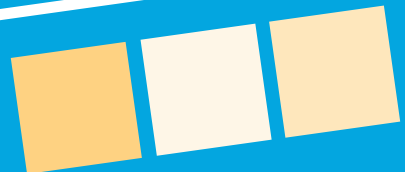





# HART COUNTY

## STRATEGIC PLAN 2014



Created by the residents of Hart County, Kentucky with assistance from the Kentucky League of Cities.  Kentucky League of Cities



# Acknowledgements

Hart County Planning Commission

Kenny Isenberg

Hart County Judge/Executive, Terry Martin

Hart County Tourism, Sandra Wilson

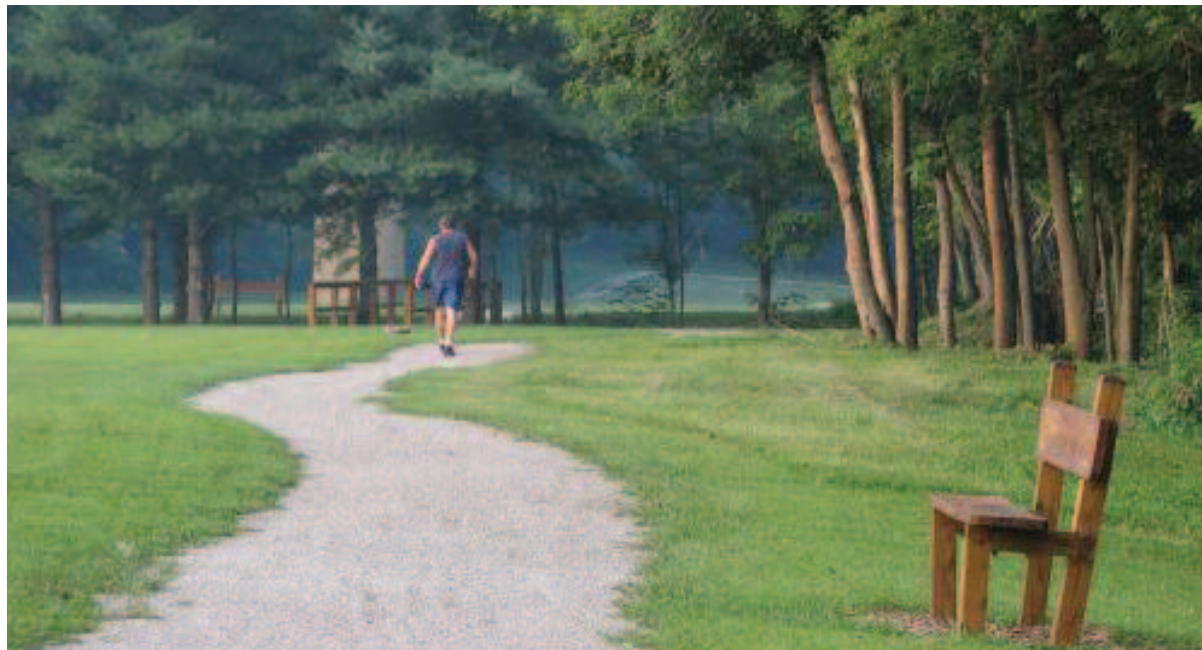
Hart County Chamber of Commerce, Virginia Davis

Linda Watts

Steve Austin, JD, ASLA



# Discover Hart County



The Hart Planning Commission set out to update the 2000 Comprehensive Land-Use Plan to meet the requirements of KRS 100. When undertaking the updating process, the Commission contracted with the Kentucky League of Cities Community Consulting Services to assist with engaging the public and to make functional and implementable recommendations.

One component of the Comprehensive Land-Use Plan update is a section for recommended implementation strategies. In addition to reviewing and considering past visioning efforts, Hart County officials listened to local residents through several public meetings in order to create a more detailed Strategic Plan. It is the desire of the county to have greater public participation in shaping and creating the city's future. This strategic planning document is the result of the input from residents during the public engagement sessions.

