



# ***Mt. Gilead, NC***



## ***DRAFT CPNI Workshop Summary Report***

*Olachi Anaemereibe, NCGrowth Analyst*

*April 12-13, 2018*





### **CPNI**

Construction Professionals Network Institute, Inc. is a non-profit initiative focusing on construction industry related projects and community service throughout the State of North Carolina. CPN of North Carolina, Inc., a non-profit construction industry membership organization, founded CPN

Institute in 2006 to expand its mission of service to the construction industry and provide assistance to communities throughout North Carolina. The CPN Institute recruits CPN volunteers to share their design and construction industry expertise to help rural North Carolina communities repurpose abandoned or underutilized buildings and districts.

[www.cpni-nc.org](http://www.cpni-nc.org)



### **NCGROWTH**

NCGrowth is an EDA University Center at UNC Chapel Hill that helps businesses and communities create good jobs and equitable opportunities through applied research and technical assistance. 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 50 businesses and 30 community clients.

[www.NCGrowth.unc.edu](http://www.NCGrowth.unc.edu)

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## CPNI Workshop Team



**Ron Leeper, R. J.  
Leeper Construction**

**Mt Gilead Workshop Leader.** Mr. Leeper directs and manages all the day to day operations of R.J. Leeper Construction. Ron Leeper is the President and Owner of R.J. Leeper Construction, LLC, a full-service minority construction management and general contractor located in Charlotte, North Carolina. During Ron's ten years of service in public office as a Charlotte City Council Member, he developed a keen knowledge of community concerns and a strong awareness of community needs that now enhance the ability of R.J. Leeper Construction to better serve the total Charlotte Community.



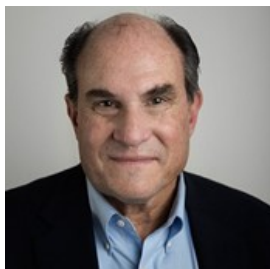
**Jody Efird, ESPA  
Architects & Planners**

A principal architect and a graduate of NC State University, Jody has over 30 years in the design and construction industry. She has been involved in a variety of project types. In addition, Jody has been active in the Triad community on a variety of boards, commissions and organizations including The Summit House Piedmont, Carolina Theatre Commission, Guilford County Historic Preservation Commission and the Greensboro YWCA.



**Phil Jones, UNC-  
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.



**Doug Burns, KSQ  
Design**

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 serving his community all along the way. To say Doug Burns is a people person is an understatement; relationships are at the heart of his work and he continues to provide leadership and build strategic relationships throughout the Southeast region.



**Jacob D'Albora,**  
*McVeigh & Mangum  
Engineering*

Educated and trained as an architect, Jacob D'Albora, throughout his career, has embraced and sought to maximize the use of Building Information Modeling (BIM). Jacob is an integral part of the team of McVeigh & Mangum Engineering (MME), a full service, multi-office engineering firm. Together, Jacob and MME serve the AEC community with a passion to not only produce designs and drawings of superior quality in the BIM platform, but to also equip facilities professionals to more efficiently and effectively manage facilities once constructed.



**Victor Jones,** *Jenkins  
Peer Architects*

Over the course of his tenure with J•PA, Victor has consistently translated his passion for design into successful projects for clients. Whether revitalizing an existing facility or creating adaptive new space, his ability to integrate creative design with practical solutions has resulted in projects that meet or exceed client and user expectations. Victor became a firm partner in 2006 as part of a structured succession plan developed by the firm's founding partners.



**Pat Fogleman,**  
*Executive Director,  
CPN of NC*



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



**Olachi Anaemereibe,**  
*Economic Development  
Analyst, NC Growth*

## **Town of Mt. Gilead Representatives & Attendees**

**Joseph "Chip" Miller**, *Mayor of Mt. Gilead*

**Matthew Christian**, *Town Manager of Mt. Gilead*

**Ron Adams**, *Resident*

**Ben Blake**, *The Vintage*

**Anil Chinapaga**, *Cochrane & Ridenhour Drug Co.*

**Bruce Haywood**, *Burger Shack*

**Jack Jordan**, *Jordan Lumber Co.*

**Earl Leake**, *Founder of Friends in Focus, Highland Community Center Advisory Board Member*

**Kyle Poplin**, *Speckled Paw Coffee*

**Earl Poplin**, *Former Mayor of Mt. Gilead*

**Harold and Joyce Robinson**, *Highland Community Center*

## Executive Summary

CPNI members and NCGrowth staff met with the Town of Mt. Gilead officials and community business owners and residents for a two-day workshop on April 12 and 13, 2018.

