

POVERTY CHALLENGE

Mayor's 'Poverty Thought Force' seeking public ideas



"I tried to come up with a sort of diverse group of individuals who were good thinkers."
 —Mayor Allen Joines

BY TODD LUCK
 THE CHRONICLE

Mayor Allen Joines' Winston-Salem Poverty Thought Force is looking to the public for ideas to reduce poverty in Forsyth County.

The Thought Force is a 21-member panel that will take community ideas for reducing poverty and turn them into actionable proposals. The panel is comprised of many government officials and heads of local organizations that deal with poverty. Representatives of local colleges such as Wake Forest University Provost Rogan Kersh, who chairs the group, and Winston-Salem State University Chancellor Elwood Robinson are also on the panel, and will be using their resources to analyze ideas and see which can be effectively implemented.

"I tried to come up with a sort of diverse group of individuals who were good thinkers, who represent various segments of the community and who had interest in poverty reduction," said Joines.

The Thought Force is divided into five sub-committees dealing with different aspects of poverty: Health and Wellness; Housing and Homelessness; Job and Workforce Development; Education and Life Skills; and Hunger and Food Insecurity. Each subcommittee is holding a meeting to get ideas from the public. The meetings follow the "World Café" model, in which attendees are divided into rotating groups that discuss specific prompts, as guided by a moderator, before sharing findings with the larger group at the end.

The first such event held in September, focusing on food insecurity, yielded about 300 ideas that the Thought Force is still reviewing. The rest of the meetings will be held in January and February.

one business leader to the panel. He said he hopes those who have lived in poverty will share their insights during World Café meetings.

Joines said the goal is to come up with

Winston-Salem Poverty Thought Force members

- Rogan Kersh, Wake Forest University provost
- Wynne Brown, Student Health Services director at the Winston-Salem State University Wellness Center
- Joe Crocker, Poor and Needy Division director at Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust;
- Beverly Emory, Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools superintendent
- Bishop Todd Fulton, Ministers Conference of Winston-Salem and Vicinity president
- Robert Garcia, Hispanic League vice president
- Lee Garrity, Winston-Salem city manager
- Art Gibel, Goodwill Industries of Northwest North Carolina president
- Cindy Gordineer, United Way of Forsyth County president
- Gary Gunderson, Faith and Health Ministries vice president at Wake Forest Baptist Medical Center
- Marlon Hunter, Forsyth County Public Health director
- Sen. Paul Lowe Jr. of N.C. Senate District 32
- Walter Marshall, Forsyth County commissioner
- Derwin Montgomery, Winston-Salem Council Member and Bethesda Center for the Homeless director
- Earline Parmon, outreach director for U.S. Rep. Alma Adams
- Kenneth Peacock, retired chancellor of Appalachian State University
- Evan Raleigh, city Community and Business Development deputy director
- Elwood Robinson, WSSU chancellor
- Michael Suggs, Goler Community Development Corp. president
- Larry Woods, Housing Authority of Winston-Salem CEO
- Linda Jackson-Barnes, director of the mayor's office

"What's been done before hasn't worked" said Joines. "The idea is to generate a lot of ideas and test each one of those ideas with impactfulness and doability and then have some really good critical thinking individuals kind of look at it and come up with what makes sense."

Joines said that he plans to add at least

20-25 final recommendations on reducing poverty next year that'll be presented to the public for further comment before being submitted to the city, county, United Way and other agencies and organizations for adoption. He's hoping to get broad community support for the plan that the Thought Force produces.

Poverty

from page A1

Institute — a Washington think tank — in conjunction with the online "Business Insider," also released a report showing that Winston-Salem was second on a list of major metro areas in the nation that experienced tremendous growth in poverty in distressed tracts with 20 percent-plus poor populations between the years 2000 and 2008-12.

With 24.1 percent of its residents living below the poverty level, the city had an 82 percent growth in its poor population from 2008 to 2012 alone, according to U.S. Census figures, with African-Americans — over 34 percent of Winston-Salem's population, according to the census — making up more than 31 percent of those in poverty.