## Public Engagement Meetings:

- ♦ April 10, 2014 - Hart County Court House/City of Munfordville
- ♦ May 1, 2014 - City of Horse Cave
- ♦ May 5, 2014 - City of Bonnieville
- ♦ August 15, 2014 - Amish Community

## Other Recent Meetings:

- ♦ September 10, 2014 - Hart County School
- ♦ September 25, 2014 - Hart County Court House/City of Munfordville

Information was also obtained from the Hart County Chamber of Commerce from previous community planning and visioning meetings held in 2009.

# What Citizens Said



## Strengths

- ♦ Great young people
- ♦ Transportation system
- ♦ Industry/jobs
- ♦ Tourism attractions
- ♦ Compassionate, generous and giving community
- ♦ Caves/lakes/recreation
- ♦ Safe community
- ♦ Good infrastructure

## Weaknesses - What we should focus on

- ♦ Empty downtown buildings
- ♦ Clean up the trash throughout the county
- ♦ Lack of skilled workers
- ♦ Better utilize the resources we have
- ♦ Communication throughout the county
- ♦ Lack of activities for young people
- ♦ More housing opportunities of all types
- ♦ Diversify the economy

## Opportunities

- ♦ Develop Green River tourism
- ♦ Frenchman's Knob development
- ♦ Trails
- ♦ Nolin Lake
- ♦ Downtown development
- ♦ Education partnership development
- ♦ Caves
- ♦ Agri-development
- ♦ Develop interstate interchanges
- ♦ Small business support and development
- ♦ Unified marketing strategy



## Threats

- ♦ Lack of working capital for investment
- ♦ Apathy
- ♦ Lack of cooperation – we don't always work together
- ♦ People are afraid of change
- ♦ Lack of adequate workforce to support the jobs we have
- ♦ Aging population – lack of services
- ♦ Lack of vision for the future
- ♦ Downturn in the economy – impacts everything



# The Future We Desire



**Vision:** Hart County and its communities have a thriving, broad, locally based economy that utilizes local people and resources and is protective of quality of life and place.

**Strategy:** Develop an integrated and mutually supporting economic development plan to leverage value from agriculture, natural resources, recreation, tourism, environmental protection, and health care.

**Core Values:**

- ◆ People
- ◆ Caves and Natural Beauty
- ◆ Rich (Civil War) History and Culture
- ◆ Tourism
- ◆ Quality of Life

# Agriculture Development Plan



## Strategies for Expanding Agricultural Markets

- ♦ Diversify agriculture in Hart County to supply more local food needs
  - ♦ Wholesale
  - ♦ Retail
1. Meet with local Amish community (as well as with other food producers) in the area and discern their interests and possible contacts in wholesale food outlets.
  2. Establish agreements that allow for the Amish food supply to be marketed/sold by a third party.
  3. Identify existing markets where Amish-grown food products may be sold.
    - a. Obtain agreement with Amish-owned businesses to promote their businesses to tourists, particularly The Loop shown on page 9.
  4. Market local food products through social media, featuring businesses located along The Loop for an in-person shopping experience.
    - ♦ Develop business to add value to crops grown
    - ♦ Processing
    - ♦ Canning
    - ♦ Preserving
1. Investigate existing processing centers (Jackson County and Bardstown Food Manufacturer in Nelson County) where fresh produce is brought to a central location for processing, packaging and labeling.
  2. Encourage schools to work with the local extension office to offer classes on canning and preserving, then market finished products at local farmer's market.
  3. Collaborate with the Amish for instructions to local producers on best practices for better quality foods for resale markets.
  4. Use tourism websites to market locally grown and processed items, featuring profile pages on each producer, and where their products are available for sale. (Preferably along The Loop.)
- Creating a locally grown "draw" to the community via food creates the opportunity to expand current businesses and create new businesses, thereby developing more jobs. Developing The Loop as described on page 9 will bring more people off I-65 and drive sales to locally owned businesses. To capture these travelers:
1. Develop points of sale (markets)
    - ♦ Create a local food/local crafts market – storefront at I-65 Exit Bonnieville (like Berea).

