

A Story of Transformation: Madisonville, Kentucky



Madisonville, Kentucky is a city rich in assets with acres of prime parkland offering outstanding recreational opportunities, a low cost of living, exceptional health care, and more. As the county seat of Hopkins County, Kentucky, the city also benefits from legal and governmental job opportunities. Despite these advantages, however, downtown Madisonville entered the lean economic years beginning in 2008 in a weakened condition which was threatening to get worse. This was most apparent in the downtown shopping area which included more than 17 vacant storefronts and offered little to entice

residents to shop or dine in town.



But change was afoot in the city. In 2007, through a grant from the state, the city had acquired a new City Hall. Also, the county was preparing to build a large new county courthouse in the downtown area. Unfortunately, budget overruns mandated that the landscape plans for this project be shelved, promising a rather stark aesthetic. A group of civic minded individuals decided that a plan was needed to create a friendlier, more inviting environment at the human scale for the downtown.

In 2011, Madisonville joined America in Bloom. Under this umbrella initial volunteer efforts to improve the streetscape included the installation of both hanging floral baskets and public art displays. Some building owners volunteered to paint storefronts to rejuvenate the downtown in the weeks leading to the arrival of the AIB judges. The first year's AIB score was not impressive, but the judges' suggestions for the city were. Invigorated, more volunteers joined the AIB effort and the improvements began to take hold.



A portion of the downtown was deliberately targeted as an area for public gatherings and beautification efforts continued. In an effort to bring more people downtown, live music concerts were initiated and quickly became very popular. Foot traffic in the downtown area intensified. Through efforts of the Chamber of Commerce and local businesses, some of the vacant storefronts began to fill with restaurants and local retail shops. Soon, a bank took over the vacant old municipal building and, in response to the growing popularity of the downtown as a gathering space, a public/private effort was initiated to create a beautiful downtown community park in the green area in front of the bank. Today, this park includes a permanent stage, greenspace, and art and floral displays and is home to numerous events including the live outdoor music concerts.



All these efforts over the years have proved contagious, with people noting the clear visual difference between "then" and "now," and many people say, "I stay in town now." Jenny Gibson, a downtown advocate and active volunteer said it all in a recent quote about the improvements for Madisonville as a direct result of involvement in AIB: "Sure! It's been pretty dramatic. Off the top of my head, I can only think of 7 vacant buildings (one of which is being worked on and that number includes the old Bart's building and Blackwells, which we have prospects for). In 2011 I can think of at least 17 vacancies. The occupants have consistently changed from primarily law and government office to small retail, food service, and personal services, which is necessary for the



district to thrive. AIB involvement has helped us focus on building an environment suitable for growth. The other side of the success has been the more recent businesses' understanding that together we are stronger than alone. In other words, we work together and help each other to succeed!"