

February 15
Enquirer Forum
Region reaches high
It will take a regional vision to make these goals reality

<http://news.cincinnati.com/article/20090215/EDIT03/902150376>



Agenda 360 is a far-reaching plan that looks at all aspects of Greater Cincinnati - from jobs to transportation to inclusion to the quality of the place.

After two years, more than two dozen community meetings involving the work of more than 1,000 volunteers, and a survey of nearly 5,000 people, the last thing the organizers of the Agenda 360 communitywide plan want is for their 12,000-word report, which was made public Friday, to be noted with a pat on the back, a "nice work" compliment, and then shelved.

How they plan to move this far-reaching regional agenda forward and achieve some of the goals they've set will be the key to whether the report is translated into action, results and progress - which is its intent - or whether it's forgotten.

The plan is broad and its ideas big, as it lays out a half-dozen chief priorities for the entire metropolitan statistical area, followed by 18 recommendations for realizing those goals.

One key to getting the job done will be the organizers' decision from the outset to tap into the work of existing organizations and attempt to align their work with the overarching goals of Agenda 360.

"We didn't want to re-invent the wheel when we already had good things happening," said Myrita Craig, who will lead the next steps as executive director of the Office of Agenda 360.

Agenda 360 leaders have signed agreements with several civic organizations, including the Greater Cincinnati Foundation, the University of Cincinnati, OKI Council of Regional Governments and the United Way of Greater Cincinnati, which have agreed to be formal partners in working toward the goals.

"We didn't want to create a new bureaucracy and another layer of complexity," said Agenda 360 co-chair Kevin Ghassomian.

In transportation, for example, OKI has already established a Regional Freight Working Group to consider ways to improve the flow of goods through the area's roads and rail lines. That work will be used by Agenda 360 leaders, as they define transportation needs for the next decade.

"Too many community efforts have said in the past that we have to start over," said Louise Hughes, a government relations director at Procter & Gamble who will be involved in the next steps. This one, she says, focuses on "how we can get our arms around solid ideas and really leverage those."

The agenda will need some leverage to achieve its goals. The group has set several measurements by which it will gauge its success, and they could accurately be called "stretch" goals.

One measuring stick will be adding 200,000 net new jobs in the region by 2020. That would require a 50 percent increase in the region's historical job growth rate.

Another is adding an additional 150,000 young professional, 20-34 year olds, to the area's work force, increasing by 50 percent the number of workers in that age range.

The third measurement is seeing that every household in the region has an income that is at least 250 percent of the federal poverty level, a goal that, if met, would essentially eliminate poverty.

"You need to set big goals," said Jeff Edmondson, executive director of education advocacy group Strive, one of the groups that will be involved in Agenda 360's next phase. Noting progress in phases will also keep the community focused on the long-term goals. "Benchmarks and objectives along the way are important," he said.

The group will use the United Way's State of the Community report as one way to gauge its progress.

Constantly communicating the goals with the stakeholders of the plan and with the public will be critical to moving ahead, said Robert Reifsnyder, president of the United Way of Greater Cincinnati. "As long as we keep the big picture in front of us and ask the questions - what are we trying to achieve as a community - we'll make progress," he said.

Involving the public will be key to keeping Agenda 360 energized, organizers say.

An effort called My Cincinnati will be created as a way for the public to interact with the plan as it moves into the action phase. A Web site will be created where residents can share what they like about the region. "We're asking every resident to step up and tell us what this place means to them," van der Horst said. That will be built into a "master narrative" used to help share Cincinnati's story with others.

A series of public dialogues will be launched later this year, in which the public will be invited to explore topics that support the vision, such as how communities and families can become "greener."

The Agenda 360 leadership modeled their work after a communitywide plan in Northern Kentucky called Vision 2015 that was completed in 2005. The Northern Kentucky group has a three-year head start on implementing an ambitious community plan that relies on the work of many volunteers and community groups.

"You need a strong organization in place to guide it and support it," said Mike Hammons, the former chair of Vision 2015 who is now a senior adviser to the effort. Hammons likened the work to being chair of an annual church festival. "You've got to do whatever it takes to get the job done," he said.

The Vision 2015 staff tracks the progress, follows up with additional research, applies for grants, lobbies state and federal government and prepares regular reports to the community and to the group's board, the Regional Stewardship Council.

