



HARLAN COUNTY Downtown Revitalization Project Summary 2020

Community & Economic
Development Initiative of Kentucky

 College of Agriculture,
Food and Environment

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[Cover Image]

Student rendering of a proposed pop-up park in downtown Harlan

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PROJECT INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

In 2017, the Community and Economic Development Initiative of Kentucky (CEDIK) launched a three year, Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) grant from the POWER (Partnerships for Opportunity and Workforce and Economic Revitalization) Initiative. This grant funded a Downtown Revitalization Project in Kentucky's eight Promise Zone counties. These eight counties are Bell, Clay, Harlan, Knox, Leslie, Letcher, Perry and Whitley. Within these eight counties, twelve downtowns signed up to be a part of this project, including Corbin and Williamsburg, Kentucky.

Within the broad scope of this downtown revitalization project, CEDIK offered a wide range of programs and technical assistance, along with networking opportunities to address the unique challenges each community faces in regards to their respective downtowns. Every community was able to select services to best meet their needs. CEDIK also facilitated quarterly convenings to allow participating communities to share ideas, strategies and information vital to successful revitalization efforts in the region. Communities that participated in this project were then able to access grant money to fund projects in their downtowns in order to successfully move from a planning phase into direct action.



WHAT IS CEDIK?

The Community and Economic Development Initiative of Kentucky (CEDIK) emerged as a college level unit within the University of Kentucky's College of Agriculture, Food and Environment (CAFE) in 2010. The CAFE administration recognized the need for both an internal source of professional development and instruction for students and county Extension agents, as well as an external outreach mechanism for Kentucky communities with programming and research that focused on community and economic development. CEDIK's programming has dramatically expanded to meet the evolving nature of places and economies, as well as recognizing the intricacies of economic development. This Whitley County Downtown Revitalization Project Summary is an example of this evolution, exploring how quality and intentional design and planning initiatives can create a more economically resilient downtown.

CEDIK'S GOALS

- Provide research and information that supports community and economic development.
- Build the leadership and organizational capacity of peoples and communities.
- Support community decision-making and collaborative initiatives.
- Facilitate partnerships and networks that enable communities to thrive economically, physically and socially.
- Sustain CEDIK's organizational capacity to efficiently and effectively accomplish its mission and vision.

IMPORTANCE OF DOWNTOWNS

Downtowns are iconic and powerful symbols for a city and often contain the most culturally relevant landmarks, distinctive features and unique neighborhoods in a city. Given that most downtowns are generally the oldest part of a city, they offer rare insights into their city's past, present and potential future.

Following de-industrialization and the growth of suburban development in the middle of the last century, many cities across the country forgot about their downtowns. During this period private investment in downtowns stagnated while it increased dramatically on the outskirts of cities. This happened throughout the western world, from Glasgow, Kentucky to Glasgow, Scotland. In Whitley County, this manifested in the suburban style of development often found adjacent to Interstate 75. Here, national big box retailers and



[Image]
Historic mixed use buildings along
Main St. in downtown Harlan

fast food restaurants opened, drawing the businesses and services that were once a staple of 'going to town' out into the periphery. This reduced foot traffic and the critical mass necessary to support a vibrant and economically resilient downtown and drove future development to the car-centric periphery. Consequently, new developments featured national retail stores rather than the locally based and owned stores that tend to be staples of downtowns. While these new stores offered much needed jobs it often came at the expense of the local downtown landscape and economy.

PRIORITIZING DOWNTOWN

Downtowns are complex places. Physically they are often the oldest part of a city, making redevelopment of infrastructure and buildings challenging. Culturally, many people have memories of 'going to town' and what the downtown looked like when it was bustling, influencing their perception of what the downtown should be in the future. Additionally, downtowns are where most civic, judicial and medical services are located. Each of the elements that have historically represented the important role and function of a downtown are discussed below.

CIVIC

Civic spaces in downtowns bring people together and nurture the larger community. Civic spaces are more than the aesthetic center of the town where public events take place; they allow cultural, economic and social exchanges to occur. Consequently, downtowns that do not have a civic space tend to feel less connected to area residents. As a result, communities without civic spaces are most likely to experience decline in the various forms of community health & wellness (socially, economically, culturally, and environmentally.)

RELIGION AND CULTURE

Vibrant downtowns foster the exchange of religion and culture through various daily interactions and public activities (farmers markets, festivals, etc). As a long-term result, people are more likely to stay connected, develop broader relationships and adopt healthy practices as they integrate other people's culture and/or religion into their everyday life.

MEDICAL

A prospering city and downtown will likely attract new residents, and with the increased residents, the demand for larger hospitals and other medical services will increase to meet demand. New medical facilities to meet the demands of patients will create jobs encouraging medical professionals to move into or stay in the area.

COMMERCIAL/SHOPPING

Downtown spaces are where people are most likely going to be throughout the day. Shops will emerge in the area to meet the public's increased demand for goods and services, leading to higher profits and increased job opportunities.

ENTERTAINMENT

Downtown areas have a civic center where public activities for entertainment can occur. After many successful functions in the area, locals will brainstorm more events to have in the civic center of the downtown area.

SOCIAL

The social aspects of downtown can consist of a town hall, cafe/ diner and even parks/plazas. Some events can also create social atmospheres, like festivals. These areas bring people together for socialization.

RESIDENTIAL

As the downtown renaissance occurs in communities across the country, people will be more likely to move downtown because it is close to their place of employment and in proximity to a variety of resources. This has led to a higher demand for residential spaces in downtown areas, which is a key component of a vibrant and walkable communities

FINANCIAL

Downtowns are historically where a city's central financial hub is located, serving the community as well as local government. These financial services play a key part in the welfare and longevity of the broader community.

EMPLOYMENT

High population densities typically found in thriving downtown areas attract businesses. As a result, there will be an increased demand for workers to meet the growing needs of residents.

EDUCATIONAL

Downtown areas allow people from various backgrounds to engage with each other on a special level. For children, this creates friendly, hands-on learning opportunities to discover other cultures in their community. This socialization can also foster place identity and community connection.

[Image Right]
View looking north along Central St.
in downtown Harlan

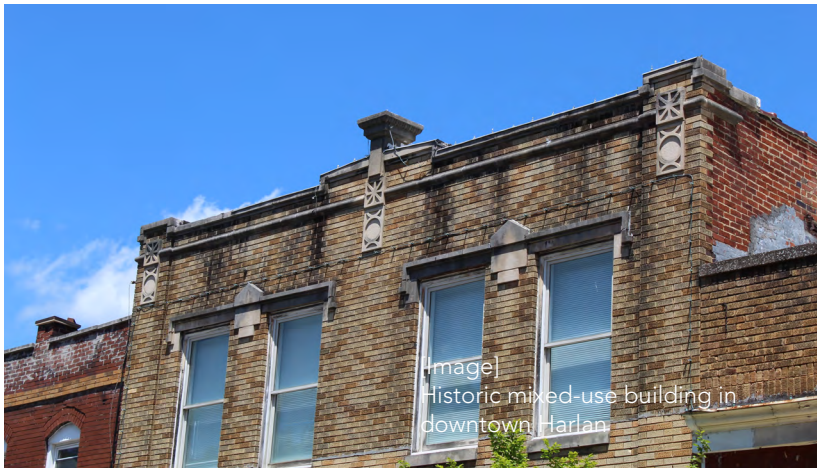
WHY INVEST IN DOWNTOWN?

Downtowns have a significant intrinsic value not easily replicated in new developments. The historic density and concentration of assets, people and businesses make downtowns natural hubs for jobs and tax revenue. Downtowns illuminate and showcase a community's culture and provide insights on its historic identity. Healthy and productive downtowns also have the opportunity to generate a high tax revenue per acre due to the mix and density of their use. Downtowns can be notably economically productive and as a result investments in downtown have the potential to generate great returns. Over time, downtowns have proven to be quite resilient because of the entanglement of built assets, ingrained memories and diversity of uses.



Downtowns are for everyone and often their vibrancy is associated with the density of small businesses and the foot traffic supporting them. Investment in revitalization can create jobs, increase property values, improve quality of life and attract new visitors and residents. Downtowns are also important investments for industrial attraction. Many sites are selected based on the quality of life for employees and a downtown's cultural and recreational amenities - not just labor, schools, housing and infrastructure. Industries want to be located in unique and authentic places where employees can be happy and healthy.

Downtown investments are as diverse as downtowns themselves. For example, investments can be made in accessibility, public art, building facades or parks and green spaces (to suggest a few) but they all serve a unique purpose while collectively contributing to the vibrancy and value of downtown.



[Image]
Historic mixed-use building in
downtown Harlan

Parks and green spaces are vital in providing a good quality of life, promoting health and wellness, and contributing to economic growth even though they are rarely considered as important as infrastructure that serves community needs like water, sewage and electricity.

Downtowns are multifaceted systems and the investments we make to support revitalization efforts are increasingly broad as well. There is no singular way to measure downtown revitalization success over time. Rather, we suggest a broad set of indicators similar to the 2014 University of Illinois Extension 'Downtown Success Indicators' found in the appendix. This publication was used to provide insights on how to begin broadening how we measure revitalization progress. The provided indicators and metrics increase our understanding of, and measure the success of, downtown investments.



[Image]
Mural being installed in downtown
Harlan

BUSINESS RETENTION & EXPANSION

WHAT IS BUSINESS RETENTION & EXPANSION?

Business Retention & Expansion (BRE) is a facilitated community-based program that engages communities to examine the local business environment, interpret the information collected and purposefully plan the ability to understand and positively respond to local business needs. BRE participants organize a planning committee, identify local business participants, conduct interviews and respond to opportunities that result from the interviews. CEDIK supports communities throughout the process, including developing the interview guide, analyzing the results of the interviews, writing the final reports and helping to present the results to the greater community.



