

The City of Russell
Tourism and Convention Commission

MASTER PLAN

February 2026



Submitted to:



Submitted by:



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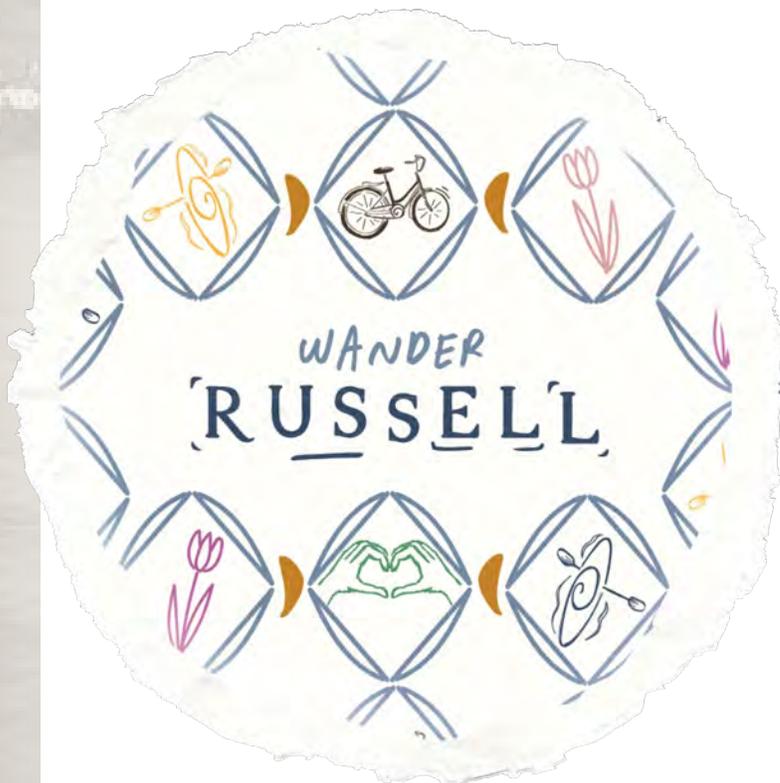
INTRODUCTION

The **2025 Master Plan for the City of Russell Tourism and Convention Commission** marks a pivotal step in shaping the future of tourism and economic development in Russell. Established in 2024, the Tourism and Convention Commission was created to promote the city's unique assets, enhance visitor experiences, and drive economic growth through strategic tourism initiatives. This Master Plan serves as a blueprint for achieving those goals, outlining a clear vision, priorities, and action steps for the coming years.

Russell is a city rich in history, natural beauty, and community spirit. With the formation of the Tourism and Convention Commission, there is now a dedicated effort to leverage these strengths, attract visitors, and create new opportunities for residents and businesses alike. This plan is built on community input and best practices in destination development, ensuring a balanced approach to growth that benefits both visitors and locals.

Key focus areas include enhancing tourism infrastructure, expanding events and attractions, strengthening regional partnerships, and developing a strong marketing strategy to position Russell as a must-visit destination.

As the City of Russell embarks on this exciting new chapter, the **2025 Master Plan** provides a framework for strategic investments, innovative programming, and collaborative efforts to make tourism a key driver of economic and community success. With a strong foundation in place, the Tourism and Convention Commission is committed to building a thriving, dynamic destination that reflects the best of what Russell has to offer.



WANDER RUSSELL

Wander Russell (wanderrussell.org) is the tourism branding initiative spearheaded by the City of Russell Tourism and Convention Commission. It positions Russell as a vibrant riverside destination blending historic charm, creative energy, and outdoor exploration. From promoting local events and shopping to showcasing riverfront lodging and recreational trails, the brand's tagline "Go with the Flow" invites travelers to slow down, explore, relax, and enjoy the authentic, smalltown atmosphere.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The Board oversees strategic direction, financial stewardship, tourism initiatives, and community engagement under the Wander Russell brand.

James Diamond Lewis

Sarah Gabbard

Ray Davis

Danny Tackett

Julie Dockray

Christie Addington

Dianna Ross

Together, the Board ensures Wander Russell's efforts align with city goals by leveraging modern amenities and historical legacy to benefit residents and visitors alike.

TOURISM DIRECTOR

Faith Wolfe is the full-time Tourism Director for Wander Russell, responsible for:

1. **Strategic Planning** – Defining annual visitor goals, target markets, and branding frameworks (“Go with the Flow” campaign).
2. **Marketing & Public Relations** – Crafting messaging across digital platforms (web, social media), coordinating with media, and pitching stories to travel press.
3. **Event Management** – Planning and promoting festivals (e.g., the Country Music Highway Tribute Show, Pink Weekend), managing vendor logistics, sponsorships, and programming.
4. **Stakeholder Coordination** – Working with hotels, restaurants, shops, arts organizations, and the Board to synchronize marketing efforts and optimize the tourist experience.
5. **Visitor Services & Outreach** – Overseeing the Entertainment Destination Center (EDC), greeting tourists, providing info on lodging, eats, recreation, and events.

The Tourism Director serves as the key connector, turning the Board's vision into meaningful tourism development and creating engaging, memorable experiences for visitors throughout Russell.

TOURISM TAX REVENUE

The City of Russell generates tourism tax revenue through a 3% transient room tax and a 3% restaurant tax, implemented in May 2024. Tourism tax revenues will be strategically invested in projects identified and prioritized in this Master Plan to enhance tourism infrastructure, support local businesses, and drive economic growth. Planned investments may include upgrades to parks, trails, and public spaces, marketing and promotional campaigns, and event sponsorships. These **Tourism Development Funds** can also be used to match grant opportunities, leveraging local dollars with outside funding to develop larger and more impactful projects for the City of Russell. By prioritizing sustainable tourism efforts, Russell aims to attract visitors while enhancing the quality of life for its residents.

To ensure the City of Russell maximizes the impact of its tourism investments, it is essential that the Tourism Commission establish clear procedures and policies to capture all eligible tourism tax revenues from businesses, hotels, campgrounds and RV parks, and short-term rentals such as Airbnbs. With more than 120 businesses operating within the city limits, consistent collection and compliance are critical to providing the resources needed for marketing, events, and infrastructure improvements. Strong oversight, regular monitoring, and coordination with local businesses will help guarantee that the commission receives the full benefit of these revenues, allowing Russell to reinvest in projects that strengthen tourism and support economic growth.



HISTORY OF RUSSELL, KENTUCKY

Russell, Kentucky, is a small city located in Greenup County along the Ohio River in northeastern Kentucky. The area that is now Russell was originally home to Native American tribes who utilized the river for transportation and resources. European settlers began arriving in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, drawn by the fertile land and access to river trade routes.

The city was officially incorporated in 1874 and named after William Russell, an early landowner and developer who played a key role in establishing the community. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Russell grew because of its strategic location along the Chesapeake & Ohio (C&O) Railroad. The railroad industry fueled economic growth, bringing workers, businesses, and infrastructure to the region. The city became a hub for transportation and commerce, particularly in connection with nearby industrial centers like Ashland and Huntington, West Virginia.

By the mid-20th century, Russell had developed into a thriving suburban community, benefiting from its proximity to larger cities while maintaining a small-town atmosphere. The construction of the Ben Williamson Memorial Bridge in the 1930s provided a direct connection between Russell and Ironton, further integrating the local economy and enhancing mobility.

Today, Russell is known for its strong residential character, quality schools, and well-maintained public spaces. While the city has transitioned from its early reliance on rail and industry, it continues to serve as a desirable place to live, offering a mix of historic charm and modern amenities. The city's ongoing development efforts focus on preserving its heritage while planning for sustainable growth and economic opportunities.



WANDER RUSSELL EVENTS

Russell, Kentucky, is a lively and welcoming community that embraces tourism through a diverse range of events, creating meaningful opportunities for both residents and visitors to engage with the city's culture, cuisine, and entertainment scene. Through the efforts of Russell Tourism and the Wander Russell initiative, the city not only organizes signature events but also supports those developed by local businesses—supporting economic growth, civic pride, and a strong sense of community.

Each year, Russell's calendar is packed with hallmark events such as Ferry Tales, Pink Weekend, Foam Party, HalloweenTown, Thanksgiving Night Social, The Great Christmas Wander, and many more.

HalloweenTown is the city's most anticipated event of the year, drawing between **5,000 to 10,000 attendees and transforming downtown Russell into a massive fall festival**. The event features themed attractions, costume contests, trick-or-treating, vendors, entertainment, and immersive experiences for all ages, making it one of the largest and most festive gatherings in the Tri-State region.

Pink Weekend kicks off the holiday shopping season each November, promoting shop-local initiatives and encouraging residents and visitors to support small businesses throughout downtown Russell. Participating retailers offer exclusive sales, giveaways, and festive in-store experiences that highlight the importance of keeping holiday dollars within the community.