Vision 2015's staff has grown to four full-time people, two part-timers and a budget of about \$1 million a year to pay for salaries and programming, said A.J. Schaeffer, chairman.

Agenda 360's implementation will be led by Myrita Craig, a vice president at the Cincinnati USA Regional Chamber who will take on the role of executive director of the newly formed Office of Agenda 360. That office will be housed at the chamber's downtown offices and will be supported by chamber administrative staff.

Craig said she hasn't proposed a budget yet for the new office, but said she wants to keep it minimized by using chamber resources and staff when possible. She does anticipate needing funding for community outreach, for lobbying state and federal governments for funding and for communications.

A "Council 360" will be formed, essentially a board of directors of 50 to 60 people representing the stakeholder groups, who will oversee progress toward meeting the goals.

Co-chairs will be named for each of the six priority areas the plan identified. That team will be a sort of "kitchen cabinet" to the Office of Agenda 360, advising the leadership.

Two of the original co-chairs, Ellen van der Horst, chamber president, and Ghassomian, an attorney with Greenebaum Doll and McDonald, will stay involved. The third, Myrtis Powell, a vice president emeritus at Miami University, will no longer serve as co-chair, but will continue in a smaller role. Mary Stagaman, a University of Cincinnati associate vice president, will serve as a co-chair.

Several early efforts and successes of Agenda 360 offer a glimpse of the type of projects the group will explore and expand on:

A Leadership 360 program has been formed, modeled after the Leadership Cincinnati program that has connecting and training future leaders in Cincinnati for more than 20 years. Leadership 360 will emphasize regional collaboration.

The Greater Cincinnati Workforce Network is a partnership of work force development programs to improve worker training in three key industries and improve job opportunities for disadvantaged workers.

The University of Cincinnati has formed a partnership with Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center to create a program for diabetes and obesity treatment.

What each of those efforts has in common is the identification of existing programs that can be built on, connected with similar programs and expanded and aligned to achieve higher results than they could alone.

"We're trying to build on the best that already exists," Edmondson said. Regular reports on progress will be made to the Council 360 board and to the community.

Additional Facts

TOP GOALS

Six imperatives identified for transforming our community:

QUALITY PLACE

We must create strong, attractive and functional places in which to live, work, journey and play.

BUSINESS GROWTH

We must use our strengths as a region to retain, attract and create businesses and jobs.

QUALIFIED WORK FORCE

We must provide our young people and our workers with the skills necessary to get good jobs now and in the future.

TRANSPORTATION

We must expand our options for moving people and freight across the region.

INCLUSION

We must work to create a welcoming community in which all people are embraced and their differences are the foundation for the community's successes.

GOVERNMENT COLLABORATION

We must help the region's many cities, counties and townships work together toward our common goals.

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Q&A: 'Whether we like it or not, we have a shared destiny'

5 QUESTIONS WITH AGENDA 360 LEADERS

<http://news.cincinnati.com/article/20090215/EDIT03/902150377>



Kevin Ghassomian, co-director of the Agenda 360 Council, said the plan will remain a living process within community institutions.



Mary Stagaman, co-director of the Agenda 360 Council, says the biggest challenge may be overcoming complacency.



Ellen van der Horst, president of the Chamber, says the community must realize the need for a regional approach.

Here are excerpts from a question-and-answer session with Agenda 360 co-chairs Ellen van der Horst, Kevin Ghassomian and Mary Stagaman.

How broad was your regional approach in setting priorities for the next decade?

Ellen Van der Horst: This isn't our plan, or my plan, it's the community's plan. We demonstrate through the information that we share, through the survey we did and the geographic scope of it that a significant number of residents in the region recognize the importance of a regional approach. Whether we like it or not, we have a shared destiny. We can't divorce ourselves from one another. One of the jobs of Agenda 360 on an ongoing basis is to continue to deliver that message and to continue to speak to an ever-increasing number of residents across the region about this work and about its importance and about how a stronger region trickles down to an individual community and to an individual household.

How will you work with existing organizations and institutions to meet the goals?

