

SPARTANBURG, SOUTH CAROLINA

OneSpartanburg



Without data, our work, as community and economic developers, is meaningless. Market Street Services was able to do what's often impossible to do - marry our community's data with community anecdotal feedback. This process helped us develop a plan, but more importantly, it set the stage for community buy-in as we began to act.

Allen Smith, President & CEO, Spartanburg Area Chamber of Commerce

Background

At the beginning of 2016, Spartanburg was gathering significant momentum. Job growth was strong, a string of major project announcements promised future growth, and Downtown Spartanburg becoming increasingly vibrant. But like many communities across the country, Spartanburg faced significant challenges related to education, poverty, and the general well-being of its residents. Moreover, the community lacked a holistic plan to organize its community and economic development efforts. Leaders understood that bold action would be required to increase prosperity and improve quality of life.

On behalf of a wide range of community partners, the Spartanburg Area Chamber of Commerce engaged Market Street Services to facilitate the creation of a holistic five-year community and economic development strategy. A highly engaged steering committee of 58 leaders guided the process, and an online survey conducted during the public input phase yielded 3,180 responses – a tremendous response rate that is a testament to the community's enthusiasm.

The strategy that resulted from the process was branded OneSpartanburg a reference both to the community's strengthening unity and the fact that there is no other community in the country is named "Spartanburg." OneSpartanburg leadership came together around a strategic framework with eight high-level objectives:

- Develop Talent from Cradle to Careers
- Market to Attract and Retain Talent
- Grow and Diversify the Economy through Strengths
- Cultivate a Dynamic Entrepreneurial Ecosystem
- Build a Vibrant Downtown Spartanburg
- Enhance Quality of Place Throughout the Community
- Create Champions for Spartanburg County
- Tell the Spartanburg Story



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Implementation Highlights

Though less than two years have elapsed since the completion of the process, Spartanburg has already made significant progress in several areas:

- OneSpartanburg launched in January 2017 and immediately gained traction in the community. More than 300 volunteers were engaged to serve on an Implementation Committee dedicated to ensuring the strategy's success and/or one of five new action teams devoted to a specific area of the plan. In the first year of implementation alone, community partners and volunteers advanced 16 strategic initiatives and six related innovative projects.
- To ensure the strategy's success, 39 public and private investors gave more than \$4.5 million to fund implementation. Five new staff positions and two new departments were created within the Chamber to enhance the region's organizational capacity. The OneSpartanburg division is dedicated to ensuring the coordinated and collaborative implementation of the holistic community and economic development strategy and The Downtown Development Partnership is focused on retaining, growing, and recruiting businesses in Downtown Spartanburg.
- Raising educational attainment levels and developing and retaining talent emerged as significant community priorities during the planning process. In response, the community's collective impact education partnership, Spartanburg Academic Movement (SAM), and OneSpartanburg combined to hire a project manager dedicated to helping Spartanburg County high school students prepare for college and careers. Other new initiatives include an internship program challenging local employers to create more opportunities for local college students and the creation of the Education2Employment framework to connect businesses with higher education providers to better align educational offerings and retain talent.
- Downtown Spartanburg is in the midst of a renaissance, with more than 100 projects and \$430 million in capital investment flowing into the district between 2000 and 2018. Recent milestones include the opening of the Children's Museum of the Upstate in a historic building downtown, the development of a new AC Hotel complete with a rooftop bar, and the completed renovation of the Montgomery Building, a 1924 structure that will be home to new apartments, retail and restaurant, and office spaces. The Downtown Development Partnership currently has 20 projects in various stages of development.
- Enhancing access to the community's natural amenities was also an important quality of place consideration that emerged through public input. Consistent with the community's Blueways Master Plan, the Spartanburg County Council allocated \$150,000 to improve public access to the Tyger River Basin. Duke Energy has awarded a \$65,000 grant that will fund two kayak launch points along the Tyger River.
- Funded by the Duke Energy Foundation, the Pipeline Project promotes diversity on area boards in order to create new champions for Spartanburg County; the partnership expects to engage more than 350 community leaders and train 122 organizational representatives on the benefits of board diversity in its first year of operation.
- The community has rallied around the #OneSpartanburg social media campaign, which seeks to "tell the Spartanburg story" under a single unified hashtag. As of early 2019, more than 34,400 Instagram posts from locals, visitors, businesses, and others had utilized the hashtag, more than doubled since 2018. The "There's Only One. Spartanburg" campaign highlights the county's assets with various initiatives, including a video series that has reached 78,000 people. Spartanburg has also garnered positive printed media coverage, with features in Food & Wine, The New York Times, and other publications.

