

LONDON

STRATEGIC PLAN 2018



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



INTRODUCTION

London, Kentucky is growing. The positive developments and economic vibrancy of London is evidenced all through the community. These developments were spurred to some degree by intentional acts of the London City Council. Two politically difficult decisions were enacted which set the city on a two-directional path. The primary path is to provide an excellent quality of life for residents. The secondary path was created to offset the costs of providing the first.

To keep taxes as low as possible for residents, the city opted to initiate both a restaurant and beverage tax. These are user fees; taxes only paid by consumers who choose to dine out or purchase liquor, regardless of where they are from. The outcomes of these policy decisions have created change for the city in many positive ways.



Park improvements and expansions have occurred including building a wellness park and renovating Mill Street Park. The city purchased 15 acres adjacent to the Rotary Playground on Dixie Street. Now known as Whitley Branch Veterans Park, the space features a handicap accessible playground, a one-mile accessible walking path, a shelter house, a bark park, and in the spring, it will get bathrooms and an additional shelter house. Other developments include a wetlands initiative and the Treetop Adventure at Levi Jackson State Park, just to name a few.

Other developments within the city include several new restaurants and package stores which have opened in the city. New garbage trucks have been leased that use compressed natural gas, and the fully accredited police department is exploring a move to alternative fuel for their cruisers.

Façade grants have been made available for property owners and the downtown is beautiful with flowering baskets and flags on the streetlights which change for each downtown event like the Redbud Ride and the World Chicken Festival. A sports facility study has been conducted and a countywide biking master plan was created to guide future developments.

As these exciting developments continue to occur, city leaders recognize the need to harness the positive trajectory the city is on and create a unified vision as they plan for the future of London. They also want to be informed as they prioritize initiatives so they can make confident decisions when setting the annual budget.

To assist in this effort, the city contracted with the Kentucky League of Cities Community Development Services to assist in a strategic planning process. The following pages reflect the vision and implementation strategy for the City of London as they work to improve the city over the next three to five years.

Listening to the People of London



City officials were most concerned about hearing the ideas, wants and needs of their constituency. Two public meetings were conducted to make certain residents had an opportunity to voice their concerns, opinions and ideas. An additional meeting was held with a group of marketing students from South Laurel High School. The class included students from grades 9-12. Further information was gathered from focus group conversations with local leaders and residents as well as the London Tourism Commission, London Downtown Board of Directors, the London City Council and city department heads.

There are many ideas that can be explored and new initiatives undertaken to improve London. From the input provided by residents, the 2018 London Strategic Plan is built around the core values and the most often referenced areas of concern or potential possibility.

What do you value about the City of London?

- Openness to something like this – hearing what people have to say
- Our heritage
- Progressive sense of community, being together

- Safety
- Volunteerism
- People here have a sense of pride and preserving our heritage

What are the strengths of this community?

- Location
- Infrastructure
- Various events
- Diversity
- Safety
- Affordable living
- Hard-working people
- Good leadership, open to things like converting the old post office to a 911 facility and an old dealership into community center
- Opportunity
- Good schools
- Large number of jobs available

Listening to the People of London

- Relationships
- Parks
- Lakes and good highways
- Recreational opportunities for youth
- Diverse business community, agriculture as well as other industries
- One of the best aviation systems in the state
- Five districts of legislature
- Apathy among youth engagement
- Lack of new housing – no development going on
- Lack of affordable property for development
- Need more opportunities for seniors and youth

What are the weaknesses or challenges we need to work on?

- Trades people
- Improve infrastructure
- Lack of retail/shopping in downtown (specialty or otherwise)
- No place to focus on the arts, performances or otherwise
- Traffic problems
- Drugs
- Job training
- Side streets are too tight
- Community outreach – lot of folks that should be here
- Nice park facilities, state park, wellness, but you can't walk to them; need to improve connectivity
- Entertainment for youth
- Lack of public transportation
- We're followers, not leaders
- Need more mentorship for entrepreneurs
- Need housing options for senior citizens
- Drug treatment facilities



Listening to the People of London



What are the opportunities London has going forward?

- Sports complex
- Something downtown to draw people – theater for example
- Expand events because the city has the finances to do so
- Center for Innovation
- Enough room to expand without losing our natural resources
- Colleges, vocational schools
- Location – CFI, collaborating with local industry
- 70,000 cars a day – need to entice them to come off the interstate
- Jobs, healthcare
- Buy Belle Bennett building and do something with it
- Become a vacation destination because of all our activities, crossroads and downtown are accessible
- To grow our city limits
- We're wet now – bring different kinds of businesses like micro-breweries

- Growing population here – should sustain new businesses
- Collaboration with the Cumberland Area Development District (ADD) to access federal funds
- Empty buildings and great spaces of land
- Need to be asking the state Republican ticket to help us – don't drag our feet

What could threaten this community?

