

The importance of wayfinding signage

By Shelby Fiegel

If a visitor unfamiliar with your community came into your city, would they be able to easily find their way around?

Locals who are very familiar with their communities may not think about how difficult it can be for a visitor to travel throughout the area. Locals know how to get from point A to point B, so wayfinding signs may not be perceived as a community issue. Yet, those outside of the community may have difficulty getting around town, even with GPS assistance. This inability to navigate throughout a given community can cause serious problems and inhibit a city's growth.

Signage plays many important roles in our cities. From the basic necessities of crosswalks, road junctions, parking, and street names, to business and attraction signs that entice customers, they are a critical element in our lives. The importance of good wayfinding signage tends to be overlooked by local officials when forming community development goals for their city. The easier it is for visitors to identify where a city's attractions and amenities are, the more likely they are to spend time and money in the community. If visitors have a difficult time navigating a city, they may give up, go home and never return.

In addition to the economic effect wayfinding signage has on a city, signage is also a good way to establish a city's identity or brand. Signage should utilize the same colors and fonts as the city logo. Creating a consistent message through the city's brand will influence public perception, make investment in your community attractive, support tourism activities, and provide citizens with a sense of identity.



Wayfinding signage can help ensure visitors don't miss your city's attractions and amenities.

If a city wants to increase tourism dollars and attract visitors, assess signage from an outsider's vantage point. Are there signs for downtown, schools, the business park, municipal buildings, and other amenities? What gaps or omissions are there? Get a group together and drive around town with these thoughts in mind to identify areas where there is a lack of appropriate signage.

The Northwest Arkansas Council realized the importance of wayfinding signage and developed a signage plan for six cities in Northwest Arkansas. After the city of Bentonville added new signage centered around Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Eureka Springs, Fayetteville, Lowell, Rogers, Siloam Springs, and Springdale followed suit and established similar signage, but with unique colors and qualities for each city.

"First and foremost, signage is important because it relays information about your city that visitors may not be aware of," Mayor Butch Berry of Eureka Springs said. "I think the benefit of having consistent signage is that people know exactly what to look for. Having signage

that is easy to read, has a simple design and does not share too much information that could overcrowd the mind is essential. Unfortunately our highway system is not designed to promote many of our communities' assets, such as our historic downtowns, so it is up to us to highlight what we have. Consistent, branded signage is a great way to bring visitors off the highway and into our communities."

Not all cities have the resources to immediately create and implement a robust signage plan. Even so, any community can start small and build up. The city of Lonoke is in the process of determining their signage needs. Lonoke's Planning and Zoning Commission, led by commissioners Michael Florence and Karen Dill, undertook an internal study of their community. The Commission first researched types of signage and case studies. Then the group conducted a driving tour, gathered photographic documentation, and created a map of preliminary locations for each type of sign they need in their community. The Commission then presented their findings to the community and have since engaged with the Arkansas Highway and Transportation Department to discuss their right of way regulation and signage program.

Planning Commission Chairman Ryan Biles said, "A primary goal of this multi-faceted study is to describe and create methods to connect the heart of our community, historic downtown Lonoke, to the town's primary entry points at the Interstate 40 interchanges. Part of our vision is the enhancement of our primary pathways and a physical unity between all areas of town. It is Lonoke's hope that well-designed, visually cohesive signage will be a contributing factor in this unity."

The work the Commission did has been a supporting document for the citizen-led work of the Kick Start Lonoke Action Team focused on beautification and recreation efforts. This Action Team will include the identification of local destinations and attractions among its goals for enhancing walkability and navigability along the town's main traffic corridors.

There are many avenues cities across Arkansas can take to ensure their greatest assets do not go unnoticed. Regardless of where you start, remember that wayfinding signage is a key to making Arkansas cities and towns places in which people want to live, work, and play.



Shelby Fiegel is project coordinator of UCA's Center for Community and Economic Development. Contact her by phone at 501-450-5269, by email at sfiegel@uca.edu, or visit the Center's website at www.uca.edu/cced.

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For those city officials who have completed the 21 hours of core curriculum, you must annually obtain 6 hours of continuing education to maintain your certification status. The required 6 hours must be gained by attending the hours of continuing education offered at the 2017 Winter Conference, the 83rd Annual Convention, or the 2017 Planning & Zoning Workshop.

The Program is for Arkansas mayors, city administrators, city managers, city directors and aldermen, city recorders, recorder/treasurers, city clerks, clerk/treasurers.

The next workshop at League Headquarters is:

- Planning & Zoning Workshop (5 continuing hours), 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. April 19, 2017, at League headquarters.

For more information contact Ken Wasson at (501) 374-3484 Ext. 211, or email kwasson@arml.org.