



Lonoke 2022: A small city's big plan for change

By Kristen Barre

In May 2017 the city of Lonoke unveiled a five-year plan for community and economic development, with an emphasis on branding and marketing, recreation, downtown development, retail, education, jobs, beautification, housing, and infrastructure. Michael Florence, a city council member and small businessman in Lonoke, said that “concerned citizens, educators, bankers, realtors, business owners, retirees,” and others have all been part of “making a difference in the future of our town.”

This plan for Lonoke’s future was formulated through a partnership with the University of Central Arkansas’s Center for Community and Economic Development and the University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service through the Community Kick Start program. Though the planning and visioning phase is complete, the city did not stop there. Phase II, known as Lonoke 2022, is off to a strong start.

“Implementing a common vision for visible, attractive, and connected Lonoke” is how Ryan Biles describes Lonoke 2022. Biles, a member of the Lonoke Industrial Development Commission, is one of the community leaders helping facilitate the five-year plan. The year 2022 will mark the city’s 150th anniversary, making the name

Lonoke 2022 particularly relevant. Through the initiative, the city has already taken great steps toward implementing the breakthroughs established during the initial planning phase. For example, the city is partnering with Thrive, a design studio based in Helena-West Helena, to create a brand that accurately portrays Lonoke as a “unique, vibrant community that attracts tourists, retirees, families, and businesses from all over the nation.”

Lonoke 2022 leaders are partnering with the Lonoke Chamber of Commerce, Lonoke Industrial Development Commission, ASU Beebe, UA-Pulaski Tech, and the Lonoke school system with the goal of educating “a capable workforce and establishing a technical school satellite facility in the community,” according to the action plan. Leaders are also working with the Lonoke Planning Commission to implement a master plan that will foster creative development in Lonoke’s historic downtown.

LynAnne Ivy, one of the Lonoke 2022 leaders, envisions that this project will significantly impact the local economy. Lonoke 2022 is encouraging “existing businesses to grow and new businesses and entrepreneurs being drawn to the attractive, available, historical storefronts,” Ivy said. Improvements are underway to



restore Lonoke’s downtown area through beautification, infrastructure, and retail development.

Biles said the key to Lonoke 2022 having a successful impact on the community is to initiate “a transparent, respectful conversation about challenging issues and ideas.” He notes that it is imperative for the discussion to include “participation by people of all generations and backgrounds.” Lonoke’s inclusive mentality is evident by the diverse group of community members who attended Kick Start Lonoke meetings.

“Lonoke 2022 crosses all demographic lines and gives our Lonoke family a vehicle to become more united as our citizens contribute their ideas, opinions, talents, and labor,” said Alice Bridges, one of the community leaders. The project has “created a contagious, collaborative spirit that has generated common visions and lists of goals for the future of our community,” Ivy added.

Over 400 Lonoke citizens have contributed their time and input since the planning initiative began in 2016, and many will continue volunteering over the course of the next five years.

Lonoke provides an example for other rural communities looking to establish a new vision and implement an effective community development strategy. According to Biles, “the example of humility, kindness, and hard work embodied by these volunteers throughout this process will have a long-term impact on raising the expectations and, ultimately, the standards of what the people of a small rural community like Lonoke will require of those in public service.”

Lonoke 2022 leaders are planning on sustaining the initiative beyond the five-year mark. A Phase III is already being discussed, with the intention of directing resources toward implementation and a focus on investing in the community.



Kristen Barre is an intern with the University of Central Arkansas’s Center for Community and Economic Development. For more information on how your community can initiate a community planning process, contact the Center at cced@uca.edu or call (501) 450-5269.



“The greatest thing in this world is not so much where we stand as in what direction we are moving.”
— Goethe

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