



Gov. Asa Hutchinson, back row center, joins Hot Spring County community leaders and engaged citizens for the unveiling of their countywide strategic action plan.

Hot Spring County Conversations: Grassroots initiative leads to 10-year strategic action plan

By Moriah Bruner

The Hot Spring County Conversations Executive Committee, along with Gov. Asa Hutchinson and Hot Spring County Judge Dennis Thornton, unveiled their action plan for the growth on Aug. 20, which plots a course for development and improved quality of life for residents of the county over the next 10 years. This milestone was the culmination of two years of grassroots organizing and extensive citizen engagement and marks the beginning of the implementation phase of this community and economic development initiative.

In Fall 2017, Thornton reached out to UCA's Center for Community and Economic Development (CCED) and shared his vision for the county. He wanted to start planning for the successful future of the county and to

lay the groundwork for leaving a positive legacy for his children and grandchildren and generations to come.

Thornton gathered together engaged community leaders and stakeholders that shared his vision and formed an executive team. The initiative was branded as Hot Spring County Conversations (HSC Conversations) with the purpose of being an inclusive, future-focused, asset-based community development initiative.

The first step in the planning process was engaging community leaders and the general public in identifying the county's needs through a county-level survey. Through hundreds of responses collected, five main priority areas were identified: education and workforce development; job creation; family recreation and youth activities; health and public safety; and housing, real estate, and downtown development.

Recognizing that the cities, towns, and rural communities that make up the county have unique opportunities and challenges, the HSC Conversations Executive Committee formed local steering committees in the five county school districts. Two residents' meetings were held in each of the districts to assess local priorities. Community surveys and focus groups solicited ideas for the future of the five districts, and the steering committee members encouraged citizens to get involved in the process. Through this community-level assessment, more than 1,500 citizens of Hot Spring County were directly engaged and each community identified its own priority areas and economic development goals that were subsequently included in the countywide plan.

During the unveiling celebration, Thornton was excited to debut the action plan as the "blueprint for the citizens' vision of a Hot Spring County that is a place where families want to live, work, and play. It envisions a vibrant community that meets the needs of residents, visitors, and the business community."

Earlier this year, the initiative was honored by the Arkansas Community Development Society with the organization's Innovative Community Development Program award.

In addition to technical assistance received from CCED, the initiative was supported by University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service, College of the Ouachitas, Hot Spring County Economic Development Corporation, Malvern/Hot Spring County Chamber of Commerce, West Central Planning and Development District, Entergy, all five Hot Spring County school districts, and numerous other public and private entities.

To read the Hot Spring County Conversations Action Plan in its entirety, visit uca.edu/cced/impact-technical-assistance.



Moriah Bruner is project coordinator at UCA's Center for Community and Economic Development. Contact her at mbruner1@uca.edu or (501) 450-3460.



We make it our business to understand yours.

Wright Lindsey Jennings offers sophisticated representation and counsel services to many local governments, municipalities and quasi-governmental agencies. We have been privileged to represent issuers of municipal debt, underwriters, trustees and other participants in municipal finance for almost 50 years. Our attorneys regularly provide services as bond counsel, underwriter's counsel, issuer's counsel and trustee's counsel in a variety of municipal finance transactions.

[Let us put our experience to work for your community.](#)



WRIGHT LINDSEY JENNINGS

Rogers Little Rock wlj.com

