

DYNAMIC LEADERSHIP PROPELS AIKEN CHAMBER PROGRESS

JANUARY TO JUNE 2014



Expand the Chamber's economic vitality emphasis

Explore and evaluate programs that develop and deliver experience-based entrepreneurship courses to youth



Action: Launched the Young Entrepreneurs Academy (YEA!), a nationally recognized program that transforms middle and high school students into real, confident entrepreneurs during the academic school year. Students learn how to set up, own, and operate fully formed and functioning businesses, which may be carried on after their graduation from the program.

Next Step: Applications are currently being accepted for consideration to participate in YEA!. Classes will start in October and run for 30 weeks.

Support Clemson University's Urban Ecology Center efforts to promote an urban live, work, and learn lifestyle in Aiken and to embrace innovation to engage the greater Aiken community in relevant social, economic, and environmental issues

Action: The Urban Ecology Center, under the direction of Gene Eidson, Ph.D., is up and running. The office is located at the Aiken Chamber of Commerce.



Elevate the critical role of education as a tool to support Aiken's economic vitality

The community's prosperity hinges upon having an educated and trained work force of the future – one that has the critical (and also soft) skills necessary for success. The Chamber's goal is to raise public awareness of the critical role education plays in the community's economic prosperity and quality of life.



Study and formulate recommendations, where appropriate, on funding options for capital investment in public school facilities, including one-cent sales tax options, bond referendums, and other options

Action: The Aiken Chamber's Board of Directors is poised to engage the business community's support of

the One-Cent Sales Tax for school construction once the authority is granted by the General Assembly and once the Aiken County School Board takes the necessary steps to move this forward.

The passage of the One-Cent Sales Tax will:

- Attract working families to our community
- Improve the business climate for attraction of new, and retention of existing, businesses
- Reduce property taxes
- Shift 30% of the tax burden to non-residents who visit our community

Next Step: A one-cent sales tax referendum for Aiken County Public Schools may be on the ballot for the November elections.

Facilitate site visits to school districts that have modern, technology rich facilities and that have captured national recognition and ranking for academic success

Action: Business, civic, government, and education leaders toured four of Columbia County's (Georgia) newest public schools on March 21. The schools included Grovetown High (2009), Columbia Middle (2012), Baker Place Elementary (2011), and Evans Elementary (2012/2013).

Next Step: Schedule future visits to learn more about other nationally recognized school districts and what they are doing to enhance the educational experience for student success



Establish an annual community benchmarking process to aid in community decision making.

The purpose of the benchmarking is to measure the Aiken community's programs, processes, performance, efficiencies, and effectiveness in meeting the current and future needs of the community. The process will define community best practices and set short- and long-term goals and expectations for Aiken's prosperity in the 21st century. The process will include the community's public and private sectors and establish a baseline for the development of a future communitywide visioning process.

Action: The Aiken Chamber, along with the Economic Development Partnership, commissioned the USC Aiken School of Business Administration to complete a regional benchmarking report. The Regional Economic Benchmarking Report for Aiken County, completed by Dr. Clifton T. Jones, professor of economics and dean, and Dr. Sanela Porca, professor of economics, was released on May 15. The report identifies the good news, and equally important, the areas of concern for the community. The benchmarking report will be done each year.

Research, establish criteria, and arrange for visits to other progressive cities where local leaders will travel to and learn about best practices that have been successful in other regions. The goal of these inter-city visits is for the group to bring back at least one idea to implement in the Aiken community.

Action: The Chamber leadership completed a research trip to Asheville, North Carolina, to learn about best practices for planning a successful inter-city visit.

Next Step: A comprehensive inter-city visit will be done in the fall of 2015 following next year's benchmarking report.

Deploy, as needed, civic forums and marketing strategies based on the findings of the inter-city visits and community benchmarking where Chamber members and community leaders establish mechanisms to achieve Aiken's economic vitality

Action: A 100-day process to begin addressing Aiken's future is underway.



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