# Agriculture Development Plan



- ♦ Create or expand upon existing wholesale markets such as Kessinger's and Detweiler's Country Store.
  - ♦ Profile growers/producers when possible to create human interest stories.
  - ♦ Connect tourism to foods and the ability to "see where your food is grown, and by whom."
  - ♦ Market via tourism websites and social media.
  - ♦ Include food-related experiences in existing tourism attractions to cross market. For example, offer locally grown grain as feed to the animals at Kentucky Down Under Adventure Zoo. Create signage that features producers and where other locally grown human food may be purchased or eaten at one of the local restaurants.
2. Restaurant development centered in downtowns and rural settings
- ♦ Work with existing restaurants to encourage sale of locally grown/processed/produced foods.
  - ♦ Ask restaurants to provide cooking classes using their cooks as the experts in preparing locally grown foods.
  - ♦ Ask restaurants to feature local producers by posting a photograph and short bio on local food producers. Change the feature monthly or quarterly. Cycle as often as needed to
- continue marketing locally grown food and the producers.
3. Wine making and distilleries
- ♦ Determine if there is interest within the community to grow grapes or learn to make wine or spirits.
  - ♦ Investigate existing venues in nearby communities.
  - ♦ Assess if there are opportunities to grow one of the existing venues by branching into Hart County, using local land and people, growing more jobs for Hart County.
4. Marketing value-added Hart County products to broader region
- ♦ Assess all marketing currently being done by Hart County and assess opportunities for collaboration and cross marketing. For example use tourism funds to develop cross marketing posters, banners or signs to be placed at each tourism destination to market another tourism draw within the county. For example at Detweiler's Country Store there might be a tourism sign that promotes the Munfordville Inn, Frenchman's Knob in Bonnieville, and the American Cave and Karst Museum in Horse Cave.
  - ♦ Use exposure at the I-65 welcome center to promote The Loop and the locally grown products of Hart County.
  - ♦ Ask the Amish to assist in marketing Hart County's Loop to other Amish communities across the U.S.





# Natural Resources Development Plan

The story of the creation of the split white oak basket in Hart County is a cultural treasure. This unique craft is in danger because the craftsmen are aging, and there is no plan in place to ensure the continued existence of this art. The split white oak basket is also an economic development opportunity.



The Mammoth Cave Basket Guild carries the torch for this art form. The community needs to assist in the effort to mentor new basket weavers. There are potential funding opportunities. But first, the target trainees must be identified. They could include students, community service workers and therapy patients.

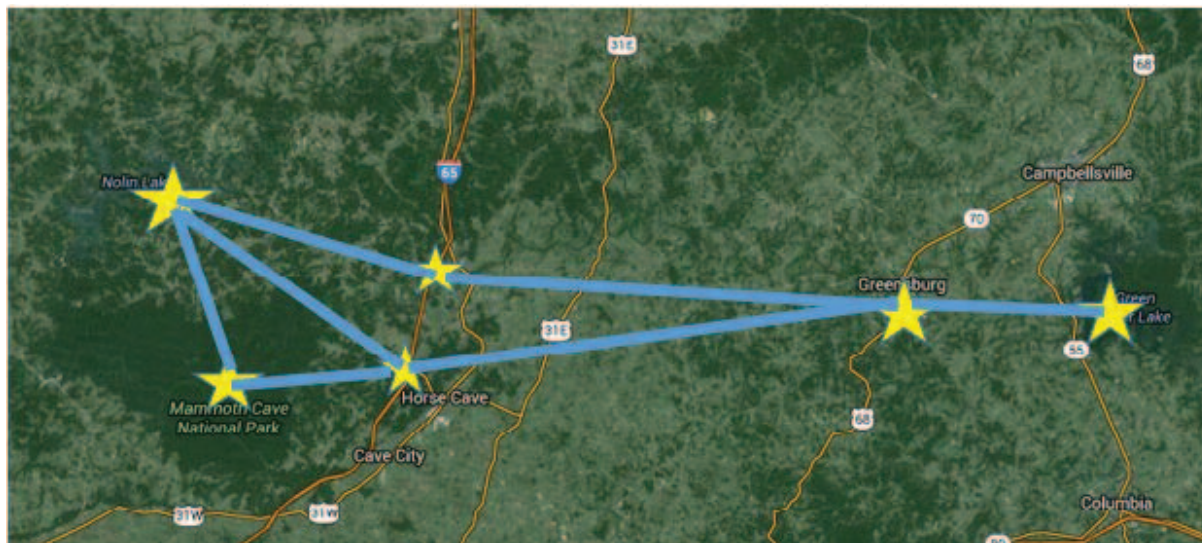
1. Identify what other plants and minerals can be used sustainably and to which value can be added. For example – oak barrels, chair caning, wood carving, weaving, pottery made by local people with local materials.
2. Identify who within the community has an interest in learning these craft skills and who can teach them.
3. Offer simple crafts training to small children during summer camps as a way of introducing them to crafts at an early age.

