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## Community and Economic Development in North Carolina and Beyond Blog: Navassa's Community Center

By CED Program Interns & Students

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Eulis "Scrap" Willis has been the Mayor of Navassa for over twenty years. Navassa is a small town of just under 2,000 people in Brunswick County. Mayor Willis is a self-proclaimed "bull" that fights for his town and isn't afraid to ruffle feathers.

Since 1991 he has been chasing the dream of building a multi-purpose community center which would include a health clinic, a senior center, a gymnasium, and would also serve as the town's hurricane shelter.

When I sat down with the mayor and the town's planner, Travis Barnes a recent UNC-W MPA graduate, the mayor dropped in front of me a beat-up foam core model of the community center as well as previous successful grant applications, and engineering reports corresponding to the project. He joked that the model was probably older than I was (for the record, I've got ten years on the model).

Mayor Willis proceeded to give the past twenty years of pertinent facts relating to the community center entirely from memory. This included names and phone numbers of the people I should talk to for more detailed engineering and financial information. As well as where and how much money the town had received from the General Assembly, HUD, USDA, and most recently from President Obama's American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (ARRA).

After twenty years of fighting for this project the possibility of actually breaking ground is within sight. The money is in place, but some final reporting needs to be updated and contracts need to be signed. Of course that will only take care of the physical building.

Now the town will be going after grant money and partnerships in order to make the programming of the recreation facilities, the medical center, and the hurricane shelter successful. I will be partnering with the town to identify funding sources and prepare grant applications to help fill out these projects. I will also serve as a liaison between the town and other individuals and groups that have previously expressed interest to the town to be a part of the community center.

In the town of Navassa, and in the other towns I have worked with in the past two weeks at the Cape Fear COG, I have been struck by the passion and commitment of the local officials I will have the privilege of working with. Many of the officials I have met with hold down full-time day jobs and serve as the mayor, council members, or volunteer positions in their free time. These small towns and public officials do not lack the ideas or the commitment to serve the town, but they do not have the staff, time or budget to pursue all of their goals. I am proud to be a part of CERC and to be working for these local officials and their projects.