

Community Development Kick Start Report for Alma, Arkansas



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**"Far better to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs, even though
checkered by failure, than to take rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy
much nor suffer much, because they live in the gray twilight that knows not
victory, nor defeat."**

Theodore Roosevelt

What is Community Development Kick Start?

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 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 Amy Whitehead, Assistant Director Shelby Fiegel, and Project Coordinator Corey Parks.

The Community Development Kick Start program 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. Community Development Kick Start uses the Breakthrough Solutions Model from the University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service, with Dr. Mark Peterson, professor of Community and Economic Development, serving as facilitator and partner for this initiative. The Breakthrough Solutions Program is a partnership initiative with the purpose of equipping communities and regions in Arkansas to be vibrant, sustainable, and resilient in this 21st century economy.

To learn more about CDI visit www.uca.edu/cdi. To learn more about Breakthrough Solutions, visit www.uaex.edu/business-communities/strategic-planning/breakthrough-solutions.aspx.

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Executive Summary

Community Development Kick Start is a collaborative initiative between the University of Central Arkansas' (UCA) Community Development Institute and the University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension to provide a community the tools they need to develop a five year strategic action plan. The program begins with a five day, intensive workshop where a team of CDI graduates (also called the Kick Start team) focuses on one Arkansas community, and creates a research based report for that community. UCA and U of Arkansas Cooperative Extension faculty then work with the community for an additional nine months to create and launch the action plan.

Communities in Arkansas were invited to apply for this unique opportunity, and Alma was selected. Alma has great assets, and is doing many things very well. The excellent school system, aquatic center, community center, and street and infrastructure improvements are signs of visionary leadership in the community. It is also a mark of leadership to look to the future, engage your citizenry, and tap strategic resources that can help move your community forward.

The challenges and opportunities identified by community leaders in Alma are shared by many other communities in our state and nation, and Alma now has a unique opportunity to address these challenges and opportunities moving forward. Our goal is that this development process will equip the community of Alma to become a model for the nation as it identifies and implements breakthrough solutions to realize its full potential and desired future.

As in the real world, people check out communities online before visiting them, so the Kick Start team researched Alma online to gather insights about the community. When the team came together during the week of CDI, they went to Alma and interacted with citizens, took a guided tour, and met with community leaders. At the end of the week, the team presented their findings to the community, and finally pulled all of their insights and future recommendations together into this report.

This is not a comprehensive analysis of all economic sectors of Alma, but it does represent a fresh look at the community from several outsiders who brought community and economic development experience and expertise into this setting.

Breakthroughs are advances, innovations, or leaps forward that can transform a community and change the dynamics in a region by acting as catalysts to leverage other resources. Breakthrough solutions carry the breakthroughs into action. The Kick Start team found that the citizens, leaders, organizations, and businesses in Alma have much to be proud of, and are successful in many ways. So these potential breakthroughs really build on the good work that you are already doing.

Potential breakthroughs for Alma:

- 1) **Community Identity and Brand** - Develop a powerful community identity and brand that describes your desired future, differentiates Alma from other communities, and attracts people (families, visitors, and businesses) to the community, with an action plan to deliver on the brand promise.
- 2) **Enhanced Online Presence** - Enhance your online presence across the several Alma websites with a common look and brand that is mobile friendly, and create a community app.
- 3) **Quality of Life and Place** – Create a clean, attractive community with walkability and trail systems that connect the entire community, a vibrant downtown, and entrances to the city that are attractive to residents and visitors.
- 4) **Support Employers and Identify New Job Opportunities** – Support your employers with a business retention and expansion program, create robust education and workforce development, and develop an entrepreneurship support system.
- 5) **Bring Wi-Fi to Public Areas in the Community** – Wi-Fi can help to attract people of all ages who seek to be online while enjoying Alma’s amenities.
- 6) **Long-Term Sustainability through New Funding and Finance** – Successful communities create ways for their citizens and outsiders to financially support community and economic development in their communities. Because people only support those things they believe in, this requires community involvement to create financing mechanisms that are good for the community over the long term.

The rest of this report provides a brief overview of the research conducted by the Kick Start team: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and quick wins that can be put into action immediately. For a copy of the full report developed by the Kick Start team, please contact Amy Whitehead at amyw@uca.edu or Mark Peterson at mpeterson@uacx.edu

Community Development Kick Start Team

The Community Development Kick Start team brought a great deal of experience and expertise into this initiative, which contributed greatly to the insights and recommendations in this report. The team was made up of the following community and economic developers:

- Allen Lipsmeyer, Mayor of Morrilton
- Ashley Garris, Economic Development Administrator for Western Arkansas Planning and Development District
- Essie Mae Dale-Cableton, Mayor of Gould
- Lisa Johnson, President/CEO of the Bossier Chamber of Commerce
- Lorie Robertson, Director of Marketing for Fort Chaffee Redevelopment Authority
- Mike Kemp, Mayor of Shannon Hills
- Team Leader: Dr. Mark Peterson, Professor of Community and Economic Development at the University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service

Each team member was given a role to assume in their investigations, as indicated here:

