





Brief History of Versailles

Versailles is the county seat of Woodford County and is located on U.S. 60 and U.S. 62. The town was established on June 23, 1792 following the settlement of Woodford County in 1788.



After Versailles was incorporated in 1837, the town government was organized, and a county court of justice was formed. The current (fourth) court house was erected in 1970.

The rich farmlands surrounding the town make it a vital agricultural trading center. Many impressive homes were built in the nineteenth century, making Versailles one of the most architecturally interesting communities in Kentucky.



Former Kentucky Governor John J. Crittenden was born near Versailles, and the best-known resident of Versailles was two-time Kentucky Governor A. B. "Happy" Chandler who moved to town in 1922, and lived there the rest of his life. He once stated, "It's one of the most beautiful small towns I've seen in my life. And it's a great place to retire."







# Introduction to the Versailles Strategic Plan



Recent economic developments have created a unique opportunity for elected leaders of the City of Versailles to step up and develop intentional strategies that are focused on the best interests of the City of Versailles. The mayor and members of the city council convened in a work session on March 27, 2014, where they discussed their ideas, concerns and the numerous efforts already underway. Emboldened by recent developments and community outcry, the council moved to convene a steering committee and host community meetings to garner citizen input for a strategic planning process which would be led by community development advisors of the Kentucky League of Cities.

A steering committee was selected and convened by the City of Versailles on May 6, 2014, to assist in a strategic planning process. The steering committee met after each of the public meetings to assist the facilitators in developing strategic recommendations for the city council and community leaders to consider for future growth and development.

On May 22, 2014, more than 180 persons attended the first public meeting held at the Kentucky Community and Technical College campus. From the information gathered during the public meeting, the steering committee, and that of

the city council, the following Core Values were identified for the city of Versailles:

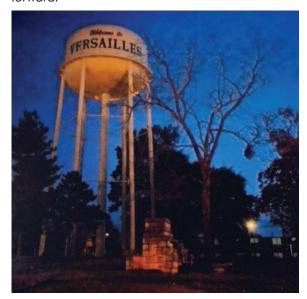
- Small town atmosphere with urban access
- The people kind, compassionate, and caring
- Safe
- Beautiful
- Hospitality and culture

The steering committee reconvened on July 14, 2014, to review the results of public comments. A special presentation was also made by Phil Holoubeck regarding potential opportunities for housing development in the city. KLC Community Development Advisor Tad Long provided an outline of strategic recommendations. Based upon the input of local citizens and input from the steering committee, a second public meeting was held on August 25, 2014.

At the public meeting on August 25, 2014, the initial draft of the strategic plan was presented to the public. In general, the ideas and concepts were well received. The residents asked many questions and provided useful suggestions that made the plan stronger and more focused. With this valuable additional input from community leaders, the public and steering committee, the plan was presented to the public on October 28, 2014.

# **Core Values**

The citizens expressed optimism about the future of their city. Based upon their comments, these Core Values emerged and set the stage for moving forward.



#### Small town atmosphere with urban access

Residents of the community greatly value their sense of place and the quality of life it offers. The idyllic location that so-enticed early pioneer settlers continues today with a close-knit, small-town feel, surrounded by beautiful farmland, and closely aligns to the urban aspects of the greater Lexington area.

#### The people are kind, compassionate, and caring

When asked what they valued most about the community, one of the most frequent responses related to the people. The friendliness of the

people is largely the appeal that many associate with a small town family-oriented atmosphere and it is highly valued.

#### Safe

That same small-town atmosphere also fosters a deeply held sense of safety, very important to families raising children in the community. This attribute also helps residents feel like they belong to the community and are not just another face in the crowd.

#### **Beautiful**

Various words were used to describe the ambiance and attractiveness of Versailles and Woodford County. There is no doubt that the visual appeal of the community is a huge draw for locals and visitors alike.



#### Hospitality and Culture

Much work has been accomplished in the community to promote the rich history and beautiful landscapes. There is great interest in continuing to shine a light on these positive aspects in order to attract additional economic prosperity.



