



Mansfield Rising 2024 Update

The original Mansfield Rising project in 2018 was a big risk with no clear path to success when it began. Something like Mansfield Rising had never been done in Mansfield, or anywhere else.

No community foundation had ever sent 15 people to an ideas festival in Texas and then tasked them—as unpaid volunteers—to build a framework for growth, development, and investment.

The big question was what would happen after the plan had been developed and delivered. No one knew if Mansfield Rising would become a rallying point for community action or a footnote in the long line of plans gathering dust on shelves throughout the region.

MANY FORMS OF IMMEDIATE AND SIGNIFICANT ROI

- 17 projects have been either completed or are in process.
 - Main Street Improvement Project
 - Community Branding
 - Development Incentive grants
- Projects noted in the MR plan have attracted over \$19 million in investment from dozens of public and private sources.
- Mansfield Rising turned into a powerful leadership development cohort. Since 2018, members of the original cohort have:
 - Started businesses
 - Purchased businesses
 - Ran for and been elected to public office including school boards, city council, and the mayor's office all of which are now occupied by Mansfield Rising members.
- The term, “**Mansfield Rising**” has been adopted in the local vernacular as synonymous for citizen-led community development and improvement.
- The citizen planners have developed a deep trust in one another and radically expanded the diversity and nature of their professional networks.

FRESH FACES AND NEW IDEAS

In 2024 an anonymous donor who had watched and been impressed by the progress and headway driven by Mansfield Rising wanted more for Mansfield. An offer was extended to send a second group to SXSW and join the effort. This came quickly and with no conditions.

A MORE RIGOROUS, SUPPORTED PROCESS

A team of three went to work to examine what worked the first time and what they wanted to improve.

- To ensure cohesion and buy-in, nominations for the new group of eight came from the original team. This was new and worked well. The nomination process was formalized through an online form, vetted, and ultimately voted upon by the original group.
- The focus on diverse backgrounds and perspectives which proved so valuable in 2018 was carried through to great effect. The cohort was remarkably diverse in all ways, representing the full spectrum of the community they were serving.
- Two original Mansfield Rising members went with the new cohort to SXSW and acted as mentors to the new group and helped them develop of ideas.
- Development of ideas became more rigorous. The new cohort received training in development of a pitch, used a common slide deck and format, and had a mock pitch day for feedback. Their work culminated with a formal pitch night attended by nearly all Mansfield Rising members and many stakeholders.

By the end of 2024, about a year after the effort began, the new Mansfield Rising cohort has been integrated into the effort and some of their projects have begun moving forward.

“There’s a fire burning. We need to add fuel.”

The anonymous donor saw the need to add new leaders and perspectives. They hoped to keep the energy behind Mansfield Rising high and mitigate the inevitable loss of members due to moves, personal situations, or job changes.

SXSW 2024 TEAM



KRIS BEASLEY

Kris is the Mansfield Senior High School Principal. He is working every day at the intersection of our city and the young adults who will make it better or worse based on their choices in the coming decades.



JESSICA HISER

Jessica is the Director of Marketing and Advertising for Spherion Mid-Ohio. She serves on the board of Downtown Mansfield, Inc., and volunteers extensively. She chose Mansfield to build a community and raise her two young children.



JENNIFER BEAVIS

Jennifer is the Marketing Director for the Mansfield Art Center. The MAC has shown a renewed vigor and dedication to arts education and attracting top talent and shows to Mansfield. Jennifer is a driving force behind that work.



NAN MCCARTNEY

Nan is a graphic designer at K.E. McCartney & Associates. She was instrumental in writing and developing the RAISE Grant for the Main Street Project.



BRAXTON DANIELS III

Braxton is the Owner of 3rd Cup Tea in downtown Mansfield. He is an established artist in the Mansfield community working with other artists to bring vibrant events to downtown. He also serves as a member of the Public Art Commission.



SANDY MESSNER

Sandy is the Marketing & Communications Director at the Richland Area Chamber & Economic Development. She is also an essential leader of the branding project, and serves on the board of Downtown Mansfield, Inc.



