



Tell us your vision of Gaston County

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[Gazette staff](#)

Tell us what your vision for Gaston County is at the bottom of this story.

The Gazette asked dozens of Gaston County residents - many of them leaders in business, government and other areas - to share their ideas for what local communities should look like in the year 2020. A few themes emerged.

People in key leadership roles in education, industry and personal health during Gaston's next decade. Read their responses.

Pat Skinner, Gaston College president: Gaston County should have a more viable, diverse economy with good jobs provided by new and existing companies. A well-trained workforce will be available to meet future needs, thanks to adequate funding for Gaston College and the Gaston County Schools. Education will be highly valued and recognized as the key to future success.

Charles Lingenfelter, president and CEO of Industrial Distribution Group: In 2020, Gaston County should be considered the top county in the state to work and to live by developing the right infrastructure to attract business including heavy industry to the area, leveraging its natural resources, managing growth and focusing on education to enhance the quality of life of those who live here.

Richard Rankin, head of Gaston Day School : In the year 2020 Gaston County should have a Garden Parkway driving economic growth, hikers using the Thread Trail along the South Fork, downtown Gastonia bustling with new restaurants and businesses, passengers commuting daily by railroad to Charlotte and Gaston Day graduates attending the nation's best colleges.

Jim Giermanski, chairman of Powers International Inc. and retired Belmont Abbey College international business professor: The fundamental role of any government must be to serve its citizens by providing for the enhancement, and protection of the common good without regard to social class or any contingent or resultant personal benefit to its leadership for doing so. Controlled government growth and spending, responsiveness to the welfare of its citizens and efficient and effective operations must be hallmarks of the future in Gaston County.

Joe Keith, dean of Gaston College East Campus and Textile Technology Center: In the year 2020 Gaston County should be recognized for continuing its strong textile tradition with the remaining textile manufacturers, and for providing all residents the opportunity to obtain a quality community college education at an affordable price that will lead to meaningful employment or transfer to a four-year college.

Annette Carter, Gaston County Board of Education chairwoman: Our education system should prepare students to succeed in an international global economy. Our classrooms must be equipped with the necessary technology to educate students with the skills needed to be globally competitive and to ensure that they are not only technology literate but technology fluent.

Ted Saunders, Bessemer City High School principal: In the year 2020 I see the educational foundation we are currently building (distance learning, on-line-learning, early college) being the spring board to both bring in new businesses and allow our current businesses to "hook up" with the Microsoft's, Bank Of America's and new car and home manufacturers of the area to create "green" ways to better build our great country.

Mark Blevins, Gaston County Cooperative Extension horticulture agent: By 2020 Gaston County should have a sustainable food system where our natural resources are protected, our farmers are appreciated, and people can choose locally grown foods. We can all help by growing a garden in

the backyard or as a community, including edible plants in the landscape and buying local foods and meals.

Art Duckworth, Apple Orchard Farm owner: By 2020 Gaston County should be a model for comprehensive (small, medium and large) business growth, including fair and equitable residential, commercial, industrial and agricultural taxation practices, environmental stewardship, family and community focus, infrastructure development (roads, services, etc.), and security (law enforcement, food safety, anti-terror provisions, etc.).

Colleen Bridger, Gaston County Health director: In the year 2020 Gaston County should have fewer cars and more sidewalks. The average person should walk out to dinner and drive-through windows should be boarded up. Everybody should have a medical home and people should realize that adult chronic diseases (like Type 2 diabetes) are curable. Everybody should also get their flu shot every year.

Cindy Moose, Gaston-Lincoln Regional Library director: In the year 2020 I hope to see Gaston County thriving economically, socially, and culturally — a place where available resources effectively fulfill diverse local interests and needs. Its most valuable resource? People — knowledgeable and informed, competent, productive community stewards serving in the workplace, in the community and at home.

Eddie McGinnis, Community Pentecostal Center pastor and former East Gaston High principal: In the year 2020 Gaston County should be the premier world class education leader in the nation that is financially supported by citizens and government leaders. As a retired educator, I believe world class education will result in a reduction in the needs of many of the social services. As a pastor, 2020 should see an end to homelessness. If each church would reinvest in just two of the homeless, we would see homelessness vanish from our county.

