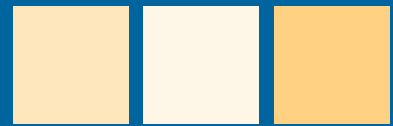


# WILLIAMSTOWN

DRAFT



**Williamstown**

Strategic Plan

2012

# WILLIAMSTOWN – THE MASTER PLAN

## Overview

The City of Williamstown, Ky., is a part of the Grant County Planning Commission which is comprised of Grant County and the incorporated cities of Corinth, Crittenden, Dry Ridge and Williamstown. In late 2010, a group of private investors announced plans for the construction of the Ark Encounter park just off of I-75 in Williamstown. The theme park is expecting to draw up to 1.2 million visitors per year and employ nearly 900 people (full-time and part-time).

In response to the anticipated impact that the park could have upon the city, the Williamstown City Council decided to create its own master plan to guide the community's potential growth over the next five years. Regardless of the level of impact of the Ark Encounter, the city recognizes that growth needs to be managed so that the values that the residents hold dear – small-town charm, rural heritage, friendliness, academic excellence and natural beauty – are not compromised. With these goals in mind, the city council – in partnership with the Kentucky League of Cities – has developed the Williamstown Master Plan.

# Williamstown – The Strategic Plan

This book includes the key areas of focus for the community, descriptions of actions, and basic next steps for implementation.

In 2011, over 80 citizens of Williamstown and Grant County came together to help plot the future of the community. Working in a combined listening session/charrette format, these citizens provided literal and figurative road maps for the community to follow into the future.

The planning team also met with over 30 community leaders and 20 high school students to discuss needs and desires for the future.

Working with the steering committee, the planning team has put together this booklet of strategic planning actions based on these inputs as well as the accompanying master plan, which includes goals and objectives as well as narrative elements which can be used to satisfy statutory comprehensive plan requirements.

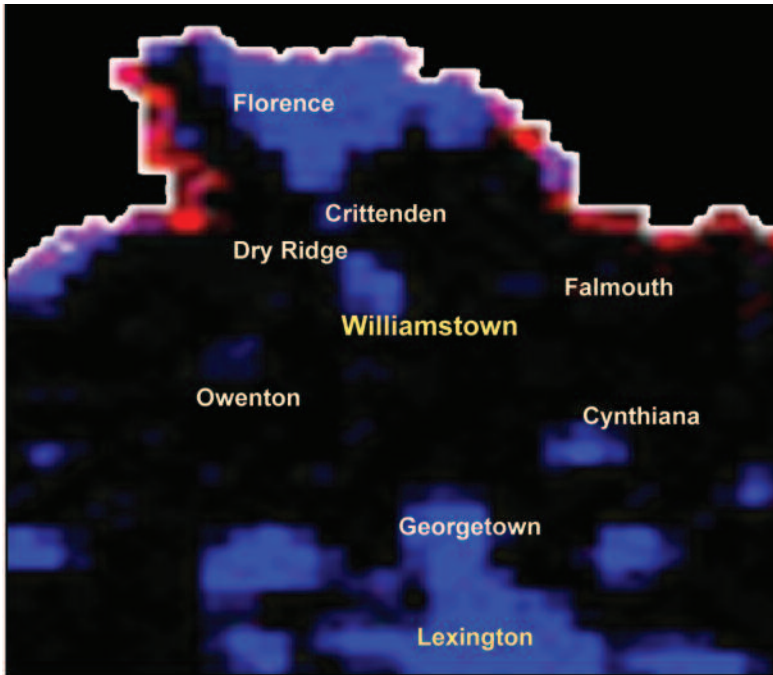


## What We Heard

During the community session several important themes emerged. These themes reflect the consensus of the group as to the most significant areas of action the community should undertake.

- ◆ Importance of downtown
- ◆ Improving local economy
- ◆ Commercial and tourism development
- ◆ Increasing housing opportunities
- ◆ Recreation, including trails
- ◆ Improving community image
- ◆ Community infrastructure/services
- ◆ Environmental protection

# Advantage Williamstown



The community possesses many advantages that can be used to improve the economy and quality of life. The community has great leadership, committed citizenry, a strong school system, and a dynamic location. The satellite photo at left shows the relative location of the community – blue areas are city lights, black areas are countryside. While situated in the middle of nearly one million people, the community has retained its distinct identity. It is this identity which is perhaps valued most of all.

## The Three Keys to Success

While Williamstown possesses many great attributes on which to build, many challenges and opportunities await the community. Significant change is likely to occur not only because of the community’s location, but also due to the construction and opening of the Ark Encounter. It is imperative that the community take action now in order to anticipate and benefit from these changes.

