



# THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF RURAL PLANNING IN NORTH CAROLINA

2021 Annual Report: January-December 2021 Activity

N.C. Department of Commerce, NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center

*The NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center works in regions, counties, cities, towns, downtown districts and in designated North Carolina Main Street communities, to inspire placemaking through building asset-based economic development strategies that achieve measurable results such as investment, business growth, and jobs.*

# NC Rural Planning Program

Part of the NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center, the Rural Planning program provides municipalities, county governments, and other organizations in rural areas with strategic economic development planning and implementation services, technical support, and training. Rural Planning program staff serve each of North Carolina's eight Prosperity Zone regions from offices in the West (Sylva), Northwest (Morganton), Piedmont-Triad (Winston-Salem), Southwest (Albemarle), North Central (Clayton), Sandhills (Fayetteville), Northeast (Greenville), and Southeast (Morehead City). Other staff are based in Asheville and Wilmington.

## On the Cover

Clockwise from left:

**Town Square**  
Rose Hill, NC

**Historic Courthouse**  
Dallas, NC

**HUB Station**  
Hudson, NC

**"When Tobacco Was King" Mural**  
Carthage, NC

**Tann's Seed & Garden Store**  
Ahoskie, NC

# Strategic Planning & Implementation Services

The Rural Planning program works with communities to develop asset-based economic development strategies and implementation plans to help identify, prepare for, and respond to growth opportunities.

## Community Economic Recovery and Resiliency Initiative (CERRI)

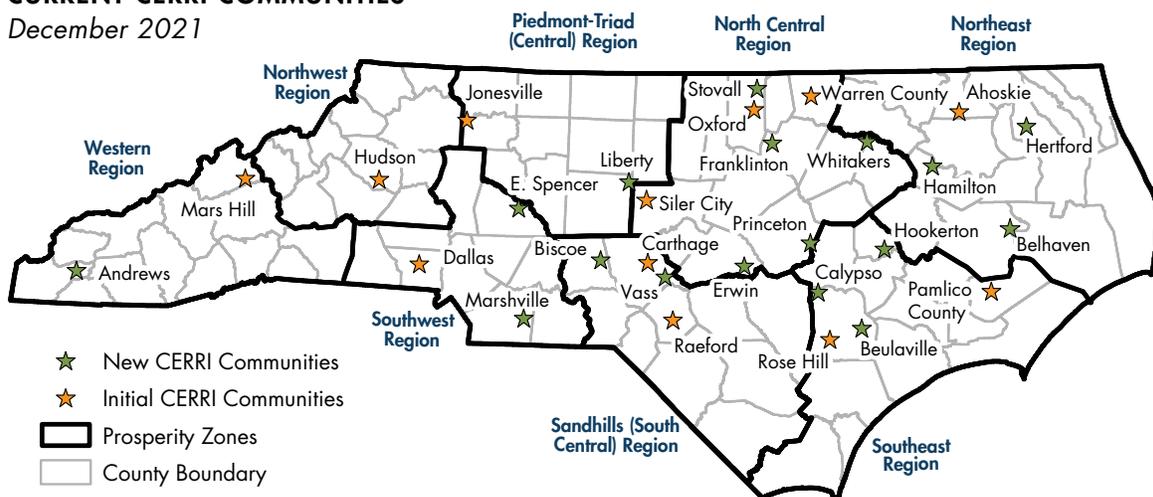
In January 2021, the Rural Planning program launched the Community Economic Recovery and Resiliency Initiative (CERRI) in response to the economic challenges small towns and rural communities in the state have faced due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Rural Planning staff conduct economic assessments for CERRI communities, help them develop economic recovery plans of work to build local economic resiliency and support small businesses, and provide assistance with plan implementation.

CERRI communities also receive project development, resource identification, and implementation assistance from Rural Planning program partners, which include the NC Main Street program, the NC Appalachian Regional Commission program, NC Hometown Strong, the U.S. Economic Development Administration, and other economic development organizations. The communities also benefit from training and tools provided by the NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center and its partners.

The Rural Planning program initially engaged 12 communities in CERRI and began expanding the program in late 2021 to serve 17 more.