MARIO DAVISON

Mario recently joined the Mansfield Police Department but previously served as the Finance Manager for NECIC. A North End native, Mario joined the NECIC as a Community Organizer in 2021.



ORIE RUSH

Orie is a small business owner / entrepreneur, musician, and visual artist. He recently was part of a group of young men who stepped up to drive the Liberty DIY skatepark forward.

Action Item:

Collaborative transportation effort between Mansfield City Schools and Richland County Transit

INCREASE ACCESSIBILITY TO SCHOOL TRANSPORTATION

The project aims to address transportation issues for high school students living within a 1.5-mile busing radius of MCS, where one third of students face attendance problems, especially in winter. By partnering Mansfield City Schools with Richland County Transit, the initiative seeks to provide reliable transportation, enhance community connections, and promote punctuality and attendance. Reviving a former relationship

between the school and transit systems, this effort also aims to utilize the underused public transportation system and instill a sense of commitment and perseverance in students.

Cost: The costs to implement will vary depending on the number of buses, rates for usage, and participation. A one-year pilot program would minimize startup costs and measure ridership to determine viability. The pilot would most likely be grant funded.

Potential Partners: Mansfield City Schools (MCS), Richland County Transit (RCT), Parents & families of MCS students, Safe Routes to School Program

Timeline: Ideal start time would be the beginning of a school year.



Action Item:

Emerging Developers Accelerator

INCREASE THE NUMBER OF QUALIFIED, TRAINED HOUSING DEVELOPERS

Mansfield's ability to grow and sustain its housing market is threatened by a shortage of skilled developers interested in completing projects in Mansfield. There is lasting benefit in the cultivation of the next generation of homegrown talent to sustain community growth and attract new investment.

This initiative is designed to cultivate homegrown housing development talent by leveraging a comprehensive training curriculum and providing invaluable mentorship opportunities to first-time developers. The program will equip aspiring developers with essential skills and knowledge while providing guidance from experienced professionals. By nurturing emerging development talent, Mansfield can build a robust housing market which drives both community growth and economic prosperity.

The cornerstone of this initiative is the mentorship program. Each participant is paired with a seasoned housing developer based on their chosen specialization track and career aspirations. Mentors will provide regular guidance, support, and feedback which will enrich the learning experience. Additionally, participants will have the opportunity to network and collaborate through local development forums, industry workshops, and community events, fostering a sense of collaboration and shared purpose.

The Richland County Housing Study identified the need for our community to either attract more development firms to Mansfield or increase the capacity to create our own housing developers to meet the needs and grow our community. By growing our own developers, Mansfield will reduce reliance on outside companies to see value in our community.

Successful homegrown projects will naturally increase external demand, which is good for everyone.



Cost: Approximately \$80,000/year for a three-year pilot period

Potential Partners: Richland County Foundation, Richland Area Chamber and Economic Development, North Central State College, Richland County Financial Institutions, Richland County Land Bank, Mansfield Metropolitan Housing Authority, Habitat for Humanity

Timeline: 12-18 months to develop curriculum, confirm university partners, and recruit mentors.

We estimate each cohort will last one year.

Action Item:

The Homage Project

CREATIVE PLACEMAKING FOR THE BENEFIT OF ALL

Central Park is the front door to our city, and should enrich our citizens lives and welcome visitors to Mansfield. Over the years it has become a crowded memorial space in the midst of one of the least quiet and reflective places in the city. Currently, Central Park neither serves the purpose of quiet reflection and contemplation that the memorials deserve, nor has the room to be a true community gathering space.

Through creative placemaking, we have the opportunity to uplift and inspire by developing a welcoming New Central Park, a serene Mansfield Memorial Peace Garden, and a vibrant Legacy Park for the benefit of all. These are not just parks, but active public spaces that converge and form culture for the city that will enhance the positive changes of the Main St. Corridor Project.

