

The Economic Impact of Main Street & Rural Planning in North Carolina



2024 ANNUAL REPORT
January-December 2024 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 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.



THE PROGRAMS

The NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center (the Center) manages the NC Main Street programs, including Main Street, Small Town Main Street, and the Downtown Associate Community program; the NC Rural Planning Program, including the Creating Outdoor Recreation Economies (CORE) initiative; the federally funded Rural Transformation Grant Fund (RTGF) – Downtown Revitalization category; the state funded Rural Downtown Economic Development Grant; and the NC Main to Main Trail initiative. Through the Center’s programming, staff provides North Carolina communities with strategic economic development planning, technical assistance, extensive training and education, and grants for downtown revitalization. CORE and the Main to Main Trail are economic development initiatives that are supported in part by a U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) State Tourism Grant.



The N.C. Department of Commerce Main Street & Rural Planning Center, NC Regional Development Commissions, and Outdoor Economy Office teams

THE SERVICES

Strategic Economic Development Planning



Pailin’s Alley, Elizabeth City, NC
Photo Credit: Elizabeth City Downtown, Inc.

The NC Main Street Program team works with designated Main Street programs and their community leaders to develop market-driven, asset based, five-year strategic economic development plans and one-to-two-year implementation/action plans for downtowns. The Main Street Four-Point Approach® for downtown revitalization, (*Economic Vitality, Design, Promotion, and Organization*), created by the National Main Street Center, is used to organize the actions and target transformational projects for implementation that increase economic impact in downtown. In 2024, staff worked with 22 communities and completed 18 strategic economic development plans, and conducted a comprehensive resource team visit and economic development report for Elizabeth City Downtown, Inc.



The NC Rural Planning Program works with local governments to develop asset-based strategic economic development plans. These plans help community leaders identify, prepare for, and respond to growth opportunities. Rural Planning staff worked with 33 communities on strategic planning projects and completed 14 community economic development assessments and economic development strategic plans in 2024. The program also continued to implement the CORE initiative that it launched in 34 communities in 2023. In 2024, staff worked with CORE communities to identify outdoor recreation assets that presented opportunities for economic growth and to develop strategies and projects to increase tourism, encourage small business development, enhance residents’ quality of life, plan for asset and infrastructure development, and attract outdoor gear manufacturers. The program completed eight CORE strategic plans in 2024.



CORE strategic planning session, Hickory, NC

Technical Assistance

Providing high quality technical assistance for North Carolina communities is a primary component of the day-to-day work of the NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center. The team provides communities with Main Street program, downtown revitalization, and rural economic development best practices, property redevelopment and small business guidance, information and resources for project funding opportunities, local government operations support, market analysis and mobile phone location data, Geographic Information System (GIS) analysis and mapping, and tools and templates to build local capacity.



In partnership with the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNC Greensboro), Department of Interior Architecture, the NC Main Street Program provides designated Main Street and Small Town Main Street programs with façade improvement plans and upper story schematic plans for property and business owners located in downtown districts. Students, known as Main Street Fellows, meet with downtown property owners and create plans in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. UNC Greensboro completed 26 design plans during the 2024 calendar year.

UNCG Design Proposal, 134 S. Third Street, Smithfield, NC

UNC System Partners Support CORE Communities

Communities that complete CORE strategic plans with the Rural Planning Program are eligible to receive implementation services from four University of North Carolina (UNC) System partners: the Center for Industry Research and Engagement at UNC Greensboro; NCGrowth at UNC Chapel Hill; East Carolina University; and the Initiative for Community Growth and Development at North Carolina State University. In 2024, UNC System partners completed four projects in CORE communities and were engaged in eight others. Projects have included the development of marketing plans and social media tools, design studies to connect outdoor recreation assets with communities and businesses, lodging feasibility studies, and an economic impact analysis of an outdoor resource. Financial support for the UNC System partners' services is provided by the U.S. EDA grant that funds the CORE initiative.



NC State University CORE implementation site visit to Mayodan, NC



Working with the NC Main Street & Rural Planning team on CORE has been an incredibly rewarding experience, providing guidance, knowledge, and planning expertise to help Western Rockingham County navigate the process of enhancing its outdoor recreation assets. This support will enable the community to create jobs, bolster tourism efforts, improve the local economy, and enhance the quality of life for residents, all while preserving and promoting natural assets.”

