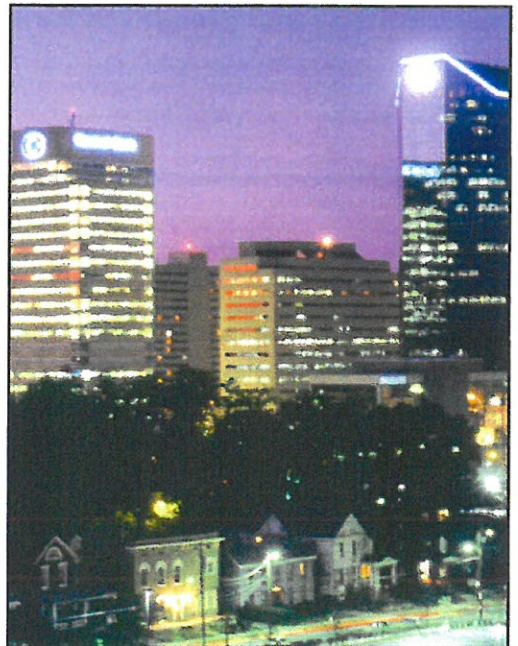


Learning from *Lexington*

Springfield Community Leadership Visit

Lexington, Kentucky
June 19-21, 2003




SPRINGFIELD
Area Chamber Of Commerce
Springfield, Missouri U.S.A.

Community Leadership Visit Learning from Lexington

Background

For 10 years now, the Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce has coordinated an annual community leadership visit for business, civic and governmental leaders in the Springfield area. The concept for the program is simple – travel to another city to learn what they’ve done that works (or doesn’t work) in the ongoing effort to build a better community. Participants return home with a shared vision of what the host community has accomplished and begin to look for ways to implement the good ideas (and avoid the bad ones) here in Springfield.

Lexington, Ky., was the destination for the Chamber’s 10th annual community leadership visit on June 19-21, 2003. Thirty-one local leaders participated in the three-day visit. The program schedule in Lexington focused on four primary areas:

- Lexington’s willingness to do some “community soul searching” and publish the results in the form of an annual Community Livability Report.
- The commitment to growth management

among leaders of the Bluegrass Region.

- The impressive and ongoing effort of center city revitalization in Lexington.
- How business and education officials communicate and work together toward the common goal of improving the Fayette County School District.

Community Livability Report

Lexington is a good community that wants to become a great community. In his welcome remarks to our delegation, Chamber President Bob Quick outlined Lexington’s goal to be among the “Top 5” mid-sized cities in the United States. This striving for excellence was a recurring theme during our community leadership visit to Lexington.

One of the ways in which Lexington focuses on that goal is through the community’s commitment to “soul searching” in the form of the Community Livability Report. Published by an organization called New Century Lexington, the report presents a great volume of data in an easily understood format. It measures various quality of life indicators across nine categories



Lexington’s vibrant downtown district is anchored by Rupp Arena, left, home of the University of Kentucky’s famed basketball program.



Lexington calls itself 'Horse Capital of the World.' (Photo by Mary Collette)

(such as Public Order & Safety, Business & Economic Climate and Community Wellness).

The Community Livability Report highlights the “blue ribbons” that should be a source of community pride and the “red flags” that are areas in

need of improvement. The mere publishing of such a report card, calling attention to those areas of concern, has helped spur positive action in Lexington.

In summarizing the motivating potential of the report, Adam Edelen, executive director of New Century Lexington, said, “Sometimes you have to make people feel the heat before they can see the light.” As the annual Community Livability Report paints an objective picture of Lexington’s strengths and challenges, other organizations and individuals come forward to address those issues. According to Edelen, the key first step was the community’s willingness to take a hard look in the mirror.

New Century Lexington has an annual budget of \$60-80,000, with the

Chamber providing \$10,000 per year to the effort. Edelen emphasized it is important for the program to be operated by an organization separate from the Chamber in order to preserve its objectivity. A broad-based and diverse board of directors governs New Century Lexington. Data collection and organization is done by a research director who is a graduate student at the University of Kentucky.