Redesigning Central Park will open new opportunities for art fairs, farmer's markets, and other community gatherings, while still providing space for daily respite. An accessible Open-Air Pavilion, trees wrapped in lights, u-shaped seating, and extensive tree canopy, will transform the cluttered park into an urban oasis at the heart of our city.

Mansfield Memorial Peace Garden will be a space to honor those who have served and allow for private reflection and remembrance. Thoughtful monument placement of our current memorials, accessible pathways, seating, nature, mature trees, flags, and a sense of reverence and quiet will show respect and gratitude to those who served. Mansfield Memorial Peace Garden will be a place to commemorate military holidays, hold celebrations of honor, and family picnics.

Legacy Park will celebrate the rich diversity of our community, and the heritage of Black history in Mansfield. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr -- who gave the dedication at Mt. Hermon Baptist Church where his uncle was a pastor, and returned to Mansfield to deliver a sermon to a packed congregation -- will be honored with a vibrant freestanding lighted mural and a podium sculpture to inspire future generations to speak. The park will create a lasting tribute to Sarah Daisy Barker Thomas, who taught music and founded the local NAACP. Her father George Barker, who was at one time an enslaved person, was one of the first African Americans to purchase a lot and build a home in Mansfield.

These incremental changes to our existing spaces will be a catalyst for building a sense of culture, identity, wellbeing, and connection; bridging the gap from where we are to what we could be, and enhancing the quality of life in Mansfield.



Cost: The costs of this project are variable and site specific with the initial estimate being between \$1.5m-\$3m total. The process for creating these spaces begins with reallocating the existing sculptures to new locations.

Potential Partners: City of Mansfield, Richland County, Sponsors of the current monuments, Richland County Foundation, Veterans Administration, Richland County Historical Society, Mt. Hermon Baptist Church, Mansfield/Richland County Public Library, NECIC

Timeline: The process for creating meaningful public spaces starts with the feedback and collaboration of our community. The work of bringing these spaces to life could happen relatively quickly once final decisions are made.

From start to finish, this project could take 2-4 years.

Action Item:

Housing First for Mansfield

ADOPT HOUSING FIRST PRINCIPLES ACROSS THE CITY

In 2023 alone there were 257 students in Mansfield City Schools experiencing housing insecurity. Mansfield has a poverty rate which is double the national average.

For kids experiencing homelessness, there are not enough shelter beds or accessible affordable housing options to meet their needs. Often times, couch surfing is the only attainable solution for these kids, leaving them vulnerable and in dangerous situations. Unsafe and unstable housing situations lead to students neglecting school, making their own futures uncertain. These kids are helpless victims in their situation, and the community should help them.

What Mansfield needs is to adopt a Housing First philosophy to reframe how we approach homelessness.

Providing housing options that welcomed tenants regardless of eviction records, addiction, and financial insecurity would create a safe environment for children while they are still in school to focus on their education in hopes of building a successful future. It would allow them to have a functional family environment so that they can grow and learn along with their parents and siblings.

Housing First is a methodology that has successfully been implemented and dramatically reduced or even eliminated homelessness in cities across America. It is a proven, humane, and cost-effective strategy for reducing homelessness.

Housing First works by assuming that everyone is housing-ready, regardless of: evictions, criminal records, addictions or mental illness. People are allowed into housing FIRST, and then support, life coaching and direction are provided to carry them into a sustainable future. Housing First is not a specific program, but rather a service model based on flexible and adaptable principles that would be tailored to fit Mansfield's needs.

Because it is a philosophy and not an organization, Housing First can serve to unite existing organizations in Mansfield currently working towards ending homelessness, and ensure alignment in their outputs. It will look like an umbrella, led by a core group and partnering with local organizations and landlords to create an efficient and effective system.

This new perspective can start small and scale itself organically with time. It will take time and energy for Housing First to be accepted across the city as the standard approach to housing insecurity, but doing so will provide safer and more sustainable solutions to end homelessness.

Cost: \$100,000 for comprehensive training in Housing First principles for all the stakeholders working on homelessness in Mansfield and Richland County. The benefits of a shared experience and vocabulary will yield downboard decision-making that's unified operating cooperatively.

