

# Erwin, North Carolina

## CPNI WORKSHOP REPORT

November 16-17, 2017



## **About CPNI**

The Construction Professionals Network Institute, Inc. (CPNI) is a non-profit initiative focusing on construction industry related projects and community service throughout the State of North Carolina. CPNI volunteers its members' design and construction industry expertise as a catalyst to empower communities across North Carolina to improve their physical and economic environment. CPNI offers the comprehensive professional and technical expertise of its membership and collaborating partners in the form of workshops tailored to assist communities and engage local governments and community leaders to facilitate discussions and efforts toward redevelopment strategy, community engagement, visioning, and financial considerations. <http://www.cpni-nc.org/>

## **About NCGrowth**

NCGrowth's mission is to help businesses create good jobs and to help communities create sustainable and equitable opportunities for their people. With a passionate staff and a dynamic pool of graduate student analysts, NCGrowth partners with businesses, local governments, other universities and colleges, and community organizations to tackle outcome-based economic development and entrepreneurship projects. NC Growth's recent successes include development of the Entrepreneur Technical Assistance Program which infuses high growth companies in rural areas with MBA talent from UNC, ECU, and NCCU and the publications of a series of reports on the practical use of agricultural waste for energy production. Since 2012 NCGrowth has worked with over 38 businesses and 19 community partners. To learn more, please visit our website [www.NCGrowth.unc.edu](http://www.NCGrowth.unc.edu).



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Members from CPNI and NCGrowth met with local officials and community members from the Town of Erwin for a two-day workshop held on November 16-17, 2017 in Erwin, NC. The workshop served to discuss the revitalization of town assets as well as promote economic growth and development. As a result of the two-day workshop and post-workshop analyses, the following workshop focus, recommendations, and next steps were conferred.

### Workshop Focus

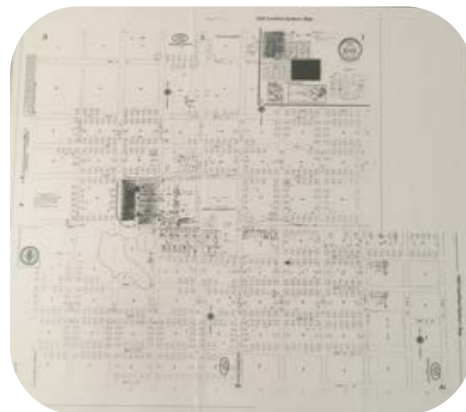
- *The Historic Erwin Mill*
- *Historic Mill Housing Stock*
- *Education, School Infrastructure, & the Future of Erwin Elementary School*
- *Good Hope Hospital*
- *Recreational Assets*
- *Marketing and Branding for the Town of Erwin*
- *US Highway 421 Transportation Corridor*

### Recommendations

- *Create a Comprehensive Master Plan that Includes— (a) A historical designation for the original mill and mill village, or (b) A designation of the entire mill property as an overlay district for mixed-use*
- *Engage in a Public-Private Partnership with Campbell University & Central Carolina Community College*
- *Leverage the Local Non-profit Harnett Community Group*
- *Conduct Analyses of and Site Visits to former Mills and Facilities*

### Next Steps

- *Create a Task Force*
- *Focusing on Projects that are Manageable*
- *Continue Partnership with CPNI in Association with NCGrowth to Provide Support Where Needed*
- *Lobby and Advocate for a New School Building*



## WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS



### **Doug Burns, KSQ design – Team Leader**

Doug received his dual Master degrees in architecture and urban planning and social work with the goal of using architecture to help people. In the past 40 years he has helped people using his design expertise and communication skills while simultaneously serving his community along the way. Relationships and people are at the heart of Doug's work and he continues to provide leadership and build strategic relationships throughout the Southeast region.



### **Mike Bedell, Barnhill Construction**

Mike Bedell has close to 30 years of experience in the construction industry and has been a part of our Balfour Beatty team since 2003. His chief focus is on nurturing and growing our higher education clients and projects for the Carolinas division. Mike's expertise is highlighted by his sharp ability to obtain results through effective management of task assignments, controlling cost, quality performance, and building high-performance teams. Mike has successfully executed projects on many higher education campuses throughout the Southeast.