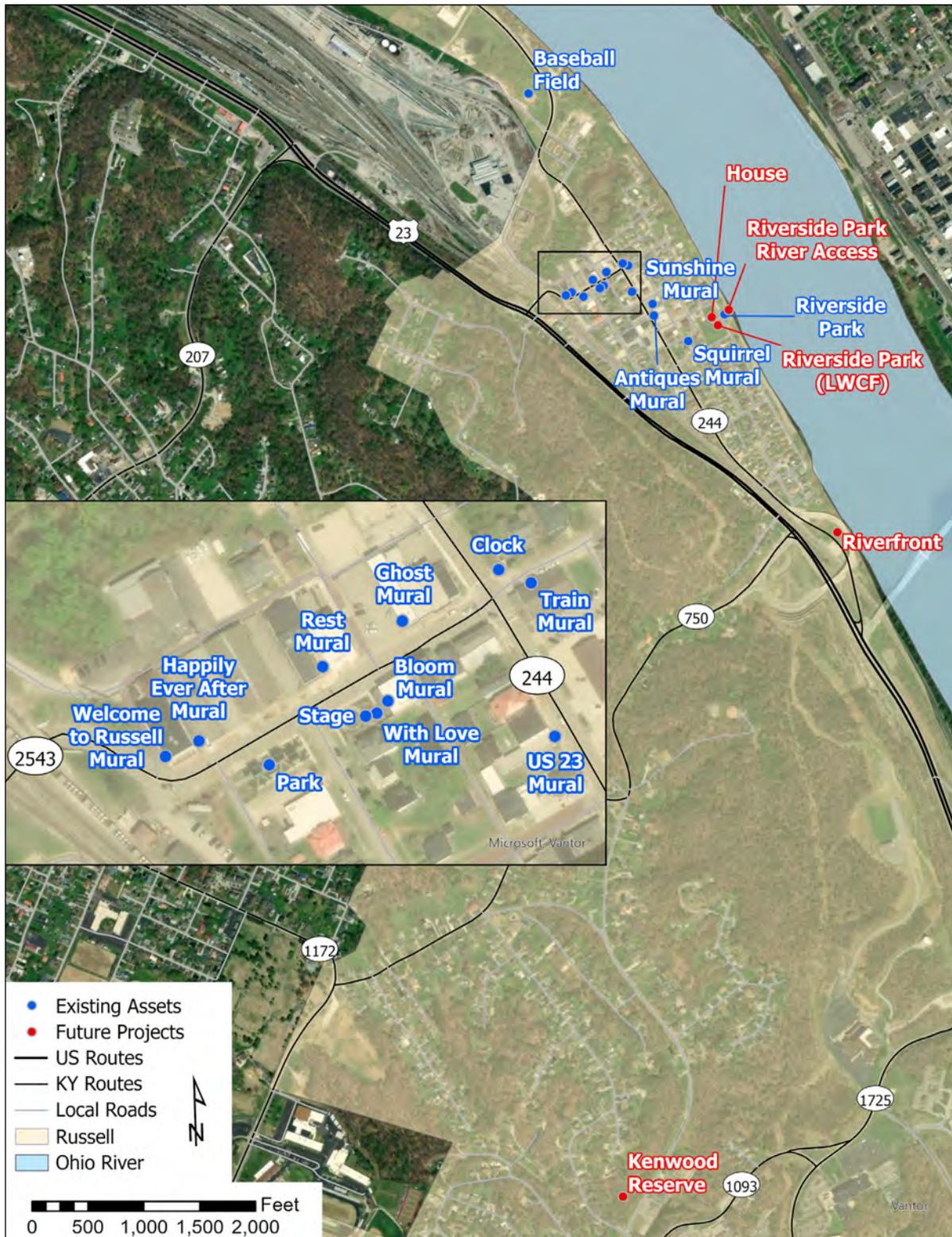
Wings Week, held in early February, is a culinary celebration where local restaurants compete for the coveted title of "Best Wings in Town." The event invites locals and visitors to dine around the city, try creative wing recipes, and vote for their favorites, driving winter traffic to restaurants and reinforcing Russell's growing food scene.

Local businesses also add to the excitement with their own special events such as Lobstober Fest, Meet & Greets with sports stars, and Oktoberfest at Eridanus Brewing. These collaborations expand the city's tourism footprint, offering unique experiences that draw visitors and strengthen community ties.

By continuously expanding its event offerings and championing business-led initiatives, Russell continues to build its reputation as a vibrant, inclusive destination. Whether through large-scale celebrations like HalloweenTown or smaller, themed gatherings throughout the year, **Russell Tourism plays a vital role in elevating the city's appeal**, supporting small business success, and fostering the sense of togetherness that makes Russell a vibrant place to live, work, and visit.



PROJECT DEVELOPMENT



Existing tourism assets and identified future asset locations

PROJECT PRIORITIES:

A TIERED APPROACH TO TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

The Commission applied a tiered method to categorize projects based on their anticipated impact, feasibility, and alignment with community goals. Four tiers emerged: *Destination Enhancers*, *Foundational & High Impact*, *Recreational Diversifiers*, and *Long-Term Catalysts*. This structure ensures that early investments strengthen core assets, while subsequent efforts enhance and diversify the tourism experience. The approach also helps direct resources where they can make the greatest difference, laying the groundwork for long-term success.

- **Tier 1: Destination Enhancers**
Add value to the visitor experience. These improve the aesthetic, usability, and programmatic offerings to encourage repeat visits and local engagement.
- **Tier 2: Foundational & High Impact**
These are the core infrastructure investments that support tourism flow and economic sustainability.
- **Tier 3: Recreational Diversifiers**
Designed to expand visitor stay length and encourage family engagement.
- **Tier 4: Long-Term Catalysts**
Legacy projects that transform Russell's regional positioning.

Note: projects are not in order by priority, only numbered for reference

TIER 1: DESTINATION ENHANCERS

1. Murals
2. Public Art Beyond Murals
3. Riverfront Swings
4. Riverfront Bike Paths
5. Riverfront Walkways
6. Playground
7. Scenic Wooded Trails and Tree Bridges
8. Fishing Areas
9. Parking Lots
10. Bike Route
11. Walkways and Trails
12. Kenwood Reserve
13. Event Spaces
14. Special Events/Holidays

TIER 2: FOUNDATION & HIGH IMPACT

1. Sidewalks – New Additions and Improvements
2. Wi-Fi Hotspots
3. Phone Charging Stations
4. Lighting
5. Riverfront Park Area Development
6. Wayfinding & Branding Signage System
7. Beautification Corridors

TIER 3: RECREATIONAL DIVERSIFIERS

1. Dog Park
2. Skate Park
3. Multi-Purpose Sports Field
4. Splash Pad
5. Farmers Market
6. Outdoor Adventure Elements
7. Event-Ready Pavilions/Vendor Pads
8. Kayak & Paddleboard Launches
9. Mini-Golf or Family Recreation Area

TIER 4: LONG-TERM CATALYSTS

1. Commercial Development Behind Russell Plaza
2. House on Riverside
3. Ohio River Recreation & Access
4. Boutique Lodging or Riverfront Cabins
5. Mixed-Use Riverfront District
6. Tourism & Heritage Center

PROJECT PROFILES

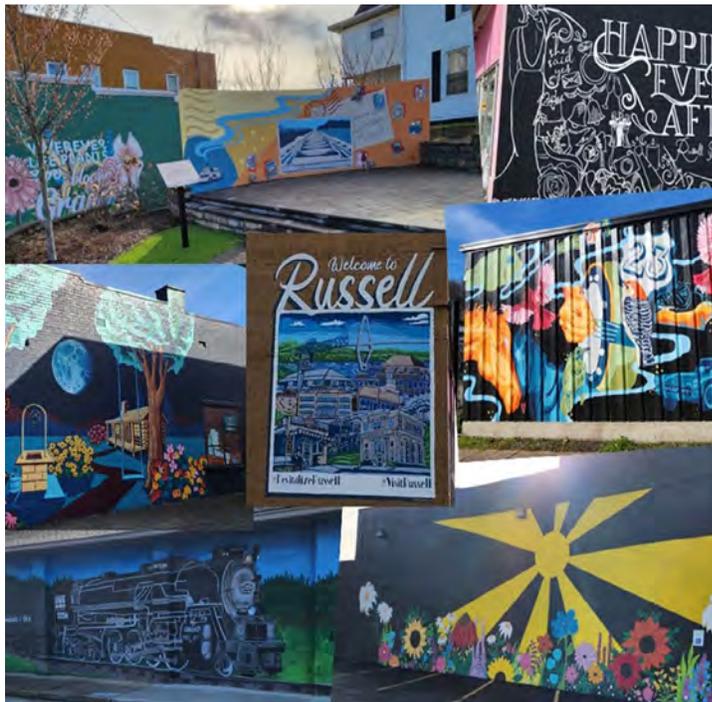
TIER 1: DESTINATION ENHANCERS

1. Murals

Russell's twelve murals bring vibrancy and character to the heart of downtown, transforming ordinary walls into works of art that celebrate the city's history, culture, and community spirit. Each mural tells a unique story, creating a sense of place and inviting both residents and visitors to explore the area. The artwork enhances the visual appeal of downtown, making it a more inviting and engaging space for businesses, shoppers, and pedestrians.

The impact of these murals extends beyond local appreciation. Russell was recently selected to be included in a statewide tour of murals in Kentucky. This recognition places the city on the map as a destination for public art enthusiasts, drawing visitors who contribute to the local economy by supporting restaurants, shops, and other businesses.

Looking ahead, Russell has plans to expand its mural collection, further enriching the downtown atmosphere. Future murals will continue to highlight the city's heritage while incorporating fresh artistic perspectives.



Murals in Downtown Russell

Goals: Celebrate local history and culture, enhance downtown aesthetics, and attract visitors.

Project Overview: Russell's twelve existing murals create a vibrant visual narrative that reflects the community's identity and history. The city plans to expand its mural collection throughout downtown.

Justification: The murals have already drawn regional recognition. Russell was selected for a statewide mural tour. These public art pieces increase foot traffic, strengthen community pride, and serve as economic drivers for downtown businesses.

Actions: Identify new mural locations, commission local and regional artists, and collaborate with tourism and arts organizations for promotion.

Potential Funding Resources: Kentucky Arts Council grants, National Endowment for the Arts, tourism development funds, private sponsorships.

Impact: Positions Russell as a public art destination, boosts local business engagement, and visually anchors the city's cultural identity.

2. Public Art Beyond Murals

To enhance community identity, attract visitors, and celebrate the rich cultural and historical heritage of Russell, the tourism plan proposes a strategic focus on public art initiatives. This includes the installation of permanent sculptures, interactive installations, and a rotating series of temporary art exhibits throughout the downtown area, parks, and public spaces.

Permanent sculptures will serve as landmark features that reflect the community's values, history, and natural beauty. These could include tributes to local figures, historical events, or the region's connection to the Ohio River and Appalachian culture. Interactive art installations such as musical sculptures, motion-activated lights, or digital murals can engage visitors of all ages and encourage repeat visits by offering immersive and evolving experiences.

A rotating art display program, possibly curated seasonally or annually, will allow local and regional artists to showcase their work, ensuring the art scene remains fresh and dynamic. These temporary exhibits can be featured in collaboration with schools, art organizations, and cultural institutions, helping to foster local talent while drawing in art enthusiasts.

Goals: Expand Russell's public art offerings to reflect community values and engage residents and visitors.

Project Overview: Introduce permanent sculptures, interactive installations, and a rotating art exhibit series throughout downtown, parks, and public spaces.

Justification: Diversifying public art experiences fosters community pride, drives tourism, and encourages ongoing engagement with local art.

Actions: Establish an art committee, develop artist selection and exhibit rotation plans, and identify key installation sites.

Potential Funding Resources: ArtPlace America, NEA Our Town program, tourism development funds, local arts councils, corporate sponsorships.

Impact: Creates dynamic, evolving public spaces that strengthen Russell's cultural landscape and support local artists.





Riverfront Swings in Pittsburgh

3. Riverfront Swings

The addition of riverfront swings along the Ohio River will create a relaxing and scenic gathering space for residents and visitors. These swings will be strategically placed along the riverfront to maximize views of the water, providing a peaceful retreat for individuals, families, and small groups. Designed for comfort and durability, the swings will feature sturdy, weather-resistant materials that complement the natural landscape.

