

2018 LGFCU Excellence in Innovation Award Project Evaluation

Project ID	GG-7
Title of Program	Boone Trail Community Center & Library
Program Category	
Submission Date	6/1/2018 10:52:30 PM
County	Harnett
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Implementation Date	20-Feb-17
FLSA Designation	Non-exempt
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Description of Productivity Improvement

The Boone Trail Community Center & Library represented a significant productivity improvement for the county in various areas. The project allowed the county to extend services to an underserved portion of the county at a significantly reduced cost than if the county had to purchase additional land to construct a park or a library. It also allowed for a property that was deteriorating and becoming more and more of an eyesore to find reuse as a hub of community activity, providing a source of community pride along with a facility from which to provide County services and make citizens aware of other County programs. The design of the former school allowed for multiple County services to be collocated at one facility, forming a synergy between Parks & Recreation and the Library, which has resulted in the two departments communicating more and adding relevant services and programs based on that collaboration. Citizens in the community and western portion of the county no longer have to drive to the county seat for services, but can enjoy recreational and library amenities closer to home. The location of a community library also gives these citizens greater access to the county's entire library catalog through interlibrary transfers.

Description of why this project was initiated

Harnett County is spread out across 600 acres and is split almost in half by the Cape Fear River. The County has five small municipalities all grouped on the eastern side of the river with the county seat located in the center of the county. The result is that the majority of the county's residents do not have access to nearby county services. Citizens, particularly in the western portion of the county, frequently request additional services from the county in terms of parks, libraries, and other amenities. The county is also behind in terms of providing adequate recreational opportunities to citizens. A 2017 Parks & Recreation Master Plan revealed the county has \$87 million in recreational needs including parks, facilities and trails. The county is also in position of several former school properties, which the county received from the Harnett County Board of Education once the schools were replaced with new schools. Over the years, the former school buildings have deteriorated due to lack of use, leaving the county with dilapidated buildings which have become eyesores in the community. One such property was the former Boone Trail School, which closed in 2010, and which sat unoccupied since then. In 2016, a group of Boone Trail residents approached county leadership and asked them to help preserve the old school before it deteriorated further. While the main school building had deteriorated significantly, the gymnasium and media center were built several years before the school closed and could be salvaged. After meeting with the citizens, county officials decided to repurpose the former gym and media center into the Boone Trail Community Center & Library. The facility would consist of a community center and library, a gymnasium, and outdoor athletic features including a playground, two ball fields, and a walking trail. Harnett County Parks & Recreation would operate the facility, which would become the department's first indoor facility. Much of the work on the facility was conducted in-house by Parks & Recreation staff. Portions of the facility opened in early 2017 with the gymnasium reopening to the public in February. A ribbon cutting for the facility was held in July 2017 along with a memorabilia sale where residents were allowed to purchase artifacts from the former school including old uniforms, desks, chairs and other furnishings. Proceeds from the sale went toward future improvements at the facility. The facility has proven popular with the community as nearly all events are well attended. Because the facility is located in a former community school, the community has taken ownership of making sure it is a success. The project has also proven to be a successful partnership between Harnett County Parks & Recreation and the Harnett County Public Library, two departments with related community outreach functions that had previously not worked together. The partnership has led to a synergistic relationship that has enhanced the efforts of both departments. The Boone Trail Community Center & Library also serves as a blueprint for other community centers at abandoned schools in other parts of the county, and has proven a more cost effective way to bring services to underserved parts of the county. Additional community centers are currently being planned for the former Shawtown school and at the current Benhaven Elementary, which will be given to the County after the new Benhaven Elementary opens this fall in another location. The County has identified a more affordable way to bring services to citizens in more remote portions of the county, and has identified a way to preserve and reuse former school buildings following their useful life as a school.

Quantifiable results (sustainability, cost savings, cost avoidance and/or a higher level of service).

Indication of what resources were used and what was done with any accrued time savings

The Boone Trail Community Center & Library resulted in a number of significant benefits, some measurable and some not. The project cost approximately \$150,000, which included \$80,000 for playground equipment, \$50,000 for additional park amenities including a walking trail and two ball fields, and \$20,000 to stock the facility with library books. This provided a playground, gymnasium, library, ball fields and walking track. Acquiring land and constructing these facilities from scratch

would have cost the County well over \$1 million. Using a former school also took a blighted and deteriorating property and gave it new life, creating an increased sense of community and a point of pride for local residents. The facility generates minimal revenue through the rental of the gymnasium for community events and through occasional library fines. The Boone Trail Community Center & Library provided a cost savings over the price of constructing new, and cost avoidance by using an existing facility in having to build new. It also allowed for a higher level of county services, with programs and amenities offered closer to residents in this portion of the county. The success of this project will lead to additional savings as it creates a blueprint for future projects. While the project does not put a dent in the \$87 million the Parks & Recreation Master Plan suggests is needed, it closes a gap in recreational programming and brings services to a previously underserved part of the county.

Other descriptive information

We would be happy to provide additional information upon request including photos of the facility and events held at the facility, along with additional budgetary information if necessary.