# What We Heard

#### Strengths

- Beauty of downtown
- Location
- Horse industry
- Thoughtful growth
- Work-ready community
- Natural tourism attractions
- Low cost of living
- Hospitality and culture
- World-class farmland
- Agricultural heritage
- Good parks and recreation
- Strong arts and crafts community
- KCTCS is headquartered here
- Good hospital
- Bluegrass Railroad Museum
- Good jobs
- Police, fire & EMS
- Award-winning schools

#### Weaknesses

- Downtown business needs to grow
- Traffic congestion
- Sprawl
- Lack of hotels/motels
- Lack of cooperation
- Vacant buildings
- Vacant houses/buildings
- Limited youth activities
- Lack of connecting infrastructure
- Fear of change
- Lack of low income housing
- Need for technical training/professional opportunities
- No visitor or community center
- Lack of communication
- Poverty and underserved population
- Lack of restaurant choices



#### **Opportunities**

- KCTCS partnership
- Lots of empty space to develop
- Workforce development
- Teen center
- Develop nightlife
- Micro-distilleries and breweries
- Farmers market permanent location
- Activities for young people
- Trail development locally and regionally
- Reimagine vacant space that is available
- Streamline government services
- Insure incoming businesses respect local values
- Beautify downtown core and city entrances
- Empower young people to be involved
- Downtown housing

#### **Threats**

- Lack of a development manager
- Too dependent on volunteers
- Vacant storefronts
- Uncontrolled growth
- Sprawl
- Lack of open forums
- Lack of business incentives
- Lack of entry level jobs
- Loss of green spaces
- Not listening to each other

# Realities



As the county seat of Woodford County, Versailles is the focal point of commerce, education, economic activity, and government. Versailles is also the self-proclaimed "Horse Capital of

the World." In recent years, the area has seen an explosion of interest in tourism as a result of the development of the Bourbon Trail which connects the region's world-famous distilleries.

The conundrum facing Versailles is one of establishing its own distinct identity that leverages these "attractors" while balancing the need to improve and uplift the quality of life for Versailles full-time residents. The city should address the realities that exist and forge a plan to move all of these priorities forward in an effective manner. A few of the realities include:

- Several plans/studies on the table Currently, the community is undertaking the creation of a community foundation; a bike/trail master plan connecting the city, county and region; the Mayor's Task Force on Commercial Retention and Recruitment; a countywide rebranding effort; and "Beyond the Legacy" created by the University of Kentucky Department of Landscape Architecture
- Branding effort in motion Uniquely Woodford – The current initiative to reimagine and brand Woodford County, Versailles and Midway seeks to create a unified vision for the county. The challenge for Versailles is determining its own role within the vision and clearly defining its own identity.

- Public is focused on Wal-Mart, merger and growth – Shaping and defining growth in Versailles and Woodford County has always been about balance. Many battles have been waged between those who want more growth and those who are just as adamant about preserving the land. Are these interests mutually exclusive or can common ground be found?
- Leadership focused on broader view Without question, the leaders of the city want to see long-term sustained growth (economic activity) and immediate impact (tactical implementation). Distilling the broad view goals into short-term tactical strategies is challenging for any community. Versailles is no different in this respect.

With so many plans on the table and a multitude of competing interests, the reality is that Versailles stands at a crossroads. How can all of these interests be satisfied? What are the ways to address local needs that build a sustainable local economy while respecting the broader community's desire to project a more global image of horses, natural beauty, farmland and bourbon? Choices made today will impact the city for the foreseeable future.



# We Recommend: Seven Prescriptions for Success

For Versailles to be successful in achieving its vision for the future, we offer seven prescriptions for success. Each of these prescriptions is centered on creating and sustaining local jobs and work in tandem. They are the keys to unlocking the pent up energy that pervades this city.

While Versailles is at the epicenter of the horse and bourbon industries, the city itself must create a robust and authentic local economy to reap the benefits of these county-centric attractions. We believe that Versailles is underutilizing its capacity to leverage these assets. As examples, consider the following questions:

- 1. Where do people find lodging in Versailles?
- 2. Where do most people begin their tours?
- 3. Where do people go for entertainment, events and the nightlife in Versailles?
- 4. Where do people find things to do in order to extend their stay?
- 5. Where do people shop?

The **obvious answer** to retaining all of those dollars that are flowing out of Woodford County "after the experience." Give folks a reason to visit and stay in VERSAILLES! This is the ultimate local job creator.