- Allen Lipsmeyer – Industrial Plant Locator
- Ashley Garris – Single 25 Year-Old Starting a Business
- Essie Mae Dale-Cableton – Family with Children Looking to Relocate
- Lisa Johnson – Potential Tourist
- Lorie Robertson – Teen Relocating with Her Parents
- Mike Kemp – Potential Retiree Moving to Alma



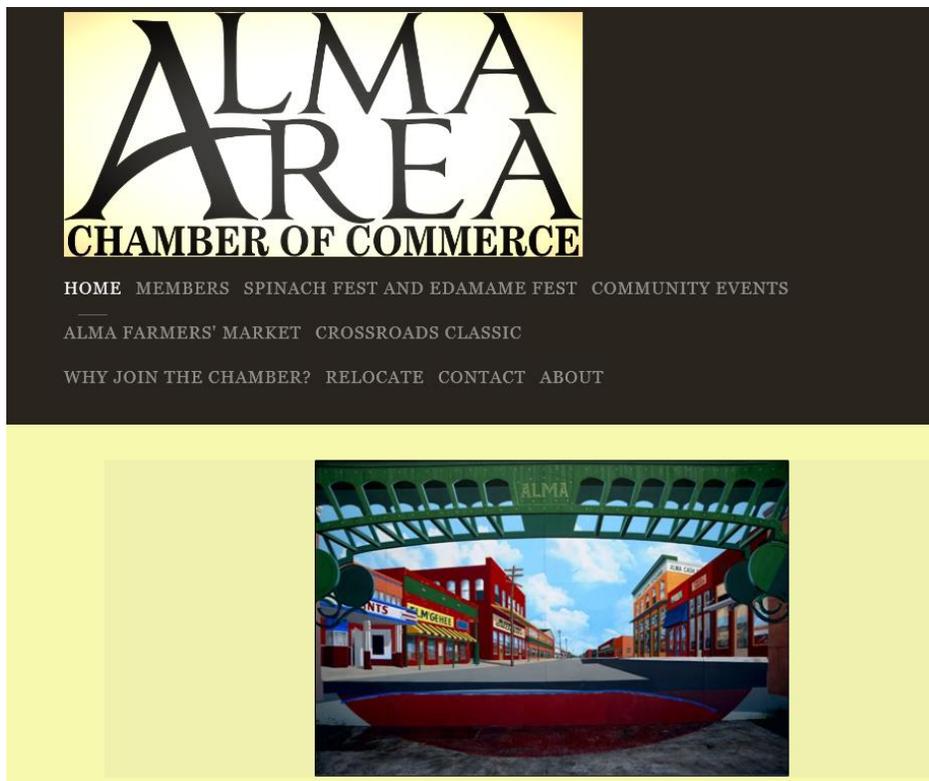
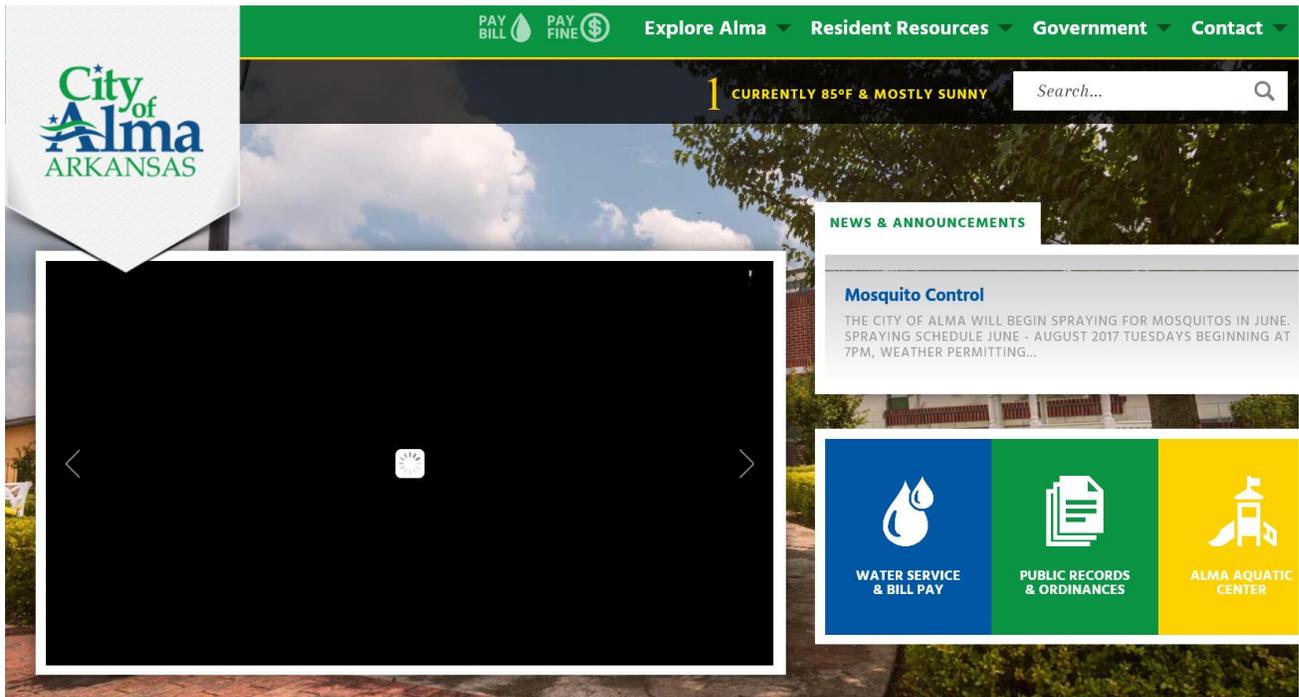
Community Development Kickstart Team, left to right: Mark Peterson, Lorie Robertson, Lisa Johnson, Ashley Garris, Mike Kemp (dressed as Popeye), Essie Mae Dale-Cableton, and Allen Lipsmeyer