Inside of Sassy Trash,
a local business in
downtown Harlan

BRE FINDINGS

The BRE Program worked closely with economic development agencies in Harlan County during 2018/19 including ONE Harlan County, the Harlan County Chamber of Commerce, Harlan Tourism and the Harlan Center. Local business owners were asked to share their perspectives and needs to help the broader community better understand the challenges confronting local businesses.

SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

The focus of this BRE effort was primarily businesses in the city of Harlan. Some respondents were also located in Evarts and Cumberland. The 35 businesses surveyed were primarily from the retail sector, but included representation from healthcare, real estate, professional services and manufacturing.

MARKET & INDUSTRY

Harlan County is a community focused on local customers and markets. As businesses start to reach out to regional and national customers, they are, at the same time, facing competitors from the region and through online sales. Businesses are making use of online platforms to both sell and advertise, but there is still significant room for growth in this area.

RECOMMENDATION

The majority (82%) of businesses that responded to the survey have added new products or services to their lineup in the past 5 years. Only 73% plan to add new products or services in the next 2 years. Given the speed of change of products and services, it is important for viable businesses to stay current with technology and trends. The BRE team recommends that regional and state resource providers

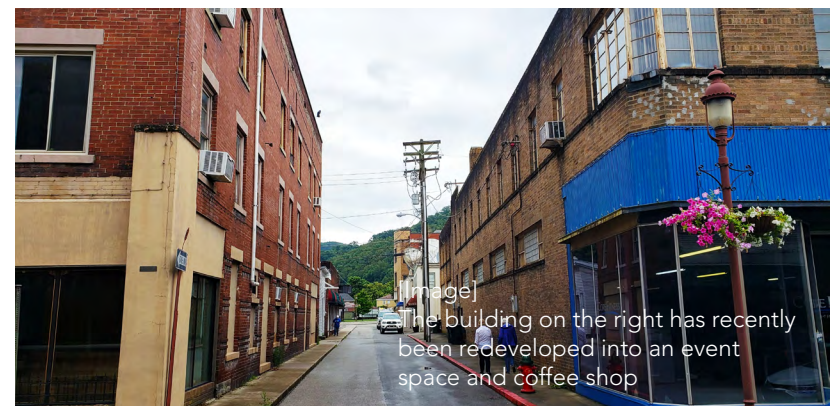
are consulted to offer programming on technology trends and industry market analysis.

GROWTH POTENTIAL

Interviewed businesses described the Harlan County business environment as stable. Of the interviewed businesses, just under half (45%) expect to expand their business in the next three years. Overall, facilities and workforce needs were sufficient for the businesses' needs.

RECOMMENDATION

Most businesses considered conditions for their expansion, or growth potential, to be favorable. That said, 14% of businesses indicated that their facilities are not sufficient for their growth. Of those that indicated their space is insufficient, none own their facilities. This points to an opportunity to help these businesses transition into new facilities. Local business support partners should investigate and make available information about available facilities to businesses, and also translate business facility needs to local realtors and building owners.



COMMUNITY

Overwhelmingly, businesses appreciate and respect the area they live and operate in. Between the natural environment and the citizens, business owners love their community. Conversely, technological and infrastructure issues are the greatest challenge for Harlan County business owners.

RECOMMENDATION

Cell phone coverage and digital communications are considered weak by 55% of Harlan County's business respondents. A deeper investigation into what particular type of coverage is needed, how businesses could best utilize stronger coverage, and how best to implement expansion is warranted.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

"Financial incentives" and "new state regulations" were the areas local businesses were most interested in learning about, followed by "small business insurance." It would be valuable for the cities and county to consider strategies for reducing the costs of operating a business in the county. This may be explored through collective purchasing, reduced costs on utilities, building improvements, internet or services, taxes or through other creative approaches to reducing costs.

The natural environment in Harlan County was the highest rated asset of the county. However, survey respondents rated pollution prevention as a priority area of interest, indicating that a clean and natural Harlan would be good for business. Just like our own homes we have to ask ourselves – "are we ready for company to arrive?" County and businesses should consider co-promoting

or coordinating a county clean-up campaign. In addition to a coordinated and sustained clean-up effort, Harlan County should explore increased recycling programs and refuse collection infrastructure.

There was broad agreement among Harlan County businesses that the county could benefit from more competitive tax rates. Harlan is perceived as having the highest taxes in the area. Businesses would appreciate the city investigating ways to have taxes comparable to other communities or offer tax incentives. In addition, one business representative noted, "While the efforts to bring jobs into the county is helpful, can the county promote and encourage business growth from within?"

Finally, it is noteworthy to mention that the business and economic environment of Harlan County can be shaped and developed by the investment and involvement of local partners. Collectively, through actions that support consumer and employee education and business support services, community partners can lay a solid foundation that allows businesses to stay and grow in Harlan County.

COMMUNITY DESIGN & PLANNING EFFORTS

WHAT IS COMMUNITY DESIGN?

Community design focuses on the creation and implementation of places for people. This process promotes change to the built environment from the neighborhood to regional scale, and aims to meet community needs through participatory decision-making at all levels.

One of the more innovative ways CEDIK achieves its mission is through the use of community design. The value of design and planning is often overlooked during economic development and revitalization efforts, especially in rural communities. This project seeks to challenge that. These efforts began in 2012, with the hiring of a faculty member in the Department of Landscape Architecture (UKLA) who partners with CEDIK through the Cooperative Extension Services. Deploying these efforts through Cooperative Extension, CEDIK has developed a library of publications centered around spatial design and planning elements for communities to learn from and incorporate themselves. These are available through the CEDIK website (<https://cedik.ca.uky.edu/>).

The following section presents a summary of community design efforts undertaken as part of the Downtown Revitalization Project.



Participants at the Chalk and Talk engagement activity at the 2019 Poke Sallet Festival

DOWNTOWN HARLAN PROJECT 2019

BACKGROUND

During the summer of 2019, CEDIK's Community Design Program Manager led a multi-disciplinary intern cohort in Harlan. The team was tasked to use their respective backgrounds, which included architecture, landscape architecture and historic preservation, to create a downtown plan with local partners in Harlan. With community engagement as the fundamental element of the project, the team spent monthly overnight visits in Harlan. Downtown lodging was provided for the cohort by Christ Episcopal Church and space for a mobile design studio was located at Harlan County Cooperative Extension's Depot Building.

OVERVIEW

While undertaking this plan, one of the cohort's primary partners shared an illuminating story about Harlan. Each summer they manage the Harlan County booth at the Kentucky State Fair, and often passersbyers will say to them "You'll never leave Harlan alive", referencing the famous Darrell Scott song. Their response? "Why would you want to leave in the first place?" This story embodies the mystique that exists about Harlan. Internationally, people recognize the city from the song, the show (Justified) or the labor struggles. Locally, people know Harlan as home: The place where they come for the Poke Sallet Festival, Where they meet at The Portal for pizza and conversations. To visit Huff Park for baseball. Once you are in Harlan there is so much more than its history, or what an outsiders perception may be.

Throughout downtown Harlan, there are people who believe in downtown and are showing their commitment by investing in it. The 2019 Harlan Downtown Project, seeks to identify all of the

strengths of downtown Harlan and develop strategies to embrace them. Engaging in Harlan over consecutive days allowed for both the observation and experience of how people. The resulting conversations that emerged with downtown patrons about what Harlan means to them and what they would like to see in their community enhanced the team's understanding of Harlan's needs for revitalization.

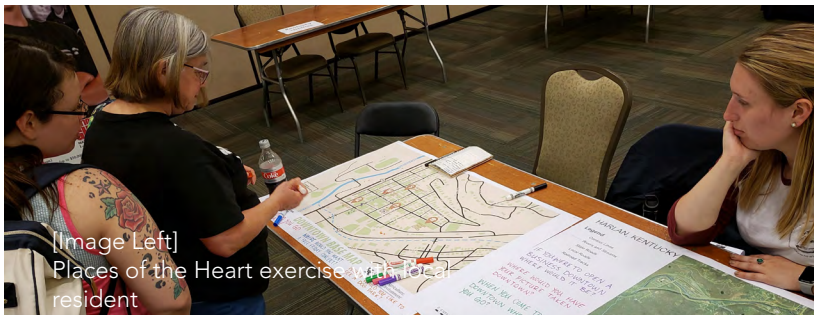
These immersion, mixed with the support of a coalition of local partners, enriched this Downtown Project and rooted it in the local desires and wants. The summary and recommendations included in this project is a direct result of our extensive community engagement, inventory and analysis.



[Image]
Student intern cohort meet with a local business owner in downtown Harlan.

Primarily, the recommendations of this project are to support the existing efforts and investments that are being made in downtown Harlan, whether by local entities or individual business owners. Supporting these efforts helped to develop project ideas to support these efforts and connect them through interventions in the public realm. An example of this is the Sidewalk Subway, which builds upon the implementation of the locally driven 'Where the Sidewalk Begins' project which aims to make downtown Harlan accessible to all users. The Sidewalk Subway uses the Harlan Center as the 'Central Station' where multiple walking tours could then branch off in the design of a subway map. Each of these lines would have a specific focus, such as culture or heritage, and would feature a small scale installation at each 'stop' that could help tell the story of Harlan. Projects like this aim to physically manifest the elements that make Harlan unique within the public realm, while getting people to experience downtown in a personal way.

Sidewalk Subway is an example of how this project intends to provide achievable interventions that don't require significant financial investments and can be led by various local doers and organizations. This process provides shared ownership and can relieve financial and capacity bottlenecks that often exist in rural communities, allowing efforts to move forward.



[Image Left]
Places of the Heart exercise with local resident

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

CHALK AND TALK

At Harlan's 2019 Poke Sallet Festival, a Chalk and Talk event sought to engage people in a creative and non-confrontational way about their city. Without creating any expectations for delivery from CEDIK or local partners, the prompt "Next time I come to Harlan.." was selected, seeking to embody this spirit. A surprising result was how people took each piece of the prompt that was on each panel and responded accordingly. Below are the findings from the comments written on the boards, in addition to conversations had with participants and passer-bys.

