

# Town of Weldon

## Profile

Sitting the banks of North Carolina's mightiest river, Weldon claims a significant place in North Carolina's history. Although not incorporated until 1843, it was founded a century earlier at the furthest navigable point on the Roanoke River. It served as a trade hub for Roanoke traffic and later for the Wilmington-Weldon Railroad. The state's first major cotton mill and first power generation facility were built here.

Commerce bustled into the 20th century, benefiting from the north-south traffic carried by U.S. 301. With the opening of Interstate 95 in 1964, all that traffic bypassed Weldon and business began to dry up.

Today, Weldon has a population of 1,301. On many tree-lined streets, grand homes in Federal, Victorian and Greek Revival styles have been preserved. Its downtown, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, is filled with architecturally interesting but deteriorating buildings.

At least five of downtown buildings have been given new life. With help from the N.C. Department of Commerce's Small Town Main Street Program and federal grants, they were converted 24 affording housing units with three street-level commercial spaces. Other improvements have included spruced-up town entryways, tree plantings and storefront appearances.

Down on the river, other developments are under way. The old grist mill, a distinctive site, is being renovated as an anchor of Weldon's Historic Waterfront Initiative. The Weldon Cotton Mill building also has been purchased for possible conversion into an antiques mall, and the town now owns an industrial site adjacent to its River Falls Park. Plans for its use have not been decided.

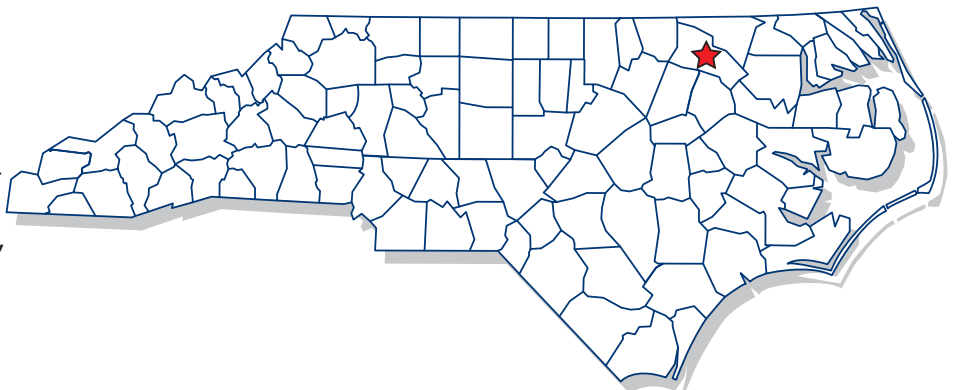
For 50,000 fishermen, no development plan is as significant as the annual run of striped bass, also known as rockfish. The fish travel upstream for spawning every spring, and the fishermen line up at the boat landing, eager to earn bragging rights for biggest catch or the one that got away, earning Weldon its own bragging rights as Rockfish Capital of the World.

## Community Issues

Weldon, located in tier one Halifax County, has experienced a steady decline over the last 40 years. Hurt by foreign competition, the major cotton mill closed and the lumber mill downsized. A stainless steel fabricator also closed three years ago. Poverty is high and persistent. More than one person in five lives below the poverty level. Job losses and poverty in turn have led to population loss. The 1960 population exceeded 2,000 people, two-thirds again as many as today. The remaining population is disproportionately elderly. In 2000, 23.5 percent of Weldon's residents were 65 or older, twice the statewide proportion.

## Opportunities

Through its participation in NC STEP, Weldon seeks to develop a plan (1) to capitalize on the growth of tourism associated with neighboring Roanoke Rapid's Carolina Crossroads entertainment complex and (2) to integrate its historic and natural resources into a long-term, sustainable program of economic development. It recognizes that these goals will entail a number of different strategies. The strategies are expected to include leadership development, support for entrepreneurship and small business development, and revitalization of downtown and the waterfront area.



## Contact

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