



2022 ANNUAL REPORT

# The Economic Impact of *Rural Planning*

in North Carolina

January-December 2022 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.



**MS&RP**  
NC MAIN STREET & RURAL PLANNING CENTER  
DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

Machelle Sanders, Secretary of Commerce | Kenny Flowers, Assistant Secretary for Rural Economic Development  
Elizabeth H. Parham, Director, NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center | Karen Smith, Manager, Rural Planning Program

# 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). Additional program staff are based in Asheville.

## On the Cover: Clockwise

Rainbow Trout on the Town Square  
*Bryson City, NC*

Hamilton Rosenwald River Center  
*Hamilton, NC*

Andy Griffith Mural  
*Mount Airy, NC*

New Town of Erwin Sign  
*Erwin, NC*

Pender County Courthouse  
*Burgaw, NC*

Dr. W. Otis Duck Memorial Greenway  
*Mars Hill, NC*

## Strategic Planning & Implementation

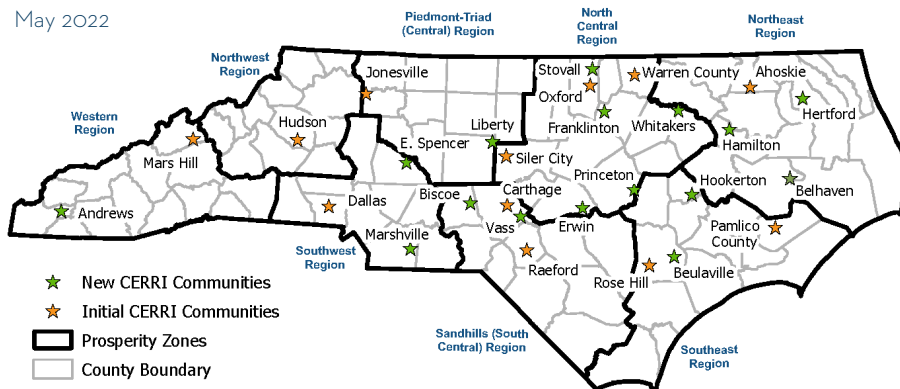
The Rural Planning program works with communities to develop asset-based economic development strategies and implementation plans to help identify, prepare for, and respond to growth opportunities. In 2022, the Rural Planning program continued its community economic recovery and resiliency-building work and introduced a new initiative, funded by the U.S. Economic Development Administration, to provide outdoor recreation economy strategic planning and asset development services to rural communities.

### Community Economic Recovery and Resiliency Initiative (CERRI)

The Rural Planning program established the Community Economic Recovery and Resiliency Initiative (CERRI) in 2021 to help small and rural communities respond to economic challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Program staff work with CERRI communities to develop economic recovery plans that support small businesses and build economic resiliency. The program and its partners provide CERRI participants with project assistance, training, and resources to support economic recovery plan implementation. In 2022, Rural Planning program staff provided CERRI services to 28 communities: 12 that began the initiative in 2021, plus 16 more that joined in 2022.

### Current CERRI Communities

May 2022



### CERRI Communities Benefit from the New Rural Transformation Grant Fund

The N.C. Department of Commerce, Rural Economic Development Division, established the Rural Transformation Grant Fund (RTGF) in 2022. The RTGF has three funding categories for transformative community economic development projects: Community Enhancements, Resilient Neighborhoods, and Downtown Revitalization. The RTGF also has a local government capacity-building program, Rural Community Capacity (RC2), with grant funds available to communities that complete the RC2 program.

In 2022, the Division held two RTGF application cycles from which it awarded a total of \$39.8 million to rural North Carolina communities and selected 19 local governments to participate in the RC2 program. Ten CERRI communities received RTGF awards totaling \$4.8 million (12 percent of the total funds awarded) and seven CERRI communities were among the 19 selected for the RC2 program.

“The CERRI program was a perfectly timed process for us. The Rural Planning program staff fostered collaboration with various Town of Vass and community representatives to work toward a common interest for the economic vitality of our town. Together we devised a vision and action plan. It’s incredible that we’ve already made progress on several goals, including the adoption of a gateway plan. The CERRI work group created a local business network immediately and the Town will be improving walkability thanks to receiving a Rural Transformation grant for resilient neighborhoods!”

*Molly Goodman, Town Planner, Vass, NC*

## Creating Outdoor Recreation Economies (CORE) Program

The Rural Planning program launched a new initiative in 2022, Creating Outdoor Recreation Economies (CORE), that offers strategic planning and technical assistance to help rural North Carolina communities leverage the state's abundant outdoor recreation assets to support local economic growth. The CORE program is funded by a U.S. Economic Development Administration State Tourism Grant.

The Rural Planning program will facilitate strategic planning processes with CORE program participants to identify outdoor recreation assets that present economic growth opportunities and to create strategies to develop them. Strategies will focus on actions and projects communities can do to increase tourism, encourage small business development, enhance quality of life for residents, plan for asset and infrastructure development, and/or position themselves to grow and attract outdoor gear manufacturing industries. The CORE program will also provide technical assistance and training to help communities implement their strategies.

Following an informational webinar about CORE in fall 2022, more than 30 communities indicated interest in the program. In January 2023, the N.C. Department formally announced that 34 local governments from across the state will participate in the CORE program.

## 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.

### Rural Community Capacity (RC2) Program Assistance

The Rural Community Capacity (RC2) program, part of the Rural Transformation Grant Fund (RTGF), provides local governments from rural and distressed areas with educational programming, technical assistance, and other support to help them plan and implement economic development programs and projects.