Ryan Hoover, owner of Ryan Hoover's Extreme Karate: In the year 2020 Gaston County should have a revitalized downtown and continue to capitalize on the desire for those who work in Charlotte to live elsewhere. I was born here, travel extensively and could live anywhere. Gaston County's uniqueness, hometown feel coupled with metropolitan ambitions, should continue to make it the area's worst kept secret.

Reeves McGlohon, Gaston County Schools Superintendent: In 2020, I envision Gaston County as a leading force in the Charlotte region — a thriving community where families enjoy hometown living near a major city. Our children will learn in modern classrooms equipped with the latest technology. The rigorous curriculum and exciting academic and extracurricular programs will prepare students for the highly competitive global society.

Bill Thierfelder, Belmont Abbey College president: In the year 2020 Gaston County should be one of the most inviting places to live and work among the sixteen counties that comprise the Charlotte Regional Partnership. A place where individuals and families are known for loving one another (John 13:34-35) and doubling their talents (Matthew 25: 14-30).

Dekota Grier McCullough, Friendship Christian Church director of administration: In the year 2020 Gaston County should be a community of pride where race relations have drastically improved across cultures. Our downtown area will have thriving businesses and life is brought back into neighborhoods that are presently barren or impoverished. The Christian community should take a stand to aggressively teach morals and values throughout the city.

Eric Hendrix, Gaston County Fire Marshal: In the year 2020 Gaston County should strive to maintain its small town atmosphere while at the same time exploring new ways to advance its technological and industrial base. I hope the county will be successful in recruiting new commercial interest while maintaining the quality of life we've come to enjoy.

Deborah Nuckles-Burnside, local blogger and Carolina News Watch Web site owner: The year 2020 brings increased industrialization, revived manufacturing and clean energy solutions. The Free Trade Act forced many manufacturers to close and community colleges filled with returning students from ages 40-50. Today Gaston County enjoys a thriving economy, highly educated workforce and a

solid infrastructure, and still remains the artsy, edgy laid-back community that is a good place to work, live or visit.

Sheran Hussain, Gaston Day School senior: In the year 2020 Gaston County should have joined the world in the race for healthier humans, which would allow more Gastonians the benefits of cleaner water, stronger crops and healthier humans.

Jenifer Kay, YMCA fitness instructor: In the year 2020, Gaston County should be an inspiration to other cities in the Activate America Campaign, a national movement in an effort to promote healthy living. The Gaston County YMCA is proud to be an Activate America YMCA since 2007. To continue to promote and sustain healthy living, Gaston County should have more greenways, bike lanes, local produce options, an updated aquatic facility and many other options to promote healthy choices by 2020.

Phyllis Davis-Brown, director of Y-Pals: In the year 2020 Gaston County should be well on its way to thriving economically with the addition of new businesses and companies which will provide gainful employment for Gaston County residents. Additionally, there should be increased programs for youth to acquire employability skills in order to prepare them for the workforce.

Emily Kirkpatrick, Gaston County native: In the year 2020 Gaston County should be a safer, more vibrant place, a place where hard-working, God-fearing families would choose to live. I'd love to see more green parks, a revitalized downtown, a commuter train to Charlotte and school vouchers. I also hope we have a Trader Joe's.

Jennie Stultz, mayor of Gastonia: In the year 2020 Gaston County should be a preferred destination to reside, invest and work; a shining example of economic rebirth in the service and manufacturing sector; a community that touts safe and uniquely livable neighborhoods, green space and an investment in human capital where lifelong learning is an expectation, not a compromise.

Mark Epstein, veterinarian and Gastonia Planning Commission chairman: In the year 2020 Gaston County should have planned in order to become known especially for its abundant natural resources, superior quality of living and generosity of giving, multiple quaint downtown communities, collaborative and open governance, fiscal responsibility and a visionary regional outlook with unique local history and character.

