



COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT KICK START REPORT



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 Assistant Vice President of Community and Workforce Development Amy Whitehead, Managing Director Shelby Fiegel, and Project Coordinator Moriah Bruner.

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 in Arkansas. 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.

For more information, contact:

Mark Peterson, PhD
*Professor of Community and Economic
Development*
University of Arkansas Cooperative
Extension Service
2301 South University
Little Rock, AR 72204
501-671-2253
mpeterson@uaex.edu

Amy Whitehead, PCED
*Assistant Vice President, Community and
Workforce Development*
University of Central Arkansas
201 Donaghey Avenue, BHCC 102
Conway, AR 72035
501-852-2930
amyw@uca.edu

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Community Development Kick Start is a collaborative initiative between the University of Central Arkansas' (UCA) Center for Community and Economic Development and the University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service (UAEX) to provide a community with the tools it needs to develop a five-year strategic action plan. The program begins with a five-day, intensive workshop where a team of Community Development Institute (CDI) graduates (also called the Kick Start team) focuses on one Arkansas community, and creates a research-based report for that community. UCA and UAEX 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 Sheridan (including Grant County and the Sheridan School District) was selected. Sheridan has great assets and is doing many things very well. The excellent school system, community center, Grant County museum, B-17 Memorial, ball fields, and street 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 Sheridan and Grant County are shared by many other communities in our state and nation, and the community 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 Sheridan and Grant County to become a model for the nation as it identifies and implements breakthrough solutions to realize its full potential and desired future.

Normally people check out communities online before visiting them, so the Kick Start team researched Sheridan and Grant County online to gather insights about the community. When the team came together during the week of CDI, they went to Sheridan and interacted with citizens, took a guided driving 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 Sheridan and Grant County, 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 Sheridan and Grant County have much to be proud of. So these potential breakthroughs build on the good work that the community is already doing.

Potential breakthroughs for Sheridan and Grant County:

1) Planning for the Future - The growth experienced in the community and school district is a tremendous plus, but there needs to be a comprehensive plan developed that will ensure that the growth will enhance and not detract from the overall quality of life.

2) Community Identity and Brand - Develop a compelling community identity and brand that

describes your desired future, differentiates Sheridan from other communities, and attracts families, visitors, and businesses to the community, with an action plan to deliver on the brand promise.

3) Enhanced Online Presence – Enhance your online presence across the several Sheridan and Grant County websites with a common look, keep them up to date, and update travel websites such as TripAdvisor.

4) Quality of Life and Place – Create a clean, attractive community with walkability and trail systems that connect the entire community and a vibrant downtown, with effective signage and entrances to the city that are attractive to residents and visitors.

5) Support Employers and Identify New Job Opportunities – Support your employers with a business retention and expansion program and create robust education and workforce development to provide a skilled, motivated workforce. Also, support the Chamber by instituting a full time director and creating new business support programs and services.

6) Bring WiFi to Public Areas in the Community and Broadband Throughout the County – WiFi can help attract people of all ages who seek to be online while enjoying Sheridan’s amenities, while broadband throughout the county would enable residents to more fully participate in the 21st century economy.

7) Tap Outside Resources to Support Local Initiatives – This could include technical assistance, in-kind resources, as well as low-interest loans and grants.

8) Long-Term Sustainability Through New Funding and Finance – Successful communities create ways for their citizens and outsiders to financially support community and economic development. This requires community involvement to create financing mechanisms that sustainable 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.

KEY PARTNERS

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

- UCA Center for Community and Economic Development
- University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service Breakthrough Solutions Program
- CDI Advanced Year (Kick Start team) 2018
- City of Sheridan
- Grant County government
- Sheridan School District
- Community leaders in Grant County



KICK START TEAM & ASSIGNMENTS

Kick Start Sheridan began with a five-day, intensive workshop where a team of University of Central Arkansas Community Development Institute (CDI) graduates (also called the Kick Start team) worked in Sheridan. The Kick Start team was led by Dr. Mark Peterson of the University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service and Lorie Robertson of the Fort Chaffee Redevelopment Authority. Members of the team and the area they focused on in Sheridan include:



Jill Gregory,
Chaffee Crossing:
Physical Environment



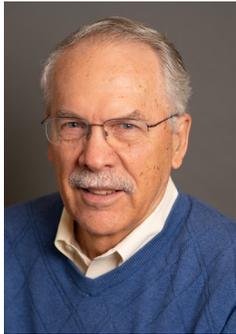
Kelly Lawrence,
City of Vilonia:
Things-To-Do