Rural Planning program staff led two class sessions for the 19 local governments engaged in the RC2 program: one on asset-based economic development strategic planning and another on project development. Staff also helped participants prepare economic development project summaries to share with their communities and potential funders. RC2 graduates are eligible to apply for RTGF Community Implementation grants.

“RC2 has been an excellent experience for the Town of Marshville. By meeting with other rural communities, we were able to communicate shared struggles that the RC2 Program was able to address. Especially rewarding were the guest experts brought in to share their perspectives, adding to the staff's extensive knowledge, all delivered in an atmosphere of warmth, humor, and friendship, making the entire experience something that will impact our community.”

*Franklin Deese, Town Manager, Marshville, NC*

## Training and Education

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



### Leverage NC

The NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center, the NC League of Municipalities, the NC State

Historic Preservation Office, and the NC Downtown Development Association continued to collaborate on Leverage NC, a training resource for local governments that want to strengthen local economies. Rural Planning program staff worked with other Leverage NC partners to select 2022 webinar topics. Staff also developed and moderated some of the sessions. In 2022, Leverage NC offered 19 webinars that provided training for 1,231 individuals.

The Leverage NC website has an archive of recordings of past webinars ([www.leveragenc.org](http://www.leveragenc.org)).

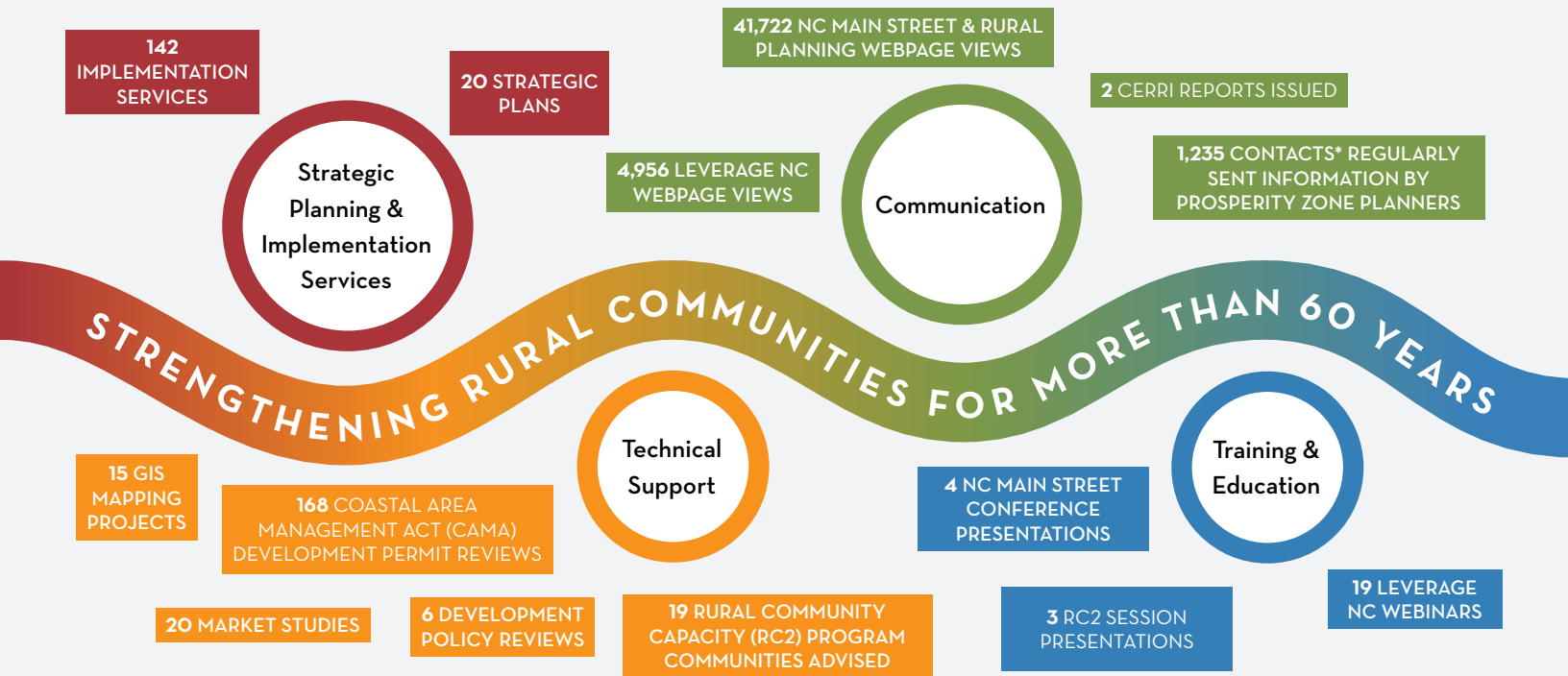


*RC2 participants from China Grove, East Spencer, and Marshville worked with the Rural Planning program on project development.*

### NC Main Street Conference

The Rural Planning program is part of the NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center team that plans, organizes, manages, and implements the Center's largest annual training event, the North Carolina Main Street Conference. The 2022 conference, *Healthy Communities Begin on Main Street*, took place on a virtual platform and drew 600 attendees.

# 2022 Calendar Year | NC Rural Planning Program Services Delivered to 147 Communities



\*Contacts are individuals with local units of government, state and federal agencies, regional councils of governments, economic development organizations, educational institutions, non-profits, and other entities.

## 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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For a complete list of NC Main Street and Small Town Main Street communities, visit

[commerce.nc.gov/about-us/divisions-programs/rural-economic-development-division/nc-main-street-rural-planning-center/main-street-program](https://commerce.nc.gov/about-us/divisions-programs/rural-economic-development-division/nc-main-street-rural-planning-center/main-street-program)