



A Strategic Plan for Economic Development in Rabun County

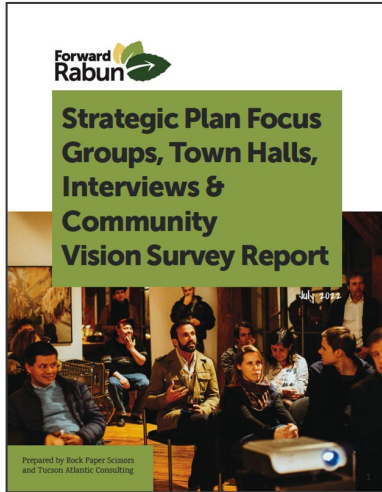
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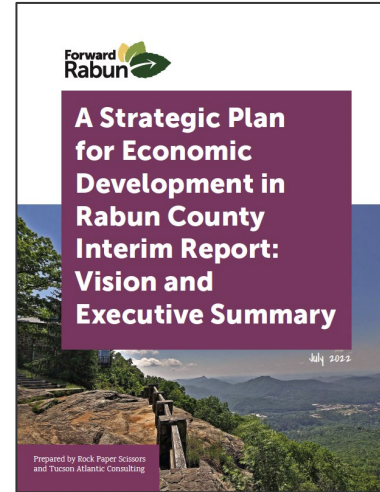
Strategic Plan

Elements of a Strategic Plan for Economic Development



Part I of Project

- Where are we now?
 - Situation assessment
 - Strengths and weaknesses
- Where do we want to be?
 - Vision for the future



Part II of Project

- How do we get there?
 - Bridging the Gap
 - Creating the Future
 - Recommendations
 - Implementation



Part I: Input, Assessment, Vision

Step 1: Obtain Public Input and Review Existing Studies

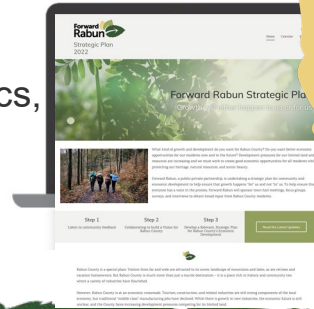
- Survey- 500 responses
- 2 Town hall meetings,
- 5 Focus groups,
- 40 Individual interviews

Step 2: Situation Assessment

- Economic trends, demographics, workforce, social factors
- Strengths and weaknesses

Step 3: Establish a Vision for Rabun County

- What would you like the County to “look like” in the coming years?
- Input from Steps 1 and 2



Note: For more detail on Part I results, see two documents they can all be found on ForwardRabun.com/strategicplan2022/



Survey Results: Growth and Development

- 68% believe the County is growing too quickly
- 78% believe stronger growth regulations are needed
- 55% believe that growth is not enhancing the quality of life
- However, 46% (plurality) believe that growth enhances economic opportunities

Is there a contradiction? – growth enhances opportunities but not the quality of life?



Challenge: Find a way for the County to grow without diminishing the quality of life



Survey Results: The Economy

Do You Agree or Disagree With These Statements?	Strongly Agree Or Agree	Strongly Disagree Or Disagree
Good jobs are <u>not</u> easy to find in Rabun	53%	23%
Jobs do <u>not</u> meet the skills of the workforce	44%	19%
More jobs with higher pay are needed in Rabun County	72%	6%
Salaries and wage rates are <u>not</u> adequate to live in Rabun County	74%	9%
It is important to grow and diversify the local economy to make it stronger	55%	22%

Note: Percentages do not sum to 100 because some respondents chose response # 3 Neutral

Conclusion:

Many Rabun County residents are underemployed and want better jobs and higher incomes



Survey Results: Quality of Life

Do You Agree or Disagree With These Statements?	Strongly Agree Or Agree	Strongly Disagree Or Disagree
K-12 Education is good in Rabun County	78%	5.4%
Housing availability is good in Rabun County	4.6%	83.6%
Good medical care is available in Rabun County	13.3%	60.4%
More national retail stores and restaurants would be a good thing for Rabun County	19.5%	65.6%

Note: Percentages do not sum to 100 because some respondents chose response # 3 Neutral



Survey: What Do You Like About Living in Rabun County?