Internet Search: Strengths and Weaknesses

In this digital era, most people check out your community on-line before coming to visit. If they don't like what they see (regardless of the real situation in your community), they will probably never come. These notes reflect how outsiders perceive your community as they search for Alma on the internet. The following websites were reviewed by the Kick Start Team:

- Arkansas Site Selection Center: <http://www.arkansassiteselection.com/>
- City of Alma: <http://cityofalma.org/>
- Alma Area Chamber of Commerce: <http://www.almachamber.com/> and Chamber Facebook
- Alma Schools: <https://www.almasd.net/>
- Boys and Girls Club of the Alma Area: <http://almabgc.com/>
- Stepping Stone School: <http://steppingstonearkansas.com/>
- Trip Advisor: <https://www.tripadvisor.com>

Here are the front doors to Alma from the world-wide web:



Web Presence - Strengths

- City has a website
- Chamber of Commerce has a website and a Facebook page
- Several Facebook pages in the community
- Pictures of the area were beautiful
- City utilities and fines can be paid online
- Reservations to the Alma Aquatic Center can be made online

Web Presence – Weaknesses

- City website needs:
 - Comprehensive programs and schedules
 - More information about historical sites
 - To promote current projects, future projects and value of projects
 - Link to Fort Smith Regional Alliance
 - Economic development contact information
 - Information about Stepping Stone School
 - Links to community websites: Boys and Girls Club website, Stepping Stone School, churches, with those sites linked back to the city website
- Chamber website needs:
 - Links to economic development contacts
 - Lists of commercial properties for sale
 - Activities, restaurants, utility providers, etc.
- City, Chamber and county websites need more cohesion and consistent messages; consider a common banner as Newport AR does
- If Chamber of Commerce is truly the “Alma Area Chamber of Commerce”, site should include an area map and information about the service area, including the industrial park at Mulberry
- Post more high quality pictures/videos
- School website needs more information such as activities, schedules, accomplishments, district rating
- Stepping Stone website needs to link to city/chamber websites

Online Community Assessment from Various Perspectives

Single 25-year-old Starting a Business

As a 25 year old entrepreneur, I am looking to establish a high-end children's resale shop.

What am I looking for?

- Tax incentives
- Low cost commercial property
- Reliable Internet access
- Funding opportunities
- Active chamber of commerce
- Entertainment
- Good restaurants
- Affordable housing

Online Presence:

Strengths	Weaknesses
Active website for City & Chamber	No information about startups
Active Chamber of Commerce	No information about incentives
Active Social media for Chamber	Limited entertainment for young adults
	Limited buildings for sale/lease
	Inadequate information on Chamber website
	Lacking details about businesses on City website (i.e., Economic Development contact information)

Benchmark Communities:

- Rogers-Lowell Area Chamber of Commerce
 - Startup information on their site with links
- Fayetteville Genesis Incubator
- North Little Rock Innovation Hub
- Helpful Websites;
 - <https://www.atu.edu/asbt/dc/>
 - <http://asbt/dc.org/services/financing-your-business/small-business-grants/>
 - <http://startuparkansas.com/>
 - <http://www.startupjunkieconsulting.com/>
 - <http://www.innovatearkansas.org/>

Family with Children Looking to Relocate

As a family with children, I am seeking family amenities.

What am I looking for?

- Affordable Housing
- Schools
- Parks
- Quality of life
- Churches
- Medical
- Shopping
- Broadband internet access
- Entertainment

Online Presence:

Strengths	Weaknesses
Great school system	No airport, no train station
Public water & sewer	Website(s) not comprehensive
Aquatic water park	No hospital in city
Shopping	No mention of medical facility

Benchmark Community:

- Arkadelphia, Arkansas

Teen Relocating with Her Parents

As a high school student, I am searching for activities for youth, sports teams, availability of technology and other amenities.

What am I looking for?