LINDSAY PEGG

Tourism Manager, Economic Development, Small Business & Tourism, Rockingham County

Main Street Impact Report Template

In an effort to help local Main Street programs better tell their story, the NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center created an impact report template. The report is used to share program, planning, and statistical information with local governments, small businesses and downtown property owners, volunteers and citizens, and is linked to the Main to Main Trail through the Main Street Impact logo.



Technical Assistance Continued



Project development training for RC2 participants at Appalachian State University

Rural Community Capacity (RC2) Program Assistance

The Rural Community Capacity (RC2) program, part of the RTGF, provides local governments with educational programming, technical assistance, and other support to help them plan and implement economic development programs and projects. In 2024, the Rural Economic Development Division offered the program in partnership with the Walker College of Business at Appalachian State University (ASU) and the Master of Public Administration Program at East Carolina University (ECU). Of the 19 local governments selected for the 2024 RC2 program, ECU assisted eight and ASU supported 11. In August 2024, the Rural Planning Program provided project development training to 10 local governments at ASU. The session helped the communities hone project ideas into funding pitches to prepare them to submit RTGF Community Implementation grant applications.

Hurricane Helene Response in Western NC

The NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center and Appalachian Regional Commission teams assumed an active role in fall 2024 to support and assist communities in western North Carolina devastated by the physical and economic impacts of Hurricane Helene. Immediately following the hurricane, staff began a comprehensive community outreach effort to establish contact with local governments in the counties covered by the federal disaster declaration. Staff created a disaster recovery webpage, established a recovery database, and regularly shared resources and funding opportunities with leaders of impacted communities. In November and December, staff worked with other Rural Economic Development Division (REDD) team members to launch Operation Elf to collect toys and gifts that were donated to benefit the Fairview Community Center and families impacted by Hurricane Helene. In 2025, staff will continue to support impacted communities through the Western North Carolina Economic Recovery and Rebuilding initiative to provide community engagement, planning, capacity building, and resources and support to help impacted communities' economies recover faster.



Team REDD delivery of toys and gifts to western North Carolina through Operation Elf

Training & Education

Attendance counts for the NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center's robust training and education opportunities totaled 2,354 in 2024, the largest number in the Center's history. Through an effort to take training to rural communities, 24 statewide trainings were offered in locations within all eight prosperity zones. The Center launched a new educational series for economic development professionals and potential developers on small scale development and historic tax credits, and another series on creating destination businesses and communities. Both series featured eight workshops each. In addition to the new trainings, the Center hosted Regional Meetings with downtown professionals in May and November, and a Main Street Directors' Meeting in Belmont in August 2024.

Main Street Basic Training courses were held in January, April, August, and October, and provided Main Street and Small Town Main Street program staff, board members, and volunteers with in-depth knowledge of the components of each of the four areas of Main Street's comprehensive program: *Economic Vitality, Design, Promotion, and Organization*. Partnerships are important to the Center, and staff offered training in 2024 through collaborations with UPLIFT (Understand, Plan, Link, Innovate, Finance and Tell), Appalachian State University, and VisitNC. Community-specific trainings provide opportunities to build capacity at the local level, and trainings were provided to CORE communities on outdoor recreation economies and to designated Main Street, Small Town Main Street, and Downtown Associate Community programs for board and committee members on a variety of downtown revitalization topics.

In an effort to better tell the story of downtown revitalization and rural economic development in North Carolina, communication was a primary focus for the NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center in 2024. Staff shared resources, educational and funding opportunities, and community success stories through both traditional communication methods and social media tools. The [NC Main Street Facebook page](#) experienced a 20% increase in reach and a 14% increase in individual followers. The [NC Rural Planning Facebook page](#), launched in late 2023, experienced a 97% increase in followers. The [NC Main Street and Planning training website](#) was enhanced with more videos, program guidance, and training opportunities for North Carolina communities and experienced a 36% increase in webpage views.

2024 TOTAL:

2,354

A record-breaking number of training & education participants!

Training & Education *Continued*



NC Main Street Conference

The NC Main Street Conference is the largest statewide downtown revitalization conference held in the United States. The 23rd annual conference, themed *Ignite, Activate, Empower...Main Street*, was held in March 2024 in Goldsboro, NC. It was a record-breaking event that attracted 805 attendees from 138 North Carolina communities and 12 other states. Erin Barnes, President and CEO of Main Street America, was in attendance to deliver a plenary address to the audience. The 2024 Annual Main Street Awards Ceremony honored 16 Main Street projects, and the 2023 Main Street Champions Recognition Ceremony honored 40 individuals, organizations, and agencies that made significant contributions to their local Main Street programs.