# Seven Prescriptions for Success

- Connect
- Attract
- Include
- Enhance
- Empower
- Reimagine
- Educate







### Rx #1: Connect

Connections are about so much more than a slick brochure. Connections are about real community amenities that empower people to easily access the entire city, county and region. These physical connections include the following

#### **Physical Connections**

- Local trail links between parks in Versailles as well as the Town Square Quilt Trail
- Link neighborhoods to downtown
  - Wayfinding signage
    - Complete streets
    - ID key streets
- Regional bike/hiking trail links Versailles could be at the center of this activity
  - UK Landscape Architect Study "Beyond the Legacy Study"
  - Link to Midway
  - Link to Georgetown and then to the Legacy Trail
  - Link to Lawrenceburg
- Consider a "Backyard Harvest" type organization to connect the farmers market to residents
- Mobility Enhance pedestrian access and reduce vehicular traffic. Address the issue of traffic congestion in the downtown. Consider all options including a limited access connector road.

#### Partners

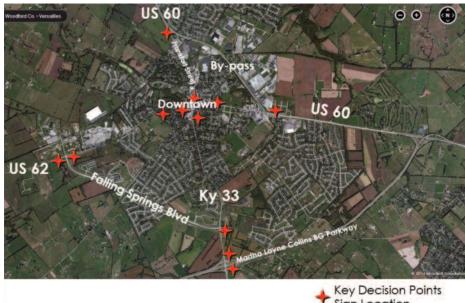
- Woodford County, Midway, Lawrenceburg, Anderson County, Georgetown and Scott County
- Community Foundation
- Kentucky Adventure Tourism and Trail Town partners at the state level work is already underway to connect the region. Efforts include the Versailles Town Square Quilt Trail, Woodford County Bike Trail, the Woodford County Quilt Trail and the Woodford County Park Trail. Potential funding is available through the Department for Local Government, Kentucky Department for Tourism (Adventure Tourism and Trails) and other agencies.
- Regionally for marketing, preservation and environmental issues
- Federal grants through the Department for Local Government Community Facilities CDBG sources.



# Rx #1: Connect

### Versailles Wayfinding System





### Rx #2: Attract



Redeveloping downtown was mentioned several times as a concern and an opportunity for the City of Versailles. Phil Holoubeck of Lexington provided the steering committee with some insight on how Versailles might successfully implement a downtown development strategy. Some of the highlights of his discussion included the following points.

Great cities have thriving downtowns. Know your market! The newest economic model focuses on attracting knowledge-based companies that attract young professionals. To attract and retain this demographic, cities need to have the amenities that they want including abundant restaurants/nightlife, mixed-use buildings with lots of cool housing across all price points and ample greenspace. Some of the specific amenities include outdoor cafes, disguised parking garages, a variety of retail, and places to buy food and daily needs downtown.

Mixed-use development provides these amenities as well as these benefits:

 Urban mixed-use creates hundreds of thousands of revenue dollars (and taxes) per acre, per year

- Mixed-use urban development pays off infrastructure in about 3 ½ years as opposed to suburban development which takes 42 years, on average.
- Downtowns should include infill development, residential development, maximized density and great urban entrances.
- Incentives are needed. Many mixed-use projects fail due to razor-thin or nonexistent margins as well as a risk/reward equation that is out of balance
- Utilize the revised Kentucky Investment Act incentives. Identify eligible areas for New Market Tax Credits, TIF, property tax abatements, creation of a retail establishment fund and a workforce housing fund.

Incentives are needed! The risk/reward equation for downtown must be brought into balance; both supply side and demand side incentives are needed. There is no "one magic bullet." Return on Investment for the public sector can be less than a year. Keep these points in mind as you consider the right mix for downtown Versailles.

## Rx #2: Attract



Market and Music Barn





Build a Better Block Pop-up Cafe

#### Attractors

- Food, Music and Bourbon Tourism Strategy – Consider creating a fun pass to use in both electronic and physical media that features a QR symbol that defines Versailles as the place to have a great experience after touring the county's horse and bourbon attractions.
- Create a Market and Music Barn as a gathering place for the sale of local goods and as an entertainment venue. Potential sites include all along Park Street from Green Street to Rose Hill Avenue. The advantage of using the lots on Park Street is that the venue could be built first, and the construction of a future parking structure could easily be added.
- Address housing needs.
- Recruit value-added agriculture business.
- Become the "Beginning and End" destination for regional tourism.
- KCTCS Campus Professional training in business management, as well as trade and certificate programs built around "Food, Music and Bourbon."
- Chefs, musicians, artists.
- Downtown developers.
- Build a Better Block Engage students in utilizing tactical urbanism strategies such as pop-up parks and pop-up businesses.

