

Rural Planning Program Overview

N.C. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE | NC MAIN STREET & RURAL PLANNING CENTER



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Part of the NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center, the Rural Planning program works with municipalities, county governments, and other organizations in rural areas to provide strategic economic development planning and implementation services, technical support, and training. Such services help communities prepare for and respond to economic growth opportunities in ways that improve quality of life and prosperity, build community capacity, and maintain rural character. The Rural Planning program has staff members based in each of North Carolina's Prosperity Zones (see below).

The Rural Planning program is an essential part of the Rural Economic Development Division's commitment to building strong regional partnerships. Actively engaged at the community level, our planners have a unique perspective on critical local issues and key opportunities for success. Through various programs, our Rural Planning program helps increase competitiveness and enhance the quality of life in communities across our state.

KENNY FLOWERS, ASSISTANT SECRETARY

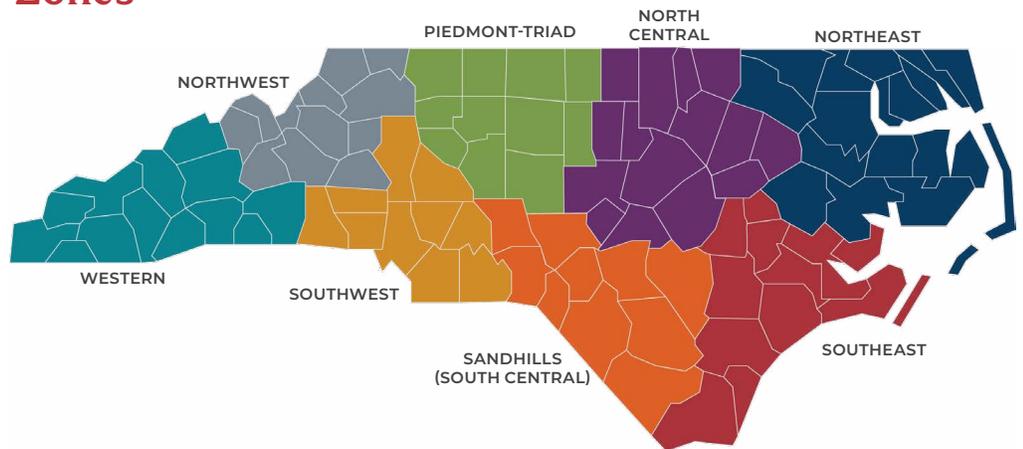
Rural Economic Development Division, NC Department of Commerce

North Carolina Prosperity Zones

In 2016, at the direction of the N.C. General Assembly, the N.C. Department of Commerce located a rural planner in each of eight Prosperity Zones, with representatives of other state agencies.

PROSPERITY ZONE COLLABORATION

The Prosperity Zones were established, in part, to encourage collaboration between the state agency representatives assigned to them. In Fiscal Year 2018, the rural planners took part in a project to develop Regional Strategic Initiatives. Led by the N.C. Department of Commerce's Labor & Economic Analysis Division, the planners and other Prosperity Zone partners worked with stakeholders to review analyses of each region's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, and to identify strategic initiatives to improve economic conditions.



OUR MISSION

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.

Rural Planning Program Services

Recognizing that economic prosperity is the number one priority in most communities, Rural Planning program staff members work with community leaders to add value to their economic development efforts by providing a variety of services and assistance, which include:

Strategic Economic Development Planning & Implementation Services

- Five-year strategic plan and program development
- One to two-day economic development assessments
- One-day strategic planning workshops
- Implementation services

Technical Support

- Assistance with a wide range of community and economic development needs (planning for high impact areas, development policy review, etc.)
- Community-specific assistance (geospatial analysis & mapping to evaluate economic opportunities; developing solutions that address particular economic development issues or needs, etc.)

Training and Education

- Workshops and other training opportunities
- Research and information-sharing (best practices, success stories, etc.)

Rural Planning staff members also collaborate on many projects with a variety of regional, state, and federal agencies.

ONE TO TWO-DAY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ASSESSMENTS

For rural communities looking for a shorter path to identifying and responding to economic growth opportunities, the Rural Planning program offers an Economic Development Assessment. Following a preliminary review of existing plans and socio-economic data, Rural Planning staff visit the community and meet with a local workgroup to identify assets and complete a SWOT analysis, tour the area, and conduct stakeholder interviews. Staff prepare findings and recommendations to spark short-term economic development successes. Such successes may inspire a community to begin a more comprehensive strategic planning process, help it prioritize local public investment decisions, or generate new project ideas and initiatives.

Strategic Economic Development Planning & Implementation Services

FIVE-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN DEVELOPMENT

In 2017, the Rural Planning program tested and adopted a strategic planning model to help smaller towns and rural communities focus their economic development efforts over a five-year period. It is based on a process the NC Main Street program has used successfully for many years.

To start the strategic planning process, Rural Planning program staff work with a local committee to look at a community's current economic situation and identify its unique assets, opportunities, and challenges. The planners then guide the committee through the development of an economic vision statement that reflects the community's desired economic future. The vision provides the framework for economic strategies. The end result is a five-year, asset-based, strategic economic development plan with a one-year implementation plan with actions and projects to carry the plan forward.



Featured Projects The Town of Sylva (Jackson County) was a test community for the strategic planning model. Through the planning process, the project committee developed economic strategies built upon Sylva being an ideal place to have a business, visit, and live.