- Stagnant, self-serving elected officials
- Public transportation
- Corbin
- Loss of current tax revenues for dedicated tourism
- Annexation is great, but don't need to forget downtown – something exciting to draw people downtown
- Workforce
- Complacent citizens and leadership
- Losing young people to more culturally diverse areas
- Drug problem
- Lack of higher paying jobs
- Need vocational school to help prepare our young adults for jobs
- Over regulations
- Failure to preserve our artistic heritage
- No reason for young people to stay in London – need to think about what these kids are going to need
- Too many identities – garden, trail town, cycling; need an emphasis

Listening to the People of London



A Few Opportunity Ideas from the Students

- Music park
- Hangout place – safe, no drugs, no fights
- Recreation center – with indoor/outdoor
- Drive-in
- Trampoline place
- Better basketball courts outside
- Sports academy
- Arcade
- Sports complex
- No practice facilities – must sign up before
- Everything is spread out – connectivity

London has the following things going for it:

- Jobs
- Education
- Parks
- Recreation
- Great people
- Location
- Location
- Location



The Plan

The areas targeted in the plan include:

- **Arts – Entertainment – Food**
- **Downtown – Facilities**
- **Recreation – Greenways – Sports Facilities**
- **Housing**
- **Marketing – Promotions – Communications**

The community must see that all efforts are to advance the overarching and twin goals for the city: to improve resident’s quality of life and to grow the economy. For a strategic plan to be worthwhile, each of its elements must support the others, so that working on one area will assist others in their completion.

London’s strategic plan is an integrated vision that is focused on dueling strategies. The strategies are creating economic prosperity and elevating the quality of life.

The Strategies

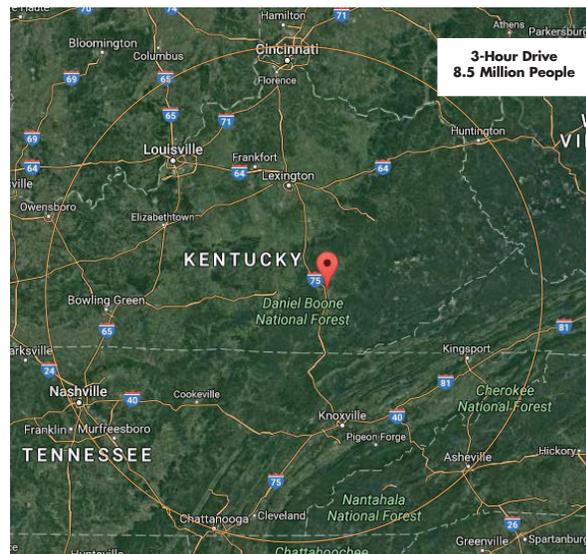
- Infrastructure = Future Economic Growth
- Revitalizing Downtown = Investment + Jobs + Housing + Tourism
- Adequate Housing = Business Expansion + Growth

For each section of the plan, an effort is made to connect that section to the rest of the plan.

Examples:

- Basic infrastructure is vital, but what other investments in infrastructure projects over the next three to five years can support housing, tourism, and other elements of quality of life?
- Revitalizing downtown is about community identity, jobs and investment, housing and tourism.

- Without adequate and varied housing, businesses cannot locate or expand and tourism cannot grow.
- Tourism is certainly economic development but it is also quality of life for residents, not just visitors and thus should be viewed holistically instead of just a segment.



Prime Opportunity – Brand Identity

London is in control of its own identity: the community must become well defined in the public perception of the super region in which it is located.

- London lies in the dead center of more than 8.5 million people within a half-day drive.

The city can position itself as the economic leader in southern Kentucky and create a brand identity as an authentic community, one that is attractive to business, tourists, and residents alike. (See Page 11 for more details.)

The key point in this strategic plan is “vision integration” – quality of life and economic development.

Authentic Community Strategies

Tourism Vision

Tourism is more than just enticing people into the community – it is about creating an authentic community that tourists will want to visit and stay because the residents themselves love it. Tourism creates real jobs and investments that can't be outsourced, adds quality of life to residents, and brings in new dollars in ways that don't overload the community (need for schools, sewers, etc.).



