



Meet Lee Padrick, Northeast Prosperity Zone Planner

Lee Padrick joined the North Carolina Department of Commerce in 1997, working as a Community Development Planner and then Chief Planner in the Northeastern Regional Office of the former Division of Community Assistance. For the last four years, he has served as the Community Economic Development Planner for the Northeast Prosperity Zone. The Prosperity Zone, home to approximately 541,000 residents, is roughly framed by Interstate 95 to the west, US Highway 264 to the south, the Virginia border to the north, and the Atlantic Ocean to the east. It consists of the counties of Beaufort, Bertie, Camden, Chowan, Currituck, Dare, Gates, Halifax, Hertford, Hyde, Martin, Northampton, Pasquotank, Perquimans, Pitt, Tyrrell, and Washington.

What are some of your current projects in the Prosperity Zone?

A couple of projects come to mind. I am finishing an economic strategy for the Town of Bethel, located in northern Pitt County. Bethel has identified its proximity to major employment markets as a strength and wants to market itself as a great alternative to living in the city.

I am also working on a project with the Town of Columbia in Tyrrell County. Columbia is a regional hub of activity along US Highway 64, and many folks driving to and from the Outer Banks stop and spend money there. It also has some unique ecological assets and the Town is working to use these assets as a springboard for economic development.

In terms of rural economic development, what are some of the opportunities that are being explored by communities in the Prosperity Zone? What challenges do they face?

Northeast North Carolina faces many challenges, one of which is geographical. The northeast corner of the state is relatively isolated from the rest of North Carolina, and there are many cultural ties to the State of Virginia because of the proximity to the Tidewater area. Those who make their home here mainly work and shop outside of the region. Because of this, much of their disposable income flows to other areas. A significant challenge is figuring out how communities can retain more of those dollars to help build economic prosperity and sustainability.

The region's geographical uniqueness and access to water are great opportunities. Also, the State has invested in upgrading the roads in the Northeast, making most towns and counties very accessible to other parts of the country. The Rural Planning program works hard to find such opportunities in the Northeast counties.

What is one thing you have learned about or discovered in the Prosperity Zone that you did not know before and that is worth sharing?

Did you know that Tyrrell County is home to a potato that only grows in and around the county and is sought after by most of the major potato chip manufacturers? That's a potential industry and supply chain that could bring good jobs to the area.

What aspect(s) of your position/role do you enjoy the most?

My passion is helping communities find their uniqueness and turn their niche into an economic development strategy. I love seeing people in small towns and rural counties, through our planning process, realize what is so special about their area, and then reach consensus on their vision of the future.

I am also a data nerd, so I love conducting market analyses for client communities and trying to figure out the local flow of money (i.e. surpluses and leakages). As of this interview, I am working on a market analysis for a NC Main Street community, Roanoke Rapids, to gauge not only how much local money is flowing inside and out of the community, but also the impact of the town's proximity to Lake Gaston, a popular vacation/second home destination.

Is there anything else you would like readers to know about the Prosperity Zone?

Of all the great places in the northeastern corner of the state, mainland Hyde County is by far my favorite community in which to work and visit. It is geographically isolated from the rest of the state, so the folks who live there must rely on one another to get things done. It is beautiful area - easily my favorite northeastern community.

Have you celebrated any recent professional achievements and/or attended any interesting workshops, courses, etc., in the past year?

I attended a Retail Business Recruitment workshop last winter in Biscoe, NC. The focus of the workshop was how to recruit franchise businesses to your community, and the criteria those businesses use when deciding on site locations. The Rural Planning program is going to offer a similar workshop this fall in Smithfield, and I think our client communities will find it interesting and useful.

What are some activities that you enjoy doing during non-work hours?

I like to fish the Crystal Coast area for red drum (the state fish!) in my spare time. It is strictly a catch-and-release fishery, and I participate in all red drum tournaments in the state.

I also have a passion for fitness and nutrition and spend roughly 12 hours a week at the gym when I am not at work. I am currently completing my Certified Personal Trainer certification and look forward to helping people reach their fitness and body composition goals.

What is the best way for communities to contact you?

I can be reached at 252-565-2060, or via email at lpadrick@nccommerce.com.