The installation of these swings will enhance the community's connection to the river, encouraging outdoor recreation, social interaction, and leisurely enjoyment of the scenic waterfront. Integrated into existing and future pedestrian pathways, the swings will offer a place to rest and take in the beauty of the Ohio River while promoting a welcoming and vibrant public space. Lighting and landscaping elements may also be incorporated to further enhance the ambiance, making the riverfront a more attractive destination during both day and evening hours.

This addition aligns with the broader vision of the Russell Master Plan by fostering a sense of place, improving waterfront accessibility, and supporting revitalization efforts aimed at strengthening the city's recreational assets.

Goals: Provide inviting gathering spots along the riverfront for relaxation and scenic enjoyment.

Project Overview: Install durable, weather-resistant swings along the Ohio River.

Justification: Simple, cost-effective addition that enhances the ambiance and draws visitors to linger at the riverfront.

Actions: Identify locations, source materials, and integrate with landscaping and lighting plans.

Potential Funding Resources: Local tourism commission funds, parks donations, tourism development funds, sponsorship programs.

Impact: Improves waterfront appeal, encourages social interaction, and strengthens community connection to natural assets.

4. Riverfront Bike Path

The Riverfront Bike Path is a planned dedicated cycling route running along the Ohio River. This project is designed to provide a safe, scenic, and enjoyable route for bicyclists while enhancing connectivity between neighborhoods, parks, downtown businesses, and recreational areas.

Goals: The primary goals of the Riverfront Bike Path are to promote outdoor recreation and healthy lifestyles, increase access to the riverfront and downtown, support local economic development through increased visitor activity, and contribute to a larger vision of regional trail connectivity.

Project Overview: The project will consist of a paved bike path separated from vehicular traffic, stretching along the Ohio River through Russell. It will connect key destinations such as community parks, local businesses, civic facilities, and nearby neighborhoods. Signage, bike racks, and safety features will be included to enhance the user experience. The design will also consider future expansion opportunities and integration with regional bicycle infrastructure.

Justification: Investing in a riverfront bike path supports Russell's long-term goals of revitalization and economic growth. By attracting cyclists and tourists to the downtown area, the city can stimulate local business activity and enhance its reputation as a destination for outdoor recreation. Additionally, this project supports health and environmental goals by promoting non-motorized transportation.

Actions: Initial steps will include feasibility and design studies, identification of a preferred route, community engagement, and coordination with planning partners. The project will be implemented in phases, with priority given to segments that offer the most immediate connectivity and visibility.

Potential Funding Resources: Funding may be pursued through sources such as the Recreational Trails Program (RTP), Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP), the Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) initiative, Kentucky's Office of Outdoor Recreation, and local public-private partnerships along with tourism development funds.

Impact: The Riverfront Bike Path will position Russell as a bike-friendly community with a vibrant riverfront corridor. It will encourage outdoor activity, draw more visitors to the area, and improve access to downtown, ultimately contributing to a stronger local economy and healthier population.





5. Riverfront Walkways

The Riverfront Walkways project proposes the development of attractive, pedestrian-friendly paths along the Ohio River in Russell. These walkways are intended to provide a comfortable and scenic walking experience that invites people to enjoy the riverfront while connecting them to downtown and key community spaces.



Goals: The project aims to enhance pedestrian safety and mobility, increase access to public spaces and local businesses, promote tourism, and support a healthy, active community lifestyle. It also seeks to create a sense of place along the riverfront, encouraging both residents and visitors to engage with Russell's natural and cultural assets.

Project Overview: The walkways will be constructed with durable, accessible surfaces and incorporate lighting, landscaping, benches, and scenic overlooks. They will link downtown Russell with recreational areas, civic buildings, and other attractions along the riverfront.

Designed to complement the adjacent bike path, the walkways will offer a continuous and inviting pedestrian route suitable for walking, jogging, or simply enjoying the view.

Justification: Creating safe and attractive walkways along the Ohio River aligns with Russell's tourism and downtown revitalization efforts. Pedestrian-friendly environments are proven to increase foot traffic in business districts, improve public health, and foster a stronger sense of community. This project will activate the riverfront and create new opportunities for events, gatherings, and passive recreation.

Actions: The City will begin with site planning and public outreach, followed by design development, environmental reviews, and phased construction. Special attention will be given to areas with high foot traffic and strategic entry points to maximize early use and visibility.

Potential Funding Resources: Potential funding sources include the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), Community Development Block Grants (CDBG), Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) funds, pedestrian infrastructure grants, and support from local tourism and downtown development programs along with tourism development funds.

Impact: The Riverfront Walkways will transform Russell's riverfront into a more vibrant and accessible public space. By linking the downtown core with scenic and recreational assets, the walkways will enhance community livability, attract visitors, and provide lasting benefits to residents, businesses, and the city's overall image.

6. Playground

The development or enhancement of a community playground will provide a safe, inclusive, and engaging space for children and families to enjoy outdoor recreation. Strategically located within walking distance of neighborhoods or park facilities, the playground will feature modern equipment designed for a variety of age groups and abilities. Shaded areas, seating, and safety surfacing will create a comfortable environment for parents and caregivers, supporting family-friendly use and encouraging healthy, active play. This amenity will strengthen community bonds and contribute to the overall quality of life in Russell.

The city can look to successful examples like the Ashland Central Park Playground in nearby Ashland, KY, which features inclusive play equipment, shaded picnic shelters, and accessible pathways, serving as a regional model for family-centered recreation spaces. Building on this model, Russell plans to develop or enhance its own centrally located playground to ensure all families have access to safe, engaging outdoor play.

Goals: Provide an inclusive, safe, and accessible play space for children of all ages and abilities.

Project Overview: Develop or enhance a centrally located playground with modern, ADA-compliant equipment, shade structures, and seating areas.

Justification: Playgrounds support child development, encourage outdoor activity, and foster community connections.

Actions: Select site, design with input from families, install modern equipment, ensure ADA compliance, and provide comfort features.

Potential Funding Resources: Land and Water Conservation Fund, GameTime Playground Grants, state parks funding, tourism development funds, local fundraising efforts.

Impact: Expands recreation opportunities for families, promotes healthy child development, and strengthens Russell's appeal as a family-friendly community.





7. Scenic Wooded Trails and Tree Bridges

The Scenic Wooded Trails and Tree Bridges project will establish a network of nature trails through Russell's wooded areas, offering immersive experiences in the region's natural landscape. Elevated tree bridges will provide unique perspectives and connect sections of the trail system, allowing users to walk among the treetops while enjoying panoramic views.

Goals: This project seeks to promote eco-tourism, encourage physical activity, provide educational and interpretive opportunities, and enhance connectivity between the riverfront, parks, and natural areas. It also aims to preserve the local environment while offering a low-impact recreational attraction that complements Russell's outdoor tourism assets.

Project Overview: The trail system will meander through wooded areas adjacent to the river and near downtown, with varying lengths and difficulty levels to accommodate different users. Elevated tree bridges will connect trail sections across ravines or through dense forest canopy, creating both a practical and visually stunning feature. Interpretive signage, rest areas, and minimal-impact construction methods will be used to protect and highlight the natural environment.

Justification: Russell's natural landscape is one of its most valuable tourism assets. By developing scenic trails and elevated walkways, the city can attract outdoor enthusiasts, families, and eco-conscious travelers. These amenities support Russell's identity as a welcoming destination for nature-based recreation while preserving greenspace and improving residents' quality of life.

Actions: Trail routes and key connection points will be identified, conduct environmental assessments, and engage with landowners and stakeholders. Design and engineering work will follow, with phased construction beginning in accessible or high-demand areas. Maintenance plans and volunteer support initiatives will be developed to ensure long-term sustainability.

Potential Funding Resources: Funding opportunities may include the Recreational Trails Program (RTP), Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), Kentucky Heritage Land Conservation Fund, Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) grants, and private sponsorship or tourism development funds.

Impact: The Scenic Wooded Trails and Tree Bridges will elevate Russell's tourism appeal by providing unique outdoor experiences that blend adventure, education, and tranquility.

8. Fishing Areas

The Fishing Areas project will enhance public access to the Ohio River and nearby waterways by developing designated, safe, and attractive fishing spots within the city of Russell. These areas will serve both casual and avid anglers, creating opportunities for recreation and relaxation along the riverfront.

Goals: This project aims to promote outdoor recreation and tourism, support intergenerational and family-friendly activities, and improve access to Russell’s natural resources. Additional goals include creating educational opportunities around aquatic ecosystems and enhancing the visitor experience along the river.

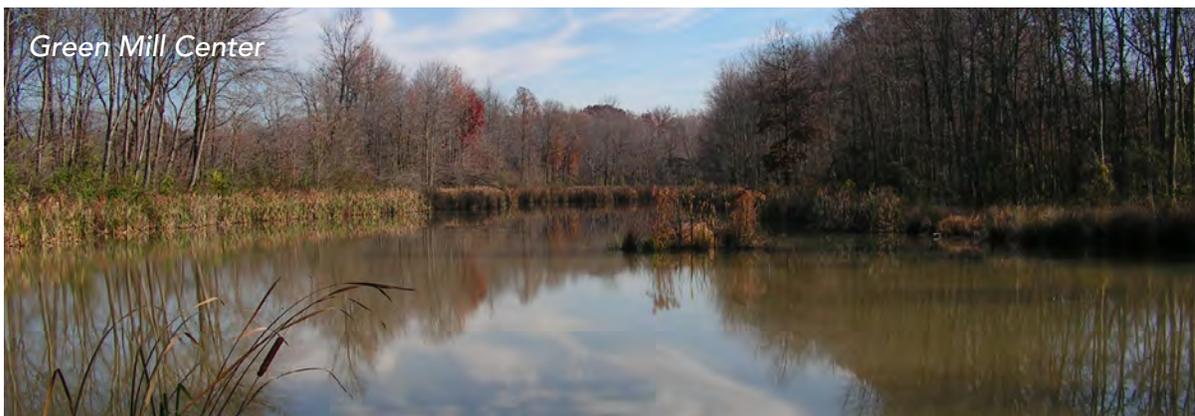
Project Overview: Designated fishing areas will be created at strategic points along the riverbank, including ADA-accessible platforms, bank stabilization where needed, and clearly marked signage. Amenities such as benches, waste receptacles, lighting, and nearby parking will enhance usability. Interpretive signs may provide information about fish species, local ecology, and safe fishing practices.

Justification: Fishing is a low-cost, high-participation recreational activity that appeals to residents and visitors of all ages. By formalizing and enhancing fishing access, Russell can attract outdoor tourists and increase the appeal of its riverfront while supporting conservation education and community wellness.