Goal 1: Year-round full hotel occupancy.

Vision: Create a fun and truly authentic community.

Strategy: Create a place that LOCALS love so much that tourists will want to come and see what it's all about. This is QUALITY OF LIFE!

There is a huge segment of the tourist market that wants to visit real places, where culture is alive and appreciated by the residents.

Detail what a full, fun weekend experience in London would be.

Friday

- Morning hike at Daniel Boone National Forest
- Take along a gourmet picnic lunch prepared by local eatery
- Afternoon paddle down Rockcastle River
- Try London's version of fish and chips at one of the restaurants in town
- Listen to music at Town Center until midnight

Saturday

- Shop at the farmers market
- Take the zip line at Treetop Adventure at Levi Jackson State Park
- Check out downtown's East 4th Street Music Row and Shop, Shop, Shop!
- Relax with tea or coffee at one of the cafés
- Check out the Fun Zone after dark

Sunday

- Enjoy the local arts at the Visitor Center
- Take a bike ride
- Nosh in downtown London
- Come back again and again

Authentic Community Strategies



Goal 2: Reach the 8.5 million people within the super region.

Vision: London is a **fun** and **authentic** place.

Strategies:

- Aggressive marketing to those within a half-day drive to create awareness of London’s brand as an authentic, recreational, and fun place.
- Create a Sister City relationship with London, England to use as marketing tool and to create fun connections to the area (fish and chips becomes local catfish and chips dish).



Goal 3: London is a FUN place to live, work and play.

Vision: Embrace your position as the HQ for outdoor recreation in southern Kentucky.

Strategies:

- Keep growing bicycling opportunities – embrace the bike culture – tie it into downtown/authentic community. “Come for the rides, stay for the food, music, and culture.”
- Ensure that no trip to Boone Forest/Laurel Lake is complete without a visit to downtown. It should be the center of activities including: climbing wall, hiking gear, music, culture – wine/beer/bourbon and local food.
- Year-round fun zone.
- Embrace position as the HQ for outdoor recreation in southern Kentucky.

Consider a Sister City relationship with London, England

- London, Kentucky is the second largest city named London in the U.S.
- London, Kentucky is the fourth largest city named London in the entire world.
- Great Britain, home of the largest London, has many ties to the state of Kentucky.
- A relationship between London, Kentucky and London, England could have many advantages.

Authentic Community Strategies

Downtown Vision

Residents are clearly concerned about the vacancies along the main corridor through town.

The loss of several long-time businesses in a short amount of time has left the downtown struggling. This loss is compounded by property owners uninterested in selling, high rental prices and buildings that require an investment to get them operational – deterrents to would-be entrepreneurs. Rather than continuing to be frustrated with in-action, the first recommendation is to focus all new development energies on an alternate location to begin drawing interest back downtown.

East 4th Street already has a toe-hold, particularly during special events. This cross-street in the middle of town provides space for entrepreneurs to show their Moxy. There are core businesses already in place, nearby rental space is less expensive than Main Street and parking is more readily available.

Downtown Steps to Success

Think of Downtown 4th Street as a Stage

- Make it pedestrian friendly
- Seek out boutique and specialty stores
- Maintain hours after 5 p.m. and be consistent
- Provide free Wi-Fi access
- Provide places to sit
- Encourage upper-story residential
- Feature weekly farmers and artists markets
- Initiate all festivals and special events here
- Make this area a trail town stop - provide bike racks and restrooms



Map of East 4th Street Corridor

Downtown Development



Even though buildings on Main Street may not be a viable option now, to prepare for the time when they are, a second recommendation is to create a Community Development Corporation (CDC) to act as a convening partner and potential funding aggregator. Develop a plan to begin purchasing downtown properties and operate similarly to the industrial authority. Create incentive packages to encourage upper-story residential, and provide extra points for boutique or specialty retail and the desired type of restaurants.

Use a percentage of funds from the restaurant tax to establish a funding pool. Create matching funds from local industry using a percentage of the funds obtained from the city's payroll tax. By purchasing the buildings and repurposing them, they are put back on the city's tax rolls, businesses are developed, jobs are created and the two funding sources are reimbursed over time so they can be used by other developers.

Use CDC to partner on projects and efforts to enhance the community. We suggest a review of the Nelson County Economic Development Agency (NCEDA) which is funded by the city and county and serves as the umbrella organization over Tourism, Main Street, Chamber and Industrial Development for a successful model. Rent a van and take local leaders to Bardstown and see how their model works.

