



STRATEGIC COMMUNITY PLAN

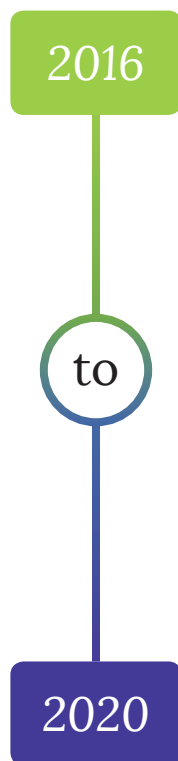
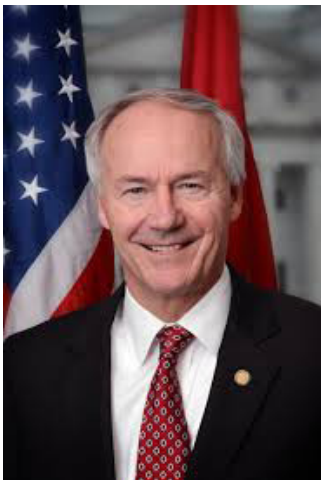


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STATE OF ARKANSAS

ASA HUTCHINSON
GOVERNOR

October 28, 2015

Dear Citizens of Independence County,

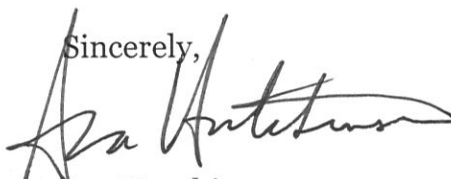
I am writing to express my support for the strategic planning initiative, IMPACT Independence County.

On behalf of the State of Arkansas, it is my privilege to recognize the work of the Batesville Chamber of Commerce, Lyon College, the University of Arkansas Community College Batesville, and the residents of Independence County for the strategic planning initiative, IMPACT Independence County.

This initiative gives the people of Independence County a plan to improve quality of life and quality of place, achieve excellence in education and boost economic development. I met with the leaders of IMPACT Independence County in July of 2015 and am confident of their commitment to the community and the vision they have for helping Independence County to thrive.

Communities working together to find solutions on the local level are an important part of what gives the State of Arkansas such a bright future. I commend the local volunteers working hard to help IMPACT Independence County be successful in their initiative to strengthen the community.

Sincerely,



Asa Hutchinson

Citizens of Independence County
409 Vine Street
Batesville, AR 72501

To Whom It May Concern:

This letter is to lend my support for IMPACT Independence County's new strategic plan. This plan strives for implementation of a comprehensive community initiative that will improve quality of life, quality of place as well as all areas of economic development for residents of Independence County, Arkansas. This strategic plan can be a blue print for Independence County's changing and growing community as it identifies the strengths, weaknesses, and challenges face in today's rapidly changing global strategy for growth.

This plan has input from the community, business leaders, institutions of higher education, the healthcare industry, and the tourist sector in Independence County. I believe when members of a community work together to form a cohesive plan and actually work that plan, they will experience the fruition of that plan.


My dream for the economic development of Arkansas is that various factions of communities come together to work for the common good of the community and this plan certainly addresses that. The staff and resources of the Arkansas Economic Development Commission and I are committed to moving forward for better communities and economic development.

Sincerely,



Mike Preston
Executive Director

PARTNERS



Governor of Arkansas
Arkansas Economic Development



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Executive Summary

IMPACT Independence County is the ten-year strategic community plan of Independence County, Arkansas (the “Plan”). The Plan has been approved by the Independence County Quorum Court and the city council of each incorporated community in Independence County, collectively (the “County”).

The Plan, which has been endorsed by a substantial number of community, civic, business, educational and governmental organizations, was created over a 6-month period by approximately 300 county residents and depicts their collective hopes and desires for the future of Independence County and is a broad vision of what can be.

The purpose of IMPACT Independence County is to develop and implement community vision—initiatives that improve the quality of life, quality of place, and economic opportunities for all County residents.

The IMPACT Independence County document is a comprehensive blueprint that organizes long-term vision into 26 strategic goals and 136 workable action items that will allow organized and sustained community engagement.

The Plan will be used to access and coordinate resources from federal, state, and municipal agencies; philanthropic foundations; economic development organizations; key regional leaders, legislators, and commercial business organizations.

IMPACT
Independence County



HOW WAS THE PLAN CREATED

In July of 2015, the Batesville Area Chamber of Commerce (BACC), Lyon College, and the University of Arkansas Community College at Batesville (UACCB) convened an initial meeting of over 300 Independence County residents to discuss the feasibility of a comprehensive countywide planning process, and unanimous support of the process among everyone present led to the Plan’s commencement.

At that time, a comprehensive survey was conducted to determine which community aspects held the focus and concern of Independence County residents. Over 1,200 survey responses were received. Additionally, a focus group of Lyon College and UACCB students convened to discuss their interests in relation to the Plan.

Based on community responses, 4 IMPACT Independence County Subcommittees were created to address the top 25 community areas of focus or concern. These subcommittees are listed below:

1. Economic Prosperity Committee
2. Tourism Committee
3. Educational Excellence Committee
4. Healthy Living and Wellbeing Committee

The table below identifies the top 25 community focus areas and the IMPACT Independence County Committees charged with addressing them.



ECONOMIC PROSPERITY



TOURISM

Agriculture
Airport
Entrepreneurship
Job Creation
Land Use and Planning
New Industry
Retail
Retirement Community
Small Business

Arts and Culture
Beautification
Convention Facilities
Downtown
Downtown Residential
Recreation Trails
Tourism
White River

Higher Education
Pre-K-12 Education
Workforce Training

Environment
Parks and Recreation
Public Safety
Public Transportation
Quality Healthcare
Recreation Trails
Sidewalks
Youth Activities



EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE



HEALTHY LIVING AND WELLBEING

Each IMPACT Independence County subcommittee elected between 2 and 4 co-chairs, and each subcommittee met at least twice per month from September 1 to November 30, 2015. Subcommittee meeting attendance generally ranged from 15 to 30 participants. All meetings were open to the public. Basically, anyone attending a subcommittee meeting was enrolled as a subcommittee member and was eligible to vote on matters under consideration.

Subcommittees are intended to be self-perpetuating and will elect between 2 and 4 subcommittee co-chairmen on an annual basis. All County residents who are interested in contributing to the fulfillment of specific action items may join a subcommittee.

IMPLEMENTATION

COMMITTEE STRUCTURE AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Batesville Area Chamber of Commerce (BACC), with the aid of IMPACT subcommittees, will provide professional and technical support to implement IMPACT from 2016 through 2026. The subcommittees are charged with implementation of the Plan.

A steering committee of 20 Independence County residents will be formed to provide overall governance and oversight for planning and implementation processes. The steering committee will be chaired by representatives of each convening organization, a subcommittee co-chair from each subcommittee and 5 at-large county residents elected by the steering committee membership. Steering committee members hold terms of 3 years with an option of term renewal for an additional 3 years. The steering committee is self-perpetuating and will elect its own membership.

The formation of the IMPACT Independence County Steering Committee and subcommittee structures creates a viable, long-term planning and implementation structure through which community residents can engage and from which strategic goals will be achieved.

VISION AND OPPORTUNITIES



Economic Prosperity – Independence County will provide an inviting and progressive business environment that provides quality jobs for all community residents. We will prepare for our economic future by developing jobs that compliment and conform to the rapidly changing 21st Century by investing in state-of-the-art technology infrastructure. We will support and grow existing business, expand entrepreneurship training, and develop innovative business partnerships with Lyon College and UACCB (collectively, the “Colleges”) to retain college graduates in Independence County.



Tourism – IMPACT Independence County will brand the County as an atmosphere that is attractive to all generations. We will be nationally-recognized as a uniquely progressive, rural, southern college community with outdoor recreation and adventure opportunities for all. The development of strategic assets will allow Independence County to become an important economic development tool for Arkansas.

