

CDI 2020 ADVANCED YEAR REPORT

BEEBE
HOME OF THE BADGERS,
ASU - BEEBE AND ASTI

WHAT IS THE CDI ADVANCED YEAR?

The Community Development Institute Central (CDI), established in 1987 at the University of Central Arkansas in Conway, trains community and economic development professionals in Arkansas and surrounding states. The complete CDI experience is a three-year training program (with an optional fourth year of training), with one week of training per year. Participants are exposed to a comprehensive, applied approach to the field of community and economic development.

CDI is coordinated by Director Shelby Fiegel, Assistant Director Dylan Edgell, and Project Coordinator Emily Cooper Yates.

The CDI Advanced Year is an optional fourth year of training for CDI graduates. The Advanced Year was created 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 in Arkansas. During the week of CDI, the Advanced Year participants conduct research on the selected community, visit the community for a driving tour, facilitate focus groups, and conduct interviews with citizens and community leaders, and host a public presentation on their findings where they identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats, and priorities for the community moving forward.

Beebe, Arkansas was selected as the CDI 2020 Advanced Year community.

To learn more about CDI visit www.uca.edu/cdi.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Community Development Institute (CDI) 2020 had to cancel its Year 1, Year 2, and Year 3 classes. Fortunately, the CDI 2020 Advanced Year participants and our partners at the City of Beebe decided they were comfortable moving forward with the Advanced Year process with the appropriate safety protocols in place.

Beebe is a wonderful community with great assets including a highly rated public school system, a top rated community college, and a strong sense of community. Participating in the CDI Advanced Year 2020 process shows that leaders in Beebe are looking towards the future and are open to new ideas and opportunities for their community.

The challenges and opportunities identified by community leaders and citizens in Beebe are shared by many other communities in Arkansas and across the United States. Our goal with this report is to share the challenges and opportunities the Advanced Year class identified as well as to provide some recommendations to help imagine the future of Beebe based on our assessment and feedback from community leaders and citizens.

The CDI 2020 Advanced Year team took a holistic approach in assessing Beebe from an outsider's perspective. Before coming to Beebe, the Advanced Year team was asked to research Beebe online. After discussing this research, the Advanced Year team then participated in a driving tour of Beebe to key areas identified by community leaders. The team then met with community leaders, conducted a virtual focus group with citizens, and implemented an online survey to collect feedback from the community to inform their recommendations. At the end of the week, the team presented their findings to the community during a public presentation, and pulled their insights and future recommendations together in this report.

This is not a comprehensive analysis of Beebe, but it takes a fresh look at the community from several outsiders with community and economic development experience and expertise. These individuals work every day in different aspects of community and economic development and came to Beebe from communities in Arkansas, Texas, and Oklahoma to provide their unique perspectives.

There is a lot to be proud of in Beebe. The recommendations found in this report will build on the great work that the community has already done. We hope this report will serve as a catalyst for future growth and development in Beebe!

KEY PARTNERS

A special thanks to these key partners who made this initiative possible:

- UCA Center for Community and Economic Development
- Amy Williams of the Cabot Chamber of Commerce (CDI Advanced Year Class Director)
- CDI 2020 Advanced Year team
- City of Beebe
- Beebe Chamber of Commerce
- Arkansas State University-Beebe
- Community leaders and citizens in Beebe



CDI 2019 ADVANCED YEAR AND ASSIGNMENTS

The CDI 2020 Advanced Year consisted of nine individuals working in a variety of professional roles from communities in Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Texas. The class was led by Amy Williams of the Cabot Chamber of Commerce along with the staff at the University of Central Arkansas Center for Community and Economic Development. Members of the Advanced Year Team include:



Christie Satterwhite,
Arkansas Division of
Workforce Services



Danny Presley,
City of Webster, TX



Donna Harris,
Arkansas Division of
Workforce Services



Doug Warner,
City of Cabot



Mayor Ethan Dunbar,
City of Lewisville



Karen Davis,
City of Lowell



Lisa Taylor,
City of Durant, OK



Mason Robinson,
Arkansas State
University - Three
Rivers



Michelle Hood,
Central Arkansas
Development
Council



Pictured (left to right): Emily Cooper Yates (UCA CCED), Dylan Edgell (UCA CCED), Amy Williams (Cabot Chamber of Commerce), Shelby Fiegel (UCA CCED), and Will Gloster (UCA CCED)

ONLINE COMMUNITY RESEARCH

CDI Advanced Year Participants conducted an “online tour” where participants assessed Beebe’s online presence through the lens of different personas. These personas include: a family with young children, tourist, small business owner, citizen of Beebe, single, young professional, retiree, and industrial prospect.

A SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis is completed for city and community websites, social media pages, Arkansas Site Select, online real estate databases, and travel websites based on these personas. Below are the strengths and weaknesses found from the online assessments from each persona:

Small Business Owner

Strengths:

- Beebe is a college town and the downtown area is very close to campus
- Close proximity to the highways (high traffic count near the highways)
- Numerous established locally-owned businesses

Weaknesses:

- Price of commercial property that is available (not much availability in downtown)
- Not many resources for entrepreneurs or small business owners
- Lack of marketing for local businesses (online and traditional)

Family with Young Children Looking to Relocate

Strengths:

- School district ranking
- High graduation rate (86%)
- All public schools are located on one campus (and other services)

Weaknesses:

- A lack of indoor activities for kids (community center, bowling alley, movie theater, etc.)

Single, Young Professional

Strengths:

- Location of Beebe (close to Little Rock, second most populous city in White County)
- The city is growing (continuously since 1990)
- ASU Beebe nationally ranked for student success/good resource

Weaknesses:

- Lack of diversity
- Lack of entertainment and shopping options/no entertainment district
- Lack of rental options
- Crime rate

Tourist

Strengths:

- Veterans Memorial Monument
- Fallin' Blackbird Festival and 5K
- Flea markets
- Hometown Dreamer Marketplace
- Arkansas Trail of Lights at Daniel Park (Christmas light display)

Weaknesses:

- The focus on advertising surrounding communities (top 15 things-to-do in Beebe were in: Searcy, Jacksonville, Little Rock, and North Little Rock)
- Lack of lodging options - would likely stay outside of Beebe

Industrial Prospect

Strengths:

- Location between Little Rock and Jonesboro
- Proximity to Interstate, rail, and the Little Rock port
- ASU Beebe/education system
- Broadband availability
- Excellent and well-run volunteer fire department

Weaknesses:

- No industrial park or available sites on Arkansas Site Select
- Price of commercial real estate
- Fire department rating (Class 4); may be a deterrent when compared to surrounding communities
- Few hotel accommodations in Beebe for business travelers - would likely stay outside of Beebe
- No industry in Beebe other than ASU Beebe

Retiree

Strengths:

- Low cost of living
- Proximity to interstate and airport for travel
- Close proximity to metropolitan area

Weaknesses:

- Close proximity to metropolitan area
- Lack of entertainment and shopping options/no entertainment district
- Housing inventory is low
- Did not find many volunteering or community service opportunities

Citizen of Beebe

Strengths:

- Parks and recreational areas
- Educational opportunities (public school system and ASU Beebe)
- Geographic location
- Easy access to commercial corridor

Weaknesses:

- Floodplain problem
- Lack of diversity
- Variety of healthcare options - would have to travel outside of Beebe
- Lack of entertainment options - especially things to do at night
- Dry county and no private clubs - must go to surrounding communities



DRIVING TOUR

The driving tour assessment focuses on the community's physical infrastructure (highways, roads, sidewalks, public utilities, signage and beautification efforts), social infrastructure (schools, healthcare, arts and cultural amenities, parks/recreational amenities and housing) and economic development infrastructure (small businesses, large employers, site and commercial building availability and downtown development). These amenities in the community are rated as very good, average, needs improvement or not available and the CDI Advanced Year team took notes about why each amenity in Beebe was given a particular rating.

Below are the notes from the CDI 2020 Advanced Year driving tour in Beebe. Downtown development was given its own heading due to the focus on the downtown area by community members and the number of notes taken.