# Rx #3: Enhance

- Beautification
  - City gateways
  - U.S. 60 corridor
  - Downtown
  - Lexington Street
- Housing
  - KY Housing Rehab Grants
  - Identify affordable, market-rate housing build sites in Versailles
  - Layered/tiered approach with KY Housing and Federal Home Loan Bank
  - Build out Wi-Fi infrastructure
- Community Gardens Assess the Need
  - Locate appropriate space school food service professionals can access information that pinpoint locations of neighborhood census tracts where children who receive free and reduced meals.
  - Work with the Foundation for a Healthy Kentucky for best practices, models and potential grant funds to address local food and healthy lifestyle needs. Funding to create and implement health and wellness strategies may also be available. Grant County in northern Kentucky is implementing an ambitious plan that could be a model for Versailles and Woodford County.
  - County produce to local restaurants and farmers market.
- Potential Funders
  - Kentucky Housing
  - Kentucky Foundation for a Healthy Kentucky
  - Kentucky Housing Corporation
  - Federal Home Loan Bank
  - Private Investors
  - Venture Capitalists
  - Place Matters Foundation
  - Playful Cities/KaBoom Grants







## Rx #4: Include

- Government and public agencies need to communicate more effectively to the public and among themselves. With so many initiatives and plans underway, a unified onestop information center needs to be established.
- Enhancing the tourism position to provide information to locals and visitors alike.
- Youth and minorities in planning and action performances at Lexington Dinner Train turn around, for example, or the Market and Music Barn
- Address affordable housing, vacant lots, infill, upper-floor development in downtown, rehab of existing structures.
- Range of housing especially in the downtown low income residents with jobs.
   Versailles needs a one-stop assistance office.
- Facilities and activities for youth.

- Community activity center for youth in vacant strip mall.
- Establishing safe environment for youth to gather.
- Create community youth clubs with supervision for activities such as biking, hiking, performing arts and theatre. The Swamp Gravy program (www.swampgravy.com) in Georgia is an excellent model geared toward creative writing, storytelling and performance. Other Kentucky communities have successfully implemented this initiative that involves adults and youth.
- Create a mayor's youth council to work with city government and community civic organizations to provide opportunity and a voice for youth to share their ideas.
   Greensburg, Kentucky is an excellent model.

# Rx #5: Empower

- Youth and minorities in identifying community needs.
- Activate potential volunteers through outreach particularly with the faith-based community.
- Local entrepreneurs gap analysis some information contained in Mayor's Task Force Report – more study needed.
- Artists consortium.
- Focus intensely on the local artists and craftspeople already in city – incubate into something more effective – master classes, identify new talent.

- Develop a business incubator, micro-industry and spinoff companies – critical mass exists – has not been unlocked yet.
- Make it easier to do business in the city by creating a one-stop shop for information about permits, regulations and potential business sites.
- Create/leverage a Community Foundation.



# Rx #6: Reimagine

- Growing a locally based economy.
- Open up Big Spring Park to provide easy access from Main Street.
- Downtown as an entertainment district. Many cities are focusing on developing specific niche markets including Paducah's Artists Village and Louisville's Smokehouse initiative and redeveloping downtown and low vacancy housing areas to attract artisans and craftsmen. This strategy would complement the local artists and crafts community that already exist in Versailles and build a critical mass.
- Strip malls as incubators, education and entertainment spaces.
- Utilizing vacant big box store for city government departments such as fire, safety, and emergency services.
- City limits should match the Urban Service Boundary. Further study is necessary. Benefits may include:
  - Residents will have a voice in issues that affect them directly
  - Better fire protection
  - Clarity
- Local lodging build on the B&Bs in place and explore the possibility of building a locally owned hotel, motel or resort.
- Versailles as a trail hub home base for bike/car tour of wineries, farms and distilleries.



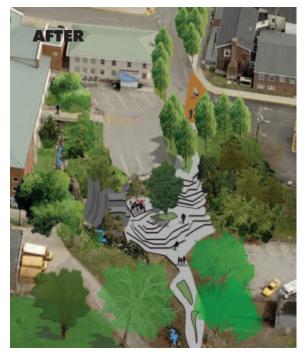
Big Spring Park Enhancement Before/Big Spring Park Enhancement After



