



CDI 2023

ADVANCED YEAR REPORT

Murfreesboro, AR



UNIVERSITY OF
CENTRAL
ARKANSAS

CENTER FOR
COMMUNITY
& ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT

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 the Mid-South. 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 Abayi Ibro Ayouba, Project Coordinator Michael Hudson, and Graduate Assistants Layne Turner and Zadia St. Louis.

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 in real-life situations 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, 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.

Murfreesboro, Arkansas was selected as the CDI 2023 Advanced Year community.

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



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Recognized as the “Diamond Gateway to the Ouachitas,” Murfreesboro, Arkansas, boasts a unique blend of historical charm, natural beauty, and community engagement. Nestled in the heart of the state, Murfreesboro is renowned for its captivating Crater of Diamonds State Park, historic sites, and its commitment to fostering a tight-knit communal spirit. As evident through their active participation in the CDI 2023 Advanced Year program, Murfreesboro’s local leadership demonstrates forward-thinking aspirations and an openness to innovative concepts for the betterment of the community.

Murfreesboro’s challenges and opportunities, as identified by the Community Development Institute Advanced Year class, resonate with numerous other communities within Arkansas and across the nation. This report endeavors to convey the multifaceted challenges and opportunities while also presenting recommendations that envision a bright future for Murfreesboro. These insights stem from assessments gathered from community leaders and residents and research.

The CDI 2023 Advanced Year team began their engagement with the community by conducting online research prior to their in-person visit. Subsequently, the team embarked on a tour of the town, exploring local landmarks and infrastructure. Engaging directly with citizens and leaders, the team convened focus groups to facilitate conversations on various sectors, including: education and workforce, health and wellness, recreation and things to do, downtown development, business and industry, arts and culture, physical environment (built environment, natural environment, infrastructure, utilities, etc.). The process culminated in a public presentation where the class’s findings were shared with the community. The outcomes and recommendations of this process are also chronicled within this report.

While this report does not aim to encapsulate the entirety of Murfreesboro’s essence, it does offer a fresh, outsider’s perspective, with the Advanced Year team hailing from diverse communities across Alabama and Arkansas. These individuals possess substantial experience in community and economic development.

Murfreesboro’s remarkable accomplishments serve as a testament to the community’s dedication and perseverance. The recommendations within this report are designed to amplify the commendable work that the town has already undertaken. It is the aspiration of this report to catalyze future growth, transformation, and progress within Murfreesboro, propelling the community toward an even more promising tomorrow.

KEY PARTNERS

The University of Central Arkansas Center for Community and Economic Development would like to thank these key partners who made this initiative possible:

- Murfreesboro Area Chamber of Commerce
- City of Murfreesboro
- CDI 2023 Advanced Year Team
- Lorie Robertson of Chaffee Crossing (CDI Advanced Year Class Director)
- Amy Williams of the Arkansas Economic Development Commission (CDI Advanced Year Class Director)
- Dana Poindexter of the Arkansas Economic Development Commission (CDI Advanced Year Class Director)
- Community leaders, business owners, and citizens of Murfreesboro



CDI 2023 ADVANCED YEAR CLASS

The CDI 2023 Advanced Year class consisted of eight individuals working in a variety of professional roles from communities in Alabama and Arkansas. The class was led by Dana Poindexter of the Arkansas Economic Development Commission, Lorie Robertson of Chaffee Crossing, and Amy Williams of the Arkansas Economic Development Commission. Members of the 2022 Advanced Year

Team include:



Ashley Brumley
Cross County
Chamber of
Commerce



Mayor Caleb Norris
City of Maumelle



Chris Treat
City of Bryant



Courtney Bennett
Montevallo Main
Street



Debbie Landers
Arkansas
Department of
Health



**Dianne Morris
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City of Centerton



Jennifer Harland
AEP SWEPCO



Lorie Robertson
Chaffee Crossing



Amy Williams
Arkansas Economic
Development
Commission



Dana Poindexter
Arkansas Economic
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Commission

ONLINE COMMUNITY RESEARCH

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

A SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis was 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 of each persona:

Murfreesboro Resident

Strengths:

