

Case Study: Kernersville, North Carolina

Many of North Carolina's smaller communities, particularly those located in the crosshairs of urban sprawl, are facing a crisis of identity. Community character and quality of life have become major issues. Kernersville, N.C., centrally positioned within the Triad region composed of Winston-Salem, High Point and Greensboro, had grown from a population of 10,836 in 1990 to 17,126 in 2000. Town leaders knew they had to take action to preserve Kernersville's small town character and protect itself from haphazard development.

Kernersville 2020 began in 1997 as a public process to give town residents a voice in the future of their community, which was being squeezed by the cities of the Triad. The process addressed issues of "quality and character in development" and explored ways to preserve Kernersville's small town atmosphere while establishing a unique, high quality community within the Triad.

The town adopted ordinances affecting Zoning Overlay Districts in 2001, which required the use of natural materials such as brick, stone or wood on building facades and prohibited synthetic materials such as vinyl or metals. The districts encompass one-third of all parcels (3,258 of 10,955) within the

town limits. The ordinances were part of a strategic analysis called Kernersville 2020 and were initiated by Kernersville Planning Director Jeff Hatling, AICP. Around City Hall, the initiative became known as the "anti-metal building and pro-brick ordinance."

"This process allowed the local community to set the standards for building requirements in the overlay districts, letting the quality of the development regulate the quantity," said Hatling. "Brick is recognized as a material that can help insure quality development, especially considering that future adapter reuse is higher with brick structures. We've found that calling on businesses to make stronger investments in Kernersville hasn't deterred investment at all."

The Zoning Overlay Districts were developed by an advisory group, incorporating input from civic organizations and community residents, which met with the Planning Department from November 1999 to April 2000. The Board of Alderman unanimously approved the Zoning Overlay Districts in December 2000. No public opposition was presented at the final public hearing. The building requirements are based on nonsubjective administrative criteria, which relieves the process of subjective design evaluations.

The Town of Kernersville’s successful public process of addressing these issues demonstrates that growth management regulations do not have to be complex, time consuming and costly in order to preserve the character and quality the community deserves. The town’s Zoning Overlay Districts plan was awarded the 2002 Implementation Award for Small Communities by the North Carolina Association of the American Planning Association.

JUST THE FACTS

City:	Kernersville, North Carolina
Population:	17,126
Founded:	1871
Masonry Requirement:	Various
Contacts:	Jeffrey A. Hatling, AICP Kernersville Planning Director PO Drawer 728 Kernersville, NC 27285 336-992-0704 Mayor Larry R. Brown PO Box 85 Kernersville, NC 27285 336-996-5949