

# EDA “Extremely Busy” In 2020, And More To Come

By Michael Stein

It’s not as if the pandemic wasn’t a disruption for the Barnesville Economic Development Authority (EDA), because it certainly was. But the momentum in business and housing that carried over from 2018 and 2019 was strong enough to maintain healthy growth in both areas.

“Yes, we were extremely busy in 2020,” said EDA Director Karen Lauer. “But we were also involved in activities that, in some cases, weren’t necessarily planned. And we had long-term plans that we continued working on. Regarding COVID-19, which hit us all, it turned into a wide variety of programs to assist Barnesville businesses.”

The EDA utilized federal, state, and local programs to create outreach opportunities for Barnesville business owners. Lauer kept in constant touch with those folks, getting information and resources to them during a time when the pandemic and subsequent shutdowns took their toll on commerce.

“The effort was to make sure the business owners were aware of all those different financial opportunities,” Lauer said. “As a result of that we had numerous follow ups from the business owners who needed clarifications and more information regarding the different programs they could take advantage of.”

Lauer served on a Clay County CARES committee that helped organize programs, which were able to represent the concerns of Barnesville business owners. The EDA also collaborated with the Main Street program on several items related to the pandemic.

“For one, we were able to secure and distribute faces masks to Barnesville businesses,” Lauer said. “In some cases those were donations from Valley Care and Rehab and Barnesville Grocery that were repackaged into individual units and made available to local businesses. We also had a very generous donation of hand sanitizer units from Valley Care. Those were also made available to at no cost. Those efforts made a significant difference in allowing our residents to shop locally in a safe manner.”

### Plans move forward in dual approach to growth

On the planned side of EDA activities was the continuation of its two-pronged approach to further the



In 2020, Barnesville made significant progress in housing with the construction of 14 new homes in the Del Acres Gilbertson development. The Third Addition has already had 12 lots sold, and construction on some are expected to begin this spring.

city’s growth.

“Our focus on housing and business development falls under the umbrella of our mission to drive Barnesville’s growth,” Lauer said. “The way we do that falls into four categories: growing businesses and employment; growing the number of households and property values; growing new businesses, which equate into a larger number of businesses; and focusing on growing population.”

In the housing arena, 2020 was a great year in that the city saw construction of 14 new homes in the community with more young families moving to Barnesville to purchase those homes.

“Our focus on housing goes back to a time when we wanted to bring more young families to Barnesville because we wanted to strengthen our school district,” Lauer said. “So it’s interesting to look particularly at the Del Acres/Gilbertson Second Addition and types of families purchasing those homes. They are young families with children, and those children then are going through the school district. In turn, that strengthens the district financially because of the per-pupil funding received from the state. We’re very glad to be part of the broader picture from the standpoint that we continue to work very closely with the school district.”

### Childcare an important component of city growth

Another area where the EDA collaborated with the school district was initial efforts to understand the childcare needs in the community.

“We were thrilled that the school superintendent, Dr. Jon Ellerbusch, had previous experience in other districts surveying families about their before and after school program needs,” Lauer said. “Our survey addressed childcare needs in a broader community sense.”

A survey that Ellerbusch assisted the EDA in assembling showed that the community was indeed facing significant childcare challenges.

“That survey, which was done in early 2020, has since spurred the creation of a childcare task force,” Lauer said. “That group of 15 individuals started meeting in November and continues work into 2021. We have established four different subcommittees that are working to support our local childcare providers, add new providers, and find local, state and national resources that we can tap into to address childcare challenges here in Barnesville. We are also researching ways to support parents in the community for additional resources, whether those are informational or financial to ensure their childcare needs are met.”

### The business of opening new businesses continues

Even in light of the pandemic, there was excitement on the commerce side with new businesses opening their doors in 2020.

“Building One Ten opened and will continue to serve Barnesville for many years to come,” Lauer said. “Another that came to fruition was The Depot. That’s a project that took about seven months of work. Philip and Jill Rogers made a significant renovations to the interior and exterior to allow Dr. Amanda Peterson to open her new chiropractic business and Ashley Slininger to open Ebb Salon. Those couldn’t have occurred without the investment the Rogers’ made. It speaks strongly of their family and so many families that recognize it’s not just about owning commercial property, but continuing to invest in it so that it serves as an attractive basis for businesses and residents.”

The year also saw the opening of the Pitchfork event center on Highway 34 and a new location and brand new building for Dean’s Auto.

### Planting and nurturing now and for the future

“Economic development is this ongoing process of planting seeds, nurturing them and watching them grow,” Lauer said. “When we work with entrepreneurs, we have to recognize that when people start talking about opening a new business, it’s probably going to be the biggest investment they’ll ever make. For example, in 2020 we started to work closely with an individual who has the dream of opening a drive-thru coffee shop in town. So much of 2020 was spent in researching the cost of a building and equipment and what target audiences would be interested in this type of business. Now in 2021, we’re encouraged that this will be the year the business actually takes off.”

Action in the Barnesville Commercial Park includes Lodestar’s new headquarters building, a designated truck turnaround and significant growth in the Shops & Storage development.