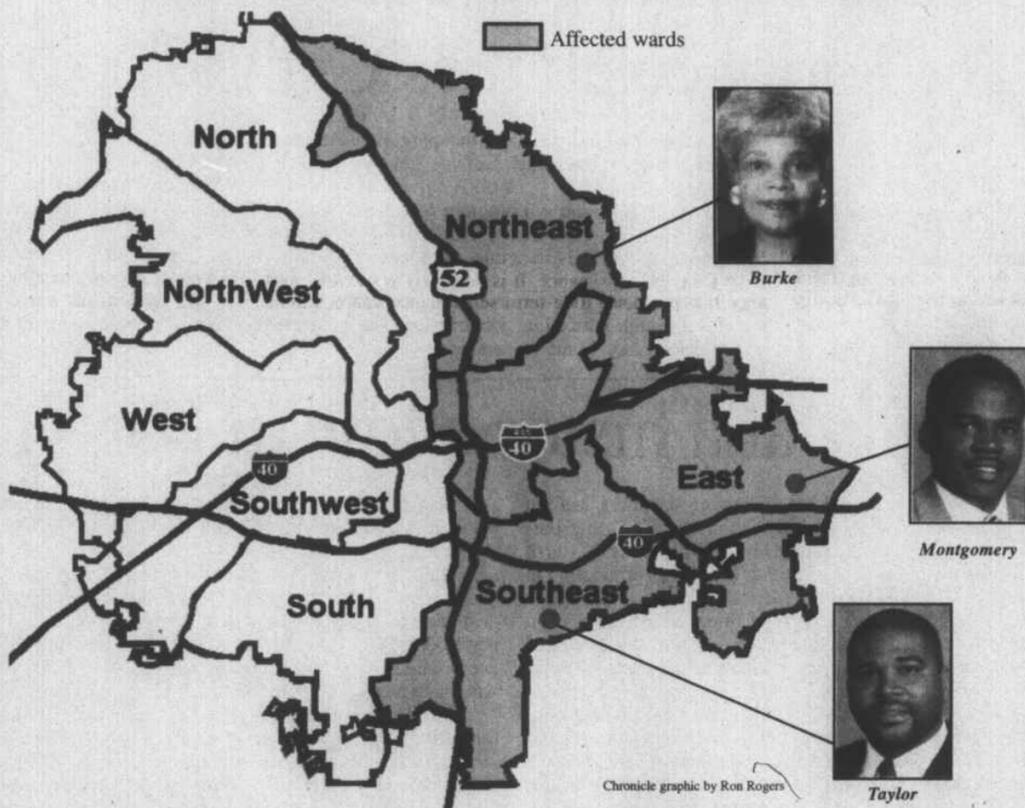
The impact of the economic recession, which cost many their jobs, is seen as a key factor, observers and officials say.

The East, Northeast and Southeast wards are the areas of the city that are struggling most with issues of high unemployment and low median household income. Like other distressed tracts across the state, poverty is concentrated in these areas, thus yielding high crime, lower health outcomes, and few, if any, economic opportunities.

In each case, according to the 2014 UNC study, these wards suffer from lower rates of home and vehicle ownership; a high likelihood of families with children headed by single mothers (indeed three of five families are headed by single mothers. They also have the highest proportion of Spanish-speaking and non-English speaking households.

Unemployment in urban distressed tracts is

High poverty concentration in Winston-Salem



literally at least twice the statewide rate. Per capita income is less than half the state average, and poor urban residents have greater rates of public assistance, according to the UNC study.

These economically distressed wards also share the characteristic of having lower percentages of adults who've graduated from high school or attained bachelor degrees or higher, than statewide attainment rates.

On Thursday, Oct. 29, Mayor Allen Joines, along with City Council Member Derwin Montgomery and others, announced the formation of the so-called Winston-Salem Poverty Thought Force — a 21-member panel of civic and academic leaders tasked to

hold a series of community meetings to devise effective approaches to lowering poverty in the city.

"We are going to address poverty in five sub areas," Joines told The Chronicle by email subsequently on Tuesday. "Jobs; food; health disparities; education; and housing. We will be seeking broad community input into each of these subject areas and from that input will create objectives to address the issue. It is our plan to complete this analysis and idea-generating phase by early spring and then transform the ideas into tangible and measurable objectives by mid-year."