- Rural, small-town feel
- Natural beauty
- Scenery - lakes and mountains
- Schools
- Climate
- Outdoor recreation



Survey: What Would Make Living in Rabun County Better?

- Affordable housing for workforce
- More healthcare options; more specialists; mental health care
- Better jobs with higher pay
- A comprehensive growth plan
- Managed development to protect natural resources
- Better internet
- Ordinances to protect the small-town charm
- Larger and better workforce



Bottom Line from Public Input

Rabun County residents believe that the County is growing too fast and that growth needs to be regulated. At the same time, they overwhelmingly want a stronger and more diversified economy with better jobs and higher pay to better match the skill sets of the existing workforce.

Mission Impossible?

Forward Rabun and the Consulting Team say this *IS* possible with the right strategy and plan!



Some Key Measures: Employment and Income

Employment is not diversified: 42% of employment in Rabun County is concentrated in two tourism-related industries and construction:

Retail Trade		17.8%
Accommodation and Food Service	14.8%	
Construction	10.3%	

Add another three industries [Health Care (10.5%), Educational Services (9.0%), and Manufacturing (6.7%)], and overall (69%) of employment in Rabun County is concentrated in just six sectors.

Lower Incomes : Annual wages in Retail (\$31,747) and Accommodation and Food Service (\$23,880) are below the County average of \$35,472 and far below the State annual average of \$55,075.

Per-capita income in Rabun County is falling further behind the State (97.4% of the State average in 2000 vs. 89% in 2021).

Note: See Part I report for full data analysis and narrative



Strengths: Assets to Build on for the Future

- Scenic beauty and outdoor recreation
- Strong community spirit
- Safe environment with low crime rate
- Strong tourism, retirement, and second home economy
- Attractive community
- Strong brand and identity
- Farm-to-table state designation and associate brand
- Schools/K-12 education
- Access to higher education
- Geographic location and access
- Good business climate
- Low property taxes
- Work ethic of experienced labor force
- Good county fiscal condition
- Increased intergovernmental cooperation
- Vacation home and retiree communities add taxes and business expertise to the County

Note: For explanation and information on strengths, see Part I report



Economic Development Weaknesses

- Limited land for development
- Availability of industrial/commercial sites and buildings
- Housing availability and affordability
- Labor availability
- Water and sewer availability and service
- Lack of childcare facilities
- Distance to commercial airports
- Health services
- Limited planning for growth
- Broadband availability
- Lack of a marketing plan to attract high-wage businesses
- Prevalence of drugs among youth

Note: For explanation and information on weaknesses, see Part I report



Attaining the Vision

To attain our vision for the future, we will follow these guidelines:

1. Follow our strategic plan for community and economic development, with regular, annual updates.
2. Promote continued cooperation for planning and managing development among the County, its cities and the private sector.
3. Be open to new ideas and concepts for managing growth and development, and to subject matter experts that can provide useful information.
4. Be open to increased density in the cities to preserve undeveloped land.
5. Welcome all new residents, including those with the skill sets and experience to help diversify the local economy.
6. Support the retention and expansion of existing businesses and industries already in the County.
7. Help stimulate entrepreneurial activity and new business start-ups.

Diversifying and Strengthening Rabun County's Economy

- Large-footprint facilities for Rabun County are not the preferred method of economic development because of relatively scarce and costly land.
- Higher-skilled “white collar” jobs and small goods- and service-producing firms can help meet the vision of diversifying the economy and preserving Rabun County's lifestyle and natural resources.
 - Less land intensive
 - Lower demand for utilities