Cathy Cloninger, The Shelter of Gaston County director: We will work together to combat the ugliness of violence. Abuse is a painful thread sewn into all levels of society, touching the entire family. There are aftereffects and damage that continue to future generations. We will learn to stand by each other and say, "There is no excuse for domestic violence and no man, woman or child should ever suffer abuse."

Alan Cloninger, Gaston County Sheriff: I hope that by the year 2020 that Gaston County will have gained new industries that will provide well paying jobs and eliminate unemployment in Gaston County. I believe that the new jobs will improve the quality of life for all the citizens of the county.

Rick Coleman, Dallas mayor: In the year 2020, Gaston County should once again be a thriving manufacturing center. We have good qualified people who want to work, excellent training and educational options with Gaston College, and major highways, I-85 and U.S. 321 to I-40 to move the goods. With good paying jobs comes a better quality of life.

Jerry Campbell, Home Builders Association of Gaston County director and vice chairman of the Gaston County Planning Board: The Gaston 2020 "Visionary" Team, a group of business leaders and citizens, will help create the structure for Gaston County's economic recovery. This team will continue to expand education, workforce development, economic and residential development, transportation, and quality of life initiatives to meet the needs of our citizens and Gaston County by 2020 and far beyond.

Tony Sigmon, Gaston County Family YMCA CEO: In the year 2020 Gaston County should be a place where we are living healthier, happier lives and where we are more connected to each other and to our communities. We will all be working together to build a stronger community network of support

for all children, teens, young adults, families and seniors that will help us reach our God-given potential in spirit, mind and body.

Michael Peoples, Cramerton town manager: In the year 2020 Gaston County will have an increased presence in the metropolitan area while maintaining its independent character. Gaston County should expand upon its growingly diverse economy of manufacturing and distribution due to the addition of the Garden Parkway for improved transportation. Quality of life will increase with the addition of the Carolina Thread Trail greenways and blueways and other conserved parks and greenspace.

Forestview High School Principal Audrey Devine: In the year 2020 Gaston County should be fully recovered from the suppressed economic turmoil of 2008. The visionaries in our county leadership have a solid plan of economic revitalization of our downtown area. The advancement of technology will move us toward better communication and information processing. Our 2020 forecast will reflect a vibrant and prosperous Gaston County in all aspects of economic development and leadership.

Ann Harrelson, Gaston County Schools 2009 Teacher of the Year and John Chavis Middle seventh-grade math teacher: In the year 2020, Gaston County should experience expansion in construction of roads and schools to meet increasing population and transportation difficulties associated with growth. With continued interest in bio-tech research, Gaston County should demonstrate progress in training and re-employment of laid-off workers as well as developing a future workforce for highly competitive jobs.

Laurie McClure, director of The Children's Advocacy Center, Hope Circle: In the year 2020, Gaston County should have a zero-tolerance to sex abuse on children. This means demanding strong prosecutions and then supporting children that have experienced such trauma to ensure they grow into healthy adults.

Barbara Pickens, Mount Holly resident and former sheriff of Lincoln County: In the year 2020 Gaston County should no longer be living in the shadow of Charlotte. Gaston County will rely on the heritage of ethics, hard work and sense of community pride to provide one of the most viable modern communities in North Carolina. People of all ages and diversities will diverge on the community that provides health, safety and prosperity for all.

Karen Heroy, executive director, Mount Holly Community Development Foundation: In the year 2020 Gaston County should be one of the best places to live, work and play, known for: Diverse housing and employment opportunities through creative mill-building revitalization using sustainable green technology principles. Historic downtowns bustling with retail, culture and entertainment. Visitors enjoying our greenway trail system along rivers and lakes – connecting to the Carolina Thread Trail.

Art Shoemaker, insurance salesman and local sports advocate: In the year 2020 Gaston County should have a new high school in Cramerton. This will revive the old spirit in this wonderful community that had a high school for 45 years. And thanks to an outstanding and progressive recreation department, Cramerton will add numerous recreation opportunities that no other town in North Carolina this size will enjoy.

