

# HARLAN

DOWNTOWN  
PROJECT  
2020

**PREPARED BY:**

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[Background Image]  
Intern cohort in downtown Harlan. From left to right: Jordan Hackworth, Rachel Crosslin, Harrison Knifley and Lily Hutzell.

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[Background Image]  
Main St. buildings in downtown  
Harlan



[Background Image]  
Buildings in downtown Harlan

# Executive Summary

While undertaking this plan we were told a story by one of our primary community partners. Each summer they manage the Harlan County booth at the Kentucky State Fair, and often passerbyers will say to them “You’ll never leave Harlan alive”, referencing the famous Darrell Scott song. Their response? “Why would you want to leave in the first place?” This story embodies the mystique that exists about Harlan. Internationally, people recognize the city from the song, the show (Justified,) or the labor struggles. Locally, people know Harlan as home. The place where they come for the Poke Sallet Festival. Where they

meet at The Portal for pizza and conversations. To visit Huff Park for baseball. Once you're in Harlan there is so much more than its history or what an outsiders perception may be.

Throughout downtown, there are people who believe in downtown and are showing their commitment by investing in it. The Harlan Downtown Project, developed during the summer of 2019, seeks to identify all of the strengths of downtown Harlan and develop strategies to embrace them. This was done by immersing ourselves in Harlan through monthly overnight trips, where we stayed overnight in a downtown bungalow generously opened to us by the Christ Episcopal Church, and worked from the Harlan County Cooperative Extension's Depot in downtown. Engaging ourselves in Harlan over consecutive days allowed us to both observe and experience how people use downtown Harlan. This immersion allowed us

to not only observe how people use downtown, but to talk with them and have conversations about what Harlan means to them, and what they would like to see in their community. These conversations, mixed with the support of a coalition of local partners, enriched this Downtown Project and rooted it in the local desires and wants.

The summary and recommendations included in this project is a direct result of our extensive community engagement, inventory, and analysis. Primarily, the recommendations of this project is to support the existing efforts and investments that are being made in downtown Harlan, whether by local entities or individual business owners. Supporting these efforts helped us develop project ideas to support these efforts and connect them through interventions in the public realm. An example of this is the Sidewalk Subway, which builds upon the implementation

of the locally driven 'Where the Sidewalk Ends' project which aims to make downtown Harlan accessible to all users. The Sidewalk Subway uses the Harlan Center as the 'Central Station' where multiple walking tours could then branch off in the design of a subway map. Each of these lines would have a specific focus, such as culture or heritage, and would feature a small scale installation at each 'stop that could help tell the story that is Harlan. Projects like this aim to physically manifest the elements that make Harlan unique within the public realm, while getting people to experience downtown in a personal way.

Sidewalk Subway is an example of how this project intends to provide achievable interventions that don't require significant financial investments and can be led by various local doers and organizations. This process provides shared ownership and can relieve

financial and capacity bottlenecks that often exist in rural communities allowing efforts to move forward.

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[Background Image]  
Dr. Greene leads a historic walking tour through downtown Harlan