

Safe and Vibrant Communities

Vision for 20/20

Communities of every size and in every region of the state offer their citizens a desirable quality of life. Citizens live in safety and in harmony. Communities achieve economic and environmental sustainability as home, civic, and cultural life prospers. And everywhere, communities celebrate a vitality evident in the proportion of young people who choose to remain at home, or to return home, for their adult years.



Goal 1: All members of the community will be valued, and their civic participation will be welcomed.

For all the ties that bind North Carolinians together, there remain wedges that drive us apart. Lingering racism is suspect in the gaps in income, health, and school achievement. Newcomers to our communities are too often greeted with misunderstanding and hostility. Our elders and our youngsters seldom receive the respect they are due. The poor become “them,” rather than part of “us.” Stereotypes and cronyism lock women out of business opportunities. Yet our communities will never achieve their potential, will never be truly vibrant places to live and grow, until we embrace all members of the community equally and profit from their contributions to civic life.

Facts:

- Charlotte scored next to last out of 40 metropolitan communities across the nation on a measure of interracial trust.
- African-Americans are about 10 percent less likely to register to vote than are whites. (p37, f161)
- Only 1/4 of Hispanic citizens in North Carolina are registered to vote.
- Black males are sent to prison 27 times as often as whites for drug-related crimes, but surveys show drug use varies little between the two races.
- Minorities are represented in the state's prisons at more than twice their proportion of the overall population. (p38, f163)
- Racial minorities accounted for only 18.3% of persons in higher-earning jobs.
- African-Americans accounted for only 13% of persons in higher-earning jobs.

Targets:

1.) **Voter Registration.** Voter registration and turnout will be equally high across all racial/ethnic groups. Available data indicate that voter registration by minorities may lag 2 to 3 percentage points behind that of whites.

2.) **Law Enforcement Treatment.** Substantially improve the perception of equal treatment by law enforcement (to 40%) and of protection of rights by the courts (to 70%) among all racial groups. To do this requires doubling the percentage of African Americans

who perceive law enforcement as even-handed and a 40% improvement in the percentage of African Americans who view the courts as concerned about defendants' rights.

3.) **High Wage Jobs.** Representation of minorities and women in the top wage-earning categories and among business owners will be equal to their proportion of the workforce. This reflects raising minority representation in these areas by about 70% and women's representation by roughly one-third.

Goal 2: Residents will feel safe in their homes and neighborhoods.

No community will thrive unless its people feel safe. North Carolina has been making progress in many types of crime in recent years, but safety is not merely safety from crime. People also need to feel safe from disasters and secure that, in an emergency, they will receive prompt and competent assistance. Natural disaster planning, in particular, takes on added importance given long-term hurricane forecasts and the growing population in vulnerable areas.

Facts:

- Of North Carolina's 50,000 fire fighters, 45,000 are volunteers.
- Among people 65 and older, women, and lower-income citizens, a majority indicated they did not feel safe going out at night.
- 1/2 of North Carolinians surveyed expected violent crimes to increase during the next three years.
- In 1999, North Carolina exceeded the national rate in property crimes by 25%.
- NC's rate of motor vehicle theft has exceeded the national rate for 20 years.
- Juvenile arrests for violent crimes were 50% higher in 1999 than in 1989.
- Juvenile arrests for property crimes were 20% higher in 1999 than in 1989.
- A capabilities assessment of North Carolina's readiness for handling disasters scored the state about a 4 on a scale of 1 to 5.

Targets:

1.) **Safe at Home.** Improve the percentage of residents who feel safe in their homes and neighborhoods by 10%. Surveys show that a majority of North Carolinians feel safe in various settings, but the size of the majority ranges from 59% to 90%.

2.) **Crime Rate.** The violent crime index rate will decline to 520 per 100,000 population. The property crime rate will decline to no more than 4,370 per 100,000 population. North Carolina exceeds the national average in both types of crime, with a violent crime index rate of 549.7 per 100,000 population and a property crime index rate of 4,683.5. The state's property crime rate has increased while the national rate decreased over the last decade.

3.) **Emergency Preparedness.** The N.C. Emergency Management Program will become the first state emergency management program to receive national accreditation.

Goal 3: North Carolinians will have adequate and affordable housing options.

Most people understand intuitively the difference good housing makes, not only for individuals and their families, but to the community as a whole. North Carolina, however, faces a significant challenge in meeting the demand for adequate and affordable housing. A lack of affordable housing in central cities drives the urban sprawl that increases traffic congestion, worsens pollution, and consumes farms, forest, and other open spaces. In Eastern North Carolina, Hurricane Floyd's lingering effects have exacerbated existing problems with substandard and overcrowded housing.

Facts:

- More than 1/3 of NC renters cannot afford the fair-market rent for a two-bedroom home (in some communities: 50%).
- 30% of NC renters cannot afford the fair-market rent for a one-bedroom home.
- In the Charlotte area, 30,000 citizens pay more than half of their income on housing.
- At least 44,000 North Carolinians are homeless (1/4 of them are children, most younger than 5).
- 20% of North Carolina households (some 250,000) are at the risk of becoming homeless.
- Only 44% of all adults younger than 35 own homes.
- In 14 northeastern counties, more than 7% of all homes either lacked plumbing, were overcrowded, or both.
- The gap between housing prices and income levels is growing.

Targets:

1.) **Affordable Housing.** Only 25% of North Carolina renters will pay 30% or more of their income in rent, and no more than 13% of homeowners will pay more than 30% of of income on housing costs. These figures represent an improvement of 25%.

2.) **Housing Prices.** Average families in North Carolina will be able to afford a home of their own. In 1997, the median price of homes sold was \$17,000 more than the average family could afford, and the gap has more than tripled since that time.

3.) **Complete Plumbing/Overcrowded Housing.** The percentage of households lacking complete plumbing has declined slowly, but steadily over the last 10 years. By 2020, the last 1.5 percent of households will have complete plumbing. Eliminate two-thirds of overcrowded housing in the state, reducing it to 1% of all housing units. As of 2000 1.85% of households were overcrowded.

Goal 4: In every community, residents will have access to essential programs and services.

Just as it takes a village to raise a child, it takes that same village to nurture an adolescent, support the parents (and aunts and uncles), encourage the grandparents, and -- increasingly -- lend a helping hand to the great-grandparents. Support services can make the difference between a family that thrives and contributes to the community, on the one hand, and a family torn apart by physical and emotional overload on the other. There are numerous services, both formal and informal, that communities need to create healthy environments for

their residents. We focus here on a few that answer the essential needs of families and individuals: the care of the young and the elderly.

Facts:

- 16,388 children remain on waiting lists for child-care subsidies.
- Teacher turnover in child-care facilities remains high at 31% annually.
- 57% of children in 2000 were cared for in facilities rated 3 stars or higher (out of 5).
- The number of North Carolinians age 65 and older is expected to reach 2 million by 2020.
- By 2010, the number of people 18 or older requiring assistance with daily living will increase by 20%, to 420,000.

Targets:

1.) **Day Care.** 85% of children in day care will be in facilities rated with three stars or higher. The state is in the process of converting to the star system for licensing. About four out of five facilities had obtained star licenses by the end of 2000. If those prove representative of all facilities, the target represents a 50% improvement (from 57% to 85%).

2.) **Long-Term Care.** Every North Carolinian will have ready access to a core set of long-term care services. The current status is unclear.

3.) **Caregiver Resource Centers.** North Carolina will have at least 10 comprehensive caregiver resource centers to provide support for family members caring for impaired older adults. Currently, no such centers exist.