Physical Infrastructure

- Access to two major highways and the Interstate (access to rail, the Little Rock Port, and the Little Rock airport)
- Community pond is a great asset to continue developing
- There is a general need for wayfinding signage around town
- Sidewalks:
 - Need for additional crosswalks, sidewalks, and ADA compliance
 - Lack of walkability and connectivity - multimodal transportation needs to be a focus
 - Focus on developing bike paths
 - US Bike Route will be close by in Lonoke - may be an opportunity to connect to the trail
- City streets:
 - Drainage issues
 - Apartments need additional days for trash pickup (dumpsters were overflowing)
 - Utilize community organizing to clean up ditches, litter, etc.
 - Streets were narrow in the city

Social Infrastructure

- ASU Beebe and public schools are the main options for entertainment
- Fallin' Blackbird Festival: musical acts and 5K
 - Potential to expand this event and bring in more people to Beebe
- No public transportation system
 - Focus on multimodal transportation, walkability, and bikeability
 - Consider involving the Community Action Program for Central Arkansas (CAPCA)
- Capitalize on flea markets and Saturday sale barns that bring in new people
- Parks and ballparks are great assets
- No evidence of community-based organizations (CBO) activity in the community
- Well-maintained public schools - looks like a college campus
 - Strong support for public education in the community
- ASU Beebe offers a variety of programs; strong student success
- Strong faith-based community

Economic Development Infrastructure

- Close proximity to Little Rock, the Little Rock Port, and airport
- Access to rail and highways
- Strong volunteer fire department that boasts a rating of Class 4 (the highest rating for a volunteer fire department)
- No industrial park or shovel ready sites
 - Develop sites to be listed on Arkansas Site Select
- Plenty of commercial property available - lots of for sale signs
 - Price of commercial property may be deterrent for investors
- No community and/or economic development director for Beebe
- Small business support:
 - Variety of locally-owned businesses
 - Reportedly high turnover of new businesses (many open and close within six months)
 - Need to connect with entrepreneurial support organizations (ASBTDC, UAEX, AR Conductor, etc.)
 - Small businesses need support and resources from Chamber (shop local campaigns)

Downtown Development

- Downtown has great potential!
- Chamber of Commerce building is a great anchor for downtown and so is Hometown Dreamer on the opposite side
- Renovation of New Life Church was a nice addition
- Current murals tie into Beebe historical background; good message
- Downtown didn't have much activity
- Downtown appears to be a ghost town: weeds growing through sidewalks, no citizens or customers, signage laying on the ground, few storefronts
- Vacant storefronts need to be cleaned and updated
- Beautification in downtown: consider adding a pocket park, flowers, more benches, public art, and other amenities
- It was hard to identify the business in each storefront
- Only one crosswalk in downtown area
- Trash in downtown - noticed broken glass on sidewalks
- Lack of walkability connecting the rest of the city to downtown

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK & TRENDS

CDI Advanced Year conducted focus groups, interviews, and an online survey with Beebe citizens to collect feedback and identify key trends in the community. The feedback included the following bright spots, challenges, and opportunities in each of these community and economic development sectors.

Bright Spots

- ASU Beebe is a draw for industry and workforce
 - A workforce pipeline in place but Beebe needs jobs
- Biggest asset is the education system (public school system and ASU Beebe)
 - Public schools being on one campus adds to the sense of community
- The community pond and 24 acres are debt free and a great opportunity for development
- Overwhelming commentary on friendly citizens/people; small town feel; embracing community
 - Beebe is still small enough for everyone to know everyone
 - People help one another in Beebe
- People from out of state are moving into Beebe
- Beebe Athletic Club is expanding
- Addition of a urgent care center on the public school campus will be a great asset for students and community
- Local doctors and healthcare quality is seen as an asset by citizens
- Beebe is in the process of becoming a Keep America Beautiful affiliate
- Beginning to add bench seating in the downtown area

Challenges

- Most people go outside of Beebe to work - general lack of opportunities in Beebe
- Some business owners are resistant to new business and could affect day to day activities for Chamber of Commerce
- Drainage is a huge issue
- There is no plan in place for future of Beebe
 - There is clearly potential in Beebe but who will lead the charge?
 - Beware of CAVE (citizens against virtually everything) people; how do you change attitudes?
- Citizens are concerned with local political climate
- Citizens report that Beebe is reluctant to new ideas and people
- Citizens report that access to broadband is an issue
- Beebe is sandwiched between larger communities that are competing for weekend dollars

Opportunities

- There is a lot of interest in community cleanup, rebranding Beebe, and putting a focus on revamping downtown
- There is a desire to establish neighborhood watch groups
- Citizens want more indoor youth activities: community center, boys & girls club, bowling alley, movie theater, etc.
- There is a lot of room to grow in arts and culture - tie into existing programs at ASU Beebe and the public school but bring events into the community

STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR BEEBE

The biggest need identified by the CDI Advanced Year team was the lack of a strategic plan or strategic vision for Beebe. Without a consensus on what the future of Beebe looks like with a clear and actionable plan, the following recommendations will be difficult to achieve.