"In 2014, more than 24 percent of the citizens in Winston-Salem lived in poverty, based on their

household income," Joines told reporters on Oct. 29. "That's not only disheartening, but unacceptable for a progressive city. Residents who live in poverty cannot provide themselves and their dependents with adequate medical care, education, housing, food and other resources by which we measure our quality of life."

Montgomery said at the press conference that with a quarter of the city's residents "lacking in the basic necessities," Winston-Salem cannot move forward. "Truly, poverty forces people to live in the shadows of our community and adversely impacts us from our schools to our private businesses," Montgomery told

reporters. "If our morality does not lead us to take action, the economics of poverty should. We will all pay if we do nothing."

In an email response for comment from The Chronicle Tuesday, Montgomery elaborated.

"At the end of the day, there are several things that I personally think need to happen. (1) People want and need to work, must make not just a 'living wage' but what I consider a 'thriving wage'. (2) There must be educational pipelines for everyone that desires, that connects to meaningful employment (3) The state and federal government must change the rules for those receiving public assistance that incentives their economic accent. As it stands today,

if an individual wants to get a higher paying job, they put at risk any assistance they receive that simply helps them make ends meet. There should be a gradual reduction in assistance and not the 'cliff' that is currently in place."

Montgomery continued, "There has to be access to opportunities. Barriers that have impacted black and brown individuals disproportionately must be set aside, this includes the impact of criminal records and credit scores used in the hiring process."

The Chronicle also reached out to Northeast Ward Council Member and Mayor Pro Tempore Vivian Burke and Southeast Ward Council Member James Taylor Jr. by email and phone to get their thoughts about what the city and state should specifically be doing to address the growing poverty in the city. However, neither responded to our requests for comment by press time Tuesday.

The five Thought Force subcommittees will begin their meetings in January and February, officials say. Forsyth Futures will provide the latest data analysis to the effort.

"Ultimately, our goal is for the Thought Force to come up with a list of recommendations that are both feasible and impactful," Joines said, "and to set a goal in terms of a percentage of reduction in the poverty rate."

Joines continued, "I realize that this is an ambitious undertaking, but I believe that if we act collaboratively as a community, we can come up with a plan that will significantly reduce our poverty rate, and in the process, improve the lives of thousands of our citizens."

WSSU ranked among top 10 in the nation for improving economic mobility

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

Winston-Salem State University was named one of the top 10 universities in the nation for its contribution toward narrowing the economic gap in the United States.

Ranking seventh in the nation on the CollegeNet Social Mobility Index (SMI), WSSU is the highest ranked university in North Carolina and the second highest ranked historically black university in the country.

A total of 931 universities were ranked.

The SMI evaluates colleges and universities based on admissions practices that work to reverse the growing economic disparity in the U.S. WSSU scored high on all of the variables considered in the ranking: number of low-income students admitted and graduated, low tuition cost, and high employment outcomes after graduation. According to the study, a "high SMI ranking

means that a college is contributing in a responsible way to solving the dangerous problem of economic immobility in our country."

"Winston-Salem State University has a long history of educating exceptionally promising students from under-resourced families," said WSSU Chancellor Elwood L. Robinson. "The Social Mobility Index ranking demonstrates that we are fulfilling our goal of helping students succeed while having a positive and long-lasting economic impact on our state and nation."

Unlike other ranking systems, which use "exclusivity" to rank colleges and universities, the SMI measures the extent to which a college or university educates more economically disadvantaged students at a lower tuition, so they can graduate and obtain well-paying jobs.

The ranking comes as WSSU is embarking on a strategic plan for 2016-2021. As the strategic plan is developed,

WSSU is intentionally developing practices and programs that ensure that the campus continues to address the challenges and obstacles facing low-income, first-generation and minority students.

"Students from under-resourced populations require an educational experience that integrates academic guidance, mentoring, support services, and a caring community," said Robinson. "HBCUs like WSSU have always created a different educational experience for our students, but we must continue to evolve to ensure that promising students learn the skills they need to be successful in jobs that may not even yet exist. I'm proud that we have been recognized for our efforts in this area and know that we will continue to make an impact on the economic lives of thousands of families."

To view the full rankings and the methodology for the SMI, visit www.socialmobilityindex.org.