These comments were photographed, transcribed and grouped by likeness. The following themes emerged, and represent a summary of the report presented to our local partners in Harlan.

Retail/Businesses

- Additional retail and business growth in Harlan was a clear theme that emerged, with a strong interest in supporting local businesses.

Downtown Amenities

- There was significant interest in what people would like to see downtown as part of their overall experience. These comments didn't focus on what they want to do downtown, but what would make them want to hang around longer. This theme is arguably the most useful in terms of downtown planning as it consists of actionable items that don't necessarily require extensive funding and that aren't reliant on market conditions (like vegan food).

Downtown Activities

- This theme centers around activities that will draw people downtown. These items fall into 3 sub-categories: social activities (outdoor eating), physical activities (skating rink) and youth activities (young people entertainment). Many suggested options require significant investment, such as bowling and a concert hall. However, some could be achievable through community processes, such as live music, downtown movie nights and a Downtown Youth Committee. The latter could be composed of local youths who provide input for downtown programming and activities.

Food and Eateries

- Increased food options received the most enthusiastic response from participants during the Chalk and Talk event. Respondents wanted to see increased local restaurant and bakery options, as well as a Kroger for groceries (the most supported comment of the day). In addition to a Kroger, many of the desired food comments have a social theme to them, such as the ice cream parlor, food trucks and additional bars.

Nature and Physical Activities

- The smallest, and most distinct theme centered on access to nature and outdoor activities. This included nature trails, a bike path and public boat docks for access to Stoner Creek.

Miscellaneous

- Every Chalk and Talk has a miscellaneous section of either comments that don't easily fit into a category, like positivity, or don't have any relation to the city or downtown, like fix potholes.

PLACES OF THE HEART

Places of the Heart is a community engagement strategy that seeks to identify the places in a city that people feel an attachment to. These places are identified by asking community members questions such as "where would you take engagement photos?" This specific prompt helps identify the buildings and places that residents feel are uniquely representative of Harlan.

The following questions are a sampling of the questions participants were asked at the 2019 Poke Sallet Festival in Harlan. Each prompt was given a colored sticker and the sticker was placed on a map. This information was transcribed and provided invaluable information to the Harlan Downtown Project 2019.

Where would you go on a date in Harlan?

- The Portal
- El Charrito
- 1up Game Room and Grill (Pool Hall)
- Harlan High School football stadium
- Movie theater

Where would you want a free Friday night concert?

- The Harlan Center
- The Portal (Cool restaurant)
- The High School (only space large enough)
- The gazebo in between the Courthouse and the Judicial Center.
- The Huff Park parking lot
- Harlan High School football stadium (existing seating)

If you were to open a downtown business, where would it be?

- Great part of town
- The Kelly Hotel (it is a cool building)
- On main street (in a great historic building)
- Corner of 1st and Central Street
- In an open space to build a building
- In between the Huddle House and 38 (plenty of parking)
- The open lot to the south of Eversole Street (next to the courthouse)
- The empty lot on Eversole Street

Where would you have your picture taken downtown?

For the architecture:

- The Courthouse (great greenery)
- Christ Episcopal Church (beautiful church)
- The Harlan United Methodist Church (great staircase)
- First Presbyterian Church (great staircase)

For the panoramic view:

- Up on Ivy Hill (great view of Harlan)
- The High School



[[Top Right Image]
Local partner meeting
with student interns at
the 2019 Poke Sallet
Festival

[Middle Right Image]
Tour of downtown
Harlan with the local
historian and local
partners

[Bottom Right Image]
Midterm presentation
of findings to local
stakeholders asking for
feedback

RECOMMENDATIONS

This plan began with a focus area encompassing the entirety of downtown Harlan. Through the research and analysis thoroughly discussed in this plan, the large focus area was refined to identify where investments could be prioritized to have the largest impact on both the downtown experience and downtown revitalization.

These filters were discussed in Chapter 3 and were shown as maps. This list was not exhaustive, but highlighted how those maps and data led to our findings by identifying where the sense of place in downtown Harlan is the strongest. Within this area, projects were proposed based on information gathered from our extensive community engagement. The recommendations in this plan provided short, medium and long term options within a variety of budgets to help local partners move forward with their downtown revitalization goals.

RECOMMENDED INVESTMENT AREAS

Green: Primary Recommended Investment Area

Gold: Secondary Recommended Investment Area

Tan: Tertiary Recommended Investment Area

Blue: Downtown Gateway



COUTHOUSE SQUARE

Located across the street from the proposed Eversole Market, this gazebo is currently underutilized and not directly accessible. This short-term proposal adds pathways, plantings and would allow it to host concerts and other programmable events.



EVERSOLE MARKET

This recommendation is for a market that assists as an economic development resource and social space. This could include programmable events that will help encourage higher volumes of pedestrians, along with economic vitality, in downtown Harlan.



HARLAN AMPHITHEATER

One of the most common goals for partners in Harlan was a location for a permanent outdoor performance venue. Utilizing the existing topography, this amphitheater is inspired by coal infrastructure and provides a place-based concept for this long term goal.

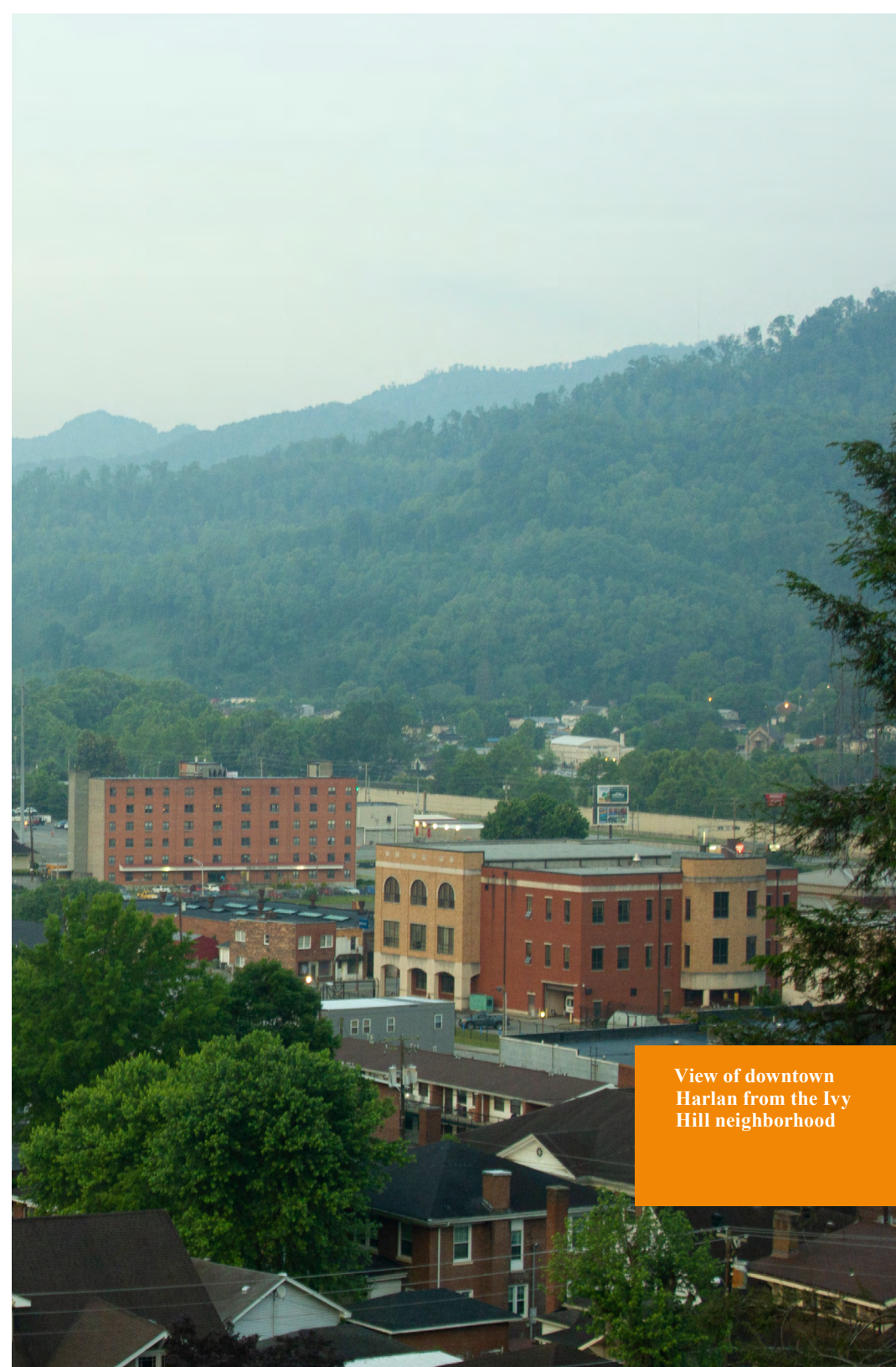


FIRST IMPRESSIONS

WHAT IS FIRST IMPRESSIONS?

First Impressions is a structured assessment program that enables communities to learn about the first impression they convey to outsiders. It offers a fresh perspective on the appearance, services and infrastructure of each community. Volunteer teams undertake unannounced, one-day visits, record their observations, and give constructive feedback to the community. Their photos and responses are then compiled and presented back to the community by a CEDIK representative. In addition, the program offers suggestions and resources to address the areas identified for potential improvement. The knowledge gained through this program is intended to serve as a basis for community action.

First Impressions was developed by Andy Lewis, University of Wisconsin Extension Associate Professor, and James Schneider, Grant County (WI) Economic Development Director. CEDIK has adapted the First Impressions Program to meet the needs of Kentucky communities.



