

# Town of Forest City

## Profile

Located at the base of the Blue Ridge Mountains, Forest City has never lacked for beauty. The main street was laid out in a 50-foot-wide corridor with a landscaped median and central square. The U.S. Department of Agriculture in 1927 called it one of the 10 best planned small towns in the country. Seventy years later, the Western North Carolina Development Council said it had the most beautiful downtown in western North Carolina.

The town was incorporated in 1877 and today has a population of 7,549. For more than 100 years, it was a textile town. Even today National Textiles, with 600 employees, is the town and county's largest employer. But other factories have closed, eliminating 7,500 jobs between 1999 and 2005.

One closure in 2001 hit particularly hard. The seven-acre Florence Mill site was in the heart of downtown and part of the town's Historic Register district. Since 2004, a public-private partnership has been redeveloping the site as a mix-used project to include a six-screen theater, restaurants and office space. A multifunctional outdoor facility, capable of hosting baseball games and concerts, opened in May.

Folks who live in Forest City claim it's 60 miles from everywhere: Charlotte, Asheville and Hickory in North Carolina and Greenville, S.C. That proximity no doubt helps account for the 10,000 people who turn out each August for the Hot Nights and Cool Rides Car Show. The annual Christmas parade also draws 5,000.

## Community Issues

Forest City faces major hurdles on the road to economic recovery. Even before some mill closures, one local worker out of 10 lacked a job, and today, one person in five lives below the poverty line. Rutherford County ranks among the state's most economically distressed regions as a tier one county. The poor economy has led to out-migration as well. Forest City lost 11 percent of its population between 1990 and 2000, a fact disguised in U.S. Census figures by a merger with adjoining Alexander Mills. Elsewhere in Rutherford are indications of growth. Thirty subdivisions, some for thousands of acres, were approved last year alone.

## Opportunities

With its participation in NC STEP, Forest City's No. 1 goal is to build its social capital. By increasing citizen involvement and preparation, it seeks to create a long-term vision for the town. Planning efforts to date have been piecemeal, tackling the downtown or an individual neighborhood. It now recognizes the need for an overall vision for development, strategies that will capitalize on its new sports and entertainment facilities, and a future with sustainable businesses and long-term job growth.

## Contact

Danielle Withrow, Town Planner  
PO Box 728  
Forest City, NC 28043  
828-248-5200  
[dwithrow@townofforestcity.com](mailto:dwithrow@townofforestcity.com)