Potential Partners: Mansfield's Homelessness Task Force, Mansfield City Schools, City of Mansfield, Great Lakes Community Action Partnership, Catholic Charities, Mansfield Metropolitan Housing, Catalyst Life Services, NECIC, Wayfinders

Timeline: Work on this project could start as soon as funding is secured.





Action Item:

Launch a Digital Trauma Support Resource

Safety and violence prevention needs to be at the forefront of every community development plan. Ensuring our residents have a safe space to live, work, and go to school are the fundamental building blocks that grow a healthy city and attract investment.

During a May 2024 gun violence panel discussion, survivors shared how exposure to gun violence led to insomnia, anxiety, social disconnection, and loneliness. They emphasized strengthening connections with law enforcement and events like “Peace on My Block” as essential for healing.

With 70% of Americans supporting [more mental health funding](#) and a 154% increase in [telehealth services](#) since 2020, Mansfield is ready for accessible trauma support through digital resources. A [Trauma Support Digital Resource](#) would provide access to support groups, workshops, and recovery events, serving as a hub for information and community support while reducing isolation and fostering resilience and mental well-being among residents.

The resource might include:

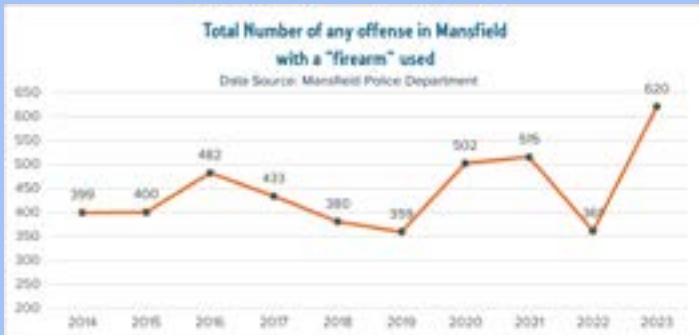
- **AI-Enabled Chatbot:** Instant information, personalized recommendations, and emotional support.
- **Community Events Calendar:** Lists workshops and events for survivors and families.
- **Task Force:** Coordinates local organization efforts for comprehensive support.
- **Support Groups:** Local and virtual support groups.
- **Care Packages:** Resources and items to help manage trauma.
- **Trauma Resources:** Articles, videos, and tools for understanding and coping.
- **Connecting with Users:** Facilitates peer-to-peer connections and mentorship opportunities.

Cost: The estimated first-year cost is \$80,000, covering web/app development, content creation, support materials, events, and marketing. Ongoing costs are \$30,000 annually.

Potential Partners: Local Authorities and Officials, Healthcare and Mental Health Providers, Community and Civic Groups, Educational Institutions, Corporate Sponsors

Timeline: We suggest a 12-month pilot program with significant stakeholders like mental health professionals and law enforcement to prove effectiveness and need.





Action Item:

Mansfield Makes

CREATE A MIXED USE CREATIVE SPACE

Mansfield has a deep history of manufacturing and innovation, and is also developing a deep and diverse creative community. While there are many existing creative spaces, they generally operate as separate units with little overlap or sharing of resources. A multi-use creative maker-space would serve to inspire the next generation of makers and entrepreneurs as well as provide a hub for the creative community to swap skills and connect with each other.

In order to make sure that creatives and idea generators want to stay in Mansfield and that they're well nourished with community and resources, they need a place to make connections and have the potential to cross-pollinate skills and ideas. With a focus on bringing ideas to life, the space will focus on accessible physical mediums such as drawing and sculpture, while also introducing 3D printing as another tool for creatives to explore.

A Creative Hub

Having a centrally located rallying point for creative assets within the city would increase the connectivity between each venue and each creator, some of which may have less exposure on average, and give a cohesive look at the creative pulse of the community. It can also be used as a smaller venue downtown for music or other community shows, widening the creative net.