Historic Main Street will assume the brand “Downtown Alive” and will be redeveloped to create a community atmosphere that is vibrant, exciting, and attractive to all County residents, including college students, young families, and retirees. An emphasis will be placed on restoring unique and architecturally attractive downtown historic buildings, churches, beautiful turn-of-the-century neighborhoods, and historic cinemas, and developing residential loft apartments, unique shopping venues, antique stores, eclectic and trendy clothing stores, bakery shops, coffee shops, internet cafes, high-end restaurants, and pubs. The Colleges will provide sporting, art, and cultural activities. We will combine the vibrancy of a college community with the ambiance of a small southern town.

Independence County will be a nationally-recognized retirement community based on its position as a uniquely progressive, rural, southern college community in proximity to beautiful outdoor recreation and adventure opportunities with the presence of a high-quality medical center and over 100 medical doctors. These assets will attract retirement community developers and large numbers of active retirees to the area.

The proximity to world class outdoor recreation (mountains, rivers, lakes, etc.) and the development of these strategic assets will allow Independence County to become an important statewide center of outdoor recreation. Tourists will be attracted to an interconnected complex of outdoor attractions, including hiking, biking, and horseback riding trails along the White River. A fully-staffed visitors’ information center will promote countywide activities. The City of Batesville Community Center and Aquatics Park will serve as a venue for statewide meetings and corporate retreats. High-quality youth sporting events and tournaments (baseball, soccer, softball, swimming, volleyball, etc.) will be aggressively marketed across the region and state.

Exciting festivals and unique cultural events will attract out-of-town, weekend guests: the Arkansas Scottish Festival, the Cave City Watermelon Festival, Celebrate America, Motorcycles on Main, the Ozark Foothills FilmFest, the TNT Festival, the White River Water Carnival, and White River Wonderland.



Educational Excellence – Lyon College and UACCB enrollments will dramatically increase from joint messaging and marketing efforts with Independence County and its business and healthcare communities. Strategic marketing will occur at a regional, state, and national level.

Independence County’s healthcare, manufacturing, industrial, technology and poultry businesses will benefit from employee training and continued education at a state-of-the-art technical training, educational, and career center on the UACCB campus.

Independence County will become a dynamic center of higher education with unique educational partnerships between K-12 public schools, higher education, and the regional and state business community. Progressive partnerships between education and business will promote entrepreneurial growth and provide training and support for all students, creating high-quality and expanding employment opportunities for county residents.



Healthy Living and Wellbeing – Independence County will become North Central Arkansas’s regional medical center by expanding progressive vision in high-quality medical care and eliminating the need to travel elsewhere for medical services by offering a full lineup traditional and specialized medical practices.

INDEPENDENCE COUNTY SWOT ANALYSIS

STRENGTHS & OPPORTUNITIES

- Natural Beauty of Area
- Good Quality of Life
- College Town Ambience
- Small-Town, Southern Charm
- Regional Businesses
- Medical and Employment Center
- Regional Airport with 6,000 Foot Runway
- 5-Lane State Highway that Connects Directly to Interstate 167
- Growing Industry: Poultry, Bad Boy, Future Fuel, Intimidator

WHITE RIVER MEDICAL CENTER

- Over 100 Medical Doctors on Staff
- Medical Residency Program - 50 Physician Residents

LYON COLLEGE & UACCB

- Several Thousand College Students in Residence
- High-Quality, Professional Educators and Families
- State of the Art Dining, Meeting and Theater Facilities
- Unique Educational Programs
- Cultural Events: Arkansas Scottish Festival, Lecture Series
- College Sports

PREMIUM, INNOVATIVE PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEMS

- Progressive K-12, Higher Education, and Business Partnerships
- Educated and Skilled Workforce
- Countywide School Choice/Competition Between Schools

SUPERIOR OUTDOOR RECREATION & ADVENTURE

- Batesville Motor Speedway
- Mark Martin NASCAR Museum
- White River Canoeing, Kayaking, Trout Fishing
- Ozark Mountain Scenic Hiking Trails and Mountain Biking
- Blanchard Springs Caverns
- Jamestown Crag Rock Climbing
- Greers Ferry Lake Boating, Scuba Diving, Skiing
- Spring River Canoeing and Kayaking
- Poke Bayou Canoeing and Fishing
- Eagle Mountain Country Club Golfing and Swimming
- Ozark Folk Center

SPORTING ACTIVITIES

- Premium Recreation Center: Indoor pool, basketball, other recreational and meeting venues, and a 2,000-seat convention center
- Regional Youth Sports Complex: Baseball, Softball, and Soccer

WEAKNESSES
&
THREATS

- General Appearance of Community Corridors
- Stagnant Population
- Outflow of Commerce
- Lack of Business/Jobs
- Insufficient Structure, Funding, and Coordination of Economic Development Organization

DIMINISHED COMMUNITY
CAPACITY TO IMPROVE

- Disjointed Leadership
- Lack of Community Vision
- Tension Between Batesville, Southside, and County
- No Structured Marketing of County/Region
- Disconnect Between College and City

LACK OF SUFFICIENT
ENTERTAINMENT VENUES

- Restaurants, Pubs, Retail Shopping, Cultural Events
- Young Family and College-Focused Entertainment
- Limited Retail Shopping

INADEQUATE HOUSING
STOCK

- Limited Quality Ownership/Rental for Professionals
- Limited Affordable Housing for Industry Workers

OTHER

- Limited Support for Entrepreneurs
- Limited Technology Infrastructure in Rural Areas
- Workforce Lacks Sufficient Soft Skills Training
- High Tax Rates Within the County
- No Advertising and Promotion Tax
- Community Health Issues
- Illegal Drug Use



ECONOMIC PROSPERITY

Independence County has a diverse economy with significant business and employment opportunities that are created by an expanding poultry industry, a large chemical plant, a regional medical center, and numerous technology-based manufacturing and service businesses. Agriculture (cattle, poultry, row crop) has, historically, been and remains the County's primary economic engine.

The Economic Prosperity committee's objectives will maximize business opportunities for current businesses and industries; develop an organized, progressive, and funded economic development structure to attract new businesses and industries; support expansion of Lyon College and UACCB; promote downtown redevelopment for main streets in all Independence County communities; create master plan retirement community concepts and infrastructure; and develop a formal infrastructure blueprint to attract new technology-based entrepreneurial businesses and start-up organizations.

STRATEGIC GOAL #1

Develop a unified economic development structure for Independence County by merging current economic development organizations to form a singular, countywide organization.

Action Steps in Support of Strategic Goal Number One Are:

- a.** Merge all economic development organizations (Batesville Area Chamber of Commerce, Independence County Economic Development, Inc., Independence County Economic Development Foundation, and Batesville-Independence County Industrial Development, Inc.) into a single, unified, and countywide organizational structure with both public and private governance and oversight, as follows:

Unifying Public-Private Entity /Marketing Entity:

Batesville Regional Economic Development Alliance and Chamber of Commerce (the “Alliance”)

Board Members:

- Independence County Economic Development, Inc. Board Members
- Chamber of Commerce Board Chair
- Chamber of Commerce President/CEO
- IMPACT Independence County Board Chair and Vice Chair
- 2 At-Large Community Representatives

Responsibilities: The Alliance will act as the primary point of contact for economic development in Independence County and will assume the responsibility of raising private funds and contracting public funds to implement comprehensive economic initiatives for Independence County. This organization will act as a facilitator of funding for Independence County’s private entity structure.

Management: Batesville Area Chamber of Commerce President/CEO

Staff: Batesville Area Chamber of Commerce Staff

Public Entity:

Independence County Economic Development, Inc.

Board Members: 5 voting board members and 15 non-voting members who are appointed by the Independence County Judge and approved by the Independence County Quorum Court to represent all areas of Independence County

Responsibilities: This entity will manage the investment of public monies and oversee economic development initiatives and activities.