- High quality of life for residents interested in outdoor recreation such as fishing, hiking, kayaking, camping
- The historic downtown is well-cared for, with a strong sense of identity and numerous independent places to eat, shop, play, and stay
- Sales tax revenue from tourism generated by Crater of Diamonds State Park, Ka Do Ha Indian Village, Lake Greeson, etc., could be used to increase residents’ quality of life

Weaknesses:

- No city website or ways to pay utilities online
- The poverty rate is 28%, compared to the state average of 16%
- Not many non-outdoorsy or non-mine-related recreational opportunities exist

Family with Young Children

Strengths:

- Small school with teacher ratio of 9:1
- Lots of activities for people with children (parks, museums, library, etc.)
- Several parks, museums, and libraries
- One main school: Pike County Elementary School enrollment 301 with a teacher ratio of 9:1 at the elementary school

Weaknesses:

- Searches bring up Murfreesboro, TN instead of AR; no city website
- No festivals
- Limited childcare, healthcare and affordable housing

Retiree

Strengths:

- Low crime rates and cost of living is appealing to retirees
- Murfreesboro has a lower cost of living compared to larger cities, which can make retirement funds go further and reduce financial stress

Weaknesses:

- Limited real estate options
- Limited access to specialized medical facilities and services
- Fewer job opportunities for retirees
- No reference to senior center and outreach programs/activities on website

Tourist

Strengths:

- Lots of activities for people with children; several hotels have mini-golf, swimming pools with slides, and an arcade located downtown
- Great area for fishing, boating, hiking, ATV, and cycling
- Local restaurant options

Weaknesses:

- No festivals
- Lack of “name brand” hotels/businesses
- No nightlife/primarily adult activities

Small Business Owner

Strengths:

- “Dig Murfreesboro” website is a great resource and properly promotes local businesses
- Tourism brings in additional customers
- 1st annual Rubber Duck Race

Weaknesses:

- Seasonal nature of tourism can create an off-season where business is slow
- Not a particularly wealthy part of the state
- Declining population

Industrial Prospect

Strengths:

- 40 acre industrial park
- Favorable for wood products sector
- Murfreesboro residents display entrepreneurial spirit
- Entrepreneurial spirit

Weaknesses:

- No sites or buildings located on state or local website
- No city website
- Proximity to rail and interstate
- Closest workforce training available at the University of Arkansas Community College Hope, AR

Single Young Professional

Strengths:

- Outdoor activities
- Three (3) healthcare facilities (for work)

Weaknesses:

- Limited places to work in the healthcare field
- No nightlife for a young person
- Limited housing

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, needing improvement, or not available, and the CDI Advanced Year team took notes about why each amenity in Murfreesboro was given a particular rating. Below are the notes from the CDI 2023 Advanced Year driving tour in Murfreesboro:

Physical Infrastructure

Sidewalks and Walkability:

- The central downtown area features limited sidewalk availability, necessitating improvement
- Addressing the need for increased connectivity, additional sidewalks should be established to interlink various downtown sections
- A lack of crosswalks in downtown Murfreesboro highlights the need for their augmentation
- Drainage issues contribute to flooding concerns and problems
- Notably, all Main Streets access routes are state highways

Signage:

- Murfreesboro's branded signage exhibits a satisfactory standard, yet discernible opportunities for enhancement exist in key areas:
- A noticeable need for improved consistency in signage, particularly the initial "Welcome to Murfreesboro" sign, is evident
- Wayfinding signage within the town is limited
- The Kadoha sign at the entrance from the diamond crater requires updating and tree trimming
- A request to petition ArDOT for altering the misleading entrance sign from "Murfreesboro" to "Oakana" is recommended to accurately reflect the destination

City Streets:

- City streets were rated as average or needed improvement overall, but road quality was an area of concern
- No traffic; traffic is light in the county

Social Infrastructure

Arts and Culture:

- Arts and Culture options in Murfreesboro need improvement in several key areas:
- Mural painting tying to diamond theme
- Arts and crafts festival
- Entertainment District
- Senior art classes
- Music on the square
- Military/veteran museums

Housing:

- Public housing options in Murfreesboro need improvement in several key areas:
- No rental housing
- Lack of new housing stock
- Affordable housing is needed

Healthcare Facilities:

- No emergency clinic in town
- Pike County Health Unit is the only noted healthcare unit in the area

Schools:

- Delight schools consolidated with Murfreesboro schools and became South Pike County schools
- Older schools need some update and upgrade
- Bridge gap between city and school