Erin Barnes, President and CEO, Main Street America, at the 2024 NC Main Street Conference in Goldsboro, NC



The NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center knocked it out of the ballpark again! The 2024 NC Main Street conference was educational, entertaining, and enjoyable. The NC Main Street & Rural Planning team definitely ignites, activates, and empowers Main Street!”

CONNIE KINCAID

Business Development Manager, Alexander County Economic Development Corporation



Jon Schallert, President, The Schallert Group, Making Your Community & Business a Destination Workshop, Concord, NC



Small Scale Development & Historic Tax Credit Workshop Walking Tour, New Bern, NC

Small Scale Development and Historic Tax Credit Workshops

In 2024, the NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center, in collaboration with the NC State Historic Preservation Office, launched a series of workshops designed to educate local commercial property owners and economic development staff on small scale development. The purpose of the training was to build local capacity on how to utilize the historic tax credit program as a funding mechanism to redevelop downtown commercial properties. Six workshops were held in six of the eight prosperity zones in 2024, and two workshops will be held in 2025 in the other two zones. A total of 246 individuals from 112 communities took part in the training in 2024.

Making Your Community & Business a Destination

Funded in part through a U.S. EDA grant to enhance the NC Main to Main Trail and help designated NC Main Street communities become more economically viable districts, the NC Main Street team launched a series of workshops led by Jon Schallert, President of the Schallert Group, a national destination creation firm. The training provided small businesses and local Main Street directors with Schallert’s 14-step “destination business” process. In 2024, eight workshops were held in the state’s eight prosperity zones and an online education portal was established for businesses that could not attend the in-person workshops. A total of 429 individuals from 66 of 72 NC Main Street communities received the training in 2024 and are eligible to participate in an advanced training series in 2025.



THE GRANTS

Rural Downtown Economic Development Grant

In March 2024, the N.C. Department of Commerce’s Rural Economic Development Division launched a new state funded category within the Rural Engagement and Investment portfolio called the Rural Downtown Economic Development (RDED) Grant. Intended to support job creation and retention in downtown districts through investment in publicly owned property, 35 grants were awarded during the 2024 calendar year to local governments in NC Development Tier 1 and 2 counties, and rural census tracts in Tier 3 counties. Projects funded through the RDED Grant include public infrastructure, public buildings, and mixed-use development projects, including downtown streetscape improvement projects, community facilities and gathering places, commercial/residential redevelopment projects, and the rehabilitation/expansion of historic downtown buildings. Grant awards totaled \$15,177,112 in 2024 and will support 1,951 jobs in downtown districts.

Rural Transformation Grant Fund

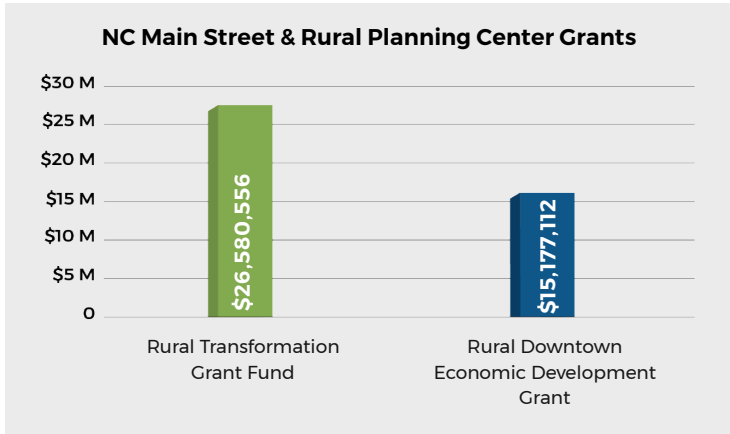
The RTGF continued in 2024 with project implementation. The fund was made available through the American Rescue Plan Act. Although no new grants were awarded in 2024, 43 grants were awarded in 2022 and 2023, totaling \$26,580,556, and were administered through the 2024 calendar year. All funded projects will be completed by December 31, 2026, and three projects were completed in 2024 in Elkin, Roxboro, and Valdese, NC.



The Old Rock School, Valdese, NC, a community center rehabilitation funded in part through NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center grant programs

“ We are excited to see these renovations take place and greatly appreciate the support of the NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center and the assistance of the Rural Transformation Fund Grant. Without the Commerce investment, this project would not have been possible”.