Kevin Ghassomian: From the onset, our plan wasn't to create some sort of new entity or a new program or strategy. It was simply to shine a spotlight on those organizations in our community that are doing the work that's reflected in our strategies. This is a very living, breathing process and initiative that already resides within existing institutions that are going to be doing this work whether we did this or not. What we did was provide a sense of alignment for the people in our community that are working in these areas. We're letting them all know that it's their ability to communicate with one another with these shared priorities that will lead to the transformation that we're seeking. It reflects the work they are already doing and it reflects the will of our community.

What will be the biggest challenge in moving this agenda forward?

Mary Stagaman: It's the idea that we're "good enough." I actually heard someone say "I don't want to be world class. It costs too much to be world class." That's an example of

this idea that because we've been tempered from the severe ups and downs of the economic system and because of the diversity of our economy, people here do run the risk of becoming complacent and saying, "It's not so bad, why do we need to change?" We knew that was going to be our greatest enemy in moving this agenda forward. That goes hand-in hand with another problem, and that is the degree to which we have lost our civic pride. But what we've discovered is that the complacency is not as deep seated as we had feared and that there really are people here who know that we could have more and that we can be better.

Is this effort a sign of a new era of leadership in the region?

Van der Horst: The nature of civic leadership really is changing across the country. Very few regions, if any, are finding that they can advance themselves, transform themselves, on the backs of a few civic fathers. This Agenda 360 effort recognized that at the outset. It's the first broad-based example of a new type of civic leadership - an intergenerational, multicultural, multi-socioeconomic group that came together to identify what we need to do. That doesn't exclude the traditional city fathers because they are critical in terms of experience, expertise, resources and support. But it is inclusive of so many more than the so-called city fathers.

How do you keep the energy and momentum going and engage the broader community?

Van der Horst: We are committed to the long haul, continuing to make progress, continuing to highlight programs that are making a difference as well as the challenges that we are facing, so we've got an ongoing commitment over the next dozen years. One big blast is not what this about. We're just getting ready.

For the first time, this community broadly has come together and said we can agree this is a short list of priorities, the strategies make sense. So let's get going.

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Editorials:

Public is watchdog of regional plan

<http://news.cincinnati.com/article/20090215/EDIT01/902150381>

Agenda 360, the region's 10 year action plan for growth and opportunity is ambitious in its goals and scope. But as many of the comments you see here point out, it will take more that goals and a report to change the face of Greater Cincinnati.

Ellen van der Horst, president of the Cincinnati USA Regional Chamber, which created the report, describes it as a map for the region to move forward in the next decade. But who will make sure we read the map and follow the landmarks it so clearly points out?

The fabric of Greater Cincinnati is woven from many patches - hundreds of towns, villages, cities and townships; 15 counties, three states. That diversity is part of our charm, but it also is part of what holds us back and often seems to prevent us from acting in concert when joint effort is needed for the greater good.

Cooperation always sounds good until it comes to a point of putting a regional goal ahead of a local objection. Take for example a regional approach to transportation, one of six key goals outlined in the report. In theory everyone supports the idea of a widespread transit network that would reduce commuting times and help improve air quality. But if you live in the city how much are you willing to pay to extend commuter lines into a neighboring county? The report identifies the need to deal with the Brent Spence Bridge bottleneck across the Ohio River as the most important public works project on the drawing board for the region. It's hard to argue against it as regional priority, but are local communities willing to see once such project use up the bulk of federal infrastructure dollars that might come to the area?

The Chamber, which has formed an Agenda 360 Council to monitor how public priorities align with the report's goals, understands that conflicts inevitably will occur over how to implement the plan. But a survey of community members found that 85 percent of the respondents support the idea of regional consideration when local governments make decisions for change.

Local officials may sometimes find it hard to resist local protests - a reality that many of our readers noted. But through its www.cincinnati360.com Web site the Agenda 360 Council is enlisting the public - that 85 percent noted above, to help keep our civic and business leaders focused on the region's goals. Public feedback - support and criticism - is what will keep Agenda 360 from being filed and forgotten.

We intend to maintain that focus as well. This plan is not a directive; it's a guide, and changes will be needed in it along the way. But the six prisms of the agenda - business growth, qualified workforce, transportation, inclusion, government cooperation and a quality of place, should be reflected in every public works project, every budget and every political promise made in the region.

Additional Facts

What readers are saying about Agenda 360

The first thing we need to do is build a solid foundation, one on which we can thrive, we do not have this. We are closing jails, filling our streets with even more criminals. I view our city as a flower bed, that's full of rubbish and weeds. The city wants to plant flowers that are pretty to be around and look at.

