



PERRY COUNTY Downtown Revitalization Project Summary 2020

**Community & Economic
Development Initiative of Kentucky**

 **College of Agriculture,
Food and Environment**

AUTHORS

LEADERSHIP

Alison Davis, PhD.

Executive Director, CEDIK

Dan Kahl, PhD.

Associate Director, CEDIK

LEAD FACULTY PARTNER

Jayoung Koo, PhD.

Associate Professor of Landscape Architecture

LEAD STAFF

Simona Balazs

Research Director

Shane Barton

Downtown Revitalization Coordinator

Melissa Bond

Arts Extension Program Leader

Sarah Bowker

Communications Director

Mercedes Maness

Extension Associate

Melody Nall

Engagement Director

Ryan Sandwick

Community Design Program Manager

[Cover Image]

Mural recently installed in downtown
Hazard

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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.



View of Main St. in the heart of downtown Hazard

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]
View of downtown Hazard and
Triangle Park

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]
Pocket park in the heart of downtown
Hazard

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.

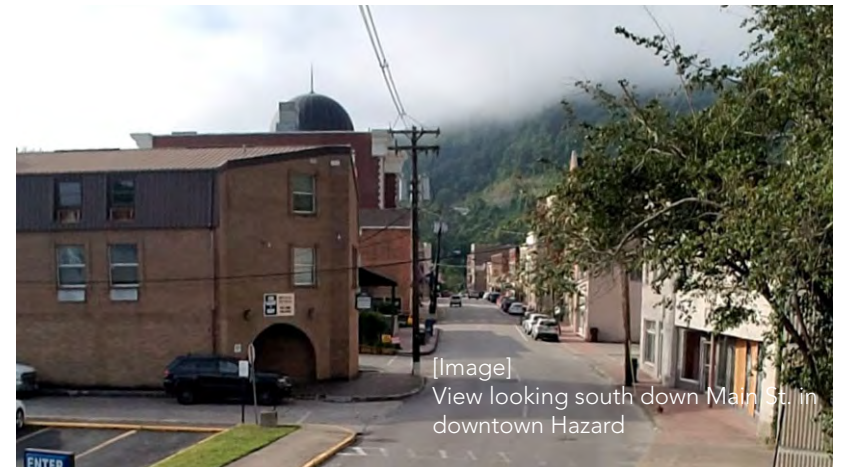
Downtown investments are as diverse as downtowns themselves. For example, investments can be made in accessibility, public art, building facades or parks and green spaces (to suggest a few) but they all serve a unique purpose while collectively contributing to the vibrancy and value of downtown.



[Image]
Makeshift wayfinding signs Hazard

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]
View looking south down Main St. in downtown Hazard