### The Three Keys

To build on the community’s advantages as well as to successfully navigate coming challenges, the community must take coordinated and consistent actions over the next three to five years. Each of the keys to success encompasses the points made by the citizens and professionals who participated in the planning and input sessions.

- 1 Get Ready**
- 2 Dress Up**
- 3 Be Real**

# Get Ready



For the community to be successful, it must be ready to deal with the challenges and opportunities of change. Three elements are vital in preparing:

- ◆ Strategic planning
- ◆ Tourist infrastructure
- ◆ Community infrastructure

Each must be in place to gain the most benefit as well as to minimize negative impacts.

# Get Ready: Strategic Planning

## Strategic Planning

Community strategic planning produces a vision of what the community desires for itself in the future. This shared vision of the future provides a framework for the collaborative implementation that will make the vision a reality.

Planning for the future is the key in mastering it. Anticipating and directing change is the function of planning in order to achieve a vision.

Below is a set of community goals that, if reached, will ensure achievement of the vision. These goals have been derived from the community sessions and discussions with city professionals. These goals and associated objectives can be used to satisfy the requirements of K.R.S. 100. More details can be found in the accompanying Master Plan; it is important to consider the entire set in context.

## Community Goals

**Economic Development:** Foster a strong and diverse economy which provides a full range of employment and economic choices for individuals and families in all parts of the city.

**Quality of Life Goal:** Preserve, enhance and promote small town character and appearance.

## Land Use Planning Goal:

Encourage the most desirable and efficient use of land while enhancing the physical and economic environment of Williamstown.

**Housing Goal:** Enhance Williamstown's economic vitality and quality of life by providing housing of different types, tenures, density, sizes, costs and locations that accommodate the needs, preferences, and financial capabilities of current and future households.

**Environment Goal:** To protect and enhance the quality of the natural environment in Williamstown.

**Infrastructure Goal:** Provide for the orderly and efficient provision of urban services.

**Transportation Goal:** Maintain a safe and efficient transportation network and provide a range of transportation alternatives.

**Community Facilities Goal:** To plan and provide for quality community facilities and services to effectively meet the municipal, social, educational and other service needs of Williamstown's residents and businesses in an efficient manner.

**Parks and Recreation Goal:** Develop a comprehensive system of parks, trails, and open spaces

that meet the needs of all age groups within Williamstown.

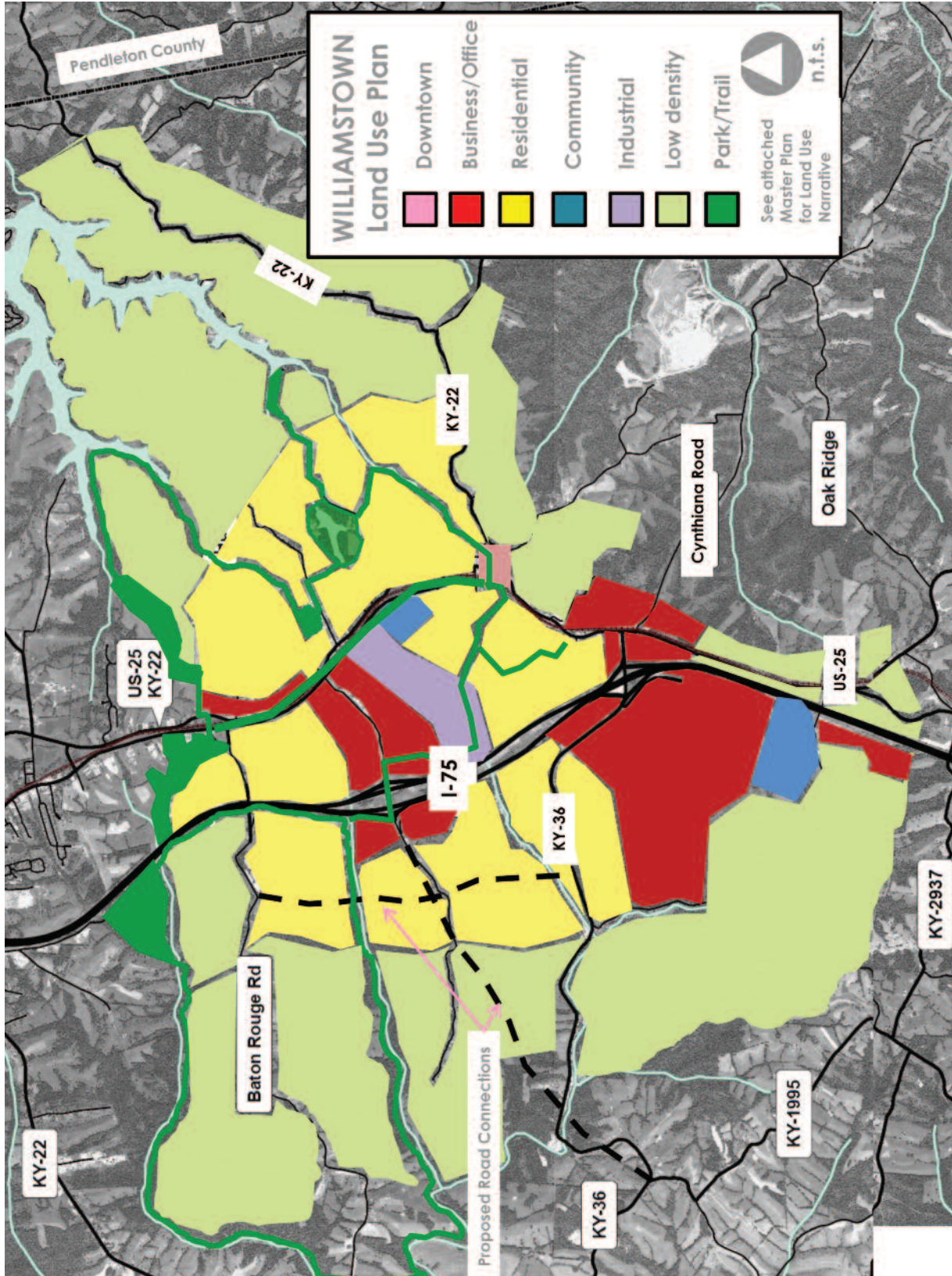
**Efficiency and Cooperation in Government Goal:** Williamstown should strive to offer the highest quality and most cost-effective services possible.