- Things to do after school/on weekends
- Summer job opportunities
- Learning opportunities outside of school
- Paths to a career: higher learning options, trades training
- High speed internet access
- Live close enough to walk or ride bike to school
- Visual arts opportunities
- Church youth activities

Online Presence:

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
Aquatic Center	Not clear what slides or areas are for teens, no photos to get my attention
Frisbee Golf	No photos of course on website, info about tournaments, teams, etc.
City Parks	No clear map of city/neighborhood parks on website other than Aquatic Park
School website	No summary of academic excellence, extracurricular academic programs
School athletic programs	No soccer listed on website; is golf offered?
School arts programs	No visual arts programs listed
School store (business training)	Not detailed on school website

After school activities	No mention of Boys and Girls Club on City or Chamber sites
Church Youth Programs	Assume they exist, but couldn't find an overview without researching each individual church
Performing Arts Center	No summer programs
NJROTC (only one of two in the region)	No written overview of program on website, relationship with UAFS ROTC
Concurrent high school/college credit program	Assumed, but no detail on school website about which colleges/universities participate, classes available, etc.
Technology learning	No indication there are opportunities to learn or be challenged outside classroom

DESIRED	WEAKNESSES
Entertainment	Have to travel to VB or FS for movie theater / depend on parents for transportation (<15 yrs.)
Shopping	Few shopping options for teens
Teen employment	Few summer job opportunities
Good schools	Nicer residential neighborhoods are not within walking distance/short bike ride of high school/PAC

Benchmark Communities:

- North Little Rock - [Community Gardens](#)
- Fort Smith - [Junior Leadership Academy](#)
- Fayetteville - [Teen Venture Academy](#)
- Perryville - [High School Maker Space](#)

Assets to Build on:

ASSET	POTENTIAL
Natural Environment – mountains, lake, AR River, etc.	Photography Club
Rural farming community	Master Gardener's Club U of A Cooperative Extension Service gardening classes Farm-to-Table program Farmers Market booth for kids
Outdoor activities-Frisbee golf, hiking trails, biking trails, etc.	Sporting goods store
School website	Some links broken, incomplete content
Performing Arts Center	Summer programs
Parks Brothers Nursery	Internships, tours of facility, learn wholesale business principles

Retiree Looking for Community in Which to Live

I spent most of my life in the workforce and now seek a place to spend the rest of my lifetime in retirement. I am a boomer and I do not want to retire from life.

What am I looking for?

- A place to live the rest of my life on a fixed income
- Easily accessible health care
- Activities to stay busy
- Local restaurants
- Low crime
- Low tax rates
- Assisted living facilities (to meet future needs)
- Active faith-based community
- According to Goodcall.com the top 10 best cities for seniors to retire are: Chesterfield MO, Leawood KS, Naples FL, Prairie Village KS, Scottsdale AZ, Aiken SC, Matthews NC, Germantown TN, Madison MS, and Brentwood TN. Note that only one city is in Florida, indicating that retirees are seeking alternative locations.

Online Presence:

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
Quality of Life	Lack of Coordination
Affordability	No Articulated Community Vision
Senior Center	No Public Transportation
Golf Course	Senior Services Difficult to Find
Performing Arts Center	Senior Discounts (not promoted)
Aquatic Center	Blighted Residential Areas
Walkability/Accessibility	No Apparent Regionalism
Many Activities 50 Mile Radius	No buffet restaurant

Are you letting retirees know about your...	
Moderate Climate?	No
Affordable Convenient Healthcare?	No
Low Crime Rates?	No
Arts and Recreation Opportunities?	Some
Accessibility?	No

Benchmark Communities:

- Eureka Springs
- Mena
- Heber Springs

Potential Tourist

As a potential tourist traveling through town on my way to a meeting in Fayetteville, I am also considering a future return with family.

What was I looking for?

- Any unique places to visit while traveling through
- Local places to eat
- Family activities for a future getaway

Online Presence:

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
City Site is very inviting	Chamber's site is dull
Spinach Festival (Popeye)	No connectivity/linkage between the sites that is easily accessible
Hiking trail	Spinach Festival cancelled
Alma Aquatic Park	No historical correlation with the Allen Canning Company
Shopping	No connection of assets on State Tourism Website
Farmer's Market	All assets not listed consistently; i.e. Bargains Galore on 64, RV Parks, Eagle Crest Golf Course, Performing Arts Center

Phone Call Response (Chamber of Commerce):

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
Answered Phone immediately and with a smile	No materials available to mail
3 really big antique stores	Mentioned shopping/hiking and regional assets
A to Z Store – outlet	
Locally owned restaurants	Few options available for restaurants
Mentioned the community is in the process of rebranding	

Benchmark Communities:

- Fayetteville, Arkansas - [Experience Fayetteville](#) (Great example for shopping)
- Mena, Arkansas - [Play in Mena](#) (Great example for outdoors)
- Broken Bow, Oklahoma - [Visitor & Tourism Information](#)

Industrial Plant Locator

What I am looking for?

- Certified Industrial site or Controlled site with due diligence completed
- Skilled and Available workforce
- Good transportation infrastructure
- Local incentives and state-wide incentives
- Availability of workforce training opportunities

Online Presence:

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
Active Chamber Website	Shows no Land Available
Good Schools	No fulltime developer
Quality of Life	Several assets not on website
Interstate	Describing yourself as a
River	bedroom community may
Rail	stifle interest from
Want industry now	industries
	No sites readily available

Benchmark Communities:

- Morrilton
- Clarksville
- **Note** - you can network with them and their economic developers, two colleges, and two workforce training centers.