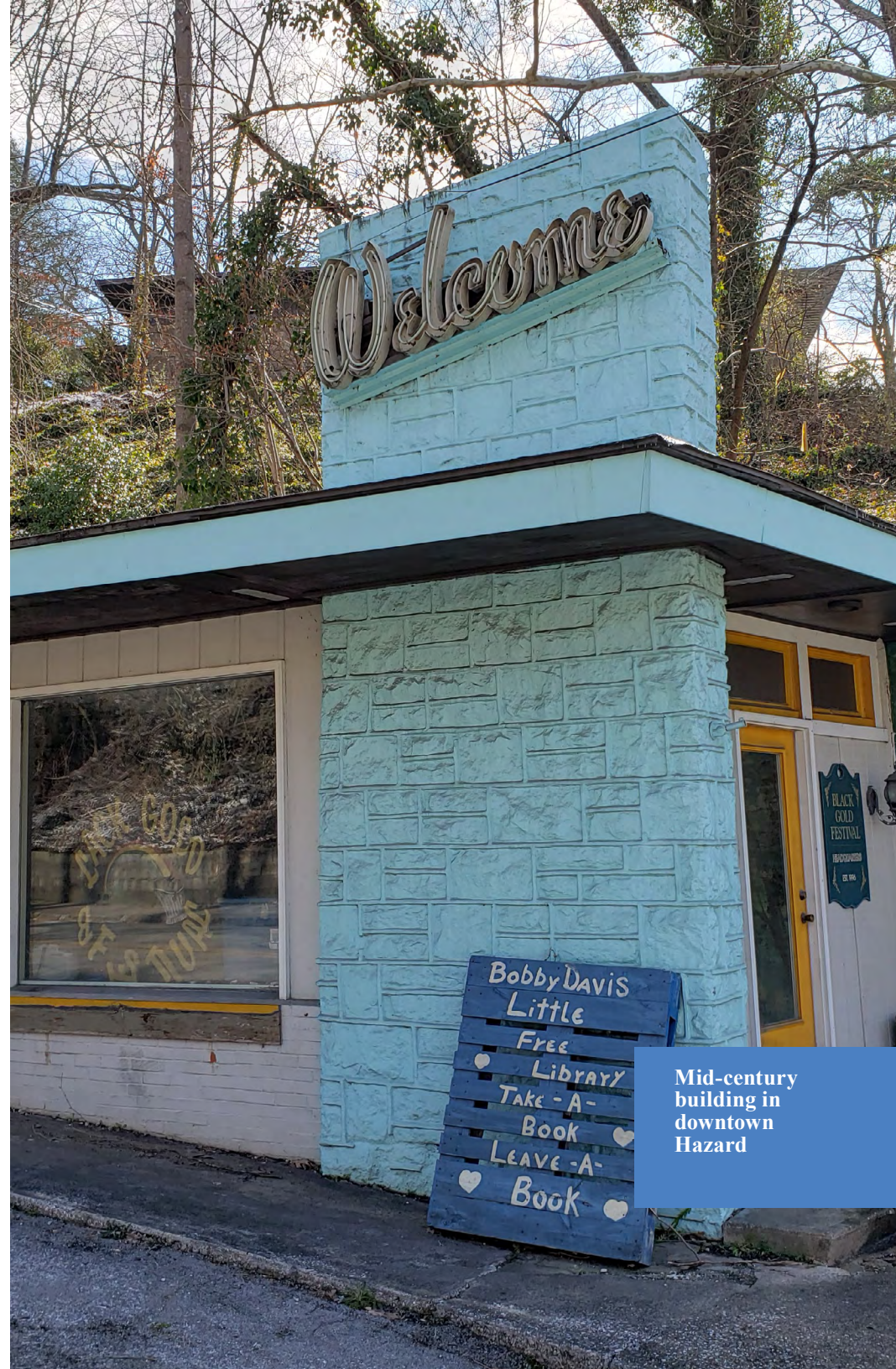
COMMUNITY DESIGN

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.



Mid-century building in downtown Hazard

BACKGROUND

During the spring of 2020, CEDIK partners in Hazard reached out to community design staff at UK for guidance in developing a wayfinding and signage plan for their downtown. Working with an intern from UK Department of Landscape Architecture, CEDIK staff visited Hazard with a list of local sites provided by the local partners and toured downtown looking for them. This exercise laid the foundation for wayfinding and signage recommendations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

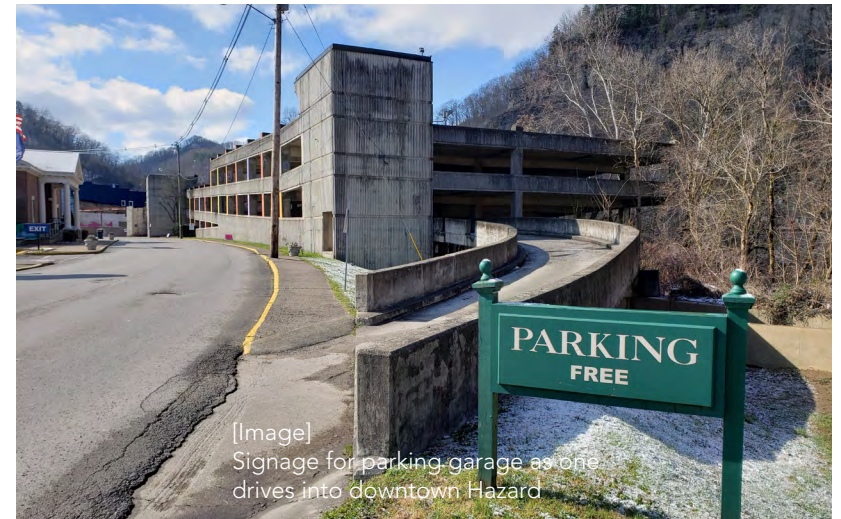
There are two primary wayfinding challenges that Hazard faces: pointing people towards downtown from the bypasses and directing people once they get into downtown. Focusing on the latter, there are clear opportunities for people to improve the visitor experience of arriving in downtown Hazard. There are three primary routes into downtown Hazard: N. Main St., E. Main St. and Town Mountain Rd. Where each of these three main roads enters Hazard there is a public parking lot. At each of these locations signs should be placed directing people to the parking lots. The goal of this is to catch people as soon as they drive into downtown and encourage them to park and walk to their destination(s).

Each of these gateway parking lots should feature a wayfinding sign which would be highly visible within the parking lot to direct people to the various destinations within downtown Hazard. These destinations could be grouped into themes, such as civic, culture and recreation. Applying a color and unique symbol to each of these themes could provide a cohesive identity to the wayfinding and signage throughout downtown, while guiding people to their destinations. The color coded symbols could then be easily and

intentionally located within downtown Hazard to further direct people to both the intended destination as well as new discoveries along the way.

DESIGN COMPETITION

During previous conversations with partners in Hazard the idea of a local design competition for the design of wayfinding and signage in downtown was mentioned. While a competition can utilize local creative talent, the contest itself would require focused guidelines so that resulting submissions are useful and comparable. Deciding the colors, symbols, and types of signage itself would be well suited to a design competition. Following a public meeting or webinar where interested participants could learn about the process and guidelines, they could look for inspiration and precedent images and locations in the greater Perry County area that could then inform their wayfinding and signage design.



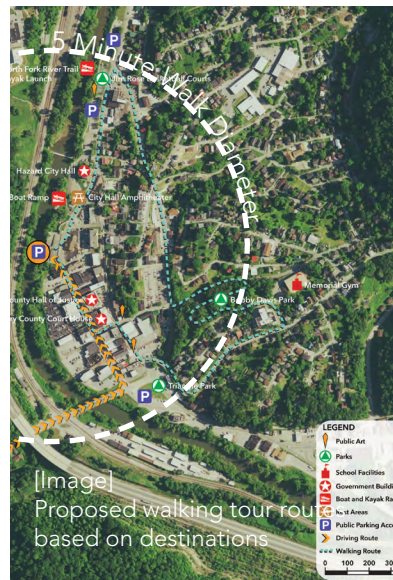
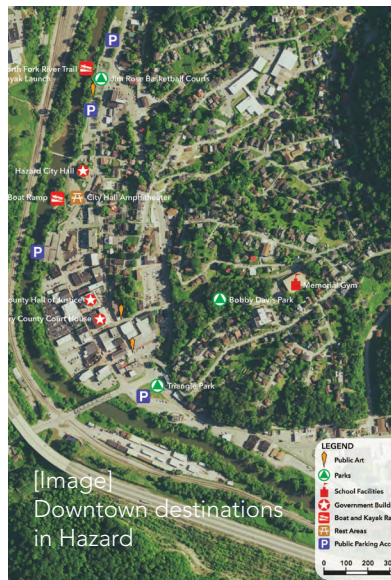
[Image]
Signage for parking garage as one drives into downtown Hazard