Parks:

- The City park is nice and decently maintained
- New equipment and upgrade for playground
- Multi-use path needed between state park and downtown
- Nice RV/camping park
- Community ball park with restrooms

Economic Development Infrastructure

- Murfreesboro's industrial park needs infrastructure
- Only one grocery store
- Not many rent ready sites
- Downtown:
 - Some good small businesses
 - Several vacant stores and some pose hazards to the public

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK AND TRENDS

The CDI Advanced Year class conducted focus groups, interviews, and an online survey with Murfreesboro citizens to collect feedback and identify key trends in the community. The feedback included the “Diamonds” (bright spots), the “Diamonds in the Rough” (challenges), and “Gems” (opportunities) in each of these community and economic development sectors.

Diamonds (Bright Spots)

- Crater of Diamonds State Park
- Lake Greeson
- Little Missouri River
- Hunting and Fishing
- Kadoha
- Local Author Club
- Locally owned and operated print newspaper
- County Seat
- Industrial Site Potential
- Glenn Campbell Home
- Lodging for Visitors
- Painting class at the library
- Rich history
- Great ambiance and buildings in downtown area
- WWW.DigMurfreesboro.com
- 90% of Pike County has internet coverage
- County Seat
- Park with walking trails
- Senior citizens exercise programs
- Veteran services
- Veterans Memorial in front of Courthouse
- Eclipse Planning Underway
- Senior center
- Custom lumber
- Ace Hardware
- Tourism Industry
- Strong School/STEM Program
- Trout fishing
- Annual car show
- Great High School band
- Pike County Youth Sports Organization

Diamonds in the Rough (Challenges)

- Lack of Affordable Housing
- Dry county hurts tourism and industry recruitment
- City Website
- More street lights
- No interstate access
- Zoning not enforced
- Limited Collaboration between downtown business owners, schools and community leaders
- Industrial park
- Lack of civic clubs and organizations that would encourage engagement such as Lions Club, Rotary, etc.
- No night time entertainment
- No Public restrooms downtown
- Distance to get medical care
- Businesses not growing or limited to tourism season
- “Biggest export are our high school seniors”
- Out migration of young people
- Expired food in grocery store
- Lack of transportation
- Empty dilapidated buildings
- Lack of space around square
- Veterans Organization Needed
- Drainage improvements needed

Gems (Opportunities)

- Increase walkability and connectivity around downtown (add crosswalks and slow down traffic around the square)
- Public Restrooms Downtown
- Organized Beautification efforts
- Potential Amphitheater
- Trails for ATVs and bikes, and EV charging stations
- Collaborate and create a plan to encourage tourism all year
- Attract younger residents and visitors
- Activating the downtown square
- Connecting the lake and diamond mine to the city
- Treasure fest in October
- Increase permit sale of alcoholic beverages
- Cohesive team between school, city and chamber partnership
- Preparing for the jobs of tomorrow (internships, cooperation between schools and business)
- Relocate farmers' market to downtown
- Increase Nightlife
- Upgrade business infrastructure



SHORT-TERM ACTION ITEMS

Based on these observations and the findings of this report, there are several short-term steps Murfreesboro can pursue to further improve the quality of life for Murfreesboro residents and expand future economic growth. In this section titled “Short Term Actions Items.” the Advanced Year team identified short-term steps that can be completed within a year:

1. Develop and begin the implementation of a formalized strategic action plan
2. Better leverage local amenities like Lake Greeson, Crater of Diamonds State Park, and the downtown area making Murfreesboro a destination for more tourists and longer tourist season
3. Create an interagency task force to enhance communication and collaboration between the Chamber of Commerce, community leaders, elected officials, the mayor, the county judge, Murfreesboro Public School Superintendent, and other stakeholders
4. Activate the Square with Special events such as live music
5. Develop plan to decorate downtown and promote merchants during Christmas shopping season
6. Initiate conversations with ARDOT about crosswalks and increased signage
7. Volunteer city wide cleanup
8. Engage the younger generation to lead and continue legacy.
9. Create Public Restroom downtown with information kiosk on the outside
10. Create a platform for downtown businesses to share and collaborate. Shift thinking from who has the biggest piece of the pie, to creating a bigger pie!
11. Cultivate a consistent and engaging online and social media presence for effective communication with Murfreesboro visitors and the broader community
12. Create a city website or combine city services to the new www.digmurfreesboro.com website
13. Consider relocating the farmer’s market to downtown with access to public restrooms
14. Create comprehensive listings of available (and potential) industrial and commercial sites in both online and print format to prepare for potential business opportunities for Murfreesboro and Pike County
15. Look at expanding this to include the county. Create Murfreesboro/Pike County Industrial Committee meetings
16. Contact your AEDC Regional Manager for assistance: Dana Poindexter (dana.poindexter@arkansasedc.com)