View of downtown Harlan from the Ivy Hill neighborhood

FIRST IMPRESSIONS OVERVIEW

This program coordinates anonymous visits to the community by professionals in community and economic development, small business owners, community leaders and more, depending upon the specific community assessment needs. Analysis includes detailed feedback from Internet search engines, social media platforms and in-person experiences. Assessors document their experience and interactions with community members.

PROCESS

Visits to Harlan County were conducted by 23 team members on both weekdays and weekends to capture a variety of activity within the community. The Harlan First Impressions team consisted of college students interested in outdoor activities, community development professionals and senior citizens



[Image]
First Impressions stakeholder presentation in Harlan

looking for historical excursions. Overall, conditions were favorable for visiting and exploring the roads, small communities, parks and businesses within Harlan County. While quotations in this report should not be considered exhaustive, they do provide a valuable snapshot of a visitor's perspective in Harlan County from a variety of ages, life experiences and interests.

WEB PRESENCE

Assessors began their research on the Internet, exploring the county's websites and social media presence in order to determine how to spend their time within the community. The assessors discovered that official sites such as Harlan Tourism and harlandcountytrails.com were useful, with several resources listed on the front page. However, there were very limited reviews on websites such as Google, Yelp and Tripadvisor. The lack of businesses listed made it difficult for assessors to plan their trip, and they recommended encouraging more businesses to become active on review sites in order to increase traffic to the area. Assessors discovered that the Harlan Tourism Facebook page was vibrant and active, with an abundance of information for the community. However, the official city page had not been updated in some time and could be revived in order to communicate to locals about city meetings, town halls, or citizen engagement efforts.

COMMUNITY VISITS

After their web search, assessors planned an in-person visit to Harlan County. They spent a day exploring by assessing signage, streetscapes, recreation, real estate and even how frontline staff at gas stations, retail and restaurants answered questions about the area. Team members visited downtown Harlan, the Tri-Cities and Evarts in order to explore opportunities for tourism and retail within the region. Many assessors noted the quality of outdoor murals and

sculptures in the area--particularly throughout the Tri-Cities. Team members identified opportunities for improvement to navigational signage, as they often had poor cell coverage and had difficulty finding their way in the area. Team members also suggested improvement in hiking trail markers in order to better identify trailheads and access points for outdoor recreation.

After several hours exploring Harlan County, assessors documented their Lasting Impressions on assets, challenges and opportunities they envision for the community, and made recommendations for further appeal to visitors that travel to the area. Notable comments include the abundance of recreational and natural resources, the rich history and natural beauty, community pride in the railroad and coal history and the friendliness of the local residents.

FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the feedback compiled from visits to Harlan County, the following suggestions are recommended for future opportunities:

Develop Regional Branding Strategies

- Visitors noticed strong branding efforts in downtown Harlan and the Tri-Cities area but did not notice much regional branding for Harlan County as a whole. Strategies for capitalizing on existing outdoor/adventure tourism efforts by drawing adventurers to downtown areas should be considered, as Harlan County has many diverse offerings.

[Top Right Image]
Mural recently installed in downtown Cumberland

[Middle Right Image]
View at the Pine Mountain Settlement School

[Bottom Right Image]
Martin's Fork near the headwaters of the Cumberland River

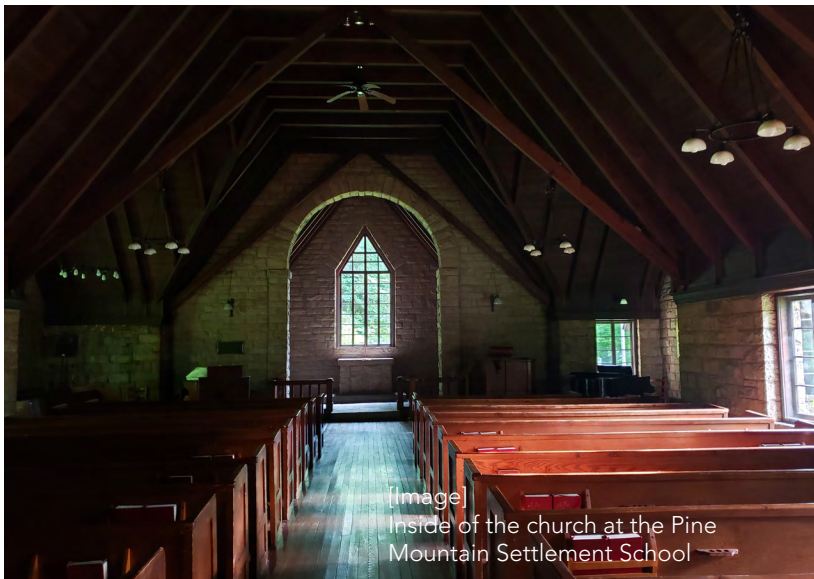


Continue to develop clear signage in the Tri-Cities Area

- While signage in town was noticeable and attractive in the Tri-Cities area, some visitors still had difficulty finding the trail head and finding official Trail Town signage. Strategically-placed additional signage would assure visitors they are heading in the right direction.

Organize Volunteer Storefront Cleanups

- While there are buildings that have been revitalized, there are still several that could benefit from cleaning, landscaping, etc. An organized community volunteer group can relieve burden to any one business or individual by assisting with clean-up and minor repairs to both occupied and vacant area buildings. Even slight improvements to the appearance of all buildings will have a large impact on a visitor's first impression of Harlan County.



[Image]
Inside of the church at the Pine Mountain Settlement School

SUMMARY OF EFFORTS

After compiling the information into a full-length report, a CEDIK representative presented the findings to Harlan County stakeholders in three separate community forums throughout the spring of 2017: once at the Cooperative Extension Service in downtown Harlan, once in the Tri-Cities area and again to the Harlan Chamber of Commerce. Stakeholders in attendance included elected officials, chamber members, tourism professionals and small business owners throughout the Harlan and Tri-Cities areas.

After reviewing the Community Assessment Report, attendees then participated in a CEDIK facilitated community forum to identify action items and priorities to act upon the information received. Jeremy Williams, Harlan County's Agriculture and Natural Resources Extension Agent, works with local groups to foster community development plans for the county. "First Impressions allows us to expand our horizons as well as to help these groups and what they want to see happen in the community and across the county. I see it as an expansion of what we're currently working on with several groups across the county," he said.

"I think the sky's the limit on a lot of this stuff," he said. "It allows us to tell the story of our area and to do a lot of outreach and to hopefully bring in tourism, but also maybe even educate our youth, our future leaders that are coming up through the school system."

Several subsequent projects in the Downtown Revitalization Efforts for Harlan County were inspired by the groundwork laid through feedback and collaboration gained from the First Impressions Community Assessment.

STAKEHOLDER NETWORKING

COMING TOGETHER

Downtown revitalization takes more than a single person's best intentions. It requires a collective effort involving many people working towards mutual goals. More times than not, the process starts with a single person or organization investing their time and attempting to address an issue they've identified as the most important. Any process can begin with an individual vision for change, but cultivating shared ownership and positive results requires a deeper commitment and understanding of the connections between the community's assets, challenges and vision for the future. This deep connection and understanding is at the heart of downtown stakeholder networking.

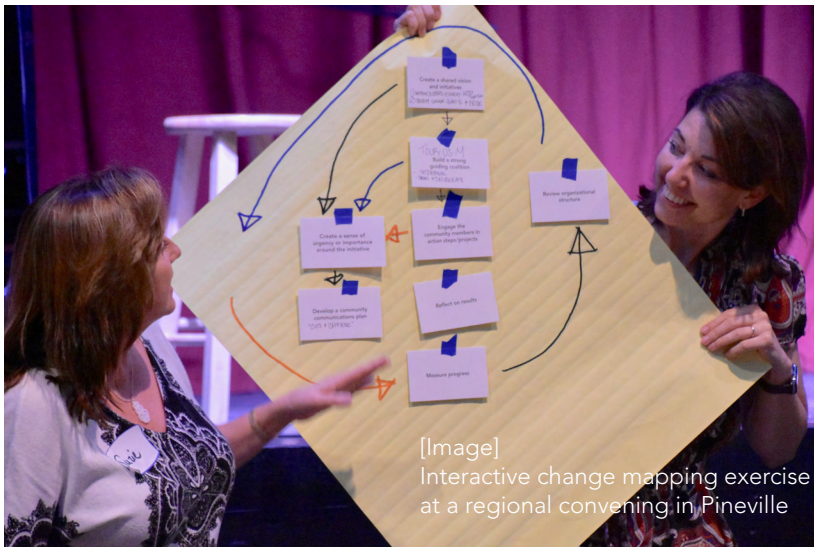


**Streetscape
in the heart
of downtown
Harlan**

DOWNTOWN STAKEHOLDER TEAM

Each participating community in the Promise Zone Downtown Revitalization project was led by a local stakeholder team representing active organizations and the downtown's diverse constituency. The varying perspectives of team members resulted in diverse solutions being drawn upon. Teams were composed of representatives from local government, chambers of commerce, Main Street organizations, local business owners, tourism organizations, downtown managers/staff, historical societies, county extension agents, community foundations, health departments, local colleges, financial institutions and issues focused nonprofits.

Quarterly convenings provided a dedicated space and time for downtown stakeholders to come together to share, collaborate and inspire each other. These rotating meetings were hosted in different communities as a way to showcase local efforts and bring attention to the stakeholder's collective and shared interests. Convenings often included concurrent sessions providing technical assistance on topics like walkability, hosting film productions, historic preservation, data analysis/collection (intercept survey methods), grant writing and more, but also provided dedicated space for local updates and sharing. Convenings included panels composed of local partners, spotlight presentations on local efforts and exercises aimed at illuminating shared regional assets and visions.