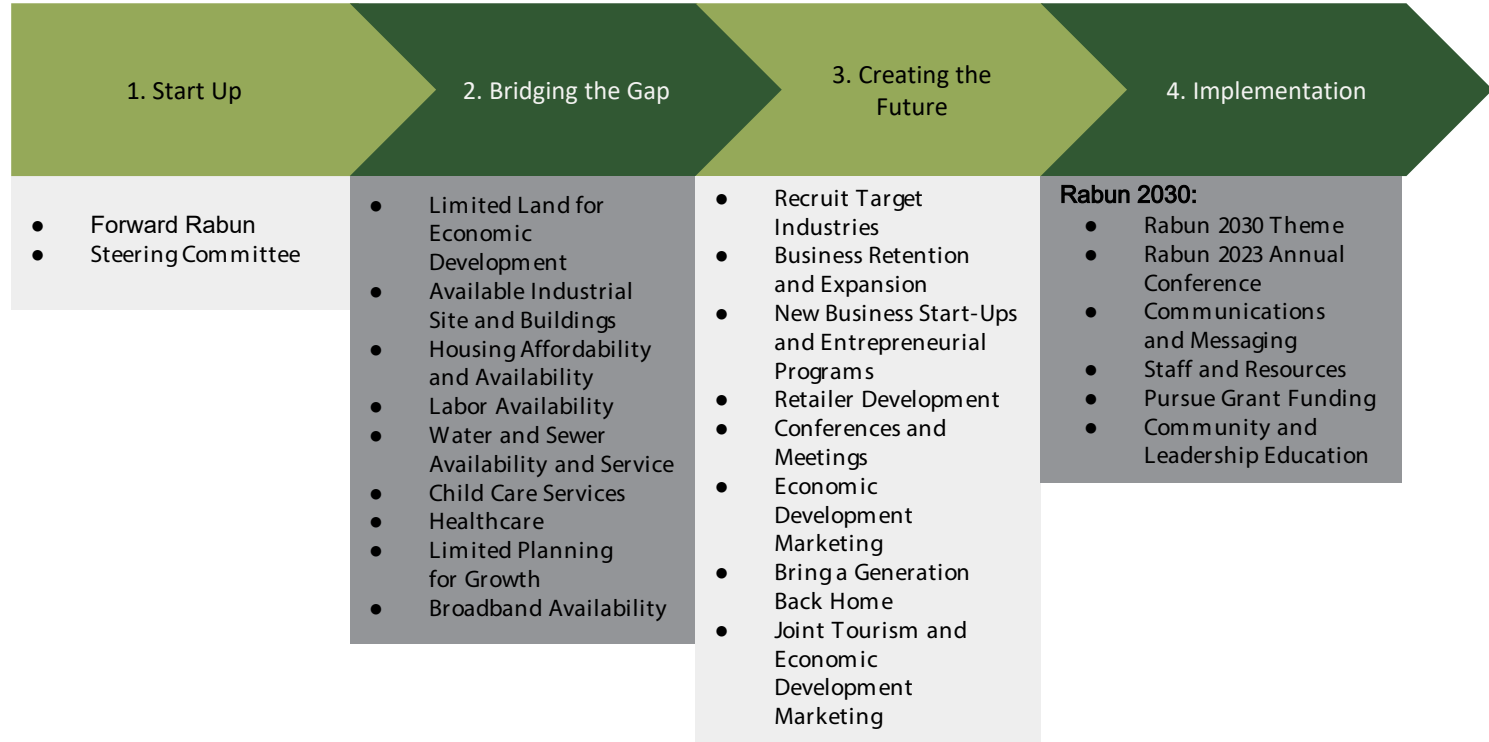
Vision Statement

Above all, we, the residents of Rabun County, are committed to preserving the natural resources and scenic beauty and the traditions of “small - town” living that make Rabun County a great place to live, work and play.

At the same time, we envision a future with a strong, diversified economy featuring good jobs at all skill levels that will provide improved career opportunities for all residents, including young adults entering the workforce.

We believe that as we work to attain our vision for the future, Rabun County will serve as a model for rural development that balances preservation and tradition with economic growth.

Vision for the Future of Rabun County



Steering Committee

A first step will be to establish a public/private Steering Committee reporting to Forward Rabun (FOR) with responsibility to prioritize, implement and monitor strategic plan recommendations, including establishing Working Groups.