Actions: Site selection and design work will be completed with input from anglers, accessibility advocates, and environmental experts. Partnerships with local wildlife and conservation agencies will guide implementation. Construction will prioritize safety, sustainability, and ease of access. Ongoing maintenance plans will be developed in coordination with parks and recreation staff.

Potential Funding Resources: Potential funding sources include the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources, Sport Fish Restoration Program, Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), and local or regional tourism development grants.

Impact: The Fishing Areas will enhance the Ohio River’s recreational value and broaden Russell’s appeal to outdoor visitors. They will provide accessible, safe, and enjoyable places for families, seniors, and youth to connect with nature, support wellness through outdoor activity, and contribute to the economic vitality of the downtown riverfront area.



9. Parking Lots

Strategically developed or improved parking lots will enhance accessibility to key destinations in Russell, supporting local businesses, community events, and recreation. Utilizing empty or underused lots for parking can revitalize neglected spaces and reduce congestion during events or peak activity periods. Incorporating green design elements such as permeable surfaces, trees, and landscaping will help manage stormwater runoff and improve visual appeal.

There are several empty lots throughout Russell that could serve as ideal locations for designated parking, particularly near downtown or event venues. Coordinated planning will ensure that parking solutions contribute to the overall functionality and attractiveness of the city.

Goals: Improve accessibility and convenience for residents and visitors by utilizing vacant lots for well-designed parking areas.

Project Overview: Identify underused or vacant lots, plan and develop parking areas with appropriate surfacing, signage, lighting, and landscaping features.

Justification: Strategic parking improves local business activity, supports tourism and events, and maximizes the use of available land.

Actions: Conduct parking needs assessment, engage property owners, develop site plans, pursue funding, and implement environmentally friendly design practices.

Potential Funding Resources: Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), Kentucky Infrastructure Authority, local economic development funds, private partnerships, tourism development funds.

Impact: Improves traffic flow, increases business patronage, enhances event capacity, and revitalizes unused properties.



10. Bike Route

The Russell Tourism Commission plans to expand the existing bike route and install bike stations along the path to enhance the biking experience, improve accessibility, and encourage more residents and visitors to explore the city by bicycle.

Goals: Promote alternative transportation and encourage bike tourism.

Project Overview: Expand Russell's bike route and add stations with repair tools, maps, and rest areas.

Justification: Enhances safety, supports eco-friendly travel, and appeals to active tourists.

Actions: Identify expansion routes, install signage and bike stations, and promote through marketing.

Potential Funding Resources: Transportation Alternatives Program, Safe Routes to School, local health initiatives, tourism development funds.

Impact: Improves infrastructure, promotes healthy activity, and enhances Russell's appeal to outdoor enthusiasts.



Lexington Road Bike Lane Project, Louisville

11. Walkways and Trails

In addition to sidewalks, the creation of scenic walkways through parks, green spaces, and along the riverfront will provide leisurely walking options that encourage relaxation, recreation, and wellness. These walkways will be designed with aesthetics and comfort in mind, including benches, shade trees, and lighting.

The King's Daughters Community Walking Trail in Russell, KY, offers a peaceful and accessible route for walking or jogging, featuring both paved and dirt paths through a scenic natural setting. Building on the success of this trail, the Russell Tourism Commission plans to develop additional walking trail areas throughout the city to enhance outdoor recreation, improve connectivity, and provide more opportunities for residents and visitors to enjoy Russell's unique landscape.

Goals: Encourage recreational walking and provide scenic, accessible routes throughout the city.

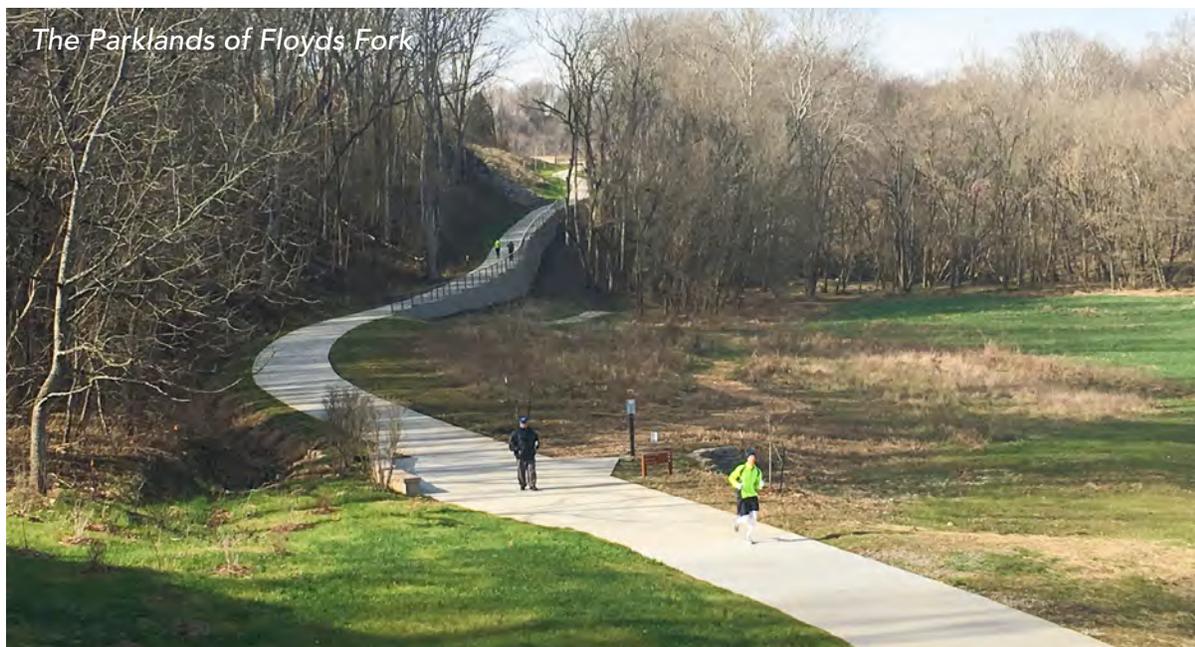
Project Overview: Expand upon the King's Daughters Walking Trail and develop new walkways through green spaces and riverfront areas.

Justification: Walkways promote health, wellness, and environmental appreciation.

Actions: Plan routes, incorporate comfort features (benches, shade), and connect trails to parks and neighborhoods.

Potential Funding Resources: Land and Water Conservation Fund, state wellness initiatives, tourism development funds, local parks funding.

Impact: Enhances outdoor recreation, increases trail use, and improves the city's livability and attractiveness.



12. Kenwood Reserve

The Kenwood Drive Park project envisions transforming a pristine, 10-acre natural sanctuary in the heart of Russell into a public city park that celebrates the beauty of the outdoors. This untouched property, home to diverse tree species, abundant wildlife, and a crystal-clear stream, offers a unique opportunity for residents and visitors to explore, relax, and reconnect with nature. The park will feature serene hiking trails, bridges crossing the creek and a central ravine, a pavilion with picnic areas, and educational elements such as tree labeling and bird-watching opportunities. With additional amenities like a small playground, a disc golf course, and potential memorial spaces, the park will provide recreational, educational, and cultural experiences for all ages. By combining community volunteerism, strategic partnerships, and sustainable development practices, Kenwood Drive Park will become a centerpiece for eco-tourism, outdoor adventure, and family-friendly enjoyment, creating a legacy for generations to come.

Project Overview

The proposed project seeks to transform the approximately 10-acre Kenwood Drive property into a public city park and nature preserve. This untouched natural area has remained a sanctuary for centuries, home to more than eight species of trees and over ten species of birds, as well as a refuge for deer and other wildlife. The site features a blue water stream, a large ravine, and open forest areas, offering an ideal location for hiking, outdoor recreation, and eco-tourism activities. By converting this land into a park, the city could provide a place where residents can escape into nature, relax, and reconnect with the outdoors.

Goals

The primary goal of the project is to preserve the natural beauty of the Kenwood Drive property while creating a peaceful, Zen-like environment for the enjoyment of citizens and visitors. The park would offer hiking trails, bird-watching opportunities, and nature observation, along with gathering spaces for families, including a gazebo or pavilion, picnic areas, and a small playground. Educational opportunities would be incorporated through arboretum-style tree labeling and environmental programming for schoolchildren, allowing them to explore and learn about the natural world. Additionally, the project aims to enhance Russell's eco-tourism offerings and attract visitors to the area, building on the success of similar regional projects such as Armco Park in Boyd County and the Charles and Betty Russell Trails in Ashland.

Justification

The Kenwood Drive property has a history of consideration for residential development, but environmental protections for the stream prevented construction, preserving its natural state. The city purchased the land approximately twelve years ago with the intent of protecting it for public use, and now there is an opportunity to realize that vision. Similar projects in Eastern Kentucky have demonstrated strong community engagement, enhanced quality of life, and increased tourism, showing the potential benefits for Russell. The park would provide a safe and serene environment for relaxation, outdoor education, and nature-based recreation, benefiting both citizens and visitors.

Actions

Development of the park would include several hiking trails, two small pedestrian bridges over the creek, and a suspension arch bridge over the central ravine. A gravel roadway would allow limited city access for maintenance, while the upper plateau would host a gazebo or pavilion and picnic areas for families. Additional features could include a small playground with swings and slides, tree labeling for educational purposes, and a disc golf course. The park could also incorporate a memorial garden or pavilion, such as the potential OLBH Memorial Pavilion with the statue and gates from the hospital. Community partnerships with local churches, civic organizations, and volunteer groups, including Scouts, ROTC, and service clubs, would support construction, maintenance, and programming.

Potential Funding Resources

Funding may come from the Land and Water Conservation Fund, Kentucky Fish and Wildlife programs, tourism development funds, private sponsorships, and non-profit partnerships.

Impact

Kenwood Reserve will boost tourism, provide residents with a safe recreation space, and enhance environmental education. It will promote healthier lifestyles while showcasing Russell's commitment to conservation and quality of life.



13. Event Spaces

A dedicated public event space featuring elevated, covered areas will provide a flexible, multipurpose venue for concerts, farmers markets, festivals, and community celebrations. With amenities such as a bandstand or stage area, lighting, electrical hookups, and vendor setup accommodations, the space will be designed to support a wide range of activities throughout the year. Whether hosting large-scale events or intimate community gatherings, the event space will become a lively focal point for civic life, cultural expression, and economic development.

Russell's central location and community spirit position it well to capitalize on such a facility. By creating an attractive, functional venue for public events, Russell can strengthen its reputation as a destination for arts, entertainment, and cultural experiences.

Goals: Establish a versatile, inviting event space that serves as a hub for community gatherings and regional events.