By developing these skills, collateral development occurs through education. This may come through formal instruction at Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS), Cooperative Extension, Folk School and/or a Craftsman Guild. The training may come through a local gardener learning to harvest certain types of wood for carving from an Amish neighbor, or a teen might learn how to weave from a local grandmother during a summer camp.





# Recreation Development Plan



Hart County is rich in natural resources, many of which create venues for enticing tourists to enjoy the great outdoors.

- ♦ Identify expanded recreation potential in Hart County, such as:
  - Biking
  - Hiking
  - Paddling
  - Riding
  - Climbing
  - Caving
  - Hunting
  - Camping
  - Swimming
  - Fishing
  - Boating
  - Zip lining
- ♦ Examples of potential connections or expansions include:
  - Cub Run
  - Moutardier Recreation Area
  - Nolin Lake
- Reimagine the cave area
- Nature Conservancy – WKU
- Build on Green River recreation area – connect to Greensburg
- ATV Trails – adventure tourism
- Frenchman’s Knob recreational area
- American Cave and Karst Museum
- ♦ Connectors are imperative to assist tourists as well as locals in navigating all the things there are to do within Hart County such as:
  - Connect Nolin Lake, Mammoth Cave and Green River State Park with trails
  - Develop and promote The Loop to connect local businesses with tourism activities
  - Assess whether there are natural connectors to local sporting events to capture tournament traffic to local tourism venues
- ♦ Develop a master plan linking recreation activities such as:
  - Bike from a bed and breakfast to a cave, then to lunch at a rural store/restaurant, then bike to an afternoon of canoeing on the Green River, then back to downtown for a music festival