Community Driving Tour

As part of their assessment, the Community Development Kickstart team toured Alma, with tour guides Mayor Keith Greene and Jim White.

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
School campuses are impressive (well maintained, large enough for student population growth)	Lack of community pride shown in personal property
Walking trails, aquatic park, frisbee disc golf course, tennis courts are located in one central location	Not capitalizing on fishing opportunities on Lake Alma
Lake Alma is beautiful	Empty storefronts downtown
Only using 20% of water capacity	Assets are spread out with few connectors
Community Center	Parking lots in parks not paved
Popeye Park downtown	Parks pavilions need repairs
Tornado shelters at every school	Schools are really spread out
Boys and Girls Club	Need a rock/brick façade on firestation on East Collum Ln.
Stepping Stone School	ISO Rating of 4; 6 min fire response time
PAC seats 1,500 people	Commercial real estate prices not in line w/market demand
Diverse faith-based community	Rental rates for the new commercial center seem high
Good variety of restaurants	Rezone lots by Country Meadow Estates from commercial to multi-family residential
Plan to make downtown improvements	Not many things for millennials, young families to do

Note: The Arkansas Department of Health does not allow boating or swimming on Lake Alma because of its size, but additional fishing piers or locations would be allowed.

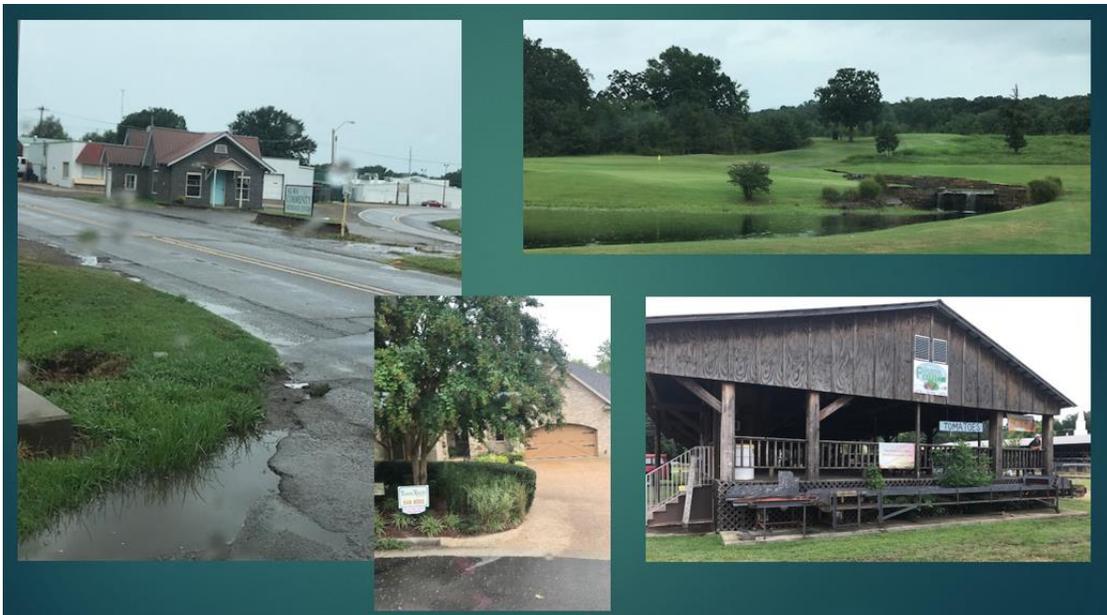


Kickstart Team on the bus with tour guides Jim White and Mayor Keith Greene

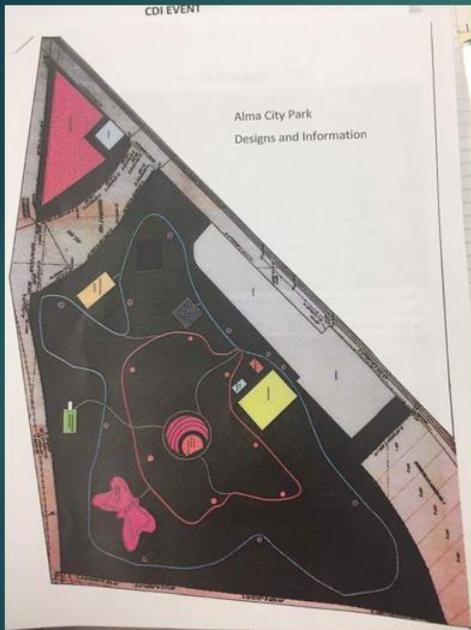
Driving Tour Feedback



We saw a headless Popeye as we drove to Fayetteville Avenue (main street), and a beautiful space between two buildings downtown.



We also observed new infrastructure being built, additional infrastructure needs, the beautiful Eagle Crest Golf Course community, and the farmers' market facility, which looks very functional but would benefit from flowers in the front.



