

Case Study: Rowan County Tourism County Wide Wayfinding Initiative

Executive Summary

The Rowan County Tourism County-Wide Wayfinding Initiative exemplifies a collaborative, community-driven approach to enhancing regional navigation and identity. Spanning three years and involving 11 communities, the project delivered 88 strategically placed signs while maintaining strong fiscal management and transparency. The process featured a double-blind public bidding system to ensure fairness, robust stakeholder engagement, and opportunities for local customization. With expansion possibilities on the horizon, the initiative sets a strong foundation for continued growth and connectivity across Rowan County.

Project Details

\$500K

Budget

ARPA grant funding

\$501.9K

Final Cost

Total project expenditure

11

Communities

Participating municipalities

88

Signs Installed

20 welcome + 68 directional

3 yrs

Duration

August 2022 – July 2025

Funding and Stakeholder Engagement

Funding Source

Rowan County Tourism secured a \$500,000 grant from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) through a detailed proposal to the Rowan County Board of Commissioners.

Community Collaboration

Tourism Officials collaborated with representatives from each of the 11 communities, allowing towns to:

- Review and modify signage plans specific to their community.
- Decide on the type and extent of community feedback needed, sharing plans with local citizens, boards, planners, managers, and mayors.
- Provide direct feedback to the project team.
- Choose the logo for their signs, while adhering to county-wide brand standards for overall design consistency.

Initial Design Process

The initial design phase was led by Bizzell Designs, a firm selected for their expertise in wayfinding systems. Bizzell Designs worked closely with Rowan County Tourism to develop a cohesive, attractive, and functional signage system. The process included:



Site Assessment

Conducting site visits and assessments to understand traffic patterns, key destinations, and community character.



Design Development

Creating design mock-ups and prototypes that balanced county-wide brand standards with opportunities for local customization.



Feedback Integration

Presenting design options for feedback and refinement before finalizing the system layout and visual language.

This partnership ensured that the signage system would be both user-friendly and reflective of Rowan County's diverse communities.

Planning and Implementation

The initiative followed a structured, multi-phase approach:

Community Consultation

Gathered input from each town to tailor signage plans.

Regulatory Approval

Secured necessary approvals from the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT).

Easement Agreements

Obtained agreements for sign placement.

Design and Fabrication

Ensured brand consistency and local logo customization.

Installation

Coordinated systematic installation across the county.

Bid Process

The project was procured through a transparent, double-blind public bidding process, in strict accordance with local government procurement guidelines. The process was divided into two separate packages: Welcome Signs and Directional Signs.

Request for Proposals (RFP)

Separate RFPs were created and distributed for each package to ensure clarity and a competitive bidding environment.

Bid Evaluation

All bids were evaluated in compliance with local government requirements, with the lowest qualified bid selected for each package to guarantee both fiscal responsibility and quality standards.

Bid Awards

Rite Lite Signs of Concord, North Carolina, was awarded both the Welcome Signs and Directional Signs contracts. Their partnership with Rowan County Tourism for the fabrication and installation of all signs was invaluable, ensuring quality, consistency, and timely completion.

Budget and Installation Challenges

Budget Management

The project concluded with a minimal budget overage of less than 0.4% (\$1,908.83), attributed to installation challenges in the final phase.

Rowan County Tourism covered the additional costs, ensuring project completion without compromising scope or quality.

Outcomes and Impact

- **Enhanced Navigation:** Improved wayfinding for residents and visitors.
- **Community Identity:** Local customization fostered ownership and pride, while standardized design reinforced a unified county brand.
- **Efficient Use of Funds:** Strong fiscal oversight with a negligible budget overage.
- **Foundation for Growth:** The system is positioned for future expansion.

Expansion Possibilities

Planned and potential expansions include:



County connector signs between communities



Development-based signage for specific areas



Interstate signage to further enhance regional connectivity

Community Voices

"Spencer is thankful to be a part of Rowan County Tourism's new wayfinding program that connects visitors and locals to their favorite original destinations. As home to some of Rowan County's most visited attractions, we appreciate the collaboration with the Tourism staff, Bizzell Design, and Rite Lite Signs to deliver our program. We believe the new welcome and wayfinding signs will serve our community, businesses, and visitors for years to come. Come visit and see for yourself!"