DRIVING INTO HAZARD

At each of the three primary driving routes into downtown Hazard (E. Main St., N. Main St. and Town Mountain Rd.) there are underutilized public parking lots. Welcoming signage should be placed at each of these locations encouraging visitors to park and walk to their desired destinations, boosting foot traffic through downtown. Each of the major roads that either lead into downtown Hazard, or adjacent to it, are shown below. The locations of the major public parking lots are also shown, highlighting the opportunity to better communicate and guide people to the existing parking inventory in downtown Hazard.

DOWNTOWN DESTINATIONS

Within downtown Hazard there are a variety of destinations that invite locals and visitors alike. Locals may use downtown for various civic uses, like going to the bank or for other everyday tasks. Visitors



are more likely to explore downtown's hidden gems, such as retail stores, public art and historic sites. The wayfinding and signage in downtown needs to recognize both of these user groups and why they will be in downtown. Connecting these places to their nearest public parking lot would help the local partners with their goal to make a navigable and friendly Hazard.

WALKING TOUR

Due to downtown Hazard's unique layout, there is a lot to explore within a compact area. The dashed white circle on the bottom right image on the opposite page is approximately 1,500 ft. across, which roughly equals a 5 minute walk for the average person. At the center of this circle lies downtown Hazard's parking garage, with nearly all of downtown's main destinations located within this 5 minute diameter. While topography plays a role in some of the walking times, showing people the time it takes to walk somewhere instead of the distance can encourage them to walk rather than drive. An increased number of pedestrians makes the streets feel safer, improves health and can increase business for local merchants by having more direct interactions.

FAMILY OF SIGNAGE

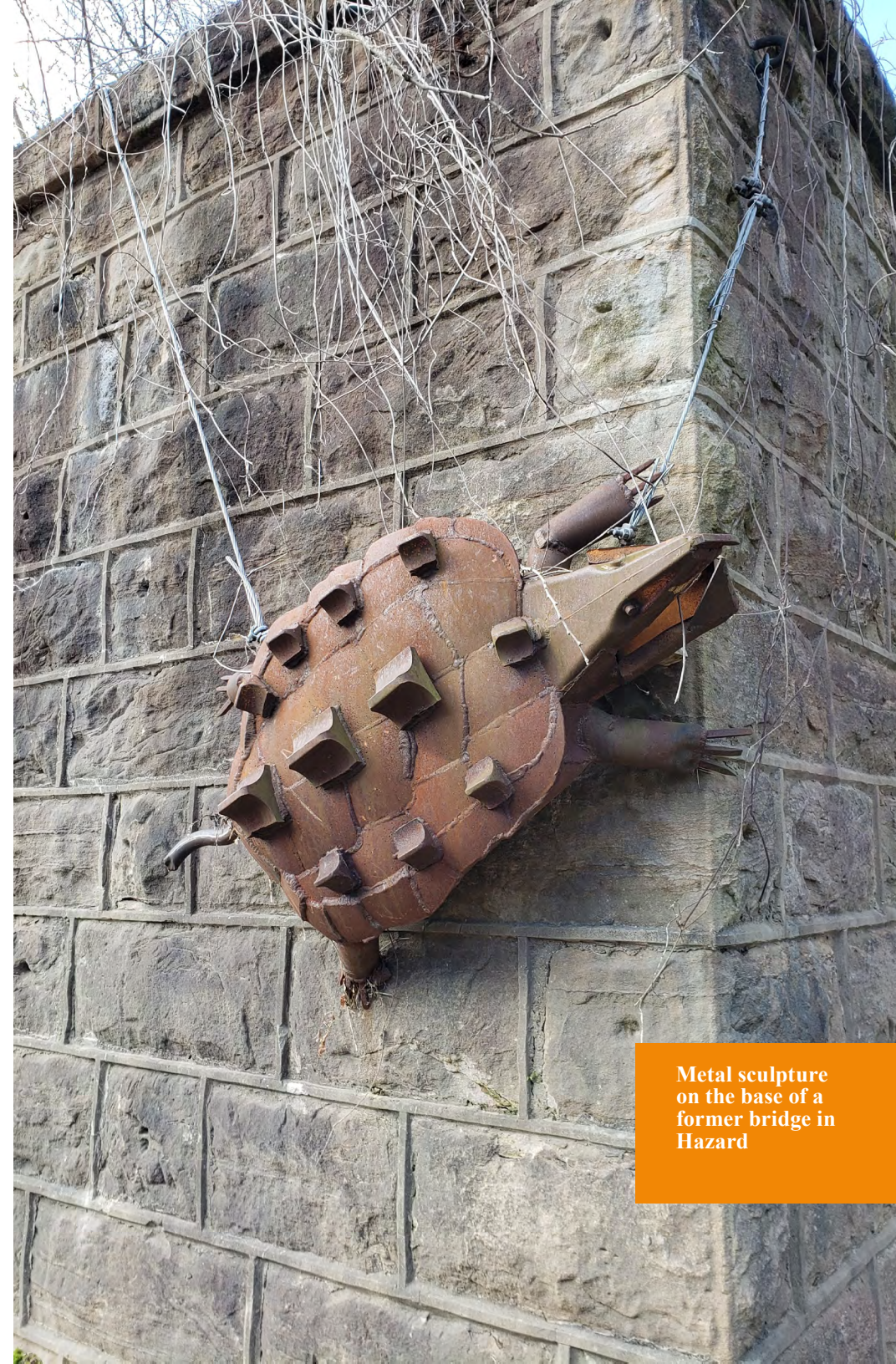
When designing wayfinding and signage, it is important to design them for the desired viewer. If you are trying to capture people as they drive into downtown, the signs and content need to be large enough for people to safely read while driving. Conversely, signage for pedestrians can feature more content as people can stop to read the signs that are placed at eye level. Developing a family of signage allows each of these various elements to have a unified look while being designed for the target viewer.