Steering Committee members should include:

- Representatives from the Forward Rabun Executive Committee and Board
- A representative from all working groups (e.g., housing, education, marketing)
- Private sector representatives



Vision for the Future of Rabun County: An Economic Development Strategic Plan

Summary of Recommended Programs and Actions

Strategic Plan Element	Recommendations and Action Items	Responsibility	Notes	Priority*
Start Up				
Steering Committee				
	Establish public/private Steering Committee reporting to Forward Rabun (FOR) with responsibility to prioritize, implement and monitor strategic plan recommendations including establishing Working Groups	FOR		Start-Up Necessity
	Add a full-time Forward Rabun staff person to support the Steering Committee	FOR		Start-Up Priority
	Secure funding commitments to kick off and sustain the strategic plan	Steering Committee and FOR		Start-Up Necessity
	Meet quarterly to evaluate progress and re-prioritize as necessary	Steering Committee and FOR		Ongoing Necessity
Bridging the Gap: Addressing Economic Development Weaknesses and Achieving the Vision				
Limited Land for Economic Development				
	Establish Land Use Planning (LUP) Working Group	FOR and Steering Committee		
	Adopt comprehensive land use plan	Contract with land use planning firm	A key component to meeting the vision of protecting Rabun County's natural resources while creating better jobs	Start-Up Priority
Available Industrial Sites and Buildings				
	Identify and prioritize potential individual smaller industrial/commercial sites	DARC		Start-Up Priority
	Identify and prioritize potential larger business park sites	DARC		Start-Up Priority
	Investigate feasibility of a shared office work space facility	Small Business Working Group and DARC	See New Business Start Ups and Entrepreneurial Programs below	Ongoing Priority
	Identify potential developers for above sites and facilities	DARC		Start-Up Priority
	Consider increasing capability of county GIS to help identify sites and implement land use plan	County and FOR		Ongoing Activity
Housing Affordability and Availability				
	Establish Housing Working Group	County and FOR	A major obstacle to attracting target industries and increasing skilled workforce in the county	Start-Up Priority
	Participate in ULI TAP studies and learn from other sources and examples (ULI study completed)	Housing Working Group and FOR		Ongoing Priority
	Develop recommendations and implement policies based on these studies as soon as practicable	Housing Working Group and FOR		Ongoing Priority
Labor Availability				
	Establish Labor Force Working Group	Steering Committee and FOR		Start-Up Priority

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	Recruit remote workers	Economic Development Marketing Group		Ongoing Activity
	Recruit target industries firms who will bring skilled workers with them	Economic Development Marketing Group		Ongoing Activity
	Enact 'Bring A Generation Back Home'	Labor Force Working Group		Ongoing Activity
	Increase child care options	Child Care Working Group		Ongoing Activity
	Encourage out-commuters to work in Rabun County	Labor Force Working Group		Ongoing Activity
	Recruit target industry jobs to attract above workers	Economic Development Marketing Group		Ongoing Activity
	Work more closely with area technical colleges to better match local skill needs with training	Labor Force Working Group		Ongoing Activity
Water and Sewer Availability and Service				
	Coordinate development of water and sewer infrastructure with comprehensive land use plan	Rabun County Water and Sewer Authority and LUP Working Group	A key component to meeting the vision of protecting Rabun County's natural resources while creating better jobs	Ongoing Priority
Child Care Services				
	Establish Child Care Working Group	Steering Committee and FOR Child Development Committee		Start-Up Priority Ongoing Activity
	Conduct survey to gauge demand			Ongoing Activity
	Begin more extensive research to determine exact needs for childcare (e.g., Infant through 4 years, early learning & education, after-school care for ages 5 & up, etc.)	Child Development Committee		Ongoing Activity
	Meet with YMCA to discuss current work in Rabun & plans for expansion of programs & how County can partner to expand services	Child Development Committee		Ongoing Activity
	Ask successful child care facilities how they got started	Committee		Ongoing Activity
	Contact national childcare franchise companies to see what they need to get started	Child Development Committee		Ongoing Activity
	Explore public-private partnerships for childcare funding & facility	Child Development Committee		Ongoing Activity
	Discuss with Rabun County Schools to explore opportunities to expand early learning services	Child Development Committee		Ongoing Activity
	Encourage investing more resources in building childcare infrastructure	Child Development Committee		Ongoing Activity
Healthcare				
	Establish Healthcare Working Group based on current healthcare committee	Steering Committee and FOR		Ongoing Priority