## Land Use Master Plan

The map on page 5 shows conceptual land uses and locations.

## Next Steps

- ◆ Adopt goals and objectives
- ◆ Adopt master plan
- ◆ Work to get new combination comprehensive plan
- ◆ Update zoning code
- ◆ Consider design standards



# Get Ready: Tourism Infrastructure

## Overview

Tourism will play a large part in the future of Williamstown. A great tourist destination does not happen by accident. Becoming and remaining a successful tourist destination is a complex undertaking. It requires strong community and government support, quality leadership, continuous marketing efforts, the ability to build upon the community's tourism strengths and

resources, and an understanding of the importance of tourism infrastructure.

The Grant County Tourism Commission has a comprehensive set of marketing tools that includes the City of Williamstown. While this partnership is critical to the region, Williamstown must re-evaluate its own needs in light of the breadth and depth of change that could occur over the next five years.

## Next Steps

A tourism plan should be developed to address the following areas:

- ◆ Attractors and experiences
- ◆ Infrastructure and visitor services
- ◆ Marketing and organization

## Components



### Attractors and Experiences

Attractors are the places and things that people come to a community specifically to see. Experiences are what memories are made of. In addition to the Ark Encounter, the community should do the following:

- ◆ Create a tourism growth strategic plan
- ◆ Develop a linked park and trail system
- ◆ Identify and develop local businesses that would appeal to tourists
- ◆ Reconnect genealogy tourists to the community
- ◆ Expand the offerings of historic tours and identify additional historic sites
- ◆ Expand the number of regular events in

downtown such as a Thursday Night Live program

- ◆ Develop and expand other tourist activity attractions such as mini-golf and arcades
- ◆ Support the expansion of Lake Williamstown
- ◆ Identify niche markets that are complementary to the visitor demographics of the Ark Encounter and grow those markets through recruitment



# Components (cont.)

## Infrastructure and Visitor Services

A successful community will meet the needs of the traveler. In order to do this, the community should do the following:

- ◆ Institute a wayfinding program

Wayfinding is a series of signs, maps, and other graphic or audible methods used to convey location and directions to travelers

- ◆ Consider creating a Visitor Center, ideally downtown
- ◆ Guide the creation of lodging, food, and convenience businesses
- ◆ Institute a "Welcome to Williamstown" Program

Increase visitors' satisfaction with a Williamstown vacation and improve customer service by arming frontline personnel with messages about the local community, region, and state

## Marketing and Organization

Williamstown must make every effort to let the world know about its tourism offerings. It must have an identity that people will respond to. In order to achieve this, it also must have the strongest tourism organization possible. The following methods can help accomplish these.

- ◆ Create a "hospitality" strategy and education program
- ◆ Determine the "brand" of the community
- ◆ Develop a consistent "look" for the communities promotional materials and visual markers
- ◆ Create a working list of "what you want visitors to know"
- ◆ Keep it simple utilizing quick lists, brief descriptions and visual presentations
- ◆ Utilize a focus group to gauge reactions to your marketing materials
- ◆ Focus on CLARITY as though a person is being introduced to your community for the first time
- ◆ Make it easy for your visitors to find what they need



## Next Steps

- ◆ Conduct a comprehensive review of all marketing materials
- ◆ Consolidate - avoid information overload
- ◆ Identify the key touch-points for visitors

# Community Infrastructure



Growth in population and tourists will place additional demands on community infrastructure. It is essential that the community carefully study anticipated impacts so that it is able to balance provision of adequate services with funding possibilities. The following is an initial assessment of current capacities needs.

