

- Give an overview of the Recreation Economy for Rural Communities planning assistance program
- Share a few examples from communities that have participated in the RERC program in the past
- Discuss the timeline and process for applying for the program
- Answer any questions you may have!











# **Recreation Economy for Rural Communities**

















- Outdoor recreation is a big and growing part of the U.S. economy
- Planning assistance program to help rural communities leverage outdoor recreation to revitalize their main streets, diversify economies, and promote land stewardship
- Helps the community convene to articulate their vision, goals, and actionable next steps
- Federal and state agencies (and other partners) come to the table to listen and help with implementation

https://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/rerc











- <u>Revitalize Main Streets</u> through outdoor recreation
- Strengthen <u>economic</u>
   <u>opportunities</u> for residents and businesses
- Get people outdoors, as a key part of the <u>sustainable use</u> of natural resources – improving people's health











### A joint project of:

- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
- USDA Forest Service
- Northern Border Regional Commission
- Appalachian Regional Commission
- Denali Commission

### In partnership with:

Local steering committees in each partner community

### With participation from:

- Other federal agencies
- State, regional, and local agencies and organizations









# **PLANNING ASSISTANCE PROCESS**

- Understand context, self assessment
- Refine the problem statement, goals
- Customize agenda and materials
- Coach community on stakeholder participation
- Engage federal stakeholder partners

Assess

# Convene

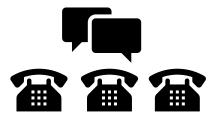
- Conduct community tour
- Affirm collective vision
- Assess assets, challenges relative to advancing the community's goals
- Discuss relevant case studies and generate ideas and locally relevant strategies
- Refine goals and identify specific actions and next steps to move forward

- Document Action Plan
- Conduct follow up discussions to review and refine action steps
- Engage project steering committee and stakeholders to identify additional resources/funding
- Finalize the blueprint for implementation

