

PART TWO - THE PLANNING PROCESS

Walton Business Association for Community Enrichment (BACE)

In 2011, the Business Association for Community Enrichment (BACE) was started. This group was part of a networking group through the Northern Kentucky Chamber of Commerce to help with community service projects. Over the past 4 years the revamped BACE group has worked on many different projects, the latest being this historic Walton Main Street project.

In 2013, Planning Commission staff was invited by the BACE group to participate in their monthly meetings with the role of providing technical assistance to the group on development issues within the City of Walton. This service is similar to what the Planning Commission already provides for the Union Economic Development Council (EDC), the Burlington Business Association, and the Hebron Business Association. In the summer of 2014 it was suggested that the BACE group produce a strategic plan for the historic Walton Main Street area in light of the obstacles the businesses and residents are facing as a result of changing market forces and trends. Planning Commission staff was directed to assist in the effort and began by producing an outline of what would be needed and produced as a result of this process.

It was agreed upon by the BACE group that the following items were to be included in the planning process. First, a general “vision statement” as well as more specific “objectives” would be created to steer the process and keep it on target. A “study area” would be established based on what the plan would aim to achieve. A list of participants and roles would be developed to ensure a proper mix of community involvement in the planning process. The key to this plan’s effectiveness is the involvement of citizens, business owners, and city officials in the planning process from beginning to end and beyond.

Study Area

In October of 2014, Planning Commission staff presented a draft outline of a planning process to the BACE group for their comments. The study area boundary chosen for this plan (**see Map 4**) was designed to accommodate the neighborhood business, government, and residential uses that primarily front Walton’s historic Main Street corridor - with a few minor exceptions. The study area is bounded on the north by the Brooks Meats/Family’s Main Street Café restaurant site near the intersection of U.S. 25 (Dixie Highway) and Old Beaver Road. The southern boundary occurs at the intersection of U.S. 25 (Dixie Highway) and Edwards Avenue. The study area encompasses approximately 70 acres. While this study area does not include some of the adjoining residential areas behind the properties that front on Dixie Highway, it does consider them in every aspect of the plan as they have an integral role in the development and support of the businesses and establishments located along Main Street.



Figure 4 - Walton Main Street Strategic Plan Study Area

Vision Statement

In order to guide and steer the planning process, the BACE group and Planning Commission staff developed the following vision statement in October, 2014:

To energize the Walton downtown district into a healthy business and residential center by utilizing and enhancing the public services, special events activities, and historical character of the town as a foundation.

Objectives

Established in November, 2014 were a list of more specific “objectives” that the BACE group hoped to accomplish as a result of this plan/planning process. After reviewing and refining, the objectives were agreed upon as follows:

Improve Pedestrian Experience

1. *Improve Main Street pedestrian crossing(s);*
2. *Develop pedestrian-friendly activities (e.g., walking tour brochure);*
3. *Have a plan for pedestrian access features in future streetscape changes and/or redevelopment.*

Make Main Street A Destination

1. *Assess the visual streetscape (power lines, appropriate new construction to match historic character of Main Street, landscaping, fencing, etc.) and make recommendations;*
2. *Create an ‘Historic Walton Main Street’ walking tour brochure;*
3. *Improve signage (informational and directional);*
4. *Install entrance signage at both north and south end of study area;*
5. *Establish Walton’s identity/brand (e.g., Family-Friendly, Sports, or School);*
6. *Create a National Main Street 4-point approach (Organization, Promotion, Design, and Economic Restructuring).*

Address Parking Issues

1. *Identify and maximize existing parking, both on-street and off-street (e.g., signage, restriping);*
2. *Explore collaborative parking agreements with churches, businesses, etc.*

Improve Business Climate

1. *Identify and attract appropriate businesses with staying power;*
2. *Have a strong business advocacy group (i.e., BACE);*
3. *Create and maintain a database of available properties;*
4. *Overcome the perception of school tax rate being an economic obstacle;*
5. *Have someone serve as an economic development professional (public, non-profit, or volunteer) at least part time to assist in Main Street effort.*

Walton-Verona High School

During initial talks about the planning process, the idea of involving students from Walton-Verona High School was discussed favorably at BACE meetings. The Business Management class (taught by Mr. David Sandlin) was invited to participate, primarily in the data gathering process. This proved to be an invaluable learning exercise for the students, who participated in a “real world” project dealing with the very subject they were studying in the classroom. It also allowed Walton’s youth to be active participants in the planning process since they are the future generation of leaders in the community and their involvement and input is invaluable.

In July 2014, staff generated a list of potential contributions the Business Management class (of Juniors & Seniors) could make to the project. Those tasks included conducting an inventory of parking spaces and properties along Main Street, developing questions for a citizen questionnaire, and conducting a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) Analysis. Staff met with Mr. Sandlin in August 2014 and began working on the role his students would have in the planning process. Planning Commission staff met with the class in January 2015 to discuss these tasks and were met with great enthusiasm by the students. The students worked on these items over the course of the next four months and provided the BACE group with several key pieces of reconnaissance that are incorporated into this plan.


2015 Community Survey

In late January, Planning Commission staff, Walton-Verona High School students, and members of the BACE group began to develop potential questions for a survey from which the comments and suggestions received could be utilized in the development of the plan (see Figure 5). Below are the survey questions:

- *What is your age?*
- *What is your gender?*
- *Where do you live?*
- *How often do you visit Walton’s historic Main Street?*
- *What types of businesses on Walton’s historic Main Street do you visit most?*
- *What types of events on and around Walton’s historic Main Street do you attend?*
- *What has kept you from visiting Walton’s historic Main Street?*
- *What types of businesses would attract you to Walton’s historic Main Street more often?*
- *What types of improvements do you feel are needed along Walton’s historic Main Street?*
- *Do you own or operate a business along Walton’s historic Main Street?*
- *How long has your business been located on Walton’s historic Main Street?*
- *Why did you choose Walton’s historic Main Street for the location of your business?*
- *Where are the majority of your customers from?*
- *As a business owner/operator, what other types of businesses would you like to see on Walton’s historic Main Street?*
- *What does your business plan include? (staying, expanding, relocating, closing, etc.)*

In February 2015, an aggressive public awareness campaign was launched to have as many people partake in an on-line survey in order to gauge what direction the community envisions for historic Walton Main Street. An article published in *The Boone County Recorder* (March 12, 2015) encouraged people to partake in the survey. Notices about the survey were also sent out by the City in water bills. Business Management class students spread the word by social media throughout the school, informing the younger generation of Walton residents to express their opinions. The goal was to reach as many people who live, shop, or own/operate a business in historic Main Street as possible.

Results of the survey, parking and property inventories, and other relevant data are presented below in Part Three.



Walton Historic Main Street Survey

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**5. WHAT TYPES OF BUSINESSES ON WALTON'S HISTORIC MAIN STREET DO YOU VISIT MOST?
(select all that apply)**

- specialty/seasonal stores
- restaurants
- healthcare providers
- animal grooming
- convenient store/deli
- banking
- barber shop
- florists
- retail stores
- city government
- Other (please specify)

Figure 5 - excerpt from the on-line survey