### **Anne Goodson, Barringer Construction**

Anne is a construction project manager with a record of success overseeing all phases of diverse construction projects for public and private clients. She has a proven history of effective completion of on-time high quality projects for satisfied clients through tenacity, creative problem solving, and a strong work ethic.



### **Emily Hinton, Lindsey Architects**

An architect and project manager at Lindsey Architects, Emily focuses on projects that are environmentally-responsible and that impact the community in a positive way. Emily's favorite style of architecture is Scandinavian Modern, because she feels the forms are progressive, aesthetically clean and deceptively simple. She also points out that, due to the extreme northern latitude, the buildings are strategically designed to allow natural light to permeate as far inside as possible, resulting in beautiful interior spaces. That, combined with the use of natural materials with varying textures, gives the forms a warm and inviting feel. In her own work, Emily strives to achieve the same thing, creating unique, well-designed buildings that are both functional for the client and good for the environment, since she believes that architects and builders are stewards of the earth and its resources.

## WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS CONT'D



### **Phil Jones, University of NC – Charlotte**

Phil Jones became the Associate Vice Chancellor for Facilities at UNC Charlotte in January 2001 after a 29-year career as an Army Engineer officer. He is responsible for overseeing all capital planning and construction, facilities maintenance, utilities, and custodial operations at the University. In the last few years, the capital construction has been the largest in UNC Charlotte's history including creation of the Charlotte Research Institute campus and reshaping of the campus master plan. UNC Charlotte's capital construction over the last decade exceeded \$500 million dollars and included the addition of 25 major facilities and over 1 million square feet.



### **Avery Monroe, RMF Engineering, Inc.**

Avery Monroe, PE, LEED AP, is a mechanical engineer, project manager, and appointed branch manager for the Charlotte office and has been with RMF for over 14 years. Monroe has more than 25 years of experience in the design, analysis and construction administration of HVAC, plumbing and fire protection systems serving educational, healthcare, laboratory, military, and commercial facilities. His specialization in the design of higher education facilities throughout his career has allowed him to offer clients innovative and highly informed expertise.



### **Schenck, Conner Gwyn Schenck PLLC**

Jim Schenck is a native of North Carolina, raised in Greensboro and now living in Raleigh. He has been in private law practice continuously since 1982, when he graduated with degrees in law and government. The focus of his practice is state and local government construction projects. He has wide and varied experience as an advocate in the prosecution and defense of construction claims. The majority of his work involves dispute resolution, including negotiation, mediation, arbitration and litigation.

### **Additional Team Participants:**

**Jessica Freeman** *CPNI of NC Staff*



**Martine Aurelien**  
*Analyst, NCGrowth*



**Carolyn Fryberger**  
*Economic Development Manager, NCGrowth*

## **Town of Erwin Representatives & Attendees<sup>1</sup>**

- *Patsy M. Carson*, Mayor of Erwin
- *Snow Bowden*, Town Manager
- *Billy Turnage*, Town Commissioner
- *Gordon Springle*, Harnett County Board of Commissioners Chairman
- *Nick Dula*, Harnett County Economic Developer
- *Bill Morris*, Harnett County School Board Chairman, Town of Erwin Building Inspector/Code Enforcement Officer
- *Carla Blackmon*, Erwin Area Chamber of Commerce Administrator
- *Shaun Savarese*, The Daily Record
- *John Wayne Hudson*, Fathom Realty
- *David Stevens & Ava Westbury*, Fidelity Bank
- *Bill Schuch*, Planning Board Member
- *Alan West*, Planning Board Member
- *Pat Cameron*, Planning Board Member
- *Michael Jackson*, Business owner
- *April Westbury*
- *Preston Blum*

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<sup>1</sup> This list is not exhaustive and does not include all attendees who may not have signed in.