Steve Eaton, executive director of Partnership for Children of Lincoln and Gaston Counties: In the year 2020, Gaston County should have an integrated system of care that is seamless for parents to navigate that provides essential information and resources for families in Gaston County to be successful. As a result, Gaston County will yield a high quality of life that attracts both new industry and prepares its youngest citizens for success in school.

Susan Lovejoy, Democratic Women of Gaston County president: In the year 2020, Gaston County should be in the news because of transformational leadership and dynamic integrated community spirit, innovative education, fewest incarcerated people in the USA, (jails are re-purposed), its abundant, cheap renewable energy supply, thriving industry creating components for green energy, safe local food and water supply and lack of poverty.

Richard Turner, Belmont resident: In the year 2020 Gaston County should be an example on how to do things right if we plan for the future and do not allow growth to outstrip the county's ability to provide services, while also maintaining a reasonable tax rate. Schools must be a priority.

Coleen L. Wright, Development Director for Habitat for Humanity of Gaston County: In the year 2020, Gaston County should not have any residents living in substandard housing or unsafe neighborhoods. Habitat for Humanity of Gaston County and the community will be working together in partnership building, renovating and providing decent affordable homes, in safe neighborhoods. Safe strong communities allow people to live and grow into all that GOD intended for them.

Titus Green, Gastonia business man: In the year 2020, I would like to see a real NEW birth in all our churches; public schools brought up to a higher level with adequate schools throughout the county; uptown revitalized bustling with business and excitement; the bypass completed from Catawba River to 321 North; a cloverleaf connection at I-85 and 321 North; and a resurgence of all West Gastonia.

John Barnette - community activist: In the year 2020, Gaston should have stronger race relations to the point that people aren't surprised to have a black president, and white and black clergy will regularly speak at one another's churches. We should help young people focus more on education and learn that if they always shoot for the moon, even if they miss, they'll be among the stars.

Jeff Cash - Cherryville fire chief: In the year 2020, Gaston should have obtained a quality of life for all Gaston County citizens that exceeds our expectations. To accomplish this, we would have required vision, cooperation and resources in the following areas: exceptional public safety services; exemplary economic development/quality jobs; superior transportation systems/components; esteemed educational system; and a genuine return to traditional values.

Robert Neunzig - retired Dallas veterinarian: In the year 2020, Gaston should still have maintained its small town philosophy, beauty and uniqueness, rather than become a distant memory, being gobbled up by Charlotte/Mecklenberg, ultimately losing its independence and identity, just as has happened to many small towns located around large cities like Atlanta and Chicago.

Ann Tippett - Schiele Museum director: In the year 2020, Gaston County should have a strong core of families and students with an appreciation for the natural world and an understanding of science that is necessary to be good stewards of our shared environment.

Pearl Burris Floyd - state representative: In the year 2020, Gaston County should have a vocational education high school that would partner with Gaston County Schools and Gaston College. Countywide water and sewer has been completed, N.C. 279 has been widened to four lanes that connect to U.S. 321, and two new hospitals are serving the northern and eastern parts of the county.

Ed Munn – Gaston College political science instructor; former Gastonia city manager: In the year 2020, Gaston County should have a business climate that creates and maintains jobs. Local governments should be committed to delivering necessary services in the most efficient and effective manner for taxpayers. We should have a system of parks and greenways, clean rivers, vibrant downtowns, good urban design, efficient transportation links, effective public safety, quality educational opportunities, and an excellent hospital and health care system.

Pastor Dickie Spargo, Bethlehem Church, Gastonia: In the year 2020, Gaston County should be a city that is united! As Christ-followers, the Bible says that "God has given us the ministry of reconciliation." That means helping people get to know and have peace with God and each other. Build bridges of hope to connect people with God's purpose for their lives.

Wes Styers, local business owner; president of the Boys and Girls Clubs of Greater Gaston: In the year 2020, Gaston County should be experiencing a rising tide of economic growth. The county's 85-321 corridor location, our hard-working and innovative citizens, along with government working to advance growth with proper infrastructure and lower taxes, should raise all our residents to a higher level of prosperity.