Management: Batesville Area Chamber of Commerce President/CEO

Staff: Economic development professionals and appropriate staff as provided by Independence County Economic Development, Inc.’s annual budget

Private Entity:

Batesville Area Chamber of Commerce (“Chamber”)

Board Members: Self-perpetuating board structure with term limits

Responsibilities: The primary emphasis of the Chamber Board of Directors is economic development in the form of business retention and expansion with a specific focus on the retail business sector.

Management: Batesville Area Chamber of Commerce President/CEO

Staff: Chamber professionals and appropriate staff as provided by the Chamber’s annual budget

- b.** Provide funding that allows the Alliance to successfully engage in meaningful business, industry, and job growth efforts.
- i. Promote and seek passage of a half-cent, countywide sales tax that is specifically targeted towards economic development. Revenues from this tax should provide approximately \$1.5 million a year that can be used to promote economic and job growth in Independence County.
 - ii. Obtain 5-year commitments (2016-2021) from local businesses and industries to establish an annual economic development assessment of no less than \$100,000 to partially fund 2 positions: a tourism director and a grant writer. The grant writer will focus on grants that promote countywide economic and job development with an emphasis on government grant opportunities.

STRATEGIC GOAL #2

Support the growth of local business and industry and assist local businesses with their existing needs and challenges.

Action Steps in Support of Strategic Goal Number Two Are:

- a.** The Alliance, in partnership with the community services group at Entergy, will form a Business Retention and Expansion program (“BRE”) designed to serve existing and start-up businesses in Independence County.
- b.** The BRE team will meet with businesses that employ between 80% and 90% of the county’s workforce and will discuss business needs, challenges, and actions that could be taken by the BRE Team and Alliance to strengthen business performance.
- c.** Conduct meaningful on-site visits with businesses and plant managers so that actionable programs of assistance, if necessary, are developed. When applicable, the BRE Team will identify those businesses that are managed by an out-of-state headquarters. In these cases, an ongoing visitation schedule will be developed so that the site manager and the Alliance can visit company headquarters on a periodic basis to determine needs and challenges of senior management as it pertains to their Independence County operations.
- d.** Coordinate financial and technical assistance with Arkansas State University’s Small Business Technology & Development Center.
- e.** Provide grant writing support services to entrepreneurial and start-up businesses.
- f.** Create a downtown merchants association to specifically promote and market downtown businesses.
- g.** The Chamber will support local businesses as follows:
 - Mobilization and focusing community support and collective marketing
 - Proactively engaging in political and judicial processes
 - Assisting with infrastructure needs

STRATEGIC GOAL #3

Expand the capacity of the Alliance/Chamber to allow engagement with large businesses—specifically, industrial recruitment and job growth efforts.

Action Steps in Support of Strategic Goal Number Three Are:

- a.** Redesign and upgrade the Alliance/Chamber website to create a cyberspace community doorstep and through this doorstep rebrand Independence County as a progressive and economically aggressive destination community. Focus website presentation on key components of the SWOT analysis with a primary emphasis on quality of life, quality of place, unique economic assets and opportunities, and skilled workforce.

Website design will incorporate critical matters considered by professional site locators and will proactively address such matters to ensure Independence County competitively presents itself through all online venues.

- b.** Engage a nationally-recognized economic consulting firm to perform a targeted industry analysis to determine and advise the Alliance on most likely businesses/industries to locate in Independence County. The results of this study will allow the Alliance to proactively target businesses and industries that are identified.

- c.** The Alliance will prepare, maintain, and provide meaningful demographic and labor market information covering the Independence County regional area to professional site locators.

The demographic data will be used in professional quality marketing materials, will be posted on the Alliance/Chamber web site and used by the economic development executive and her/his staff to proactively recruit business/industry to Independence County.

- i. In conjunction with the Arkansas Economic Development Commission and the Arkansas State Chamber of Commerce, the Alliance will prepare a comprehensive labor study to document the demographics, availability, and quality of the Independence County's regional labor pool.
- ii. The Alliance will create an Independence County Regional Market Area database that provides competitive analysis of property values, rent, etc. The database will include the following on all commercial and industrial buildings: cost per square foot, sales comparisons, rental comparisons, market analysis, owner contact information, local lenders, local appraisers, vacancy rates, building condition, photographs, sample development agreements, potential funding sources, and other pertinent information.
- iii. Develop an online inventory database of office and professional space available for sale or rent. The database will be updated monthly and will focus on large, contiguous office/building locations for call center-type businesses as well as smaller spaces for professional service organizations and technology-based start-up companies.
- iv. Develop an inventory database of available commercial and industrial property available for sale or rent. The database will be updated monthly and will include available square footage, zoning designation, condition

of property, required tenant improvements, lease terms, and contract information. Specifically determine usability of currently vacant industrial properties.

- d.* Construct a state-of-the art Alliance building on a major traffic corridor—either at the top of Ramsey Mountain or adjacent to the White River. Locate all economic development organizations established within the Alliance umbrella in this building. The new building will create a strong and progressive image of success that is important to the economic growth of Independence County.

The new building will have sufficient space to provide business/industry location teams (“Advance Teams”) confidential working space and will utilize state-of-the-art technology with high-speed internet connection and telephone conferencing/video conferencing capabilities.

Sell the old Batesville Area Chamber of Commerce building and apply all proceeds to the cost of the new building construction.

STRATEGIC GOAL #4

Develop a ten-year plan to attract commercial aviation business to the Batesville Regional Airport.

Action Steps in Support of Strategic Goal Number Four Are:

- a.* Engage an aerospace engineering and consulting company to develop a feasibility study, financial analysis, location analysis, and federal and state funding schematic for the Batesville Regional Airport.
- b.* The feasibility study will identify the political and economic feasibility of converting the Batesville Regional Airport into an avionics commerce center.

STRATEGIC GOAL #5

Develop a ten-year plan of strategic investment in optimum-speed fiber optic technology and communication infrastructure. Independence County will proactively market this technology to attract technology-based entrepreneurs and startup companies.

Action Steps in Support of Strategic Goal Number Five Are:

- a.* Develop a comprehensive plan to provide optimum-speed fiber optic internet service to all primary business corridors, college campuses, and K-12 school buildings in Independence County. This plan will detail infrastructure requirements, capital investment, management, and organizational support necessary for such services.
- b.* Create an internet umbrella over key centers of commerce and education.

STRATEGIC GOAL #6

The Alliance will proactively market the Independence County region as a premier location for businesses and families. Aggressive and proactive marketing efforts will target state, regional, and national business organizations, trade associations, and professional industrial recruitment and location companies.

Action Steps in Support of Strategic Goal Number Six Are:

- a.** Prepare high-quality marketing materials that address the strengths of Independence County. Marketing material will include print and video media that will be distributed through the creation of a professional website. Marketing material will blend financial, workforce, and quality of life reasons to locate to Independence County with a focus on the image of a small, southern community with significant tourism/recreational opportunities and the ambience of a college setting.
- b.** The Independence County region will be broadly defined as “North Central Arkansas” and will be specifically branded to establish a powerful, emotional identity and strong sense of place. The regional brand and emotional identity will be used as a foundation for all regional marketing and job growth efforts.
- c.** Alliance representatives will attend 2 national economic development/industrial recruitment conventions annually and will develop relationships with the top 10 professional recruitment and location companies.

STRATEGIC GOAL #7

Double student enrollment at Lyon College and UACCB within 10 years. Such expansion will require collective branding and marketing between Lyon College, UACCB, and Batesville.