Debbie Turner, Lawrenceburg

The only real goal is creating a quality place to live. To get the ball rolling, I would move "being inclusive and welcoming" to the top of the list. The city need not change it's core

values in order to prosper, but it must establish itself as a place that welcomes new blood.

George Corneliussen, Montgomery

I have every reason to be cynical. In February 1999 The Riverfront Advisors Commission sent a similar proposal out concerning The Banks development. Their mission - "Create a new front door for our community and energize economic growth."

Ten years later, the dirt is still there.

With all due respect, I think Agenda 360 will be a streetcar going in "circles".

I hope I'm wrong.

Steve Koesterman, Montgomery

When I think about how to transform a community, I think of a line from the musical The Music Man: "Suddenly there were things to do, and people to go out of your way for." I think about a renewal of neighborliness and courteousness, an interest in others for their own sake, and an everyday spiritual oneness. When I read about business people trying to socially engineer a better society, I really find it kind of depressing.

Beth Egbers, Pleasant Ridge

Another grand plan that will entail a lot of work with nothing ever getting done. We can't get the east side of Cincinnati to talk to the west side. How do we ever think there is going to be cooperation among regional areas located in three states?

Larry Schmolt, Price Hill

The plan's proposed programs and projects are wide ranging and quite wonderful...But nowhere does it tackle the problem of rampant crime..."Neighborhood revitalization" first demands the cleanup of drug and gang cultures that have made them hell holes.

Martha Lunken, Mount Lookout

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Keep an eye on the goals

<http://news.cincinnati.com/article/20090215/EDIT03/902150378>

Taking charge of Agenda 360 and moving it from plan into action will be the responsibility of Myrita Craig, who will become executive director of the newly formed Office of Agenda 360.

Since 2002, Craig has been vice president of small business and programs for the Cincinnati USA Regional Chamber, focusing on development of small businesses and introducing and expanding leadership programs for young professionals and women.

Since 2007, she has also been project manager for the Agenda 360 initiative.

She was recently selected by the American Chamber of Commerce Executives as one of 50 business and civic leaders to participate in the Ford Foundation Regional Sustainable Development program, a 12-month training and research program on growth and sustainability issues.

She also serves on the board of HickoryTech Corp., a publicly traded communications firm headquartered in Mankato, Minn.

In 1999, she started Sapientia Consulting Inc, a management consulting firm.

Before joining the chamber leadership, she was vice president of residential services at Cincinnati Bell.

She serves on the board of YWCA of Greater Cincinnati and the Women's Fund at the Greater Cincinnati Foundation.

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Leaders get Agenda 360 road map

<http://news.cincinnati.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20090214/BIZ01/902140325>

The Agenda 360 communitywide plan officially kicked off into action mode Friday as 200 people attending the launch were asked to commit to work to achieve the plan's ambitious goals.

The plan's organizers said regionalism and inclusion were two keys to putting the plan together and will be essential to moving it from planning to action.

The plan released publicly Friday is a wide-ranging road map meant to guide business, governments and civic groups over the next decade and to establish community priorities of attracting young talent, increasing job growth and providing economic opportunities. The Agenda 360 plan envisions transforming the Greater Cincinnati metropolitan area into a leading region for talent, jobs and opportunities by 2020.

It also sets big goals for measuring success of the effort, including creating 200,000 new jobs by 2020 and attracting an additional 150,000 20- to 34-years-olds to the region's work force.

Regionalism and inclusion were two themes repeated Friday as the leaders and organizers of the agenda sought to widen the circle of those involved and generate public support and action.

"Economic growth doesn't respect political boundaries," said Kimm Coyner, Warren County's director of economic development.

Butler County Commissioner Greg Jolivette said the future of his county is closely linked to Cincinnati's and the rest of the region. "Why wouldn't we, as neighbors, want to make Cincinnati as good as it can possibly be?" he said.

Agenda 360 co-chair Myrtis Powell, a vice president emeritus from Miami University, said this community plan is different from others that have come before because nearly 7,000 people were involved in giving their opinions, the leaders were willing to work with existing civic organizations, and they are committed to including all races and genders in the effort.

