

# Ruleville Strategic Community Plan



Strategic Community Plan  
Winter 2008

Ruleville, Mississippi  
2008 - 2012



# Ruleville Strategic Community Plan

## HISTORY & OVERVIEW

The Delta is breadbasket to a nation. Its rich fertile soil, music legacy, literary fame, and cultural diversity make the region unique and special to residents and visitors alike. However, the winds of social and economic change have begun to blow across the Delta, dramatically changing the culture and landscape. Although the Delta region of Mississippi remains a center for agricultural production, as an industry agriculture has transitioned from a labor intensive to a capital intensive business enterprise. This transition to mechanized farming triggered an out-migration of population to manufacturing employment centers in the north. In the wake of this significant loss of population, businesses closed, rural schools struggled to remain open, and a way of life unique to the region changed. Ruleville, a small Delta agriculture community located in Sunflower County, has suffered the same fate that has befallen the Delta in general – declining population; weakened or non-existent business base, and an under-educated workforce ill-prepared to compete in the 21<sup>st</sup> century economy. Against this backdrop, the citizens of Ruleville have banded together to address the economic and social problems that face their community.

Community leaders formed the Ruleville Development Council (RDC) in September 2007 and partnered with Southern Bancorp, a bank-centered development organization with a banking presence in Ruleville, Mississippi, to lead area residents in a strategic planning process. Sunflower County Medical Center underwrote the process and hosted citizen leaders in an intense planning effort to produce the Ruleville Community Strategic Plan, a document that is intended to serve as a blueprint for change.

### Vision Statement

**By 2012 Ruleville will be an economically prosperous, growth-oriented and unified model community with developed infrastructure and safe, affordable housing for all income levels. The community will be driven by strong spiritual values and its rich cultural heritage. Ruleville will also be characterized by level 5 schools with student access to post secondary education and quality healthcare.**

Successful community development is most often driven by a common vision for the community that is shared by area residents. This common vision is intended to be the link that attracts diverse people from all walks of life to provide direct contribution to the implementation of this strategic plan and the revitalization of Ruleville, Mississippi. An organizational entity has to be responsible for the implementation of the Ruleville Strategic Community Plan. This task falls upon the Ruleville Development Council (RDC). Not all individuals or groups participating in Plan implementation have to be a member of the RDC. It is intended to be an umbrella organization that links all development groups together for a common goal or vision. Groups such as municipal government, the Chamber of Commerce, religious organizations, local development organizations, non-profits and individuals will work together under a common banner. To guide its work the RDC has developed the following Mission Statement.

**Mission Statement**

**The mission of the Ruleville Development Council is to utilize public and private assets to promote area prosperity and to successfully implement the current and emerging recommendations of the Ruleville strategic plan, capitalizing on the uniqueness of the region and the talents and vitality of area residents to work together to enhance the social and economic well-being of the community.**

| <b>SWOT ANALYSIS</b>   |   |
|--|---|
| <p><b>Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hospital</li> <li>• School</li> <li>• Strong infrastructure</li> <li>• Major highway intersection (Hwy 8 &amp; 49)</li> <li>• 2 banking institutions</li> <li>• Churches and civic institutions</li> <li>• Heritage tourism</li> <li>• Good fire and police departments</li> </ul> <p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Duck hunting</li> <li>• Wellness Center</li> <li>• Delta Heritage and Blues Trail</li> <li>• Blues Trail Markers in the Community</li> <li>• John Wayne Museum</li> <li>• Bedroom community for Clarksdale</li> <li>• Water (Quiver/Sunflower Rivers)</li> <li>• Civil Rights Trail</li> <li>• Fannie Lou Hamer Historic Site</li> <li>• Quaint Downtown area with park</li> <li>• Ruleville Roast/Fall festival</li> <li>• 2 Nursing Homes/hospital/Clinic/DME/Home Care</li> <li>• Location to the penitentiary</li> <li>• Hotel and Bed and Breakfast</li> </ul> | <p><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of employment</li> <li>• Limited retail shopping opportunities</li> <li>• No beauty parlors/barbershops</li> <li>• Underperforming education system</li> <li>• Aging Population</li> <li>• Depressed property prices</li> </ul> <p><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 32% of Ruleville’s population does not have a high school education</li> <li>• Divided school system</li> <li>• Population out-migration and population aging.</li> </ul> |