Action Steps in Support of Strategic Goal Number Seven Are:

- a.** Develop a blue ribbon committee of college, city, county, business and community leaders to establish a joint strategic direction and scope of work through which all parties coordinate to double the student population of Lyon College and UACCB.
- b.** Within the parameters of the strategic direction established by the blue ribbon committee, city and county governments, the business community, and colleges will form a working group of senior staff to execute specific development activities. This group will report to the blue ribbon committee at least quarterly.
- c.** Engage a prominent, national, professional master planning consultancy with the specific intention to create a community design that exhibits the ambience and charm of a small, southern, college community with a unique and eclectic historic downtown that is comprised of residential and business areas and neighborhoods immediately surrounding both colleges that serve the residency of the college communities.
- d.** In order to become attractive to a youthful college population and increase the ability of Lyon College and UACCB to attract an increasing number of students, establish a small business/retail environment—small and eclectic retail shopping, outdoor outfitter stores, dining, music and pubs (think Dickson Street in Fayetteville)—that serves the needs of the college student and young family population.

- e. Create a countywide Business After Hours program that rotates program hosting between all communities in Independence County. The Business After Hours Program will be revisioned as large, public gatherings with street parties, live bands, art shows, etc. that includes all age groups with a focus on college students and young families.
- f. Evaluate the feasibility of an Independence Promise modeled after the El Dorado Promise and the Arkadelphia Promise that would ensure high school graduates are financially supported to attend college at either Lyon College or UACCB.

STRATEGIC GOAL #8

Implement a small business incubator program to support entrepreneurial and startup businesses.

Action Steps in Support of Strategic Goal Number Eight Are:

- a. Organize and structure the small business incubator as a partnership between Main Street Batesville, the Arkansas Regional Innovation Hub, Lyon College, UACCB, and the Arkansas State University Small Business Technology and Development Center.
- b. Develop a specific financial plan and structure that allows the small business incubator to be financially sustainable.
- c. In partnership with the banking institutions in Independence County, create a low-interest program of gap financing for small businesses that graduate from the incubator program.
- d. Provide general business training, computer training, financial literacy workshops, and technical assistance to small business owners.
- e. Coordinate incubator programs with the hospitality training programs of Lyon College and UACCB to specifically assist and support tourism-related businesses in the form of business plan fundamentals, technical assistance, marketing, and finance.

STRATEGIC GOAL #9

Expand and upgrade technology infrastructure in the industrial park to classify it as a technology park.

STRATEGIC GOAL #10

Engage an experienced economic development consulting firm to prepare a retail gap analysis of Independence County with specific emphasis on lost opportunities to Jonesboro, Searcy, Cabot, and Little Rock.

Action Steps in Support of Strategic Goal Number Ten Are:

- a.** The retail gap analysis will identify retail organizations and franchises with a high likelihood of locating in Independence County due to alignment of Independence County demographics and corporate/franchise standards.
- b.** The retail gap analysis will include a study of the impact on Independence County of maintaining its dry county status. A working group of interested citizens will use this study to develop an organized process through which county residents can evaluate a potential change from dry county status.
- c.** The retail gap analysis will make specific recommendations on the process and timeline to attract appropriate retail venues. Based on such recommendations, an aggressive plan of outreach to appropriate retail organizations will be developed.





TOURISM

Tourism is a large part of Independence County's economy, providing 450 jobs and bringing just under 160,000 visitors to our towns and cities each year. Despite being a nearly \$50 million a year industry, Independence County's tourism sector has been on a steady decline, both in terms of visitor interest and revenue, for more than a decade.

IMPACT Independence County establishes specific goals that maximize the area's potential as a tourist destination and boosts the economy through focused development and marketing of tourism assets. The Plan organizes a permanent tourism structure that is designed to manage tourism initiatives, promote tourism-related jobs, provide for innovative community development, enhance natural resources, and promote recreational opportunities and cultural activities.

Tourism is one of the most efficient ways to create jobs in Independence County. Existing natural resources and attractions lend themselves perfectly to increased job opportunities for county residents. IMPACT Independence County is dedicated to creating tourism-related jobs and providing opportunities for entrepreneurial growth.

Historic Main Street will be branded as "Downtown Alive" and will become an exciting enclave that is welcoming to all generations. The strategic investment in Historic Downtown Batesville and an intentional connection to Lyon College will create a vibrant college community that combines the ambiance of a small, southern town to create a unique college community atmosphere attractive to college students, young families, and retirees.

The combination of vibrant small town community atmosphere surrounded by beautiful mountains, lakes and rivers and supported by exemplary and progressive medical care allows Independence County to become a nationally-recognized retirement community. A national marketing campaign will be designed to promote this significant community potential.

Independence County's natural beauty and many outdoor recreation and adventure opportunities will be brought to life on the banks of the White River and across the Ozark Foothills of North Central Arkansas. We will develop and market our abundant natural assets

through development of the White River waterfront and unified trails and signage—making our community not only a tourist destination but a place people want to stay and live—from college students to retirees.

STRATEGIC GOAL #1

Establish a countywide Tourism Commission with an executive director and staff that organizes and promotes the county's overall tourism activities and coordinates such efforts with tourist-related businesses and the county's economic development organizations. It is intended that Independence County becomes a premiere state, regional and national center of outdoor recreation as the Gateway to the Ozark Mountains.

Action Steps in Support of Strategic Goal Number One Are:

- a.*** Form a Tourism Commission as a division of the Batesville Regional Economic Development Alliance and Chamber of Commerce. The Tourism Commission will oversee the executive director in a comprehensive re-branding and marketing effort of Independence County to the state, region, and nation.
- b.*** Obtain initial financial support to operate the Tourism Commission from local businesses. Long-term economic support will be obtained through continued local business support, passage of a countywide advertising and promotions tax, and available state and federal grants.
- c.*** Update the overall brand identity of Independence County and its cities and towns to produce a clean, updated, and unified image. This brand will encompass North Central Arkansas and will be the foundation for a professional marketing plan. A detailed plan for placement of destination and historic signage throughout Independence County will be developed to direct visitors to the county's outdoor and historic assets.
- d.*** Work with Lyon College and UACCB to develop a hospitality training program to support tourism growth in the area. This program will occur as continuing education for current tourism employees and/or professional certifications/designations for college students.
- e.*** Develop a Regional Visitor's Center that will serve as a focal point for visitors to North Central Arkansas. Consider staffing the visitor's center with Lyon College and UACCB students through an innovative work-study program that allows students to gain experience in the tourism profession.
- f.*** Develop a professional marketing strategy designed to promote the unique synergy between a vibrant college/retirement community; availability of cultural/artistic entertainment and sporting events at the colleges; and outdoor recreation and adventure opportunities provided by the White River, Jamestown Crag, Poke Bayou, Ozark Heritage Center, Spring River, Blanchard Springs Caverns, Mammoth Cave and the Ozark Mountains.
 - i.*** An integrated media packet that includes publicity materials focused on tourism activities in North Central Arkansas, including a website connected to the State Department of Parks and Tourism, compact disk and full-color brochures will be distributed to state and national media outlets, state-wide visitor centers, area hotels, etc.

- g.** Create a comprehensive community calendar of musical events, festivals, art and theater productions, sporting activities, etc. Market the community calendar and related activities throughout the region using radio, print and television advertising.
- h.** Host a familiarization tour for meeting planners, special events planners, and military reunion organizers to host events in Independence County. Develop contacts with national bus tour companies and organizers to recruit them to the area.
- i.** Develop a plan to recruit events to Independence County including university-related business travel, youth sporting events at the baseball, soccer and swimming complexes, fishing tournaments, boat races, etc.
- j.** Inventory all meeting venues and hotel spaces and determine capacity to host significant tourist events. Based on the results of the inventory, prepare a comprehensive report on the findings and develop a detailed plan to address challenges identified in the report.

STRATEGIC GOAL #2

Continue development of Historic Downtown Batesville to emphasize its architecturally attractive downtown buildings, historic churches, beautiful turn-of-the-century neighborhoods, historic cinema attractions, unique shopping venues, antique stores, eclectic and trendy clothing stores, high-end dining, and pubs.

