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The Preservation and Revitalization of Downtown Parkersburg



Amanda Stevens
Downtown PKB

Amanda Stevens has been Executive Director of Downtown PKB since September 2021, where she also serves on several boards in the Parkersburg community. Prior to this, Stevens served as the Executive Director of Artsbridge in Parkersburg. She has been a grant reader and a panelist for the West Virginia Department of Arts, Culture, and History and has been instrumental in overseeing several large events and art installations. Stevens has also worked for her family's business, DeBarr Trucking Co. in Parkersburg. Directly after obtaining a degree from WVU-Parkersburg, Stevens served as a licensed real estate agent in West Virginia.

Downtown Parkersburg is experiencing a renaissance of economic growth and development. As Parkersburg's Main Street organization, Downtown PKB is proud to play a role in this exciting era.

The most significant addition has been the \$12 million investment of Discovery World on Market, a world-class interactive children's museum with a focus on STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics). Located at 900 Market Street, the building was originally a masonic Temple



with four floors and a basement. The museum creation was headed by the Ross Foundation, who also contributed most of the funds.



Currently, Discovery World has three floors and a basement full of interactive exhibits, including a Makerspace for hands-on maker activities and collaborative projects. Plans are in place to renovate and open the theater on the fourth floor in the coming months. Renovations to "Puppy's Playhouse Theater" will include updates to the electrical, seating, lighting, sound, and audio-visual equipment and cosmetic improvements. During the renovations for the opening of the children's museum, new heating and cooling systems, elevator access, restrooms, and egress were addressed. Following completion of the theater, the Discovery World board plans for an outdoor addition.

Located at 820 Market Street is the home of a 40,000-square-foot former Odd Fellows lodge building. In June of 2022, along with the City of Parkersburg, Downtown PKB

"Our community is blessed with citizens who care about the downtown area and its preservation and revitalization."

Discovery World opened to the public in April of 2023, and attendance has far exceeded expectations for visitors, having surpassed 30,000 by the end of August 2023.

applied for an Opportunity Appalachia grant. Downtown PKB was one of 34 grantees in the region that was awarded. We received up to \$75,000 for a financial and architectural pro forma. Upon the completion of these reports,



Wood County Society expansion project.

building rehabilitation, including the creation of first floor retail space and second to fifth floor mixed use apartments and office space, is an estimated \$8 million. While the building is currently privately owned, the financial groundwork towards total rehabilitation has been laid and can be of use to any future property owner.

In July of 2023, the Wood County Society announced their expansion plans, which will include building an addition where the parking lot currently sits. The Society has been providing services and resources for over 65 years and sees over 2,000 individuals annually. They have also purchased the building located at 810 Market Street, which they will raze and rebuild to match their current two-story structure. With this expansion, they will provide a state-of-the-art ArtBeat Studio and Art from the Heart Shop. Their expansion will provide social work services that will connect their families with even more resources. The Wood County Society plans to add a Nurture and Grow Learning Center that will provide early childhood intervention for all youth, regardless of abilities, ages birth to six years old.

The corner of 7th and Market Streets is home to the Parkersburg Art Center and the Actors Guild of Parkersburg. In September 2023, a large-scale mural was created on the 7th Street side of the Guild. It will be similar in style and design to the Good Space Mural on the 7th Street side of the Art Center. In the summer of 2021, the Art Center, along with the Arts

Collaborative of the Mid-Ohio Valley, hired Good Space Murals to create a large mural that is representative of the culture and history of downtown Parkersburg. This was funded, in part, by an AARP grant that was awarded to Downtown PKB. There are new murals on both sides of the downtown Parkersburg floodwall. The wet side murals have been headed by Edward Escandon, Christopher Santer, Abbie Burge, and local art students. The Gateway Mural as you enter Point Park was headed by the Mid-Ohio Valley Arts Collaborative. Downtown PKB has facilitated the placement of multiple “selfie station” murals throughout the downtown over the last several years.

We are excited to announce the addition of the Downtown Parkersburg Historic District this fall. This has been an ongoing effort since 2021, and the nomination for recognition on the National Register of Historic Places took place in September 2023. Downtown PKB, acting on behalf of the Wood County Historic Landmarks Commission, was awarded a \$12,600 grant from the West Virginia History and Archives Commission to hire a consultant to complete the survey and present the official nomination. The advantage to this district includes the eligibility of properties within the boundaries to apply for historic tax credits and historic preservation grants.

Our organization hosts several downtown events and initiatives throughout the year, including Taste of Parkersburg, Downtown Throwdown, Point Park Concert Series,

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Monster Mash, Winterfest, Clean Up days, signage programs, vacant property tours, and the #ShopPKB program. We proudly help promote all downtown events and encourage and advocate for economic growth and development at every opportunity. We work closely with the City of Parkersburg, Wood County Economic Development, and our downtown businesses and neighbors. We have an active social media presence, with over 10,000 followers and a new website, thanks to a grant from the Wood County Commission. Our community is blessed with citizens who care about the downtown area and its preservation and revitalization. 