



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 24, 2017

Contact: Linda Bailey
Miller Davis Agency
704.314.4728

County Begins 'Growing Rowan' Initiative to Direct Future Growth

The Rowan County Board of Commissioners has planned a citizens' forum for Friday, June 23 to kick-off a study entitled "Growing Rowan: Rowan Communities Working Together to Compete Globally."

Growing Rowan is a concerned group of local leaders who believe that it is time for Rowan County to create and implement a new vision, one that promotes an aggressive, dynamic and growing economy and secures a positive future for all our citizens, according to a document released by commissioners.

"This is a pivotal time for our county's future," the document reads. "We can make the decision to actively seize the opportunities that will propel our county forward ...or we can do nothing and simply accept our fate."

Three focus areas have been named for Growing Rowan, as follows:

- Steve Fisher, President and CEO of F&M Bank will lead Economic Development and Jobs, Workforce Development, entrepreneurship and Innovation and Target Clusters.
- Jason Walser, Executive Director of the Blanche and Julian Robertson Foundation, will lead Quality of Life, Education, Community Infrastructure, and next Generation Philanthropy.
- Michelle Patterson, Director of Fun for Patterson Farms Market and Tours, will lead Marketing, Branding, Business Climate and Tell Our Story.

Craig Lamb, Vice President of Corporate and Continuing Education at Rowan-Cabarrus Community College, is working with Fisher. "Rowan County is rich with resources, innovation, initiative and passion," Lamb said. "Growing Rowan gives us the framework for linking and leveraging those assets to move us forward. Our strength as a county

comes from sharing a vision of the future and working together to continuously move forward.”

The all-day forum will be held Friday, June 23, at the West End Plaza (old JC Penney store), from 8:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. Citizens interested in working in one of the three areas or learning more about Growing Rowan are invited to attend.

Speakers include:

- Donnie Charleston, Economic Policy Manager of the N.C. State University Institute for Emerging Issues. He will speak on “FutureShock: NC’s Demographic & technological Storm.”
- Steve Chandler, Owner and Brand Strategist, Chandlerthinks of Franklin, TN, who led the Rowan County Tourism Development Authority’s recent “Be An Original” branding program.
- Rod Crider, new CEO of Rowan Works, the Rowan Economic Development Commission.

Creating a collaborative region requires a leap of faith and new habits of civic behavior, according to the commissioners’ document. Our natural inclination is to protect our political and organization boundaries. In today’s world, this first impulse is self-defeating. No one has the sufficient resources to be globally competitive. No one, standing alone, can learn fast enough. No one can process the flood of information coming at us each day. We need trusted partners to thrive.

The document says that the 10 municipalities in Rowan County have not had a strong history of working together. But to be fair, we have never had a concentrated organizing force that unites us. The good news is that this perceived ‘weakness’ can become a strength.

Rowan County is blessed with rich assets, such as abundant water, cheap and reliable energy, great interstate access, rail access, four collages, a remarkable arts community, local history, available land, a growing airport, agriculture, parks, tourism-related attraction and a good location, the document said.

We have a unique opportunity to define our future together in new ways. While we have far more than unites us than divides us, our county’s economy --- along with the entire economy of North Carolina --- faces some challenging times ahead.

We believe that challenges drive innovation. They force us to see the world in new ways; to find new opportunities in traditional markets; and to explore untapped markets. For educational institutions, governments, and nonprofit organizations, our challenges require new ways of prospering together.

“We can accelerate our emergency innovation economy if we align our core goals and beliefs.”

The core group has adopted a Rowan County Declaration of Interdependence as part of its goals and beliefs.

Charleston

Charleston, originally from Salisbury, is a seasoned professional with extensive research and policy experience gained while working in several of the state's leading organizations and institutions. He currently serves as the Economic Policy Manager at the state's premier public policy think tank - the NCSU Institute for Emerging Issues. He works in collaboration with leaders from the Legislature, local government, and the state's leading corporations on emerging issues of importance to North Carolina's economy. Before his work at the Institute, he did stints at the NC General Assembly, the NC Juvenile Justice Institute, and the NC Association of County Commissioners.

During his nearly 20-year career in public service, he's been involved with nearly every major policy reform initiatives affecting the state of North Carolina, including tax reform, mental health reform, and local government finance reform. He has also authored numerous articles and reports on the state's economy, and is currently working on a book focusing on American innovation..He has earned Bachelor of Science degrees in Sociology and Psychology and an MA in Sociology from North Carolina Central University. His doctoral work at NC State University focused on Economic Sociology.

###