



FARMVILLE BOASTS A DIVERSIFIED ECONOMY THAT HAS GROWN SINCE THE ORIGINAL CASE STUDY IN 2008. THE VISION AND PARTNERSHIPS FORMED STARTING IN THE LATE 1990S HAVE CONTINUED TO BEAR FRUIT, AND THE TOWN REMAINS FOCUSED ON ARTS AND EDUCATION CENTERED DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT THROUGH ROBUST PARTNERSHIPS.

Farmville celebrated its 150th Anniversary in February 2022. According to the Town’s website, “Farmville could just as easily be called ‘New Town’ again, because visionary leaders, with the same kind of courage as the early settlers, have proactively responded to a changing economy and created a community of the future.” Town officials, business leaders, and residents describe Farmville as fostering small-town charm with big city amenities. The Town has been prominently featured in publications such as Our State Magazine, North State Journal, and Business NC.

Fostering Public-Private Partnership

After the great recession of 2008, Farmville witnessed one of its entrepreneurs fail in his venture due to undercapitalization. Looking back, the Town and local

business owners realized they could have helped the entrepreneur. Bert Smith, a member of The Farmville Group, describes that moment of realization:

“We were all guilty of [not helping]... The town, as a governmental entity, had to be a vital partner, but not the lone ranger. The Town Manager has a large job. He’s got more than Economic Development to deal with, and we realized we needed to help. Businesses leaders then flipped the script, started meeting with the town, and became partners with the town.”

This was the catalyst for the formation of ‘The Farmville Group,’ a small grassroots economic development group formed in 2012 by four residents and business leaders which has become instrumental in the town’s downtown transformation. The group provides support to existing and potential businesses who are interested in moving into downtown, and is a partner in redevelopment projects and promotion of the arts. They host a local ‘shark tank’

event for entrepreneurs to pitch to investors, encourage business owners to maintain their storefronts, and have partnered with local arts organizations to get murals painted downtown. In part due to their efforts, the number of vacant buildings downtown dropped from 29 to 10 between 2012 and 2017.¹

Investing in Downtown and in the Arts

Much of Farmville's success is focused on the Historic District. There are about 330 contributing buildings in and around the historic central business district. Farmville's Town Manager, David Hodgkins, illustrates that the "downtown area is very vibrant, with lots of business activity, lots of storefront occupied, nice mix of businesses, restaurants, and offices. There are plenty of activities that bring people downtown town. It's a pleasant, charming, walkable place."

Hodgkins works alongside community residents and business owners to ensure stakeholders are active in the Town's decisions. "What we're doing in Farmville is targeting and managing growth", said Randy Walters, owner of Farmville Furniture and member of the Farmville Group. Walters explains that, in the past, Farmville did not focus on economic development downtown, but to maintain Farmville's quality of life, things had to change. That change meant focusing on the central business district, which Walters sees as the front door to the community.

ARTS

The Farmville Group partnered with East Carolina University's (ECU) College of Fine Arts to renovate a former service station into the GlasStation, a glass-blowing studio and teaching space that opened to the public in 2017. This project serves as an anchor for downtown revitalization and the arts.

East Carolina University students recently completed a public art project, painting several murals in the downtown area. The project was in partnership with the Farmville Group, the Community Arts Council, the public library, and the Chamber of Commerce. The Arts Council has created the Farmville Arts Trail, a self-guided tour consisting of murals, ghost signs, local galleries, and sculptures. Ghost signs are murals reminiscent of past advertisements and signs located on a structure. The 20 stops along the Farmville Art Trail have a QR code to provide insight into each piece. The trail combines local history with creativity. The town is actively working to bring art galleries downtown and thinking about other ways to develop cultural opportunities for residents.

EDUCATION

In 2016 Pitt Community College, opened a location in downtown Farmville, named the Farmville Center. The Farmville Center offers associate's degree programs in Healthcare Management Technology and Medical Office Administration, college credit options for high school students, and various continuing education programs. Additionally, the town opened a new state-of-the-art library around the corner from PCC's Farmville Center in April 2021.

¹ <https://businessnc.com/farmville-ads-art-and-entrepreneurship-to-farming-community/>

The new library is 17,000 square feet, possesses bigger meeting spaces, and now has double the shelving from the old library, making space for new books.

FAMILY ACTIVITIES

Farmville currently has five parks; some of the amenities located across the various parks include a sand volleyball court, a splash pad, a disc golf course, and an interpretive nature trail. The town hosts several events each year, including: the annual Dogwood Festival, A Taste of Farmville, Movies on the Common, the Music in the Park series, an annual Ghost Walk, Independence Day Celebration, and more. These events and amenities are contributing to a quality of life that is attractive to young families; members of the Farmville Group say they are seeing an influx of young people and families moving into town.

REBRANDING

Farmville has recently partnered with a marketing firm to create a new website showcasing the history of the town, places to visit, and town events, as well as a new logo, signage, and apparel. The hope is that this rebranding will better showcase the town and tell the story of recent downtown revitalization to residents and visitors alike.

Incentive Programs

Farmville continues to provide several incentive programs aimed at strategically guiding growth and preserving historical character; these programs can be used separately or combined for maximum impact. The façade improvement grant provides 50% of the total costs of an approved façade improvement project, including restoring historic fronts, renovating storefronts, and conducting minor renovations. The building improvement incentive is a grant program

for the rehabilitation of buildings that have been vacant for more than a year in downtown Farmville. This program encourages property owners to improve the interior or exterior of their building to maintain the building's historic character. The target business grant program provides assistance to businesses that the community identifies as a need. A business needs to be in continuous operation for six- months before they qualify to apply, the grant not only aids in financial assistance but also offers rebates on town utilities. Finally, the town has recently added a gateway and landmark building improvement incentive grant program. Recent examples of businesses that have benefited from these programs include a daycare, Pharmville Drug, Bonnie's Café, and Farmville Hardware.

Updated Planning

In 2022 Farmville updated its Comprehensive Land Use Plan with the help of a steering committee and community input. The Steering committee was made up of current and former business owners, town officials, and non-profit leaders. The plan will help steer growth and direct priorities across many sectors, including economic development, for the next five to ten years. Economic development recommendations in the plan include: site development and promotion, continuing to promote the town as a great place to raise a family and retire, and deploying public wifi.

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