

Arkansas Gov. Asa Hutchinson, third from left, joins city and community leaders at the May 7 unveiling of Kick Start Sheridan's action plan.



PHOTO BY SARENA DOMBROSKI.

Kick Start Sheridan: This is their time

By Moriah Bruner

On May 7 the city of Sheridan unveiled its Kick Start Sheridan Action Plan, a strategic blueprint for the growth and development of the city, Grant County, and the Sheridan School District over the next five years.

The action plan was created as a result of public forums and action teams working together for nine months to identify a vision and goals for the community, as well as long-term strategic opportunities. The Sheridan plan focuses on the following five priorities: downtown development, recreation and things to do, education and economic development, small business development and entrepreneurship, and infrastructure.

Leaders of the Kick Start Sheridan movement were proud to unveil the action plan to the public. Sheridan Mayor and Kick Start Sheridan Recreation and Things To Do Action Team Co-Chair Joe Wise said, "We were very pleased to be chosen for the Kick Start process because we see many opportunities here in our community. In Sheridan we go by the old saying 'if you fail to plan, then you plan to fail.' Now that we've gone through the Kick Start process, we have an action plan that will guide us into the future."

Key breakthroughs—or strategic opportunities—identified in the action plan include beautifying downtown Sheridan and creating a "shop local" campaign, developing and promoting unique entertainment and dining destinations; installing wayfinding signage; connecting and improving streets, sidewalks, and trails; supporting job training and entrepreneurial development; creating a business retention and expansion program; establishing a marketing plan to attract and retain young residents; and expanding and improving high-speed internet access.

Creating additional opportunities and public spaces for recreation and things to do is another key breakthrough, starting with enhancing communication strategies to disseminate information on local events and activities, developing welcoming spaces for community events, as well as supporting after-hours programs and activities.

Governor Asa Hutchinson was on hand to help the community celebrate this important milestone.

"Sheridan is a community that has strong relationships, a great place to live, a good school system, and good paying jobs here as well," he said. "But in today's world we also need to make sure we are growing and

moving in the right direction. It does take leadership and it does take planning. I congratulate you on this kick start, I hope that you will build on this foundation.”

Kick Start Sheridan Communications Chair Lauren Goins ended the event with an enthusiastic call to action for community leaders, stakeholders, and citizens.

“This is our time,” she declared. “Are you ready? We are right on track for possibly the greatest transformation our community has even seen. There is no better time to take the next step and make our community a better place to live, work, and play.”

The Kick Start Sheridan Action Plan is truly a collaborative effort. Guided by the University of Central Arkansas Center for Community and Economic Development (CCED) and Dr. Mark Peterson at University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service (UAEX), the planning process began in July 2018 when a group of trained community and economic development professionals from CCED’s Community Development Institute (CDI) Advanced Year Class completed a high-level assessment of the community.

Following the assessment phase, the project partners and community began a period of extensive public engagement, including a community-wide survey and

monthly public meetings. An executive committee and action teams were formed to guide the process and develop a vision statement articulating goals for Sheridan. Kick Start Sheridan included representatives from the city government, Grant County Chamber of Commerce, Sheridan School District, Grant County Cooperative Extension Service, state and county elected officials, churches, nonprofits, business owners, local banks, and many other community leaders and citizens.

The Community Development Kick Start program was created in 2014 to provide a unique opportunity for CDI graduates to apply their knowledge and skills to a real-life situation and to kick start a community and economic development process in one community. Previous Kick Start communities include Paris (2014), Heber Springs (2015), Lonoke (2016), and Alma (2017). To read the Kick Start Sheridan Action Plan in its entirety, visit: uca.edu/cdi/advanced-year.



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