### CURRENT CERRI COMMUNITIES

December 2021



## Strategic Planning for Public Airports

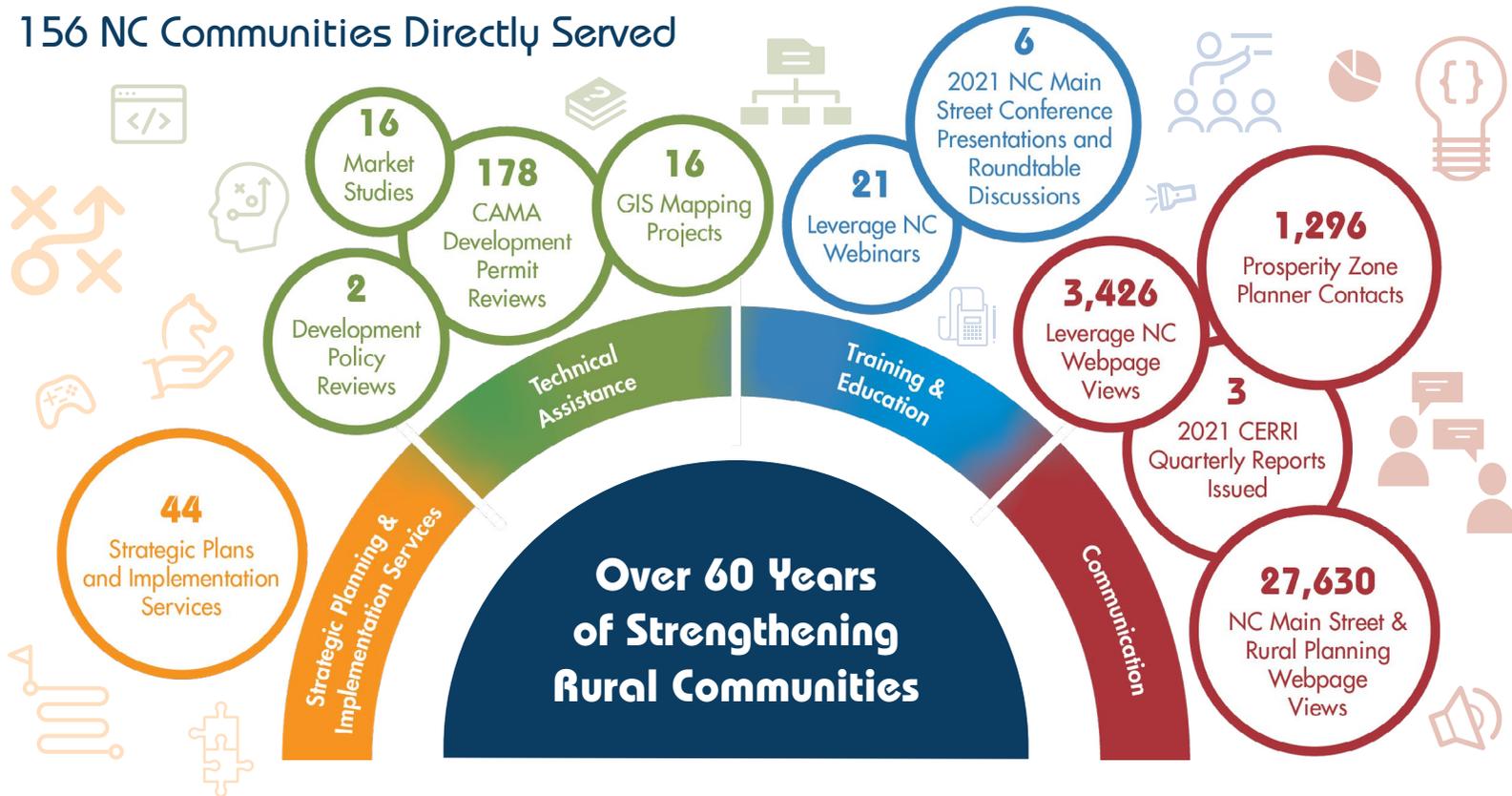


Mount Airy/Surry County Airport, Mount Airy, NC

In partnership with the N.C. Department of Transportation, Division of Aviation, and the Institute for Transportation Education and Research at North Carolina State University, the Rural Planning program began working with public airports on economic development strategic planning in 2021. The partners provide the airports with economic impact data, an inventory of existing facilities, an evaluation of infrastructure, capabilities, and services, as well as a facilitated strategic planning process. The process helps participants identify opportunities for operational and other improvements to enhance airports as economic assets, establish a vision for the future, and prepare a five-year plan with growth and development strategies. In 2021, the Mount Airy/Surry County Airport and the Laurinburg-Maxton Airport completed their strategic planning processes.

