Case Study of

Sharpsburg Community Center

Keys to Success

- Project Description
- Economic Value
- Challenges & Advice
- Benefits
- Stewardship Meaning

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Established in 1814, Sharpsburg is a community in Bath County, Kentucky, with a population in the city limits of about 400. In 1910, Sharpsburg School was built to be a fireproof replacement for several one-room school buildings in the area. In 1936, a grant from the Works Progress Administration was used to construct a gym for the school. The architectural style, distinctive and long-lasting, is called WPA Architecture or WPA Rustic Architecture. This style emphasized the use of native materials and was widely used on gymnasiums, amphitheaters and lodges.

In 2002, when the school building deteriorated to the point of being unsafe, it was demolished. The gym, with its 18-inch thick stone masonry walls and metal structure, later was used as a junkyard and farm implements store. Finally, the gym's roof and all organic materials decomposed and littered the former crawl space of the building, becoming a community eyesore.

When the owner of the property, who was a former resident of Sharpsburg, offered to donate the old Sharpsburg gym and school grounds to the city, Mayor Dorothy Clemons and other city officials contacted the Kentucky Department for Environmental Protection's Brownfield Redevelopment Program for assistance and were appreciative of the help they received.

> **"We called the Kentucky Brownfield Redevelopment Program for advice," says Mayor Clemons, "and appreciated their help."**

"We called the Kentucky Brownfield Redevelopment Program for advice," says Clemons. "A staff member talked with us and did an assessment. Later, we brought in a bulldozer to clear the brush and undergrowth from the inside. During this process, contractors removed kitchen appliances, tractor parts, car parts, wood flooring, roofing and more than 500 old tires that were found in the ground."

The city wanted to renovate the property and provide a community center for the people of Sharpsburg.

Area residents realized the need for a community center, with meeting spaces, a library, classroom and exercise space, and worked to overcome the financial hurdles. Friends of the Sharpsburg Community Center sold engraved bricks for $100 to raise funds. With assistance from the Gateway Area Development District Funding Administration, the city applied for grants several times, ultimately receiving funding from the USDA Rural Development's Community Facility Grant and Loan Program, Appalachian Regional Commission and Ky. Department for Local Government's Block Grant Program.

There were a lot of ups and downs during the process, says Clemons. The city was given 30 days to raise $40,000 to prove it was serious about the project before an architect could be hired. The Friends of the Sharpsburg Community Center raised $45,000. Then the city went through the bidding process three times, having the project listed by line items until the bids were in a range the city could afford.

Restoration in progress

"For anyone thinking about doing a project such as this, look at the big picture," Clemons advises. "What do you want? What can you live without? Have your finances stable and in order before the project kicks off because you will end up having to dip into your funds. Also, never give up!"

Due to the length of time it took from the initial stages to completion, there were some citizens who felt the project would never become a reality, but it did! With persistence, Sharpsburg's community center was completed, making everyone proud. The city partnered with Maysville Technical College and the Bath County Extension Agency to use the classroom for educational workshops and classes. Area residents keep the facility, which also has a kitchen, busy. The center is available to rent for wedding receptions, family reunions, birthday parties and other events.

Before restoration, the building was a shell littered with tires and trash.

A branch of the Bath County Memorial Library in the building, open on Mondays, Wednesdays and Saturdays, has received a lot of use. Since the Owingsville library is nine miles away, the Sharpsburg branch is more convenient for area residents.

The people of Sharpsburg took a site that played a major role in the community's history and, with patience and persistence, transformed it from being a blight to an asset. The old gymnasium is once again productive and a vibrant part of the community.

Helpful Hint: **Before you begin a project, contact the Kentucky Brownfield Redevelopment Program for advice, plan ahead and don't be discouraged if there are obstacles.**