## ERWIN BACKGROUND<sup>2</sup>

Originally, the town of Erwin was known as Duke, named after the Duke family members who were prominent stakeholders in the newly constructed Erwin Cotton Mill completed in 1904. Later, in 1926, when Trinity College in Durham, NC, became Duke University, the town's name was changed from Duke to Erwin. The cotton mill was the engine that powered Erwin until its closing in 2000. Even today, Erwin is still referred to as the "Denim Capital of the World" for the vast quantities of raw denim the mill produced for well over half a century.

Through population growth and aggressive annexation, many towns in Harnett County grew rapidly between 1990 and 2010. However, Erwin is the only entity in the county that did not follow this trend. Although the population of Harnett County is projected to increase 49.2 percent by 2033, the pace of municipal growth is likely to slow due to a change in North Carolina annexation law and the fact that Harnett County provides water and sewer services within the county. Furthermore, fringe residential development has little incentive to annex into municipalities within the county.

## ERWIN AT A GLANCE

**Population:** 4,931<sup>3</sup>

**Median age:** 42.8

**Poverty rate:** 22.2%

**Median Household Income:** \$35,170

**Number of Employees:** 1,763

**Median Property Value:** \$89,000

### **Amenities & Attractions**

Access to Cape Fear River

Dunn-Erwin Trail runs into downtown

Historic Erwin Denim Mill

Downtown structures are limited to two-stories



Source: U.S. Census

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.erwin-nc.org>

<sup>3</sup> As of July 2016

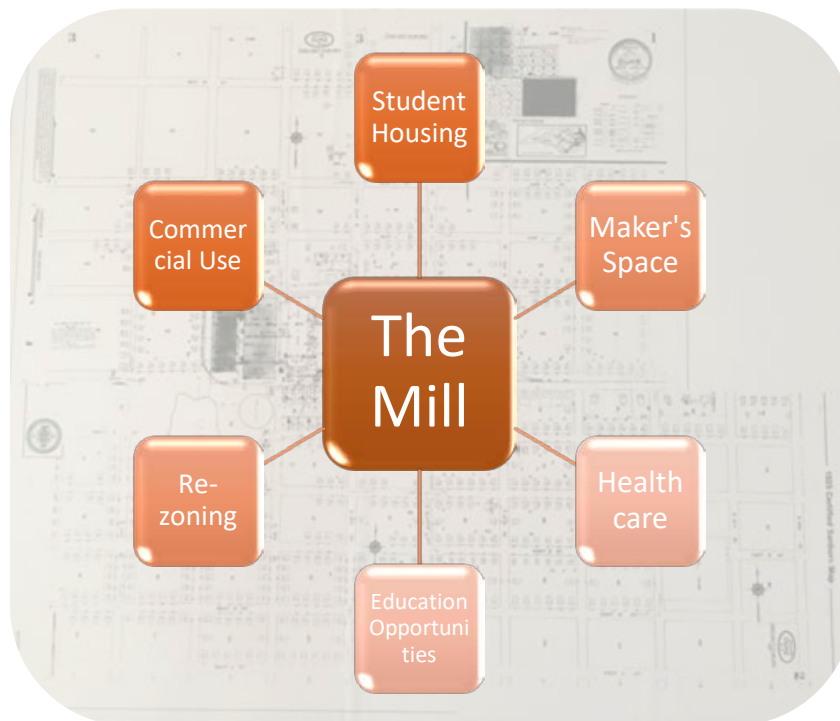


## WORKSHOP FOCUS

*Discussions and site visits during the workshop focused on seven topics aimed at fostering revitalization, ideation, and action regarding the potential and possibilities for the future of Erwin, North Carolina.*

### I. The Historic Erwin Mill

- Historically, the mill has been the backbone of Erwin. The mill shaped the town as a Mill Town and was the epicenter of economic and community development for Erwin. Generations depended on the mill for employment, housing, and healthcare—the mill contributed to a hospital. As such, after the mill closed, Erwin lost a substantial portion of its tax base.
- The mill property sits on 52 acres of land, and is comprised of 13 buildings that sum to just under 1M square feet. Currently, approximately 90% of the buildings are being used for storage; it is currently on the watch list for historical preservation.
- At this time, the Mill is owned by Schwarz Auman Properties LLC and is currently up for sale.
- **Possible Uses:** The size of the property as well as its location in the center of town creates the possibility for the Mill to be utilized as a mixed-use property where education, housing, and innovation can thrive and help revitalize Erwin through the following outlets:



Student housing: Two tax credit incentives exist that encourage the development of student housing that could serve Campbell University and Heritage Bible College students.