Growth Management

Balancing the natural environment of the Bluegrass Region with the appropriate level of economic development is an ongoing challenge

Springfield area delegation

- David Agee**, Blackwell Sanders Peper Martin, LLP
- Jim Anderson**, Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce
- Jim Baker**, Southwest Missouri State University
- Brad Bodenhausen**, Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce
- Tom Carlson**, Mayor, City of Springfield
- Mary Collette**, Springfield City Council
- Gary Deaver**, Springfield City Council
- Darrell Decker**, Greene County Commission
- Charlie Denison**, City Utilities Citizens’ Advisory Board
- Tom Finnie**, City of Springfield
- Mike Hoeman**, Springfield R-12 Board of Education
- Doug Jackson**, Butler, Rosenbury & Partners, Inc.
- Bob Jones**, Springfield City Council
- Tracy Kimberlin**, Springfield Convention & Visitors Bureau
- Allen Kunkel**, Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce
- David Kunze**, Signature Bank
- Kay Logsdon**, Springfield Regional Arts Council
- Marc Maness**, Springfield Public Schools
- Ralph Manley**, Springfield City Council
- Mary Norman**, Springfield R-12 Board of Education
- Richard Ollis**, Ollis & Company
- Todd Parnell**, THE BANK
- Karl Plumpe**, City Utilities
- Mary Lilly Smith**, City of Springfield
- Chris Tuckness**, Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce
- Randell Wallace**, Lathrop & Gage, L.C.
- Denny Wayne**, Springfield City Council
- Greg Williams**, Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce
- Rusty Worley**, Urban Districts Alliance Board of Directors
- Shelia Wright**, Springfield City Council
- John Wylie**, Springfield City Council

for community leaders in the Lexington area. An organization that takes the lead in promoting such a vision for central Kentucky is Bluegrass Tomorrow.

The location of a Toyota auto assembly plant in the region was the catalyst for starting the organization in 1989. Bluegrass Tomorrow is the oldest “smart growth” organization in

Four key areas

- Lexington’s willingness to do some “community soul searching” and publish the results in the form of an annual Community Livability Report.
- The commitment to growth management among leaders of the Bluegrass Region.
- The impressive and ongoing effort of center city revitalization in Lexington.
- How business and education officials communicate and work together toward the common goal of improving the Fayette County School District.

Kentucky. With more than 500 members (including more than 100 corporate members), a 55-member board of directors governs the organization. Bluegrass Tomorrow is primarily supported by private investors, urban government and some small local governments.

The organization’s vision is very

similar to the Ozarks Regional Economic Partnership. Bluegrass Tomorrow advocates a regional vision, with a pattern of livability that reflects the desires of a majority of residents:

- Our towns remain separate and distinct, people friendly and full of architectural character;
- Our best farmlands remain secure and productive;
- The beauty of our landscape remains evident from our roadways;
- Our governments make informed, responsible decisions about growth and change;
- We are sensitive to our unique fragile environment;
- We foster a strong, sustainable economic future.

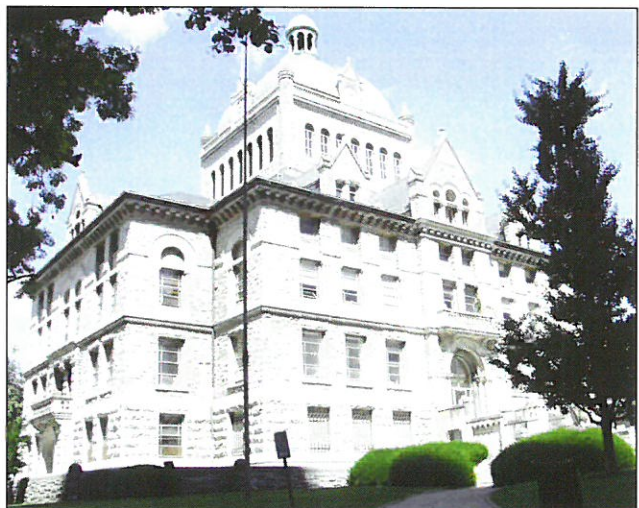
The organization’s philosophy is simple: Quality of life equals economic advantage.

Growth remains a major issue facing the Bluegrass Region, leaving leaders to grapple with specific challenges like transportation and environmental protection.

Steve Austin, president of Bluegrass Tomorrow, outlined the dilemma: “Two hundred thousand new people could move into our region in the next 20 years, without one significant new road currently planned anywhere in our region. And by the year 2020, as many as 300,000 people could be utilizing septic tanks at their homes. Prime agricultural land is currently being developed at a rate of greater than 5 acres a day.”

Lexington is a unique metropolitan area surrounded by world-class horse farms, which are incompatible with suburban development. Between 1990-98, Fayette County lost more than 4,700 acres of rural land area to suburban development. However, that land could only accommodate 429 single-family homes. At an average density in the urban area, 4,700 acres would typically result in over 23,000 residential dwellings. Additionally, the cost of infrastructure development away from the urban setting is significant.

Fayette County’s approach to preserving farmland is the county’s Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) Program. The PDR is the first Agricultural Conservation Easement program by a local government in Kentucky.



Fayette County Courthouse (Photo by Mary Collette)



Urban streetscapes and mixed-use developments contribute to the attractiveness and efficiency of Lexington's center city.
(Photo by Mary Collette)

This program is a result of skyrocketing land costs, development pressure on farmland and a strong desire to protect the world famous landscape from urban sprawl. The PDR attempts to protect the agricultural economy of Fayette County by conserving large areas of farmland and compensating farm owners to maintain their farm operations.