LONG-TERM ACTION ITEMS

The CDI Advanced Year team also identified several long-term action items that Murfreesboro can take in a section titled “Long Term Actions Items.” These are action items that would take more than one year to accomplish but are part of a long-term vision to further improve quality of life and expand future economic growth:

1. Work with the school to connect with local businesses and be intentional in the development of the next generation of Murfreesboro leadership and workforce programs that support local business and industry. (i.e. internships, job fairs, youth leadership program, ACT Work Readiness Community etc.)
2. Create a Master Street and Trail Comprehensive plan to assist in pursuing future grants and to improve connectivity
3. Implement telehealth/telemedicine program and utilize state broadband office for community training
4. Create a comprehensive beautification plan for downtown Murfreesboro that includes creating a clearly defined downtown area, investing in signage, fixing drainage issues, creating enhanced lighting and pedestrian infrastructure, and embracing and encouraging public art
5. Continue to research economic impact of potential alcohol sales and educate the community
6. Create a long term plan to encourage tourism during traditional “off season” such as fishing, hunting, camping (RV and Primitive) trails, motorcycle tourism
 - Formerly Identify Tourism Assets
 - Focus on capturing tourist for several days by creating suggested itineraries and sharing them online
 - Collaborate with communities within 1-hour drive
 - Work with State Tourism Office
 - Utilize Travel Vloggers or Influencers (ex: Arkie Travels)
7. Utilize national and state affiliations for community and economic development resources
 - Examples include Keep America Beautiful and Main Street Arkansas
8. Upgrade and support infrastructure for entrepreneurs in the area to encourage small businesses
 - This could look like partnering with outside entrepreneurship organizations, applying for grants to support entrepreneurs, and integrating entrepreneurship into the local school curriculum
9. Explore taxing options to capitalize on tourism dollars coming into the Murfreesboro community
10. Consider investing in an EV charging station(s) for the RV/camping /cars
11. RV parking needed in downtown area

LOOKING FORWARD

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

- Lisa Harvill, Agent and Owner of Harvill and Associates Insurance
- Steve Harvill, Owner of Harvill and Associates Insurance
- Mayor Jim O'Neal
- Queen of Diamonds Inn (Terrell family)
- Swaha Lodge & Marina
- The Feed Bin
- Telingas
- The Crusted Loaf
- Local business owners
- Citizens of Murfreesboro

We appreciate the community leaders and citizens of Murfreesboro 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.

Murfreesboro 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 Murfreesboro for your children and grandchildren. The citizens of Murfreesboro and Pike County 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 Murfreesboro a place to grow.



PIKE COUNTY
COURT HOUSE

PIKE COUNTY
DIAMOND MINES

TWO AND A HALF MILES SOUTHEAST OF THIS POINT IS THE ONLY LOCALITY IN NORTH AMERICA WHERE DIAMONDS HAVE BEEN FOUND IN THE ROCK IN WHICH THEY WERE FORMED. THEY HAVE BEEN FOUND PRINCIPALLY IN ONE IDEOUS PIPE WHICH WITH THREE SMALL PIPES, ACCRETES ABOUT 80 ACRES. THESE PIPES ARE THE CRATERS OF A VOLCANO WHICH ERUPTED UNDER THE WATER OF THE SEA WHICH COVERED THIS PLACE. DIAMONDS WERE FIRST DISCOVERED OCTOBER 1, 1868. IT IS ESTIMATED THAT 48,000 STONES HAVE BEEN REDCOVERED. ABOUT EIGHT PER CENT OF THE DIAMONDS REDCOVERED HAVE BEEN GEM STONES.

1868 ARRANGED SEPTEMBER 1898. CHAS. H. HUNT, 1874-1904.

Welcome to
Murfreesboro