The Town of Hookerton, in Greene County, was also a test community. Its economic development strategies focused on business recruitment and job creation, downtown revitalization, and creating new opportunities for housing. Not only did the Rural Planning program fine-tune its strategic planning process and services by trying out the model, but these and other test communities also gained goals, objectives, and tangible actions to advance their economic strategies.

After this process, I don't feel as much like our hands are tied. I feel like we certainly have obstacles, but there are now real strategies that Sylva can be focusing on to improve economic and community development.

PAIGE R. DOWLING, TOWN MANAGER, TOWN OF SYLVA, NC



Featured Project The Town of China Grove wanted to grow and develop its downtown area but did not know where to start. The Rural Planning program conducted a two-day Economic Development Assessment for the town. While the Assessment addressed the entire town, it also focused on China Grove's central business district. The Assessment Report recommended that the town focus on four strategic goals: community involvement and communication, downtown retail and dining options, downtown building appearance, and orderly growth of key intersections. The report also proposed a series of actions to achieve each goal.

ONE-DAY STRATEGIC PLANNING WORKSHOPS

Rural planners work with communities to design and facilitate half-day or full-day economic development strategic planning workshops for boards, committees, and staff. The workshops often have a specific focus, such as asset mapping, SWOT analysis, goal setting, or action planning, and are intended to help groups identify issues, generate ideas, establish a direction, and determine how to move forward.

Featured Project Burke Development, Inc. (BDI), and the Burke County Board of REALTORS® requested Rural Planning program assistance with a Housing Summit in 2017. The event brought together representatives of a variety of interests and industries to address a key concern in Burke County: housing supply and demand. Rural planning staff and a team of facilitators designed and executed the event's information gathering exercises. Through productive conversations, participants identified housing issues and objectives that could be achieved in the short-term. They also developed initial actions to advance the objectives and many volunteered to lead or serve on various work groups to tackle the issues.



This [Burke County Housing Summit] was a very impressive event and we had the correct people in the room. The key to this Summit being a success will be the follow-up and how a plan is developed to address this important and pressing issue for Burke County's future economic growth.

ALAN WOOD, PRESIDENT AND CEO, BURKE DEVELOPMENT, INC.

Technical Support

Through its technical support services, the Rural Planning program provides information and assistance for communities and economic development organizations to examine conditions and trends, answer questions, consider options, and find solutions to address economic development issues.

Featured Projects To help towns measure and increase the economic impact of community events, the Rural Planning program, with funding from the Appalachian Regional Commission, partnered with the UNC-Greensboro Bryan School of Business to develop an Events and Festivals Tool Kit. Rural planners have also mapped visitor data collected by a tourism development authority, created a wayfinding signage plan, provided organizational support to a new business association, and helped develop projects for grant funding.

IMPLEMENTATION SERVICES

The Rural Planning program helps communities move from economic development planning to action. Planners work with communities on plans and projects that implement their strategies. Implementation services include working with groups to identify the tasks, people, resources, and time needed to carry out projects. Depending on the project, communities may also engage Rural Planning staff to assist with specific implementation tasks.



Featured Project The Town of Boonville developed an Economic Development Strategic Plan with assistance from the Rural Planning program. As part of its small business development and downtown revitalization strategy, the town wanted to identify businesses that could serve the community. Rural Planning staff helped the town develop and conduct an online consumer survey. Based on the survey results, Boonville focused on recruiting a pharmacy and grocery store.



At the request of the N.C. Department of Commerce, the Rural Planning program provides technical assistance and support to a variety of federal, state, and regional

Rural Planning Services Delivered in Fiscal Year 2018

108

NC COMMUNITIES DIRECTLY SERVED

41

STRATEGIC PLANS

27

IMPLEMENTATION SERVICES

27

MARKET STUDIES

25

GIS SERVICES

4

DEVELOPMENT POLICY REVIEWS

organizations and projects. Examples include: serving on the North Carolina Shellfish Mariculture Advisory Committee which prepared the *North Carolina Strategic Plan for Shellfish Mariculture: A Vision to 2030*; working with N.C. State University Industry Expansion Solutions and the N.C. Department of Military and Veterans Affairs on the North Carolina Defense Industry Diversification Initiative; and leading a compatible use effort with the U.S. Department of Defense Office of Economic Adjustment to enable rural communities and the military to make informed and mutually beneficial land use decisions.

Training & Education

Rural Planning program staff give presentations, conduct workshops, and assist with other educational events to share economic development ideas, tools, and best practices being implemented by communities in North Carolina and beyond. Rural planners also compile and provide relevant examples of plans, programs, projects, policies, funding resources, and other information that can help communities develop and implement economic development strategies.



Featured Project In late 2018, the Rural Planning program began developing The Rural Solutions Workshop Series: Best Practices for Small Town Economic Development. The series is designed to provide smaller and resource-limited communities with information and tools to help them grow their local economies. The first workshop in the series, Recruiting Retail Businesses, debuted in Biscoe, NC, in early 2019.

I plan to identify some properties that make sense for retail recruitment and then start building relationships with the right companies.

SURVEY RESPONSE FROM RECRUITING RETAIL BUSINESSES WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT, JANUARY, 2019

NC Main Street & Rural Planning Program 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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Program Manager, Appalachian Regional Commission

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Community Economic Development Planner, Southeast Region

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*The Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) is a supporting partner of the NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center.

NEED RURAL PLANNING SERVICES?

Please contact Darren Rhodes, Rural Planning Program Manager at (336) 618 5117 or drhodes@nccommerce.com, or the Prosperity Zone planner assigned to your region (staff contact information can be found [here](#)).



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