

Woodford Tomorrow

A Community Vision and How to Achieve It

Executive Summary

Woodford Tomorrow strives to act as strategic facilitators to bring together neighbors and community leaders to envision and collaborate on doing what it takes to improve and communicate Woodford County's attractiveness to residents, businesses and visitors.

We are citizens who are committed to a better future for our community and are willing to work with anyone to achieve that important goal.

A brief overview of Woodford Tomorrow

The Woodford Tomorrow group came together in November 2011 and started the process to identify six key clusters of economic activity which showed the most promise for success in capitalizing on the uniqueness of Woodford County. The key clusters included: agriculture, business and industry, health care, education, hospitality, and the arts. The idea was to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in these six clusters and use that information to formulate ways to encourage progress and development in these areas, which in turn would create a ripple effect in other areas of the community.

From the analysis the Woodford Tomorrow Committee has created a vision for Woodford County. At the heart of this vision is creating a Woodford County that continues to nurture the entrepreneurial spirit and respect the natural resources which make Woodford County unique.

It is a vision where a ***Uniquely Woodford*** brand is created and entities within the county collaborate in support of the destination industries, the arts, value-added agricultural products, and all that is ***Uniquely Woodford*** in the community. A vision that would create an atmosphere that would ensure that the agricultural, arts, tourism, health care, education, and business economic clusters across the county continue to thrive. A vision that would create economic vitality that builds on and enhances the unique quality of place in Woodford County. A vision for Woodford County that can only be achieved with the whole community communicating, collaborating, and working together to create the Woodford County for all Tomorrows.

A quick overview of progress to date as of June 2012:

- Establishment and seed funding for the Woodford County Community Foundation to support new community initiatives
- Completion of 6 Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, and Threat analyses that conclude with document “Woodford Tomorrow—A community vision and how to achieve it with goals for action”
- Development of a comprehensive list of available commercial and industrial properties
- Began process of “Uniquely Woodford” brand
- Began process of tree plantings on main roads leading to Versailles
- Won “Community Partner” award from Woodford County Economic Development Authority 2012
- Won “Community Spirit” award from Woodford County Chamber of Commerce 2012

Woodford Tomorrow Cluster Analysis Executive Summary

Created in 1788, Woodford County was the last of nine counties organized by Virginia before Kentucky's separation. Today, Woodford County sits in the heart of Kentucky's Bluegrass Region and is home to almost 25,000 residents and consists of 191 square miles of land.

It is the Karst geology of Woodford County with the rich levels of phosphorus and limestone deposits that creates the fertile, unique soil that sets the county apart from their neighbors. In fact, over 90% of Woodford County is comprised of soils that are prime for agriculture production according to the *Versailles, Midway, and Woodford County 2005 Comprehensive Plan Update*.

Agriculture has defined Woodford County since the first settlers came to the area in the late 1700's. The fertile farmland with its phosphorus rich limestone soils has been the foundation on which the cities in the county have developed, first Versailles in 1792 and later Midway in 1846.

It is this unique territory that has also created a rich tradition of breeding, raising, and selling horses - Thoroughbred, Saddlebred, and other breeds in Woodford County. Today, there are over 300 horse farms in the county that bring tourists in from around the world.

While agriculture has been the foundation on which Woodford County was developed, it has been the strong entrepreneurial spirit of the community that has allowed it to grow beyond its agrarian roots.

Woodford County's location in the golden triangle makes it strategically placed to access major transportation routes, including two major interstates (I-64 and I-75), a state parkway (Bluegrass), and the Bluegrass Airport in Fayette County. The solid business infrastructure, quality health care, strong entrepreneurial spirit, and quality education system in Woodford County also provide a foundation for the growth of business in the community.

The Woodford County region presents significant educational opportunities for both business and employee development and for quality of life. Woodford is home to Midway College and the Kentucky Community and Technical College System, plus it is located within a day's drive of 28 colleges and universities in Kentucky and within a two-hour drive of two major community and technical colleges. The county school district is compact and effective and performs over state averages in most significant measures.