J.A. Dalpiaz, community leader: In the year 2020, Gaston County should have grown and prospered by applying the slogan of the United Way, which calls for us 'living united through service of

our time and talents.' That motto covers all facts of life ... education, religious, social, civic, family. We should embrace that united spirit and the togetherness it inspires.

N.C. Sen. David Hoyle, D-Gaston: In the year 2020, Gaston County should be an even better place to live and work. We must continue to attract new employers and maintain our commitment to being business-friendly. We must also ensure that our roads and infrastructure keep up with growth. I've lived here my whole life and our future looks brighter than ever.

Gastonia City Manager Jim Palenick: In the year 2020, Gaston County should be a place no longer lamented for its unmet potential, or scorned for its lack of vision, but rather a place awash in the vitality and creative energy that emanates from the bold, visionary leadership of risk-taking public and private-sector change-agents pursuing the business of reinventing every conventional social, cultural, economic, political, and educational paradigm that has held the community back for so long.

Gaston County Manager Jan Winters: In the year 2020, Gaston County should be a recognized leader in education and in job creation. Our local foundations have created a remarkable local initiative, unique in the state. The constructive working relationship between the county commissioners and school board will make us the envy of the region. Our public-private partnership in economic development is creating the most aggressive program in the state.

Gaston County Commissioner Allen Fraley: In the year 2020, Gaston County should be a better place to work, live and raise a family. With new schools and industry, I am confident our unemployment rates will be back in single digits and the people of Gaston will prosper once again, as we all learn to live a more 'green and clean' life.

Jim Long, Bessemer City councilman, transportation leader: In the year 2020, I see Gaston County as a thriving cluster of economically sustainable communities, connected by sidewalks and public transportation. We will have the best roads to move goods and services, jobs for everyone, and communities that are a safe place to raise our families. We can have all this if we are willing to make the sacrifices today that are necessary for our future.

Gaston County Commissioner Donnie Loftis: In the year 2020, Gaston County should have an excellent quality of life. We should lead the Charlotte region in graduating the greatest percentage of students from high school, the highest percentage of two parent families and the lowest divorce rate. Families are the foundation of our society. Economic opportunities abound for hard-working citizens and entrepreneurs.

Gastonia City Councilman Walker Reid: In the year 2020, Gaston County should have made serious progress toward getting countywide water and sewer. Candidates use this buzz word in every municipal election, but no serious effort is ever made to bring it to fruition. We should also consider our image on transportation, by addressing how those that are entering and exiting our county are being accommodated, and providing better facilities.

Duke Kimbrell, community leader and businessman: In the year 2020, Gaston County will need to have allowed for the beautification of our city by the destruction of the AT&T tower, the destruction of the two unoccupied tall buildings on Main Avenue (allowing development for that thoroughfare), the elimination of the Firestone Mill and beautification of these properties, allowing for their development.

Austin Rammell, pastor Hardin Baptist Church, Dallas: In the year 2020 Gaston County should have downtown communities growing while maintaining its small town atmosphere, a new economic base established, and a growing number of churches doing serious work to change struggling communities as well as effectively impacting young generations with the awesome message of the Gospel!

Natalie Tindol, principal dealer Tindol Ford: In the year 2020, Gaston County should be the undisputed cool place to live. With an awesome downtown, lots of fabulous restaurants and recreation, the best school system in the state, and nestled between the peaks of Crowder's, the fun of the Whitewater Center, and 15 minutes from Charlotte with NO traffic issues....why would you live anywhere else?!!

Walt Israel, director Gaston County Tourism Department: In the year 2020, Gaston County should be established as a thriving center for amateur sports for the entire region. The Garden Parkway will be complete, opening up the entire south end of the county for new residential and commercial development while easing the current traffic burden on 74, I-85 and secondary roads.

C.J. Lowman, Consumer Credit Counseling of Gaston County: In the year 2020, Gaston County should reflect upon the benefits of being a coached financial warrior. Consumer Credit Counseling of Gaston County will have helped thousands develop strategies that make a financial warrior attitude successful. Financial literacy promotes financial stability, which draws new businesses and jobs to Gaston County.