Steps to Success in Downtown London

- Create a Community Development Corporation (CDC)
- Clearly define the role of the CDC
- Educate potential funding partners about the CDC
- Identify funding partner(s)
- Develop a funding pool with specific guidelines on how it works (see samples of successful programs of Paducah, Bardstown and Hopkinsville)
- Identify which properties or areas of town will be included in the development area
- Inventory each vacant building with specific details (owner, purchase price, square footage, desired business or housing potential and realtor if it is on the market)
- Invite all property owners in the development area to participate in the plan
- Invite real estate professionals to be partners in the CDC, especially to promote the properties to potential investors
- Seek engineer and architects willing to provide low or no-cost designs for potential business (see Paducah's Fountain Avenue project for ideas)

Downtown Development

Another element the CDC should consider is the development of a student internship program to include local business, nonprofits and/or government opportunities. Nelson County also has a successful model for an internship/co-op program. It is made available through the Career Ready Program at Nelson County High School. They have a designated staff person who works with their local companies. Growing the next generation of workforce should be a priority for the entire community.



Downtown Short Term

Goal 1: Downtown Property and Business Owner Summit

Vision: A vibrant downtown with full occupancy.

Strategies:

- Convene a facilitated conversation with downtown property and business owners. Investors in the community must come together to work on solutions.
- Survey and interview current business owners to establish relationships, identify problems and uncover areas of real concern for future development.
- Once concerns are voiced, work on solutions to fix problem areas then tell the story. Make sure residents, business and property owners, real estate professionals and potential new residents are aware of the extra effort you're making to make the City of London fun and authentic.
- Consider a partnership trust fund to revitalize and support start-up businesses.

Downtown Development

Goal 2: Develop a Local Food Ecosystem

Vision: Provide an incubator space for area artisans and cooks.

Strategies:

Connect with local food producers to support year-round production, then connect with local schools, industry and hospitals for customers.

- Utilize tourism funding to sponsor/support a food ecosystem incubator – a space providing shared-production space and business development for London-area artisans and cooks at early stages of their culinary business so that they can be successful. Then, support entrepreneurs as they transition from the incubator into storefront space. Use SBA, SCORE and other programs offered through banks and professional organizations to point new entrepreneurs to assistance that will help them navigate in their new arena of owning a business.
- Connect to local growers and support year-round growing. Check out these resources:
 - <https://businessfacilities.com/2017/02/high-tech-greenhouse-creating-140-jobs-in-kentucky/> and
 - <https://www.kyfreshharvest.com/#moving-forward>
- Ensure that local schools, hospitals, even the prison, are connected – make every effort to connect these incubators with potential clients.

Downtown Mid Term

Goal: Rebrand Downtown

Vision: Establish East 4th Street into an entertainment destination focused on music – “London’s Music Row.”

Strategies:

- Utilize tourism funding to sponsor, support redevelopment of buildings into entertainment venues, including food, wine, beer and bourbon.



- Support young musicians especially by hosting events where they can learn more about authentic music as well as have opportunities to play.
- As noted elsewhere in this plan, create a Community Development Corporation and implement a development plan to begin purchasing downtown properties and operate similarly to the industrial authority.

Developing the Brand of London

- Seek out local marketing professionals who may be willing to assist in the process
- Invite a cross section of population to serve on a branding committee
- Conduct an audit of stakeholders and resources
- Use the core values established by the community
- Develop a marketing/branding plan and implementation strategies
- Determine how best to “sell” London’s attributes to local residents
- Identify ways to market the community’s assets and attract visitors, business and residents
- Develop a broad marketing plan including an online identity plan and segmented marketing plan

Downtown Development



Downtown Long Term

Goal: New Development for Downtown

Vision: Support the previously mentioned initiatives by exploring the development of a boutique hotel in downtown London.

Strategies:

- Combine tourism marketing efforts and collectively brand the city as a **fun** and **authentic** place - connect with site selectors to locate possible tenants.
- Downtown needs 250 events annually to be successful. It's a great venue for concerts, contests, local food and kids activities!

London may wish to work through a third-party agency to accomplish collaborative marketing

goals. We believe it is feasible to use the community economic development structure to collectively market Laurel-London tourism. This initiative could be supported financially by each existing taxing entity and have representation from each of the tourism-related organizations. Each commission would allocate a specific dollar amount to be used to establish the initiative; then, contract with an outside marketing and communications professional to organize, manage and implement the joint-marketing initiative.