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Strategic Plan Element	Recommendations and Action Items	Responsibility	Notes	Priority*
	Conduct feasibility/market study for healthcare in Rabun County, given healthcare facilities in Habersham & Hall Counties & Macon County, NC	Steering Committee and FOR		Ongoing Activity
	Contact Atlanta area medical practices to discuss opening offices in Rabun County	Healthcare Committee		Ongoing Activity
	Identify doctors with second homes in Rabun County who may be interested in assisting with this effort.	Healthcare Committee		Ongoing Activity
	Research ways to make telehealth a more viable option	Healthcare Committee		Ongoing Activity
	Partner with larger providers to hold mobile clinics on a regular basis	Healthcare Committee		Ongoing Activity
	Explore the possibility of utilizing community health workers to service the community.	Healthcare Committee		Ongoing Activity
	Explore the possibility of applying for a Rural Hospital Stabilization Grant. Interview Stephens County Hospital officials to learn about their experience.	Healthcare Committee		Ongoing Activity
	Interview the Pennsylvania Rural Health Model team to learn more about their transition to a network of hospitals and participating payers from fee-for-service to global budget payments.	Healthcare Committee		Ongoing Activity
Limited Planning for Growth				
	Enact this strategic plan for economic development	Steering Committee and FOR; all stakeholders		Ongoing Priority
	Enact land use plan	LUP Working Group		Ongoing Priority
Broadband Availability				
	Create Broadband Working Group	Steering Committee and FOR		Start-Up Priority
	Continue to pursue opportunities and grants for improved broadband service	Broadband Working Group	Especially important for white collar and remote work jobs	Ongoing Activity
Creating the Future				
Creating Jobs to Attain the Vision				
Recruit Target Industries				
	Identify and prioritize "white collar" intensive industries	Economic Development Marketing Committee and FOR	"White collar" and "remote work" industries and occupations recommended as best way to attain the vision of providing better jobs while protecting the county's natural resources	Ongoing Activity
	Identify and prioritize "remote work" industries and occupations	Economic Development Marketing Committee and FOR		Ongoing Activity
	Identify and prioritize "lifestyle industries" that match Rabun County	Economic Development Marketing Committee and FOR	Examples include food processing and outdoor recreation and sporting goods	Ongoing Activity

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Strategic Plan Element	Recommendations and Action Items	Responsibility	Notes	Priority*
	Identify small, high growth companies in the above industries	Economic Development Marketing Committee and FOR		Ongoing Activity
	Create marketing message for the target industries	Economic Development Marketing Committee and FOR		Ongoing Activity
	Implement marketing/recruitment program	Economic Development Marketing Committee and FOR		Ongoing Activity
	Establish supply of sites/buildings including office space suitable for above industries	DARC		Ongoing Priority
	Create and execute "Internal Marketing Plan" to market to part-time and tourist	Economic Development Marketing Committee and FOR	This can include messaging on potential sites as well as developer/investor events, and an Annual Report	Ongoing Priority
Business Retention and Expansion				
	Enhance business retention and expansion programs per recommendations in plan	FOR	BRE is a vital part of economic development strategy; current business owners will benefit from the Small Business Center below	Ongoing Activity
New Business Start-Ups and Entrepreneurial Programs				
	Establish Small Business Working Group	Steering Committee and FOR		Start-Up Priority
	Feasibility study for Small Business/Entrepreneurial Resource Center	Small Business Working Group	Would include physical facilities such as office space and conference rooms, and services such as admin support, mentoring and seminars	Ongoing Priority
	Establish mentoring program like SCORE	Small Business Working Group		Ongoing Priority
	Ensure that Rabun County is "Entrepreneurial Friendly"	Small Business Working Group		Ongoing Priority
Retail Development				
	Establish Retail and Conference Working Group	Steering Committee and FOR		Start-Up Priority
	Conduct retail market study to identify retail "gaps" and opportunities	Retail and Conference Working Group	Retail development will enhance Rabun County's attraction as a tourist destination and serve the local population	Ongoing Activity
Conferences and Meetings				
	Survey and interview conference planners to determine how to increase conference business in Rabun County and assess facilities	Retail and Conference Working Group		Ongoing Activity
Economic Development Marketing				
	Establish Economic Development Marketing Group	FOR		Start-Up Priority