Action Steps in Support of Strategic Goal Number Two Are:

- a.** Develop a comprehensive and achievable master plan for historic Batesville that addresses the specific requirements of a historic downtown district; defines land and building use plans that recognize the importance of historical context; establish standard design guidelines, including building appearance, signage and general streetscape parameters. Extend the master plan into an artist's rendering of a redeveloped Historic Downtown Batesville.

Historic Downtown Batesville should develop a lasting and recognizable image that is distinguishable from the greater Batesville community. The master plan will establish pedestrian-friendly designs of streets, public areas, and public-private connections. Downtown will be planned to become a place of 24-hour activity, encouraging sidewalk and plaza cafes and street vendors to help enliven the downtown area.
- b.** Develop a specific brand and logo for Historic Downtown Batesville—"Downtown Alive." Aggressively market the Downtown Alive brand on a regional, state, and national level in a manner that positions Historic Downtown Batesville as a vibrant and exciting small town, college community with loft apartments, family-friendly entertainment, diverse and eclectic shopping, dining, pubs, arts, cinema, and musical entertainment.
- c.** Define Historic Downtown Batesville into distinct districts with individual personalities that are individually and collectively developed with adequate buffering, suitable pedestrian connections (walkable/bikeable trails, parks and easy access to the historic core), and aesthetic signage standards that define a sense of place.

- i. Gateway Structure to Historic Downtown Batesville - A beautiful native fieldstone gateway will be erected at the intersection of St. Louis Street and Main Street to define the entrance into Historic Downtown Batesville.
- ii. Historic Neighborhood District - Driving South on Main Street and bordered by Water Street, Boswell Street and concluding at 7th Street is a unique community of 19th century Victorian mansions, early 20th century cottages and a large number of homes listed on the historic register. The Historic Neighborhood District will be established as smaller, walkable/bikeable residential neighborhoods within the downtown area and redesigned as pedestrian-oriented rather than vehicle-oriented.
- iii. Civic Center District - Located south of the Historic Neighborhood District is Batesville's Civic Center District, which is comprised of historic churches, the original Lyon College campus, and City Hall. The Civic Center District should be developed as a distinctive mixed-use area for retail, office, and residential spaces. Vacant lots should be redeveloped with a focus on creating a series of outdoor venues such as outdoor cafes and courtyards, unique retail businesses appealing to the 20 to 40 year age generation, and businesses that provide community-oriented goods and services.
- iv. Historic Downtown District - The area from 4th Street to Central Street contains the Historic Downtown District, the primary focus of the downtown redevelopment plan. This area is envisioned as a mixed-use focal point in the Batesville community and for Independence County. Street level retail shops, professional offices, and second story loft apartments are envisioned in this district.

Historic Downtown will be the financial, office, and government center of the region and will be planned as a place where people live, visit, and work in a safe, pedestrian-friendly environment.

- v. Riverfront District - This area of town is south of Central Street. Anchored by the Melba Theater and bordered by College Street and the Bayou, the Riverfront District will become a regional destination, providing opportunities to attract large numbers of people to Historic Downtown Batesville. Business development in the Riverfront District will be a blend of entertainment venues designed to attract younger adults (college students and young families). Outdoor development will tie commercial businesses into both water and walking and bike trails in the bayou area.
- vi. Polk Bayou - Within the Riverfront District, Polk Bayou will be developed to improve access and eco-friendly usability of this unique water system.
 - The City of Batesville and the Alliance will develop a plan for improving the floating experience along Polk Bayou by removing old piping and other unsightly, manmade clutter that defeats the natural experience desired by tourists and community residents interested in natural, outdoor adventure.
 - The City of Batesville and the Alliance will develop a plan to improve access to Polk Bayou at the entrance point beneath the bridge at White Drive, thereby providing better access and connection to downtown Batesville.
 - Maxfield Park, located next to Polk Bayou, will be developed as an

outdoor musical performance venue with comfortable bench seating and a relaxing atmosphere.

- The White River access point (current pick-up location for O'Neal Outfitters) will be redeveloped and cleaned up.

- d. Create a Historic Downtown Revitalization Fund through grants and low-interest loan funds that fosters building redevelopment and serves as a catalyst for growth in Historic Downtown Batesville.
- e. Create incentives, such as a tax abatement program, to aid development of a full spectrum of downtown housing.
- f. Assist developers with design, zoning, land assembly, and site preparation costs.
- g. Provide tax credits on the full value of historic buildings to encourage rehabilitation/preservation of existing buildings used for housing and potential housing structures.
- h. Create a downtown development authority that has the ability to issue bonds and assist with project financing.
- i. Adopt alternative building codes for renovation of space above commercial establishments for housing. Examine options for expanded middle and low-density residential housing.
- j. Develop and implement a sidewalk improvement plan for the downtown area.
- k. Develop and implement a coordinated streetscape program that will provide pedestrian amenities including street trees, public spaces, benches, public art, and historic lighting.
- l. Ensure a high-speed wireless umbrella that covers Historic Downtown Batesville to attract technology-related business.
- m. Identify properties or districts in Historic Downtown Batesville that are eligible for the National Historic Register. Obtain historic designations for all such properties identified.
- n. In accordance with the master plan for restoring historic buildings, create functional commercial space and specialty shops at street level. Loft apartments and professional office space will be developed in second floor spaces. Historic tax credits, rent, and tax incentives and other special inducements will be used to attract and support business.
- o. Complete current streetscape work. Install historically accurate street lighting throughout the downtown area. Emphasize landscape amenities through wayfinding and distinctive signage that celebrates the historical context of downtown.
- p. Relocate the Independence County Library to the Barnett Building. Expand the library's technology capabilities to create 21st century relevance. Develop the library into a community center that hosts special community events, activities, and civic/business functions.
- q. Complete renovations of the Melba Theater.

- r. Build specialty, handcrafted wood signs and place at the entrance to the Historic Downtown Batesville travel corridors.
- s. Commission historic murals on key buildings to drive this historic image of the downtown area.

STRATEGIC GOAL #3

Continue development of the White River waterfront area to allow better access to and enjoyment of this tremendous natural resource. Development efforts will focus on expanding river access by creating eco-friendly, natural uses through an interconnected complex of outdoor experiences such as hiking, biking and horseback riding trails, wilderness camping, river rafting, canoeing, white water kayaking, etc. Eco-friendly, natural, outdoor adventure opportunities are key to attracting people to Independence County.

Action Steps in Support of Strategic Goal Number Three Are:

- a. Develop a pedestrian boardwalk with historic lighting, signage, maps and descriptive pictures of White River history, river topography, native animals, fish, flora and fauna in Riverfront Park directly on the waterfront. The waterfront pedestrian boardwalk will include a fishing pier section and a river view area with benches for resting, talking, and reading. The spillway area will be illuminated at night to create strong nighttime aesthetics.
- b. Extend the White River pedestrian boardwalk into a scenic nature trail that runs west along the White River to the conflux of the White River and Polk Bayou. The scenic nature trail will continue along the banks of Polk Bayou into Historic Downtown Batesville and conclude at Maxfield Park and will include historic markers depicting key historical events that occurred in the area.
- c. Construct a full-service marina where Polk Bayou meets the White River. The marina will accommodate private boat docks, bait store, dining facility adjacent to the marina to provide high-end, river view dining.
- d. Build a bridge across Polk Bayou at the marina and create a new river beach area called North Beach, a sandy beach designed as a family entertainment and river recreation center.
- e. Develop an arboretum behind the newly developed North Beach across the bottoms of lower Main Street. The scenic nature trail discussed above, will travel through the arboretum and down Polk Bayou to Maxfield Park.
- f. Continuing west along the White River after North Beach, develop a high-adventure trail system between Batesville and Mountain View running with the White River and traversing through the Ozark Mountains. Begin a process with the State of Arkansas's Parks and Tourism Department to form a new state park on the White River midway between Batesville and Mountain View.
- g. The Kennedy Park area on the White River's south side will be redeveloped to include a public pier with boat docks, boat rentals, bike rentals and riverboat excursions in addition to expanded dining and pub style restaurant venues. Access to the sand bar will be improved by the creation of a navigable road to the sand bar area.