— Peter Franzese, Town Manager, Spencer

"I believe it's very important that, as our entire county continues to grow, we also preserve the unique identities of our cities and townships. This project helps visitors easily locate and understand the proximity of each distinct community. Kudos to the TDA and their incredible staff for delivering this in such an efficient and cost-effective manner. "

— Craig Pierce, Rowan County Commissioner

Conclusion

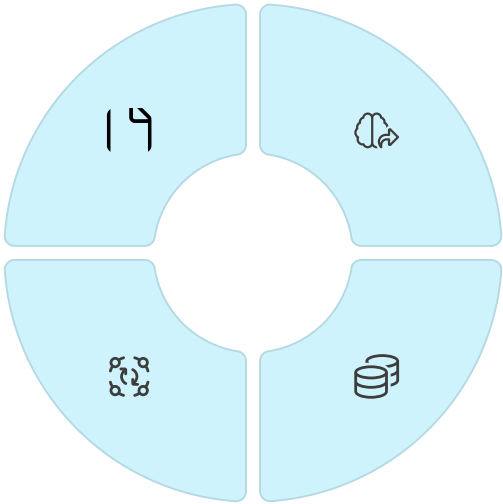
The Rowan County Tourism Wayfinding Initiative stands as a model of effective collaboration, strategic planning, and prudent financial stewardship. Through strong partnerships, thoughtful customization, and community engagement, the project has delivered lasting value to residents and visitors alike, reinforcing Rowan County's commitment to accessibility, local pride, and a unified county identity.

