

Town of Franklin

Profile

Franklin is well placed for the outdoor enthusiast. It lies alongside the Little Tennessee River and close to the Appalachian Trail, making hiking, fishing and boating easily accessible. A four-mile, 13-foot-wide greenway travels through the heart of town along the river.

The town, population 3,618, was incorporated in 1855 and named for Gov. Jesse Franklin. The local newspaper, The Franklin Press, has operated since 1886. Until the Great Depression, wealth was based on agriculture, mining and logging. Manufacturing would come to play a significant role as well, but in the last decade, three plants have closed, laying off 470 workers.

The tourism industry began when landowners opened their property to casual gem exploration. Today, a series of special events help lure locals and tourists alike. They include a folk festival, Pumpkinfest, the Scottish Heritage Festival and a weekly music event called Pickin' on the Square.

Though Main Street has suffered from neglect, residents and local business owners have spent several years sprucing it up again. In 2006, the town joined the Small Town Main Street Program, sponsored by the N.C. Department of Commerce. While most Main Street projects focus exclusively on historic downtowns, Franklin's also incorporates the industrial thoroughfare and a contemporary retail corridor.

Community Issues

Stabilizing the economic base is Franklin's No. 1 challenge. In 2000, a fifth of the population lived in poverty, and the median household income barely exceeded half the state median. With the economic base shifting from manufacturing/commercial to commercial/tourism, more jobs have become seasonal. In fact, the unemployment rate doubles in winter when the population, conversely, shrinks by half. Now there are signs that the downturn in the housing market is affecting the second-home industry and concerns that rising gas prices may hurt tourism as well.

Opportunities

Through NC STEP, Franklin will seek strategies to grow small, locally owned companies to keep wealth within the community. By also revitalizing Main Street, it hopes to encourage more tourism as well as providing dining, shopping and entertainment options for residents.

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