- h. The sand bar south of Kennedy Park will be renamed South Beach and developed into a separate and eclectic outdoor recreation venue with a splash park for children, sunbathing areas for youth, low level piers for fishing and outdoor cooking, food truck dining and general areas of river interest.
- i. A Class 4/5 whitewater kayaking park will be developed in the White River, just south of the spillway and adjacent to South Beach. This highly technical and professional kayaking run will be used to host competitive kayaking contests, drawing outdoor enthusiasts to the area.
- j. The amphitheater will be expanded to accommodate live music concerts and other large scale outdoor events, with seating capacity for up to 5,000 people. The amphitheater expansion will consider the AMP in Northwest Arkansas as a potential model.
- k. Construct pedestrian bridges across the White River at lock number one in Batesville and at lock number two in Desha with scenic walking/biking trails on each side of the river connecting the pedestrian bridges. This will provide 15 miles of circular scenic trail system along both banks of the White River.
- l. Relocate and dock the Mary Woods II at the Kennedy Park Pier and convert the boat into a unique, floating regional visitors' information center and river history museum.
- m. Develop a miniature-styled train ride opportunity on the banks of the White River for children and adults that is modeled after the Zilker-Zephyr in Austin, Texas.

STRATEGIC GOAL #4

Develop and promote Independence County as the southern gateway to the Ozark Mountains and the tourism hub for North Central Arkansas.

Action Steps in Support of Strategic Goal Number Four Are:

- a. Consider adopting sister city relationships with the North Central Arkansas Communities of Mountain Home, Mountain View, and Hardy. Mountain Home is the Northern Gateway to the Ozarks and is in close proximity to Bull Shoals and Norfork Lake. Mountain View is located between Batesville and Mountain Home in the middle of the beautiful Ozark Mountains and is home to wonderful blue grass music and the Ozark Folk Center. Hardy sits on the banks of the Spring River, a nationally-recognized, year-round white water river that is powered by a steady flow from Mammoth Cave.

Collective vision and marketing of regional tourism opportunities rather than county or city marketing is substantially more powerful at the state, regional, and national levels.
- b. Engage the Master Gardeners Club to develop a beautification plan for the major roadway, bridges, and communities in Independence County.

A primary focus will be beautification of Highway 167 between the top of Ramsey Mountain and the White River Bridge by adding trees, flowers, and historic lighting with banners that include the names of all area communities.

Major entry corridors into each Independence County community and selected primary intersections within each community will be planned by the Master Gardeners Club.

- c. Highlight the Batesville Motor Speedway's races as a unique and exciting activities occurring from March to September in Independence County. Include the Motor Speedway in all marketing materials, brochures, and electronic media advertising.
- d. Develop and promote Jamestown Crag as a major high-adventure tourism opportunity for Independence County. The Crag includes over 70 bolted climbing routes that span a 40-acre climbing wall. Improve the entryway into the Crag with good signage and road access.

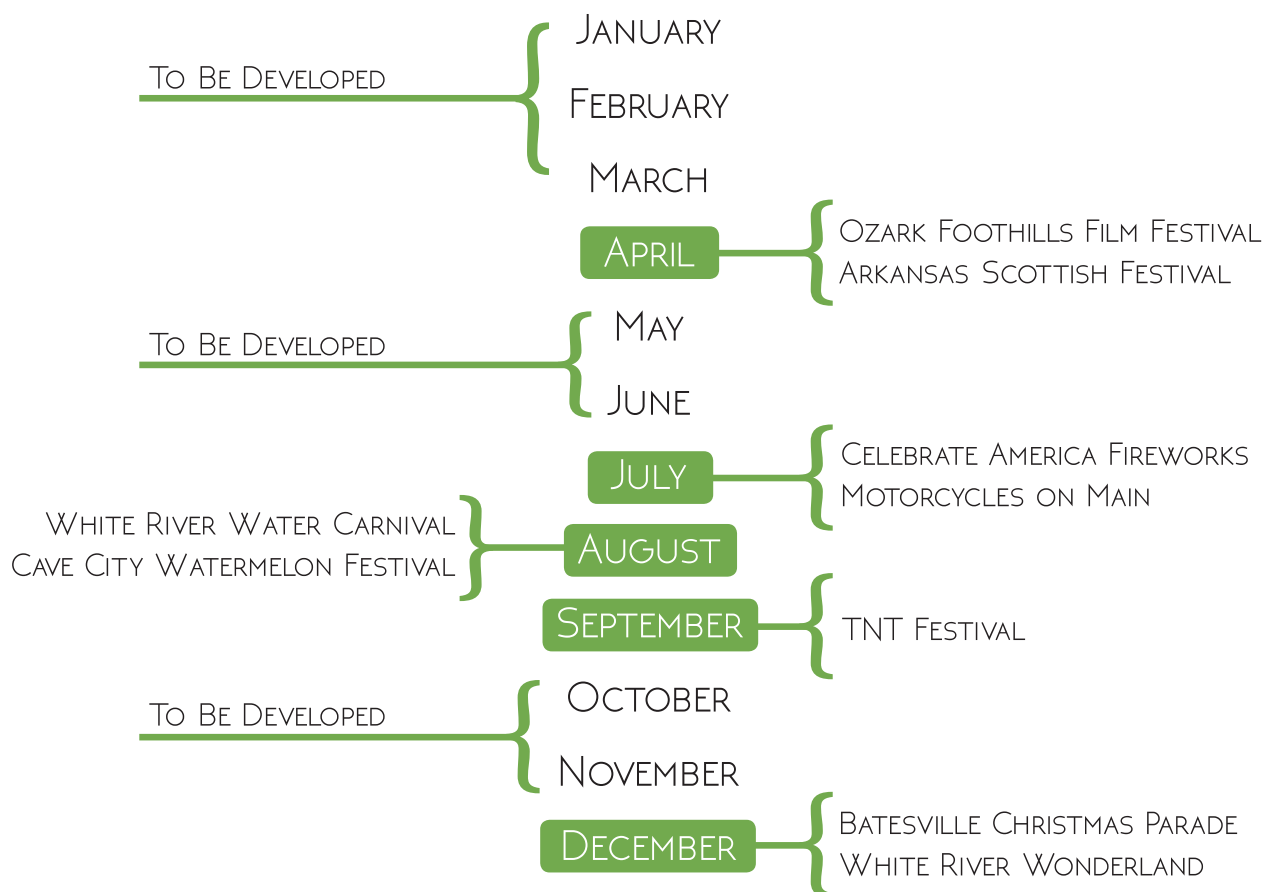
Prepare Crag-specific marketing materials and professional publicity frameworks designed to attract regional rock climbing enthusiasts (Mid-South region outdoor supply stores, internet, word of mouth, etc.). Establish the Crag as a leading Mid-South adventure location.
- e. Utilizing the miles of property available to Independence County through the State of Arkansas's Rails-to-Trails Program, develop an overland trail program throughout the county that connects all major communities through a formal County Greenway Program, providing pedestrian and biking access throughout the county.
- f. Prepare a 10-year plan for extensive development of regional cycling, walking, backpacking, horseback riding trails, and motorcycle routes through North Central Arkansas with specific emphasis on the Rails-to-Trails Program.
- g. Identify properties or districts throughout Independence County that are eligible for inclusion in the National Historic Register. Obtain historic designations for all such properties identified.
- h. Identify significant historical events and sites in Independence County and erect appropriate historical markers and interpretive signage. Tour maps and brochures will be developed accordingly.
- i. Promote the county's unique heritage present in the Mark Martin Museum and the Old Independence Regional Museum.