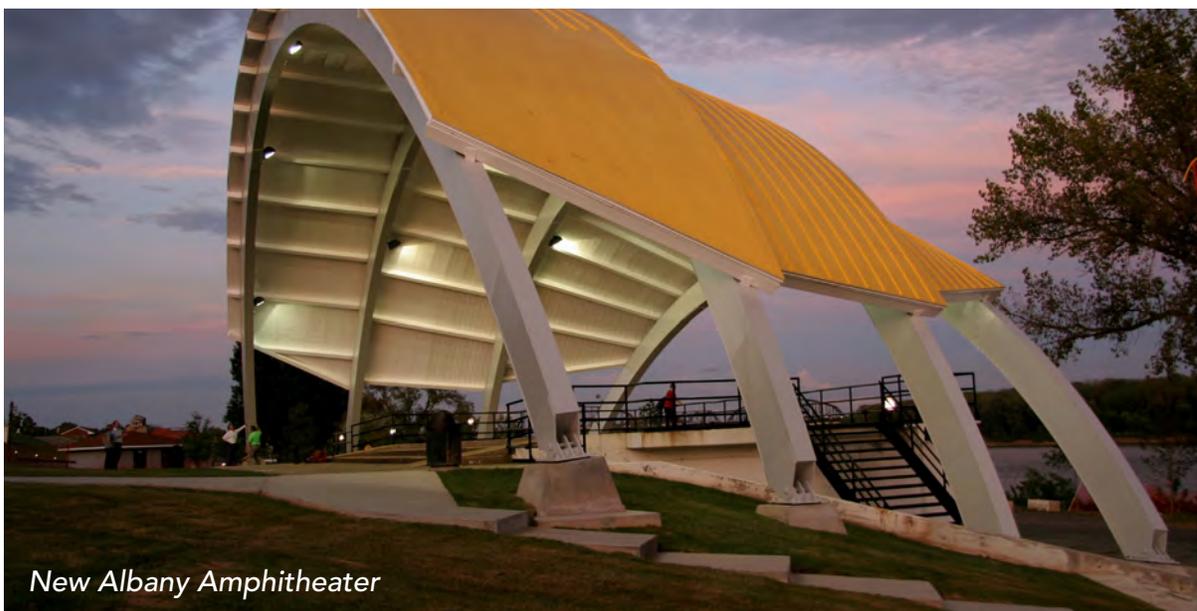
Project Overview: Construct a public event area with four elevated, covered sections, a bandstand or stage, and essential infrastructure for sound, lighting, and vendor operations.

Justification: Event spaces encourage community engagement, boost local business revenues during events, and attract visitors to Russell.

Actions: Finalize site selection, design infrastructure features, coordinate with local organizations for event planning, and develop a schedule of recurring events.

Potential Funding Resources: Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) grants, Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), Kentucky Arts Council funding, private sponsorships, tourism development funds.

Impact: Stimulates local economy, provides entertainment and cultural value, strengthens community identity, and enhances Russell's regional visibility.



New Albany Amphitheater

14. Special Events/Holidays

Expanding and promoting a diverse calendar of events and holiday celebrations will strengthen Russell’s community identity, foster civic pride, and attract visitors throughout the year. By hosting a variety of engaging activities, ranging from pop-up markets to seasonal festivals, the city can activate public spaces, support local businesses, and create memorable experiences for residents and guests alike. Events will be designed to appeal to different age groups and interests, ensuring broad participation and fostering a sense of belonging and excitement in the community.

Many Kentucky communities have successfully established signature events that grow attendance and local economic impact year after year. With Russell’s downtown assets and scenic spaces, the city has a strong foundation to build a year-round event program.

Goals: Create a vibrant, well-promoted calendar of special events to build community pride, increase tourism, and support local businesses.

Project Overview: Plan and execute a range of community events across seasons, using public spaces such as the new event venue, riverfront areas, parks, and downtown streetscapes.

Justification: Special events foster local engagement, create economic opportunities for vendors and businesses, and position Russell as a lively, welcoming community.

Actions: Form an events committee, coordinate marketing efforts, partner with local businesses and organizations, and pursue event sponsorships.

Potential Funding Resources: Tourism development funds, Kentucky Department of Tourism, event sponsorships, admission/vendor fees, Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), National Endowment for the Arts (NEA).

Impact: Boosts local economy, draws visitors to downtown, enhances community spirit, and increases Russell’s regional profile.



Jeffersontown
Town Square

POTENTIAL EVENTS:

Annual Signature Events:

- HalloweenTown (Flagship, 5,000–10,000 attendees)
- The Great Christmas Wander
- Pink Weekend
- Ferry Tales
- Thanksgiving Night Social
- BBQ & Bluegrass Festival
- Railroad Days (Parade, fireworks, historical recognition)

Seasonal Community Series:

- Outdoor Movie Nights (Summer)
- Seasonal Food Truck Fridays
- Riverfront Summer Concerts
- Pop-Up Artisan Markets
- Spring in Bloom Festival
- Fall Festival
- Holiday Tree Lighting & Parade

Themed Niches & Partnership Events:

- Wings Week
- Dog Day Downtown
- Classic Car & Motorcycle Cruise-In Nights
- Health & Wellness Expo
- Veterans Day Parade & Ceremony
- Volunteer Appreciation Day

Small-Town Favorites:

- Trivia & Game Nights
- Cultural Heritage Nights
- Farmers Market Special Days
- PorchFest / Neighborhood Music Crawl
- Garden & Home Tours
- STEM in the Park
- Art Wander

Sweet Harmony Sidewalk Project, Union



TIER 2: FOUNDATION & HIGH IMPACT

1. Sidewalks – New Additions and Improvements

The City of Russell boasts a well-developed pedestrian network that supports both residents and visitors in exploring the community on foot. As part of ongoing efforts to enhance connectivity, accessibility, and overall visitor experience, tourism initiatives will focus on identifying and addressing gaps within this network. Key improvements will include the strategic installation of crosswalks at high-traffic and tourist-prone areas, assessing and installing safety railings where appropriate, particularly in areas with steep grades or near traffic—and repairing deteriorated sidewalks to eliminate tripping hazards and improve aesthetics.

To guide these efforts, a comprehensive walkability assessment will be conducted. This assessment will evaluate sidewalk conditions, ADA compliance, lighting, signage, and connectivity between key destinations such as downtown businesses, parks, riverfront areas, and historic landmarks.

Goals: Improve pedestrian safety, accessibility, and connectivity across the city.

Project Overview: Conduct a walkability assessment and upgrade sidewalks, crosswalks, and safety features.

Justification: ADA-compliant and well-maintained sidewalks are essential for residents and tourists navigating Russell.

Actions: Evaluate gaps and deterioration, prioritize improvements, and install railings and crosswalks as needed.

Potential Funding Resources: CDBG, TAP, KYTC sidewalk funds, tourism development funds.

Impact: Supports walkability, increases safety, and strengthens connections between key destinations.

2. Wi-Fi Hotspots

Installing free public Wi-Fi hotspots throughout the park and downtown area will expand internet access for residents, students, and visitors. These hotspots will support digital inclusion, enabling users to connect for work, education, or leisure without cost. Strategic placement of reliable, high-speed access points will enhance the usability of public spaces, support events, and encourage longer visits to local businesses and attractions.

Goals: Expand digital connectivity for residents and visitors in public spaces.

Project Overview: Install free Wi-Fi in downtown and park areas to support access, events, and tourism.

Justification: Digital inclusion enhances equity, supports business activity, and encourages longer stays.

Actions: Identify access points, partner with internet providers, and publicize access locations.

Potential Funding Resources: Rural broadband grants, EDA digital infrastructure funds, tourism development funds.

Impact: Supports education, business, and tourism; improves public space functionality.

3. Phone Charging Stations

This project proposes the installation of secure, solar-powered public phone charging stations at accessible locations throughout the City of Russell. Potential installation sites include the Riverfront Park, downtown gathering spaces, and areas near public buildings and recreational facilities. These stations will provide residents and visitors with the ability to charge mobile devices safely and conveniently while spending time in public spaces.

Goals: The project aims to improve access to digital connectivity, support individuals who may have limited access to reliable power sources, enhance the functionality of public areas, and promote equitable use of technology infrastructure in Russell.

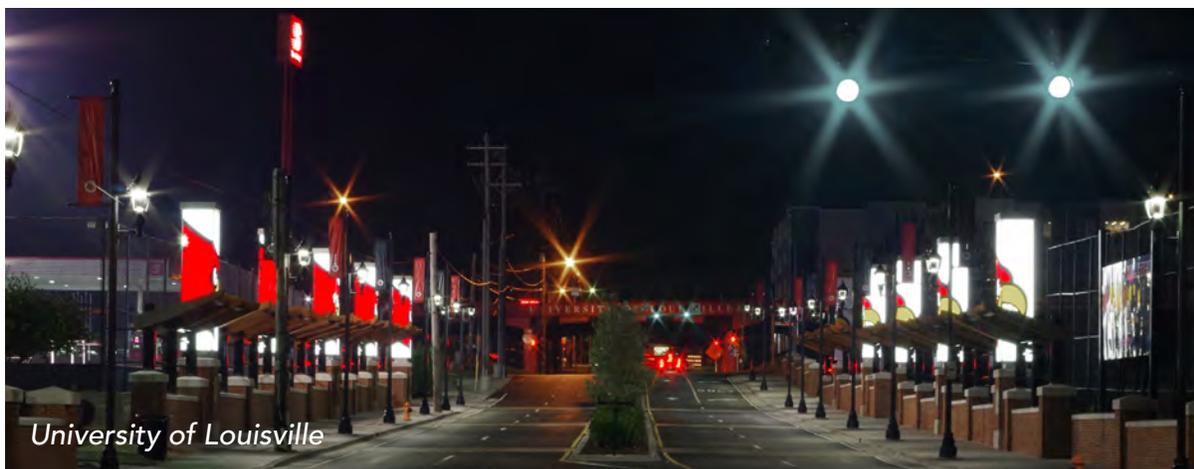
Project Overview: Russell Tourism will work with local partners to install durable, weather-resistant charging stations that are powered by solar energy where feasible. Locations will be selected based on community feedback, usage patterns, and accessibility considerations. The stations will be available for public use at no cost and will serve as an added amenity in key community spaces, promoting increased engagement with the city's recreational and civic assets.

Justification: Many residents depend on mobile devices to access essential services, education, job opportunities, transportation, and emergency information. In a small community like Russell, public amenities that improve digital access help bridge the gap for those facing economic or housing instability. This project also supports local events and tourism by providing a convenience that encourages people to stay longer in the area.