Myrita Craig, who will lead a new Office of Agenda 360 at the offices of the Cincinnati USA Regional Chamber, said organizers received a clear message from the public that accountability is needed and she pledged to track and report frequently on the effort's progress.

February 14

Hamilton Journal News

Middletown Journal

Oxford Press

Planners aim to create 200,000 jobs across region

<http://www.oxfordpress.com/hp/content/oh/story/news/local/2009/02/14/hjn021409Agenda360.html>

<http://www.middletownjournal.com/search/content/oh/story/news/local/2009/02/14/hjn021409Agenda360.html>

<http://www.journal->

[news.com/search/content/oh/story/news/local/2009/02/14/hjn021409Agenda360.html](http://www.journal-news.com/search/content/oh/story/news/local/2009/02/14/hjn021409Agenda360.html)

CINCINNATI — The goal of Agenda 360 is to add 200,000 jobs to the Greater Cincinnati region and 150,000 young professionals to the local work force by 2020, the group announced Friday, Feb. 13.

To do this, the regional planning group announced six priorities that they say governments, agencies and residents across Butler, Warren, Hamilton and Clermont counties should work on together.

Those priorities are:

Focusing on neighborhoods and "place-based investment," such as Middletown's East End, by practicing smart growth and green building and developing proud, walkable neighborhoods.

Promoting business clusters — such as the automotive, aerospace and chemical industries — for economic development. This includes becoming a national leader in the prevention and treatment of obesity and diabetes. And that's not all.

"It is our aspiration, through Agenda 360, to become one of the top five consumer marketing regions in the world. Yes, I did say 'The world,' " said Kimm Conyer, Warren County economic development director and Agenda 360 co-chairwoman.

Developing a qualified work force by expanding the United Way's Success by 6 program and increasing access to college with programs such as the proposed Middletown Promise, which would give college scholarships to all public school students.

Transportation, including replacement of the Brent Spence Bridge in Cincinnati and creation of a regional bus service. This was a major priority to residents who took part in Agenda 360 work groups, said Liberty Twp. Trustee Christine Matacic, who helped draft the plan.

Inclusion of all cultures and demographics. This includes programs to provide access to primary medical care to all residents.

Collaboration among the region's 130 political jurisdictions. To illustrate the importance of this, Butler County Commissioner Gregory Jolivette listed what he called some of history's dumbest decisions, including the city of Hamilton not taking part in planning the route of Interstate 75.

"It's important that Butler County doesn't make a dumb decision like the trade of Babe Ruth to the Yankees or not attending a meeting," he said.

But creating these priorities during the past two years by collecting input from thousands of residents across the region — including input sessions in Hamilton, Middletown and Lebanon — was the easy part, local leaders agree.

Now they have to deliver.

February 13

Enquirer

Agenda 360's ambitious path

<http://news.cincinnati.com/article/20090213/BIZ01/902130338/1076/NLETTER04?source=nletter-business>

A wide-ranging blueprint to move Greater Cincinnati into the next decade, a plan two years in the making, calls on the region to unite behind the broad goals of keeping and attracting young talent, igniting job growth and providing economic opportunities for all.

The plan, called Agenda 360, envisions transforming the Greater Cincinnati metropolitan area into a leading region for talent, jobs and opportunities by 2020.

Agenda 360 is a template for growth, change and progress over three states, 15 counties, and dozens of local governments. The plan was generated and driven by the Cincinnati USA Regional Chamber, but was formulated over two years by nearly 1,000 volunteers who created a consensus for progress through 28 community meetings attended by 1,500 people and a survey of 4,500 respondents.

The result of their efforts is "an aligned vision for socioeconomic growth in the region and a road map for getting us there," said Chamber President Ellen van der Horst.

The plan was scheduled to be released officially this morning at an event at the Museum Center at Union Terminal.

Through the community process, six broad priorities were identified:

Improving the quality of the region as a place to live, work, visit and play.

Encouraging the growth of businesses.

Preparing the current and future work force with the skills needed for good jobs.

Urging local governments to work together.

Improving the transportation of people and products.

Creating a community of inclusion where everyone has access to economic opportunities regardless of their color, race, gender or sexual orientation.

"Identifying those areas is a way for all of us to understand what our focus should be as we move forward," the report says.

The priorities are meant to guide policy, initiatives and community action over the next 10 years. They are what Agenda 360 Co-chair Kevin Ghassomian calls "a first step to get everybody at a level playing field where we're at least using the same vocabulary."

