
CREATIVE INNOVATION: PLANNING IN NORTH CAROLINA

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Many communities in North Carolina have some type of planning “white elephant” which has been difficult to address. Whether the issue is the legacy of past land use policy, or the physical remains of obsolete industry or infrastructure, unique solutions must be found, and these solutions may not conform to existing municipal practices. Strategic risk-taking is not an approach traditionally practiced in the public sector, but may in fact be what is required to find innovative solutions to the complex issues we face today. Elected officials, managers, and planners must be open to new solutions in order to have a chance for success. The articles in this edition cover some of these innovative solutions, ranging from incorporating artists into the planning process, to unconventional community engagement, to new business models. In each case, an organization was forced to confront a challenge in a new way, and their successes provide lessons for the future of our North Carolina communities.

In his article describing safety issues on the Durham section of the American Tobacco Trail, **Kofi Boone** discusses how a past legacy of social and racial separation has affected attitudes toward what should be seen as a community asset.

Through a process funded by a foundation grant, non-profit organizations and the City of Durham came together with neighborhood residents in an innovative process to address community division and create a common sense of ownership for the American Tobacco Trail.

Molly Hemstreet describes the structural change necessitated by the ongoing effort to revive the textile industry in North Carolina. It is a movement in which workers must be part of the decision making process in order for the industry to thrive.

Two articles focus on art that inspires community solutions. **Janet Kagan** reports on the 2015 Cross Current Conference in Rocky Mount which used the city as a lab to develop innovative approaches to downtown revitalization. The author discusses the involvement of creative professionals working in cooperation with non-profits, local governments, civic, and business groups to “focus attention on how creative and cultural artists produce innovative strategies for economic revitalization.” The thrust of the event was to break down traditional silos in order to produce positive results. **Adam Levin’s** article showcases three communities; Shelby and Wilson, North Carolina; and Newberry, South Carolina; which have used an arts- and culture-based economic development strategy to tackle industrial decline. Each town used a redevelopment strategy blending the arts with community assets.

Finally, **Ben Hitchings** discusses the necessary steps planners and local governments must take to support successful entrepreneurship. He describes the infrastructure, regulatory framework, and collaboration that must be in place for innovation districts to flourish.

The old adage “necessity is the mother of invention” holds true in each of these examples. Difficult, intractable issues may have driven the subjects of these articles to seek new approaches, but it was their willingness to embrace a participatory process with new voices that ultimately contributed to success. 