REGIONAL CONVENING IN HARLAN

The networking opportunities provided by regional convenings facilitated the cross sector pollination of ideas and in many cases led to communities adapting similar programs they heard others share. For example nearly every community was inspired by Pineville's local development incentive programs, Harlan's inventory and reinvestment program for vacant or underutilized buildings and Williamsburg's inspiring story of the River Fog Park enhancements and subsequent local festival planned in its space.

On Thursday, December 7th the CEDIK Promise Zone Downtown Revitalization project hosted 50 downtown stakeholders for the winter '17 quarterly convening in Harlan, Kentucky at the Harlan County Extension office. This convening provided a dedicated space and time for downtown stakeholders and partner organizations to come together to share and collaborate on current, but perhaps more importantly, future projects. Harlan provided an excellent backdrop for an afternoon discussion on hosting film productions and promoting film credits as a form of economic development. The weather did not cooperate and a planned walking tour was re-imagined as a facilitated discussion on downtown walkability, historic purposes and the various scales of development found throughout the region. The convening wrapped up with a facilitated discussion focusing on visioning and a round robin style sharing of projects each stakeholder team were most excited about in 2018. This dialogue spurred a number of connections between communities with similar ideas, needed resources and future collaborations.



[Image]
Breakout group presents their discussion points to the larger group



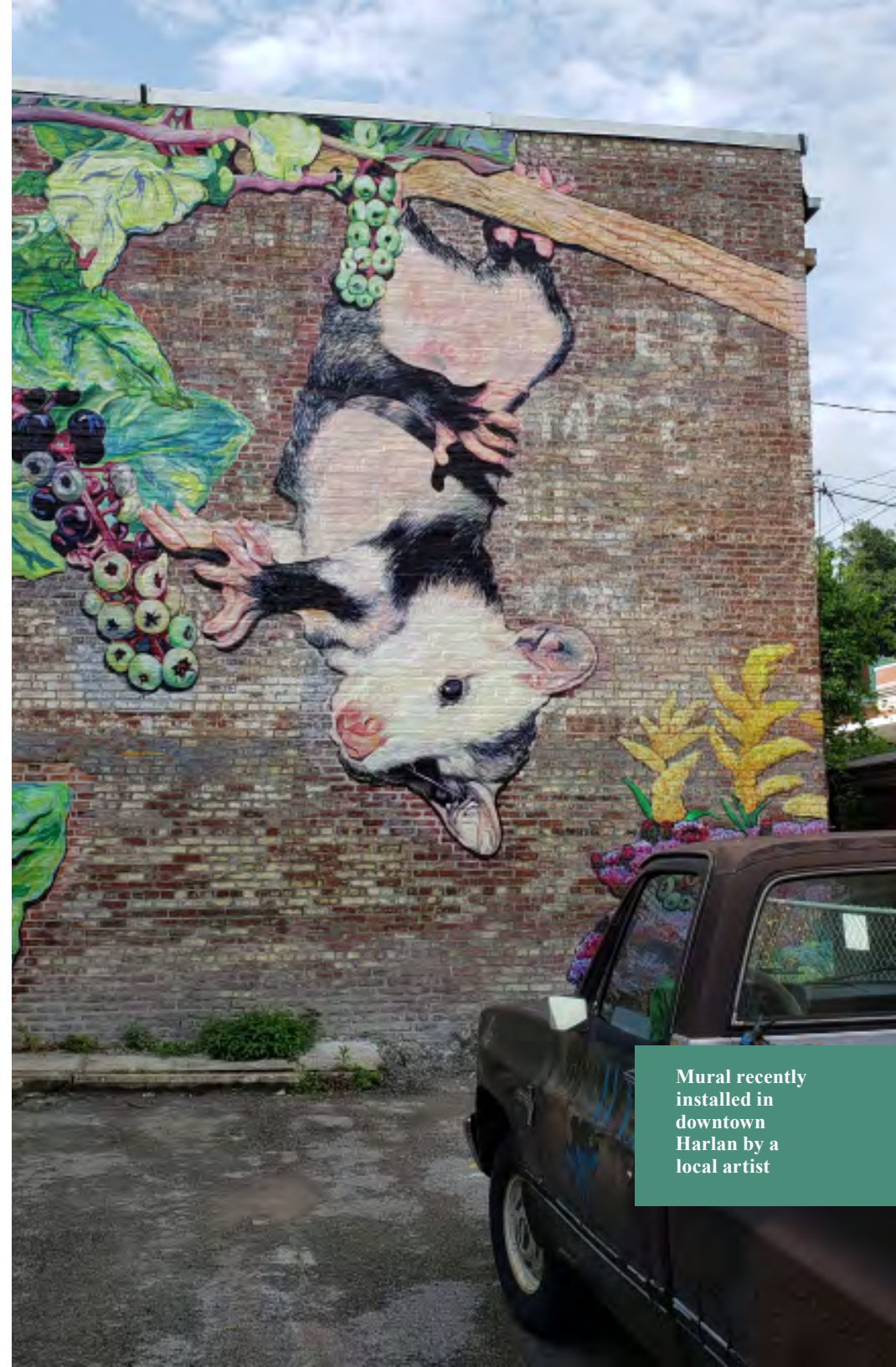
[Image]
Presentation on engaging vacant property owners in Harlan

DOWNTOWN INVESTMENTS

ABOUT

Participating Promise Zone downtown stakeholder teams that utilized available programing like the First Impressions Program, Business Retention and Expansion Program and community design planning were eligible to apply for funding to implement at least one strategy from their downtown revitalization engagement. Communities accessed two cycles of grant funding to support implementation.

The first grant was a mini grant to initiate efforts often illuminated by the First Impressions report. These early mini grants acted as catalytic projects providing pathways for broader community engagement and collaboration. Stakeholder teams accessed larger implementation grants as more programs were deployed, leading to a more firm vision of the necessary strategies required to move revitalization efforts forward. All applications were reviewed by a regional committee composed of individuals from CEDIK, Kentucky Main Street Program and Foundation for Appalachian Kentucky. The Foundation for Appalachian Kentucky executed agreements with each community and provided fiduciary responsibility.



Mural recently installed in downtown Harlan by a local artist

MINI GRANTS - CITY OF HARLAN

The Downtown Harlan Working Group in partnership with the Harlan County Chamber of Commerce, utilized their mini grant to organize a woman-led conference in November 2018 that brought together participants in downtown Harlan to network, learn from local business leaders and gain professional development training. Conference organizers, a team of women in Harlan working with CEDIK, including the Downtown Events Coordinator, Harlan Tourism and Convention Center Assistant Director as well as three downtown business owners, recruited other local business leaders to share their lessons learned. Along with the day of connection, conference funds were re-invested in local businesses, with a particular focus on women-led businesses in the region.

OUTCOMES

Mountain Women Mean Business

- Organized, planned, and held a conference, with 100 attendees that included targeted tracks, lunch and an awards banquet highlighting women-led businesses in Downtown Harlan while connecting and supporting women business leaders locally and across the region. The conference partnered with four regional development entities to provide workshops on topics like business accounting and time management. The conference concluded with an awards ceremony that recognized four outstanding women leaders in the region.

Youth Engagement

- 25 female members of the Future Business Leaders of America from Harlan High School attended a CEDIK-led empowerment and leadership session and facilitated discussion with community leaders on transitioning from high school to college.



[Image]
Breakout session during the Mountain Women Mean Business Conference



[Image]
Sign in during the Mountain Woman Mean Business Conference



[Image]
Panel session focused on business ownership during the conference

MINI GRANTS - TRI-CITIES (BENHAM, CUMBERLAND AND LYNCH)

Shop The Tri-Cities Heritage Development Corporation in partnership with the Tri-Cities Chamber of Commerce, Cumberland Tourism Commission and Tri-Cities Trail Town Merchants Committee developed and hosted a series of targeted market events, named 'Shop and Walks', activating underutilized buildings and green spaces to increase foot traffic and local business sales. market events, named 'Shop and Walks', activating visual aesthetic throughout the three cities during the events.



OUTCOMES

Shop and Walk

- Two Shop and Walk street markets held during the summer of 2018 featured 16 vendors and averaged roughly 200 attendees. The Tri-Cities Shop and Walk program culminated with a holiday season Shop Local campaign featuring 48 local businesses during the 2018 Christmas season. Two targeted social media advertisements for the shop local event reached 5,271 individuals and resulted in over 900 engagements.

Flag dedication event

- A cross promoted flag dedication event scheduled to coincide with 9/11 memorial events attracted more than 80 community members. The audience included retired veterans, elected officials, service member support agencies and local residents. A number of community members became volunteers for future downtown programming as a result of their attendance. Bobbie Gothard, Director of the Tri-Cities Heritage Development Corporation shared, "We feel the project was well worth the hours we worked. It brought new volunteers to our work. Not just this project, but others in the area too."

IMPLEMENTATION GRANT - HARLAN COUNTY

Harlan County Downtown Stakeholders representing multiple communities (Harlan, Evarts, Loyall, Cumberland, Benham, Lynch) and partners (Harlan Tourism and Downtown Development, Harlan County Public Libraries, Cumberland Tourism, Tri Cities Heritage Development Corporation, Main Street, ONE Harlan County and the Southeast Kentucky Revitalization Project) collaborated to implement a series of programs to increase accessibility, walkability and foot traffic in each of Harlan County's downtowns.

The goal of Where the Sidewalk Begins is to increase access and walkability in each of Harlan County's downtown spaces to provide a more inclusive downtown experience for visitors and citizens of all ages and abilities generating positive economic impacts.



OBJECTIVE

Reduce vacancy rates in Harlan County's downtown area. Current commercial vacancy rate among all US cities was measured to be 30% in March 2019. Measure of occupied commercial spaces vs. vacant commercial spaces in Harlan was 49 occupied vs. 15 vacant (23% vacancy rate) and as of July 1st 2020, 53 occupied vs. 11 vacant (17% vacancy rate).