Actions: Russell Tourism will begin with a public outreach effort to gather input on ideal station locations and design preferences. A vendor will be selected to provide and install charging stations that meet safety and accessibility standards. City staff or a designated partner will oversee maintenance. Signage and community outreach will help raise awareness of the new resource, and data collection may be used to determine future expansion opportunities.

Potential Funding Resources: Community Development Block Grants (CDBG), Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) funds, Kentucky Infrastructure Authority, private sponsorships, and tourism development funds.

Impact: The addition of phone charging stations will improve quality of life by supporting digital access and connectivity for all residents, particularly those with limited access to electricity at home or while on the move.



4. Lighting

Improved and expanded lighting throughout downtown and recreational areas will increase safety, extend usability into the evening hours, and contribute to the ambiance of public spaces. Emphasis will be placed on energy-efficient, decorative lighting fixtures that align with Russell's character and vision.

Goals: Improve safety, extend the usability of public spaces, and enhance visual appeal.

Project Overview: Install energy-efficient, decorative lighting in downtown, parks, and trail areas.

Justification: Lighting contributes to safety, ambiance, and nighttime activity in public spaces.

Actions: Inventory current lighting, prioritize installations, and select fixtures that match city character.

Potential Funding Resources: Energy efficiency grants, local capital improvement budgets, tourism development funds.

Impact: Increases public space use, supports evening tourism, and promotes a welcoming environment.



Riverfront Park

5. Riverfront Park Area Development

Riverfront Park is a community space that currently offers picnic shelter and benches, providing a serene setting for residents and visitors to enjoy the natural beauty of the area and view of the Ohio River. With the support of a Land & Water Conservation Fund grant, the City of Russell will expand and enhance the park’s amenities, making it an even more inviting and vibrant destination.

The planned improvements will include the installation of scenic walkways, a new gazebo/shelter pad, and enhanced lighting, all designed to increase accessibility and extend the park’s usability into the evening hours. Additional amenities, such as trash receptacles, grills, and new picnic tables and benches, will create more comfortable spaces for relaxation and gatherings. A community message board will provide a central hub for local announcements and event updates, fostering a sense of connection and engagement within the community. In addition, a public bike repair station will promote active transportation and provide cyclists with the resources they need to maintain their bikes while enjoying the park. Future enhancements will provide restrooms, shaded gathering areas, and convenient hookups for vendors to better serve visitors and event organizers.

Goals: Enhance park accessibility and usability while encouraging recreational and community use.

Project Overview: Improve Riverfront Park by adding walkways, shelters, lighting, a bike repair station, new amenities, and a community message board.

Justification: The enhancements will transform the park into a more versatile and appealing destination, supporting events, daily recreation, and tourism.

Actions: Finalize design plans, coordinate with LWCF, and install new features in phases.

Potential Funding Resources: Land and Water Conservation Fund, Kentucky Recreation and Parks Society grants, tourism development funds, local match funding.

Impact: Expands year-round park use, improves public infrastructure, and creates a central community gathering space.

6. Wayfinding & Interpretive Signage

Strategically placed signage will help both visitors and residents navigate the city while also sharing Russell's history, cultural landmarks, and natural features. Wayfinding signage will include maps and directional signs, while interpretive signage may feature local stories, notable figures, historical events, and ecological information along trails and public areas.

Goals: Strengthen navigation and educational opportunities throughout the city.

Project Overview: Develop and install signage to guide visitors and share Russell's history and cultural context.

Justification: Clear, engaging signage helps visitors feel oriented while deepening their connection to the community.

Actions: Design signs, identify key locations, and integrate signage with existing trails and landmarks.

Potential Funding Resources: NEA Our Town, heritage tourism funds, local design grants, tourism development funds.

Impact: Improves visitor experience, supports heritage tourism, and unifies city branding.



7. Beautification Corridors

Enhancing the city's primary corridors through gateway landscaping, decorative planters, and community-branded banners will create a strong first impression for residents and visitors entering Russell. These improvements will highlight community pride, support economic development, and strengthen the city's visual identity. By transforming key entrances and roadways into attractive, welcoming spaces, Russell can reinforce its image as a vibrant, forward-looking community.

Beautification efforts along major corridors are a proven strategy in many Kentucky cities, showcasing local character while encouraging investment and tourism. Russell will apply this approach to highlight its unique assets and create a cohesive, visually appealing streetscape.

Goals: Establish visually distinctive gateways and corridors that reflect community pride, enhance the city's identity, and create inviting public spaces.

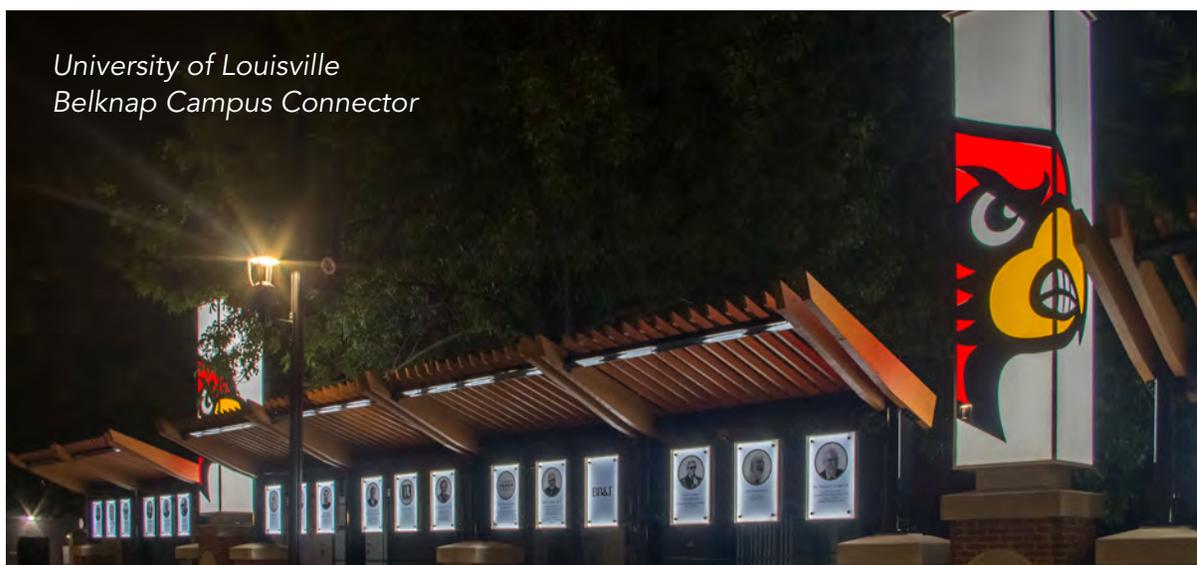
Project Overview: Design and implement beautification elements along main entry points and downtown corridors such as landscaping at key gateways, seasonal planters, decorative lighting, and custom banners featuring the city's branding.

Justification: A well-maintained and visually appealing environment supports local businesses, improves visitor experiences, and fosters civic pride among residents.

Actions: Identify and prioritize key corridor locations, develop cohesive design standards for landscaping, signage, and banners, partner with local businesses and civic groups for sponsorship opportunities, and establish maintenance programs to ensure long-term success.

Potential Funding Resources: Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP), Kentucky Pride Fund, tourism development funds, Community Development Block Grants, and local business sponsorships.

Impact: Creates an attractive and unified city image, supports tourism and economic growth, encourages private investment, and enhances residents' sense of place and pride in Russell.



TIER 3: RECREATIONAL DIVERSIFIERS

1. Dog Park

A fenced-in dog park would provide a dedicated space for residents to exercise their dogs off-leash in a safe, social environment. Amenities could include separate areas for large and small dogs, agility equipment, seating for owners, and water stations. This feature encourages community interaction and supports pet-friendly recreation.

Goals: Provide a secure, well-equipped area for off-leash dog exercise and socialization.

Project Overview: Develop a fenced dog park with designated areas for different dog sizes, agility features, shaded seating, and water access.

Justification: Dog parks promote responsible pet ownership, foster community connections, and enhance the livability of the city for pet owners.

Actions: Select and secure an appropriate site, engage community input, design layout, install fencing and amenities, and establish park guidelines.

Potential Funding Resources: PetSafe Bark for Your Park Grant, local fundraising, sponsorships from pet-related businesses, Land and Water Conservation Fund, tourism development funds .

Impact: Supports active lifestyles for pets and owners, builds community relationships, and enhances Russell's appeal as a pet-friendly city.

2. Skate Park

A dedicated skate park will provide a safe and engaging environment for youth and adults to enjoy skateboarding, BMX biking, and scooter riding. Designed with input from local users, the park will feature ramps, rails, and open areas to accommodate a range of skill levels. Creating a designated space for these activities reduces the likelihood of unsafe use of sidewalks, streets, and parking lots while encouraging healthy outdoor recreation and creative physical expression.

Goals: Provide a designated, safe, and modern space for skateboarding, BMX biking, and related activities.

Project Overview: Develop a professionally designed skate park with input from local skaters to include a variety of features for different skill levels.

Justification: Skate parks offer youth a safe recreational outlet, promote physical activity, and foster community among participants.

Actions: Engage youth in the design process, secure site, develop conceptual plans, seek funding, and install safety signage.

Potential Funding Resources: Tony Hawk Foundation Grants (The Skatepark Project), Land and Water Conservation Fund, local fundraising, tourism development funds.

Impact: Promotes youth engagement, reduces unsafe skating in public spaces, and increases recreational diversity in Russell.

3. Multi-Purpose Sports Field

A multi-purpose sports field will offer a versatile space for organized sports, recreational leagues, and casual play. Whether used for soccer, football, baseball, or other field sports, the facility will accommodate youth and adult activities, fostering teamwork, fitness, and community spirit. With appropriate lighting, seating, and amenities, the field can also host tournaments and local events, drawing participants and spectators from the region. The sports field will serve as a hub for physical activity, community pride, and youth engagement. There is currently a baseball field at the Velocirabbits Baseball Facility located off Terminal Road, providing a dedicated space for baseball activities. Building on the presence of this facility, Russell plans to develop an additional multi-purpose sports field to expand recreational opportunities and meet the growing demand for versatile outdoor sports spaces.

Goals: Provide a flexible, high-quality sports field to support local leagues, tournaments, and recreational activities for all ages.

Project Overview: Develop a multi-purpose sports field with lighting, seating, and supporting amenities to accommodate a variety of organized and casual sports.

Justification: Multi-use fields promote physical activity, teamwork, youth engagement, and can attract regional events and visitors.

Actions: Identify suitable site, design layout for multiple sports, install necessary infrastructure (lighting, seating), and coordinate with local sports leagues.

