

<https://mckenziecommunity.org/project/tiny-business-village/>

BRINGING BUSINESSES BACK TO BLUE RIVER

This project helps lower costs so Small & Micro-Businesses can open a shop.

This helps Businesses that lost their storefront in the fire to open while waiting for their shop to be rebuilt.

[This is a new trend in supporting local businesses in small rural towns.](#)

Becky McCray writes in “Innovative Small Business Models in Small Towns”

#4. Tiny business villages

Groups of tiny houses or dressed-up sheds are popping up on empty lots and unused green spaces, filled with extra-small businesses. The smaller spaces encourage lower-risk experiments, and all the businesses together draw a critical mass of visitors to the village. The key factor is to bring a number of them together. One tiny business on its own is lonely; groups of tiny businesses are a draw.

Individual crafters or artisans who couldn't fill an entire store get a chance to fill a tiny space. Agri-tourism businesses like wineries or maple syrup who couldn't justify renting an entire downtown storefront, can easily support a tiny storefront.

Tiny businesses are a good fit for super-specialty retail.

McKenzie Community Partnership is working with locals to create special opportunities to help small businesses open in Blue River. This includes opportunities for micro businesses.



Many of these smaller organizations would likely never have the opportunity to open if they had to build a building and pay the current operation overhead required by a traditional location.

The small season and pop up retail opportunities will help us build small business opportunities in our community.

The space already has commitments for 2 food carts, a book/gift store and will work with other community groups including art guilds and gardening clubs.

This is huge as Blue River has no existing retail buildings.

We have a huge desire to see quality buildings rebuilt in the downtown core with vibrant businesses. This Tiny Business Village is a step in making things better. As small shops get established and grow they are more likely to build bigger in Blue River. **Bringing energy & vibrancy will help attract more business investment to rebuild our commercial space.**

WE ARE LOOKING FOR FUNDING PARTNERS FOR THIS PROJECT. PLEASE REACH OUT IF YOU'D LIKE TO PARTICIPATE.

If you are interested in helping us to build this and / or having your business in the village, reach out to us through our contacts links or give us a call. 541-204-1001

UPDATE 6/28

We have a donor for shipping containers and they should start arriving shortly!

PROPOSED LAYOUT

In Phase I of the project we expect to place 3 buildings and 2 food carts

- Art Gallery / Artist Co-op (more info below)
- Indoor Gathering Space – will provide indoor, heated seating during shoulder and off season. It will also serve as a small meeting space for community groups, board meetings and training.
- Another Specialty Food cart and Contract Commercial kitchen (rentable for local food businesses).

At the center of the space will be an Outdoor Garden / Seating area for people to relax, eat, meet with friends and enjoy the space. We will also have space for pop-up vendors.

Other features:

Plans include restrooms and showers, as there is a huge need for this service for campers, cyclists and other tourists.



ART GALLERY

Here is a rendering of how the Art Gallery building might look:



SUPPORT FOR LOCAL ARTISTS

This building is designed to showcase works by local artists. 40' long by 8' wide and 9' tall will serve as an exceptional micro art gallery. The intention is to support local artists, have a featured art show every week. Eventually in phase 2 we hope to have studio space for art workshops. We will be working with local art guilds. The space may also be used as a co-op space.

Phase II will include:

Additional space for vendors, business incubator space (shared offices with high speed internet and other support services), space for art workshops.

PROJECT EXPENSES

Total Development Cost is around \$150,000-200,000

We have over \$60,000 in cash and in-kind donations already.

We are well on our way!

<https://mckenziecommunity.org/news/shared-spaces-for-small-town-retail-businesses/> (2023)

NEW TRENDS FOR SMALL BUSINESSES IN RURAL TOWNS

Rural and small town businesses aren't limited to the downtown mom-and-pop stores or the businesses recruited into the industrial park any more. In fact, rural businesses today don't really have to look like any of the traditional business models for small town. Things are changing for small business owners who dream of having their own retail space but face many of the traditional barriers to attaining one.



Starting a business in a small town used to follow a traditional path: First, you would come up with an idea and try to find a location for your storefront. Next, you needed to make a business plan, set up the legal stuff, think about marketing, hire employees, and figure out a way to finance your business. Many of these steps involve utilizing personal assets, having good credit to secure business loans, establishing reliable connections and maybe even insider knowledge. As a result, *a significant obstacle existed between the inception of an idea and the actual realization of a business in the traditional framework.*

The new, innovative models tear down these barriers to entry for small businesses in rural communities. Today's [Innovative Rural Business Models](#) include tiny, temporary, together, trucks and

trailers, and creative ownership. They add up to new ways for more people to participate in the *benefits of owning a business* with less risk of failure.

For small, rural communities, this could be the future of thriving retail businesses.

In [Washington, Iowa](#), there is a business called The Village. The huge old department store sat empty for decades because no one could fill all 15,000 square feet. It has now been divided up into a little “village” of shops that have only a few hundred square feet to fill. These smaller spaces give a lot more people the opportunity to try out a business idea.