Effective Collaboration

Partnership between county tourism, 11 communities, designers, and contractors

Community Identity

Balanced local customization with county-wide brand standards



Strategic Planning

Structured approach from consultation through installation

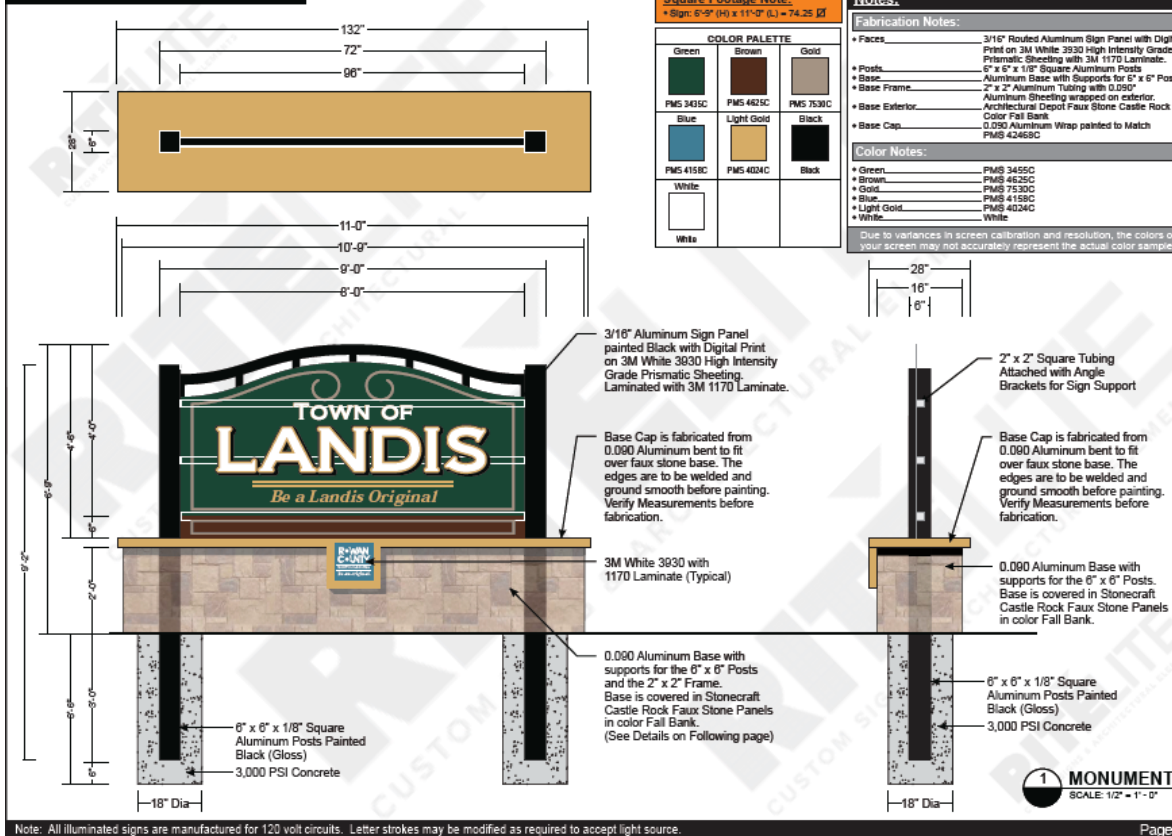
Financial Stewardship

Completed with less than 0.4% budget variance



Renderings were created of all sign types by Bizzell Designs and presented to each community based on their individual needs.

OPTION A - TOWN OF LANDIS DETAILS



RITELITE
 NORTH CAROLINA ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENTS
 1000 Blacayne Drive, Concord, NC 28027
 704.798.7097
 www.rite-lite.com

Client:
ROWAN COUNTY
 NORTH CAROLINA
 Be an original.

Job Location:
 204 East Imes Street
 Salisbury NC 28144-5189

Designer: SR
Checker: RH

Project # 27848
Date: 19 June 2024

Revision Dates:

28 June 2024	SR
29 June 2024	SR
19 July 2024	TWR
21 Aug 2024	SR
28 Aug 2024	TB
19 Sept 2024	SR
27 Sept 2024	SR
30 Sept 2024	SR
1 Oct 2024	SR
8 Oct 2024	SR

File Location:
 N:\2024\Rowan County\Monument Signs\27848

Customer Approval: _____ **Date:** _____

Land Lord Approval: _____ **Date:** _____

Architect Approval: _____ **Date:** _____

This original design is the exclusive property of Rite Lite Signs, Inc. and is protected by federal copyright laws. Any reproduction similar to the one embodied herein is expressly forbidden. Should an unauthorized construction of this design occur, Rite Lite Signs, Inc. is due \$2,500 as compensation for their time & effort in creating each drawing.

UL UNDERWRITERS LABORATORIES

SHOPS

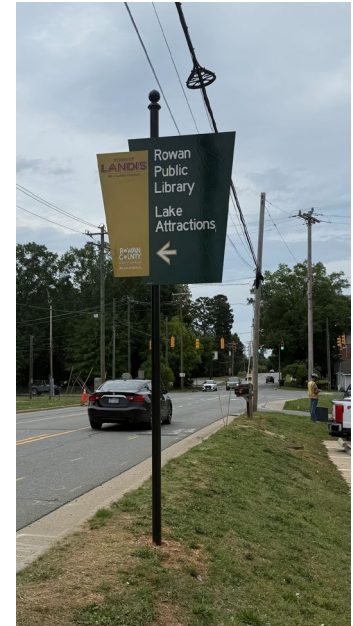
Shop drawings were created for each sign including color profiles and installation guides. Shop drawings and color swatches were reviewed by Rowan County Tourism staff prior to approval for production.



Small welcome signs were used for smaller communities and in areas that would not allow for larger monument Gateway signs – Gold Hill (3), Spencer (2) and Woodleaf (2).



Large Gateway monument signs were used in most communities – China Grove (2), Cleveland (2), Faith (2), Landis (2), Rockwell (2), Spencer (1). Granite Quarry chose to retain their existing gateway signage. East Spencer was awarded a grant to develop their own signs. Rockwell opted to receive updated signage while preserving the stone bases of their current signs. We worked with each community to suit these desires.



Directional signage was installed in 9 Rowan County communities with placement based on each community's size and the presence of tourism-related attractions. A mixture of sign types were used depending on the speed limits in selected locations – China Grove (8), Cleveland (10), East Spencer (4), Faith (7), Gold Hill (1), Granite Quarry (5), Landis (10), Rockwell (4) and Spencer (12). The City of Salisbury, which received X signs through Rowan County Tourism's original wayfinding project in 2017, received 8 additional site-specific directional signs in the downtown Railwalk District. Woodleaf's small size and limited tourism infrastructure did not support the need for directional signage at this time.