

EAST KINSTON NEIGHBORHOOD HUB



Kinston Teens is working alongside our neighbors, partners, and local stakeholders create a vibrant and inclusive community hub that empowers East Kinston residents, fosters youth leadership, and enhances the quality of life for all.

Join us as we shape the future of East Kinston!



KINSTON TEENS

ESTABLISHED 2014

Since 2014, Kinston Teens has worked at the intersection of youth empowerment and community development.

Kinston Teens, Inc. was founded by Chris Suggs in October 2014 to provide young people the tools, skills, resources, and opportunities to develop solutions to the issues that most affect us. At the time, gun violence and poor neighborhood conditions in East Kinston were two of the most pressing issues affecting our organization's membership and these issues became core focus areas for our efforts.



Throughout 2014, our city experienced over 60 reported shootings with the average age of victims and offenders in these shootings being 21 years old. That same year, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill released a report detailing that **East Kinston is home to the #1 most economically distressed census tract in the entire state.** While other parts of our city such as our downtown and industrial area have experienced growth and revitalization, this neighborhood—our neighborhood—has been the victim of decades of neglect and disinvestment.

We've proven ourselves.

Over the years, our organization has embarked on several initiatives to serve and improve our community. In 2016, we recognized that the City of Kinston owned over 1,000 vacant and underutilized properties that had become a strain on City resources and an eyesore for the community. Partnering with the City of Kinston, we initiated the Adopt-a-Vacant Lot program, enabling nonprofit organizations to acquire and transform these vacant properties into neighborhood assets like small parks, gardens, and public art installations. **This collaborative effort not only beautified the community but also addressed public safety and health concerns posed by these vacant lots.**

In 2021, we led community engagement for the Emma Webb Park Master Plan, securing \$1 million in funding to revitalize this neglected seven-acre park into a model greenspace for flood mitigation and community enjoyment, earning us an **American Society of Landscape Architects Merit Award.**

We are dedicated to building a Neighborhood Hub that cultivates collaboration, resilience, and opportunity, serving as a catalyst for positive change in East Kinston.



Our most recent initiative is the Neighborhood Hub, an abandoned home we acquired and renovated in 2018. It serves as a youth-led community center, offering a pantry, meeting space, technology access, and monthly gatherings with food and social opportunities. Formerly called the Kinston Teens Neighborhood Hub, we envision the **East Kinston Neighborhood Hub** being a catalyst for positive development and community building in our beloved neighborhood.

Our ongoing efforts at the Hub include: providing free, fresh, and healthy foods through partnerships with grocery retailers and food banks; empowering youth and neighborhood residents to initiate and engage in community & economic development initiatives; increasing the community's civic engagement capacity through voter registration and mobilization; and providing safe spaces for youth & community members to build, learn, lead, and grow together. We are currently working on the architectural designs for a larger facility that is more responsive to the needs of our organization and community.

So, what and where is East Kinston?

While other parts of our community have begun to thrive and revitalize, East Kinston has struggled to get back on track. We're working to change that.

Kinston, North Carolina, once a bustling textile and tobacco town, has faced economic challenges including numerous industry closures, hurricanes, and downturns, resulting in disinvestment and population loss. However, recent years have seen major downtown revitalization and industrial growth, bringing new opportunities to the region.



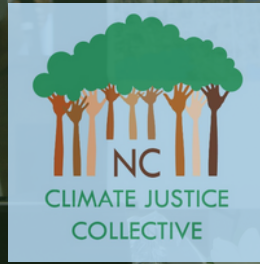
East Kinston, an area just east of downtown and the focus of our work, has had more difficulty recovering in comparison to other areas of the city. East Kinston was hit hardest by recent hurricanes and struggles to regain its footing as we grapple with issues related to concentrated poverty and crime. The neighborhood is also dramatically underserved by commercial enterprises, resulting in scarce employment opportunities and limited access to goods and services for local residents.

Despite its struggles, East Kinston is held near and dear to the heart of those of us with roots in the area. From **the Adkin High School Walkout of 1951**—featured in the Smithsonian’s National Museum of African American History and Culture—to being **the birthplace of funk music**, few places can parallel the resiliency, cultural richness, and historic importance of East Kinston.

For the purposes of this project, Kinston Teens is focused on the area of our community located east of Queen Street (our city’s “Magic Mile,” in downtown, that dissects Kinston into an East and West), and south of Vernon Avenue (our main commercial roadway, that separates what is known as “up the hill” and “down the hill” in Kinston). This neighborhood is anchored by the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard corridor in its heart, and flanked by the Adkin Branch to its east and Neuse River to its south.

What are we doing to transform East Kinston?

We're turning passion into action, thanks to these partners:



We are currently working with neighborhood residents, nonprofit partners, and local business stakeholders to gather input for a site and facility framework plan for a larger Neighborhood Hub facility that is more responsive to the growing needs of our organization and community.