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Strategic Plan Element	Recommendations and Action Items	Responsibility	Notes	Priority*
Bring a Generation Back Home	Develop a marketing program to attract target industries and occupations to Rabun County	Economic Development Marketing Group		
	Design a marketing program to encourage Rabun County natives in other locations to move back home and help achieve the vision.	Labor Force Working Group and Economic Development Marketing Group		Ongoing Activity
Joint Tourism and Economic Development Marketing	Develop programs and messaging integrating tourism and economic development marketing	Tourism Marketing Committee and Economic Development Marketing Committee		Ongoing Activity
	Increase economic development messaging at Welcome Center	Tourism Marketing Committee and Economic Development Marketing Committee		Start-Up Activity
	Use highway signage to direct visitors to the Welcome Center	Tourism Marketing Committee		Start-Up Activity

Implementation

Create Rabun 2030 Theme	Create theme for building a better future and achieving the vision	Steering Committee and FOR		Start-Up Necessity
Rabun 2030 Annual Conference	Create Rabun 2030 Annual Conference including meetings and collaboration among Working Groups and banquet to report progress and present the next year's program priorities	Steering Committee and FOR and outside assistance as necessary		Ongoing Priority
Communications and Messaging	Establish program of regular messaging and communication for Rabun 2030	Steering Committee and FOR		Ongoing Priority
	Establish Rabun 2030 website for communications, messaging and Ongoing public input, as well as a platform for the working groups	Steering Committee and FOR	Can enhance website already in place for the strategic plan study	Start-Up Priority
Staff and Resources	Solicit public and private funding to kick-off Rabun 2030 and establish the Steering Committee	FOR		Start-Up Necessity
	Add a full-time Forward Rabun staff person to support the Steering Committee	FOR		Start-Up Priority
	Revisit staff needs as programs take off			Ongoing Priority

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Summary of Recommended Programs and Actions

Strategic Plan Element	Recommendations and Action Items	Responsibility	Notes	Priority*
	Working Groups establish priority action items and develop program budgets in respective areas	Steering Committee and all Working Groups		Ongoing Priority
	Utilize outside resources and expertise as necessary to implement	Steering Committee and all Working Groups		Ongoing Activity
Pursue Grant Funding				
	Identify and apply for grant assistance to implement Rabun 2030 recommendations	Steering Committee, Working Groups and FOR		Ongoing Priority
Leadership and Community Education				
	Expand current leadership programs to include working age adults	Current Education/Youth Leadership Committee, Steering Committee and FOR		Ongoing Activity
	Develop programs to educate Rabun County residents on community and economic development and how to participate in Rabun 2030	Current Education/Youth Leadership Committee, Steering Committee and FOR		Ongoing Activity
	Train the next generation: develop programs in Rabun County schools to increase knowledge and awareness of community and economic development and create enthusiasm for Rabun 2030 and achieving the vision	Current Education/Youth Leadership Committee, Steering Committee and FOR		Ongoing Activity
Priorities				
Start Up Necessity	Action necessary to establish building blocks of the strategic plan			
Startup Priority	Once the necessary building blocks are in place, a priority near-term action to start program implementation			
Start Up Activity	A near-term action to enhance the strategic plan			
Ongoing Priority	Longer term, regular priority actions necessary to implement the strategic plan			
Ongoing Activity	Longer term, regular activities to enhance the strategic plan			

A Bright Future Ahead!

Rabun County residents have clearly stated what their vision is for the future.

FOR has created this strategic plan to achieve that goal - make the County an even better place to live, work and play for everyone and give future generations the opportunity to remain in Rabun County.

For the strategic plan to work, it must have:

- Widespread financial support from the public and private sectors
- Volunteers to serve on the working groups and do the work
- A community pulling together to create the kind of future they want!

