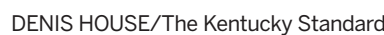


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BARDSTOWN MAYOR DICK HEATON



Ten years later, Streetscape has revived downtown



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ty Economic Development Agency and Bardstown Industrial Development Corporation. “People do take note of these lists as future towns they may want to visit. I remember when we won the Most Beautiful Small Town in America that guests would come into the office with the article on Bardstown in their USA Today newspaper and say that’s why they were here. You just can’t put a price on this type of recognition.”

Taking a cue from neighboring cities

Heaton was in his first term as mayor of Bardstown when the city received the funding, but worked on the initial project while he was on the Main Street Committee. “We felt like we needed something more permanent and visible for our downtown,” Heaton said. “We wanted to improve the viability of downtown.” So it was decided to start the Streetscape Improvement Plan, taking a cue from nearby towns that had recently revitalized their downtowns with renovations.

“Springfield, Lebanon and Hodgenville had all done renovations to their downtowns,” Heaton said. “We felt like it was time to be more aggressive.”

Economy tanks, help arrives with stimulus plan

The city applied for funds and was approved and from a budget standpoint was looking at phasing the plan in over a 3-5 year period. Then the bottom fell out of the economy with the Great Recession.

When it looked like the project might be put on hold, the Obama Administration enacted its federal stimulus plan, The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, which brought the project back to life.

“We had a shovel-ready project, which helped us obtain the funds,” Heaton said. “Myself and Dean Watts went to the transportation cabinet and requested the funding. It was very unlucky that the economy collapsed, but we were very lucky to have a shovel-ready project. That was one of the things the state was looking for.”

Congressman Brett Guthrie also helped the city secure \$100,000. The city put up the remaining \$800,000, which went to rebuilding the downtown water distribution lines in the four-block quarter. With downtown being in the National Register of



FILE PHOTO

November marked 10 years since Bardstown secured the grant for its streetscape, which officials and business owners say has inspired a renaissance downtown. Pictured in November 2009, former Gov. Steve Beshear spoke on Court Square when delivering more than \$2 million in grants for the project

Historic Places, a lot of rules and regulations had to be adhered to before the project could be completed.

Public meetings proved beneficial

Heaton said several productive meetings were held with the community to receive feedback on the project, both positive and critical. The city also took a study conducted by (former resident) Rick Hill on how to improve downtown, and a lot of the final details were derived from his study.

“A lot of local people saw what could be the final results and they started investing simultaneously with the project,” Heaton said.

The wheels were in motion, and within a year the project was completed. While downtown Bardstown wasn’t suffering to the extent that some small cities were (with businesses leaving), Heaton said they really did need to upgrade what they had to offer potential clients.

Downtown revitalized

The public-funded project inspired a sort of synergy, officials and business owners said, encouraging

private investment in the area.

“Bardstown has experienced a real renaissance since the streetscape completion in 2011,” Huston said. “The downtown was re-energized due to the rehab of the sidewalks, street lights, benches and a rebuild of the Courthouse Square. It sparked new interest from property owners to do their own ‘face-lifts’ on their buildings and eventually enticed the addition of many new businesses.”

Heaton feels like the project was one of the best things the city could have done.

“Now we have many more restaurants, profitable businesses and residents downtown,” Heaton said. “The property values also escalated and the demand for downtown space were very strong.” Heaton also noted that a lot of this happened at the same time when the Kentucky Bourbon Trail tourism really started picking up steam.

Huston said the streetscape acted as a sort of down payment, and it is still paying off.

“There has been significant investment in downtown post-streetscape by many local residents including Joe and Jenny Buckman and the Kreso family,” Huston said. “In addition to the new businesses that have opened on the street level, many



DENIS HOUSE/The Kentucky Standard

A customer looks over some bubble bath bombs at Making Good Scentz. The business opened five years ago on Third Street.

second floor spaces were renovated to become accommodations for residents and overnight guests. We consider our downtown historic district to be one of our largest attractions in Bardstown as people enjoy visiting for various reasons including the history, the architecture, the shops and the bars and restaurants. Many guests may just be driving through Bardstown on their way to another destination and will stop because of its quaint and inviting personality.”

Businesses thrive

When Steve Stivers decided to open his business, Making Good Scentz, five years ago, he was impressed with the way downtown had been revitalized.

“This is one of the cleanest downtowns I’ve seen,” Stivers said. “The way they redid this area, I love the way it looks. It’s made it a lot easier for customers to come and go.” Making Good Scentz offers a variety of handmade soaps, lotions, scrubs and candles, to name just a few items.

Catherine Clements opened Peacock on Third

in 2009, a high-end affordable clothing store that originally sold just women’s clothes, but has expanded to include men’s fashions. She outgrew her original location (on Third Street) and when the opportunity came to purchase the building across the street, she jumped at it because she wanted to own her own building. She said the Streetscape Project made a difference.

“It has been very beneficial and very positive,” Clements said. “It has helped us keep the most beautiful downtown title. The city is always doing something every year to make it better. Mayor Heaton and his administration have done an excellent job in keeping the area clean and always coming up with new enhancements.”

The renovations to downtown increased the number of visitors and residents to the area, which means Bardstown must tackle another issue: parking.

“We hope to start a study in early 2020 that will be completed by the end of the year to tackle parking issues,” Heaton said. “We have a major need for more parking downtown, for residents, visitors and businesses.”

And new businesses continue to locate here, including several gift shops, taverns and coming soon, a burger and milk shake restaurant.

Bloomfield also reaped benefit of funds

Bardstown wasn’t the only Nelson County town to receive state funds 10 years ago. Beshear also gave Bloomfield \$230,500 to be used for sidewalk improvements along portions of U.S. 62, Faith Avenue and Arnold Lane, as part of the Safe Route to School program, to allow students to safely get to class and improve their health by walking to school. Safe Routes to School projects are designed to encourage students in kindergarten through eighth grade to walk or ride bicycles to school, which gives them exercise and reduces motor vehicle traffic at the same time.

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