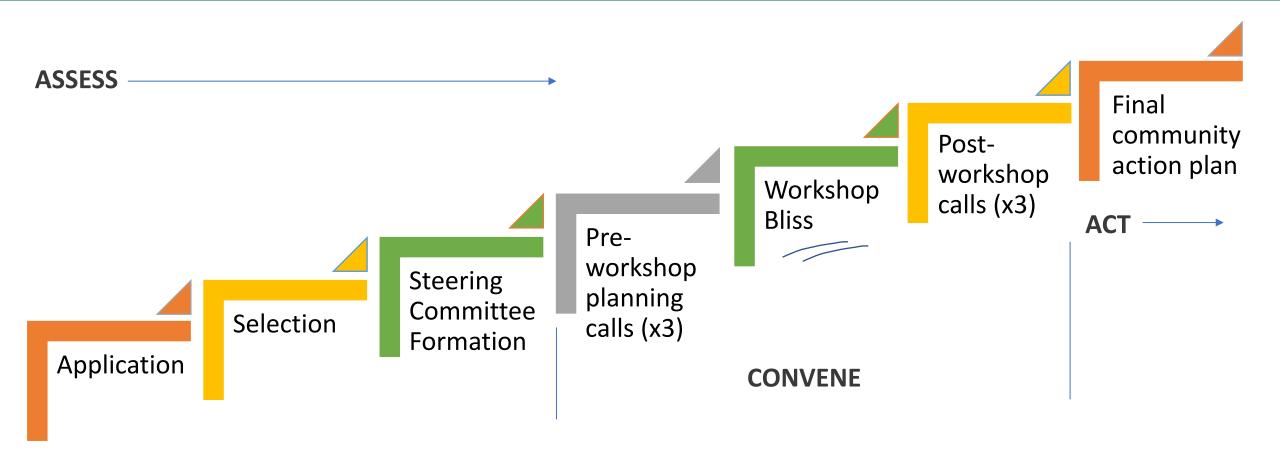
Implement







# **ANOTHER VIEW OF THE PROCESS**

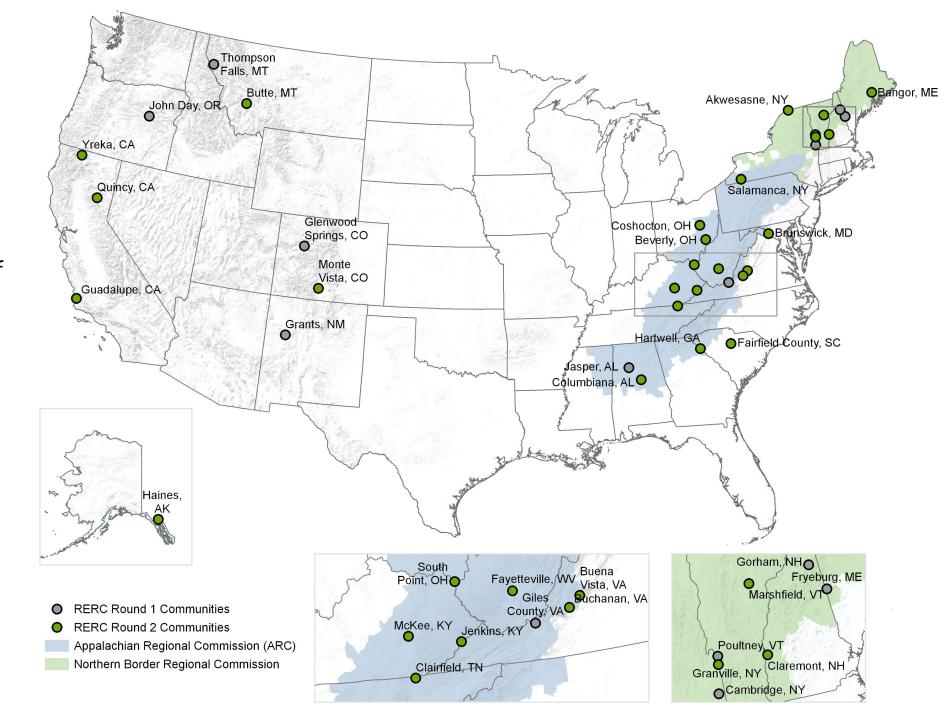




# RERC Partner Communities

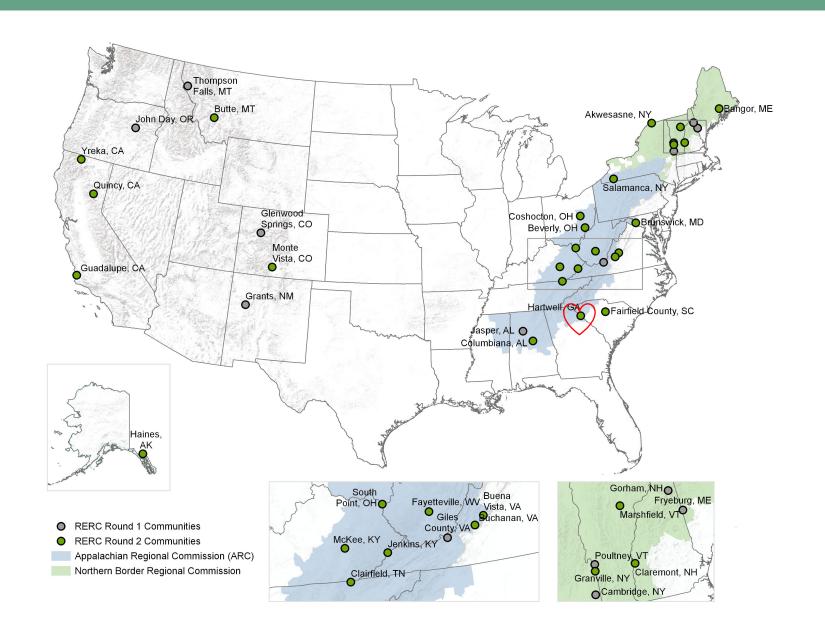
communities in the pilot round in 2020-2021

communities in Round 2 of the program, with workshops in 2022-2023





# **RERC PARTNER COMMUNITIES**





# CITY OF HARTWELL, GEORGIA

### **COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVE**

- Agricultural community with a strong main street located on the Georgia-South Carolina border
- Lake Hartwell, covering 56,000 acres, is the third largest lake in the Southeast
- Historic downtown is less than two miles from the lake shores, yet there is a need to build a connection between downtown and the lake
- Archway Program provides vital partnership with University of Georgia for planning and engagement efforts
- 33 businesses have opened in the last two years, with over \$3 million of public and private invested in the downtown
- Desire and need to connect African American "Rome Neighborhood" to downtown and natural assets through sidewalk and trail improvement
- Applied for RERC to create a vision and process to work through to leverage recent development momentum intentionally

### **WORKSHOP GOALS**

- 1. Connecting Assets and History
- 2. Improving Infrastructure
- 3. Identify for Marketing, Branding, Promotion
- 4. Develop and Expand Offerings