STRATEGIC GOAL #5

Create 12 major annual festivals/tourist events (one per month) that promote business volume and traffic flow to Independence County. Each major festival/tourist event will be marketed via radio, television, newspaper, internet, and social media to the Mid-South region of the United States: Arkansas, Missouri, and Tennessee. The festivals will be featured prominently by the State of Arkansas's Department of Parks and Tourism on its web site and in its annual publications (Arkansas Adventure Guide, Arkansas Tour Guide).

Action Steps in Support of Strategic Goal Number Five Are:

- a. The following table lists current Independence County festivals. At this time, seven months of the calendar year do not feature a festival, event, or activity. The executive director of the tourism commission will be charged with developing a full schedule of monthly festival activity.



- b. Batesville will celebrate its 200th anniversary as an incorporated community in 2021. This milestone and Batesville's status as the 2nd oldest community in Arkansas is a unique opportunity to create large scale celebrations around this event. The Batesville 200 Celebration will be designed to be the largest annual event in Independence County.

Other considerations for festival activities are music and visual arts festivals, an Elvis Presley Festival, a Johnny Cash Festival, a Latino Heritage Festival, and Cinco de Mayo.

- c. A significant opportunity for Independence County is the development of regional and state-level youth sporting events in baseball, soccer, and swimming due to high quality investment in facilities, fields, and other sporting infrastructure.

The Tourism Executive Director, in partnership with the Batesville Department of Parks and Recreation, will develop a multi-year schedule of youth sporting tournaments and events to be hosted in Batesville. Additionally, the tourism executive director will develop statewide

relationships and a proactive marketing plan that attracts additional youth sporting events.

- d. The Batesville Community Center will be marketed as a venue for statewide meetings, corporate retreats, and large scale gatherings.

STRATEGIC GOAL #6

Establish Batesville as a nationally-recognized retirement community based on its position as a uniquely progressive, rural, southern college community in close proximity to beautiful outdoor recreation and adventure opportunities with the presence of a high-quality medical center and over 100 medical doctors.





EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE

Independence County is proud to have excellent public (K-12) school systems and strong institutions of higher education—Lyon College and UACCB. Innovative programs and non-traditional concepts are currently in use in area public schools with more being considered, all of which are designed to provide a well-educated and trained workforce that is able to succeed in a college or career of their choice.

The success of Independence County depends on a 21st century education model that provides students with marketable skills and requires completion of personal work plans prior to high school graduation to ensure each student considers future opportunities and understands the importance of being prepared.

Strong mentorship programs, high quality and affordable childcare, improved student literacy levels, increased graduation rates in high school and higher education, increased participation of parents in their children's education, greater involvement between the education community and the business community, and contextualized education programs that support skills needed by local employers are all key goals of IMPACT Independence County.

Independence County recognizes it is becoming a more diverse community with the growth of its Latino population. In order to provide a welcoming educational environment to new residents, public school systems are preparing to offer English as a Second Language courses.

STRATEGIC GOAL #1

Create the Independence County Educational Foundation with mission to advance public education imperatives throughout the county and to organize a process through which local businesses, institutions of higher education, and the public education system can coordinate educational efforts and programs.

Action Steps in Support of Strategic Goal Number One Are:

- a.** In conjunction with the educational leadership of Independence County (school district superintendents and college presidents), establish an educational foundation with a 501 (c)(3) nonprofit designation.
- b.** Develop the educational foundation's charter and define specific operational responsibilities and elect a chairman and determine frequency of meetings. The charter is anticipated to be similar to the Little Rock Educational Foundation charter.
- c.** The educational foundation will integrate educational and business needs/responsibilities and coordinate joint efforts to align public schools, colleges, and the business community. This public education system will be designed to ensure students graduating from high school have the skills they need to succeed in college with limited need for remediation. In like manner, the colleges will ensure their graduates have the skills needed by business/industry to create an acceptable workforce.
- d.** The educational foundation will coordinate opportunities for increased personal growth. This will be accomplished through creation and maintenance of a comprehensive monthly community calendar of leisure and educational offerings. The comprehensive calendar will be available to all citizens. All resources will be identified to assist unemployed citizens with navigating an online GED program. A culture of education throughout the county will be encouraged through the coordination of entities regarding public education matters.

STRATEGIC GOAL #2

Equip businesses and industry with a highly trained labor force by developing a state-of-the-art workforce training center and offering engineering programs in the area high schools.

Action Steps in Support of Strategic Goal Number Two Are:

- a.** Perform a feasibility analysis of developing a high-quality workforce training center on the UACCB campus. The training center's primary goal will be to train students to support local industry and graduates of the program will be able to move directly into local industrial jobs without the business organization training or retraining the graduate.
- b.** Meet with the major industrial employers in Independence County and discuss local issues and challenges relating to workforce attraction and retention. Based on these discussions, determine the specific type of work skills needed

and anticipated hiring needs during the strategic plan period. In partnership with business and industry, develop a contextualized workforce curriculum.

- c.** Create and implement community computer access and support programs as a component of the workforce training program at UACCB. The workforce training program will provide a computer laboratory that provides computer access and training to area residents as follows:
 - i. Assistance to navigate UACCB's online GED program
 - ii. Administer computerized career readiness tests.
 - iii. Provide resources to assist unemployed citizens with navigating online applications.
 - iv. Utilize school districts, the Independence County Library and other public buildings throughout the county to serve as a public technology labs after school hours and on weekends.
- d.** Develop a long-term funding strategy for the workforce training program.

STRATEGIC GOAL #3

Establish Independence County as a leader in K-12 education innovation.

Action Steps in Support of Strategic Goal Number Three Are:

- a.** Target teacher salaries to be in the top quartile of state salaries, through both base pay and incentive compensation programs.
- b.** Improve test scores in both math and science by at least 25% in all Independence County schools.
- c.** Increase parental involvement in school activities and school board meetings, especially at the junior and senior high levels.
- d.** Develop an aggressive program of language education in K-12 with a specific emphasis on Spanish.

STRATEGIC GOAL #4

Facilitate growth at Lyon College and UACCB. Establish coordination between the colleges and the community. Create an exciting college town atmosphere full of cultural, entertainment, education, and employment opportunities for college students—an atmosphere that helps Lyon College and UACCB attract students.

Action Steps in Support of Strategic Goal Number Four Are:

- a.** Specifically seek to retain Independence County high school graduates at Lyon College or UACCB
 - i. Evaluate the feasibility of establishing an “Independence Promise” to all high school graduates in Independence County whereby the cost of attending Lyon College or UACCB is fully funded by area businesses and philanthropy.

- ii. Develop a formal relationship between the Colleges and Independence County public schools where high school juniors and seniors are able to take advanced placement classes at either Lyon College or UACCB. This concept will be used for specialty classes such a higher-level math, foreign languages, etc. Students would earn concurrent credit hours for enrollment in high school and college courses.
- iii. In coordination with the tourism subcommittee, work with the Colleges and city/county management to establish a monthly calendar of events and available activities for college students. Post the calendar online at each college and on the community website.

STRATEGIC GOAL #5

Expand existing quality programs within the county's school districts with the help of public and private partners to maximum capacity needed and support programs unable to solely support infant and toddler care.

Action Steps in Support of Strategic Goal Number Five Are:

- a. Increase infant childcare options with quality ratios.
 - i. Increase school readiness in young children and provide an educational foundation needed to learn in secondary school systems and encourage higher learning.
 - ii. Retain quality childcare workers by creating access to the Child Development Associate program at UACCB and increasing funding for performance based salary increases.
 - iii. Connect CDA licensed professionals with higher learning opportunities and financial aid to seek the next level(s) of certification.
- b. Increase access to affordable quality childcare as it benefits the parent/guardian.
 - i. Retain adult learners in higher education institutions.
 - ii. Increase workforce retention of parents that have children.
 - iii. Extend childcare hours to provide care of evenings and weekends.

STRATEGIC GOAL #6

Increase county-wide access to reliable broadband internet service.

