



Key Facts

Total Population: 10,248
Incorporated Area: 10.6 Square Miles
Population Density: 967 per Sq. Mile
Form of Government: "Mayor-Council"
Founded: 1810s (Oldest Living City in AR)
Industries: Healthcare, Food Processing

Revitalizing Main Street... "To Keep Our Children in Town"

Mayor Connects Walkability, Economic Development and Retention of Young People

Rick Elumbaugh was the Middle School Physical Education instructor for Batesville Public Schools for thirty years. He taught an entire generation of twelve and thirteen-year-olds and stayed in touch with many of them - but was saddened that so many moved away.

"One boy who took my mountain biking class in 2004 is a case in point," said Elumbaugh, a lifelong resident of Batesville, "Completed college in Little Rock, medical degree at the University of Missouri in Columbia - and now we've lost him! He loves the bike trails and the vibrant downtown lifestyle too much to move back."

Elumbaugh realized the city - the oldest in Arkansas - would die unless someone figured out what would bring its young people back to raise their families in Batesville. Taking matters into his own hands, he ran for mayor in 2006, won election with 73% of the vote, and has been implementing his plan ever since.

He started by spearheading a popular initiative to expand parks, trails, and outdoor recreational opportunities along the dramatic White River that forms the southern border of the central city. In 2011, he led the effort to pass a new sales tax to establish a community recreation center. Then he turned his attention to Batesville's Historic Main Street.



Mayor Rick Elumbaugh

Elected: 2006 and 2011

Previous Career: Physical education instructor with Batesville Public Schools

Philosophy: "I want Batesville to be a healthy community that attracts young families and entrepreneurs- that means we need a vibrant Main Street and a walkable Downtown."



Main Street and the downtown area had functioned as the economic and cultural center of the community from the earliest beginnings until the middle of the twentieth century, when the rise of the automobile led to the development of far-flung, low-density, car-oriented business and residential districts. While the "bones" of the central city - a compact street grid and many attractive commercial buildings - were still intact, retail occupancy had fallen to 50% with just a handful of active businesses (many open for limited hours) by 2012.

Around this time, Mayor Elumbaugh heard walkable communities visionary Dan Burden speak at a conference, and was impressed with his enthusiasm and success in revitalizing downtowns by focusing on people, not cars. It suddenly struck Elumbaugh that decades of trying to accommodate automobiles had made Main Street inhospitable - even hostile - to pedestrians, and that the City would need to reverse that trend in order to bring back its former vibrancy. Working with the Main Street Batesville organization, he won the support of his City Council, the Chamber of Commerce, and three local banks to bring Burden's Walkable and Livable Communities (WALC) Institute to Batesville to facilitate a workshop and community visioning in 2014.

Key elements of the Main Street Revitalization plan (as illustrated in the WALC Institute's Photovision graphic) are improving the streetscape by adding greenery, reducing traffic speeds by narrowing the street to one lane with angled parking on one side, replacing traffic signals at intersections with landscaped curb extensions, restoring historic buildings and implementing a sign ordinance, and adding human-scaled period lamps.

Since the workshop, Rick Elumbaugh has led the community engagement effort and progress has been rapid. City staff used portable planters and temporary street markings to create the new street layout in time for the Downtown Batesville Festival. Attendance was strong and community feedback on the new street design was overwhelmingly positive, leading to permanent streetscape changes and the formation of the Main Street Batesville Foundation.



The private sector has been quick to respond with a new sandwich shop opening and a historic building being purchased for conversion into loft apartments. Mayor Elumbaugh is upbeat, "This feels like a new beginning," he said, "Maybe one of my old middle school students will decide to come back and live in these lofts."