A Creative Funnel

Along with offering a suite of tools that work in sync with each other to best bring an idea to life, the space can also offer classes and demonstrations by local makers to give the public a casual and accessible entry point to art, manufacturing, and product generation. Attendees are more likely to then take deeper classes or pursue avenues of creation utilizing the city's creative resources.

An Invitation

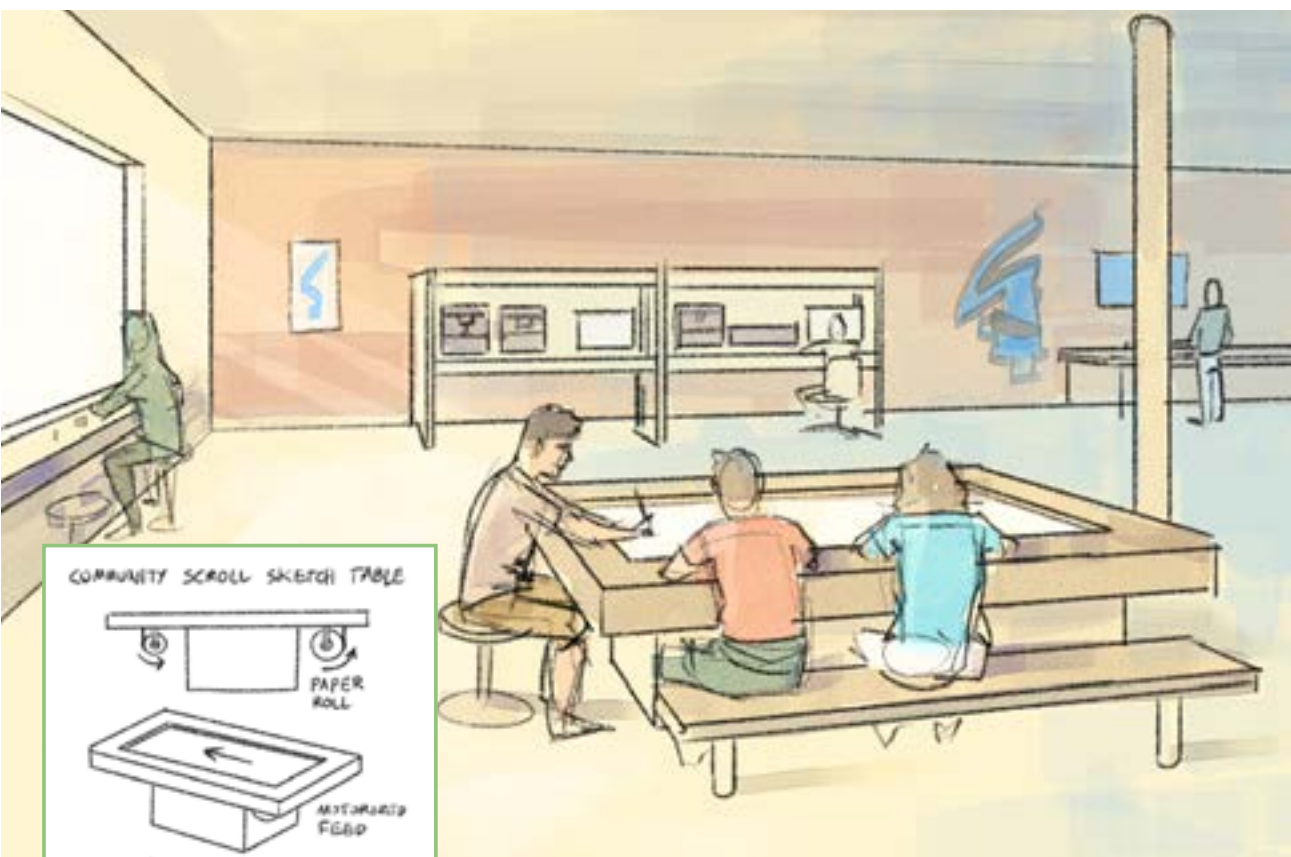
By opening up the creative process to the public, Mansfield Makes will satisfy a deeply human desire to create while simultaneously fostering an appreciation for those things. The more creatively minded people we can collect, the more potential we have to produce novel and productive ideas.