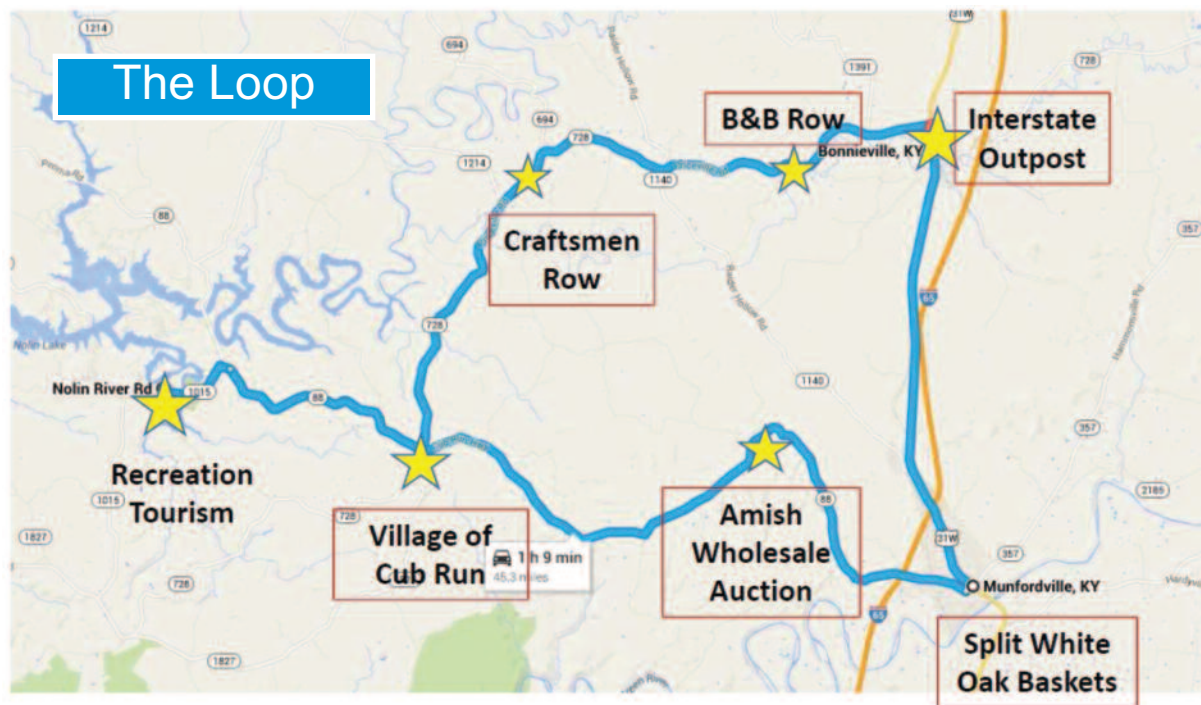
# Recreation Development Plan



- ♦ Collateral development business opportunities in:
  - Supplies
  - Rentals
  - Lodging
  - Food
  - Entertainment
  - Teaching
- ♦ Need renovated living spaces above storefronts for lodging options, bed and breakfasts, and hotels
- ♦ Restaurants
- ♦ Artists
- ♦ Music
- ♦ Pocket parks and plazas

Most of these new business opportunities should be located in downtowns.

# Tourism Development Plan



In evaluating the current status of economic engines within the community, it is clear that tourism is recognized for the value it adds to the local economy. Marketing and promotion efforts are excellent and something the community can be proud of. The greatest challenge we see for the community is how to tie all the individual attractions together to build a greater buzz about Hart County.

We suggest that you build upon the current tourism plan by developing cross marketing strategies that encompass locally grown and processed foods, crafts, products and services. Using the concept of The Loop as shown here, will increase traffic drawn from I-65 travelers.

1. Create a Driving Tour and market consistently at the Visitor Center
  - ♦ Identify key locations and cross promote with existing tourist venues
  - ♦ Highway 728 Loop tours/B&B/Amish
  - ♦ Develop a Wayfinding System of signage to guide tourists to destinations
  - ♦ Rest stops – provide public facilities along The Loop



# Tourism Development Plan

## 2. Educational tourism – host people from elsewhere to learn from what you’re doing in Hart County

- ◆ Partner with cave, craft, food and history-related businesses to develop training workshops. For example, develop two-to-three-day seminars with a variety of hands-on training in particular crafts or food-related topics, site visits and recreational outings.
- ◆ Use your partner’s lists of customers to cross-promote and market nationally.
- ◆ Tie in local history whenever possible to attract a broader audience.



## 3. Collateral development

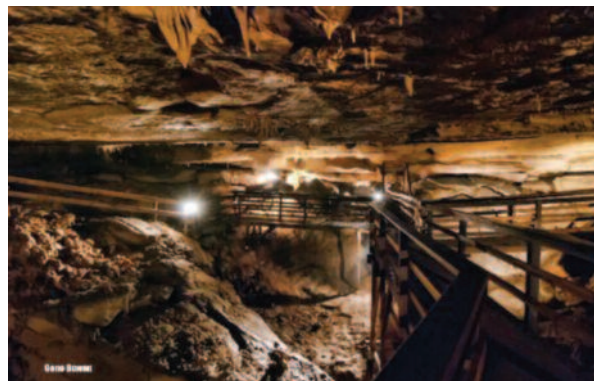
- ◆ Lodging
- ◆ Restaurants
- ◆ Arts and crafts
- ◆ Entertainment



# Environmental Protection Plan

With national attention drawn to the area from the recent sink hole at the National Corvette Museum in nearby Bowling Green, people are naturally concerned about the safety and protection of natural resources. Residents of Hart County are keenly aware of the need to protect their water supplies, and cave areas.