Within each of those broad priorities, several specific strategies are outlined as ways to achieve the over-arching goals. The strategies for fostering business growth, for example, include creating a world-class health center, building on the expertise at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center and the University of Cincinnati Medical

Center; building on the area's existing strengths in the automotive, chemical and aerospace industries; and jump-starting the growth of emerging strengths in consumer marketing, life sciences and advanced energy.

The transportation strategies include expanding public transportation and creating a regional transit plan to provide viable alternatives to auto travel.

The group also calls on governments to save money by sharing services and to explore revenue-sharing across local government jurisdictions.

Programs and projects are listed as concrete ways to begin to take action. Rather than make a call for new organizations and new initiatives, Agenda 360 organizers made the strategic decision to tap into existing community groups and their initiatives, and to build on that work. By piggybacking on the ongoing efforts of those groups, such as the United Way, University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati Public Schools and the Greater Cincinnati Foundation, Agenda 360 organizers have given a sort of stamp of approval to that work and hope to capitalize and expand on it.

By resisting the temptation to call for a new slate of organizations and initiatives, the leaders have outlined a unified set of simple, long-term goals they say have the benefit of a strong foundation of existing support.

"What we have now that we never had before is real community buy-in," said Myrita Craig, who will lead the implementation of the plan as executive director of a new Office of Agenda 360.

Organizers of the plan set several standards by which to measure their success: creating 200,000 net new jobs by 2020; attracting an additional 150,000 young professionals, ages 20-34, to the region; and boosting income so all households that have an income of at least 250 percent above the federal poverty level.

The Office of Agenda 360 will be housed at the Cincinnati USA Regional Chamber and receive administrative support from chamber staff. A "Council 360" will be formed, composed of volunteers who will oversee taking the plan from report stage to implementation and overseeing progress.

Organizers agreed that the effort of engaging the community, creating a consensus and committing it to writing will be easy compared with the work of coordinating the projects to achieve the goals and keeping people focused on them.

"The two years we've spent planning gets us to the starting point," van der Horst said.

February 13

Enquirer

Become part of plan

<http://news.cincinnati.com/article/20090213/EDIT02/902130364>

Agenda 360, an action plan for the Greater Cincinnati region, is inserted in the newspapers of more than 160,000 of our Ohio readers today. It's the product of a two-year effort by 1,000 volunteers under the auspices of the Cincinnati USA Regional Chamber of Commerce to transform the region into a center of economic opportunity.

Save it; read it; ask questions about it.

In areas of job growth, government collaboration, transportation, inclusion, workforce development and quality of place it offers guidelines for the next 10 years. These are goals for our communities, for our business and civic leaders and for ourselves.

We believe this plan can be more than just a report to be filed away under "might have been," or "would be nice." Agenda 360 should be a lens through which we examine public policy decisions that will shape the region over the next decade. A key piece of plan is the ability of all members of the community to follow and comment on its progress online at www.cincinnati360.com.

A more detailed analysis of the plan will appear in Sunday's Forum. We urge you to join this discussion and help our community navigate its course.

February 13
Business Courier
Agenda 360's vigorous goals not for meek

<http://cincinnati.bizjournals.com/cincinnati/stories/2009/02/16/story2.html?b=1234760400^1777999>

Let no one accuse the business and community leaders behind Agenda 360 of thinking small.

The sweeping regional action plan has goals for the Tri-State that are beyond lofty: Create 200,000 net jobs in the 15-county region by 2020; add 150,000 young professionals to the work force by that time; and ensure that every household earns at least 250 percent of the federal poverty level so everyone here makes enough to pay their bills and care for themselves and their families.

"I think people want to be inspired and have some hope and put their energies and efforts into helping big things happen," said Michael Fisher, a past chamber president who is an affiliate partner with a private equity investment firm. He was one of 17 Agenda 360 Advisory Council members.

"It's going to be very difficult," added Clermont County Commissioner Ed Humphrey, a Procter & Gamble retiree who was involved in the plan. "But I think the goals are possibly achievable."

Ambitious, he said, but not impossible.