John Nabholz:
Physical Environment



Amanda Norwood,
City of Vilonia:
Health & Wellness



Dr. Mark Peterson,
UAEX:
Class Director



Lorie Robertson,
Chaffee Crossing:
Class Director



Marie Trisollini,
City of Camden:
Health & Wellness



Christopher Wasson,
Entergy Arkansas:
Business & Industry



Deborah West,
Monticello Chamber
of Commerce:
Arts & Culture



Amy Williams,
Cabot Chamber of
Commerce:
Education & Workforce



Candace Williams,
Rural Community
Alliance:
Education & Workforce



Kim Williams,
Conway Downtown
Partnership:
Downtown & Retail

WEB PRESENCE

Competing for top of mind awareness in this day and age requires a powerful online presence. Individuals interested in Sheridan would likely begin by researching the city online. Information that is readily available and easy to find on these sites is extremely important and can significantly impact a person's view of Sheridan in either a positive or negative way.

Web Presence Strengths:

- City, county, school district, Grant County Museum, and Sheridan Headlight have websites
- Pictures of the area are beautiful
- Can pay county utilities online
- TripAdvisor identifies three (3) things-to-do in Grant County

Web Presence Weaknesses:

City Website

- Lacks photos and direct email links to staff and council members
- No list or contact information for utility providers
- Cannot pay city utilities online
- City meeting schedules, agendas, and minutes not available
- Building/development codes, guidelines, and ordinances not available
- No links to chamber, school district, county, or community sites
- No welcome from mayor
- General content is not current
- No info promoting current projects, future projects, and value of projects
- Social media is out of date, lacking information, underutilized

Grant County Website

- No meeting schedules, agendas, or info
- Facebook page is not updated

Grant County Chamber of Commerce Website

- Website has limited links to member info and is difficult to search/navigate
- Limited info about activities, restaurants, utility providers, etc.
- Limited info about economic development contacts
- There is no list of commercial properties for sale

Sheridan School District

- Lacks links to city, county, and community websites

Overall

- City, county, school, community websites, and social media need to be linked together and updated regularly
- Post more high quality pictures and videos
- Community does not appear to be engaged online through 21st century avenues (websites, social media, etc.)

DRIVING TOUR IMPRESSIONS AND OBSERVATIONS

The Kick Start team explored Sheridan through a driving tour led by key community leaders. Based on this tour, here are the team's observations concerning key community indicators:

Business and Industry:

- Strong industrial base, including creative utilization of local resources
- Partnership with local industry is particularly evident between Kohler and the school with the new advanced manufacturing center

Education and Workforce:

- Impressive school system with new construction underway
- Strong community support and involvement is evident in the community

Economic Infrastructure:

- Growth in the community demonstrates the desirability of many families to move to Grant County and the Sheridan School District
- Curb and gutter in new subdivision is a sign of quality development
- Creation of a locally-owned bank is a sign of real cooperation, community pride, and local investment
- Grassroots farmers' market shows initiative and potential; working to bring it downtown could be a real win-win

Downtown Revitalization and Retail:

- Charming shops draw people downtown
- Open air shop is not a good fit with the rest of downtown

Physical Infrastructure:

- Urban Chair building shows what good landscaping can look like
- Some buildings could use a spruce-up
- Vacant lot in downtown would make an excellent pocket park
- A few houses detract from the beauty of some neighborhoods and may enable undesirable activities

Social Infrastructure:

- Active organizations show pride and caring in the community

Things-To-Do/Heritage:

- B-17 Memorial and Grant County Museum demonstrate tremendous community pride and sense of history
- Timberfest is an effective way to bring the community together to celebrate
- The vacant movie theater is a diamond in the rough with real potential
- Ball fields, swimming pool, splash pad, and tennis courts present opportunities for community recreation
- Community Center could use sprucing up

OVERALL STRENGTHS

- Hometown feel, caring community
- School District is the heart of the community
- School District is leading innovation in industry and workforce development (Kohler lab)
- Good manufacturing base
- Downtown has tremendous potential; historic buildings are still intact
- Strategically located for commuters and urban amenities
- Safe, low crime rate
- Strong churches that work together
- Creative city and county leadership
- Outdoor recreational opportunities
- Excellent museums, B-17 memorial, and Jenkins Ferry memorial
- Community Center
- Performing arts center
- Local newspaper

