



PHOTOS COURTESY CITY OF MOUNTAIN HOME

A new craft brewery, the city's first, is slated to open in 2021 in Mountain Home's second-oldest building. It will be part of the city's new entertainment district, which has already helped revitalize the historic downtown.

## The District: How Mountain Home is leveraging a new law to revitalize their downtown

By Dylan Edgell

In 2019, Mountain Home Mayor Hillrey Adams attended an Arkansas Municipal League meeting where Executive Director Mark Hayes spoke about potential laws coming through the Arkansas Legislature. One bill in particular caught his attention. It would allow cities and towns in Arkansas to establish entertainment districts in a designated area of their city.

Adams saw the potential of an ordinance like this to serve as a catalyst for revitalization efforts in downtown Mountain Home. Following the meeting, Adams and his team researched entertainment districts, drafted an ordinance and presented it to the Mountain Home City Council. "We wanted to be the first in the state to have an entertainment district," Adams said.

On July 24, 2019, the Mountain Home entertainment district, dubbed The District, became the first of its kind in Arkansas. The District is open between 4:30 p.m. and

midnight daily, allowing patrons to leave a restaurant or bar with a single, commercially branded paper or plastic cup of beer, wine or a mixed drink to be consumed within the district's boundaries. Since establishing The District, there has been a steady increase in business, activity and community engagement in downtown Mountain Home.

The downtown area is beginning to look more inviting with hanging flowerpots paid for by the city, banners created by a local leadership group and murals popping up all over Mountain Home. In recent months, there have been multiple real estate transactions involving buildings in downtown Mountain Home with talks of new restaurants and shops coming into the area. There are even "wine walks" that invite patrons to drink a glass of wine and enjoy the downtown area and public art with their family and friends.

There has also been an increase in cultural events in Mountain Home. Hickory Park is right outside of The District and has been revitalized to host concerts and community events. Earlier this year, Farmers and Merchants Bank donated \$75,000 to install a permanent stage for concerts in the park that has been utilized all summer in the Baxter Summer Concert Series. During the concert series, the tennis court in Hickory Park transforms into a food truck park and beer garden featuring local restaurants and breweries. COVID-19 has unfortunately disrupted some of the community events that were set to take place this fall, but others, like the concert series, will continue with social distancing and mask requirements.

According to Angela Broome, executive vice president of the Mountain Home Chamber of Commerce, The District has been a revitalizing force in downtown. Visitors are looking for things to do at night after enjoying fishing, hunting and golfing in and around Mountain Home, and The District and summer concert series have been a way for residents and visitors to spend more time and money in downtown Mountain Home, she said. “I have only seen positive changes with The District. We are seeing many improvements downtown, noticing more socialization and an increase in patronage.”

Mayor Adams shared a few key takeaways for cities looking to establish an entertainment district:

### Set your intention

Mountain Home had a clear purpose for establishing their entertainment district, which was to focus on downtown revitalization and increase tourism at restaurants and shops in the area. If your city is considering

an entertainment district, make sure that your community has an agreed upon intention and a plan for establishing the district that works for your community’s specific needs.

### Involve the downtown community

Establishing an entertainment district may feel like a big change for your downtown community. In Mountain Home, leaders established an entertainment district oversight committee that included downtown business leaders and residents to establish rules, regulations and procedures for citizens and businesses to follow during entertainment district hours. Involving the downtown community will create buy-in from local businesses and provides a formal body to review potential events in the area.

As a final piece of advice, Adams said, “Come visit Mountain Home. It’s going to look a lot different since the last time you’ve been here.”

If establishing an entertainment district is right for the needs and interests of your city or town, it can be a catalyst for activity, engagement and business in your downtown area. Mountain Home is leading the way on entertainment districts in Arkansas and their downtown community is starting to thrive because of it. Learn more about Mountain Home and The District by visiting [cityofmountainhome.com](http://cityofmountainhome.com).



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Adjacent to the downtown entertainment district, the new stage at Hickory Park will host a summer concert series and other events.