# CITY OF HARTWELL, GEORGIA

### **ABOUT THE PROCESS**

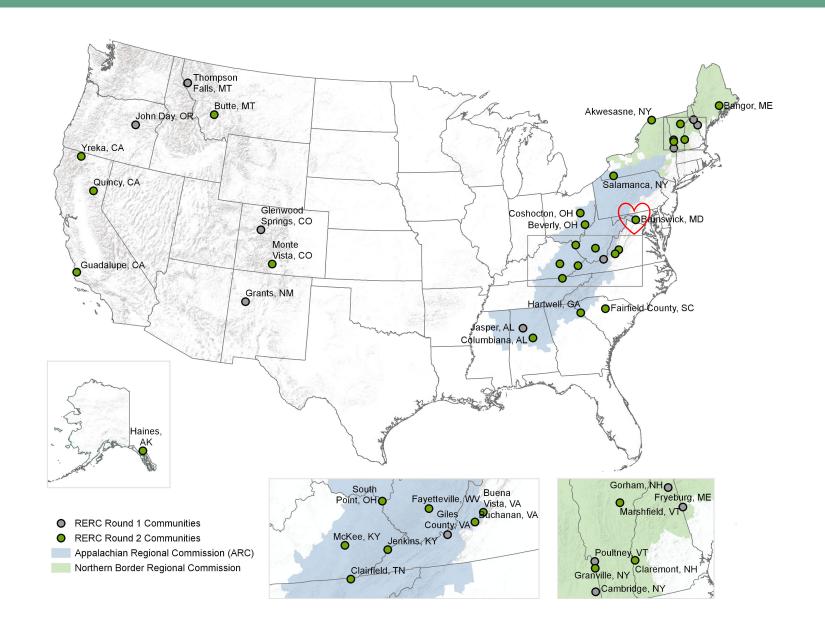
- The workshop was held at the Hart County Schools Agriscience Facility.
- There is a strong partnership between the City of Hartwell, Hartwell Main Street, University of Georgia plus other groups like local business owners, residents, and outdoor enthusiasts who showed up and became engaged.

### SINCE THE WORKSHOP

- Received an Outdoor Roundtable Grant for \$10,000 to put in first trail marker a statue of our namesake Nancy Hart, the only county in Georgia to be named after a woman is Hart County.
- Applying for Appalachian Region Commission Grant to update community theatre to activate the space for outdoor plays and connect to refurbished Railroad Street Park.
- Partners with University of Georgia's Carl Vinson Institute of Governments Marketing/Branding Program, a one-year long grassroots program that helps the city capture and tell Hartwell's story. The lake will be a primary focus.
- Seeking EPA's Environmental Justice funding to remediate a blighted building in African American "Rome Neighborhood," to capture history through a pocket park, outdoor museum, and trails that connect to the lake.
- Selected as the 2023 Georgia Outstanding Community Transformation/Downtown of Year Award.



# **RERC PARTNER COMMUNITIES**





# **RERC**

in

Brunswick, MD

**COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN RECREATION** ECONOMY **RURAL** COMMUNITIES Brunswick, Maryland 2023 Appalachian Northern Border Regional Commission Regional ARC Commission

September 12, 2024

# The Why... Why did Brunswick apply for RERC program?





Seize opportunities of local outdoor recreational assets



Create a thriving working outdoor economy that supports local livelihoods



Improve economic and workforce development



Revitalize downtown



Increase awareness of existing recreational assets



Expand recreational amenities



Preserve natural and historic assets

RERC in Brunswick, MD

# **The HOW...** What was the process used?

Local Steering Committee was formed With the Planning Assistance Team, we:

- Assessed opportunities and challenges
- Set goals to strengthen
  Brunswick's recreation economy

Held public workshop in February 2023 which created the Community Action Plan

Follow-up meetings held to refine the feedback and identify resources

Community Action Plan should guide Brunswick's recreation economy development over the next 2-3 years



# Next steps...What do we do to implement this Community Action Plan?

Correlate goals with other plans like Small Area Plan, Comprehensive Plan, and BMS Strategic Goals

Define "who is doing what" currently

Determine funding and resources for outstanding action items





# Focus areas

- Downtown Occupancy
- Outdoor Recreation Amenities
- Physical Connections
- Business Development
- Promotion

# Goal 1: Downtown Occupancy

# Increase the occupancy of downtown buildings to create a vibrant, attractive community hub for residents and visitors

Action Item	Results to Date
Continue the Brunswick Building Blocks Grant Program	Awarded \$528,800 to 10 projects
Continue the Blighted Property Acquisition Program	Currently working on single largest investment in downtown
Coordinate downtown infrastructure improvements among City departments, development project leads, and other partners	In Progress
Create promotional materials and a walking tour for prospective downtown building investors	First walking tour held June 2024 with 40 participants, Created Brunswick Brochure & Pocket Guide

# Goal 2: Outdoor Recreation Amenities

Provide additional basic and supportive amenities that serve residents and visitors participating in outdoor recreation.

