.

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