MORRISSA ANGI
 Director of Community Affairs & Tourism, Town of Valdese



THE IMPACT

Main Street Program Community Statistics: Fiscal Year 2023-24

In FY 23-24, NC Main Street and Small Town Main Street communities collectively saw a large increase in full time and part time jobs from the previous year, and the largest number of volunteer hours in the program’s history, representing a dedication from North Carolinians to invest in their communities.

\$377,451,681
 PUBLIC/PRIVATE INVESTMENT

293
 BUILDINGS REHABILITATED

360
 FAÇADE IMPROVEMENTS

375
 NET GAIN BUSINESSES

2,461
 NET GAIN FTE & PTE JOBS

131,986
 VOLUNTEER HOURS
 Valued at \$4,176,037

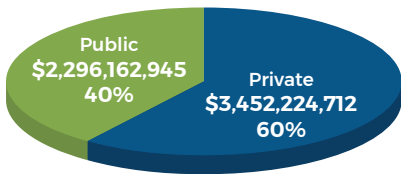
2024 CALENDAR YEAR RESULTS: 231 COMMUNITIES DIRECTLY SERVED

53 Years of Strengthening Local Communities

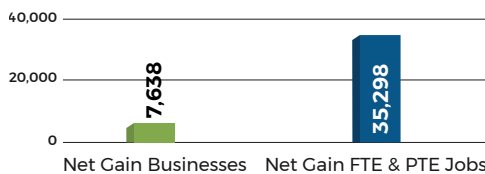
● Strategic Economic Development Planning ● Technical Assistance ● Training & Education ● Grants



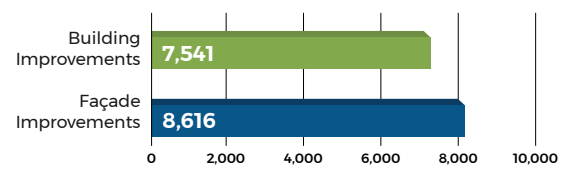
Total NCMS / STMS Cumulative Data: \$5.58 Billion Investment and 37,605 Jobs Since Program Inception



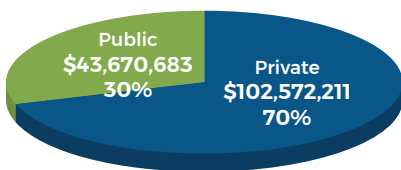
NCMS | Cumulative Investment, 1981-2024



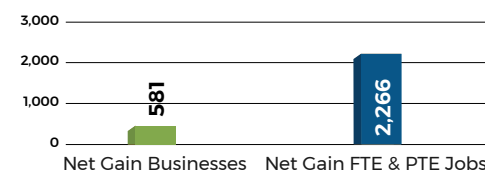
NCMS | Cumulative Job Growth, 1981-2024



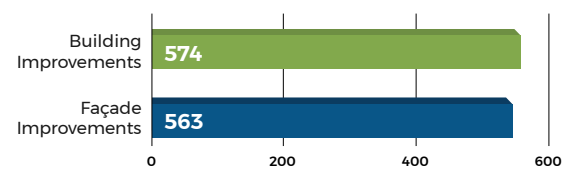
NCMS | Cumulative Property Improvements, 1981-2024



STMS | Cumulative Investment, 2004-2024



STMS | Cumulative Job Growth, 2004-2024



STMS | Cumulative Property Improvements, 2004-2024

STMS numbers reflect communities that moved up to NC Main Street designation.

ABOUT THE CENTER

Main Street America™ is a program of the nonprofit National Main Street Center, a subsidiary of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Coordinating agencies such as the N.C. Department of Commerce’s NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center, locally designated communities in North Carolina, and more than 1,200 additional neighborhoods and communities across the country are working in collaboration with the National Main Street Center to build stronger communities through asset-based economic development. There are 81 designated Main Street and Small Town Main Street communities in North Carolina, yet the principles of Main Street® are adopted and followed by hundreds of communities, of all sizes, throughout the state.



NORTH CAROLINA MAIN STREET

Part of the NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center, the Rural Planning Program provides municipalities, county governments, and other organizations in rural areas with services and assistance to add value to their economic development efforts. Staff work in North Carolina’s eight prosperity zone regions from offices in the West (Waynesville), Northwest (West Jefferson), Piedmont-Triad (Mount Airy), Southwest (Lincolnton), North Central (Clayton), Sandhills (Fayetteville), Northeast (Washington), and Southeast (Leland). Additional program staff are based in Asheville.

To learn more about the NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center, visit [NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center | NC Commerce](#)

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, grant administrators, and a Geographic Information System (GIS) analyst.

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