Maker's Space: Some of the buildings could be utilized as an Innovation Incubator or Maker's Space for the community and surrounding universities. A makerspace provides a space that fosters inquiry, innovation, learning, experimentation, ideation, and the like across all career sectors, branches of art, and academic disciplines. Makerspaces could also serve as incubator spaces for growing industries or businesses looking for less expensive flexible space.

Healthcare: The infrastructure of the mill buildings are exemplary spaces for assisted senior living. Additionally, the spacious infrastructure could also be utilized as a location for an Urgent Care helping to meet the need for more proximate and cost-effective access to healthcare for the residents of Erwin.

Education opportunities: Given the mill's history, landscape, and infrastructure, the property is a vessel for educational expansion, ideation, and collaboration. Such educational opportunities include but are not limited to collaborating with local higher education institutions such as Campbell University. Such a collaboration could foster partnerships such as creating internship positions for students that provide them with work experience in exchange for the expertise and skill sets of interns. A partnership with the vocational departments (e.g. cosmetology, welding, computer technology, etc.) of four-year universities and community colleges also lends itself to similar symbiotic relationships.

Additionally, the shared space of the mill generates opportunities for working and collaborating with K-12 districts to engender county-wide subject-based projects and competitions. Lastly, opportunities for the establishment of a new school are possible on the site; a portion of the mill property could be converted into a career technology education school affiliated with the community college.

Rezoning: The township has the ability to rezone the property for mixed-use—the town would seek the owner's permission and support. If the property is established as a mixed-use product, some of the zoning can be industrial and an overlay district can be established (city commission and council has power to do this).

Commercial Use: A portion of the property could be a location for commercial uses—a brewery, movie theater. Towns such as Tarboro and Rocky Mount have capitalized on such use of former mill properties.

## II. Historic Mill Housing Stock

- Several community members and stakeholders shared a collective desire to preserve the current uniqueness and village feel of the residential areas of Erwin. This desire is being lived out through the rehabilitation of old mill homes. Additionally, new homes are being built in vacant lots in old neighborhoods; individuals surmise that this due to Erwin being a safe place to live.



## III. Education, School Infrastructure, & the Future of Erwin Elementary School

- The two current elementary schools, Gentry Elementary (grades K-2) and Erwin Elementary (grades 3-5), are in need of new buildings (the buildings were built in the 1930s & 1950s).
- A merger of the elementary schools is being considered by the school board.
- Growth in the southern part of the county suggests an increase in the number of students in the near future, however, school enrollment is static despite growth in housing and residents.
- Educational attainment is higher in Erwin compared to Dunn. However, the academic proficiency levels are not as competitive as surrounding communities. According to the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction's 2017 Report Cards, both of the elementary schools in Erwin were graded with a "C."
- According to self-reports, many teachers who are living in Erwin teach in adjacent counties due to better pay, benefits, curriculum, and achievement levels.
- **Elementary School Building(s):** The Erwin school board is preparing to vote regarding funding for a new building for elementary students. If funding is provided, Gentry Elementary and Erwin Elementary would merge as a result. Considering this tentative merge and the potential vacancy of a school building, the following suggestions and ideas were proposed:
  - The new school maintain the current location downtown in order to reinforce walkability ("new urbanism") for the purpose of making the school a central focal point and important dimension to the community.
  - Construct the new school on the existing football field adjacent to the original High School (the current Erwin Elementary).
  - Consider a two-story educational wing on the Erwin elementary property, thereby maintaining the existing two-story elementary building for an adaptive reuse project which could then utilize tax credit programs.
  - Use the Gentry Elementary facility since the building is more modern.