Richard Randall, executive director Cherryville Chamber of Commerce: In the year 2020, Gaston County should dichotomically maximize its connectivity, both physically and socially, with Charlotte, taking advantage of much of the urban growth to be; while simultaneously working to preserve the character of perhaps its most unique attribute, its numerous small towns. I'm not sure we're aware of how fortunate we have been to be able sit back and learn from the problems faster growing counties in the region have experienced. This knowledge can be used to effectively balance a move to develop a more modern urban core while maintaining the special nature of the many distinctive communities lying throughout Gaston County.

Kim Price, president of Citizens South Bank: In the year 2020, Gaston County should... be recognized as the premier public school system in North Carolina. By focusing our resources (both financial and non-financial) on education, we will solve a number of other problems including unemployment and economic development. Every parent and grandparent desires that their children receive the best educational opportunities possible. Therefore, people, money and economic development will follow an uncompromising commitment to providing the highest quality educational system in North Carolina. The systemic benefits to such a commitment would be immeasurable.

Juliette Shelley, Gaston Arts Council executive director: "Gaston County should be a vibrant, creative community with events going on across the county for all of our constituents to take part in. Music, theater, dance, visual arts, something for everybody, no matter your age, your race, your background."

Mary McCreight, executive director of Reinvestment In Communities: "I would like to see no homelessness and no homeless shelters ... It's going to take the entire community, it's going to take government, the non-profits, businesses, the churches. Everyone pulling together to say, 'We're going to make this happen.'"

Faisal Lakhany, UNC School of Business student from Gastonia, traveler: "Something should be done about people cashing out on unemployment. They should be checked on before they get unemployment, whether they really deserve it or not or if they're just drugs addicts ... More things should be done for people in communities, like Muslims. We have to commute an hour to get our [kosher] meats."

Bill Rhyne, farmer: "I'd like for the taxes to come down some, on the family farm ... The bottom line is, how are we going to be able to stay on the family farm? Because if the taxes keep going, we're not going to be able to do it. We won't able to pay the taxes, and therefore you're going to end up selling it or the state taking it over."

Abbot Placid Solari, head of Belmont Abbey: "I think Gaston County will be, hopefully, economically prosperous. I'm not sure that there will be large manufacturing, but perhaps more small locally-owned businesses ... I think the eastern part of the county in particular is going to be an attractive place, where you have small towns that retain their identity, but are easily accessible to the advantages of the metro area."

Gordon Lewis, Commander, WWII Last Man Club: "When a homeowner reaches the age of 70 or 75, they need to cut out the school part of the property tax. A lot of the counties in Georgia do that, and I think they ought to do it here."

Donny Hicks, Economic Development Director for Gaston County: "I think one of the things I'd like to see by that time is a vibrant, diverse economy. We've had to diversify a number of different times, and I think we're at that point again."

District Attorney Locke Bell: "My vision for Gaston County for the year 2020 is that the neighborhoods will be working more closely together to prevent crime through community watch and other programs, and that criminals who do break the law will be prosecuted more quickly."

Bill Carstarphen, Pharr Yarns: "The number one thing that the county needs to strive to do is bring in new jobs, and manufacturing-type jobs. I think we need to continue the improvements we've made in our school system. We need better roads. We need the garden parkway ... The Carolina Thread Trail will be completed by 2020 in Gaston County."

Clyde Walker, president of the NAACP, Gaston County chapter: "I would like to see [African-American students'] test scores, the gap between them as opposed to other races, closed. I would like to see parents attend PTA. I would like to see parents contacted when a child first acts out. And I would like to see parents have a conference with the teacher and the principal. If it's nipped at the bud, I think there'd be fewer suspensions."

Moses Colbert, founder of Faith, Hope and Love Community Outreach Ministries: "I would like to see the city helping people help themselves, instead of just the city helping itself. It should have the people's best interests at heart. You go to uptown Gastonia and all you see is a bunch of dilapidated houses ... I would like them to help people stay in their houses instead of forcing them out."