Action Items	Results to Date
Construct public restrooms	Seeking Funding
Increase the usage of the West End Trails	Benches added, seeking grants (RERC Rural Implementation Grant not awarded)
Explore the need for bike storage lockers, including installing them at a pilot location	In Progress
Create a visitor center at the train station	Awarded \$50,000 Grant for Train Station Improvements

# Goal 3: Physical Connections

Improve connections among our downtown, outdoor recreation resources, and newer residential developments, particularly for people on foot and bicycle

Action Items	Results to Date
Conduct a signage assessment	Completed assessment and working on implementation plan and funding sources
Repair and connect sidewalks	Awarded \$500K for Phase 1 of Maple Ave. sidewalks. Awarded funding for Multi-Modal Study to improve connectivity.
Conduct bicycle infrastructure assessment	See above Multi-Modal Study
Work with business owners to create an on-demand shuttle betwen the Holiday Inn and downtown	Not Started

# Goal 4: Business Development

# Support the startup, growth, and recruitment of businesses that complement Brunswick's focus on outdoor recreation

Action Items	Results to Date
Assess local and regional economic development capacity, partnerships, roles, and next steps	Beginning assessment
Develop a business incubator program to support the startup, growth, and recruitment of outdoor businesses and workforce	5 New businesses in the past year (3 were Farmers' Market vendors)
Develop a business recruitment strategy targeting regional businesses	In alignment with Blighted Building Program/Targeted recruitment for vacant bike shop successful

# Goal 5: Promotion

# Promote Brunswick as an outdoor recreation, history, and cultural tourism destination linked to other regional attractions

	Action Items	Results to Date
	Promote local outdoor recreation opportunities to youth and teens	Created & sent out survey to determine park amenities that would appeal to older youth/teens
	Develop virtual and in-person educational tours of the wastewater and water treatment plants	Began tours for internal staff and area politicians
	Form a regional recreation tourism group	Not Started
) (	Create a volunteer program	Increased volunteer recruitment

# Questions?



Julie Martorana, City Administrator Carmen Hilton, Program Manager



# **Community Eligibility and Special Considerations**

- Applicants must be located in, and project activities must be focused within, the United States, Puerto Rico, US Virgin Islands, Guam, Northern Mariana Islands or American Samoa.
- Special consideration for communities that are:
  - ✓ Small towns and rural communities.
  - ✓ Economically disadvantaged communities.
  - ✓ Tribal and Alaskan Native Village communities.
  - ✓ Communities located in the Northern Border region of Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, and New York (visit the Northern Border Regional Commission's website at <a href="http://www.nbrc.gov/">http://www.nbrc.gov/</a> for a list of counties in this region).
  - ✓ Communities located in the Appalachian Region (visit the Appalachian Regional Commission's website at <a href="https://www.arc.gov/appalachian-states/">https://www.arc.gov/appalachian-states/</a> for a list of counties in this region).
  - ✓ Communities located in the Denali region representing rural Alaska (visit the Denali Commission's website at <a href="https://denali.gov/about/funding-2/">https://denali.gov/about/funding-2/</a> for a list of communities in this region).

# **Community Responsibilities**

- Form a Steering Committee
- Complete the Community Self-Assessment
- Participate in:
  - ✓ Three facilitated planning calls
  - ✓ All workshop sessions
  - ✓ Three facilitated post-workshop calls
  - ✓ Steering committee meetings without facilitation, as needed
- Secure a workshop venue
  - ✓ Refreshments are optional and at the community's expense
- Plan a Community Tour
- Invite community members to the workshop and perform follow-up outreach to ensure good community participation
- Help implement the action plan

### **Potential Focus Areas**

- Ensuring **local residents, including young people**, have connections and opportunities related to nearby outdoor assets to foster community pride, good stewardship, and local economic benefits.
- Creating or expanding **trail networks** to attract overnight visitors and new businesses and foster use by local residents.
- Developing **in-town amenities**, such as broadband service; electric vehicle charging; housing; or shops, restaurants, or breweries, to serve residents and attract new visitors and residents with an interest in nearby outdoor assets.
- Marketing local downtowns and Main Streets as gateways to nearby natural lands to capture and amplify outdoor recreation dollars.
- Developing a **community consensus** on the management of outdoor assets to reduce potential conflicts and ensure sustainable use of resources.
- Engaging in stewardship of outdoor recreation assets and mitigating and adapting to climate change and other environmental challenges.
- Ensuring that all residents and visitors, particularly those who have not historically been engaged in outdoor recreation and Main Street revitalization efforts, have **equitable access** to and can benefit from the growing outdoor recreation economy.

# Who Can Apply?

- Eligible applicants include local governments, Tribes, nonprofit organizations and institutions representing any community in the United States. Local colleges, universities and extension agencies can also serve as the lead organization for the assistance.
- Regional organizations that apply should identify a strong local partner and should explain the place-based focus of the project.





# Timeline and Q&A

- Applications due at 11:59 pm Eastern time on October 16, 2024
- Partner communities selected and all applicants notified in early 2025
- Planning process and workshops take place in 2025
- Stay tuned to the RERC website for more information:

https://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/rerc

### **Questions about applying?**

Email: receconomy@epa.gov

### **RERC Program Contact:**

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