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## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

### **Strategic Goal Number One – Improve the frontage of Highway 49 to enhance the area’s appeal and attract new businesses and developments**

#### **Action Steps in support of strategic goal number one are:**

- A. Review City ordinances as they pertain to residential and commercial properties. Update as needed to stimulate economic development activities.
- B. Develop an architectural rendering of how HWY 49 should look.
- C. Market HWY 49 properties to potential residential and commercial clients in order to transform area into a development corridor.
  - Engage in commercial property clean-up along HWY 49 to make the area more inviting to potential clients
  - Create a database that identifies properties available for lease or sale, including condition, price, and square footage of property
  - Determine feasibility of recruiting national franchises considering traffic count information and regional trends.

### **Strategic Goal Number Two - Improve the ability for Downtown Ruleville to retain, expand and attract new businesses**

#### **Action Steps in support of strategic goal number two are:**

- A. Create a downtown committee to oversee all expansion and improvement projects.
- B. Develop a complete market analysis for downtown Ruleville. Pursue a partnership with Mississippi State University on their First Impressions program to assess the potential of downtown Ruleville.
- C. Utilize the market analysis of the business potential of downtown Ruleville to engage in a targeted business retention, expansion and recruitment program.



Downtown Ruleville

### **Strategic Goal Number Three: Expand and improve Rule Park**

#### **Action Steps in support of strategic goal number three are:**

- A. Place more garbage receptacles throughout downtown.

- B. Upgrade the landscaping and determine the feasibility of putting a fountain in the park.
- C. Face-lift the gazebo.
- D. Place a sculpture/statue in the park.
- E. Increase the lighting on the trees.
- F. Place a water fountain in the park
- G. Replace the existing broken benches.
- H. Update the infrastructure, install electrical outlets.



Rule Park

**Strategic Goal Number Four: Develop the facilities and capacity for the community to host civic meetings and promote civic activity. Develop the capacity to attract and host visitors to the community by developing and enhancing fixed structures.**

**Action steps in support of strategic goal number four:**

- A. Repair the Community House. Develop it into a center for community and civic activity.
- B. Improve the interior of the depot building, thereby improving its flexibility as a potential site for meetings and community activity.
- C. Make improvements to the facility building (fix the roof).
- D. Promote the Hollywood Star collection museum.
- E. Provide technical assistance to existing bed and breakfast facility in Ruleville. Measure the potential to expand this market.
  - Assess market potential by conducting a market study
  - Work to link existing bed and breakfasts to B&B networks
  - Provide business development training opportunities for owners



Refurbished Community House

**Strategic Goal Number Five: Promote training for persons interested in starting a business in Ruleville**

**Action steps in support of strategic goal number five:**

- A. Partner with Southern Good Faith Fund to promote financial literacy, asset building strategies, and business development training.
- B. Identify other business development service providers in the region and connect interested area citizens to these services.
- C. Conduct a feasibility study to identify opportunities, establish a loan fund, and connect to providers for the purpose of starting at least five new businesses.

**Strategic Goal Number Six: Develop the Fannie Lou Hamer Memorial Garden into a national tourist attraction for Ruleville. Develop other tourist attractions in the local community.**

**Action steps in support of strategic goal number six:**

- A. Get the Fannie Lou Hamer site listed on the Civil Rights Action Trail.
- B. Organize committee to take responsibility for beautifying and maintaining the site.
- C. Acquire Blues Markers highlighting the accomplishments of local blues artists.
- D. Expand gospel music in Sunflower County by working with local churches and regional choirs. Explore the possibility of:
  - An annual Gospel Festival
  - Regular concerts
  - Partnership with school music programs
  - Gospel music tourist sites or supporting businesses



Recently renovated Fannie Lou Hamer Memorial Garden.