- ◆ Police
  - The City of Williamstown currently has seven full-time police officers. Two additional officers will be needed in the near-term to bring the department to full capacity.
- ◆ Fire
  - The Williamstown Fire Department is a volunteer fire department with a paid fire chief and 28 active volunteer members. The department currently has adequate facilities.
  - The Grant County Water Rescue Team consists of members of the Williamstown Volunteer Fire Department and the Grant County EMA.
- ◆ EMS
  - The Williamstown Fire Department is the first responder to all major

medical calls within its coverage area of approximately 61 square miles.

- TransCare provides ambulance transport and paramedic services for the city and county (except for Dry Ridge).
- ◆ Water
  - The Williamstown Water Department serves the cities of Williamstown, Dry Ridge, Corinth and a portion of the PenWater District NW. The plant is rated at 2.5 million gallons/day and is currently utilizing 1.4 million gallons/day.

## Next Steps

Coordinated planning efforts should commence immediately in anticipation of the development of the Ark Encounter. Future needs should be identified by creating a working group composed of the city's leadership to carefully budget for growth and to anticipate comprehensive strategies.

# Dress Up



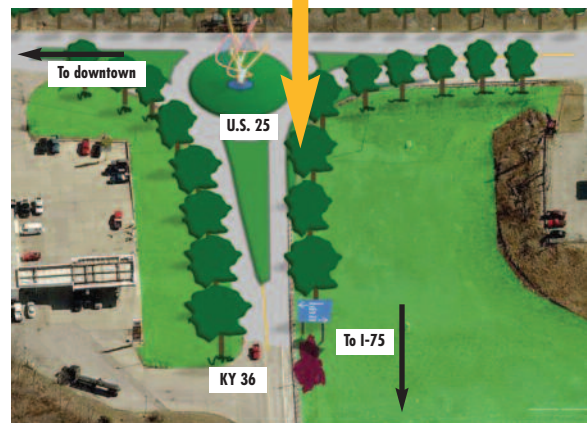
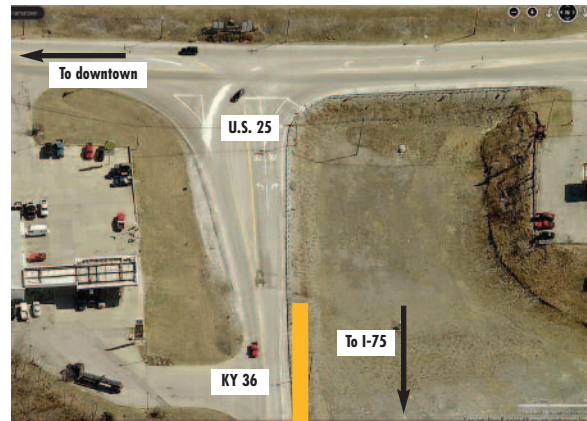
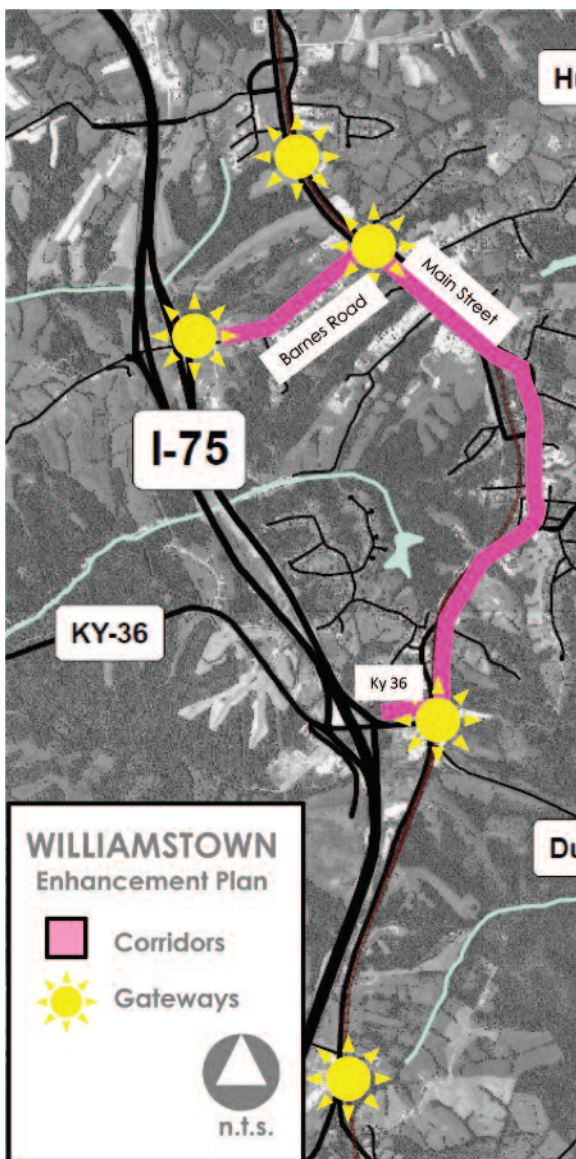
The world is coming to Williamstown. It is important to put on the community's best face. There are two areas where much can be gained:

- ◆ Community gateways
- ◆ Highway corridors

Each offers unique opportunities to beautify the community and enhance its brand image.

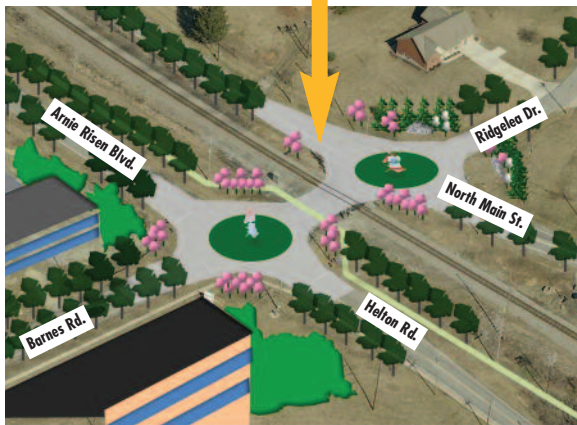
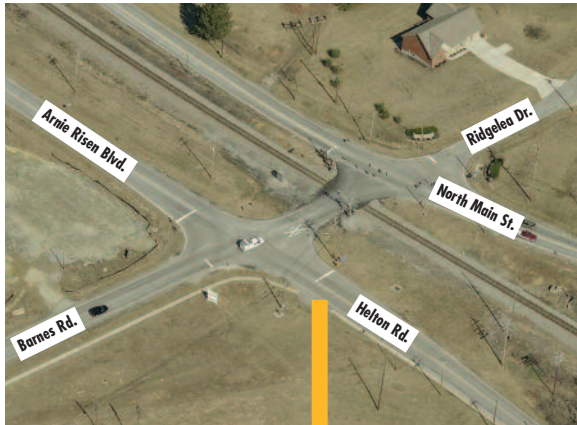
# Dress Up: Gateways

The map below shows the key community gateways and the prime corridors. Gateways would be at both Interstate interchanges, near the Baton Rouge Bridge, and at the southern end of the city on U.S. 25. The prime community corridors are along KY 36 from the Interstate to U.S. 25, U.S. 25, and Barnes Road.

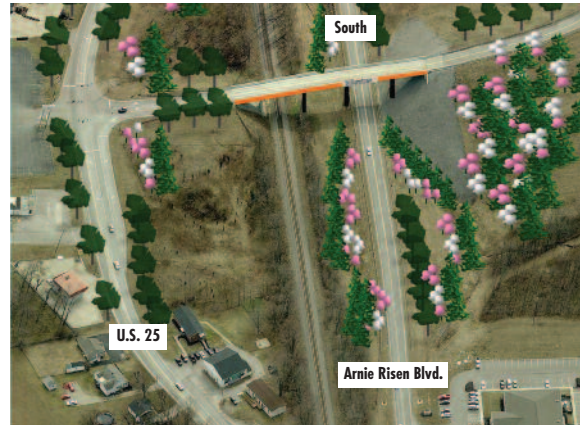


The illustrations on this page show some of the improvements that could be made to enhance the experience of arriving in Williamstown for both visitor and resident alike.

The pictures above show the possibilities at the intersection of KY 36 and U.S. 25. Landscaping, wayfinding signage, and public art could all be incorporated into a more efficient traffic flow using a roundabout.



The pictures above show the Barnes Road intersections with Arnie Risen/Helton Road and North Main Street. Landscaping, wayfinding signage and public art are incorporated. Two roundabouts are possible which would enhance traffic flow and safety. A portion of the loop trail system could also be developed between the roads and the railroad tracks.



The picture above shows the area along Arnie Risen Road and U.S. 25 near the bridge on Baton Rouge Road. In addition to other features, the bridge itself could be painted in school colors.



As illustrated in the above photo, it is recommended that the cabin be relocated to face oncoming traffic into downtown. A new park could surround the area making a very nice entry into downtown.

# Dress Up: Corridors



The photos at left show landscape improvements at the southern interchange on I-75. Instead of clearing the interchange, massive amounts of landscaping should be added to make a special sense of place.