OUTCOMES

Building Inventory

- An inventory of available buildings engaged building owners and offered assistance in renting, selling or transferring ownership. This program resulted in contacts with building owners that has led to new ownership of four buildings and investments taking place. ONE Harlan County's online inventory of available properties now reflects each building's distance from the nearest accessible parking now and lists the level of accessibility of the block where the property is located.

Public Engagement Events

- Take a Stroll Activity on August 28th 2019 engaging local leaders to highlight the importance of accessibility by having them take a baby stroller from the Harlan Center to The Portal or other locations downtown. Participants were encouraged to reflect on the difficulty navigating the city during their lunch hour. Property owners were asked to reflect on the impact that inaccessible sidewalks have on their property.
- Sidewalk Chalk Activity event on August 29th 2019 highlighted and identified areas where accessibility is limited.

[Image Left]
Map of sidewalk accessibility in downtown Harlan

Downtown Maps

- Harlan and Cumberland Tourism designed and distributed maps identifying local businesses, offices, public parking, handicapped spaces and accessible corners throughout downtown.

OBJECTIVE

Increase foot traffic and use of free parking lots in city in Harlan by bettering signage in downtown lots. The March 2019 average of cars parked in designated free parking lots in Harlan's six cities was 6.67. Pedestrian traffic was measured on November 5th, 2019 in three separate locations for 1 hour in the city of Harlan. Findings revealed 226 pedestrians in town during that hour with 218 traveling by foot, 3 by wheelchair and 5 by bicycle.

OUTCOMES

Signage

- Planned curation and of signage directing visitors and residents to available free parking will highlight the availability of underutilized designated free parking areas downtown. Signage installation has been delayed because of the Covid-19 pandemic but designs have been completed.

OBJECTIVE

Increase tax revenue for tourism organizations brought about through increased access to downtown restaurants and an increased number of overnight visitors. Annual restaurant and lodging tax revenue in FY2018 totaled \$556,933.22. Pre-COVID, revenues were on target to see \$581,831.22 for FY2020. However, given the 17% decrease in tourism revenue measured in March 2020, it is now anticipated that a 15% decline from previous projections will be realized for the year, totaling \$567,285.39.

OUTCOMES

Trainings

- Curb ramps were assessed and upgraded throughout Harlan County increasing accessibility in high traffic downtown areas. Repairs and upgrades were made possible throughout Harlan County, utilizing a series of trainings provided by Extreme Designs with support provided by ONE Harlan County, Harlan Tourism, Cumberland Tourism, Tri Cities Heritage Development Corporation, Harlan County Road Department, Harlan City Street Department, Cumberland City Street Department, Wright Concrete and Dirt Work.

Public Market Events

- Originally proposed Downtown Gallery Hops were celebrating art and the newly implemented accessible sidewalks was re-imagined and developed as part of "Safe Shop Hop" event to account for the Covid-19 pandemic.

Increased Accessibility and Interest in Sidewalks

- According to local partners, one of the most impactful components has been the increased accessibility afforded to pedestrians in their downtown areas. Sharing that it is more common to see those with mobility issues on the sidewalk now instead of being forced into the street and in harm's way. The project has also had a tremendous impact on local morale. After years of citizens feeling as though their downtowns have been neglected, this project created a visible and tangible sign that progress is being made toward revitalizing the six downtowns.
- This grant has led the cities in Harlan County to apply for additional funding for sidewalk projects, utilizing the Transportation Alternatives Program grant to address additional pedestrian safety issues.

HEALTHY DOWNTOWN INITIATIVE GRANT

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic induced economic uncertainty, and growing from the success of the Southeast Kentucky Downtown Stimulus Fund, the Appalachian Impact Fund, CEDIK, The Foundation for Appalachian Kentucky and Invest 606 collaborated to create the Healthy Downtowns Initiative.

Philanthropic funding was made available to existing community collaboratives and provided support to nonprofit organizations, local businesses and public partners focused on downtown revitalization, community economic development, engagement, and public health during the COVID-19 pandemic and Kentucky's reopening. Applicants were chosen based on their collaborative capacity. ONE Harlan County received grant funds to develop safe shopping events and create a mini grant program for local businesses.



[Image Left] Social media graphic supporting local business in Harlan County. Photo courtesy of Harlan County Tourism.

OUTCOMES

Mini Grant Program

- Awarded 20 mini grants ranging from \$500 to \$2,500 to locally owned small businesses throughout Harlan County. Funds were used to new point of sales systems to reduce customer contacts to purchase PPE for employees and customers, make payments for past due bills and other expenses that allow businesses to remain in operation during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Downtown Shopping Events & Safety Protocols

- Safety protocols and guidelines were established in conjunction with the Harlan County Fiscal Court and the Harlan County Health Department. Interventions included limited capacity indoors, face coverings, sanitation stations and physical distancing.
- Developed and hosted "Safe Shop Hop" events in downtown Harlan and Cumberland on October 2nd and 3rd featuring food trucks, vendors, extended hours for local businesses, and live music. 1000 people are estimated to have attended both events with several business owners reporting increased sales.

Feedback received from downtown businesses in Harlan and Cumberland was overwhelmingly positive. The promotion of the Safe Shop Hop online and via WYMT increased traffic in participating downtowns, but not to the point where it felt unsafe for organizers. One business in downtown Harlan reported more than 500 visitors the day of the event and sales that exceeded their Black Friday sales in 2019. Several other business owners shared it was well worth their time staying open for extended hours. With the success of this event in mind, Harlan County partners have discussed hosting quarterly downtown shopping events in the future to continue highlighting our locally owned businesses.

PROJECT RECOMMENDATIONS

ABOUT

Over the course of the project (2017-20) local stakeholders, partners, technical assistance providers and communities at large have engaged in and with their downtowns in new ways. We have learned from each other, built collaborative partnerships, explored other downtowns, successfully developed and implemented projects, ignited new ideas, developed new skills, built the skills of others and endured a global pandemic together. However, these accomplishments only represent a launch point for more sustained downtown revitalization efforts in the future. The collective lessons learned, established practices and challenges illuminated can provide the foundation for future downtown revitalization efforts.



Classic
mountain scene
in south eastern
Kentucky

LOCAL LEADERSHIP AND CAPACITY

Downtown revitalization takes more than a single person's best intentions and requires a collective effort working towards mutual goals. The Promise Zone Downtown Revitalization Project has shown that local leadership, shared ownership, and broad capacity create positive results but requires a deep commitment and understanding between downtown stakeholders, and about community assets, challenges, and visions for the future.

Understandably, every community is different in regards to skills, abilities, interests, assets and existing investments in downtown revitalization. With so much occupying the development landscape it is understandable why this may be the case. As such, the timeline and delivery of technical assistance programs was not linear or prescriptive but rather delivered as requested, allowing community stakeholders to commit to only what they felt was feasible and impactful. For example, not every community committed to the Business Retention and Expansion (BRE) Program because it required a substantial time commitment. As a result, communities may have missed out on the relationship building with local business owners noted as an unexpected outcome by communities that participated in the BRE program. Local capacity is foundational to future efforts.

Communities with dedicated, paid staff, responsible for downtown revitalization efforts (however narrow or broadly defined) often demonstrated greater overall capacity. A critical piece for many downtown teams in the Promise Zone was a paid staff member to drive, coordinate and provide leadership for the community's downtown revitalization process. Practices often associated with paid downtown coordinators that provide capacity to development efforts were observed:

- Project coordination and acting as liaison between multiple parties.
- Data collection to measure and document project impacts.
- Promotion of downtown activities, opportunities, programs and events.
- Often tasked with grant writing and administration.
- If affiliated with the Kentucky Main Street, the main street manager has programmatic commitment to support enhanced urban design & placemaking efforts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Work to create or develop a dedicated funding source for a paid staff member devoted to supporting coordination and providing local leadership and continuity to downtown revitalization efforts.
2. Continue to seek out opportunities to build the skills, abilities and leadership capacity of elected officials, community volunteers, business owners and downtown stakeholders to address current and future challenges.



LOCAL FOUNDATIONS AND PHILANTHROPIC CAPACITY

At the onset of the pandemic, some of the first organizational responses emerged from local nonprofits and philanthropic organizations. In the Kentucky Promise Zone, the Foundation for Appalachian Kentucky took a leadership role, in partnership with the Appalachian Impact Fund, CEDIK and Invest 606 to create the Eastern Kentucky Downtown Business Stimulus Fund. This fund leveraged existing assets, relationships and donations to respond directly to local businesses. Communities with existing foundations also created their own hyper-local responses to support businesses, often taking the shape of a stimulus fund or mini grant program.

The Eastern Kentucky Downtown Business Stimulus Fund provided 153 grants, ranging from \$600 to \$3000. In total, \$385,400 went to business owners (60% female) in 23 counties representing a mix of restaurants, unique retail, attractions, personal services and other businesses active in the broader downtown and tourism ecosystem. The fund received over 550 applications requesting more than \$1.5 million dollars.

Communities with existing local philanthropic leadership, capacity and available assets accessed financial support more quickly than communities without existing relationships with philanthropic organizations. Communities without this specialized capacity were relegated to navigate the often confusing assortment of federal assistance programs and loan products available for COVID-19 relief.

RECOMMENDATION

1. Continue developing local (or regional) philanthropic programs or organizations to build local knowledge, leadership, capacity and interests to serve needs with local giving and investment.

RELATIONSHIPS MATTER

The arc of this project has shown that our ability to come together and work towards revitalizing our downtowns is often built upon relationships – both existing and those we build. The Promise Zone Downtown Revitalization Project has helped build and establish new relationships within downtowns, counties and among the region. At the heart of the project was an intentional effort to create a regional network of stakeholders using a series of facilitated convenings to learn together, collaborate on efforts, share ideas and support each other's efforts. Even public policies were shared among the network inspiring their implementation in other communities. For example, communities have learned about and later adopted downtown business development incentive programs and nuisance code enforcement updates to address underutilized, vacant, abandoned or dangerous properties as well as litter. The relationships and information shared has inspired and supported a number of innovative regional downtown revitalization strategies.