The goal is to protect 50,000 acres (out of 128,267 acres) by utilizing conservation easements. To achieve this, the PDR program will provide more than \$140 million over 20 years. Funding comes from local government, a state matching grant (using tobacco settlement funds), and a federal grant. The easements are based on the future development value of the land.

Farmers apply on a voluntary basis only, with a minimum of 20 acres. Priority order of acquisition is based on a scoring system, which considers various agricultural and environmental factors. The preservation easement is in perpetuity. In two years of operation, there are 27 participating farms with more than 7,000 acres in the program.

Center City Revitalization

Lexington's vibrant downtown is a hub of commercial activity, entertainment, arts and culture. With a layout that is in the style of a "Main Street business district," Lexington's downtown has survived the decentralized development that most cities (including Lexington) have experienced. At the same time, there are parts of Lexington's center city currently undergoing redevelopment and revitalization.

A key factor in the vitality of Lexington's downtown is its proximity to residential areas. Rose Lucas, executive director of the Downtown Lexington Corporation, said more than 18,000 people live within a 15-minute walk of Main Street. Additionally, with the University of Kentucky, Transylvania University and Lexington Community College all located in the center city, there are more than 32,000 students in the downtown area.

One tool leaders in Lexington have used to stimulate residential growth in the center city is the "employer assisted housing" program. This program allows an employer to provide down payment assistance or low-interest loans for employees interested in buying a home in an area targeted for redevelopment. These benefits are only available during the employee's tenure of employment. So, in addition to encouraging center city investment, the program offers a tangible employee recruitment and retention tool as well as a tremendous incentive for potential homebuyers.

Members of the Springfield delegation noted several other observations about Lexington's downtown that may relate to the ongoing center city revitalization efforts in Springfield:

- The urban streetscapes and mixed-use developments of downtown Lexington are major factors in its attractiveness and efficiency. An example of a mixed-use development is the Park Plaza building, which houses ground floor retail businesses, five levels of parking and apartments above that (with 98 percent occupancy and a diverse base of tenants.)

- Lexington has done several things to make downtown a destination for people. Examples include a very successful farmers market; numerous options for entertainment, restaurants, and nightlife; and events at Rupp Arena, the Convention Center and the Downtown Arts Center.

- To that end, the Downtown Lexington Corporation is focused on its mission of marketing and promoting the downtown area to potential patrons and investors. They are aggressively seeking developers on a national scale.

- Much like Springfield, downtown Lexington has plenty of parking (with 15,000 spaces available), but they fight the perception that there is a shortage of parking.

- Lexington is focused on improving the linkages between downtown and the University of Kentucky. Unto itself, the UK campus would be the fifth largest city in Kentucky, so this effort to improve collaboration between the University and the City makes sense. It should be noted that community leadership visit participants remarked that the collaboration between higher education, the City and the community is already strong in Springfield.

Business, Education and Community Partnerships

Fayette County Public Schools is a good school district. It is the second-largest school district in Kentucky and is well known in the state as a “top district,” according to School Board Chair Kathy Lousignot. But when she joined the school board, Lousignot couldn’t

help but feel the district was “resting on its laurels” and not reaching its full potential.

Several challenges faced the school district, including a striking gap in achievement between students in different socio-economic classes. In addition, Lousignot said the school district’s customer service was horrible. “It’s difficult for educators to think of themselves in a customer service role,” she said. But, that is exactly what needed to happen.

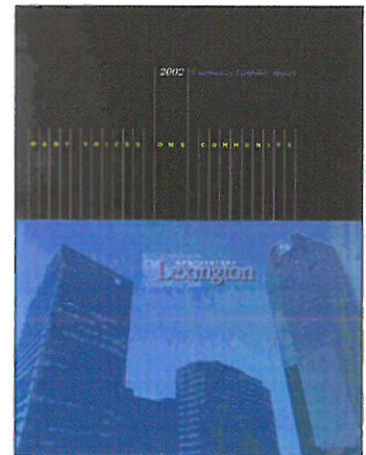
These days, the striving of Lexington-Fayette County to go from “good to great” is the best way to characterize the goal of the school district and the community.

Quoting the book of the same title by Jim Collins, the Rev. (Dr.) C.B. Akins, pastor of the

Bracktown Baptist Church summed it up this way: “The enemy of becoming great is the willingness to settle for being good.”

A primary tool in their process of going from good to great is a solid partnership of business, education and community leaders. To best understand this partnership, it is important to see it from all three perspectives.