The planned new city park looks impressive, and this graffiti shows creativity and a sense of hope and optimism for the future of the community.

Overall Strengths of Alma

- Over \$30 Million in current projects
- Proactive community leadership
- Alma has a history of being “forward thinkers” (aquatic park first in region)
- Strategically located for intermodal and tourism development
- The great school, aquatic center, and community center are signs of visionary leadership, financial capability, and community support.
- Stepping Stone School
- Boys and Girls Club
- Interesting geography, scenic views
- Great people
- Nice senior center
- Nice community center
- Impressive performing arts center
- Diversity of faith-based organizations
- Great stopping point enroute to Fayetteville (Cracker Barrel, Catfish Hole)

Overall Weaknesses of Alma

- Town needs sprucing up; code enforcement needs strengthening in the business and residential areas.
- Downtown needs to be revitalized
- Part-time mayor
- Part-time chamber of commerce director, with office in a caboose
- Community apathy
- Dry county
- Lack of land for industrial and residential development
- Lack of quality residential rental properties
- No association with Invotek
- Need to improve communication with citizens and advance notification of meetings
- Lack of entrepreneurial training in school and community

Key Issues and Opportunities



Key Issues Discussion on August 3 in the Alma Community Center:

As the real experts are the citizens and community leaders in Alma, these recommendations are things to consider, for you to select the gold nuggets that may confirm what you have already known, or describe a new opportunity you had not considered. If many of these recommendations look familiar, it is because they emerged from our discussions with citizens and community leaders in your community.

Infrastructure

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
Interstates/highways	I-40 overpass needs to be cleaned up, top to bottom, and right-of-ways mown; could be a welcoming gateway; short visibility of I-40 westbound exit ramp
Proximity to VB & FS ports	Lack of sewer outside city limits
Railroad service	Attitudes towards development
Proximity to regional airports	High taxes
Quality water system	Lack of housing
School facilities	Downtown needs Wi-Fi
	Wastewater Inflow/Infiltration capacity
	Flooding/drainage issues

Quick Wins:

- Provide Wi-Fi access in public facilities/areas – downtown, in the community center, and aquatic park
- Involve EAST Lab students in mapping infrastructure

Greatest Opportunities:

- Tap the sewer line in the Collum West area for new homes
- Remain engaged in highway planning process (I-49, I-40, and state highways)
- Continue with wastewater inflow and infiltration abatement
- Encourage residential development (identify land, plan for utilities, work with developers)
- Develop and implement a long-term infrastructure/utility plan
- Address flood plain and drainage issues

Economic Development and Jobs

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
Proximity to regional job hubs	Availability of land
Access to regional workforce training programs	No certified, ready sites
Quality of Life/Place	No mid-size employers
Central US location	Limited urgent care services
Access to multimodal transportation	Don't have a dedicated economic developer
Readily available/cheap water	Losing young, skilled labor
LED lights on highway exit ramps	Dry county
Strong agricultural production	Lack of housing options
	High property taxes

Quick Wins:

- Survey small businesses and work with Arkansas Small Business Technology and Development Center to offer small business workshops
- Meet with local employers to identify their needs and partnership opportunities (business retention and expansion)
- Update and improve demographic information on city website; broaden area for potential workforce to a regional viewpoint
- Invite the community to hear the Retail Strategies presentation and seek to recruit businesses to fill the retail gaps in the community.
- Make local employers aware that the Arkansas Procurement Assistance Center (part of the U of A Cooperative Extension Service) can assist them sell their goods and services to the public sector.
- Add Mulberry's industrial park to the Alma Area Chamber of Commerce website.

Greatest Opportunities:

- Strengthen the Alma Area Chamber of Commerce
 - New location
 - Define roles – Chamber director, contact person for economic development, Mayor, etc.
 - Funding – provide city funding, eliminate rent to free-up funding
 - Full-time director

- Support housing development, which needs to be in place to attract new industry, options for people who relocate
- Encourage organic growth - support existing small business and entrepreneurship
- Encourage light industry
- Develop economic development incentives program and consider corporate tax abatement to attract new businesses and industry
- Sponsor economic development training for planning commission and local officials
- Consider raising spinach in the area for fresh market, as there is strong demand from Harps, Wal-Mart, and other grocers.
- Explore development opportunities at the intersection of Highway 70 and I-40.

Marketing and Tourism

Quick Wins:

- Connect the city and chamber through links
- Shopping - collaborate with Van Buren and Fort Smith
- Create a presence on Western Arkansas Mountain Frontier
- Market your RV parks
- Market your golf course – it is on the Arkansas Trail!
- Confirm you have an appropriate presence on the regional and state tourism websites

Greatest Opportunities:

- Create a strategic economic development brand and identity for the community, outside of I-49. Make it relevant to the Alma of today, what assets are there now and are being built on.
 - What if Alma became the fresh market Spinach Capitol of the World?
 - If you google Popeye, you will find he is an internationally-known celebrity in several countries, with theatrical performances and festivals held in several countries.
 - Consider a brand that communicates that Alma is a wonderful community for families, with great schools, recreational opportunities, and close proximity to larger cities
 - Crossroads of America – not visible from the community, may not be that meaningful to local people; search online to see how many other communities have the same tagline
 - Roger Brooks International is a tremendous authority and resource on branding communities. His videos have been invaluable to Arkansas communities and are available through the Crawford County Extension office.

