

CARBONDALE, PA

HEART & SOUL ACTION PLAN





ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Our Core Team:

Mayor Michele Bannon (City of Carbondale)
Todd Pousley (NeighborWorks Northeastern Pennsylvania)
Gus Fahey (Valley In Motion)
Mary Tomaine and S. Robert Powell (Carbondale Historical Society)
Alicia Zazzera (Carbondale Housing Authority)
Maura Rottmund (Carbondale Public Library)
Holly Sayre and Colleen Sullivan (Carbondale Area School District)
John Gorel (Greater Carbondale Chamber of Commerce)
Jason Mackie (Greater Carbondale YMCA)
Christine Dettore (Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources)
Emily Arcaro and Nancy Brown (United Neighborhood Centers of Northeastern Pennsylvania)

Finally, thanks to all of the residents who shared their stories and all of the other volunteers who donated their most valuable asset—their time—to this project!

Welcome to Carbondale

COMMUNITY HEART & SOUL

“What we need is an ‘Ambassador of Fun,’” the woman exclaimed, to the laughter of everyone in the room. The group meeting at the YMCA had finished their chicken parmesan from Pettinato’s Restaurant and were eying a frosted cake from Barbour’s Bakery as their dessert.

Does this sound like your usual city planning meeting? The folks in this room were not engineers with proposal drawings. They weren’t pitted against one another in a bitter public meeting. Instead, they were residents simply working together to turn their collective values into action steps towards a better future.

Welcome to the “Community Heart & Soul” process of Carbondale.

Community Heart & Soul is a planning method that looks to engage the entire population of a town to identify what they love most about their community, what future they want for it, and how to achieve it. There are a total of 16 Heart & Soul communities in Pennsylvania and many more across the country.

The process starts by talking to residents and recording their visions, values, and voices about where they live, work, and play. It continues by developing and implementing an action plan that serves the community for years to come – all focused on what matters most to citizens.

People are at the heart of this planning process, with resident feedback regularly incorporated. Intended to be highly inclusive, Community Heart & Soul seeks to represent all voices in determining a town’s future. This work built upon Carbondale’s Outdoor Town process where residents developed steps to make the city a fun and welcoming place for outdoor recreation.

Carbondale began its Heart & Soul process in early 2021. Led by NeighborWorks Northeastern PA, the City of Carbondale, and other community organizations, the program went through four phases over two years to identify community strengths, values, and ideas for action. This report memorializes both the process and the outcomes, so city leaders and residents can implement actions along a shared vision for the future of Carbondale.

“What matters most is the community.”

Community Heart & Soul

PRINCIPLES

The Community Heart & Soul program is a grassroots, resident-driven process that engages residents in identifying what they love most about their community, what future they want for it, and how they hope to achieve this vision. It is based on three principles:

1. **Involve** everyone
2. **Focus** on what matters most
3. **Play** the long game

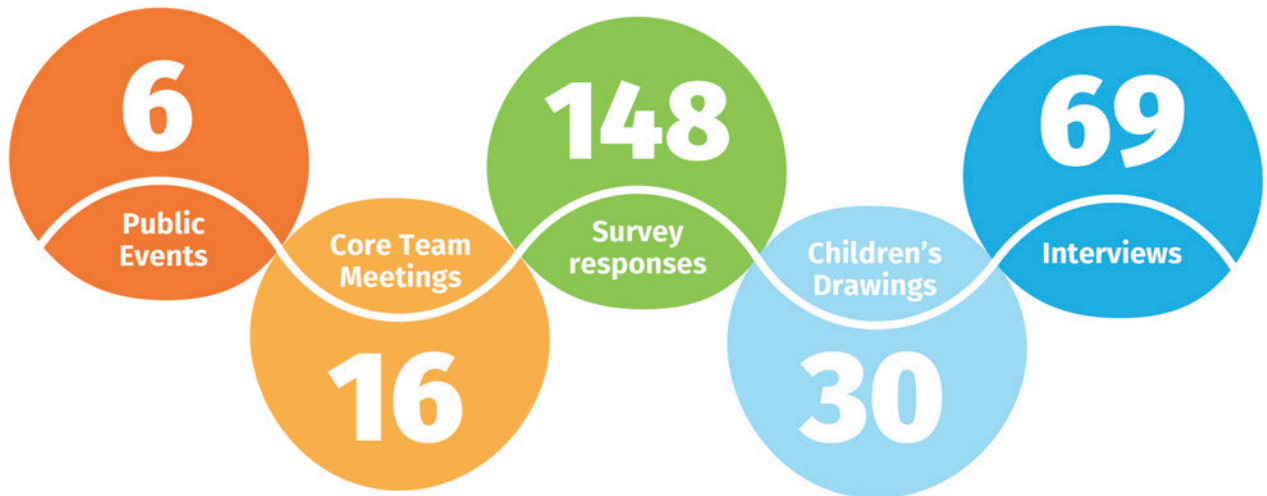
Community Heart & Soul is a four-phase process that brings residents together to help shape the future of their community:

1. **Imagine:** Lay the groundwork
2. **Connect:** Explore your community
3. **Plan:** Make decisions
4. **Act:** Take action



Community Engagement

SUMMARY



Why Interviews?

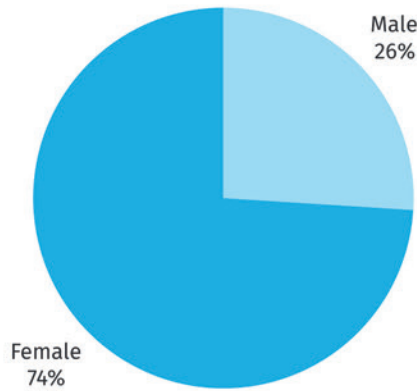
The Carbondale Heart & Soul team conducted face-to-face discussions with residents to explore the stories that lay behind their views. Although interviews take more time than surveys to conduct, they allowed residents to provide details about events and emotions that informed their opinions of life in Carbondale.

People Suggested:

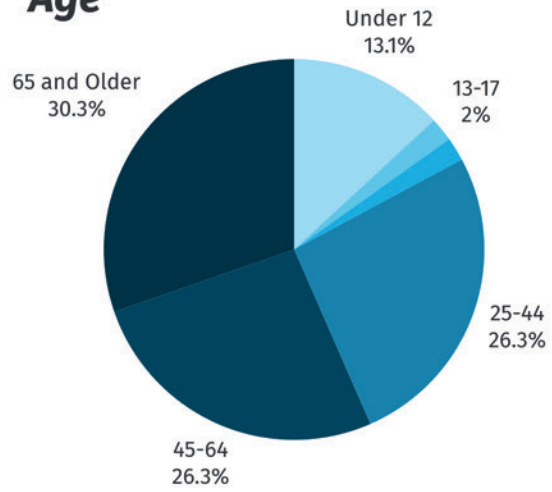


Community Engagement Demographics

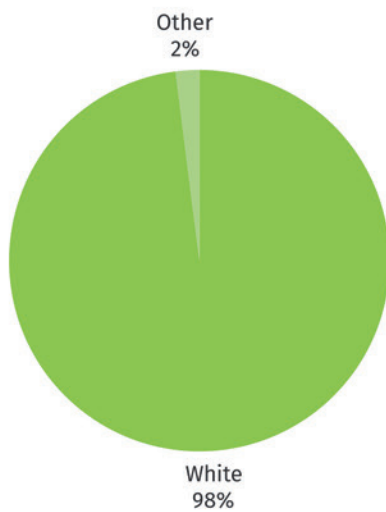
Sex



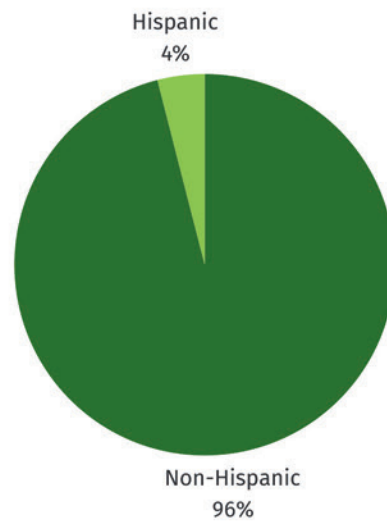
Age



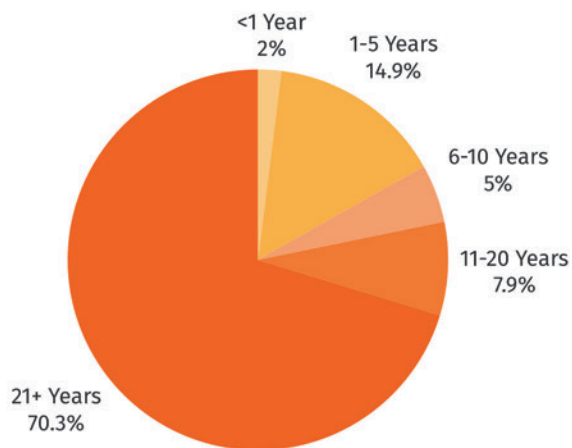
Race



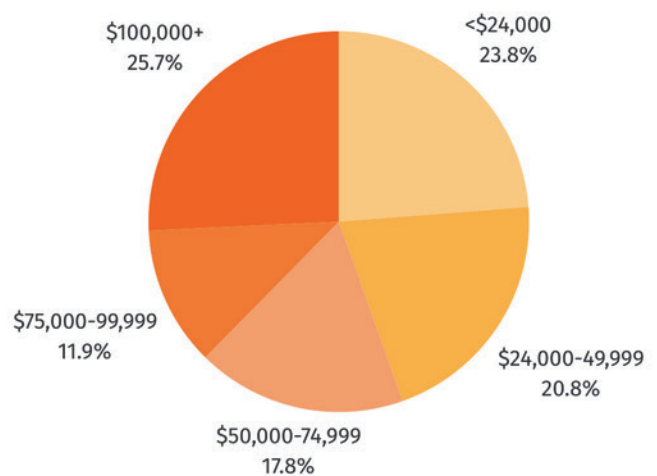
Ethnicity



Length of Residency



Household Income



Phase 1:

IMAGINE

NeighborWorks and the City of Carbondale invited community organizations and volunteers to participate in an initial Community Heart & Soul stakeholders meeting on June 14, 2021. A core team was formed and, over the next few months, the group:

- Conducted a Community Network Analysis that identified key groups and individuals to engage, taking special care to uncover “hidden” voices that are often missing in the community planning and decision-making process.
- Recruited volunteers to support initial Heart & Soul activities
- Informed city officials about the Heart & Soul project
- Created sub-teams for specific tasks and jobs
- Researched and recorded current city demographics
- Mapped out initial objectives, tasks, and budget
- Developed a messaging strategy and marketing tools
- Publicly launched the Heart & Soul effort during Pioneer Nights!



"I want the kids to know where they come from"

"I love to go to the parks in Carbondale"

Phase 2:

CONNECT

We asked people who live, work, and play in Carbondale to tell us the stories that defined their experiences in the community. We intentionally asked positive questions to elicit their aspirations, values, suggestions, and hopes for the future:

- What do you love about Carbondale?
- What actions do you think will make Carbondale even better?
- What is something about Carbondale that you hope the next generation will also know and experience?