The workshop opened with discussion about Mt. Gilead's history and current opportunities for economic growth. Following this discussion, the CPNI team and workshop participants took a tour, led by town officials to a few abandoned buildings and underutilized assets in the community. Among them was the Downtown Historic District on Main Street, Highland Community Center on Hoffman Road, and the Russell-Harvell Hosiery Mill on Industry Avenue. This report captures a detailed summary of the workshop discussion and concerns raised by town stakeholders, a description of properties visited during the site tour, and CPNI's key recommendations on how town staff can better leverage their built assets to meet economic development objectives.

The primary recommendation CPNI shared with Mt. Gilead officials was to develop a Master Plan. A comprehensive master plan will enable town officials to focus on economic growth opportunities of Mt. Gilead's built environment as well as attracting businesses, residents, and visitors to the town. The Master Plan should include marketing and rebranding strategies, rezoning for structural assets and land use, infrastructure and utility measures, and methods to optimize community input.

Additional recommendations were made specific to the sites the team toured. Along the tour, the team visited the Historic Downtown and shared several concepts for enhancing the downtown experience. Recommendations concerning Highland Community Center are focused on community engagement efforts and building improvements. Lastly, the team discussed rezoning and revitalizing the former Russell-Harvell Hosiery Mill.



## Master Planning Areas of Focus



### Marketing and Promotion

Mt. Gilead has much to offer and even greater potential to creating an enjoyable environment for all generations. Residents and visitors are attracted to Mt. Gilead for its proximity to Lake Tillery, the Uwharrie National Forest, the Town Creek Indian Mound historic site, and a variety of outdoor recreational events and festivals. Local residents and visitors frequent Mt. Gilead's Historic Downtown for its unique antiques shops and art galleries.

On the other hand, very few dining and lodging options are located in Mt. Gilead, which deters visitors and future residents who desire an overnight stay in town. Failure to capture such commerce imposes great challenge towards the economic growth goals for the town. Furthermore, Mt. Gilead has experienced small yet steady decline in population over a number of years. The highest population decline was reported between 2009-2010; which may be a result of the Great Recession.

Officials, residents, and the CPNI team concur Mt. Gilead can become a destination town for vacationing and permanent residency. A beneficial marketing strategy for the town would be to focus on what Mt. Gilead has to offer through imagery rather than text depictions. Marketing and promotional focuses include the following:

***Capturing capital gains.*** Lake Tillery is one of Mt. Gilead's greatest attractions. Revenues for the town may be captured by promoting restaurant, lodging, and retail development located nearby and on the lake. Desired lodging may include bed and breakfast, hotels, Airbnb, lake house rentals and extended stay vacationing options. Other ways to stimulate economic growth is to work with the Land Trust of Central NC to sponsor events such as a hike or run, and other events that will attract overnight visitors and generate foot traffic downtown on a weekly or monthly basis. Examples mentioned during the workshop include sidewalk sales, art walks, and garage sale every first Friday.

***Publications and print media.*** Publications and print media such as brochures, flyers, and newsletters, as well as cybernetic media such as social media, the town website, radio, and televised advertisements are a few key outlets for marketing and promoting the Town of Mt. Gilead.

***Social media.*** Mt. Gilead may utilize social media for impacting its growth efforts. Partnering with businesses, residents, and regional stakeholders who have a large social media following by sponsoring their visit to Mt. Gilead, especially during events. These partners will use applicable hashtags and post about Mt. Gilead to their social media outlets; ultimately attracting more people and businesses to the town.

***Digital reviews.*** Mt. Gilead may improve search engine optimization by maximizing Yelp and Google digital reviews. Business owners can place laptops or table kiosks in their restaurants and stores in-town to capture higher volumes of feedback of guest experiences. Finally, the town may improve its' main website to work as a main hub for information and include a live newsfeed featuring current events and town relations on Mt. Gilead's website. The town's website and social media pages should also include an updated log of community wide activity log and events calendar to promote people, businesses, events, and organizations within the town.

***Public art events.*** Promote public art events such as mural painting and banners in the Town of Mt. Gilead. Individuals and private entities can purchase space on art banners. Utilize Highland Community Center, The ARTifex Studio, Grassroots Art Center, and area schools to host public art events. The events are open to all and will be cross-promoted among all ages and to other through other towns.