Assets to Build on:

- Strong Swim Team
- Strong High School Program – extracurricular
- Are there any regional meets/programs you can host in the community?
- History of Allen Canning / Spinach – create a Popeye Museum downtown (could start in the library)
- Create an arch with a name for your water park/park/Frisbee golf course
- Motorcycle tourism is a promising market segment
- Develop a driving tour of Alma with assets identified on a city map
- Tell your STORY!!
 - Lake Alma Trail: Testimony – “Lovely little trail - lots of surprises! The little waterfall, old stone structures, and rustic bridges are all great. You also get some lovely views of the lake, of course, plus bluffs, boulders, pretty creeks, and an

amazing view from the top of the dam... I was astonished by how much this short, easy trail offered.” Miranda Kohout (www.alltrails.com)

- Consider using school pride as a launch pad for other community strengths—infrastructure, economic development, and location.

Education and Workforce

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
School academics, facilities, and athletics	Lack of job opportunities in the city
Stepping Stone School	A large percentage of the population is not eligible to join the workforce (retired, disabled, students, children at home, homemakers = approx. 74%)
Boys and Girls Club	
Performing Arts Center	
Availability of advance training and education in the region	
80% of high school graduates go on to some form of technical or college training	
School district is largest employer in community and has little turnover	Workforce is not aware of all the regional training opportunities available
Alma can draw from a larger skilled workforce in the region to fill jobs	
Age 20-74 - 61% of population	
Babies to age 44 - 68% of total population	

Quick Wins:

- Bring together representatives from area colleges, universities, and Western Arkansas Planning and Development District with local employers to identify their needs and partnership opportunities.

- Survey small businesses, offer training through the Arkansas Small Business Technology and Development Center

Greatest Opportunities:

- Attract high-tech businesses
- Create/offer entrepreneurship programs (Harrison has an effective entrepreneurship short course).
- Develop a reciprocal relationship with Stepping Stone School to make it widely known that educational opportunities for developmentally challenged children exist in Alma; help attract/recruit educators in the specialty field

Quality of Life

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
Proximity to larger cities with small-town feel	Community lacks drive and involvement
Outdoor recreation opportunities	Don't have an accessibility park
Arts and Culture	Dry county
Diverse faith-based community	Housing choices are extreme (high end or public, low-income); lack median income options
Boys and Girls Club	Lack of sidewalks
Outreach Center/Food Bank	

Quick Wins:

- Launch a city-wide beautification program, sponsoring clean-up events, and involving local nurseries
- Partner with Keep Arkansas Beautiful Sept. 9 – October; 31, 2017 (free materials, planning guide, volunteer reward materials, etc.)
- www.KeepArkansasBeautiful.com; offer extra credit for student participation
- Create a Lawn of the Month program,
- Invite food trucks downtown
- Expand Lake Alma fishing opportunities and access
- Remove the headless Popeye” and lettering at Cherry St. and Fayetteville Ave., replace with message “Downtown (with arrow)”

Greatest Opportunities:

- Complete downtown revitalization
- Roger Brooks International is a tremendous authority and resource on downtown revitalization and branding communities. His videos have been invaluable to Arkansas communities and are available through the Crawford County Extension office.
- Continue to enhance and expand parks and recreation
- Consider an indoor pool and/or a portable dome over the existing pool
- Develop entertainment, nightlife activities
- Expand Performing Arts Center opportunities for year-round community engagement
- Create a festival tied to the performing arts

- Improve curb appeal on gateways and entry corridors to the community
- Expand and partner with farmer's market to provide more community activities
- Improve online and physical appearance and location of Alma Public Library in downtown
- Create a community farm-to-table dining event downtown near the farmers' market (similar to an event held in Russellville)
- Revitalize the Spinach Festival, and include a Popeye look-alike contest, a food carving contest, and a theatrical production
- Create a historic tour with a Confederate general, Bonnie & Clyde reenactors, founding fathers, tie in with the historic cemetery and host cemetery tours/walks at night
- Start a program for teenagers to do minor exterior lawn care and maintenance for homebound / disabled residents
- Have a "paint downtown" event/festival and learn from "Let's Paint Stuttgart"

Community Health and Well-Being

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
Building new sidewalks and trails	Lack of specialists
Aquatic Center, outdoor activities	High poverty
Existing parks and new park	Lack of public transportation
Farmers market/food bank	Higher than average drug abuse
Medical clinics/EMS	Housing conditions
Fitness/rehab center	
Three pharmacies, including a compounding pharmacy and a health coach	
Senior activities	

Quick Wins:

- Conduct a civic pride campaign—meet with every civic, church, community, public and private group to communicate the positives of the community and the future plan for growing and improving the quality of life for every Alma citizen; tell the story over and over again.
- Educate the community on the benefits of exercise, encourage participation in outdoor activities

