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## Community and Economic Development in North Carolina and Beyond Blog: Arts and Economic Development in Eastern NC — African American Music Trail

By Marcia Perritt

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The African American Music Trail (AAMT), a heritage trail network commemorating the rich arts and cultural history of eight eastern North Carolina counties, is underway in Kinston, North Carolina (NC). Kinston, the Lenoir County seat, will serve as the trailhead for the AAMT, which is a collaborative project of the NC Department of Cultural Resources (DCR) and the NC Department of Transportation (DOT), and spearheaded by the NC Arts Council. The AAMT seeks to promote the significant accomplishments of North Carolina musicians like saxophonist Maceo Parker and his brother Melvin Parker, both Kinston natives, who are well known for their collaborations with James Brown and the George Clinton collective the Parliament-Funkadelic. Kinston was selected to serve as the primary hub of the AAMT because of strong partnerships between the City of Kinston, the Kinston arts community, the Tourism Development Authority, and the Kinston Community Council for the Arts (KCCA), a nonprofit organization that has championed the AAMT on the local front. Construction on a four acre music park and sculpture garden in downtown Kinston will break ground late this summer.

Kinston has received over \$650,000 in grant funding over the past seven years to support projects related to the AAMT. Funders include the NC Arts Council, the NC Department of Transportation, and the Golden Leaf Foundation. The Community and Economic Development Program (CED) is working with the City of Kinston to explore innovative ways to revitalize a downtown neighborhood called Mitchelltown, which lies in walking distance to the AAMT music park. The city hopes that the many vacant, dilapidated, yet historic homes of Mitchelltown will ultimately house the artists and musicians who comprise Kinston's burgeoning creative economy.

Similar to the Mississippi Blues Trail (MBT), a series of historical markers linking sites across the Mississippi Delta, the AAMT will eventually include interactive kiosks, public art projects, as well as maps and guidebooks directing music fans to cultural events and sites across eastern North Carolina. And, like the Mississippi Blues Trail, the AAMT is expected to provide a much needed boost to local economies in economically distressed counties like Lenoir County. A recent study by the Mississippi Arts Commission and the Mississippi Development Authority on the economic impact of the creative economy on Delta communities found that in Indianola, a hub of the MBT, tourism and travel expenditures increased by 12.5% in its first year. Moreover, a new report released by the NC Arts Council found that the state's arts and cultural industry has a tremendously positive impact on the North Carolina economy, yielding \$119 million in revenue for state and



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local government. In Lenoir County alone, the arts and cultural industry supported 52 full-time positions and accounted for over \$1.5 million in expenditures in 2010. The entrance of the African American Musical Trail on the state's arts and cultural scene could bring additional revenue to eastern NC communities by leveraging the area's unique cultural assets. In addition, the influx of tourism that the AAMT is set to bring to downtown Kinston could benefit other local businesses, such as shops, restaurants, and hotels. That's music to our ears.

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\*Photo of Maceo Parker by Cedric Chatterley