



Meet Jeff Emory, Southwest Prosperity Zone Planner

Jeff Emory has worked for the NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center as a Community Economic Development Planner for the Southwest Prosperity Zone since May of 2017. The Southwest Prosperity Zone extends from Cleveland County on the west to Anson County on the east. Its northernmost counties are Iredell and Rowan, while its southern limit coincides with the South Carolina state line. The Zone contains 10 counties and approximately 85 municipalities. Jeff's office is in the City of Albemarle in Stanly County.

How did you become a Prosperity Zone planner?

Public service is all I have ever known. In 2016, I retired with over 29 years of service as a city manager. A good friend directed me to the Prosperity Zone planner job posting. I thought the position presented a perfect opportunity for me to use my education and experience to work with local governments and provide planning assistance, technical assistance and resources to the region.

What are some of your current projects in the Prosperity Zone?

I am conducting an economic development assessment focused on the downtown area for the Town of China Grove. Recently, I completed a visioning session with the Town of Dallas and will now assist the town with developing a strategic economic development plan. I am also working on an initiative that will place individuals aging out of foster care with employers in Gaston and Lincoln counties. The project, which resulted from a Southwest Prosperity Zone SWOT analysis in the summer of 2017, will provide training and transportation for participants.

In terms of rural economic development, what are some of the opportunities that are being explored by communities in the Prosperity Zone? What challenges do they face?

I see a major emphasis across the region to provide training for citizens to provide a stable workforce to meet the needs of an ever-changing economy. Units of government are working with community colleges and high schools to meet this need. In addition to creating a diverse workforce, the cost of providing infrastructure is a daunting challenge for cities and counties.

What is one thing you have learned about or discovered in the Prosperity Zone that you did not know before and that is worth sharing?

The level of cooperation has exceeded my expectations. I have witnessed a collaborative effort focused on improving the economic outlook of the entire region. The cooperation between state agencies, local governments, the community college system, councils of government, county economic development groups, the Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina and citizens has been excellent.

What aspect(s) of your position/role do you enjoy the most?

I enjoy visiting the various towns and counties in the region and learning what makes each unique. I learn something interesting everywhere I go.

Is there anything else you would like readers to know about the Prosperity Zone?

In addition to containing the state's largest city (Charlotte), the region includes places such as Gaston County, which has 13 municipalities with populations ranging in size from about 700 (McAdenville) to 74,000 (Gastonia).

Have you celebrated any recent professional achievements and/or attended any interesting workshops, courses, etc., in the past year?

I am now a Lifetime Member of the North Carolina City & County Management Association. I also enjoyed my first NC Main Street Conference in March (2018).

What are some activities that you enjoy doing during non-work hours (family, friends, hobbies, volunteer work, etc.)?

I grew up in a tight-knit family and that has continued throughout my adult life. I love spending time with my wife and 3 children. My passion is Appalachian State University athletics. I also enjoy reading, watching Seinfeld reruns and listening to the music of Bruce Springsteen and Jason Isbell.

What is the best way to contact you?

I can be reached by telephone at 704-984-3666 or by email at jeff.emory@nccommerce.com.

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