This professional would inventory tourism offerings of the entire community and with input from each organization, develop an overarching marketing strategy and promotional campaign for the community. The end result of this marketing initiative will be to present a collaborative, consolidated tourism presence to the various audiences being encouraged to visit London and Laurel County.

By having a contracted professional who is not affiliated with any one entity, there is a greater chance of a successful outcome. A successful outcome would include a single tourism website and coordinated marketing materials that cross-promote other tourism venues, and each entity is proud to use.

Housing Vision

A Place for Everyone

There were several comments about the need for market rate and senior housing during the listening sessions and focus group meetings. There were even suggestions of potential locations for retirement housing: the Marymount property. Other suggestions included upper-story residential options in the downtown. As it seems that land costs are an obstruction to private development, we recommend the following.



Goal: To Improve Housing Options for Residents of London

Vision: A varied offering of residential options and price points including apartments, patio homes and senior citizen alternatives. Envision upper-floor development in the downtown core, new development along East 4th Street and middle-to-upper-scale condos at Town Center.

Strategies:

- Convene a “housing summit” – all the players – what will it take to offer more and varied housing options? Definite actions lead to results. Zoning, infrastructure (roads, water, sewer) schools, land availability, building regulations – all need to be reviewed and considered. Perhaps bring in developers from elsewhere who have dealt with issues like this in order to have outside eyes.
- Partner with the local board of realtors, Industrial Authority and/or Chamber of Commerce to initiate a housing needs survey to be conducted with citizens in the city and county.
- Consider potential upper-story opportunities as well as properties within the community that could be adapted for new use. People who live downtown usually create demand for economically diverse businesses. Visibility of people on the sidewalks energizes a downtown!
- Create incentive packages to encourage upper-story residential, and provide extra points for boutique or specialty retail and the desired type of restaurants.
- Once survey results are in, the city should appoint a task force to review results and establish next steps.

Additional concern was raised throughout the planning process regarding local codes and ordinances. Some codes are considered too stringent, while others are thought to be not firm enough.

Goal: Assess and Update London’s Codes.

Vision: To encourage existing housing and businesses opportunity to succeed and to open possible options for new development to occur within the City of London.

Strategies:

- Invite and engage current property owners to discuss concerns about current codes.
- Establish desired outcomes.
- Seek assistance to evaluate city codes and ordinances.
- If changes are desired, establish the process and update the codes.
- Bring recommendations to city council and planning commission for adoption.

Redevelopment Opportunities



What to do When Private Property Meets Public Opportunity

During the listening sessions and focus groups, several people mentioned the desire to rehabilitate the Sue Bennet College property and the Magee building for public purposes. As these properties are held in the private sector, we recommend these property owners be approached as set forth in the previous section on creating public-private partnerships through the CDC.

The Sue Bennett Building is an ideal property for a public-private partnership. Several steps are needed:

- Convene property owners to determine willingness to participate in a joint venture with the city
- Establish or engage a 501(c)(3) nonprofit for fundraising and management

- Detail an acquisition budget, capital improvements budget, operations budget and maintenance budget
- Conduct a financial analysis – it must be sustainable and pay for itself financially
- Determine all of the ways the property could potentially be used
- Prepare a model development plan with the partners

Connectivity was a primary need mentioned by young people. Create connections between critical points throughout the city and beyond, including schools, downtown, parks, neighborhoods and near the interstate. This can be done with bike trails, walking paths and sidewalks.



Implementing a Public Infrastructure Plan

Public Infrastructure

Another item mentioned during the listening sessions was the need for short-, mid- and long-term plans for infrastructure. This plan should have benchmarks for both basic and critical needs and include sidewalks, roads, water, sewer, and broadband infrastructure.

Goal: Develop a Comprehensive Infrastructure Master Plan for London

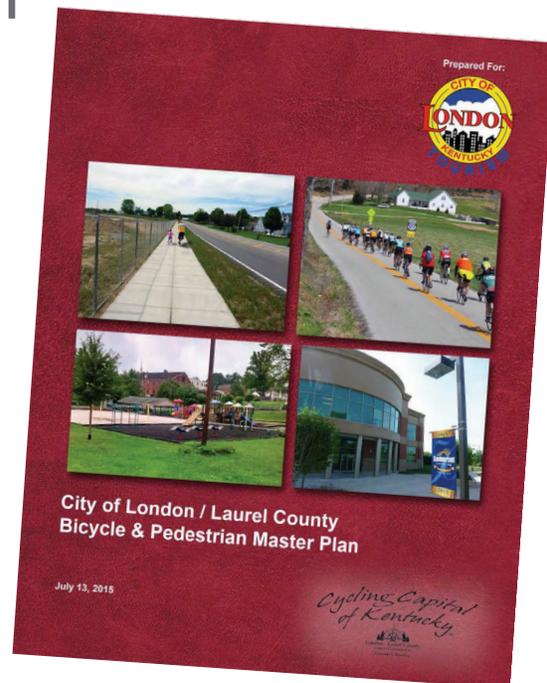
Vision: An Infrastructure Master Plan with specific goals, benchmarks and timelines.