*Gentry Primary School*



*Erwin Elementary School*



#### IV. Good Hope Hospital

- Good Hope Hospital, which is owned by a non-profit, is a locked facility that provides mental health and behavior services for adults. The hospital currently serves 16 in-patients and is looking to double that number. The hospital was recently approved to expand to 50 rooms, which would produce approximately 90 jobs.



Before such an expansion can occur, the hospital must receive clearance regarding what parts of the building they will be permitted to use; the hospital is currently waiting for approval. The hospital is also looking to put an urgent care on the property; this would be critical to the healthcare of Erwin, since it would be the only urgent care facility located in the town. In the long-run, Good Hope seeks to become the “Mental Health Hub” for Erwin.

#### V. Recreational Assets

##### *The Cape Fear River*

- The Cape Fear River provides leisure and natural attractions for families, students, visitors, children and many more.
- The recently completed Dunn-Erwin Rail Trail traverses 5.3 miles of the Aberdeen and Rockfish corridor in Harnett Count. It connects the downtown areas of Dunn and Erwin, coursing through residential areas, light industrial areas and cotton fields, and crosses the Black River and wetlands.
- The Rail-Trail is part of the East Coast Greenway; interpretive markers and signs relay the history of the area. The trail is also close to shops and restaurants.

##### *Recreation & Parks*

- Recreation facilities, activities, and parks have been reconstructed and revamped. Many families that live in surrounding towns and communities travel to Erwin to take advantage of the recreation facilities and opportunities (e.g. baseball, soccer, etc.).



## VI. Marketing and Branding for the Town of Erwin

- Rebranding Erwin could help provide increased opportunities for economic growth and development. This can be done by capitalizing on the character, charm, and heritage of Erwin. Erwin’s history as the “denim capital of the world” can be preserved but rebranded as, “The Town of Erwin is like denim—relaxed, unique, high quality, and well suited for everyone.”
- This brand should be reflected and permeated through all possible outlets. The moment people enter the city limits of Erwin, denim should be evident—denim lights and denim flags should be posted on poles; billboards should denote the new brand; holidays seasons should have symbols and icons dressed in and decorated with denim (e.g. Santa Clause, Turkeys, etc.). All events, marketing, and branding should be driving towards the ultimate event of the year—DENIM DAYS; high quality, unique events filled with relaxation and fun for families, co-workers, and friends.
- Support and assistance can be provided by and drawn from social media, K-12 system, partnerships with local artists, relationships with community-based organizations, collaboration with the chamber of commerce, a marketing promotional firm, and interns from Campbell University’s leading business program.



*Stock photos are representations of Denim Day photos Erwin can potentially market to share the town’s charm and history associated with denim*

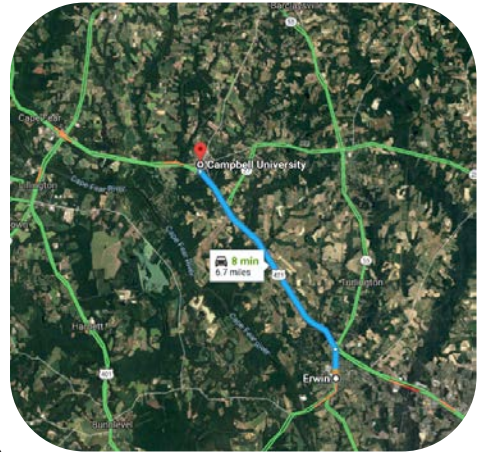
## VII. US Highway 421 Transportation Corridor

### *Proximity to larger cities and interstates*

- The Town of Erwin is located in eastern Harnett County between Raleigh-Durham and Fayetteville—34 miles south of Raleigh, and 22 miles north of Fayetteville. The Town is located four miles west of Interstate 95 and bisected by three major routes—Highways 55, 421, and 217. The Town is four miles west from the county’s largest municipality, Dunn, and 11 miles east of the county seat, Lillington. The Cape Fear River, runs along the western and southern edges of Erwin, and offers recreational activities for hiking, fishing and mild white-water kayaking and canoeing.