Potential Funding Resources: Land and Water Conservation Fund, state recreation grants, private sponsorships, local fundraising, tourism development funds.

Impact: Increases recreational and athletic opportunities, promotes health and fitness, encourages community involvement, and supports local economic activity through events and tournaments.



4. Splash Pad

A splash pad will provide a fun, safe, and interactive water play area for children and families, especially appealing during the hot summer months. With features such as spray jets, fountains, and dumping buckets, splash pads offer cooling recreation without the need for lifeguards or deep water. Designed for accessibility, these spaces serve as a family-friendly attraction that encourages outdoor play and community gathering.

Nearby communities such as Grayson, KY, feature splash pads that have quickly become popular summer destinations for families. Building on these successful examples, Russell plans to establish its own splash pad in a central, accessible location.

Goals: Create a safe and interactive water play feature to provide outdoor recreation during summer months.

Project Overview: Design and construct a splash pad with interactive water features, shaded seating, and accessible pathways.

Justification: Splash pads offer cooling recreational opportunities, promote family engagement, and enhance local parks.

Actions: Identify location, engage families for design input, secure necessary permits, and install water-efficient infrastructure.

Potential Funding Resources: Land and Water Conservation Fund, Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), tourism development funds, local fundraising.

Impact: Provides inclusive, summer recreation for families, encourages active outdoor play, and increases park visitation.



5. Riverfront Farmers Market

Establishing a permanent or seasonal farmers market space would support local agriculture, artisans, and small businesses while creating a vibrant community hub. This market could attract both residents and visitors seeking fresh produce and handmade goods. Featuring local growers, bakers, crafters, and specialty food vendors, the market will encourage entrepreneurship and healthy eating habits, while fostering community interaction.

Russell has previously hosted farmers markets under the covered pavilion across from City Hall, though past efforts faced challenges with participation and promotion. With renewed focus on marketing, vendor recruitment, and community engagement, the city plans to revitalize the farmers market into a successful, sustainable event.

Goals: Create a successful, community-driven farmers market that supports local producers and artisans.

Project Overview: Re-establish the farmers market at the pavilion with consistent scheduling, vendor outreach, improved promotion, and supporting amenities (tables, signage, etc.).

Justification: Farmers markets promote access to fresh, local foods, encourage small business growth, and provide a gathering place for the community.

Actions: Develop a vendor recruitment strategy, create a marketing plan, establish regular market dates, and collaborate with local organizations and businesses for cross-promotion.

Potential Funding Resources: USDA Farmers Market Promotion Program, Kentucky Proud funding, local sponsorships, tourism development funds.

Impact: Boosts local economy, increases healthy food options, supports local entrepreneurs, and enhances Russell's sense of community.



6. Outdoor Adventure Elements

Developing outdoor adventure amenities, such as a zipline, ropes course, or climbing structure, along the riverfront will strengthen Russell's position as a destination for recreation and tourism. These features will provide unique, family-friendly attractions that promote physical activity, draw visitors, and enhance the community's connection to its natural surroundings. By leveraging the scenic beauty of the riverfront, Russell can create an engaging and dynamic recreation area that complements existing green spaces and supports local businesses.

Many thriving river communities across Kentucky have successfully integrated adventure-based recreation to attract visitors and boost economic vitality. Russell will build upon this model to create safe, accessible, and exciting outdoor experiences for all ages.

Goals: Encourage active recreation, attract visitors, and highlight Russell's riverfront as a hub for outdoor adventure and community engagement.

Project Overview: Plan and construct outdoor adventure features such as a zipline, ropes course, or climbing structure near the riverfront, incorporating safety measures, accessibility, and integration with trails, parks, and public gathering areas throughout Russell.

Justification: Adventure recreation promotes healthy lifestyles, supports tourism, stimulates local spending, and enhances quality of life for residents.

Actions: Conduct feasibility and safety studies; engage community input to select preferred adventure elements; coordinate with state and local partners for permitting and design; and pursue partnerships with private operators or recreation organizations for development and management.

Potential Funding Resources: Land and Water Conservation Fund, Recreational Trails Program, Kentucky Department of Tourism grants, tourism development funds, and public-private partnerships.

Impact: Expands recreational opportunities, strengthens tourism appeal, supports local economic growth, and creates a distinctive riverfront destination that celebrates Russell's natural and community assets.



*Bluegrass
Bouldering,
Lexington,
Kentucky.*

7. Event-Ready Pavilions/Vendor Pads

Creating event-ready pavilions and vendor pads equipped with power hookups will enhance Russell's capacity to host community gatherings, festivals, and markets along the riverfront and other key locations. These versatile spaces will provide the necessary infrastructure to support food vendors, artisans, and live entertainment, making it easier to organize and attract events that bring people together and stimulate the local economy. By investing in functional and attractive event spaces, Russell can position itself as a welcoming destination for both residents and visitors.

Communities across Kentucky have successfully developed multi-purpose event infrastructure to strengthen local tourism and community engagement. Russell will follow this proven approach to expand its ability to host regular events and encourage year-round activity in public spaces.

Goals: Provide flexible, functional spaces to support community events, local vendors, and tourism initiatives while enhancing Russell's riverfront and downtown amenities.

Project Overview: Design and construct covered pavilions and vendor pads with built-in electrical service, lighting, and water access as needed to accommodate events of varying sizes from farmers markets and food truck rallies to concerts and festivals.

Justification: Permanent, well-equipped event infrastructure reduces setup costs, attracts more frequent events, and supports local entrepreneurship while encouraging community participation and tourism.

Actions: Identify high-traffic and event-friendly locations; engage stakeholders and vendors to determine design needs; coordinate with utility providers for power access; and establish a management plan for event scheduling and maintenance.

Potential Funding Resources: Kentucky Department of Tourism Development Grants, Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) funding, Community Development Block Grants (CDBG), local sponsorships, and tourism development funds.

Impact: Expands community programming opportunities, supports local businesses, boosts tourism, and enhances Russell's reputation as an active, event-friendly community.



8. Kayak & Paddleboard Launches

Expanding access to the Ohio River through dedicated kayak and paddleboard launches will encourage outdoor recreation, attract visitors, and strengthen Russell's connection to its natural environment. By creating safe, convenient, and accessible entry points for paddlers, the city can promote water-based activities that celebrate the beauty and recreational potential of the riverfront. These amenities will complement existing green spaces, trails, and potential adventure elements, making the riverfront a centerpiece for active living and tourism.

Communities along the Ohio River and throughout Kentucky have invested in similar amenities to enhance tourism and outdoor recreation. Russell will build upon this model to provide high-quality, user-friendly facilities that appeal to both residents and visitors seeking authentic river experiences.

Goals: Increase recreational use of the Ohio River, enhance tourism, and provide safe, accessible water access for residents and visitors.

Project Overview: Design and construct kayak and paddleboard launches with durable, ADA-accessible materials, signage, parking, and nearby amenities to support both casual and experienced paddlers.

Justification: Improved river access encourages healthy outdoor activity, boosts local tourism, and supports businesses catering to recreation and hospitality while growing appreciation for the city's natural assets.

Actions: Identify optimal launch locations based on safety, accessibility, and environmental conditions; coordinate with state and federal partners for permitting; engage local outdoor recreation groups for input; and integrate signage and wayfinding to connect launches with trails and public spaces.

Potential Funding Resources: Land and Water Conservation Fund, Recreational Trails Program, Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife boating access grants, tourism development funds, and partnerships with local outfitters.

Impact: Expands recreational opportunities, increases riverfront activity, supports local businesses, enhances tourism potential, and strengthens Russell's identity as a riverfront community connected to nature and adventure.



Origin Park Canoe Launches

9. Mini-Golf or Family Recreation Area

Developing a mini-golf course or family recreation area will provide a fun, family-friendly attraction that serves as both a community amenity and a potential revenue generator for Russell. Strategically located near the riverfront or downtown, this project would encourage year-round activity, complement nearby parks and event spaces, and enhance the city's tourism appeal. By offering affordable, accessible entertainment for residents and visitors of all ages, Russell can strengthen its local economy while promoting a vibrant, active community atmosphere.

Many successful Kentucky communities have invested in small-scale recreational attractions to increase foot traffic, support local businesses, and generate sustainable revenue for park maintenance and community events. Russell will apply this approach to create a welcoming, enjoyable space that aligns with its broader goals of revitalization and recreation.

Goals: Provide a family-oriented recreation destination that encourages local spending, supports tourism, and enhances quality of life for residents.

Project Overview: Plan and construct a mini-golf course or family recreation area featuring shaded seating, rest areas, landscaping, lighting, and complementary amenities such as picnic tables, playground equipment, or concessions to encourage longer visits.

Justification: Family recreation amenities increase community engagement, attract visitors, and provide ongoing revenue opportunities through affordable admission fees, event rentals, and concessions.

Actions: Identify a suitable, high-visibility location; develop a business and operations plan to ensure sustainability; seek public-private partnerships or sponsorships; and design the facility to be low-maintenance, inclusive, and visually appealing.

Potential Funding Resources: Kentucky Department of Tourism Development Grants, tourism development funds, private sponsorships, and public-private partnerships.

Impact: Generates local revenue, supports tourism and downtown activity, promotes family recreation, and enhances Russell's reputation as a lively, visitor-friendly community.



TIER 4: LONG-TERM CATALYSTS

1. Commercial Development Behind Russell Plaza

The City of Russell has identified approximately 13 acres of prime development property behind the Best Western Hotel as a key opportunity to expand the city's commercial footprint. This site has strong visibility and accessibility, making it ideal for new shops, restaurants, and businesses that will diversify the local economy and enhance the visitor experience.

Goals: Expand retail and dining options that will serve both residents and visitors, while also increasing the city's commercial tax base and overall tourism revenue. By creating a vibrant destination that complements existing businesses and leverages Russell's growing tourism activity, the development will strengthen the local economy and enhance the community's appeal.

Justification: With over 120 businesses already within city limits and growing tourism activity, Russell is well-positioned to support additional commercial development. The proximity to the Best Western Hotel provides a built-in customer base of overnight visitors, while the site's location behind Russell Plaza ensures synergy with existing businesses. Expanding commercial offerings will help capture visitor spending, reduce retail leakage to surrounding communities, and improve quality of life for residents.

Actions: To bring this project to life, the City of Russell will implement a coordinated marketing strategy to recruit businesses that align with its tourism and economic goals, while working with developers and investors to design and construct needed infrastructure. The city will also promote available incentives and reinvestment opportunities, streamline zoning and permitting processes, and apply design standards that ensure the development is both attractive and functional.