John Russell, chairman of the Gaston County Historic Preservation Commission: Gaston County should have in place systems that protect its historic character and encourage sustainable growth: through building new schools in traditional neighborhoods, limiting development along rivers and open spaces, enhanced funding of public transportation, and partnering with local businesses to promote renovation and continued use of industrial buildings and commercial spaces.

Ted Hall, president, Montcross Area Chamber of Commerce: In the year 2020, Gaston County should be bursting with economic vitality, having capitalized on the green technology revolution, restoring lost textile jobs. The Garden Parkway has opened up southern Gaston for creation of office jobs. New bridges over the Catawba River in Belmont and Mount Holly have given Gaston County three gateways to the booming Charlotte-Mecklenburg market, helping spark a major economic rebound.

Martha Stowe, member of Belmont City Council: My vision for Gaston County in 2020 includes light rail and a countywide greenway system linking the Daniel Stowe Botanical Garden, Belmont's riverfront park, the U.S. National Whitewater Center and bordering towns which will encourage businesses and rebuild our economy. I envision this area to be a major tourist destination with a ferry and restaurants along Lake Wylie.

James Muhammad, Dallas community activist: In the year 2020, Gaston County should have a better grasp on the concept of Unity, Gaston County Schools should really know what the word Diverse means and by this era we should see the children of today's Gaston County finally embrace the vision that has been put in place for them now which is Leadership and success, for they will be the ones to mold this world back into peace.

Jim Jones, commercial real estate agent and chairman of Gaston County Economic Development Commission: In 2020, Gaston County should be a more vibrant, contributing asset within the region. We will have attracted large investments and jobs to make our local economy one of the strongest in the Southeast. Our school system will be producing students that are more prepared to fill new, highly technical jobs.

John Bridgeman, commercial real estate agent and former state representative: In 2020, Gaston County should be proud of its infrastructure, featuring countywide water and sewer. This will bring business, industry and jobs. The downtowns of all our cities should be growing and vibrant, since this is our heart. Gaston County should continue being a wonderful place to live, work, worship and raise families.

Jesse Cole, Gastonia Grizzlies general manager: In the year 2020 Gaston County should be known as baseball county USA. With a 19 field complex including a state of the art marquee stadium, the county will host hundreds of baseball tournaments a year. The complex will be one of the nicest in the country and will host youth, softball, high school and college tournaments year round. The Grizzlies will make their home at the Stadium and play in front of sold out crowds for years to come!

Chizzle, Gastonia Grizzlies mascot: In the year 2020 Gaston County should be known for its outstanding night life and be home of the best dance clubs for mascots. Gaston County will host the first World's Strongest Mascot Competition and Chizzle will be named champion. The Grizzlies will be known as America's team and Chizzle will be elected the first ever Mascot Mayor.

Patricia Brannon Franks with Belmont Neighborhood Partners: In the year 2020, Gaston County should be the envy of all North Carolina Counties, a safe place to live a raise a family with excellent schools, affordable housing, thriving industries and a vision for 2040.

Thelma Whitworth Belmont Historical Society volunteer and dog portrait artist: In 2020 Gaston County should have a state of the art no kill animal shelter with an educational/resource center for the public. There will be no gassing of animals. The new, clean, welcoming facility will be a place where the public will feel good about visiting and bringing their children to see. The educational/resource center will offer training and events in responsible pet care and ownership. Spay and neutering and vaccines will be offered for all pets in the county at affordable fees. By combining the shelter with an educational center, possibly with cooperation with Gaston College, Gaston County will be a model for the entire state in animal population education, care and control.

Vince Hill, owner of Caravan Coffee: In the year 2020, Gaston County should have finally become a destination location. All cities within the county have come together and built one of the largest Cultural Centers in the Southeast, drawing some of the top musical acts as well as theatrical performances that rivals New York. Hearing the term, "Bedroom Community of Charlotte" has long since been laid to rest. Our school system has developed a new method of education that has placed us in the top rankings in the nation. Now we have the world watching to see what we will do next.