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 will 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 will offer 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.



Metal sculpture on the base of a former bridge in Hazard

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. Visitors document their experience and interactions with community members.

PROCESS

Visits to Perry County were conducted by 7 team members on both weekdays and weekends to capture a variety of activity within the community. The Perry First Impressions team consisted of small business owners, young professionals, traveling retirees, and community development professionals. Overall, conditions were favorable for visiting and exploring the roads, small communities, parks and businesses within Perry County. While quotations in this report should not be considered exhaustive, they do provide a valuable snapshot of a visitor's perspective in Perry County from a variety of ages, life experiences and interests.



[Image]
Downtown Hazard and the surrounding mountains in the fall

WEB PRESENCE

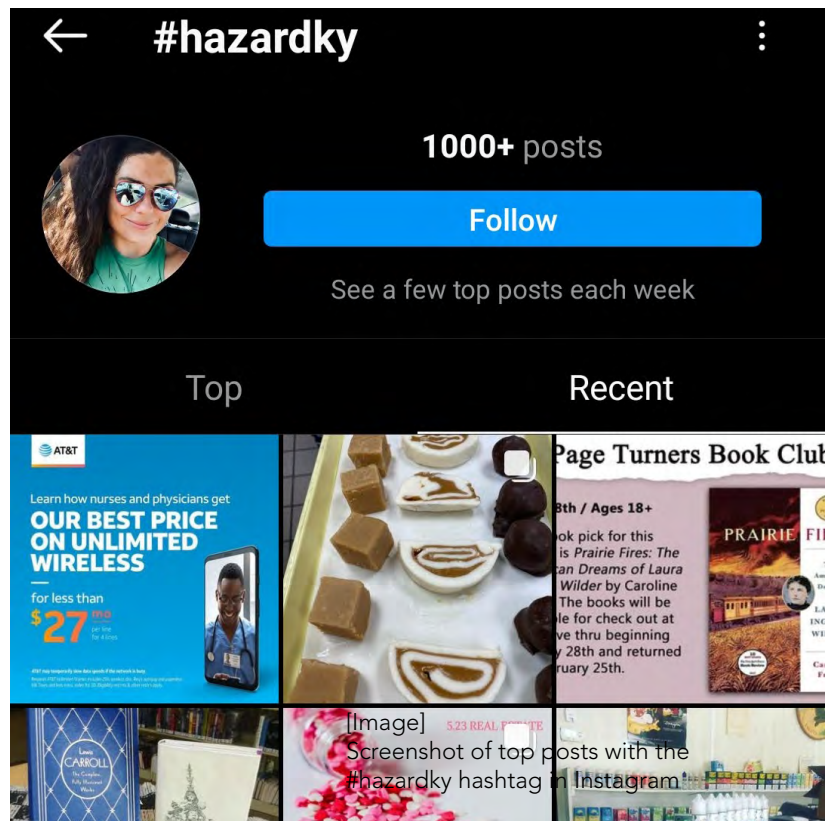
Prior to visiting Hazard, assessors researched the community on the internet. They visited official and non-official sites from search engines, restaurant and hotel reviews and even school and newspaper outlets. Overall, visitor impressions of the web presence were favorable. Several assessors noted the strengths of the hazardky.gov website. Many noted that the photos were bright and drew viewers in, going so far as to say, "It is a very nice website! It looks well-designed, up-to-date and very informative both for visitors and for community members. There are homepage links to information about history, industry, community and education - all with current links to further information."

HazardHappenings website was another popular hit for the assessors. Volunteers were receptive to the notion of collecting all community activities in one location. An assessor wrote, "Hazard Happenings is a fun site. The title is catchy and I really appreciate how there is a collective effort to list all community activities in one spot. This makes planning simpler on tourists and locals!" It was evident to visitors that the city had taken great time and poured energy into cultivating an online presence that would appeal to both locals and tourists. One suggestion was to create a go-to list with links to all local restaurants and businesses.

Assessors also analyzed Trip Advisor, Urbanspoon, and Yelp reviews to identify strengths and weaknesses. All assessors reported planning their trip and selecting locations to visit based on reviews on these sites. Many struggled to find online reviews of attractions to plan their trip around, but The Mother Goose, Bobby Davis Museum and Holliday Farm and Garden all had high ratings on Tripadvisor. Visitors appreciated the range of options. One wrote, "Rudy's

Bakery and The Big Blue Smokehouse were two that stood out based on reviews and web information that I was interested in visiting during our trip. There did seem to be a good mix of chain places to eat and local fare as well. There was no shortage of options. Patrons of local businesses should write reviews for their favorite spots in town to encourage more visitors and tourists.”

