



Community and Economic Development in North Carolina and Beyond Blog: Community-Campus Partnerships: Marion and Valdese, NC

By CED Guest Author

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Marvin Hoffman is a faculty member at Appalachian State University.

Two years ago, Appalachian State University (ASU) joined a partnership with the Community-Campus Partnership (CCP) at UNC Chapel Hill to support small towns in North Carolina. The North Carolina Rural Center provided grant funding for faculty, students and staff from ASU, UNC-Chapel Hill and UNC-Pembroke to support the work of small town leaders attempting to carry out transformative local economic and community development projects. This post will review several of the major accomplishments from our campus' partnerships with the City of Marion and the Town of Valdese.

ASU faculty, students and staff performed a variety of roles and offered technical assistance that helped each of the two towns implement the plans that were developed in the Rural Center's NC STEP community-based planning process.

Infrastructure Projects

ASU graduate students assisted the City of Marion with applications for funding to provide a sidewalk to an elementary school and for curb and guttering along the route. This would make it easier and safer for children to walk to school. Data gathered by ASU students allowed the City and County to secure funds needed to re-lamp five public buildings which will reduce operating costs and free funds for other needs for which funding would not otherwise be available.

Zoning

An ASU graduate student compiled data for reclassifying zoning districts within the City of Marion. This work involved conducting research into every recorded parcel of land within the jurisdiction and compiling a filing system that recorded the parcels' structures, functions, and activities. The grad student then produced a computer plot showing the parcel information along the appropriate descriptive data. This project will allow land use planning decisions to be made on the basis of compatibility with neighboring properties and it will allow more accurate identification of property with a potential for future development. In Valdese, graduate students also assisted the planning department by rewriting and updating the zoning ordinance.

Greenway Development

The City of Marion has invested considerable effort in the Greenway project as a means of improving the quality of life and attractiveness of the community. After a successful fundraising effort, the City has completed construction of Phase I of the New River Greenway project including 4,300 feet of trail, fishing dock, picnic areas, and a wildlife observation deck. In support, ASU graduate students have developed a sponsorship program to give citizens the ability to sponsor benches along the greenway.

Small Business Loan Program

ASU resources have been widely deployed in the creation and implementation of the Valdese Economic Development Investment Corporation (VEDIC). VEDIC is the town's revolving loan fund program which uses NC STEP funding granted to the Town. Among other tasks, ASU graduate students helped VEDIC apply for non-profit status from the IRS and created a partnership to administer the Burke Business Loan Program (BBLP) which uses using Golden LEAF funds to further complement the STEP program objectives. ASU representatives marketed VEDIC to the business community. As VEDIC began functioning, they did title searches, worked with the Town Attorney on loan documents, and participated in



all VEDIC meetings while the loan program was beginning. To date, three loans have been made from the Valdese pool and the total amount loaned is \$54,000. These loans resulted in two jobs created and an additional 15 jobs retained by loan recipients. To date, six loans have been made from the BBLP pool and the total amount loaned is \$140,000. These loans resulted in a projected total of 44 full time and 32 part time jobs created and an additional 33 jobs retained by loan recipients.

EECBG Waste Water Treatment Project

ASU graduate students assisted the town with an EECBG Waste Water Treatment Project. The project, which ASU has helped to scope, draft, and fund, includes the replacing pumps that will result in an energy savings of \$25,000 annually.

Movie Theater Project

In Valdese, ASU graduate students completed a feasibility study and potential marketing efforts aimed at opening a movie theatre in a portion of the Waldensian Mill. Although this project did not come to fruition, aggressive efforts were made to put to use the large unoccupied building.