The Heart & Soul team collected this story data in a number of ways and places. We conducted audio and video interviews, online and paper surveys, and “coaster” surveys (answering one question on a coaster). To engage children, we asked them to draw pictures of their favorite thing to do in Carbondale. In 2021 and 2022, we engaged residents at 25 different locations, including:

- Carbondale Public Library
- YMCA
- Carbondale Housing Authority
- UNICO
- United Neighborhood Centers’ Fallbrook Community
- Carbondale City Hall
- Mazza Linens
- Peanut Bar
- Private homes
- Public events, like Pioneer Nights, the City Wide Trick or Treat, and Arts Thrive.

The Story Listening Team reviewed transcripts from audio and video interviews, recording key statements and categorizing them into hopes, concerns, values, and ideas for action.

The Story Gathering Team interviewed residents from different groups to hear about their values, hopes, and concerns.

From all the stories and surveys collected, the team developed six Heart & Soul Statements to capture Carbondale’s values.

Carbondale Heart & Soul

STATEMENTS

People

We get to know our neighbors, so everyone feels connected, welcome, and included.

History

We show pride in our rich pioneering history, because it reminds us what makes our community unique and demonstrates what we can accomplish when we work together.

Nature

We appreciate our scenic natural resources—including the Lackawanna River, trails, and parks—because they enrich our lives and provide a place to connect with family and friends.

Small-Town Feel

We embrace the simplicity of small-town life, which fosters a sense of contentment, safety, and happiness.

Family-Friendly Environment

We look out for our neighbors, building the trust and collective responsibility that creates a stable environment to raise a family.

Local Businesses & Community Events

We support our mom-and-pop businesses and local events—like Pioneer Nights—because they bring people together, build community spirit, and strengthen connections.

"There's nowhere else I'd rather be"

"I love to go to the parks in Carbondale"

"Everybody is genuinely looking out for one another"

Phase 3:

PLAN

The Heart & Soul team took the ideas for action collected in Phase 2 and supercharged them through feedback collected from Facebook, a Google survey, and a well-attended public meeting.