From the business perspective, here are the words of Chamber President Bob Quick: “No institution has more impact on our future than education. A Chamber must be plugged in.” Although it is sometimes hard to measure the



2002 Community Livability Report, published by New Century Lexington



Chamber, school district and community leaders outlined Lexington’s approach to business-education partnerships. (Photo by Mary Collette)

benefits to the business community, it is certainly a “pay now or pay later” concept. Businesses cannot tell the school district what to do, but it is imperative for business to have a seat at the table. In particular, the Chamber can play the role of convener and facilitator for the important discussions that must take place.



The Downtown Arts Center, which includes gallery space and a theatre, is part of Lexington’s commitment to arts and culture. (Photo by Mary Collette)

The business community can also play the role of promoter. Recently, when a new superintendent was hired for the school district, the Lexington Chamber led the public relations effort to introduce him to the community.

From the school district perspective, Lousignot said the key to improving customer service and reducing the achievement gap is to keep talking and resolve the issues before they become problems. She believes the partnership is working and the school district is moving in the right direction.

From the community perspective, Rev. Akins believes inclusiveness and involvement are the key ingredients. “Everyone is either engaged or enraged,” he said, adding that every segment of the community must be engaged in the learning process and the planning process.

He outlined his thoughts in the form of a

five-step process for stimulating this type of inclusion:

1. Irritation – someone must bring important issues to the surface so they can be discussed.

2. Confrontation – allows participants to entertain someone else’s ideas.

3. Collaboration – is being invited to the same meetings, sitting at the same table and beginning the process of working together.

4. Cooperation – continues the process of working together toward a common goal.

5. Cross-fertilization – is when you have such a free exchange and acceptance of ideas that the end result is better due to this partnership.

Rev. Akins believes the business-education-community partnership in Lexington is just about to the fifth stage in this process.

An outstanding example of community involvement in education is the Bracktown Baptist Church. The church provides a comprehensive program to encourage student achievement and

parental involvement in education. They offer mentoring programs, incentives for high achievement and oversight of parental participation in regularly scheduled meetings with their children’s teachers.

Conclusions/Recommendations

Several banner headlines emerged as the major themes of our visit to Lexington:

Lexington is a very strong community that is striving to improve. Local leaders there are not afraid to set lofty goals and work hard to achieve them. At the same time, they are also willing to take a hard look in the mirror and identify those challenges they need to address in order to improve as a community.

We were reminded once again in Lexington that **economic development and quality of life go hand in hand.** They are not separate

concepts, but rather are interconnected goals for a community. This is particularly true here in southwest Missouri, where (much like the Bluegrass Region) the natural environment is an economic strength and a reason why people want to live in this area.

Working together is the most effective means to achieve important community goals. In Lexington, we saw the positive example of collaboration displayed by the business-education-community partnership focused on improving their schools. Locally, we must continue to focus on inclusiveness in community decision-making, ensuring that the right people have a seat at the table.



Morning provides a breathtaking backdrop for the Kentucky Horse Park experience, the world's only park dedicated to the horse. (Photo provided by Kentucky Horse Park)

As we apply these lessons to our future goals here in the Springfield region, we would make the following observations and recommendations:

- Springfield is very strong community too, but we should beware of complacency. One antidote would be to apply some of the same “community soul searching” that Lexington has used. Specifically, we would recommend community leaders consider coordinating efforts to collect and publish data on Springfield’s strengths and challenges, much like Lexington’s report card on community livability. Springfield has a major advantage that Lexington leaders

said was missing from their approach. The goals and direction provided by the ongoing Vision 20/20 process should help guide this community assessment effort in Springfield.

- Like Lexington, Springfield is a center for higher education. We should continue to draw on that strength and maximize the ties between business, government and higher education in terms of community and economic development.

- As Springfield’s downtown revitalization rolls ahead, the next big goal should be to stimulate residential development in the center city.

One tool that shows great promise in that regard is Employer Assisted Housing. The City of Springfield’s model for such a program was recently unveiled, showing how Employer Assisted Housing can be a great incentive for home-buying employees, a recruitment and retention tool for employers and a key piece of the center city redevelopment puzzle.

- Springfield’s center city revitalization should continue to focus on mixed-use development. A great example of such an approach is the recently opened Jordan Valley Car Park, which provides parking but also will house the offices of the Springfield Convention & Visitors Bureau.

- Lexington has placed an emphasis on arts and culture. With the development of the Creamery Arts Center, Springfield is continuing to make great progress in supporting the arts. We should continue to support development of the arts, particularly in center city.

CREDITS

Report written by Brad Bodenhausen, Chamber senior vice president, public affairs and communications.

Cover photos: Lexington Chamber building, Mary Collette; Kentucky horses, James Archambeault; Lexington skyline, Jeff Rogers