### *Proximity to Campbell University*

- The Town of Erwin is approximately 7 miles away from Campbell University. This increases the feasibility and impact of a public-private partnership between Campbell University and the Town of Erwin.



### *Development Opportunities*

- Access via major thoroughfares
- Proximity and accessibility to adjacent communities
- Synergy created from existing development
- Utilization of highway 421 such that it creates opportunities to support, complement, and enhance the social and economic structure of the Town of Erwin. Additional opportunities may exist for commercial and industrial development in the 421 corridor due to its access to major highways and proximity to other towns.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- ***Create a Comprehensive Master Plan to Include—*** (a) *A historical designation for the original mill and mill village, or* (b) *A designation of the entire mill property as an overlay district for mixed-use and* (c) *the 421 Transportation Corridor:* A master plan serves as a living document and guide for the vision, goals, and expected procedures. The plan should be comprehensive and inclusive of specific timelines, methods, as well as implementation strategies and evaluation plans. Furthermore, the plan should include but not be limited to the following key stakeholders—Mill Owner, Chamber of Commerce, local building officials, Harnett Community Group, Hospital Board, Campbell and Central Carolina Community College, and the County Board of Education.
- ***Engage in a Public-Private Partnership with Campbell University & Central Carolina Community College:*** Collaboration and partnership are critical to the execution and sustainability of community-wide change. Institutions of higher learning have resources and networks that should be utilized to assist and support the Town’s efforts. Business and engineering, as well marketing departments are branches of the university and community college that may be particularly helpful for the Town of Erwin.

- **Conduct Analyses of and Site Visits to Former Mills and Facilities:** Visit adaptive uses facilities such as Charleston Pacific Box & Crate. Such facilities are models of spaces and properties that have been remodeled for adaptive reuse mixed-use.
- **Leverage Harnett Community Group:** Community-based organizations are key levers for change and the mobilization of local endeavors. As such, the Town of Erwin should capitalize on the Harnett Community Group to assist with the town’s goal and objectives for revitalization and growth.

## NEXT STEPS

- **Create a task force:** The task force should be diverse in regards to age, career fields, areas of expertise, duration of residence, and representative of the residents of Erwin. Additionally, a designated town member should serve as a liaison between the town and the property owners of the mill for the purpose of cultivating a consistent partnership and mode of communication. Furthermore, leveraging the voice of community members is also critical for the task force and fostering hope and revitalization for the future of Erwin. A community member and participant during the two-day workshop shared the following reflection after the two-day workshop:

*“I am full of appreciation and respect for what you have done for us the past two days. I came in here yesterday, and [thought] I am going to learn, A, B, C, and D, [and thought] if I’m going to learn A, B, C, and D, I’ll be alright. And all of a sudden I started doing something strange, I started thinking. And, I told one of the ladies, I didn’t sleep last night because I was thinking, and it was just generating things out at a million miles an hour. I assure you I will pass that on to get people thinking, to get people acting, that if they want this community to survive for their grandchildren, we are going to have to make some changes, and some of them are not going to be warm and fuzzy.*

*I think we have the people here that are going to be [helpful], and I think we can do things in a manner that is both going to be respectful to the citizens of the town of Erwin and will also serve their long-term interest. If we can manage to pull that off, we’ll be great. But again, thank you very much for your time.”*

- **Focus on projects that are manageable:** Feasibility is an important criterion for success. Establishing precise, streamlined goals and timelines will ensure that projects remain focused and manageable.
- **Continue partnership with CPNI and NCGrowth to provide support where needed:** Both organizations are willing to serve as an additional resource to the Town of Erwin.
- **Lobby and advocate for a new school building:** Lobby the Harnett County Board of Education to build the new elementary school in the geographic heart and epicenter of Erwin—downtown.