Woodford County's appeal to potential businesses and residents is strengthened by the health care resources within the community and in the surrounding region. The county is home to a wide array of health specialists, a community hospital, and care for seniors.

The Hospitality industry has grown in importance through the years as the interest in Kentucky's equine industry, bourbon, and agritourism industries have grown. The bed and breakfast lodging include unique and charming overnight options for those visiting the community. The tourism and hospitality sector of the economy will represent a significant and growing component of the local economy and entrepreneurs new business opportunities to enhance the visitor experience

Woodford Tomorrow--A Community Vision and How to Achieve It

The arts community in Woodford County also provides a strong appeal to potential residents and visitors. Over 300 writers, artists, and musicians call Woodford County their home. Woodford County is home to seven art and artisan galleries and the Annual Arts Walk, Art in the Park fair every May for Woodford County artists, and the Francisco Farm Arts Fair.

Even with the strengths of the community, the county faces challenges as it moves forward with community and economic development. In the past, Woodford County has struggled to create alternative economic development strategies because of the differences in opinions for land use policies. Other challenges for the county include business retention, business expansion, and regional branding.

While urban expansion in counties surrounding Woodford has pushed agriculture to the margins, in Woodford County there is significant support to see agricultural production remain a strong and viable economic contributor to the county.

The opportunities to grow the agriculture industry vary from the development of value-added opportunities for farmers (direct marketing and agritourism) to the development of the agribusiness sector (equipment dealers and agriculture credit services) in the community.

It is important for community planners to recognize the potential of Woodford County's agriculture industry, and the important economic value of the farms and the fertile soils to future generations.

The agriculture industry in Woodford County has the opportunity to capitalize on the uniqueness of the natural resources by developing a "Uniquely Woodford" brand for agricultural products, from beef to berries. The ***Uniquely Woodford*** brand can go beyond traditional agriculture to be the brand for all of Woodford County capturing bourbon, agritourism, recreation, tourism, the arts and other specialty products and experiences.

A summary of the Woodford Tomorrow short term goals to begin working collaboratively on within the community by economic cluster:

Agriculture:

1. Identify Uniquely Woodford promotional ideas the agricultural community could sponsor, from festivals to progressive dinners.
2. Promote Uniquely Woodford Agritourism with signage, day tour itineraries, a smart phone app, organized bus tours, and premium "Uniquely Woodford" tours
3. Conduct a feasibility study for a Uniquely Woodford Beef to identify producers, processors, and retail outlets for the product.

Woodford Tomorrow--A Community Vision and How to Achieve It

Business and Industry:

1. Hire an economic development person and fund their budget for multiple years with a priority on retention and expansion of existing business and industry, filling the existing already platted properties, and the recruitment of destination industries and businesses.
2. Market existing, already platted commercial property—have packets readily available in multiple locations including web sites
3. Insure Crossfield Drive extension is developed as pedestrian friendly

Education:

1. Establish specific branded partnerships with Midway College and other area colleges and universities including brand for enhanced local lifelong learning offerings in
 - a. Recreational and quality of life programming.
 - b. Workforce related associate and bachelor degree programs.
2. Support the continued development of secondary education programs including public/private initiatives and co-curricular programs which focus on creativity, problem solving skills, and regional development and citizenship to position Woodford County public education as Uniquely Woodford.
 - a. Expand corporate and public support to innovative school initiatives.
 - b. Enhance leadership development opportunities for high school students in local business, industry, government, and not-for profit community organizations.
3. Integrate description of County and Regional educational resources and programs into County promotional literature and sites.

Hospitality:

1. Build and successfully operate a Hotel
2. Have a “super website” and corresponding links all around
3. Have tours of various attractions on website with smart phone apps

Arts:

1. Develop an Arts Council
2. Develop a comprehensive community calendar to provide web-based information on all arts and related special events
3. Bring together artists, writers, filmmakers (about 300 in Woodford County) and ask them what they need

Woodford Tomorrow--A Community Vision and How to Achieve It

Health Service:

1. Develop an opportunity for all health care providers in the community to collaborate on health promotion and services in Woodford County
2. Increase the utilization and support of existing health services
3. Market the availability and quality of existing health services