The Village shops range from 80 to 144 square feet, with most being 120 sq ft. The rent is based on square footage, and includes all utilities, liability insurance, some expenses such as packaging, fees and dues, minimal advertising, as well as the additional “common space” in the courtyard and the display windows. In addition, there is a “gallery wall”, where local artists can display their work for a small commission fee.

For people who may never have the resources or assets to start a traditional downtown storefront, these tiny shared spaces can help them get started.



A formerly-empty department store downtown converted into space for many tiny business in Washington, Iowa. Photo by Cathy Lloyd.

Businesses can rent out spaces temporarily; ranging from a single day, a week, or even a specific season. In the past, businesses would often stay around for a long time, sometimes even for decades, without much change. Nowadays, new businesses can come and go quickly as their owners learn more, gather resources, and build a group of loyal supporters and customers. Temporary pop-up options allows them to move on to their next projects with confidence.

Consider the concept of booths at events as platforms for testing entrepreneurial concepts and products. Virtually every town hosts special events that present opportunities for setting up booths, thereby facilitating a greater number of business experiments to take place.



Many of the tiny stores in these spaces start out as a table-top shop, then scale up to a micro-shop, and eventually to a full-scale business. When you bring together the idea of pop up (temporary) businesses with the tiny house movement, you get tiny business villages. They make great sense for small towns and rural places.

Sources: [Small Biz Survival](#)

TINY BUSINESS VILLAGE FOR MCKENZIE RIVER COMMUNITIES

We're developing a [tiny business village](#) to help the McKenzie River communities recover from the Holiday Farm Fires. Help support our project.

TINY BUSINESS VILLAGE – LUCKY BOY MINING CAMP

Donation Form

Step 1 of 3

33%

COMMUNITY SUPPORTERS

Your name featured on a plaque / signage, special acknowledgments on our website and print.

COMMUNITY SUPPORTER – GOLD LEVEL

Your name on a plaque / signage showing you as a Gold Level Community Supporter

Price: \$1,000.00

Quantity

COMMUNITY SUPPORTER – SILVER LEVEL

Your name on a plaque / signage showing you as a Silver Level Community Supporter

Price: \$500.00

Quantity

COMMUNITY SUPPORTER – COPPER LEVEL

Your name on a plaque / signage showing you as a Copper Level Community Supporter

Price: \$100.00

Quantity

COMMUNITY SUPPORTER

Choose the amount you'd like to donate. Any amount helps!

FOUNDING SUPPORTERS

Your support is critical and we are saying “Thank You” with high visibility for you or your organization’s support.

- Your name featured on a plaque / signage, special acknowledgments on our website and print.
- You will also get banner space for your organization, or your donor or family name.

FOUNDING SUPPORTER – GOLD LEVEL

Price: \$10,000.00

Quantity

FOUNDING SUPPORTER – SILVER LEVEL

Price: \$5,000.00

Quantity

TY

WE OFFER A HIGH VISIBILITY “THANK YOU” TO OUR FOUNDING SUPPORTERS!

Your support is critical and we are saying “Thank You” with high visibility for you or your organization’s support.

Gold level Founders will receive space for a banner up to 32 sq ft (4’x8’).

Silver Founders will receive a banner up to 16 sq ft (4’x4’).

MCP will create and buy banners using logos you supply. MCP reserves the right to have editorial standards for banner content.

Of course, you can choose to be anonymous as well.

WHAT NAME WOULD YOU LIKE LISTED PUBLICLY.

<https://www.delawareonline.com/story/delawareinc/2015/08/03/project-pop-up-expands-seven-towns/31073295/>

One downtown building gives life to many new retail stores

BY [BECKY MCCRAY](#)



The Village now houses many new retail ventures with the flavor of a turn-of-the-century Iowa town. The small shop sizes and vendor carts act as incubators for new retailers. Photo by Cathy Lloyd.

Guest post by Cathy Lloyd, [The Village](#) (Washington, Iowa)

<https://www.thevillagewashingtonia.com>

<https://www.facebook.com/thevillagewashingtoniowa/>

In the summer of 2007, I had an idea to help the state of retail on the square in downtown Washington, Iowa. Since Wal-Mart came to town in the ‘70s, there had been a steady decline in the number of retail businesses in the downtown area. I hoped by making shopping an “experience” we could keep some Washington people in town instead of defecting to Iowa City....but I knew it would have to be really unique.

A large historic two-story building on the square was in the process of being renovated. I talked to the owner about my idea to have a retail complex on the first floor. I would call it “The Village”, and it would consist of small boutique-type shops surrounding a central courtyard. The shops would be designed with wood façade fronts to replicate a turn-of-the-century Iowa village. Clapboard siding, awnings and window boxes would be features, and each shop front would be different. I would rent the main area from the building’s owner, divide it into small shops at my own expense, and those shop “owners” would pay me rent.