Edward Smith, Gaston Regional Chamber of Commerce Interim President and CEO: In the year 2020 Gaston County should have a population of about 250,000 having experienced job growth in small businesses and entrepreneurs if the state government gives priority to business incentives and a business friendly tax structure. The quality of life for Gaston County residents will be greatly improved as economic prosperity increases.

Harley Gaston, former judge: In the year 2020 Gaston County should be brought together by history, needs, active leadership by government and community and led by such organizations as Gaston Together and Gaston 2012. Gaston County should occupy an exemplary position of leadership in the state. The east Gaston area, pursuing its unity efforts, should become a major player in this development.

Ed Sadler, former Gaston County Schools superintendent: Gaston County will be one of the most desired places in the country to live, work and play. An area that is noted for a well-educated workforce and enterprising group of government officials who are working together collaborating in the best interest of our citizens. An economic development corporation that has successfully recruited high technology and high wage positions to our county.

Ray McKenney, owner of McKenney Family Dealerships: In 10 years Gaston County can be a vibrant community of its own or it could be swallowed by Charlotte's shadow. My hope is that we can maintain each township's identity by all of the leadership understanding that we must speak as one voice. If we keep accepting a bedroom community role that means the kids we are raising have to move away to find a job.

Jerry Clemmons, Gastonia Downtown Development Corp. board of directors President and owner of Rainbow Paint Store: By the year 2020 Gaston County should...have seen a period of explosive growth revolving around a multimodal transportation center near East Main and Broad in Gastonia. Retail and residential activity will increase near the center creating greater demand for historic buildings. Light rail will connect Gastonia and surrounding towns to Charlotte's system creating unsurpassed growth in Gaston County.

Daniel Patton, Head of School of Gaston Christian School: In the year 2020 Gaston County should be a thriving location for business and a great close-knit family community with strong church and moral foundations. Gaston County will see many opportunities in education and cultural activities fueled by increased population as public and private investment is made to assure we become the county of choice.

Kevin Krouse, Bessemer City Planning Director: In the year 2020 Gaston County should be a place that has defined its urban boundaries and preserved its most valuable asset of open space by investing in "green infrastructure." Gaston County should focus on creating complete neighborhoods designed to promote jobs closer to where people live and accessible by transit, shops and services near home.

Trip Hord, executive director, Boys & Girls Club of Greater Gaston: In the year 2020, Gaston County should have fewer gang problems and fewer youths joining gangs thanks to the influence of education and intervention programs. Every child should have the opportunity to be a high achiever, and more Gaston County schools should receive the School of Excellence designation. We should prepare our children to enter the work force and find good jobs.

Wil Neumann, N.C. House District 108 representative: In the year 2020, Gaston County should be a community that is focused on meeting the needs of a global economy by providing education and jobs needed for success in the 21st Century.

Scott McAllister, president United Auto Workers Local 5286: In the year 2020, Gaston County should see manufacturing triple and the average minimum wage worker should be making twice as much as they are now. I'd also like to see more of the small businesses growing to replace the large manufacturers that we've lost. And I'd like to see the hardworking and proud people of Gaston County provided with good pay and good benefits to care for their families.

Renee Southard, owner of the Organic Marketplace: In the year 2020, Gaston County should have in place municipal support for sustainable business practices, cohesive transportation linkages to Charlotte, and have programs that encourage the interaction and positive relationship building between all groups of people.

Martin Eudy, owner Gaston Real Data: In the year 2020, Gaston County should ... have diversified industrial and commercial growth to help secure jobs. I'd like to see us have a more diversified economy to broaden the tax base and the work force security.

Tracy Philbeck, Gaston County commissioner: In 2020, Gaston County will be the envy of our state due to the high standards we as a community have placed on education. Our students will excel due to parental involvement and targeted funding with emphasis on accountability and results.

Robert Whitt, Mount Holly mayor and attorney: In the year 2020, Gaston County should have one of the most highly developed sets of greenways in the entire Metrolina region, if not the state. We should have passenger rail service from Gaston County to Charlotte. We should have county-wide water and sewer available to all residents. Hopefully, we as a county and as a state will have brought education to the forefront of our society's needs.

<http://www.gastongazette.com/news/gaston-39433-county-vision.html>