***Creating synergy and cross-promotion.*** As it relates to marketing and promotion, downtown merchants may be responsible marketing their own businesses. Nonetheless, Mt. Gilead officials wish to give way for a business community that cross-promotes and uplifts one another. Thus, synergy around billboards and other marketing opportunities with neighboring municipalities and cross-promotion with The Lounge in Stanton and The Fork Farm will be a focus. Town officials also wish to reestablish better connections with the Town Creek Indian Mound and will work with the Chamber of Commerce on rebranding efforts. Additionally, the newsfeed on Mt. Gilead's main website may include links to downtown businesses.

***Promoting workforce.*** To sustain or grow Mt. Gilead's workforce, town officials may build partnerships with major employers such as Mohawk, Jordan Lumber, and others. The first step in building these partnerships is to inquire about the company's specific needs for attracting employees and enterprise. Collaborations could include:

- Uwharrie Forest retreats for workforce recruits

- In-town conferences, expos, and conventions
- Construction of a civic center or central meeting space downtown, with food and lodging
- Partnering with local schools and community for internships, workforce recruitment and job specific training programs, and research opportunities.



## Revitalizing Abandoned or Underutilized Assets

Inabilities to attract visitors and promote consumer spending negatively impacts entrepreneurship in Mt. Gilead. While current landlords and business owners are receptive to maintain building improvements, affordability to do so is a real issue. As a result, a significant amount of buildings and homes have been abandoned. After evaluating property value, growth potential, and community needs, town officials will consider rehabilitating properties that are abandoned or underutilized. This evaluation must address public health and environmental issues associated with renovation or demolition of each asset.

Several broad recommendations were made concerning how such buildings can be repurposed. More detailed site-specific recommendations are included in the Site Tour section of this report.

- Adopt zoning ordinance such as an overlay district with relaxed conditions and or development incentives to make revitalization goals more attainable.
- Form partnerships with nearby community colleges, to explore whether abandoned buildings can be repurposed as business incubators or educational facilities.
- If buildings cannot be reutilized, donating the structures to the fire department for demolition training is another possibility or simply contract demolition at a low premium.

- Mt. Gilead Town officials could adopt an Interim Relief Clause to hold business owners accountable for keeping vacant or underutilized properties well-maintained. This would allow the city to make improvements at a premium, or hire out a third-party, and then assess fees or tax-liens on buildings that owners have failed to upkeep.
- The Town Manager must be empowered to foster any effort as part of his work scope.
- Explore Brownfield grants and historic tax credits to fund redevelopment.

Lastly, for funding revitalization efforts, the CPNI team recommends utilizing Historic State and Federal Tax Credits in conjunction with Historic District Contributing Structures and National Registrar of Historic Places.



## Utilities and Infrastructure

Montgomery County Public Utilities provides water to all five towns and most of the rural areas within the county boundaries. Sewage service is provided by the Town of Mt. Gilead. Electric services are provided by Duke Energy and Randolph Electric Membership Corporation. Telecommunications are provided by CenturyLink and Natural Gas is serviced by Piedmont Natural Gas. Mt. Gilead is the only town in Montgomery County with natural gas service which is a major asset to the town. However, there are many under and non-performing utility systems in Mt. Gilead. Water and sewer issues persist due to aging infrastructure; effecting residents throughout the town and businesses on Main Street.

Rehabbing infrastructure is a necessary, though costly endeavor. Communicating this priority to residents is very necessary. Community stake holders also voiced concerns regarding parking downtown. CPNI suggests conducting a condition assessment of the current infrastructure. Another top priority is to replace the overhead cables providing electrical power or telecommunications with underground infrastructure downtown to improve streetscape.



## **Community Involvement**

Producing a Master Plan can begin after a series of engagement with the Town of Mt. Gilead's community at large. The community at large must be fully aware and have several opportunities to be involved with implementation of the master plan. During the workshop, members discussed various methods to promote engagement from all stakeholders. This engagement will help officials better understand and meet the needs of the town's people.