Action Steps in Support of Goal Number Six Are:

- a. Perform broadband internet service needs assessment in Independence County.
- b. Seek funding to develop affordable countywide internet access focusing first on school districts, low to moderate residences, and emergency service facilities.



HEALTHY LIVING AND WELLBEING

Independence County has an outstanding medical community that is anchored by White River Medical Center, a progressive hospital and the regional medical center for North Central Arkansas. Besides the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences in Little Rock, White River Medical Center is the only hospital in Arkansas that offers a medical residency program. Because of the presence of the White River Medical Center, over 120 primary and specialized care physicians call Independence County home.

In addition to the existing medical community strength, the Plan will increase health and wellness opportunities throughout Independence County by expanding existing physical activity initiatives, health education programs, and increasing citizens' access to and knowledge of healthy, local foods.

The Independence County Recycling Center greatly benefits our county and the people in it, but we are losing several hundreds of thousands of dollars in recycling revenue each year by failing to take full advantage of our county's recycling amenities. Beautification efforts will also target several zoning concerns throughout the county and create a healthy and positive aesthetic that communities throughout the county can enjoy.

High quality of life is also dependent on constant communication and making widely available the information that will prove advantageous to all citizens of Independence County. The lack of communication regarding community activities and opportunities has created a barrier that has prohibited unity amount the citizens of Independence County and hindered our quality of life. The numerous community activities, initiatives, and amenities that ensure healthy living and wellbeing throughout Independence County will be communicated through multiple channels.

STRATEGIC GOAL #1

Develop a plan to support the growth of White River Medical Center. IMPACT will be a joint initiative between Independence County, Independence County municipalities, White River Medical Center, and area businesses and educational organizations.

Action Steps in Support of Strategic Goal Number One Are:

- a.** Support the medical residency program being initiated at White River Medical Center by developing quality residential housing that is attractive to young doctors (condominiums, single family residential and rental).

High quality residential development will be a primary consideration in the housing master plan goal contained in the Economic Prosperity section of the Plan. After completion of the housing master plan, develop no less than 50 quality residential houses, condominiums, etc. in a manner that is consistent with the master plan design.

- b.** In cooperation with the Educational Excellence sub-committee, create a medical magnet school in one or more public school districts in Independence County, the purpose of which is to develop a pool of young talent for employment in the local health care industry. Coordinate all public school programs and curriculum with the medical services training programs at UACCB.

- i. Form a planning committee that includes representatives from interested school systems to make a site visit to the successful medical magnet school in Mercedes, Texas. After returning from this visit, determine if this program is viable in Independence County.
 - ii. If the program is a viable option, obtain funding to conduct a detailed feasibility study for the creation of a medical magnet school.
 - iii. Begin fundraising efforts to hire professional staff, identify local facility availability, purchase distance learning equipment to link with participating organizations such as White River Medical Center.
 - iv. Expand the UACCB nursing program to include a full range of allied health education.

- c.** In partnership with the White River Medical Center, develop a high-quality marketing campaign designed to jointly promote Independence County and the White River Medical Center. The marketing campaign and related collateral materials will be used in the recruitment of physicians and other medical professionals.

- d.** The White River Medical Center, in partnership with local business and educational organizations, will develop a formalized program of professional employment for spouses of medical doctors who are considering locating to Independence County.

- e. Identify university students from Independence County who are pursuing healthcare careers and create an incentive program designed to entice the healthcare students to remain in or return to Independence County once they receive their professional licenses or certifications.
- f. Compile a list of healthcare services that are important to the retiree population. Match this list with current hospital services and identify gaps in desired services and available coverage. Develop a plan to correct service gaps where needed.
- g. This action step supports the Tourism Committee's goal of expanding Independence County into a destination for retirement living.

STRATEGIC GOAL #2

Improve the appearance and image of communities in Independence County.

Action Steps in Support of Strategic Goal Number Two Are:

- a. Improve community zoning to create a desired community image. In partnership with elected officials, develop a plan to beautify communities throughout Independence County. Initiate improvements in zoning and infrastructure regulations in support of community beautification.
- b. Create appealing and uniform landscaping along main roads and highways. Seek adoption of key intersections by community organizations and businesses. In partnership with the Master Gardeners of Independence County, design unique and attractive intersections using a wide array of landscape design.
- c. Develop a pole ordinance for businesses along main roads and highways in order to provide a more appealing and cohesive aesthetic.
- d. Raze dilapidated buildings and give new life to vacant lots by creating parks or new residential spaces.
- e. Repair or install sidewalks in all current and potential pedestrian areas throughout the county.
- f. Develop mid-level rental property to accommodate new residents, young families, and retirees.

STRATEGIC GOAL #3

Expand walking, running, and biking trails throughout Independence County and ensure Independence County is progressive in transportation development.

Action Steps in Support of Strategic Goal Number Three Are:

- a. Complete the Greenway Trail project in Batesville to allow this trail system to encircle the entire city and connect to the trail system concepts in Historic

Downtown Batesville and the White River trail complex. Extend the Greenway Trail or similar trail systems throughout Independence County.

- b.** Generate community support for further development of the Greenway Trail to secure trail routes.
- c.** Collaborate with the City of Batesville to complete the trail within a 5-year timeframe.
- d.** Develop a comprehensive trail system plan for Independence County. Coordinate this plan with the White River trail system design.
- e.** Ensure municipal and county regulations to proactively support the development or installment of transportation companies such as cab services and Uber drivers throughout the county.

STRATEGIC GOAL #4

Enhance recycling awareness and practices to promote cleaner, more eco-friendly communities for current and future residents.

Action Steps in Support of Strategic Goal Number Four Are:

- a.** Label all county recycling bins with recyclable materials information and instructions.
- b.** Promote and increase countywide recycling efforts by providing large, public recycle bins (similar to public trash receptacles) throughout parks, main streets, and other high-traffic areas.
- c.** Reduce county trash transport expenditures and grow the county's revenue stream by improving the county's recyclables-to-waste ratio.

STRATEGIC GOAL #5

Increase the number of community programs and projects that support healthy living and lifestyle education of county residents with a focus on substance abuse prevention, research, and treatment.

Action Steps in Support of Strategic Goal Number Five Are:

- a.** Expand current programs and initiatives in the public school systems pertaining to health education, community gardens, recycling education, etc.
- b.** Enhance community awareness of programs and events with broad-based communication and marketing efforts.
- c.** Measure the number of people impacted by existing programs and take action to increase citizen involvement.
- d.** In partnership with the White River Medical Center and UAMS's College of Public Health, charter a substance abuse, research, and treatment facility in Independence County:

- i. Engage a professional consultant who will develop and produce a comprehensive plan to charter and operate a health and substance abuse treatment facility. This plan will include (i) program planning and evaluation, (ii) preparation of employment and personnel policies, (iii) identification of program services, (iv) requirements for accreditation/license, (v) recommendations on proper staffing and skills needed, (vi) development of legal incorporating documents and processes, and (vii) development of a sustainable business plan, funding model, and 5-year budget.
- ii. Execute the action items of the plan discussed above, using the suggested timeline and priority of objective critical activities to create the health clinic and substance abuse facility. The substance abuse program will compel a substance-abusing offender to deal with his or her substance abuse problems through comprehensive supervision, drug testing, treatment services, and immediate sanctions or incentives.

STRATEGIC GOAL #6

Ensure all residents of Independence County have access to healthy food.

Action Steps in Support of Strategic Goal Number Five Are:

- a.*** In partnership with area grocery stores and farmers' markets, develop programs for low and moderate-income families that ensure consistent access to healthy food.
- b.*** Partner with local store managers to implement an "ugly produce" discount program, that makes imperfect produce more affordable by selling it at a deeply discounted rate to low and moderate income families, saving grocery stores the cost of discarded inventory.
- c.*** Encourage healthier menu options at existing fast food and traditional restaurants.
- d.*** Establish or expand farmers' markets throughout Independence County.
- e.*** Implement broader tower or rooftop garden use.