Cost: \$100,000 startup costs.

Potential Partners: Buckeye Imagination Museum, Mansfield Art Center, The Renaissance Theater, The Mansfield/Richland County Public Library

Timeline: From when the space is selected it could be running within eight months. Timelines for different spaces may be closer to 1–2 years of development, but that time can also be used for planning and logistics.





Action Item:

Pocket Park: Creating an Urban Oasis

UTILIZE A DOWNTOWN LOT TO CREATE A SAFE, INVITING, AND FREE RESTING SPACE.

Much of downtown Mansfield is designed for family outings. But navigating the “in-between” time when businesses or attractions are closed can be difficult for families with little ones.

Creating a Pocket Park, near the Carousel District/Brickyard area will provide a much needed space that is inviting, safe and free to the public. The long term goal of Pocket Parks will bring life to numerous locations throughout downtown. The differentiator for this project is a primary playground design geared towards children and young families, with an intentional consideration of serving visitors of all ages.

A Pocket Park will provide more than just physical space. It addresses the growing need for in-person, cross-generational social connections and community engagement.

[Loneliness is at an all time high in the United States.](#)

Well-designed pocket parks will play a role in combating that on a local level.

The inaugural Pocket Park would feature a play area that draws visitors in, provides a safe resting place, offers shade, seating and can be enjoyed year-round. Conversations with a sample group of Richland County residents with young children garnered overwhelming support of an environment filled with “humps & bumps” of rolling hills, small tunnels and climbing structures and interactive art. Our focus group said a nice resting place would extend the visits for families downtown, encourage them to attend more community events, and offer a communal environment to meet others.





Cost: \$1.5m - \$2m

Potential Partners: Mansfield City, Richland County Commissioners, Downtown Mansfield, Inc., Mansfield/Richland County Public Library, civic groups & organizations, landscape companies

Timeline: Once funding is in place and site is selected, we estimate 12 - 18 months for drawings, bids, and construction.

Action Item:

The Yard

ACTIVE UNDER-UTILIZED SPACES FOR HEALTHY AND FAMILY-FRIENDLY RECREATION

Mansfield faces challenges such as physical inactivity and social isolation that traditional parks can't fully address. "The Yard" offers a transformative solution. Designed as a central hub for athletic training, social engagement, and community development and serving users like high school athletes with state-of-the-art facilities and structured programs.

Unlike typical city parks, "The Yard" features advanced sports facilities, including modern fields and courts for soccer, basketball, and tennis which encourage active lifestyles. By providing organized sports leagues, fitness classes, and training sessions, "The Yard" ensures residents have ample opportunities to engage in physical activity, significantly reducing the risk of chronic diseases and sports dropout rates due to lack of enjoyment or stress.

Social isolation is another issue "The Yard" addresses by offering more than just open spaces for casual interactions like those found in the standard city park. It provides a variety of structured programs designed to foster deeper community connections including community events, workshops, and social gatherings. These activities help build a sense of belonging and strengthen social bonds among residents while alleviating loneliness and cultivating a vibrant community spirit.

By hosting youth and adult leagues, instructional programs, and entertainment events, "The Yard" establishes itself as a premier community athletic complex, driving local visibility, economic growth, and lasting community engagement.

"The Yard" is more than just a community complex—it's a beacon of hope and progress designed to uplift Mansfield. It offers organized athletic programs that fuel passion and community events that foster real-life connections.

Intergenerational mentorship which cultivates wisdom and unity across ages will happen naturally as part of the activities The Yard enables. By addressing key physical, and social gaps, "The Yard" sets a new standard for enriching lives and strengthening community bonds, making it a model for community development and engagement.

Cost: \$500,000

Potential Partners: NECIC, Richland County Foundation, City of Mansfield, Carrousel Properties, Engwiller Properties, Downtown Mansfield, Inc.

Timeline: From start to finish, we estimate 24 months.



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