1. Continue to preserve/protect karst formations
  - ◆ Collaborate with local cave-related businesses to build awareness of cave area/sinkholes/groundwater/water tables
  - ◆ Riparian buffers – repair and protect
  - ◆ Protect Green River – clean up on a regular and ongoing basis
  - ◆ Monitor development in and around Nolin Lake
2. Collateral development
  - ◆ Education – use these unique natural resources as a draw to attract visitors
  - ◆ Organize and leverage regional environmental protection work



# Conventional Economic Development Plan

With three exits into Hart County from I-65, there is no limit to the possibilities for economic development. Some decisions need to be made by local residents as to the importance and prioritization of what must happen next. A few things to consider as Hart County reimagines itself:

1. Exit 58 at Bonnieville – Master plan development with the A.M.E.R.I.C.A. plan noted within the Bonnieville strategic plan of 2013. This would be a private/public partnership to include possible crafts market such as that found in Berea.
2. Exit 65 at Munfordville – As the seat of county government and hub of commerce, develop a one-stop shop for all things business-related, making start-up of new business easy and accessible.
3. Exit 71 at Horse Cave – Collaborate with local officials and residents to repurpose the outlet mall property as noted in the Community Prosperity section of the Horse Cave Strategic Plan of 2011. One suggestion for this property, which emerged several times during listening sessions, is to turn the property into a vocational school. Teach skills such as boat or horse trailer building, mechanics, robotics, and other technical and engineering skills needed by local industries. Other training that could be offered includes health-related skills. See page 15 herein for details.

For these ideas to be successful, the community should:

- ♦ Push for a work-ready community designation.
- ♦ Perform a gap analysis to determine what needs are not being met with local people.
- ♦ Develop strategies to leverage I-65/rail service.

Other supporting strategies include:

1. Community growth and development

For Hart County to have an effective economic development climate, there are two issues that emerged at every public meeting:

- ♦ The need to have one person in charge of and held accountable for economic development.
- ♦ The need to have a countywide planning administrator as well as the need to update ordinances and abide by them.

We recommend that Hart County:

- ♦ Establish a full-time, paid position for a countywide economic development manager.
- ♦ Establish a full-time, countywide planning administrator position. Empower and assist the cities of Munfordville and Horse Cave in evaluating, updating and streamlining current zoning ordinances.
- ♦ Utilize search engine optimization for economic development.

While essential information related to industrial development is available through the Kentucky Cabinet for Economic Development webpage <http://www.thinkkentucky.com/cmnty/quickfacts.aspx?cw=40>, we recommend the community optimize Hart County's industrial and economic development profile. Search engine optimization is the act of designing your web content to show up





# Conventional Economic Development Plan

on search queries that are likely to be used by your target audience. For example, hosting a page on the county's existing site, or the Chamber of Commerce site, that is titled "Industrial Parks in Hart County" and populating the page with information about the facilities should be adequate.

## 2. Develop support system

- ♦ Business mentors – use existing resources through the Chamber and SCORE offices to assist business owners in best practices.
- ♦ Develop quarterly bus tours within a day's drive to see how other communities are dealing with problems similar to those identified in Hart County.
- ♦ Investigate community funding models and layer options of funding as needed.
- ♦ Investigate funding mechanisms such as a community foundation. Use the Transfer of Wealth study for additional information.



- ♦ Involve local banks and determine their interest and potential involvement.
- ♦ Develop an entrepreneur fund created by local people.

## 3. Communication

- ♦ Determine how best to reach citizens, whether through small kitchen meetings or public places.
- ♦ Present concepts of economic development in terms of how each development will impact local residents financially.
- ♦ Assess how best to integrate students at the high schools into community development, teaching by doing.