The aim is to get all of Southwest Ohio working to achieve a common vision. The leaders behind Agenda 360 spent more than two years talking to thousands of residents to gauge their priorities and passions. The release of the Agenda 360 plan Feb. 13 marks the “official start of the clock” for executing the plan, said Ellen van der Horst, CEO of the Cincinnati USA Regional Chamber and a co-chairwoman of the Agenda 360 effort.

“What we have for the very first time in Southwest Ohio is a truly aligned vision for growing the region and a road map for making that happen,” she said. “We have clearly defined our goals so we can track and measure our success.”

And that, she said, sets this apart from other plans that have come and gone.

Already, Myrita Craig has been named executive director of the Office of Agenda 360, which will be housed at the chamber to oversee implementation of the plan and report progress to the community each year. Craig has relinquished her duties as the chamber’s vice president of small business and programs to take on the job full time. The office has no formal budget and no other staff yet, but Craig will work to determine what she needs and break down the goals into annual benchmarks. Other organizations already are doing much of the work it will take to reach the goals, van der Horst stressed, but Craig’s office will help convene, coordinate and work toward success.

Mary Stagaman and Kevin Ghassomian will be volunteer co-chairmen of Council 360, the board that will help guide Craig’s work. Ghassomian, a member of the Greenebaum Doll & McDonald PLLC law firm, has been a co-chairman of the Agenda 360 initiative and will continue his leadership in the new role. As associate vice president for external relations at the University of Cincinnati, Stagaman represents the region’s second-largest employer and one of the major reasons young people come to Cincinnati, van der Horst said.

They will recruit other members of the volunteer council, which Stagaman said could number from 60 to 80 people.

The structure is similar to the one in place for Vision 2015, the regional plan for Northern Kentucky that aims to create 50,000 net new jobs in that region by 2015.

The Agenda 360 goals encompass Northern Kentucky, so those jobs south of the river will count toward the regional total.

But that doesn’t mean it will be easy.

The Agenda 360 plan calls for leveraging the region’s existing economic clusters. Those are industries such as aerospace, automotive and financial services. It also calls for creating a “world-class health center,” building upon expertise at the University of Cincinnati and Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center in obesity and diabetes and

their delivery of cancer prevention, research and treatment programs. And it details emerging industry clusters with promise, such as consumer marketing.

“Our goal is to be recognized as one of the top five consumer marketing regions in the world,” the plan states.

Of course, these goals are being announced during the worst economic downturn in generations. Adding 200,000 net new jobs is a 50 percent increase in the region’s historic job growth rate, van der Horst noted. And the region has seen some pretty good years.

But the bad economic times are no excuse not to act, said Cincinnati City Councilman Chris Bortz, who co-chaired the GO Cincinnati action plan for the city.

“Now more than ever, you need a plan like this,” Bortz said. “We have a real opportunity here to say, ‘How can the region take advantage of a down economy to really strategically invest in ways that make us more attractive?’”

To that end, Agenda 360 calls for regional approaches to issues such as transportation, education and governance. The plan puts a priority on enhancing regional assets, such as the arts, and improving the system of urban education. It calls for improved health care access and investment in neighborhoods. And it suggests “exploring multijurisdictional revenue sharing,” a political hot button that few dare to push.

It’s a lot to accomplish in 11 years, Stagaman acknowledged, but that doesn’t mean it isn’t worth trying. “We didn’t want to make any small plans,” she said. “In this economy, being bold may be the best approach.”

For the plan in its entirety, go to www.cincinnati360.com.

Cluster Strengths

- The Agenda 360 plan identifies eight economic clusters as strengths for growing jobs in the region.
- Established clusters:
- Aerospace: The Cincinnati-Dayton corridor ranks in the top 15 areas nationally for the number of firms directly involved with aerospace products/parts manufacturing.
- Automotive: The Tri-State accounts for more than 25 percent of Tier 1 auto suppliers in the U.S.
- Chemistry and plastics: The region is home to nearly 300 such businesses.
- Financial services: More than 5,300 businesses locally come from this field.
- Emerging clusters:
- Advanced energy: The state of Ohio has made a strong commitment to the alternative and renewable energy industry.

- Consumer products and creative services: Core companies such as Procter & Gamble Co., Kroger Co. and Macy's Inc. drive this industry.
- Life sciences: Southwest Ohio is home to a research university (University of Cincinnati), as well as 220 businesses involved in life sciences.
- Source: Agenda 360