Strategies:

- Establish an Infrastructure Review Committee to initiate and complete the plan.
- Review current Laurel County Comprehensive Plan, Bicycle & Pedestrian Master Plan and any other plans related to the city's infrastructure.
- Identify gaps or oversights and develop master list to address.
- Work with local and statewide partners and affiliates to determine what steps are needed and establish steps for implementation within each area of infrastructure.
- Identify funding possibilities which may include grant potential, in-kind and matching funds.
- Estimate costs for short-, mid- and long-term options for each area of infrastructure.
- Develop proposed multi-year funding plans for each area of infrastructure.

Expansion Opportunities

Another aspect mentioned by several individuals during each of the listening sessions was the need for future land to develop. The need and the opportunity for future growth is something that



should make the residents of London proud – not all cities are growing.

Goal: Identify Potential Areas for Future Development that are Contiguous to the Current City Boundaries

Vision: To provide appropriate services to the proposed area(s), if they were to be incorporated into the city.

Strategies:

- Determine the potential for economic growth generated by expanding the city's boundaries.
- If there are to be more than one area for future growth, prioritize, especially if they are not to be attained at the same time.
- If annexation is deemed an appropriate next step, establish a process to educate the property owners within the identified area as well as the entire population about the steps and benefits of annexation.

Implementing Existing Plans

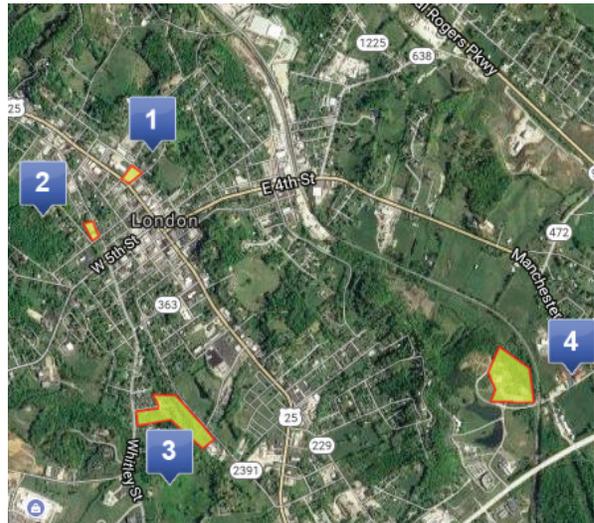


Recreation – Greenways – Sports

The city has wisely invested some of its tourism tax dollars to develop plans for recreation, sports and green spaces. The existing plans are well done and provide guidance for future developments. Between the Sports Complex Feasibility Study and the Bicycle & Pedestrian Master Plan, there are significant recommendations that should be used as foundational elements of a comprehensive Parks and Recreation Master Plan. By pulling all these pieces together, the city can consider, prioritize, fund and implement as deemed appropriate.



An easy win on the way to implementing the bike and pedestrian plan would be to start with Project A - to allow bicycle and pedestrian access to the Somerset Community College Campus, the Laurel County Public Library and the London Wellness Park.



Leading Implementation

Managing Implementation

As the outsiders, the consultant's role is to be an unbiased observer of current activities, look for possibilities and pitfalls and to rise above assumptions, dig deep and figure out what may work more efficiently. Our question for the community is "Who is leading implementation?" Assign responsibility to someone and hold them accountable.

Local Jobs

The city should convene a local leadership forum to be held annually to keep the pipeline full of qualified employees for future jobs in London. Some of the partners that should be included are:

- City and County
- Economic/Industrial Development

- Business Owners/Industrial Plant Managers
- Schools – Public, Higher Education
- High School Students

Local Leadership

A concerted effort is needed to engage more people in community life. When people are involved, they have a stake in the community's success. Young people, particularly high school and college students, are often overlooked as a volunteer base. London has an opportunity to engage its young people and, possibly, give them hope that the local community wants them to stay after they graduate.

We encourage you take up the offer made by DECA students. Invite and encourage them to participate on committees to get these strategies underway.

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