Greatest Opportunities:

- Strengthen and enforce housing codes to provide clean, affordable housing
- Explore options for urgent care facility and expanded weekend hours for walk-in clinics
- Encourage healthy food options on local restaurant menus and in schools
- Create a Senior Center social media page

Overall - Golden Nuggets

- Create a Funding and Finance Action Team. For example, Kickstart Heber Springs created a Funding and Finance Action Team with these purposes:
 - Review all funding streams (taxes, etc.) coming into the community, to see if they are used for the most strategic purposes in the community, and if they can be enhanced or leveraged in some way,
 - Assist the other action teams with identifying possible funding sources and strategies,
 - Offer training on grantsmanship, and
 - Connecting people of means (such as wealthy individuals who have some connection to the community with major projects that would be breakthroughs for the community.
- Create a comprehensive calendar of events for the website(s), Facebook pages, and local media
- Use multiple venues to communicate to the community and the world about upcoming events and the list of community projects and investments, and keep it updated
- Embrace openness, collaboration and citizen involvement from all levels of citizenry

2017 Community Projects/Investment in Alma

The Community Development Kick Start Team was impressed with these projects and investments completed or underway in Alma, which will be useful to communicate to the public and the world:

Downtown streetscape:	\$2,850,000
Highway 162 re-location:	\$11,000,000
Multi-use trail, Boys and Girls Club	\$35,000
Sidewalk projects (Collum Lane and Maple Shade Road)	\$500,000
Street and infrastructure improvements:	\$8,600,000
27 Homes under construction:	\$2,900,000
3 Bay retail outlet under constructions:	\$1,200,000
New park land and grant:	\$594,000
Walmart remodel:	\$1,200,000
Atwoods:	\$700,000
CV's IGA:	\$340,000
The Potting Shed:	\$57,000
Crawford County Storage:	\$700,000
INK:	\$12,000
Impact Church:	\$25,000
Baker Law Firm:	\$275,000
Taco Bell:	\$21,000
Total:	\$30,360,500

Summary

This report is a culmination of the Community Development Kick Start team and their interactions with citizens and leaders of Alma, Arkansas. It is a rare opportunity for a community or organization to receive a fresh look from the outside of how they are perceived, and more importantly, what are the strategic opportunities they see for your community.

Alma is a special community with unique assets and opportunities. You all do many things very well, and have a great foundation on which to build the future you desire for your children and grandchildren. You who live in Alma are most knowledgeable about Alma, and are in the driver's seat moving forward. We hope this report offers some useful observations, recommendations, and gold nuggets that will be helpful to you on your journey.

Thanks to all who have been involved with this initiative so far, and we look forward to seeing great things happening in Lonoke.

**“Don’t ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive and go do it.
Because what the world needs is people who come alive.”**

Donald Thurman

Thank you for your time and hospitality!

Appendix: Alma Community Characteristics Results

Compiled from Kickstart Alma meeting on August 1, 2017.

Community characteristic	Very Poor	Poor	Good	Excellent
	1	2	3	4
Highway access			9	27
Telephone service		5	17	10
High-speed broadband access	2	5	17	2
<i>High-speed broadband cost</i>	2	10	13	1
<i>Water and sewer cost</i>		2	22	6
<i>Availability of affordable housing</i>	1	9	18	5
Quality of healthcare		10	18	4
Level of local crime	1	2	22	10
Responsiveness of local govt.		7	21	4
<i>Overall local political climate</i>	3	8	23	2
<i>Proactive local leadership</i>	1	2	30	2
<i>Openness to new ideas and new people</i>	1	8	22	4
Availability of cultural activities	2	18	14	2
Availability of recreational opportunities	1	14	15	5
Quality of local education			11	24
<i>Availability of jobs</i>	3	23	7	1
<i>Quality of life</i>		2	26	8
<i>Availability of industrial sites</i>	11	14	8	
Availability of industrial buildings	14	18	5	
Diversity of retail offerings⁶	6	17	11	
Availability of workforce training	8	16	7	1
<i>Attractiveness of the community</i>	3	12	19	3
<i>Suitability for attracting retirees</i>		19	14	2
<i>Sense of optimism and can-do attitude in the community</i>	1	3	25	7

The thing I like best about Alma (besides the people) is:

- 11 - Location and access to major highways (Ft. Smith and Fayetteville)
- 9 - Good schools
- 2 – It's home
- Friendliness
- Performing arts center
- It is western Arkansas, with connections to Fort Smith and northwest Arkansas. It is an overall good place to live, a bit limited because of size, but with access to a reasonable amount of amenities.
- The fact that it is a bedroom community / small town close to larger city
- The proximity to bigger cities with the small town feel
- Sense of community
- Small, tight-knit community that is very supportive of local businesses. We also have unlimited business and community growth opportunities in the future.
- The opportunities
- Cost of living is relatively low
- Our education system is A++
- A good school district, however it concerns me that the numbers are declining.
- Low crime
- The church community
- Community's interest in working to better quality of life issues