Our vision for this space is for it to be one that is multi-functional—with the ability to hold large meetings and gatherings, to be used as a staging area for emergency relief and response efforts, to be renewable and sustainable, and to have a solar microgrid to collect and store energy to keep the facility (and our programs) operational in the event of a disaster or power outage.

In addition to creating a site and facility framework plan for the Neighborhood Hub, we are also working on the Kinston Teens Equitable Development Plan—a document that would offer a “bridge” between our framework plan and its implementation. This additional plan would offer phased strategies for site development at the Neighborhood Hub, program implementation, partnerships, fundraising, and revenue generation. Particularly, this plan would identify ways to strengthen our organization’s ongoing efforts to build community and boost social, economic, and environmental resilience in Kinston.

We’ve secured the services of **Design Workshop** to serve as our Project Manager and lead the creation of a these plans. We’ve been actively gathering input from neighborhood residents & community stakeholders through a survey, focus groups, listening sessions, and community workshops to inform our action steps; and we’re receiving advisory and technical assistance from **Notch Design** and the **Just Communities Lab at NC State University**.

The **Design Workshop Foundation** and **NC Climate Justice Collective** have also generously supported this effort with both direct and in-kind grant assistance.

We believe that inclusive housing creates inclusive communities.



Kinston Teens and the East Kinston Neighborhood Hub are deeply committed to fostering inclusive, vibrant neighborhoods where everyone has access to safe, affordable, and quality housing. We recognize the importance of housing as a fundamental building block of community well-being and economic prosperity.

Our vision for equitable development in East Kinston includes the rehabilitation of existing housing and the creation of new housing that caters to the diverse needs of our community. This means striving for a balance of housing options, including:

- **Low-Income and Affordable Rental Housing:** We are working toward safe and affordable rental housing options for individuals and families with limited financial resources.
- **Market Rate Housing:** Middle-income earners deserve access to quality housing too. We aim to create market-rate housing options that are attractive and affordable for this segment of our community.
- **Pathways to Homeownership:** For those who aspire to homeownership, we are working with our partners to create pathways that make this dream a reality. We believe in expanding homeownership opportunities for all who desire it.

The Current Landscape:

In recent years, our community has grappled with housing challenges, including a declining housing stock and increased vacancies, largely due to aging homes lacking energy efficiency and minimum housing standards, exacerbated by economic downturns and climate-related disasters, making housing a top priority for our efforts.

In East Kinston, a significant number of homes are renter-occupied, leading to higher population density compared to the rest of the city. Additionally, the Kinston Housing Authority provides more than 600 units of public housing in this area. We're addressing these housing challenges by partnering with developers, lenders, and property management companies, and building relationships with housing agencies and government entities. We're also acquiring land to develop housing units, aiming to enhance housing quality, affordability, and availability in our community.

Where Economic Development meets Community Empowerment.

Through the East Kinston Neighborhood Hub, we are committed to fostering economic growth and job opportunities in our community. We recognize that vibrant neighborhoods not only provide housing but also offer access to retail and commercial outlets that create jobs, increase access to goods and services, and help families thrive.

Kinston boasts a robust retail presence, with over 3.4 million square feet of retail space spanning across 245 properties. While vacancy rates have seen fluctuations over the years, Kinston maintains a competitive vacancy rate compared to the statewide average. The demand for retail space remains high, indicating significant opportunities for future development.



Of that 3.4 million square feet of retail space in Kinston, our East Kinston study area is home to only 189,000 square feet of retail space, concentrated mainly near downtown and Vernon Avenue—our city’s main thoroughfare. East Kinston’s economic vitality is evident in the near-zero retail vacancy rates in the neighborhood, reflecting a sustained demand for retail space. We recognize the need for essential services, such as grocery markets, and are actively exploring ways to address East Kinston’s food desert designation through initiatives like grocery co-ops, mini farmers' markets, and community gardens.

Currently, the Neighborhood Hub provides a platform for local entrepreneurs and businesses to showcase their goods and services during our events. We aim to expand opportunities for our neighbors to access commercial outlets and services, including grocery stores, banking, health, fitness, and more. Our goal is to create a just and regenerative neighborhood economy that benefits all residents.

Are you ready to join us in our mission to empower youth, strengthen our community, and create lasting positive change in East Kinston? There are several ways you can get involved and make a meaningful impact:

You can get involved by donating to support our programs, volunteering your time and skills, partnering with us if you represent an organization, attending our events and workshops, and spreading the word to raise awareness about our mission. **Your support makes a meaningful impact in building a brighter future for East Kinston.**

Kinston Teens, Inc. is a nonprofit 501(c)3 charitable organization. Tax-deductible contributions can be made online at www.EastKinston.org/give, or mailed to P.O. Box 2625, Kinston, NC 28502 payable to Kinston Teens.

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WWW.EASTKINSTON.ORG

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