In addition, the courtyard would feature vendor carts, and a comfortable sitting area (our “gentlemen’s area”, we call it!) Complimentary coffee—or in the summer, lemonade— would be available. The rent for the vendor carts would be on a month-to-month basis, and would give timid souls the opportunity to “get their feet wet” in retail before moving into a shop. Thus The Village would act as a true incubator: vendor cart users might move into shops, and shop owners might move on to their own stand-alone shops.



The Village courtyard between the stores includes comfortable places to sit, called the “gentlemen’s area.” Photo by Cathy Lloyd.

A central checkout area would enable shoppers to wander from store to store with their shopping basket without having to pay for their purchases in each shop. Shop owners would not need individual counters and employees in their shop, allowing for the maximization of space.

I knew I wanted to concentrate on retail...not beauty shops, insurance, consignment shops or tattoo parlors! Some ideas for shops I originally envisioned:

- Year-Round Xmas Shop
- Books and Stationery Shop
- Women’s Specialty Shop
- Quilt Shop
- Antique Shop
- Tea Room

Each shop would be decorated and furnished by the renter. All shops would be expected to maintain the same store hours, and participate in any sales or promotions. The shops would be, by design, small. My goal was to attract those who always had a dream of owning their own shop, but didn't have the funds necessary to purchase a building or pay high rent. The small size of each shop would only require a small investment in inventory...and if the worst happened and the shop had to close, at least it hadn't depleted one's life savings, and shop owners would have the satisfaction of knowing that they at least tried something they always wanted to do.

Once I got the go-ahead from the building's owner, I set to work designing the complex—I wanted to stay true to the 1890s architecture of Washington—and I wanted to maximize every inch of space. No one could quite envision what I had in mind, and those who could told me the space was too small. They didn't know what I was going to do with a pole right smack in the middle of the store (it became a tree!), and my banker asked my husband if I was “crazy”!!!



The column that turned into a tree, and right next to it, one of the vendor carts that gives hopeful retailers an inexpensive way to get started. Photo by Cathy Lloyd.

We began construction in the fall of 2007, and moved into The Village in July of 2008...the day they poured concrete for the sidewalk in front of our store! Since the downtown area was such a mess, we weren't able to have a Grand Opening until the next summer! But that didn't stop the customers from coming!

I was fortunate to find five varied and unique shops to fill the Village at the beginning. The current residents of The Village are:

- “Girlfriends” gifts for girls of all ages;
- “Petticoat Ranch” a touch of the Old West;
- “Village Kids” a spot for tots;
- “The Soaring Sparrow” gourmet coffees, teas and linens
- “Creations by Char” unique, handpainted clothing and accessories
- “Plethora” featuring shabby chic handpainted furniture and accessories

The vendor carts are always rented, with a nice variety of merchandise.



A typical shop in The Village. Photo by Cathy Lloyd.

The Village shops range from 80 to 144 square feet, with most being 120 sq ft. The rent is based on square footage, and includes all utilities, liability insurance, some expenses such as packaging, fees and dues, minimal advertising, as well as the additional “common space” in the courtyard and the display windows. In addition, there is a “gallery wall”, where local artists can display their work for a small commission fee.



You can see how each shop in The Village has its own front. The gallery wall gives local artists an affordable place to put their art on sale. Photo by Cathy Lloyd.

All shop owners take turns working at the central check out counter, the hours they work are based on the square footage of their shops(s). This eliminates the further expense of hiring part time help.

The recession years haven't been the best climate for retail, but we are persevering. The economy took a nose dive, and suddenly no one had any money. We were counting on attracting customers from Iowa City and Cedar Rapids, but then came the floods, and those poor souls had to use their shopping money to rebuild their homes. The higher gas prices actually worked in our favor, as those spur of the moment trips to the mall became less frequent. Then there was the street construction, a bitter cold and icy winter, and a mini-tornado! The plagues of Egypt had nothing on us! We began to think we were jinxed.

But compliments from the townspeople keep us going; and daily we hear things like “This is so neat!”; “It looks like Galena in here!”; from a group of Iowa City women: “To heck with the Amanas...we’re coming here from now on!”, and “I live in St. Louis, and I can’t find some of these things there!”.

I truly believe that this is the future of retail in small communities, and we plan to be here for a long time!

our tag line:

The Village: Close to Home...Far from Ordinary!

New to SmallBizSurvival.com? Take the [Guided Tour](#). Like what you see? [Get our updates](#).

Cited in:

Commonwealth Communities: Cultivating a Small Business Ecosystem, Smart Growth America, Discussion Guide, Virtual Symposium: October 20, 2021

[Rural economic development strategies for local leaders | McKinsey](#)

[Building resilient rural places: Strategies from local leaders to strengthen rural assets, diversity, and dynamism | Brookings](#)