On social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, reviewers had largely varied responses. Some observed high traffic for certain organizations on certain platforms.



The hashtag for Hazard, Kentucky, #hazardky, had some positive posts, but felt like an underused resource. Others felt social media presence could improve considerably and encouraged the community to make note of pages that are outdated and recommended for page owners to increase activity to improve presence. Reviewers also observed that many small businesses were not adequately represented on social media, suggesting opportunity for social media trainings to support business owners. Overall, reviews for the web presence were positive.

COMMUNITY VISITS

After completing their pre-visit research, the assessors began their time in Hazard by doing a Quick Pass Impression: driving through the community quickly, without stopping, to create an instinctual impression without focusing too much on detail.

During the Quick Pass, reviewers overwhelmingly had positive impressions of the drive into Hazard, noting the natural beauty and the maintenance of the roadways. They appreciated the William D. Gorman bridge and believed it to be a beautiful way to enter the town. One volunteer wrote, “There was also some great historical signs that provided some local history.” Many reviewers commented on the number of unoccupied, run down and vacant buildings.

After completing the Quick Pass, assessors returned to locations that caught their attention and began detailed exploration and documentation of the community. Highlights from these categories include the ability to easily navigate the town, the kindness of the people and the public infrastructure. The importance of the medical field within Hazard was noticed by assessors. The town was beautifully decorated and assessors felt a sense of pride from community members regarding the city.

All visitors noted the availability and ease of parking, but also noted that they had limited cellular service which put a snag in some of their plans. Perhaps a printed map would be beneficial for visitors. The Visitors Center was easy to locate, but was unfortunately closed when the majority of assessors traveled to Hazard. Visitors remarked that downtown was beautiful and charming, but there were few pedestrians out and about. Notable buildings included the Hazard Fire Department and Hazard/Perry County Senior Center. Visitors appreciated the signage throughout. One wrote, "I was impressed by the government buildings and facilities. They were easily identifiable so that if someone needed to access these places, it would be easy to find even if not familiar with Hazard."

Visitors spent most of their time at the local restaurants and shops. A real highlight for many was the Perry County Park. The park in the community had a positive influence, as visitors noticed it seems like a community that cares for its youth and resident well-being. Many felt like the majority of community engagement activities surrounded or were centered around the park, "I love the idea of everyone being able to be included in activities at the park." Other notable attractions include the Mother Goose House, the Bobby Davis Museum and Park, Coal River Grille, Sazon, Big Blue Smokehouse and Holliday Farm and Garden. Assessors noted that some businesses that drew their interest were closed during their visit. There were many signs for the Black Gold Festival, which interested many reviewers. The lack of a 'shop local' campaign was evident to assessors.

[[Top Right Image]
View driving into
Hazard from the north

[Middle Right Image]
Fishing pier in
downtown Hazard

[Bottom Right Image]
Playground along
the North Fork of the
Kentucky River



FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

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

Improve Web Search Metrics, Social Media and Review Site Presence

- Once reviewers finally found the several strong websites Hazard has to offer, their expectations for the community improved significantly. Trainings could be organized for website editors and business owners on how to use hashtags to populate current feeds, improve their metric search results and maintain a social media presence.

Identify Ways to Provide Tourists Information Outside of “Business Hours”

- Visitors during weekday, daytime hours had a more positive impression of Hazard than those on the weekend or evening hours. Assessors recommend finding ways to make it easy for visitors to access information about all that Hazard has to offer even when city and tourism offices are closed.

Determine the Identity and Future Direction of Downtown Hazard

- Even though locals appear to have a strong sense of Hazard’s identity and history, new ways to convey Hazard’s identity, direction and appeal could be considered. Several visitors identified a good “power-washing” could improve Hazard’s outward appearance. An organized community clean-up of downtown and empty storefronts would offer significant help.

SUMMARY OF EFFORTS

After compiling the information into a full-length report, a CEDIK representative presented the findings to Perry County stakeholders in two separate open community forums: one in March and one in April of 2019. Stakeholders in attendance included elected officials, chamber members, community foundation representatives, downtown development coordinators and community volunteers. After reviewing the Community Assessment Report, attendees then participated in a CEDIK facilitated community forum to identify action items and priorities to address the information received.