Hart County leaders are to be applauded for recognizing the need for management of local industries, elected officials, business owners and leadership of both Caverna and Hart County High Schools, to meet regularly. We recommend that you engage students from the high school to participate in these meetings.

## 4. Engagement strategies

- ♦ Determine which methods work best to rally people and keep them involved.
- ♦ Expand Leadership Hart County to offer a youth mentoring program. Use the meetings noted in the statement above to develop relationships between students and local leaders. Develop key measures of success. For example, how many complete the training and how many then take a leadership role in the community. For those who graduate, how many are they mentoring?
- ♦ Ensure that outstanding leadership demonstrated within the community is recognized and rewarded.

# Economic Development – Housing

There were two areas of common conversation during the public meetings:

1. Owners and managers of local industry often don't choose to live in Hart County.
2. There are a few neighborhoods and/or individual properties that need attention.

We recommend the following ideas for consideration:

1. Conduct a comprehensive housing inventory, and evaluate current Census data to identify inventory and potential usage.
2. Interview industry leadership with specific questions related to housing needs.
3. Work with local realtors to determine current needs and what future opportunities may exist for additional housing. Additional senior housing, apartments or patio homes might be in order.
4. Establish incentives to entice residential development in Hart County. (Seek out local leaders from Calvert City and share ideas.)
5. Work with local builders to identify where the obstacles to housing development may lie.
6. Potential assistance and resources may come from programs such as Repair Affair or Habitat for Humanity, depending upon the needs.
7. Consider potential upper story opportunities as well as properties within the community that could be adapted for new use, such as former tobacco warehouses.
8. Develop a Property Owner Recognition Initiative, investigate the City of Mayfield for ideas.
9. Organize and conduct neighborhood clean-up days. Bring in a dumpster and provide at no cost.
10. Update and streamline codes and ordinances.
11. Partner with Kentucky Housing and seek ways in which housing may be improved.
12. Establish local needs through surveys – seniors, low-to-moderate income, students, young adults – funding is out there, but the need must be identified.



# Economic Development – Health Care

Education and health care are the growth “industries” for the foreseeable future. Health care providers are possible tenants for local properties, buyers of local services, and they provide a target market of users/buyers to capture.

Hart County’s population indicates an escalating aging population, providing a boost to the economy in the following areas:

- ♦ Assisted living facilities
- ♦ Medical care
- ♦ Extended care
- ♦ In-home care
- ♦ Transport
- ♦ Health care professionals
- ♦ Certificate programs

We recommend:

1. Conduct a community-wide audit of medical and health-related services and determine gaps.
2. Interview health care professionals in each type of service and learn what may be missing that the community can provide in terms of related business, products or services.



3. Identify needs, resources and funding, and establish steps for moving forward.
4. Work with local schools to provide hands-on learning opportunities for local students, growing them into careers in the health care industry.
5. Invite and encourage health care businesses to actively participate in economic development meetings noted on page 13.



# Gateways to Hart County

Images below are part of the 2012 Bonnieville Strategic Plan. During the 2014 Hart County public meetings, citizens noted a desire for a more welcoming appearance at key entry points to the community. These types of enhancements are relatively inexpensive and easy to accomplish. Bonnieville is underway with implementing this concept, and several other visually appealing

elements of their plan, including entry signage and banners. We recommend that Hart County creates a visually consistent theme at the gateway entrances of the county. For example, use wild flowers or dogwood trees at one entrance, sun flowers or tulips at another. These gateways are the first impression of the community as a whole.



Bonnieville Entrance From I-65



# Community Gathering Places

This before/after image is an example of a small park concept that was created for the City of Horse Cave in 2010. These types of greenspaces have already been added to strategic locations in

Bonnieville and Munfordville. We recommend that other sites throughout Hart County be identified for small pocket parks where people can gather to picnic, relax, and have community gatherings.





**Kentucky League of Cities**

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2014.