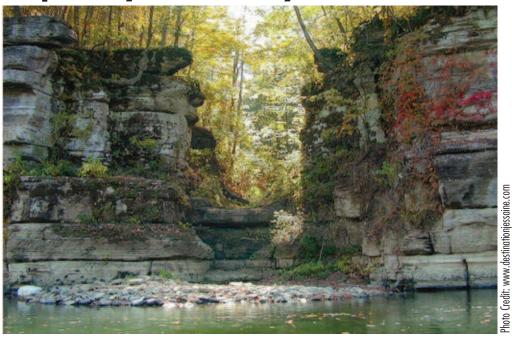
# Rx #6: Reimagine

### **Big Spring Park Enhancement**





### **Inspired by the Kentucky River Palisades**

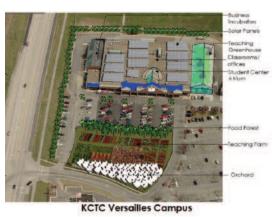


## Rx #7: Education



The Kentucky
Community and
Technical College
System (KCTCS) is
headquartered in
Versailles. More than
90,000 students (both

full-time and part-time) are enrolled in classes across 70 campuses statewide. The city and KCTCS should partner to create a unique community college campus in Versailles for local students. The city already has an entity in place to facilitate the purchase of a soon-to-be vacant big box store which could then be sold or transferred to KCTCS. A similar transaction facilitated the purchase of a vacant manufacturing facility which KCTCS converted into its present-day headquarter.



The KCTCS Versailles Campus could become the linchpin to implementing many of the city's economic development and workforce training initiatives. This arrangement would train local students in the fields of culinary arts, business management, hospitality services and vital certificate programs necessary to the economic vibrancy of the community. Walla Walla, Washington, is a great example of these ideas in practice. A case study of their success is included in this plan as a potential model for Versailles.



- Forge a partnership between the city, local businesses and KCTCS.
- Create a vision of economic development focused on local jobs.
- Base it on adding value to local products tourism, culinary arts, and hospitality.
- Invest in local people many of the jobs are entry-level, but could grow into management opportunities and startup companies.
- KCTCS can actually facilitate Versailles' desire to chart its own course for the next several decades.
- Professional level training for business management.
- Forge relationship between the excellent local school system and KCTCS to enhance education opportunities.
- Develop dual credit and transfer to four-year college or community college programs.

# **APPENDIX 1: A Case Study**

The policy and decision-makers have an incredible opportunity to enhance the business and economic opportunities for the residents of Versailles. One of the most effective resources is KCTCS. This brief case study describes how the leaders of Walla Walla, Washington, and its community college harnessed and then unleashed the pent up potential of the community. It is a successful model that Versailles could adapt for its own purposes.



#### Case Study: Walla Walla, Washington

Examining the Role of a Community College on Local Economic Development

Walla Walla, population about 32,000, is located in far southeastern Washington State, four hours drive from the nearest large city. The area is very dry, but soils are fertile and there are scenic mountains nearby.

Fifteen years ago, Walla Walla was in a funk. Jobs and people were leaving town, farming was a money-losing proposition, and downtown was becoming a wasteland. Fast forward to 2014. Today, Walla Walla has a thriving 21st century economy, a downtown booming with art and food attractions, and a national reputation as the little town that could.

What happened? Primarily, this economic and cultural renaissance was forged by a partnership between the city and Walla Walla Community College. By creating a vision of economic

development based on adding value to local products and by investing in local people, the community has been able to chart its own course. The *National Review* recently said of this effort, "the nation would do well to consider Walla Walla, which seems to have cracked the code on how to get mid-skill workers back into the labor force while revitalizing an economy. If the country needs a model, this could be it."

The community vision was encapsulated by the theme of "Wine. Food. Art." All primary economic and cultural improvement efforts were based on these three interrelated tenets. The plan was to link development of human talent with entrepreneurship and investment and the necessary infrastructure to enable growth to occur.

The role of the Walla Walla Community College is to offer the education necessary to develop human talent as well as to help provide the needed infrastructure. So, the College created what has become nationally renowned curriculum in all facets of wine making and business, culinary skills, and the arts. The College invested in a \$5 million viticulture facility, which is involved in not only teaching but also the making of its own College Cellars label.



Today, as the *National Journal* reports, "The College's graduates populate the fields, wine laboratories, cellars, and tasting rooms that unfurled like tendrils across the county. As the industry grew, so did the city's tourism business, its restaurants, and its hotels."

The Community College's effort was focused by the typical conundrum of higher education. "Many students were coming to college for retraining," says Walla Walla Community College President Steve

# **APPENDIX 1: A Case Study**

VanAusdle. "Our question was, 'Retraining for what? Are we just training them to leave this area?" By instituting a local first approach, VanAusdle turned the conundrum inside out: "Then our vision grew, and it was not just wine, but wine, food and art, the creative community."