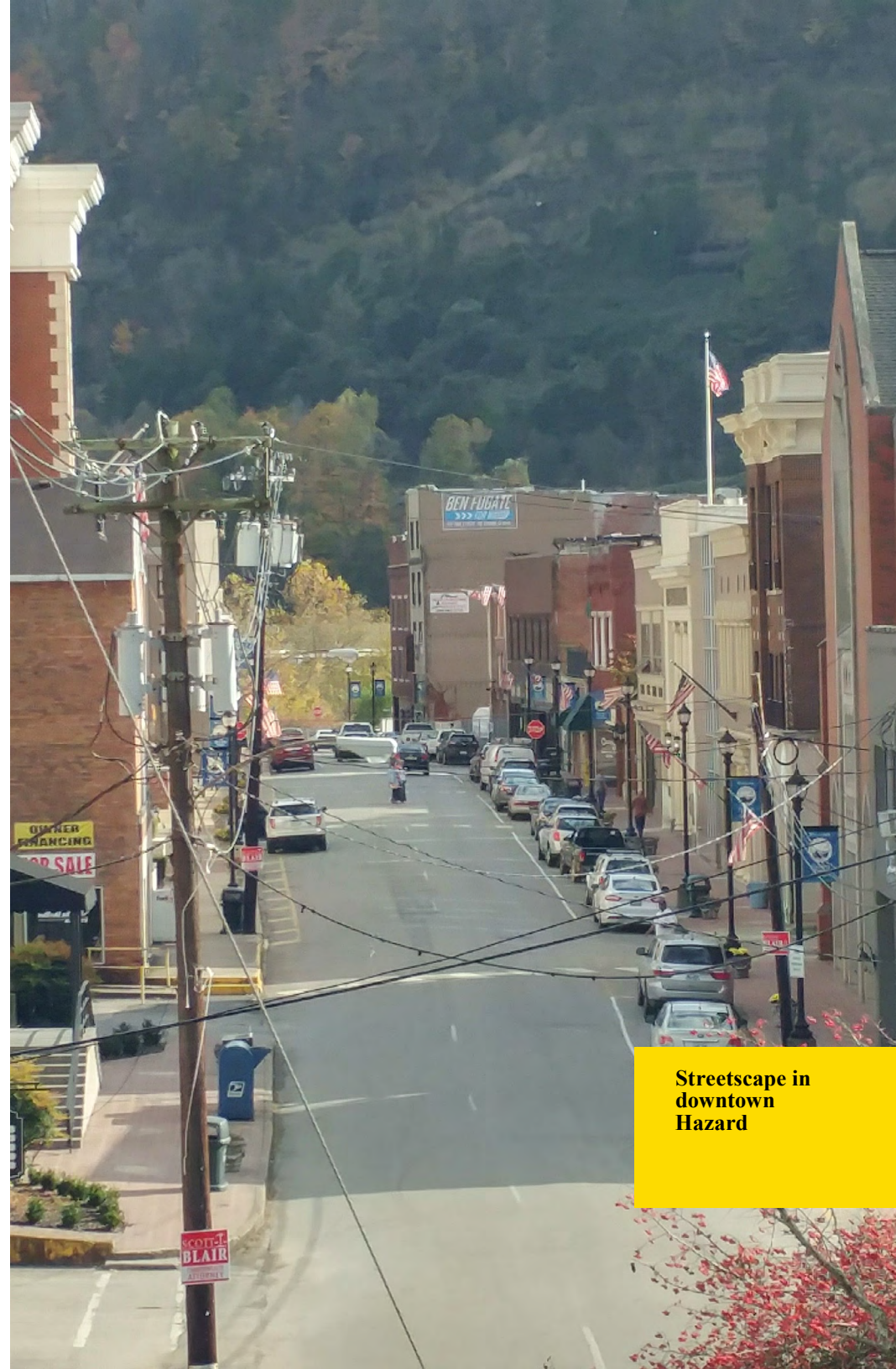
Based upon the feedback provided by this report, Perry County organized to establish clear wayfinding signage in downtown, made immediate improvements to county social media and websites, created a uniform brand for the community and established a permanent employee that focuses on downtown development and revitalization.



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
downtown
Hazard**

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 more 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. These networking opportunities facilitated the pollination of ideas and in many cases led to communities adopting 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, Williamsburg's story of the River Fog festival and the progress of the Arts Station in Hazard.

On Thursday, October 4th Promise Zone Downtown Revitalization partners and stakeholders came together for the Fall of 2018 convening hosted by CEDIK and local stakeholders in Hazard, Kentucky. The "Queen City of the Mountains" hosted 50 stakeholders along the North Fork of the Kentucky River which provided a wonderful backdrop for the day. Attendees joined sessions inside Hazard's City Hall and outside along the river. As a session dedicated to community data convened inside, others joined Ryan Sandwick and Dr. Jayoung Koo on a Radical Walking tour down Main Street, past the parking garage and downtown pocket park and back with a stroll behind the buildings on Main St. along the river back to City Hall. Hazard downtown stakeholders facilitated a discussion on the history, process and future of the Arts Station in downtown Hazard. The panel conveyed that a better understanding of financial feasibility means having to change course and adjust plans sometimes. The panel focused their time on how building restoration and their envisioned programming did not always correlate with their budget and how these constraints forced revisions to their original plans.