At quarterly convenings, attendees cultivated space for skills building (team and personal). Stakeholders shared, more often than not, that the networking opportunities and relationship building components that took place during the convenings were most impactful. In focus group conversations with downtown stakeholders, many noted the convenings as among the most impactful elements outside of the First Impressions Program and community design projects.

These networking opportunities facilitated pollination of ideas and in many cases led communities to adapting similar programs or policies they heard shared by others. Stakeholders shared they now feel more comfortable speaking in public as a result of presenting to the regional network and providing updates and that they felt

valued being asked to share insights with other communities. Some shared they were empowered to learn there were mutual challenges faced in other communities ultimately helping them solve issues together, while others shared a new commitment to regionalism and collaboration within their own counties and in the region at large.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Continue to embrace regional efforts, collaborations and shared ownership (within counties and the region) focusing on mutual interests, assets and capacity to address shared challenges.
2. Seek out opportunities to join regional networks, collaborations or initiatives that provide relationship building opportunities with other stakeholders seeking solutions to shared challenges.

COVID-19

The most dramatic and impactful issue encountered during this project revolves around the unprecedented COVID-19 global health pandemic. The challenges have been substantial, however what we have learned about ourselves and our communities has also been substantial. We have been forced to confront our values and reevaluate priorities. As we consider what is next after the pandemic it is important to reflect on the impacts and observations from this time. For some these impacts may have been mere inconveniences and for others life altering. It has meant working virtually from home, not working at all, travel and crowd restrictions, canceled events and community engagement opportunities, supply chain disruptions, economic uncertainty, job insecurity, increased commitments at home with youth or elders, virtual learning, shifting shopping patterns and dealing with the reality of death and losses in our families and communities. The last year has been incredibly taxing on individuals, families, communities and society.

BROADBAND

While physical distancing and other public health practices have been encouraged we have not lost the need to stay connected. This has largely meant outreach, engagement, organizing and simply maintaining interpersonal relationships has shifted to virtual platforms. Not only have we seen the ways we connect change in real time but we are collectively shaping how we use technology moving forward. While virtual spaces are limited by internet connectivity it is important to note that virtual spaces have been more accessible to some. For example, individuals who traditionally work during meetings have been able to join remotely, and for others it has meant not choosing between childcare and attending a meeting. However challenges still persist in terms of access to broadband internet. It is important to note that mobile phone ownership has increased connectivity options. In May of 2019, the Pew Research Center reported that 44 percent of adults in households with incomes below \$30,000 do not have broadband but 71% own smart phones.

Addressing broadband access, while important to the work of this project, was not a central focus. The COVID-19 pandemic pushed the issue to the forefront, and this section would be incomplete without providing recommendations focusing on broadband access.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Continue to close the digital divide by prioritizing the reduction of barriers to broadband access and costs associated with realizing the 'last mile.'
2. Continue to develop mobile friendly alternatives to desktop web interfaces and the infrastructure supporting its networks.
3. Continue to hold internet service providers accountable for

services (including upload and download speeds) they have committed to when contracted to provide broadband products.

OUTDOOR SPACES AND THE PUBLIC REALM

COVID-19 has left no place unaffected. Its impacts have reached every rural, urban and suburban community whether they have the infrastructure or capacity to deal with these new challenges or not. The connectivity between people and places has perhaps never mattered more or at least been more obvious. The connections between the physical, social, civic and financial capacity of yesterday is the foundation for our resilience and recovery today.

During lockdown phases and subsequent periods of increased public restrictions and precautions, including social distancing, or limited indoor capacity, the ability to go outside and get some fresh air never felt so important. Parks and outdoor spaces have always been known to offer benefits related to physical and mental health, community relationship building and habitat protection. In seeking refuge from the pandemic, outdoor spaces have been elevated from mere amenities to critical infrastructure needed for escape and recharging.

It has been well documented throughout the pandemic that more people sought out outdoor spaces. Many parks, green spaces, and trail systems have experienced increases in local use. At times, high visitation strained the capacity of local parks and resulted in modified restrictions on the numbers of users at a time, the activities available and in some cases temporary closures. These moments of access inspired many people to explore their neighborhood for outdoor recreation. Many communities throughout the region noted that as car traffic decreased, pedestrian traffic increased. This was most

notable in downtowns and adjacent neighborhoods.

When given the opportunity to invest philanthropic funds targeted at supporting COVID related economic recovery as part of the Healthy Downtowns Initiative, two thirds of the participating Promise Zone communities prioritized investments in the public realm and public spaces. The stakeholders responsible for a community garden and outdoor classroom (planned pre-pandemic) noted that it had a larger impact now than they originally anticipated. They attributed their observation to more residents simply needing a place to go because they have been in their homes more than ever. Each example highlights a real investment in increasing access to outdoor spaces by promoting both public health and economic development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Prioritize investments in pedestrian infrastructure that promote increasing accessibility, connectivity and improved access to sidewalks, walking, hiking and biking trails and nearby water resources.
2. Determine the impact of decreased car traffic on downtown streets and businesses and consider the conversion and redesign of currently underutilized parking, alleys or even roads as outdoor seating and dining to support local businesses.
3. Consider prioritizing future investments in accessible pedestrian infrastructure, maintaining aging infrastructure and designing new public spaces that serve the needs of people above cars.
4. Prioritize flexible or multi-use outdoor learning environments and experiences that provide access to COVID safe, family-friendly extracurricular activities, bridging the need for respite from virtual learning and opportunities to enjoy and receive the benefits of being outdoors.

LOCAL MATTERS

It has never been so evident that communities are passionate about their local businesses. As economic uncertainty loomed over every community, one of the most resounding responses were collective actions/programs to support local business enterprises. Never before has the idea of supporting local, generating local tax dollars and keeping businesses open been so prioritized and championed. We have seen the creation of take-out bingo cards, gift card incentive programs, initiatives to feed front line health workers by local businesses, transitioning outdoor spaces to serve the needs of local restaurants with no longer accessible indoor spaces.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Continue to develop programs that promote, bring attention to, and ultimately contribute to the success of local businesses and enterprises.
2. Consider developing a local first campaign, building off of the collective support shown during the pandemic and the collective sacrifices made by many front line retail workers.

WHAT'S NEXT?

DOWNTOWN ECOSYSTEM APPROACH

The Promise Zone Downtown Revitalization Project has documented that revitalization efforts are multifaceted and complicated at times because of all the moving parts. It makes sense, given the development histories and existing infrastructure in the region's downtowns, that reimagining their uses can come with challenges. Sustained revitalization will require moving beyond the successes of this project (visioning, planning, skill relationship building, assessments, design solutions, prioritization and implementing

projects) to thinking about how our collective efforts will contribute to a broader investment landscape and entrepreneurial ecosystem.

A September 2020 study by the National Main Street organization, in partnership with the Bass Center for Transformative Placemaking, investigated the impacts that being located in a downtown core had on an establishment's ability to mitigate negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in both urban and rural downtowns. In nearly every example, small businesses in older, established commercial corridors, downtowns and Main Streets proved more likely to leverage their physical location (in proximity to other businesses, resources and amenities that) in ways that mitigated COVID-19 impacts more than businesses in other locations. The affirmation that businesses located in downtowns have generally been more resilient during the pandemic speaks directly to the built environment underpinning a community's resilience more broadly.

Perhaps the most significant and insurmountable challenge faced in the built environment during the Promise Zone Downtown Revitalization Project were the physical constraints and limitations presented by the realities of downtown buildings. Nearly every community has at least one building, however large or small, that presents a real challenge with tangible and varying obstacles. While downtown buildings are iconic they are also difficult to restore and maintain once they have fallen into disrepair. The reality is many Kentucky Promise Zone downtowns are burdened with underutilized or abandoned structures, and transitioning these spaces will require outside private capital investments beyond what is traditionally available in grant supported efforts. The next iteration of CEDIK's downtown revitalization to address just this question is the recently funded ARC POWER grant to launch The ReVitalize, ReInvest, ReDevelop Appalachia (R3) Initiative.

THE REVITALIZE, REINVEST, REDEVELOP APPALACHIA (R3) INITIATIVE

R3 is a strategic partnership between the Appalachian Impact Fund at the Foundation for Appalachian Kentucky and the Community and Economic Development Initiative of Kentucky (CEDIK) at the University of Kentucky to revitalize southeastern Kentucky's downtowns, support entrepreneurial ecosystems and promising sectors and begin readying our communities for new investment. By creating comprehensive downtown revitalization plans oriented towards supporting entrepreneurs in the downtown ecosystem, building the capacity of local leaders and attracting new private investments, the R3 initiative will help infuse much needed outside capital into our downtowns.

The R3 Initiative takes a four-step approach to readying communities for investment and building markets for multiple forms of capital absorption. These steps include: city-wide planning that engages a diverse set of stakeholders, identification of tangible catalytic projects, deployment of early-stage impact investment capital to amplify the competitiveness for outside capital investment, followed by deployment of later-stage traditional capital to complete projects. In order to concentrate investments into the hardest-to-serve communities there is an underlying need to supplement the existing investment ecosystem that R3 aims to address.

CEDIK is fulfilling a vital need at the front-end of this progression to build local capacity that enables inclusive and comprehensive planning, helping communities determine the necessary and impactful revitalization projects in their own downtowns. The R3 Initiative will help build the Appalachian Impact Fund's existing social impact investment fund with investment capital targeted for

the implementation of catalytic downtown revitalization projects. These investments will be used for downtown revitalization projects that present entrepreneurial opportunities that can: improve infrastructure and the built environment, start and grow small businesses, retain and attract families, draw in visitors for extended stays across the region and attract additional private investment.