Impact: This project will strengthen Russell's identity as a destination by creating a dynamic commercial hub that meets the needs of residents, visitors, and businesses alike. Increased tax revenue will support reinvestment into tourism, infrastructure, and community amenities. Coordinated marketing and business recruitment will ensure the development reaches its full potential, drawing new enterprises into the city and further fueling economic growth.



2. House on Riverside

The City of Russell is exploring the redevelopment of a city-owned house located near the city park and along the riverfront into a vibrant, multi-purpose community facility. This project supports the City's long-term vision of enhancing tourism, encouraging community engagement, and revitalizing downtown infrastructure by repurposing existing assets for public benefit. The house, with its strategic location and scenic views, presents a unique opportunity to serve both residents and visitors through improved amenities and flexible public space.

The city visions transforming the house into a welcoming hub that strengthens the local tourism economy while providing much-needed services and venues. The facility could be used in several ways:

- **Welcome Center:** Provide visitor information, maps, and promotional materials for local attractions, businesses, and events.
- **Public Restroom Facility:** Offer essential amenities for park users and event attendees.
- **Event Space:** Host small-scale community gatherings, meetings, and private events.
- **Restaurant on the River (Optional Concept):** Explore the possibility of a restaurant that takes advantage of the riverfront view, offering a unique dining experience that complements tourism and downtown development.

The city may explore funding options, including grants and partnerships, to renovate the house while preserving its historic charm and functionality.

Goals: Create a multi-purpose community asset that enhances tourism and supports local events.

Project Overview: Convert a city-owned house into a welcome center, public restroom facility, and event space.

Justification: The facility will improve the visitor experience, provide amenities near key destinations, and support community programming.

Actions: Conduct feasibility study, secure renovation funds, and develop operational plan.

Potential Funding Resources: CDBG funds, tourism development funds, local heritage funds.

Impact: This project will enhance the visitor experience, support local events, and strengthen downtown infrastructure. By providing public restrooms, visitor information, and event space, or potentially a riverfront restaurant, it will make the area more welcoming and functional. The facility will attract more people to the city park and nearby businesses, boosting tourism and local economic activity. Repurposing the existing house also preserves community character while meeting modern needs. Overall, it will serve as an asset that improves accessibility, encourages engagement, and supports long-term growth.

3. Ohio River Recreation & Access

As part of the Master Plan, enhancing water-based recreation along the Ohio River is a key priority. The river serves as a natural asset for the community, offering opportunities for kayaking, fishing, and scenic exploration. Expanding access and amenities along the waterfront will not only improve recreational opportunities for residents but also attract visitors seeking outdoor experiences.

The Ohio River provides an ideal setting for kayaking and paddle sports, with calm stretches and scenic views. Plans include developing designated kayak launch points to improve accessibility and safety for paddlers. These launch areas will provide a seamless entry into the river, encouraging more individuals and families to explore the water. Additionally, wayfinding signage and safety measures will be implemented to guide recreational users and enhance their overall experience.

With over 150 fish species in the Ohio River, angling is a popular activity among locals and visitors alike. The Master Plan includes the addition of accessible fishing docks along the Russell riverfront, providing safe and convenient spots for anglers of all ages and abilities. These improvements will complement the existing shoreline fishing opportunities while enhancing the aesthetic and functional aspects of the waterfront.

Goals: Promote water-based tourism and recreational use of the Ohio River.

Project Overview: Add kayak launches, fishing docks, wayfinding signage, and safety measures to improve access to the riverfront.

Justification: The river is a vital community asset with untapped potential for recreation and economic activity.

Actions: Identify launch points, design accessible docks, coordinate signage and safety planning.

Potential Funding Resources: LWCF, Sport Fish Restoration Program, Blueways Trail Initiative, tourism development funds, tourism grants.

Impact: Enhances public engagement with the river, supports healthy recreation, and boosts regional tourism.



Ohio River (West Virginia)

4. Boutique Lodging or Riverfront Cabins

Developing boutique lodging or riverfront cabins will increase overnight stays in Russell, enhance tourism, and generate additional transient tax revenue to reinvest in community improvements. These accommodations will offer visitors a unique and comfortable way to experience the city's scenic riverfront and downtown amenities while supporting local businesses and tourism-related growth. By focusing on quality design and integration with the natural landscape, Russell can create a memorable lodging experience that appeals to travelers seeking relaxation, recreation, and small-town charm.

Across Kentucky, riverfront and boutique lodging projects have successfully revitalized tourism economies by encouraging longer visits and greater local spending. Russell can follow this proven model to strengthen its hospitality offerings and position the city as a desirable destination for weekend getaways, family vacations, and regional events.

Goals: Increase overnight stays, expand tourism offerings, and grow the local economy through enhanced lodging options that reflect Russell's character and natural beauty.

Project Overview: Plan and develop boutique lodging options—such as small cabins, cottages, or a boutique inn—located along or near the riverfront, incorporating amenities like outdoor seating areas, walking access to trails and attractions, and connections to downtown dining and shopping.

Justification: Expanded lodging options generate transient tax revenue, support local businesses, and attract visitors seeking authentic, experience-based stays, contributing to sustainable tourism growth.

Actions: Conduct a market feasibility study to determine lodging demand; identify suitable development sites; explore partnerships with private developers or hospitality groups; and ensure infrastructure (utilities, access, parking) supports long-term operations.

Potential Funding Resources: Kentucky Tourism Development Act incentives, Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) grants, private investment partnerships, and tourism development funds.

Impact: Increases visitor spending and transient tax revenue, supports economic development, enhances the city's tourism profile, and establishes Russell as a distinctive riverfront destination for relaxation and recreation.



Riverfront rentals



5. Mixed-Use Riverfront District (Retail, Dining & Lodging)

Developing a vibrant mixed-use riverfront district will serve as a long-term economic anchor for Russell by combining retail, dining, and lodging opportunities in a unified and walkable setting. This project will transform the riverfront into a lively destination that attracts residents, visitors, and entrepreneurs, enhancing the city's economic vitality and overall quality of life. By capitalizing on the Ohio River's scenic beauty and strategic location, Russell can establish a thriving waterfront hub that promotes investment, tourism, and community pride.

Successful riverfront redevelopments across Kentucky have demonstrated the transformative impact of mixed-use districts in revitalizing local economies and creating vibrant gathering places. Russell will build on these best practices to create a sustainable, attractive district that celebrates the city's history, natural environment, and entrepreneurial spirit.

Goals: Create a dynamic riverfront destination that supports economic growth, tourism, and community engagement through a balanced mix of retail, dining, and lodging opportunities.

Project Overview: Plan and develop a phased mixed-use riverfront district featuring restaurants, boutique shops, lodging, and public gathering spaces integrated with walking trails, landscaping, and scenic overlooks. The district will serve as a year-round attraction for residents and visitors alike.

Justification: A mixed-use district diversifies the local economy, increases property values, expands the tax base, and creates a hub for cultural, social, and economic activity in Russell.

Actions: Conduct a market and feasibility study; develop a riverfront master plan with public input; pursue public-private partnerships for phased development; and invest in supporting infrastructure such as streetscapes, utilities, and parking.

Potential Funding Resources: Kentucky Product Development Initiative (KPDII), Tax Increment Financing (TIF), Community Development Block Grants (CDBG), Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) funding, and tourism development funds.

Impact: Establishes a signature destination and economic driver for Russell, generates sustained revenue through tourism and business growth, strengthens the city's identity, and enhances livability through a vibrant, connected riverfront experience.



Eastern Kentucky Heritage Center,
Pikeville Photo credit: Big Sandy
Heritage Center Museum

6. Tourism & Heritage Center

Establishing a Tourism & Heritage Center will provide Russell with a permanent headquarters for tourism, community engagement, and cultural preservation. Designed as a welcoming visitor hub, the center will serve as a gateway for guests exploring the city and surrounding region while celebrating Russell’s unique history, river heritage, and community pride. Featuring a small museum, visitor information area, and flexible event space, the facility will function as both an educational and economic resource—encouraging longer stays and repeat visits.

Across Kentucky, similar tourism and heritage centers have become focal points for regional storytelling, event hosting, and economic revitalization. Russell will build upon this proven approach to strengthen its tourism infrastructure and create a lasting community asset that connects the past, present, and future.

Goals: Establish a central, year-round facility to promote tourism, preserve local heritage, and provide space for community events, exhibits, and visitor engagement.

Project Overview: Develop a Tourism & Heritage Center that includes a staffed visitor information hub, interpretive exhibits highlighting Russell’s history and riverfront culture, a small museum, meeting or event space, and outdoor gathering areas.

Justification: A permanent tourism headquarters will strengthen marketing efforts, centralize visitor information, highlight cultural assets, and generate local pride while supporting tourism-related business growth.

Actions: Identify a strategic, accessible riverfront or downtown location; engage stakeholders including historical societies and tourism organizations; develop architectural and interpretive designs; and secure sustainable funding and operational support.

Potential Funding Resources: Kentucky Department of Tourism Development Grants, Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), local tourism commissions, and community partnerships.

Impact: Enhances Russell’s tourism infrastructure, preserves and promotes local heritage, supports economic development, and creates a welcoming space that celebrates community identity while serving residents and visitors alike.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Public input is a vital part of the Russell Tourism Master Plan. The success of this plan depends on the voices of those who live, work, and visit our community. As such, the City of Russell and the Wander Russell Board of Directors are committed to an open, transparent planning process that invites residents, business owners, and stakeholders to share their ideas and perspectives.

To encourage participation, the draft Tourism Master Plan will be made available on the Wander Russell website at wanderrussell.org. Community members will be invited to review the plan and submit feedback through an online form, email, or by attending a public meeting. Details and deadlines will be posted on the webpage and shared through local media and social platforms.

All public comments and suggestions will be collected, reviewed, and presented to the Board of Directors for consideration. The Board will thoughtfully evaluate this input and incorporate community priorities and interests into the final version of the plan, ensuring that it reflects the shared vision of those who call Russell home and those who choose to explore it.

This collaborative approach helps build stronger connections between residents and tourism initiatives and ensures that the plan supports local values while promoting long-term growth and vibrancy.

CONCLUSION

The **2025 Master Plan** for the City of Russell Tourism and Convention Commission represents a bold and forward-thinking approach to community development, economic growth, and visitor engagement. By building upon the city's unique cultural and natural assets, the Commission is creating a comprehensive strategy that enhances quality of life for residents while positioning Russell as a dynamic, must-visit destination. From signature events and creative placemaking to infrastructure improvements and increased river access, every component of this plan is designed to be inclusive, sustainable, and impactful. With strong community support, strategic partnerships, and dedicated leadership, Russell is poised to thrive as a regional leader in tourism, culture, and connectivity for years to come.

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