



Columbia stands out among other small towns across North Carolina because of its innovative approach to governance and dogged protection of natural resources.

Over the last ten years, Columbia has continued to make the most of the resources it has been given. It has maintained its 4-H Center, boardwalk, and Visitor's Center, while opening an assisted living facility, restaurants, and even a winery.

The Visitor's Center has seen a steady flow of visitors in the last few years for multiple reasons. The location is prime; many tourists stop by the Visitor's Center on the way to the Outer Banks. Columbia has maintained its facilities, keeping the curb appeal high for passersby. The facilities were renovated in 2012. The Visitor's Center is funded through a contract with the NC Department of Transportation, providing two full-time positions and six part-time positions. Overall, the Visitor's Center is doing very well; providing employment, encouraging guests to stop as they drive through, and maintaining a healthy relationship with the state. However, the Visitor's Center has a hard time rerouting the guests into Columbia's downtown to spend money and stay.

The 4-H Center has been an equally important asset for Columbia, if not more important. In the last two years, Columbia has added a multipurpose recreation building, providing facilities for a gym, large meeting rooms, and enhanced indoor spaces. This additional space has increased its capacity to hold summer camps, summits, and conferences. Half of the funding for the 4-H Center comes from North Carolina State University appropriations and the other half is generated with campers' fees for 4-H summer camps as well as contracts with various groups who use the space throughout the year. The 4-H Center employs eight full-time positions and sixteen additional summer positions. Needless to say, the 4-H Center has added a huge value proposition to the small town of Columbia.

In addition to investing in facilities, Columbia has also taken initiatives to embrace and enhance its surrounding natural assets. The boardwalk has been maintained to be accessible every day, all year around. This accessibility has increased in the last few years by adding in two additional points of entry, so that there

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are now three points of entry. The boardwalk currently provides access to the water for kayaks, canoes, and boats increasing the uses of the boardwalk and diversifying the market of potential users.

In addition to the boardwalk being maintained and improved, Columbia has explored leveraging its proximity to the Albemarle Sound. The Partnerships of the Sounds has been a group for small towns in and around Eastern NC Sounds to join forces and work to improve their communities. Sadly, Columbia has struggled to stay engaged in the Partnership, as the lack of funding and lack of initiative makes it hard for the various town leaders to connect. According to John Merrick, the Economic Developer Director, the future is hopeful, as the partnership is 'looking on the ups.'

Columbia has maintained and expanded its amenities and employers since the original case study was published. There have been many new successful openings in the area since 2008, but only three will be covered here: Tyrell House, Columbia Crossing and Vineyards on the Scuppernong. The Tyrell House was opened in 2010 and was the product of a major planning process that prioritized the creation of the 60 room assisted living facility. This retired living home employs between 25-30 people full-time. Columbia Crossing, a country cooking restaurant is another new business that has opened. Financed in part by state funding to renovate abandoned buildings, Columbia Crossing employees 8-10 full time employees. Lastly, Vineyards on the Scuppernong is a wine shop housed in another previously distressed building. Considering the size of Columbia, the Vineyards on the Scuppernong is a tourist attraction and unique amenity for Columbia, bringing additional revenue to the town.

Columbia is a prime example of how to leverage government funding and partnerships to expand town assets and amenities. Moreover, the businesses that have opened as a result of town initiatives have brought over 72 jobs to the town in the last decade.

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