

Can a Small Town Chart its own Destiny as it Grows?



The Town of Boiling Springs is planning for growth. Can it have its elected board come to consensus on priorities? Is there a balanced comprehensive approach to growth? Is there the capacity to meet the existing and predicted growth?

Setting Direction.



*Justin Longino, Town Manager
Town of Boiling Springs*

The Town of Boiling Springs is a small town in Cleveland County, North Carolina and the home of *Gardner-Webb University*. During the strategic planning board retreat, the town council was excited to reach consensus on four priorities, with supporting objectives, that focused on the following: economic development, quality of life, infrastructure and staff support. The board also enjoyed developing two priorities directly for *The Boiling Springs, NC Downtown Master Plan* so the staff would know what to focus on in this many faceted plan.

Recruiting New Businesses While Respecting Small Town Atmosphere.

The Architectural Study for Downtown

Similar to many municipalities, the town is exploring ways to enhance the economic vitality of its downtown. The board stressed the importance of hiring an architect to complete a study on existing business structures and potential new buildings with possible uses. Mayor Pro-Tem Patrick Litton believes that “it is important to look for ways to provide shell buildings as well as renovations to existing structures to attract small businesses.” Justin Longino, the town manager shared with me the town’s success. “The architect

has been engaged. He has completed some great renderings for us and we are moving forward with exploring an executable development plan.”

Comprehensive Business Recruitment Package

While analyzing *The Boiling Springs, NC Downtown Master Plan*, the town council prioritized developing a comprehensive business recruitment package to share with businesses who are considering locating in Boiling Springs. The council directed staff to include amenities, workforce, community atmosphere, business advantages, proximity, educational opportunities, collaboration with the *Cleveland County Economic Development Partnership*, and partnering with *Gardner-Webb University*.

Mayor Daniel Thomas explains the success of the Boiling Springs Board Retreat in this way:

“We all got to voice our ideas, we came to consensus, really almost unanimous agreement on priorities, we got clarity, staff got direction, and we still have a unified council with much momentum and have accomplished much on our priorities already.”



*Daniel Thomas, Mayor
Town of Boiling Springs*

This approach is helpful to staff as having these priorities in the strategic plan itself has kept momentum, deepened commitment to the master plan, and provides clear direction of what to work on first in the master plan. We have completed much on this package internally and hired a consultant.

– Justin Longino, Town Manager

Balance Small Town Atmosphere and Growth

Small towns often ask: How can we grow while still keeping our small town atmosphere? Mayor Thomas thinks that planning growth can minimize this challenge of the old ways versus the new ways. “I think we have opportunities to establish a stronger base of locally owned businesses which will also create stronger community ties.” Mayor Pro-tem Litton believes that “closer ties with *Gardner-Webb University* is also important as they are a central local driver of the town’s economy and culture.”

Sometimes Board’s have to be bold, and empower their citizens to make decisions. Since the retreat, The Board voted to have Liquor-by-the-Drink on the ballot in November. The mayor shared with me that: “We were founded as a small Southern Baptist town. We respect that alcohol and loud music would not be in the whole town, but it is on the ballot because restaurants have said it is not profitable for them to come without this. It is all about culture “.

Building capacity.

Infrastructure

The town has three main infrastructure objectives and there have been many results. Justin shares that there is a list of available land for small commercial use and that a first draft of funding sources for sewer extension has been reviewed. Justin also told me that “We are

working on an update to our future land use plan that will include some preliminary input on parks. We heard about potential funding sources in the spring for park planning.”

Lead for NC Fellow

Similar to many small municipalities, Boiling Springs does not have a grant writer or a planner. At the retreat, the board created an objective to discuss the feasibility of hiring a town planner and a grant writer during the upcoming budget process.

The town solved this by hitting two birds with one stone, hiring a Lead for NC Fellow. Justin clarifies: “as a full time position he has been helping with planning, grant writing and other projects. The *UNC School of Government* provided initial training tailored to our needs, and continued support as well as helping to fund the position.” The mayor and mayor-protem agree. “The fellow has been a great addition to the team and has helped to drive a lot of these items on the strategic plan forward!”

“We have two options: let growth just happen or develop a plan so that we have consistency in future growth. Our council and management have chosen the latter. It is our job to serve the citizens everyday and our board is committed to this.” - Mayor Pro-Tem Patrick Litton

This statement to me is what we are all about and why we are all in this together.



*Patrick Litton, Mayor Pro-Tem
Town of Boiling Springs*



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