[Image Top]
View at Pine Mountain
Settlement School

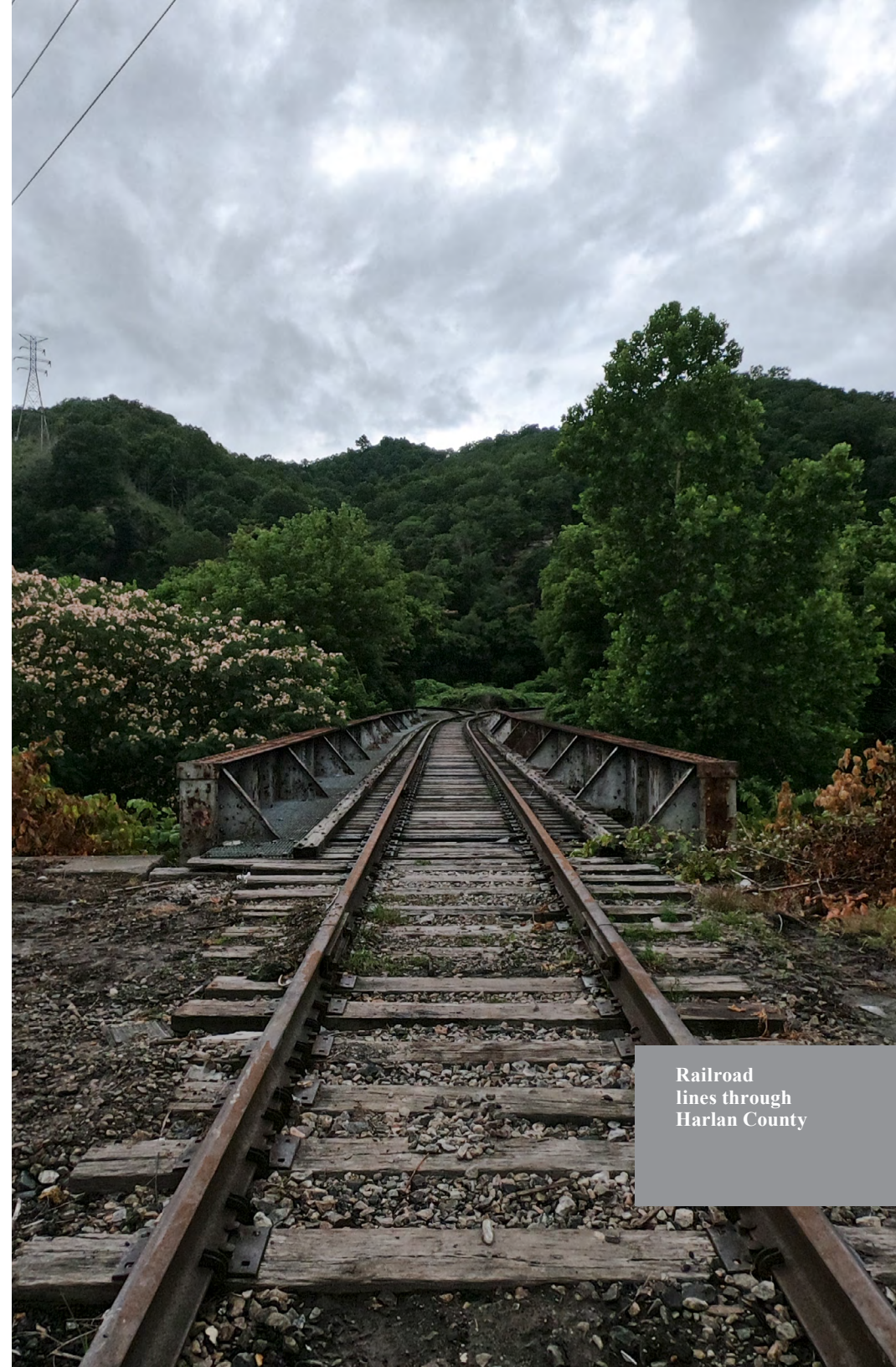
[Image Bottom]
Kentucky historic
marker



INDICATORS OF DOWNTOWN SUCCESS

A number of broad indicators were introduced using the 2014 University of Illinois Extension 'Downtown Success Indicators' publication to provide insights on how to begin measuring revitalization progress. CEDIK references these indicators in its own work to gain perspective and evaluate the relative successes of investments to downtowns. While broad, all the following indicators focus on a need to get people downtown for unique experiences not easily replicated in suburban development. The following represents a summary of indicators to consider in tracking downtown revitalization investments and metrics.

North Central Regional Center for Rural Development, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and University of Illinois Extension. "Downtown Success Indicators: A Review of Literature." August 2014. <https://fyi.extension.wisc.edu/resilientdowntowns/files/2016/06/59491.pdf>



Railroad
lines through
Harlan County

DOWNTOWN RETAIL

Downtown Retail has long been understood as an indicator of downtown health and vibrancy. Retail activity attracts a daytime population, contributes to the local tax base and increases to sidewalk activity.

Suggested Measures:

- Proportion of all retail businesses located downtown
- Increase in retail businesses downtown over a time period
- Occupancy rate and longevity of businesses
- Daytime population
- Business mix

DOWNTOWN HOUSING

Downtown Housing and residents provide a 24 hour customer base for downtown businesses and associated amenities. Downtowns provide unique housing opportunities for a number of target populations.

Suggested Measures:

- Proportion of city's population residing downtown
- Increase in downtown housing units over a time period
- Surrounding market rate of residential neighborhoods
- Regulatory framework supporting downtown housing

ORGANIZATIONS AND PARTNERSHIPS

Organizations and Partnerships are critical to the implementation of downtown revitalization efforts. They play active leadership roles while bringing a variety of stakeholders together to develop the community's long term vision.

Suggested Measures:

- Active partnerships and coalitions
- Downtown development authority (or organizational support)
- Downtown centric plan
- Community involvement/engagement (affection from citizenry)

DOWNTOWN TRAFFIC GENERATORS

Downtown Traffic Generators come in a variety of forms but ultimately aim to attract people downtown. These assets, when leveraged, provide a competitive advantage. Traffic generators can be both man-made, like a university, or natural, like a waterfront.

Suggested Measures:

- Proportion of the city's civic and cultural uses located downtown
- Access to natural amenities (or waterfront development or parks)
- Arts and entertainment amenities
- Educational establishments
- Civic or judicial buildings

HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Preservation and Rehabilitation of structures neglected by the retail exodus to the periphery protect the identity of unique places not replicable in the suburbs. Historic preservation helps define the character of place and encourages investment in neglected and underutilized buildings.

Suggested Measures:

- Proportion of city's registered historic structures located downtown
- Number of hotel/motel rooms per 1,000 central city residents
- Rehabilitation and Historic preservation initiatives
- Heritage tourism programs and sites

IMMIGRATION AND DIVERSITY

Immigration and Diversity are relatively new indicators of downtown success. Looking at diversity provides insights into a community's openness to a diverse population that includes non-traditional families, LGBTQIA+ and immigrants of varying faiths and ethnicities.

Suggested Measures:

- Percentage of foreign born population in the city
- Percentage of non-white population in the city
- Civic leaders' attitude toward diverse populations

MIXED USES

Multi-functionality refers to the historic roles downtown have played over time as destinations for shopping, services, employment, housing and culture. Successful downtowns offer a variety of interwoven opportunities that serve to attract people at various times of the day.

Suggested Measures:

- Variety of land uses downtown
- Mixed use development featuring housing, office use or conference/meeting space

DESIGN AND PLANNING

Downtown Design can improve the quality of life of residents and functionality of the built environment. Successful downtowns have clear boundaries and entrances - you should know when you have arrived. The sense of place is a cumulative expression of a multitude of downtown design elements.

Suggested Measures:

- Clear boundary and entrances
- Design guidelines
- Bike/pedestrian friendliness
- Public spaces
- Streetscape and facade improvement programs
- Accessibility and connectivity

BRANDING AND MARKETING

Branding and Promotion are marketing strategies deployed to reach larger audiences and disseminate information about downtown programs, opportunities and vision. Successful downtowns use marketing strategies to let residents and tourists know about the unique experiences their downtowns offer.

Suggested Measures:

- Special events
- Marketing initiatives

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Downtown Finance, employment and demographic data provide insights on long term changes.

Suggested Measures:

- Change in assessed value of property
- Change in real property investment
- Change in downtown employment by sector
- Percentage increase in rental value
- Income of downtown residents
- Crime known to police per 1000 residents
- Downtown labor force

COUNTY DATA PROFILES

CEDIK's research team has created and maintains updated data profiles for stakeholders to use, relevant to the community. These data profiles provide insights on a number of valuable metrics and can support various decision making processes. To access the most recent data profiles for your community please visit <https://cedik.ca.uky.edu/CountyDataProfiles>

After selecting the appropriate profile type simply click on your county name using the dropdown menu. These data profiles are compiled from data gathered from federal, state and local databases and are updated as new information becomes available.

County Budget Profile

- Population Estimates
- Total Tax Revenues
- Change in Population
- Change in Revenues
- Change in Spending
- County Revenue Sources
- Weather Related Disaster Indicators

Economic Profile

- Employment (top industries and location quotient)
- Labor Force
- Commute Times
- Median Household Income
- Poverty %
- Unemployment Rate
- Personal Income

Housing Profile

- Total Housing Units
- Owner Occupied Units
- Renter Occupied Units
- Homeowner Vacancy
- Renter Vacancy
- Housing Stock Age
- Housing Characteristics (mortgage rent, taxes, cost burden, etc.)
- Commuting Patterns

Retail Profile

- Retail Employment and Pull Factors
- Percent Change in Retail Employment and Sales
- Retail Earnings and Employee Age

Small Business Profile

- Total Jobs (Gains and Losses)
- Sales per Business & Employee
- Top Employment Industries
- Small Business Types
- Self-Employment

Workforce Profile

- Workforce by Education and Gender
- Commuting Patterns
- Employment by Occupation
- Earnings