**Strategic Goal Number Seven: Develop regional strategies and partnerships in promoting economic development in Ruleville, Mississippi.**

**Action steps in support of strategic goal number seven:**

- A. Find ways to partner with the Chamber of Commerce in Cleveland, MS to promote area development.
- B. Work directly with the city of Drew, MS to promote the area's development and seek ways to defray municipal costs through shared services. Including:
  - Shared Code Enforcement Officer
  - Unified city codes
  - Shared fire and police services
  - Shared mosquito eradication services

## EDUCATION

### **Strategic Goal Number One – Improve the quality of public education in Sunflower County and Ruleville, Mississippi.**

#### **Action steps in support of strategic goal number one:**

- A. Establish the linkage between a strong public education system and a healthy local economy by providing information to area citizens demonstrating the correlation between public education and the economy.
- A. Work directly with school administrators to create an environment of learning in the public schools.
- B. Provide continuing education opportunities for teachers by identifying programs and funding sources for certification and advanced degrees.
- C. Create a list of five programs designed to improve student performance; implement at least one program in the local school system.



Ruleville Central High School.

### **Strategic Goal Number Two – Develop a Dropout Prevention Plan. Such a plan would be utilized to reduce the alarming rate of teenagers dropping out of school and limiting their career options.**

#### **Action steps in support of strategic goal number two:**

- A. Assess community interest by sponsoring community meetings to garner support from stakeholders, parents, and concerned citizens to develop and implement a Dropout Prevention Plan.
- B. Contract with a facilitator to lead community meetings and develop a dropout prevention plan.
- C. Implement prevention plan, collect data to measure change.
- D. Partner with MSU on the “studio school” model.

### **Strategic Goal Number Three – Utilize the expertise of professionals to assist in the introduction of math and science curricula in pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, and first grade.**

#### **Action steps in support of strategic goal number three:**



- A. Contact the Mississippi Department of Education; obtain guidance in expanding math and science curricula in Pre-K, K and first grade.
- B. Identify and implement new methods for placing greater emphasis on math and science curricula in elementary schools. Such as:
  - Programs sponsored by the National Math and Science Initiative, including Advance Placement (AP) programs.
  - Enroll in math and science literacy programs.
- C. Introduce Core Knowledge curriculum alignment program in the local public school systems.

**Strategic Goal Number Four - House Project Head Start Program in the public school setting by securing funds to build additional classrooms, thus providing a smoother transition from the preschool to the public school setting.**

**Action steps in support of strategic goal number four:**

- A. Identify Head Start Program service providers that may be interested in locating in the local school system. Enroll 75 students in Head Start classes. Make program available to all public schools in the Ruleville market.
- B. Secure funding for additional classroom space in each school system to house the project.

**Strategic Goal Number Five – Attract and increase community and business participation and support in the Sunflower Public Education Foundation (SPEF), an organization that provides signing bonuses to attract highly qualified teachers and scholarships to future educators.**

**Action steps in support of strategic goal number five:**

- A. Conduct a series of public forums with the community’s business sector to discuss support for public education.
- B. Contract with the SPEF to utilize their services to attract qualified teachers to the area.

**Strategic Goal Number Six – Solicit parental action in support of public education in Ruleville.**

**Action steps in support of strategic goal number six:**

- A. Develop a survey instrument to gain public opinion from parents.

- B. Identify the best method for delivering the survey document to area parents. Consider partnering with an outside service provider.
- C. Form a task force to Explore Parents for Public Education program. Identify other models for parental involvement from around the country.
- D. Implement a comprehensive parental involvement program in the school district.

**Strategic Goal Number Seven - Secure funds to build a vocational-technical center that will be shared by the citizens of Drew, MS, a neighboring community with similar demographics.**

**Action steps in support of strategic goal number seven:**

- A. Develop a feasibility study to identify sources of funds and demand for the construction of a vocational-technical center and pursue funding.
- B. Identify five existing vocational programs; learn and share best practices.
- C. Develop a resource list of after school programs; identify and implement additional after school programs deemed to be relevant in the public education system.

**Strategic Goal Number Eight – Promote and support programs that recruit and maintain highly qualified teachers.**

**Action steps in support of strategic goal number eight:**

- A. Work with local financial institutions to develop a down payment and closing costs assistance program to attract qualified teachers willing to locate in the area.
- B. Provide continuing education opportunities (certification, advanced degrees) to teachers locating in the Ruleville public school system.
- C. Provide pay incentives for high performing teachers.

**Strategic Goal Number Eight – Solicit area community colleges, Mississippi Delta Community College and Coahoma Community College to provide course offerings at the high school.**

**Action steps in support of strategic goal number eight:**

- A. Identify eligible course offerings of interest to area high school and partner with the appropriate community college to deliver them.
- B. Survey high school students to determine their interests in additional educational opportunities.

