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NC Community Foundation Grant works with Preservation of Wilson to kick-off revitalization efforts in the Old Wilson Historic Neighborhood

Preservation of Wilson (POW) has received a grant from the NC Community Foundation for \$590 to assist in their mission of taking a lead role in the revitalization of the historic residential districts in Wilson County. This grant will be used to commission Knoll Architectural Models, Inc. to construct a model of the "Old Wilson Neighborhood Mile" as a planning and marketing tool. The area will begin at Barton College and move east toward the commercial downtown district. The model will be portable allowing for use at public meetings and presentations.

The "Mile" will be a pilot area for POW as it markets homes to preservation minded owner-occupied buyers. The Old Wilson Historic District dates from the 1850s through 1920s. While the area has lost several significant structures it still contains a representation of the area's major architectural styles, many of which are the works of Wilson's major builders and architects. There is a large and varied collection of bungalows which were erected when Wilson's agriculturally-based economy was booming.

Today many homes have been neglected, abandoned or have been razed due to dilapidated conditions. Many of the homes that remain have been divided into apartments or boarding houses.

The model will show the houses in block form and color coded to indicate the level of historic significance. Barton College's main entrance and other selected properties will be highlighted with slightly more detail. Street names, major sidewalks, limited landscaping, vacant land and parking lots will be identified.

POW will create a small cluster area to kick-off the project and then move from block to block within the "Mile." The pilot program will include real estate activities, in-fill opportunities for vacant land, creating a mechanism to use abandoned and vacant structures as opportunities for economic growth, educational workshops on how to properly rehabilitate historic properties, and a priority area for full enforcement and policing activities.

The "Mile" will focus on community activities such as historic architectural walking tours, children's events, strengthening neighborhood associations and in-kind opportunities to ensure the historic district as safe and aesthetically pleasing.

According to the National Register of Historic Places Inventory submitted by the City of Wilson to the U. S. Department of the Interior, there are four residential historic districts in the City of Wilson. The Old Wilson Historic District has 361 properties, the East Wilson Historic District has 1,163 properties, the Broad Kenan Streets Historic District includes 345 properties, and the West Nash Street Historic District has 99 properties.

With 1,968 properties, there is a great need for POW to focus. In partnership with Barton College, Wilson Downtown Development Corporation and the City of Wilson, the Old Wilson Historic District was selected as a starting point.

The pilot project's success will be measured by tracking variables: property owners agreeing to work with POW; crime statistics; number of rental units and owner-occupied properties; participation in rehabilitation workshops, community and neighborhood activities; and the varied partners that come together to address infill, enforcement, condemnations, foreclosures and in-kind services.

The Wilson 2020 Community Vision Plan promotes this work as a top priority. The Wilson City Council Vision Principles recognizes the importance of protecting historic resources as a means of maintaining the community's character. Wilson County's Comprehensive Plan states the goal to preserve and protect historical resources for the benefit of current and future residents.

This grant has been provided by the Wilson County Unrestricted Endowment, a component fund of the North Carolina Community Foundation.

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