The overall goal should be a sense of arrival in a very green place. This would help set the tone that Williamstown is a special place. The Barnes Road interchange should receive the same treatment.

The main roads into and through the community could be landscaped with flowering trees and shade trees where appropriate. The effect would be of a great scenic Kentucky drive.

## Public Art

Public art should be an important part of community enhancements. Permanent art should be displayed at strategic points such as gateways. Temporary art could be displayed at many locations.

## Next Steps

- ◆ Create a corridor development timeline with benchmarks and milestones
- ◆ Determine the kinds and number of landscaping elements that are needed
- ◆ Create a consistent and environmentally sound plan taking into account that hardy plants will be needed for the “car” environment
- ◆ Divide and prioritize the overall work into smaller area projects
- ◆ Spread the development and landscaping projects out over a period of time
- ◆ Prepare a five-year pro-forma budget estimate for implementation
- ◆ Establish critical partnerships including the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet, local arts clubs, garden clubs, school groups, civic organizations, and private businesses to adopt and implement the elements of the plan

# Dress Up: Corridors

Throughout the planning process, participants stressed the value of developing a trail system for the community. The proposed response is to plan and implement an interconnected trail and park system linking the core of the community to the rural surroundings, including Williamstown Lake.

Several lessons are important to learn. First, in the politics of trail development, committed people and collaborative partnerships are necessary. It is vital to forge wide-ranging, trusting, mutually beneficial partnerships in order to create the consensus needed on uses, routing, and long-term support.

Second, community involvement is invaluable. Many of the trails began with community meetings to solicit input from residents on the trail and the process of development. This community building makes the project a vested community interest. Community dialogue informs the residents about the trail and gives trail planners a forum in which to respond to opposition. Concerns about land acquisition, the safety of having the trail near homes, and effects on property value

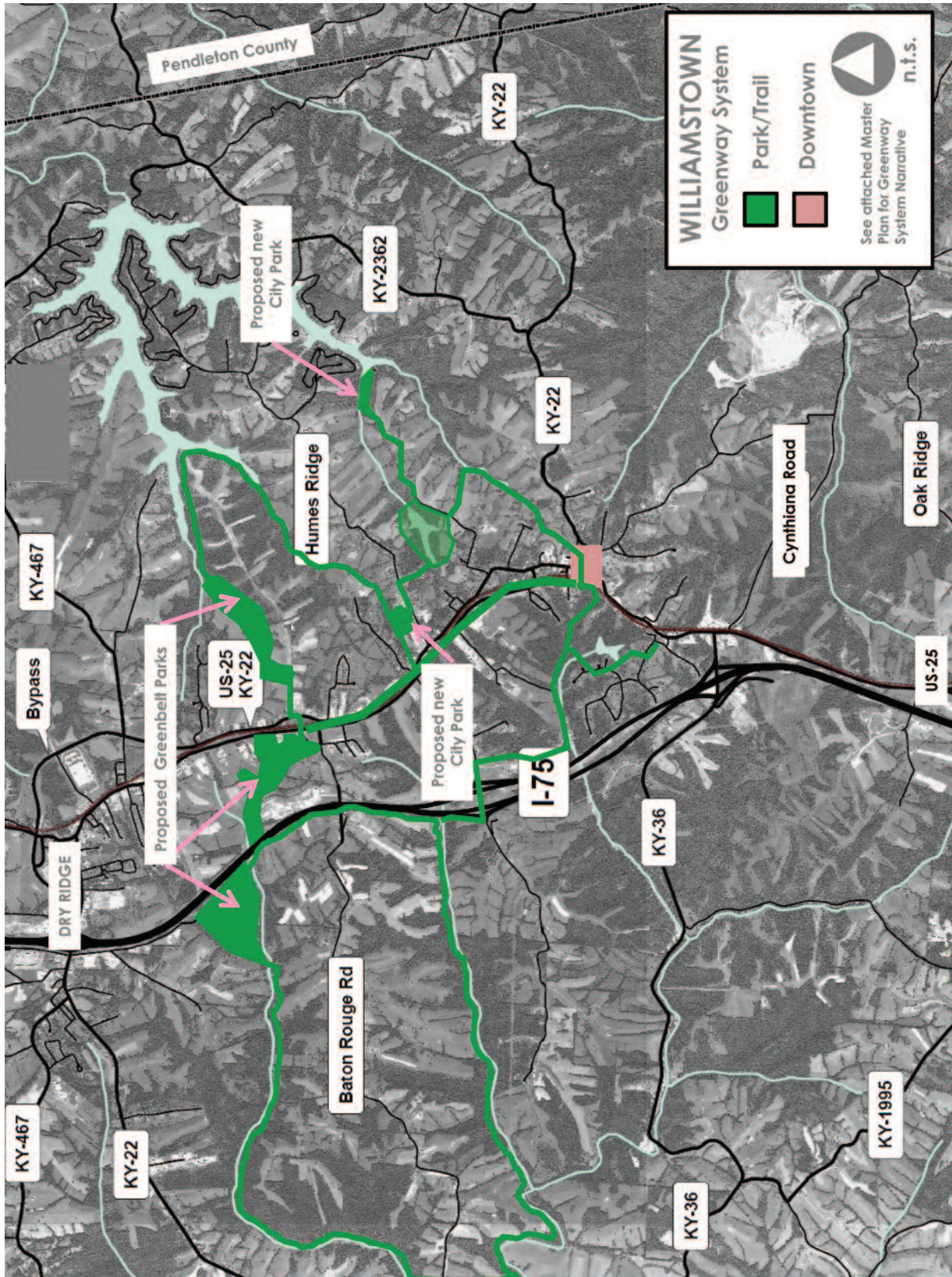
are common. Communicating openly and addressing concerns help to facilitate support for the trail.