Here are a few things to consider while going through the strategic planning process:

- What will Beebe look like in 25 years?
- Important to get the community involved in the process to increase community engagement and unity
 - Build community power: invite people to a seat at the table
 - Conduct a community needs assessment, focus groups, and community town halls
- “Make Beebe Better”
 - Initiative to get Beebe moving forward
 - Create visualizations of upcoming community assets
 - Community development facilitates economic development
 - Utilize the ASU Beebe-Searcy economic development specialist
- Potentially hire a community/economic developer for Beebe
- Involve the White River Planning and Development District in the planning process



BADGER BITES

Based on these observations and the findings of this report, there are several short term steps Beebe can pursue to raise quality of life and expand future economic growth. These “Badger Bites” that we identified can be completed within a year.

- Develop a new brand for Beebe
 - Be Beebe: embrace what makes Beebe unique
- Host additional cleanup days that focus specifically on sidewalks and downtown (Beebe hosts cleanup days already, but these are suggestions for the focus of future cleanup days)
- Embrace flea markets as an asset - entice visitors through a promotional campaign to utilize Beebe’s other assets; “Beebe Boutiques”
- Create a historic tourism industry passport program: ASU Beebe, blackbirds, flea markets, etc.
- Encourage activity after hours - invite people out and about after dark
- Tripadvisor and businesses claiming their spot on Google:
 - Once businesses are online, encourage customers/citizens to review online
- Host community block parties to promote community togetherness and develop stronger relationships between leaders and citizens
- Encourage community leaders to seek professional development opportunities (CDI, LeadAR, OUEDI, Mid-South Basic, ARML, AEDC, etc.):
 - Strengthen relationships with the Arkansas Economic Development Commission (AEDC)

VANGUARD VISION

The CDI Advanced Year team also identified several longer term action items that Beebe can take that we called “Vanguard Vision.” These are action items that would take more than one year to accomplish but are a part of a long-term vision to raise quality of life and expand future economic growth.

- Create a connected community: bike paths, connection of the school to residential areas, walking trails, network of sidewalks, and connecting the community to the downtown area
- Fix the drainage issues; commission an engineering study and develop a water runoff plan
- Develop an Art Alley:
 - Create more murals in downtown
 - Display public art
 - Develop a downtown stage and expanded seating area for citizens to gather
- Develop a pocket park (picnic tables, public art, string lights, etc.)
- Create a public space for food trucks (food truck court)
- Develop an inclusive park for Beebe and surrounding communities
- Encourage community and police relationships to reduce crime rate
- Develop a shovel ready, certified site for industrial development
 - Reach out to AEDC for assistance
 - Create an open line of communication with property owners

LOOKING FORWARD

A special thanks to the following individuals for their leadership, cooperation, and hospitality in welcoming the CDI Advanced Year team to Beebe:

- Kristen Boswell, City of Beebe
- Carol Westergren, City of Beebe
- Kim Weeks, City of Beebe
- Derrek Goff, City of Beebe
- Camille Stout, Beebe Chamber of Commerce
- Dr. Jennifer Methvin, ASU Beebe
- Andrea Cole, ASU Beebe
- Rose Mary Jackson, ASU Beebe
- Dr. Chris Nail, Beebe School District
- Jessica Prothro, Beebe School District
- Lauren Shook, Total Erosion Control, Inc.
- Leslie Richardson, The Leslie Richardson Agency
- Vikki Parker, Options Pregnancy Center
- Dr. Sabrina Williams, Williams Chiropractic

We appreciate the community leaders in Beebe who came out and participated in the focus groups and public presentations. Your participation, positive attitude, and commitment are crucial to the community development process moving forward.

Beebe is a special place with unique assets, opportunities, and a strong sense of community. You have a great foundation on which to build the future of Beebe for your children and grandchildren. The citizens of Beebe are the most knowledgeable about your community, and they are in the driver's seat moving forward. We hope this report offers some useful observations, recommendations, and quick wins that will be helpful to you on your journey to continue making Beebe a dream hometown.