OVERALL CHALLENGES

- Need for overall planning for the future
- Inadequate broadband infrastructure
- Lack of code enforcement
- Lack of affordable workforce housing and rental properties
- Aging and insufficient infrastructure: sewer and storm water system and sidewalks
- Lack of coordination between utilities
- No city or county unified brand
- No economic development plan and staffing capacity
- Limited downtown retail hours
- Limited entertainment options (“nothing to do”) - restaurants, shopping, movie theater, live music, arts
- Absence of after-hours urgent health care
- No appearance of community pride on primary corridors
- Lack of leadership development opportunities

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK AND TRENDS

During focus groups and interviews with Sheridan and Grant County citizens, the Kick Start team collected citizen feedback and identified key trends in Sheridan and Grant County. The feedback included the following strengths and weaknesses in each of these community and economic development sectors:

Business and Industry:

Strengths

- Support of community and local leadership
- Strong locally owned bank
- Advanced manufacturing training center
- Geographic location

Weaknesses

- Not all employers involved in advanced manufacturing training center
- Utilities and infrastructure (not prepared for growth)
- Lacking economic development strategy to recruit industry
- Relationships with AEDC, state, and federal agencies

Physical Infrastructure:

Strengths

- Support of community and local leadership
- Street improvements in Sheridan
- Geographic location
- Sports complex

Weaknesses

- Long-term city planning/code enforcement
- Access to broadband/high-speed Internet
- Utilities and infrastructure (not prepared for growth)
- Lacking economic development strategy to recruit industry
- Relationships with state and federal agencies



Arts and Culture:

Strengths

- Fine arts education (private lessons/school)
- Churches offer creative outlets
- Timberfest/Grant County Fair showcases talent
- Grant County Museum offers student programs and summer day camp featuring local heritage

Weaknesses

- Resources such as money, manpower and time
- Performing arts activities are not community wide
- Limited by traditional ideas and avenues

Downtown Revitalization and Retail Environment:

Strengths

- Shopping and dining core
- Annual downtown events
- Downtown has maintained historic character
- Safe area

Weaknesses

- Shop hours and parking
- Limited access to adult beverage purchases
- Availability of family-friendly activities
- Clean and green efforts (clean sidewalks, planters or hanging baskets)
- Vision-building code enforcement
- Keeping library downtown
- No Merchants Association

Education and Workforce Development:

Strengths

- ACT Work Ready Community Initiative
- Partnerships with businesses and organizations
- “YJ Nation” fosters community pride and unity
- Qualified teachers, native to Sheridan community
- Career and technical education program being revamped through Kohler partnership
- TLC program in lieu of expulsion
- Advanced Placement and Concurrent Credit through College of the Ouachitas and University of Arkansas at Little Rock
- New facilities
- Telling story about school successes and variety of programs

Weaknesses

- No plan for new growth
- Resources (6A school in a 3A town)
- Limited residential access to Internet to do school work
- Partnerships with diverse businesses to develop skills for trades
- Basic life skills/soft skills gaps
- Low labor pool

Health and Wellness:

Strengths

- Diverse healthcare services available
- Diverse physical recreation facilities
- Splash pad and swimming pool
- Recreation Center
- Multiple commercial gyms
- Healthy food options at restaurants

Weaknesses

- No after-hours urgent care (evening/weekend)
- Recreational facilities need to be resurfaced and updated
- No multi-use trail system
- Sidewalks in disrepair, not continuous or connected
- No organized farmers’ market
- Community wants more healthy food options
- No free exercise options for seniors

Things-To-Do/Heritage:

Strengths

- Timberfest
- City of Sheridan Sports & Leisure Complex
- Grant County Fair
- School activities
- Church activities
- Grant County Museum
- Battle of Jenkins Ferry Memorial
- B-17 Memorial Park

Weaknesses

- Lack of communication between existing businesses and community
- Inconsistency of business hours
- Need more community-sponsored activities

GOLDEN NUGGETS

Build on your assets – plan **TOGETHER** to become a 21st Century community! Areas to focus on include: funding and finance, staffing, communication, infrastructure, and legislative relationships. You can also consider the following:

Tap outside resources:

- Southeast Arkansas Planning and Development District
- Arkansas Economic Development Commission (site selection, grant funding, etc.)
- Arkansas Historic Preservation Program
- Mainstreet Arkansas
- Arkansas Game & Fish Commission
- Arkansas Department of Tourism
- Arkansas Department of Transportation (TAP grants)
- Delta Regional Authority
- Expand relationship with the Stephens family
- AR Blue Cross (Blue & You Foundation)
- Walmart Foundation
- Winthrop Rockefeller Institute
- Baptist Foundation
- Clinton School Internships
- AARP Grants – walkability studies
- Small Business Administration
- USDA Rural Development
- Arkansas Community Foundation
- University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service (government contracting, retail and impact services, farmers' market information, and Master Gardeners)

Wellness and Quality of Place:

- Work with Baptist Health to get an urgent care clinic on property they own on Hwy. 167B
- Create a master trail plan
- Develop free exercise programs for seniors
- Build a community tornado shelter/multi-use facility

Online Presence:

- Update websites and social media
- Add attractions to TripAdvisor and other travel sites
- Make updates to the Chamber's website

Signage and Wayfinding System:

- Create a comprehensive signage system in town
- Utilize billboards
- Make new welcome sign larger and install closer to bypass junction

Other opportunities:

- Pursue leadership training: CDI, LeadAR Extension leadership program, state Chamber leadership program, or the Breakthrough Solutions Conference

WHAT DO YOU ENVISION THE REGION TO LOOK LIKE IN 10 YEARS?

10 years from today:

- Top of the line infrastructure
- Improved library
- Live action downtown
- Host sporting events
- Restaurants and hotels
- Diverse industry and culture
- Parks and programs
- More restaurant options and experiences
- Clean and green programs
- Quaint downtown, modern flair
- Food and entertainment
- All services are here in Sheridan (no need to leave)
- Brand for community
- Dedicated codes and land use
- Tech school/trade education/other training

WHAT DO WE WANT TO:

Preserve:

- Small town/hometown atmosphere
- School district momentum
- School support
- Historic aspects
- Safety
- Downtown
- Local bank

Improve:

- More community participation in planning for the future
- Sidewalks around schools, and downtown street plan
- Large/small business opportunities
- Clean up vacant lots
- Create a leadership program
- Sustainable backpack programs
- Internet service
- City codes and enforcement
- Job opportunities
- Chamber of Commerce (expand and hire full time director)

WHAT IS THE LOW HANGING FRUIT WE MUST TAKE ADVANTAGE OF?

- Merchants Association
- Movies on the square or in the park
- Signs on highway
- Better communication in community
- Recycling (county grant)
- Website updates
- One-stop shop combined
- City wide cleanup day
- Branding/marketing
- Volunteer coordination
- Wayfinding signs
- Planters/beautification downtown
- Better codes/enforcement
- Revamp/add signage throughout Sheridan and the county (example: Northwest Arkansas)
- Sidewalk cleanup, better sidewalk accessibility
- Better Internet and connectivity

NEXT STEPS

Following the release of this report in September 2018, the community will:

- Launch eight-month community engagement process
- Form action teams to address high priority issues and opportunities
- Set goals and identify strategies for community improvement
- Start action on quick wins
- Complete and publish action plan
- Launch implementation process

LOOKING FORWARD

A special thanks to the following individuals for their leadership, cooperation, and hospitality in welcoming the Community Development Kick Start team to Sheridan:

- Mayor Joe Wise, City of Sheridan
- Carrie Smith, City of Sheridan
- Brad McGinley, Grant County Cooperative Extension
- Lauren Goins, Sheridan School District
- Jerrod Williams, Sheridan School District
- DJ Wallace, Business Owner
- Jan Wallace, Business Owner
- Betty Cook, Sheridan City Council
- Jake Easley, VP of Grant County Chamber of Commerce
- Lacey Hix, Business Owner
- Tina Hurtt, Grant County Chamber Executive Director
- Justin Wise, Community Member
- Judge Randy Pruitt, Grant County
- Lisa Grove, Accountant
- Tammy Winters, Business Owner/Non-profit

We appreciate the community leaders in Sheridan and Grant County who came out and participated in the community meetings. Your active participation and commitment is invaluable to launching the Kick Start development process. Sheridan 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 Sheridan and Grant County are most knowledgeable about your community, and 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.

Thanks to all who have been involved with this initiative so far - we look forward to seeing great things happen in Sheridan and Grant County!

To connect with Kick Start Sheridan, please follow us on Facebook at:
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