Finally patience is essential. Trail development requires perseverance. Negotiating funding, planning and designing the trail, acquiring land, waiting for permits, coping with personnel changes or changes in government, and getting community support before construction begins all take time and a great deal of patience.

Fortunately, Williamstown and Grant County have excellent community-based partners and initiatives in place that can be relied upon and built upon to develop the corridors including Fitness for Life Around Grant County (FFLAG), Connecting to Care, Williamstown High School and the local health care network.

The map on the following page shows the approximate location of such a system. Several new parks are interwoven, serving as destinations as well as “greenbelt” to keep the identities of Williamstown and Dry Ridge separate.





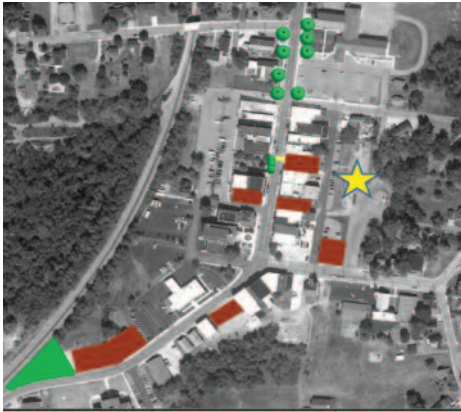


# Be Real



Authenticity is an essential element to economic success. People reward places that are real. Williamstown is an authentic place, but can do more. One key to improving authenticity is the restoration of downtown as the true heart of the community. Another is diversifying the economy by focusing on unique, local strengths.

# Be Real: Make Downtown Succeed



Standards for New Buildings



New Farmers/Community Market



Authenticity is an essential element to economic success. Williamstown is an authentic place, but can do more. One key area is the restoration of downtown as the true heart of the community.

## Make Downtown Succeed

The prime desire for participants in this process was the restoration of downtown. The next two pages offer actions that can be undertaken to truly achieve that desire.

In order to make downtown succeed all of the following should be undertaken:

- ◆ add new mixed-use buildings
- ◆ new gathering places
- ◆ improve the retail mix
- ◆ manage downtown like a mall
- ◆ increase street life
- ◆ make downtown the food and entertainment center of the city
- ◆ develop livable spaces for downtown residents
- ◆ set an expectation for success
- ◆ measure progress and celebrate it

The illustration at left shows opportunities for new building sites (brown areas) in the downtown core. The yellow star represents a potential location for the Farmers Market. New residential downtown should be encouraged.

## Standards for New Buildings

All new buildings should be mixed-use: retail on first floor— with office or residential uses above. Buildings should be built flush to the sidewalk line, not setback. Buildings should be two stories minimum or three stories maximum. Parking should be located on the rear of lots. The illustration at left shows these principles.

## New Farmers/Community Market

Process participants pointed out the importance of having a permanent building space for selling food and goods. This year-round building could be located on the west side of downtown, lined up directly with the park (shown at left). The building should be designed in such a way that enables many different types of uses to occur as well as to allow parking to continue when not in use. Users of the facility should pay a small fee to help with maintenance. An example is illustrated bottom left.

### Retail Development

Downtown does not currently offer a strong variety of retail options. The following list offers some potential retail development targets based on current needs and future opportunities.

#### Retail Development Targets:

- ◆ Lifestyle and wellness retail
- ◆ Stores that entertain
- ◆ Retailers that celebrate local heritage
- ◆ Businesses as community gathering places
- ◆ Unique destination retailers
- ◆ Gift and indulgence stores
- ◆ Religious-themed book and crafts stores
- ◆ Stores that celebrate local arts

Each retail target is complementary to the others and should be seen as an opportunity to create local businesses and jobs.

