

# GFA Roundtable Discussions

## Themes:

Regional collaboration

Opportunities come with growth

Shared vision for the future

Clarity and certainty in development regulations

Quality of life and cost of living

## STRENGTHS of Wilmington

- Once potential employees get to Wilmington and evaluate it as a place to live, they're easily sold on it
- We have a strong realtor community who market Wilmington well
- Strategic location along the East Coast
- Climate and natural resources make Wilmington an attractive place to live
- We will always be a place where people want to live
- Existing infrastructure within the city
- We have a willing and able workforce
- There is momentum building to move Wilmington and the region from good to great
- There is much potential and opportunity to be realized here
- Wilmington offers quality of life that people enjoy
- Partnerships are emerging
- There is an existing desire for and some resources available for fostering entrepreneurship

## OPPORTUNITIES coming our way

- Wilmington and NC will grow
- Since most people outside of NC don't know of Wilmington, we have a "clean slate" in terms of marketing ourselves
- We have sufficient water and sewer capacity to accommodate growth
- Our airport has sufficient infrastructure and capacity to accommodate growth
- Growth at the Charlotte airport will put ILM travelers within reach of many national and international destinations with only one stop
- State Port has a cold storage facility under development and existing capacity to serve North Carolina; focus on NC commodities and bulk and break bulk
- Mixed-use development and redevelopment can provide a mix of housing options and needed commercial/non-residential uses while helping to off-set traffic impacts and create nodal development that supports public transit usage

- Lots of redevelopment opportunity
- Lenders are increasingly willing to make loans on mixed-use projects
- Focus on development of specific types of industry/business recruitment
- There are opportunities to concentrate like-business and grow our brand as a good place to do business
- As residential units are developed downtown, this will help make downtown a more attractive place for other goods and services
- The market for rental property, mostly multifamily development, continues to grow, and the development community may be trending toward including a range of price points scattered throughout a development project

#### WEAKNESSES on which we can improve

- When considering Wilmington as a place to live, many potential employees believe it to be too small, not enough opportunities, not enough jobs for trailing spouses
- Too many groups operating with blinders on – not a regional mentality
- Lack of integrated housing types and price points within neighborhoods and therefore lack of diversity within schools
- Infrastructure improvements not keeping pace with development
- Our current low-density and development patterns do not adequately support public transportation choice ridership
- Public housing is concentrated in large developments right now; de-concentration and integration of housing types into neighborhoods is desirable
- Many businesses/employers do not consider Wilmington as a place to do business due to uncertainty in the development regulations (SUP process)
- We should establish ourselves as a place that is open to do business; focus on removing impediments from downtown and other redevelopment areas and business development will follow
- Major players within our region are not working together towards a common vision for the area; multijurisdictional leadership and cooperation is critical to our success
- High cost of living/cost of housing is a factor in recruiting employees
- It is difficult to recruit minority teachers to the area
- There is a disparity in the school system between the downtown schools and the suburban schools, as there is a concentration of poverty in and around the downtown area
- Crime and the perception of crime may hamper business recruitment, especially to our downtown area

#### THREATS, challenges, and things we need to consider

- We need to develop a regional vision and work collaboratively towards implementing it
- Wilmington is too small for recruiting necessary talent/employees from within, must recruit from outside the area

- Wilmington needs to more publically announce who we are
- We do not have a common vision of the path forward
- New Hanover County's SUP process is a threat to job growth and industrial development, particularly along the 421 corridor
- Advances in technology make it easier for people to work from home; this may change the face of office development in our city. It also means that employees who "report" to an office in Wilmington may not even live in NC and are not investing in our local economy
- We are in need of an additional river crossing – should be our top infrastructure priority, as the entire region depends on it; We are currently too small to offer low airfares and many nonstop flights
- We cannot serve large ships at our port
- Perception of traffic problems
- Lack of job opportunities for new/recent college graduates
- The cost of insurance is very high in coastal areas and proposed to be increased again; this has a snowball effect, reaching homeowners and tourism
- Limited amount of vacant land
- Retrofitting an already-developed city for multi-modal transit and mixed uses will be a challenge
- In terms of business looking to locate downtown, the river skews our demographic/trade area data – there is a large geographical area for which there is no population/income to be considered; increasing the density and diversity of people living downtown will help offset this