“We saw numerous lots sold and five new buildings constructed there,” Lauer said. “And now in 2021 we’ve already entered into purchase agreements with three parties, two of which will be opening businesses in the Shops & Storage area. One is the golf simulator business, which will be constructed this year.”

The EDA has also been working with Mark and Paula Thimjon on their plans for a new dog grooming business in the commercial park. They plan to lease space in the building that houses the veterinary clinic.

One external factor that has been impacted by uncertainty in the economy and the pandemic is the cost of building materials. Lauer said these outside forces can affect decisions made regarding both commercial and residential development.

“We are hopeful that the cost of some of these building material will go down in 2021,” Lauer said. “Time will tell.”

### Many reasons to be optimistic in 2021 and beyond

“The EDA board and staff are extremely optimistic about the response we’ve see with the new Del Acres/Gilbertson Third Addition,” Lauer said. “The infrastructure installation was completed on that late last fall with the lots officially opened in October. It’s exciting that as we speak, already 12 lots are currently under contract, and I expect we’ll be seeing new homes starting up this spring. That’s very encouraging and exciting for the entire community.”

Another area the EDA housing committee has started working on stems from a research study that shows Barnesville has significant multi-family housing needs.

“We found we need more twin homes, townhomes, and senior housing as it relates to independent living,” Lauer said. The EDA group has identified three areas in the community that we think offer great options for multi-family housing: a mixed use development in the Ermas Garden area, prime property the EDA owns near Highway 9 on the west side of town, as well as some property the EDA owns in the Heartland Addition. We’re currently in conversation with several different developers who may have an interest in constructing in one of those areas.”

The EDA recently contracted with Moore Engineering to prepare a study on what it would take to create some multi-family housing in the Heartland area.

### Marketing and goodwill vital facets of development

Intertwined with all these EDA activities over the past two years has been the Giving Hearts Day campaign. In 2020, the walk/bike trail developed on east side was the recipient of GHD funds. This year the fundraiser went toward scholarships for area students.

“Things like bike paths and scholarships are instrumental in attracting young families to the community,” Lauer said. “This year’s success with Giving Hearts Day shows that as families select where they want to move they are thinking about their kids and the opportunities that a town offers. The EDA actively supports the community fund effort to raise

money for these kind of fundraising projects, which certainly strengthen our overall fabric as a community.”

From an economic development standpoint, anytime that people come to Barnesville for any reason, the community makes an impression on them. In some cases, those impressions have an effect on their long-term decisions about where they might want to call home.

“On that front, the EDA plays an instrumental role in putting together information for prospective residents,” Lauer said. “For example, in the Wagner Park campground we have a kiosk that will have information about the housing areas and the businesses in the community. We know there have been many people who visited Barnesville and later decided to live here.”

As the EDA looks forward to the remainder of 2021, the marketing plan for Barnesville will continue to roll out.

“We are positioned to do significant outreach to families in the Fargo, West Fargo and Moorhead areas,” Lauer said. “This year’s strategies in our “Choose Barnesville” campaign will include direct mail marketing and online streaming ads with our target audience being young families.”

### Simply stated, there’s a lot going on in the EDA

Lauer said of the secrets keeping all this activity together is the devoted volunteers in the community who serve on committees and groups.

“A lot of people are working hard to make sure we’re looking at all angles and opportunities for growth,” Lauer said. “On the EDA side we have a very active business and housing committee. On the childcare side, we have the task force and four subcommittees.”

In the housing packets mailed to prospective residents, all the volunteer opportunities among about 35 volunteer organizations are listed.

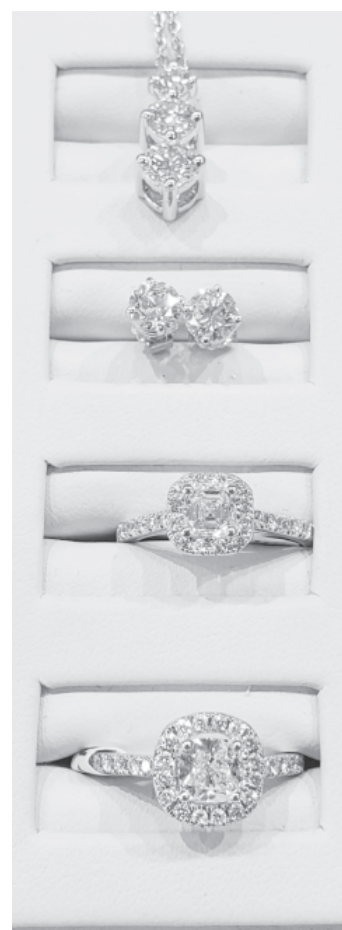
“We have all these people who live here and are willing to share their time and treasures and embrace our mission to grow Barnesville,” Lauer said. “So when people are thinking of moving here they can sense that vibrancy and they want to be part of it. And that’s definitely a positive for Barnesville.”



Although Barnesville has a dedicated childcare center, a survey shows a great need for more providers and resources.




The Main Street Program and the Barnesville EDA held a ribbon-cutting event in February 2021 for The Depot and its first two business tenants. From left are Jill Rogers, Ashley Slininger, Amanda Peterson, Karen Lauer and Bailey Thompson.



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