# 2021 Calendar Year NC Rural Planning Program Services Delivered

## 156 NC Communities Directly Served



## Strategic Planning for the Outdoor Recreation Economy

The Mitchell County Chamber of Commerce and Mitchell County government engaged NC Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) and Rural Planning program planners to facilitate a countywide strategic planning process focused on growing the local outdoor recreation economy. Through meetings that began in January 2021, the planners helped a local work group identify four primary activity areas for further development – walking and hiking, cycling, fishing, and floating (e.g., canoeing and rafting). Building on an existing outdoor asset mapping project by NCGrowth, the work group and planners analyzed outdoor recreation assets in the county, expanded on potential user experiences, and identified gaps in those experiences that presented business development opportunities. The work group completed, and county government adopted, the Mitchell County Outdoor Recreation Economy Strategic Plan in fall 2021.



Toe River Tubing, Mitchell County, NC (Photo Credit: Marley Knowles)

Before finishing the plan, work group members were involved in implementation projects, such as working with partners to build a pump track at a Spruce Pine park and discussing the development of other assets with state and federal agencies. The Town of Spruce Pine prioritized other plan implementation activities, including constructing a longer mountain bike trail at a park and identifying funding for a riverside project to connect outdoor experiences to the downtown commercial center.

The experience staff gained from the Mitchell County and similar projects underpinned a program proposed in North Carolina's successful request for a U.S. Economic Development Administration American Rescue Plan State Tourism Grant in 2021. Some of the grant funding will allow the NC ARC and Rural Planning programs to extend outdoor recreation economy strategic planning and asset development services to other rural communities to support pandemic recovery efforts, build more resilient local economies, and help grow the state's outdoor recreation industry (<https://www.nccommerce.com/news/press-releases/north-carolina-tourism-travel-and-outdoor-recreation-industries-receive-6>).

## Training & Education

The Rural Planning program staff provides economic development training opportunities to communities and shares information on a variety of economic development topics, trends, and best practices.

### Training Partnership with Leverage NC

In 2021, the NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center continued to collaborate with the NC League of Municipalities, the NC Department of Natural and Cultural Resources, and the NC Downtown Development Association on Leverage NC, a resource for communities looking to strengthen their local economies and support enhanced business opportunities ([www.leveragenc.org](http://www.leveragenc.org)). Leverage NC offered 21 educational webinars to build local capacity for economic development in 2021 and the Rural Planning program coordinated two of them: the first segment of a Leverage NC Successful Small Town Series that highlighted Elkin, North Carolina, and a webinar devoted to CERRI that featured conversations with representatives from four participating communities.



## Technical Support

The Rural Planning program provides technical assistance to local governments and their partners, including local, regional, state, federal, public-private, and non-profit agencies, organizations, and institutions, to support community economic development planning and decision-making.

### Coastal Development Permit Reviews

The North Carolina General Assembly adopted the Coastal Area Management Act (CAMA) in 1974 to establish a framework to protect, preserve, allow orderly development of, and manage the state's coastal resources. CAMA requires permits for development in Areas of Environmental Concern, which are places with natural hazards or significant environmental, economic, or cultural resources. For decades, planners from the Rural Planning program, and its predecessor agencies, have conducted CAMA development permit reviews in compliance with statutory requirements and in coordination with the N.C. Department of Environmental Quality, Division of Coastal Management. In 2021, two Rural Planning program staff performed a combined total of 178 CAMA development permit reviews.

## NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center Team

The NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center team is comprised of Main Street and downtown revitalization specialists, rural and community economic development planners, special project coordinators, and Geographic Information System (GIS) analysts.

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To learn more about the NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center and the Rural Planning program, visit [nccommerce.com/about-us/divisions-programs/rural-economic-development/nc-main-street-rural-planning-center](http://nccommerce.com/about-us/divisions-programs/rural-economic-development/nc-main-street-rural-planning-center)