Town officials are focused on building social capital for the town and creating accessibility to low-income residents. CPNI's primary recommendation is to form action committees that may make successful strides towards readily attainable goals as well as strategizing effective engagement efforts to generate a large percentage of community input. The action committees should be diverse in regards to age, career fields, areas of expertise, duration of residence, and representative of the residents of Mt. Gilead. Correspondingly, action committees may generate a target list of people and organizations to engage, and with them, be transparent about the master planning process and implementation. Engagement meetings should be hosted on multiple dates and at various times throughout the day. Engagement meetings should also be held at locations conducive for stakeholders to attend and participate such as churches, the community center, local colleges, hospital, or during neighborhood HOA meetings.

A great representation of Mt. Gilead's senior community is highly engaged with the town's civil matters. Challenge with increasing community involvement may be more evident with younger residents, working-class households, and with the vacationing homeowners of Lake Tillery, as much of their time may be dedicated to their permanent residential communities. A few solutions to engaging these groups would be a) attending Lake Tillery HOA meetings. b) consulting with major employers about hosting a presentation at the facility or granting paid time to attend and participate in the town meeting. Likewise, employers may be encouraged to become more active and representative in Mt. Gilead annual programming and community events.

In addition to gaining community input, town officials may also observe what the Town of Troy, Mecklenburg County, Davidson County, and the Town of Erwin are doing to address economic development and growth concerns.

## Site Tour of Mt. Gilead, NC

During the 2-Day workshop, Mt. Gilead town officials and business owners led the CPNI team on a visit to a few of the town's key assets. Following lunch at Lefler's Café, the team stopped in several businesses while visiting the Historic Downtown of Mt. Gilead. The team also visited Highland Community Center and Russell-Harvell Hosiery Mill. Following the guided tour, the CPNI team regrouped with town stakeholders at the firehouse to debrief and share recommendations.

### Historic Downtown Mt. Gilead

Main Street



*Mt. Gilead Downtown Historic District tour led by Matthew Christian, Town Manager, Joseph "Chip" Miller, Mayor, and local business owners*

Downtown Mt. Gilead spans along both sides of North and South Main Street from First Avenue on the north to 106 and 117 South Main Street on the south, and the north and south sides of the 100 block of West Allenton Street.

The commercial core of this town exhibits high levels of integrity and is almost fully intact with the historic architectural character of a small, turn-of-the-century Piedmont town. The exterior of the buildings downtown mostly demonstrates high standards of brick and stone work;

maintenance of intact storefronts with original recessed entrances, double-leaf doors, and leaded-glass windows; and decorative pressed cornices.

There are approximately 16 businesses on Main Street currently in operation including a hardware store, art gallery, multiple thrift and antique shops, a coffee shop, a florist, and Methodist Church. A number of vacant businesses line the streetscape as well. Downtown Mt. Gilead is recorded in the National Register of Historic Places.

### **Downtown Recommendations**

1. Hire a third party to assist the town with developing a masterplan.
2. Move power meters to the back of the building.
3. Underground electrical infrastructure.
4. Create a walkable downtown experience with preservation of the original architecture and small-town ambience.
  - a) Enhance streetscape with trees and planters. However, consider using hanging planters in front of the store front to be sure store fronts are visible to passers-by.
  - b) Consider using pedestrian lamp post on the streets to enhance the small-town ambience. These lamps may be powered by Mt. Gilead's natural gas infrastructure or the town's future underground electrical system.
  - c) Community created art banners on utility poles.
  - d) Welcome to Mt. Gilead signage so visitor's feel a sense of place when they arrive.
  - e) Consider repurposing the stucco wall adjacent to the Methodist church
5. Renovate second floor of downtown businesses to provide efficiency housing options for teachers, students, and retirees.
6. Revamp zoning ordinances to include mixed-use commercial and integrated single-family housing, Airbnb in zoning allowances, and second floor lease ordinances. Code enforcement issues will arise without it.
7. Identify site for future downtown parking.
8. Utilize Historic State and Federal Tax Credits in conjunction with Historic District contributing structures.

## Highland Community Center

131 Hoffman Rd, Mt Gilead, NC 27306



*Tour of the center was led by Mt. Gilead native, community activist, and HCC advisor, Mr. Earl Leake and Mrs. Joyce Robinson, Mt. Gilead native and HCC staffer.*

Highland is the only community center in Mt. Gilead and has a unique history of being the first elementary school for African-Americans grades 1-8. After local schools began integrating in the late 1960s, the original Highland Elementary (Negro/Colored) School, became a community center. However, the separation between blacks and whites persists in the shadows of the community today, even as it relates to the community center.

