

# Let's all work together on our city's ambitious 'list of next great projects'

The late Buck Mickel, a relentless promoter of economic development and cultural improvement in Greenville, was fond of saying, "You always need to have a list of the next great projects."

In 1987, Mickel and other visionary leaders such as former Greenville Mayor Max Heller developed an ambitious community strategic plan called "Vision 2005: The Journey Forward." The document called for an array of magisterial projects: the development of an Upstate coliseum, a downtown center for the performing arts, the removal of the Camperdown Bridge and a year-round Governor's School for the Arts.

The Vision 2005 plan emphasized that international investments were needed to diversify the region's economy. A new perimeter highway and a more expansive Interstate 85 would pave the way for industrial growth and open new areas for residential and retail development.

Mickel, Heller and many others worked tirelessly during the next two decades to see these projects (the Bi-Lo Center, Peace Center, Southern Connector, BMW, Governor's School for the Arts and Humanities) and others to fruition. While not all of the projects have been as successful as hoped, they have generated great momentum and energy. With 2005 — the final year of that visionary plan — behind us, now is the time to forge ahead with Greenville's next blueprint for the future.

What should Greenville of tomorrow look like? How will



**David Shi**

growth be managed? What will be our priorities? What should the next great projects be? To enable everyone to suggest answers to these questions and others, community leaders formed Greenville Vision 2025 in January 2003. More than 1,000 people attended the meeting at the Palmetto Expo Center launching this initiative. And thousands more attended open forums across the city thereafter. During the next 18 months, task forces discussed the arts, economy, education, the environment, local government, health care, infrastructure and transportation needs, and ways to promote greater diversity.

As the months passed, an overall plan crystallized. It emphasized creating a more cosmopolitan, healthier and environmentally friendly Greenville that will attract young people and a knowledge-based work force. In the planning sessions, people expressed pride in the community's entrepreneurial spirit and civic energy. They relished the Upstate's natural beauty and the city's vibrant downtown development. People agreed that Greenville must preserve the attributes of its name by keeping our "green" environment and our "village" sense of community.

Vision 2025 was completed in November 2004. It calls for adopting an extensive land use

plan that will promote responsible growth, limit urban sprawl and protect our remaining farmland, open spaces and trees. The Greenville of tomorrow will also include an expansive web of bikeways and walkways that connect residential and urban areas. A downtown trolley and light rail system linking Travelers Rest and the Golden Strip area to downtown Greenville is also part of the plan.

While Greenville will continue to be an entrepreneurial engine and a magnet for international investments, our region's reliance on labor-intensive manufacturing industries will give way to more high-paying knowledge-based businesses. These companies require a sophisticated, educated work force that will increase per capita income, improve our standard of living and expand educational and cultural opportunities.

But how will we get there? A bright future is much easier to imagine than implement. To convert our dreams into reality, Greenville has fastened on a unique approach. We have created a new nonprofit organization called Greenville Forward to coordinate the implementation of the Vision 2025 plan. Recent grants from the Community Foundation and the Hollingsworth Funds will enable Greenville Forward to serve as a catalyst to help benchmark, measure and guide Vision 2025. Greenville Forward will nurture partnerships, keep us all informed and get people involved in making the vision a reality.

You too can play a role in this exciting process. Begin by re-

viewing the Vision 2025 plan. It is available online at [www.greenvillevision2025.com](http://www.greenvillevision2025.com). Then you can get involved directly with Greenville Forward. Its executive director, Russell Stall, is eager to help connect you with the projects that most excite you. He can be contacted at [rstall@greenvilleforward.com](mailto:rstall@greenvilleforward.com).

People are already hard at work on many of the Vision 2025 initiatives: constructing a center to promote international economic activity, renovating the Palmetto Expo Center, getting the permanent exhibits displayed in the new history museum and creating a new children's museum, transforming Lake Conestee into a wildlife preserve and education center, converting the abandoned county rail line into a public trail, installing a bronze statue and creating a laser light show in downtown Greenville to honor Nobel laureate Dr. Charles Townes, constructing a downtown baseball stadium, enhancing annual arts festivals and creating attractive downtown venues for art to be created. And many more.

So get involved. Help convert dreams into reality. By marshaling our community's resources through innovative partnerships, transparent communication and extraordinary cooperation, we can continue a proud community tradition: working together to complete Greenville's exciting list of "next great projects."

■ David Shi chaired Vision 2025. He is a historian, writer and president of Furman University. He can be reached at [david.shi@furman.edu](mailto:david.shi@furman.edu).