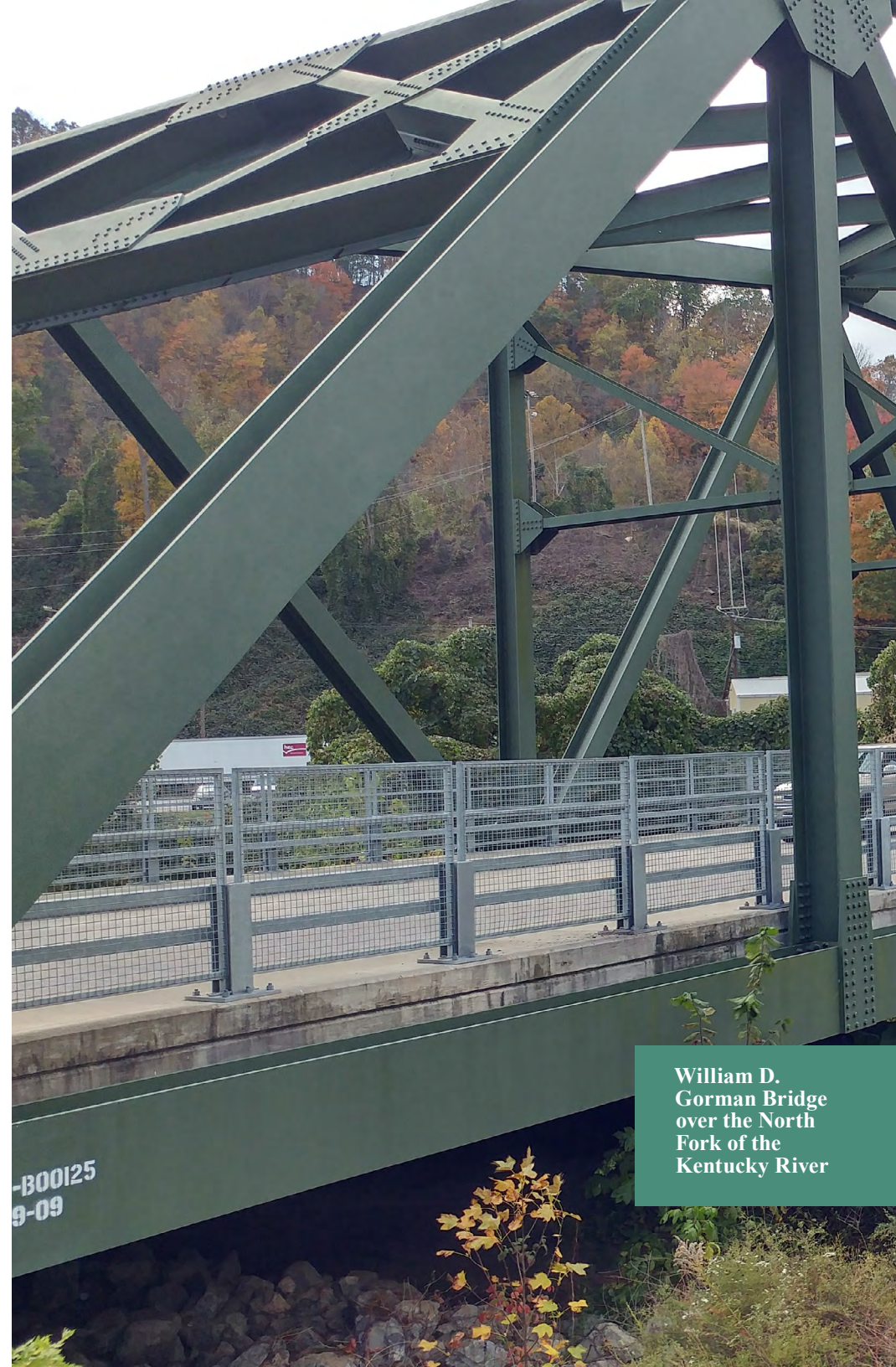
[Image]
Presentation at the Regional
Convening in Hazard

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 funding opportunity 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.



**William D.
Gorman Bridge
over the North
Fork of the
Kentucky River**

PUBLIC – PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

The reliance on public funds to support long-term economic development is not a winning strategy and we considered these POWER funds as an effort to re-energize long-term solutions in the region. Part of our overall strategy is to amplify the impacts of public-private partnerships and local foundations. The Foundation for Appalachian Kentucky, based in Hazard, Kentucky has been instrumental in providing philanthropic leadership throughout the region. In addition to supporting the creation of a number of affiliated funds, they have continued to build local capacity and facilitate community collaborations and charitable giving.

One recent example in partnership with the Kentucky Promise Zone coordinator is the new, regional community fund called the Upper Cumberland Community Foundation (UCCF). UCCF aims to transform eastern Kentucky through charitable giving, community involvement and strategic partnerships by investing in community assets throughout Kentucky's Upper Cumberland counties of Bell, Clay, Knox and Whitley. Local philanthropic organizations like the Foundation for Appalachian Kentucky and its affiliated funds like the Perry County Community Foundation and UCCF will continue to play an important role fostering local collaborations to address place-based community and economic development challenges.

MINI GRANTS - PERRY COUNTY & HAZARD, KY

Hazard, Kentucky's InVision Hazard organization received funds to support costs associated with hosting an Appalachian Transition Fellow in partnership with Highlander Research and Education Center. The Fellowship was designed to increase community capacity supporting the strategic shaping of Downtown Hazard's

physical and social character by amplifying arts, culture and creative placemaking.

OUTCOMES

Building Coalition Engagement Capacity

- Appalachian Transition Fellow planned, coordinated and supported the facilitation of outreach and education efforts aimed at building InVision's group capacity. Attendance at monthly InVision meetings remained consistent, but the digital media reach for InVision Hazard increased over this time period. For example, InVision's Facebook followers increased by 45%.
- In collaboration with Hazard Community and Technical College and Appalachian Arts Alliance, the Appalachian Transition Fellow and InVision worked to develop a podcast to tell the stories of real people in Hazard grappling with true community issues. The podcast explores the recent road construction and development projects, town histories, downtown revitalization and absentee property owners, housing insecurity in downtown Hazard, LGBTQIA+ experiences in Hazard/Perry County and more.

Creative Placemaking and Downtown Revitalization Projects

- Facilitated collaborative efforts initiated by InVision Hazard, Appalachian Arts Alliance, Pathfinders of Perry County and others to fuse the work of all into a grassroots collaborative project to develop a healthy walking mile with art and green space projects along the path.

Downtown Events

- InVision Hazard hosted 60 attendees at the 2nd Hazard Soup event in September, 2018. The Appalachian Transition Fellow spearheaded this effort and coordinated the working group to provide food, gather community applicants and facilitated

the democratic grant giving process. This event took place at a downtown picnic shelter near City Hall and generated \$350 in donations. Four groups presented their ideas and the winner was The 606 Coffee shop.