#### Manage Downtown Like a Mall

Another key to downtown success is to emulate the business practices of successful retail areas, specifically shopping malls. People have described trying to coordinate downtown merchants and property owners as “trying to herd

cats.” Yet every mall, while under unified ownership, has numerous differing retailers that all play by the same rules.

Downtown Williamstown should be/have:

- ◆ Tidy
- ◆ Safe
- ◆ Well maintained
- ◆ Common signage
- ◆ Common hours
- ◆ Common marketing

These will allow downtown to be competitive with other shopping destinations.

#### Nourishment Downtown

Downtown Williamstown should become known as the food and entertainment destination of the community and region. Efforts should be made to grow local business operations, local food options, and local talent. The market for these businesses should be families, both visitors and residents.

#### Street Life

Every great downtown has an active street life with people strolling, sitting, and people-watching. The city should make every effort to ensure that activities occur on the street on a regular basis, and that there are few barriers to outdoor dining and entertainment.



### Next Steps

- ◆ Create a downtown implementation plan
- ◆ Be able to share a clear vision of downtown
- ◆ Cultivate angel investors
- ◆ Create a revolving loan pool or grant pool for façade restoration
- ◆ Make downtown the center for community and family activities
- ◆ Cultivate leadership – someone/group to carry the banner
- ◆ Identify the economic drivers – must be economically sustainable

# Diversify the Economy



## **Create the Barnes Road Med-Tech Corridor**

The Barnes Road Med-Tech Corridor can become a prime location for biomedical, health care and technology companies looking to take advantage of fantastic locations and great small-town atmosphere.

Community leaders should strive to make the Med-Tech Corridor the home of an

expanded NKU campus as well as work toward gaining a campus of Gateway Community and Technical College.

The Med-Tech Corridor also has the potential for a mixed-use retirement/senior residential development, in addition to commercial/retail space.

# Focus on Local

Williamstown must take great efforts in ensuring a diverse economy. A large portion of those efforts should be on supporting and growing local businesses. While no community should shun any legitimate business, some businesses are more important to the community than others. The importance of local, independent businesses cannot be overstated. They are uniquely suited to take on the challenges of the 21st century. They possess authenticity and agility, embody a sense of place, and employ a relationship-based business model. Local businesses are more than employers and profiteers; they are neighbors and community builders.

Local businesses that meet a community's needs offer people greater control over their lives. Money remains in the community rather than being siphoned off by global conglomerates. Jobs are more secure, and economies are more stable. And, there are the means and the incentives to protect the environment and to build the relationships of mutual trust

and responsibility that are the foundation of community.

The economic sectors below represent economic "building blocks" with which a community can grow a more locally based economy. Each should be complementary to the rest. These "building blocks" represent the basic pillars of most local economies.

- ◆ Local agriculture
- ◆ Energy efficiency
- ◆ Independent retail
- ◆ Community capital
- ◆ Local clothing/household needs
- ◆ Education
- ◆ Independent media/communications
- ◆ Business development/professional services
- ◆ Health and wellness
- ◆ Arts and culture

*Adapted from the Business Alliance for Local Living Economies*



## Next Steps

- ◆ Create a clear vision and direction
- ◆ Create an implementation plan
- ◆ Create working teams for each market segment
- ◆ Identify project developers for each segment
- ◆ Identify potential investors for each segment
- ◆ Be task and project oriented
- ◆ Build upon existing community groups and their work
- ◆ Encourage the community to get on the same page
- ◆ Communicate and share information regularly
- ◆ Measure and celebrate success
- ◆ Tell the story of Williamstown to everyone utilizing traditional media, social media, word of mouth, and marketing materials

# Other Important Areas



The following elements are derived directly from participant input. These are essential in increasing authenticity.

## **Protect the Environment**

Throughout the planning process, protecting the environment was stressed repeatedly. One key action is to protect the water quality of Williamstown Lake. The lake lies downstream of all the existing and projected urban development in the community.

Another action that will protect the environment as well as contain costs is energy conservation. The city government should become recognized as a leader in energy efficiency.

## **Improve Health**

Improved health of Williamstown residents is an important goal for the community. Several actions can be taken to enhance health. Creating an interconnected trail system, increasing reliance on local food, and encouraging and enabling alternative transportation such as walking and biking will all improve health.



## **Work with Grant County Neighbors**

Williamstown should continue with its record of interlocal and regional cooperation. Decisions made in the community will impact the rest of the county, and vice versa. Communication and mutual respect is essential to success.

## **Budget for Capital Improvements**

The actions in this plan require careful prioritizing and budgetary planning. Community leadership must be committed to making these improvements a reality.

## **Shorten Feedback Loops**

Success will require community involvement. Social media tools can enable the city to interact with citizens in a real-time basis. Further, these tools are important for broadcasting Williamstown's message as well as providing information to visitors.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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