## HEALTHCARE

**Strategic Goal Number One – Recognize and develop the full potential of the North Sunflower Medical Center to serve as an economic development engine and address the total health care needs of area citizens. Develop NSMC into a regional medical facility.**

**Action Steps in support of strategic goal number one are:**

- A. Construct a new wellness center to be located on NSMC’s hospital campus.
- B. Promote chronic disease programs in the community (i.e., diabetes, cardiovascular disease, obesity, etc.) by developing information brochures, sponsoring education forums, and other measures.
- C. Improve access to specialty services at a local level by identifying need through information surveys and expanding services at the NSMC.
- D. Create a wound care center at the NSMC utilizing a combination of public funding and retained earnings.
- E. Increase ambulatory surgery (Same day) to the public by expanding the capacity of NSMC through the recruitment of qualified doctors.
- F. Create a Memorial Park with Serenity Chapel on hospital campus by seeking Board approval and obtaining public/private funding for the project.
- G. Work with leadership goal team to create a volunteer candy striper program at NSMC.
- H. Create a small gift/coffee shop for hospital visitors, staff and patients.
- I. Open a hospital based retail pharmacy that increases access to medications on week nights and weekends.



North Sunflower Medical Center

## **HOUSING**

**Strategic Goal Number One – Housing Improvement: Develop safe infill single/multi-family housing units on abandoned underdeveloped property sites.**

**Action steps in support of Strategic goal number 1 are:**

- A. Conduct a “windshield” survey to identify all eligible properties.
- B. Once sites are identified, review property tax records and recorded deeds to establish identification of property owners.
- C. All available lots in Ruleville will be made ready for site development by linking property owners, potential tenants, financial institutions and developers together through public meeting and newspaper ads.

**Strategic Goal Number Two – Litter Control (Make a Difference Day). Community leaders will organize recurring clean up days to improve the esthetics of the town and promote civic pride.**

**Action steps in support of strategic goal number 2 are:**

- A. Attend board meeting with Alderpersons to discuss litter ordinance.
- B. Select clean up day(s); identify wards to be cleaned up and implement strategy.
- C. Institute code enforcement in Ruleville by hiring a Code Enforcement Officer and updating the codes. Explore shared CEO concept with the city of Drew.
- D. Remediate ten abandoned properties and unsightly lots.

**Strategic Goal Number Three – Initiate a midlevel housing development targeting the middle class in Ruleville.**

**Action Steps in support of strategic goal number 3 are:**

- A. Develop a study to determine the feasibility of a midlevel housing development. Determine if people will stay in Ruleville and work in Cleveland, Mississippi.
- B. Select sites from available property inventory. Pay particular attention to remediated sites.
- C. Assess the availability of funding/capital, assist in connecting developers to funding.
- D. Select and acquire one site for development in Ruleville.



## **LEADERSHIP**

### **Strategic Goal Number One – Enhance and develop leadership opportunities in the community.**

#### **Action Steps in support of strategic goal number one:**

- A. Contact principals and student councils of area high schools; meet as required to determine the leadership needs of the community from their perspective.
- B. Create a job shadow/mentor program for area youth by organizing interested citizens in Ruleville and Drew.
- C. Start a Boys & Girls Club for the community.
  - Organize a board of directors; assess the potential for a partnership with Drew, MS and existing youth development programs
  - Develop a strategic plan in coordination with the Boys & Girls Clubs of America regional director
- D. Work with social service providers, religious groups to create a parenting program for young mothers & fathers (Delta Health Partners).

### **Strategic Goal Number Two: Identify “At Risk” youth (7th - 8th grade) and administer support programs to lower the high school drop out rate**

#### **Action Steps in support of strategic goal number two:**

- A. Identify “at risk children” through parents, civic clubs, and high school administrators.
- B. Identify service providers to implement the “Reality Check” program for youth.
- C. Plan and implement a tour for area youth to Parchman Prison or a local jail.

### **Strategic Goal Number Three: Update the Youth Recreation Center**

#### **Action Steps in support of strategic goal number three:**

- A. Organize a volunteer community program to remodel and paint the Youth Center.
- B. Solicit local merchants to donate materials and supplies.