- During the 2018 political season, InVision hosted candidate forums to promote civic engagement and local leadership. Livestreaming reached 5,448 people on Facebook, and the event was broadcast on the local radio station as well.

IMPLEMENTATION GRANT - PERRY COUNTY & HAZARD, KY

USER FRIENDLY HAZARD

InVision Hazard, Mountain Association, The Appalachian Arts Alliance, the Foundation for Appalachian Kentucky, North Fork Local Foods, the City of Hazard, Perry County Fiscal Court and the Hazard Perry County Chamber of Commerce collaborated to design and implement a signage plan aimed making Hazard easier to navigate to address concerns noted in the First Impression Program report. In addition, downtown stakeholders will create a high traffic mural that contributes to ongoing creative placemaking efforts.

OUTCOMES

[Image Right]
Proposed new mural welcoming people to downtown Hazard

New High Impact Mural

- A new mural showcasing the history of Hazard has been designed by muralist Charles Boggs for the side of the Foundation for Appalachian KY building. This mural looks over the site of the future Farmers Market and where downtown stakeholders had previously prioritized new bathrooms and bollards to designate a pedestrian friendly area. The site is a highly visible location on Main Street as drivers enter downtown from the bypass.

Wayfinding Design

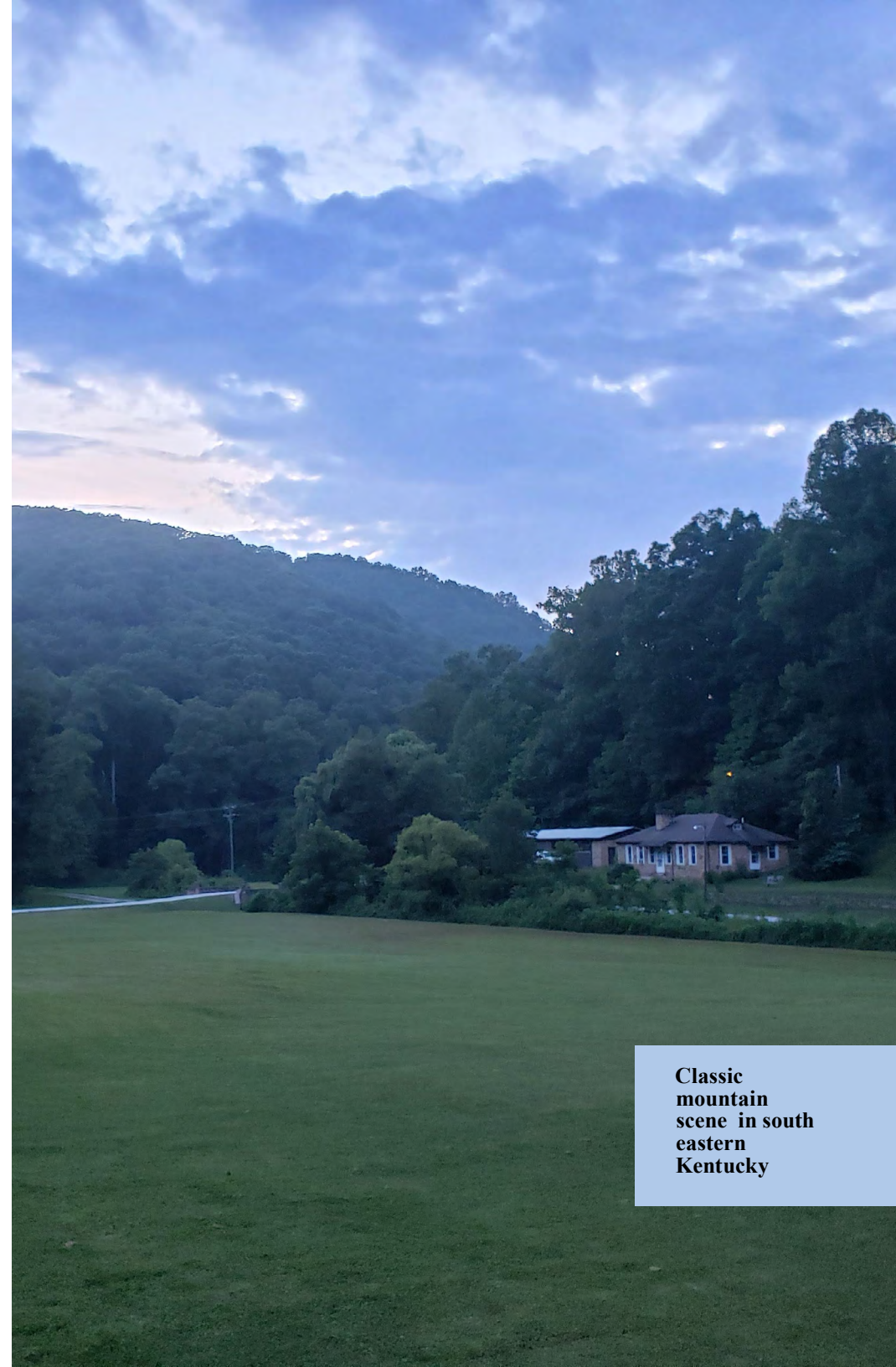
- CEDIK staff prepared the Hazard Short-Term Wayfinding and Signage Recommendations document that identifies downtown destinations, proposes a prospective walking tour layout and provides insights into the family of signage recommended for downtown wayfinding in Hazard.



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>



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