The role of local government has been to help provide the support, the physical infrastructure, and regulatory environment, including protecting farmland from development, to allow these efforts to flourish. Examples of government action include brokering public and private investments in downtown for building renovation, creating a local film and television commission, and working on regional cooperation toward common goals.



#### Results

In 1999 there were fewer than 15 vineyards in the entire region. Today, there are over 170. This has led to the opening of at least 20 wine tasting rooms in downtown. In turn, this has helped foster a world-class culinary scene and a progressive small farm culture has evolved in response. In addition to wine and food-related tourism, Walla Walla has also become a hub for outdoor activities like hiking and bike tours. Locally owned hotels and B & B's are prospering.

Other aspects of the creative economy have also flourished. The Intelligent Community Forum (ICF) recently named Walla Walla as one of 21 communities worldwide that are positioned to prosper in the broadband economy. Art businesses like the Walla Walla Foundry have earned an international reputation. A go to for renowned artists like Maya Lin, Dale Chihuly and Jeff Koons to produce work, the Walla Walla Foundry is the largest contemporary art foundry in the nation, specializing in traditional casting along with digital 3-D technologies. It employs more than 100 artisans and workers.

Walla Walla Community College recently won a \$400,000 Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence, as only one of two winners out of the nation's 1,200 community colleges. The College is now expanding into renewable energy and environmental protection areas. Overall, Walla Walla Community College provides an impressive display of the power of higher education to help transform an economy.

The Walla Walla area has won several awards and recognition including one of 24 best places to live and work by *Sunset Magazine* in 2014, one of 10 best wine travel destination in 2014 by *Wine Enthusiast* magazine, Fodor's list of 10 best small towns in America in 2013, Tonique named Walla Walla as the most Authentic wine region in America in 2012, and 2011 they were named as one of the best small and friendliness towns in America by *USA Today*, as well as several other awards and recognition.

Walla Walla Chamber of Commerce President/CEO David Woolson recently said, "I want Walla Walla to be a poster child. One that shows you can have commerce and a wonderful lifestyle because of technology. Being in the middle of nowhere ain't what it used to be!"

Oh, about the name. Walla Walla is both the name of a tribe of Native Americans, but also means "many waters." Going forward, it just might also mean "success."

# **APPENDIX 2: What's Next?**

The next steps for any community are always a challenge. We recommend "Pick One. Do One." Form working groups around each strategy and create mini-strategic plans. We have created an implementation guide for you to follow with a sample plan.

#### Immediate Project Implementation

- 1. Identify your project/issue. Describe it in detail.
- 2. What needs to be done?
  - a. What does the end product look like?
  - b. How will you know you've been successful?

- 3. Who needs to be on board with the project? (Stakeholders)
- 4. How much will it cost? (Budget)
- 5. Who will pay for it? (Funding sources)
- 6. What is the first step? And then what?
- 7. Who will lead and do each step? (Take action)
- 8. When will it be done? (Time line and accountability)
- 9. How will you tell the story? Who do you want to hear the story? (Marketing)

#### SAMPLE IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

| Project                                 | Planning Entity                            | Funding                                 | Implementation |
|---|--|---|----------------|
| Parks and recreation plan               | Advisory board, rec department and board   | Grant requests, city match, fundraising | 2 years        |
| Remove outdated signs                   | Advisory board and public works leadership | n/a                                     | 6-9 months     |
| Establish dialogue with business owners | Volunteer committee members                | n/a                                     | Ongoing        |
| Tree ordinance                          | Advisory board                             | n/a                                     | 4-6 months     |
| Streetscape design                      | Advisory board and volunteer committee     | Grant, TEA-21, city                     | 1 year plus    |
| Blight control                          | Volunteer committee and code enforcement   | Recycling funds                         | ongoing        |

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

#### **City of Versailles**

Brian Traugott, Mayor
Mary Ellen Bradley, Councilmember
Michael Coleman, Councilmember
Carl Ellis, Councilmember
Ken Kerkhoff, Councilmember
Ann Miller, Councilmember
Owen Roberts, Councilmember

#### **Steering Committee Members**

Bob Blankenship
Jim Calvery
Mike Lawson
Governor Martha Layne Collins
Dr. Gloria McCall
Ann Miller
Adrian Teegarden
Brian Traugott, Mayor
Tony Wilson

The great citizens of the City of Versailles and the students of Woodford County High School.

KCTCS and Woodford County High School for the use of their fine facilities for the public meetings.

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