

Local and Regional North Carolina Collaborations

Case Studies from the North Carolina Chapter of the American Planning Association

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Editors' Note: Carolina Planning regularly publishes a feature highlighting projects from members of the North Carolina Chapter of the American Planning Association (APA-NC). This year's submissions range from multi-county visioning efforts to small-town transportation planning, demonstrating that planning at any scale can benefit from innovative collaboration.

Innovative Partnerships

Ben Hitchings

I love partnerships, and here's why. Nothing catalyzes creative solutions like a shared problem and different viewpoints. For me, this process is like a controlled nuclear reaction – large amounts of creative energy are released when different perspectives collide in service to a shared objective.

This edition of the *Carolina Planning Journal* highlights innovative partnerships. In a time of growing societal challenges and declining resources, partnerships enable us to combine our expertise, link our networks, and leverage our resources.

These benefits do not always come easily. To realize them, we need to:

- 1) Push outside our comfort zone to engage unfamiliar partners;
- 2) Work together to identify shared interests;
- 3) Sort through our differences; and
- 4) Collaborate to build mutual trust.

I recently went through this process in developing a partnership to relocate a farmers market. The market had been operating successfully for five years, but was losing its space and was looking for a new home. Farmers market leaders approached the town where I work about finding

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a new location. These leaders, who were experienced in private business, engaged town staff, who were experienced in local government. Some of the early conversations were challenging. Farmers market leaders were surprised that town staff couldn't agree to build a million-dollar market pavilion. Town management was surprised that a small non-profit organization couldn't contribute more financially to the effort. Through continued dialogue we sorted through these issues, shared information, and built mutual understanding.

The process required patience, creativity, and an open mind. It was aided by hiring a third-party facilitator with expertise in local food systems, as well as by the shared task of preparing a grant proposal to seek outside funding for relocating the market. Preparing the grant proposal spurred us to refine our ideas, work collaboratively, and demonstrate our commitment to the project goals through the time and energy we invested. Successful submission of the proposal gave us a small "win" to celebrate together. The result was a strong organizational collaboration that combined the site acquisition, site development, and facility maintenance expertise of local government with the market know-how and operational expertise of a seasoned non-profit. Now that's an exciting partnership, and one that dramatically strengthens the prospects for a successful project.

This section of CPJ describes four examples of dynamic collaborations from across North Carolina. Such innovative partnerships take work, but the rewards can be substantial. If done right, they can generate an arc of creative energy to do something transformative in the life of our communities – by doing it together.