Highland Community Center staff have the goal of becoming a community center where *all* residents and visitors of Mt. Gilead feel welcomed to fellowship and engage in community-oriented activities. Outdoors, the facility offers 14-acres of open field, a picnic area, benches, basketball courts, and parking. Inside amenities include a multipurpose room, kitchen, computer lab, gymnasium and a few classrooms.

a. *Multipurpose Room:* Used as a meeting space for the Saturday Academy, a summer camp centered around tutoring and improving the reading levels of children in grades 3-5. Mt. Gilead residents also utilize this space for community and family events such as weddings, baby showers, Thanksgiving dinner, movie screenings and more.

b. *Kitchen:* Although the center aims to recruit more, 15 seniors utilize the main kitchen as a weekly meeting space to fellowship, play bingo, and enjoy crafting. Guest specialists are invited to speak on health and other relevant matters for the aging

community. The kitchen is also utilized as a classroom space and dining room for students upon morning arrival.

c. *GED Room*: There are 15 computer stations in this room, with an addition 4 computer stations setup in the adjoining room. This computer lab is maintained by Montgomery Community College and is used as a workforce training space for unemployed and under-employed persons, ages 18 - 39.

d. *Gymnasium*: The 84' X 50' recreational room is utilized for annual programming and community events such as early voting, dances, and holiday dinners. This room includes a recently renovated 15' X 40' stage. All in all, the gym has the capacity to fit approximately 150 people.

e. *Classrooms*: The facility contains three former classrooms. There is a primary classroom in the main building. Staff plan to use the other for the Head-Start program. The third classroom, at times, is used for preparing food and concessions during events.

In 2012, the center received a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) to make improvements to the property including central air in all rooms except the gym, roof replacement, outdoor walkway, and restroom upfitting. The block grant also funded the clearing of unsalvageable buildings previously located on the 14-acre property. The NC Rural Center and the North Carolina State Trade Expansion Program (STEP) provided funding for the computer lab. Staffers of the community center are seeking funds to continue upfitting the facility, removal of asbestos in the ceiling and walls, and providing A/C in the gym and overall air quality.

### **Highland Community Center Recommendations**

1. Improve indoor/outdoor air quality
2. Eradicate asbestos in hallway ceilings and walls
3. Generate a site plan to determine the highest and best use of land configuration.  
Considering:
  - a) Community's need for senior or multifamily housing
  - b) Community's need for outdoor gaming and recreation
  - c) Expansion of the community center and other needs to be addressed by Highland
  - d) Use site plan to assist developers and solicit tax-credit funding
4. Solicit in-kind donations from local manufacturers

## Russell-Harvell Hosiery Mill

Industry Avenue



*Tour led by Matthew Christian, Mt. Gilead Town Manager*

The hosiery mill was formerly constructed as a building where cotton seed was processed. Sometime in the 1950s, the building was encapsulated and an additional wing and upper floor level was added. The hosiery mill presumably experienced a quick close before 1973 and was sold to its current owner in 2000. The current owner has offered to gift the building and its 10.3-acre tract of land to the town of Mt. Gilead. The total property is currently valued at \$48,400. Adjacent to property is a privately-owned truss manufacturer.

### Russell-Harvell Hosiery Mill Recommendations

1. Verify if restoration of this building could qualify for historic status given its importance to the local Mt. Gilead Economy. If so, obtain National Registry status for stand-alone historic building to allow utilization of State and Federal Historic Tax Credits.
2. Investigate Brownfield Grants for site remediation and abatements.
3. Contact property owner and review sale records to confirm whether a phase one environmental assessment has ever been completed.
4. Rezone for Vertical Mixed Use (2-3 stories to match downtown) through an overlay district specific to that site.

## Next Steps

- **Develop Master Plan:** Hire third party to assist town leadership with developing a comprehensive master plan. Elected officials must empower the Town Manager to foster any and all effort as part of his work scope.
- **Form a task force:** The task force should be diverse in regards to age, race, areas of expertise, duration of residence, and representative of the residents of Mt. Gilead. A designated member of the task force should serve as a liaison between the task force and the town council for the purpose of cultivating a consistent partnership and mode of communication. Leveraging the voice of community members through a task force is critical for the master planning process and fostering hope and revitalization for the future of Mt. Gilead.
- **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.
- **Report to Town Council:** Present the CPNI workshop report to the council and invite stakeholders to council meeting.
- **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 Mt. Gilead.