

Is the Formula Right?

Engaged Mulvane Citizens Take Action

BY ANGIE BAUR



Angie Baur

“The entire citizenry has a stake in the success of downtown.”

Special projects are becoming more common for Public Square Communities. The city of Mulvane and a group of downtown business owners organized more than a year ago to explore what it would take to make improvements downtown from the structural standpoint of its building stock to increasing foot traffic, all toward an effort to put Mulvane on the map while boosting the economy. During the past nine months, I have been working in Mulvane on this initiative and wanted to share some considerations that may apply to your community.

- ▶ Incorporating the four sectors of the public square has merit,
- ▶ A commitment by a dedicated few can energize others,
- ▶ Incorporating action teams into the work reinforces the systems approach.

What does this mean exactly?

First, I have seen the power of perspective brought by the four sectors of the public square—government, education, human services and business. While business owners may be the primary stakeholders for the success of downtown, it is much greater than that. Consider not only the business owner but the building owner.

Our school districts are driven so much by census necessitating thriving communities to attract young families; a downtown is a part of this. In fact, the entire citizenry has a stake in the success of downtown not only from the economic standpoint related to such things as property tax but also to the conveniences of retail needs.

My second consideration for you to ponder is not just the strength of one but the power of

many. A group of citizens has again shown me a depth of dedication to its heritage, its work and its community. A barber, a restaurateur, the city manager, an educator, a pastor and a banker are at the table on this initiative, consistently demonstrating their pride of its past and their investment in its future, casting a vision beyond their generation.

After months of organizing, conducting interviews and surveys, the community conversation was held in December. More than 50 citizens participated in positive face-to-face conversation. This broader segment representing the community moved beyond vague ideas toward a vision of what could be achieved with an organized and structured effort. By the end of the community conversation, opportunities emerged as goals for this initiative and I witnessed energy and hope from the community.

This moves me to my third consideration—Action Teams. In January, citizens of Mulvane convened to take the goals and create teams. The teams identified are Beautification, Events, Retail Diversity and Building Assessment. Local talent and expertise will be applied to the team goals as they share the work in the coming months.

How long will it take? Will the community get the downtown they envision? Well, the formula is right—a four-sector public square, many citizens engaged, and readiness for action. Time will now tell the rest of the story, but I am confident this community will see positive change. **KCL**

ANGIE BAUR is a Public Square Communities colleague and Executive Director of Central Kansas Community Foundation.