On May 18, 2023, the Heart & Soul team led members of the public through “Change Over Time” discussions. Community members examined each Heart & Soul Statement, proposing actions and their likely impact on Carbondale. They compared conditions today with 20 years ago and discussed what change would happen 20 years from now with proposed actions. Residents generated dozens of new ideas for action from this meeting.



Using all the ideas compiled through multiple stages and sources of this project, community partners and potential implementers convened on October 24, 2023 to prioritize action steps. Rating action ideas for feasibility and impact, the Heart & Soul team recommended the following short, medium, and long-term actions for Carbondale.

Supports values of:



People



History



Nature



Small-Town Feel



Family Friendly



Local Business
& Community Events

SHORT TERM ACTIONS

6 Months or Less

Improve Communications



- **What:** Create an online calendar of events hosted on the City of Carbondale website. Use social media to promote existing activities
- **Who:** City of Carbondale, Chamber of Commerce, Anthracite Hotel
- **How:** Use Locable for calendar and email functions. Pursue grant funding for dedicated social media staff.

Improve Curb Appeal



- **What:** Put out additional trash cans on Main Street. Organize volunteers and businesses for regular clean-ups. Kick off City Pride effort with a city-wide clean up event engaging downtown businesses, school clubs, and organizations with a pizza party at the end
- **Who:** City of Carbondale, Shade Tree Commission, Carbondale Library Garden Club, and NeighborWorks NEPA
- **How:** Carbondale's Department of Public Works purchases, installs, and maintains new trash receptacles. City of Carbondale and NeighborWorks NEPA organize City Pride effort

Encourage Block Parties



- **What:** Groups of neighbors organize block parties with support of the City.
- **Who:** Informal neighborhood groups and City of Carbondale
- **How:** City of Carbondale develops guide for closing streets, and facilitates permission

Host Music Events Downtown



- **What:** Schedule more concerts with more diverse types of musicians in downtown Carbondale.
- **Who:** Carbondale Concerts and Lackawanna County Department of Arts & Culture
- **How:** Carbondale Concerts pursues additional grants from Lackawanna County Department of Arts & Culture

Provide New Activities for Teenage Residents



- **What:** Organize activities for teens, like LEGO nights at the library
- **Who:** Carbondale Public Library, Carbondale YMCA, and Carbondale School District
- **How:** City of Carbondale intern conducts survey of teens at Carbondale High School and presents recommendations to leadership at library and YMCA.

"[Kids] need love, they need everything, and we just have to give them more"

Supports values of:



People



History



Nature



Small-Town Feel



Family Friendly



Local Business
& Community Events

MEDIUM TERM ACTIONS

6-18 Months

Improve Communications



- **What:** Create community forums for discussion of local issues. Create a print and online newsletter. Promote Carbondale as a benevolent place that encourages volunteerism.
- **Who:** City of Carbondale and Greater Carbondale Chamber of Commerce
- **How:** City of Carbondale starts quarterly public "Coffee with the Mayor" sessions at local restaurants and businesses. City of Carbondale pursues grant funding for Communications Specialist.

Develop a Self-Guided Walking Tour



- **What:** Self-guided walking tour of historic sites
- **Who:** Carbondale Historical Society, City of Carbondale
- **How:** Apply for DCNR mini-grant to create new physical infrastructure for existing maps and narratives of local historical sites

Create Special Events



- **What:** Create series of quarterly or annual events that feature unique aspects of Carbondale, including a Halloween tour of Maplewood Cemetery, commemoration of the "alien landing," and pop-up movie nights in unexpected downtown venues.
- **Who:** Carbondale Public Library, Rail-Trail Council, Carbondale Historical Society, Arts Alliance, City Line Cafe, Adams Cable, and Carbondale YMCA
- **How:** Apply for Lackawanna County Arts & Culture funds to support cultural or historical events. Seek sponsors for individual programs. Support Arts Alliance with grant-funded Elm Street Manager and partners.

Build Business Alliance



- **What:** Connect business owners and encourage participation in mutually-beneficial events
- **Who:** Chamber of Commerce and NeighborWorks NEPA
- **How:** Use grant-funded Elm Street designation to restart downtown business alliance as part of Neighbors and Economy subcommittee

Create Speaker Series



- **What:** Support inspirational speaker series for residents and students
- **Who:** Carbondale Public Library, Chamber of Commerce, and Carbondale School District
- **How:** Choose residents to speak about their experiences, diving deep dive on biography. Pair with Chamber of Commerce award ceremony and opportunity to get a drink and network; support Library speaker series with promotion; recommend guest speakers to middle and high school classes.

"We'll stand behind any cause, any person, anything"

Supports values of:



People



History



Nature



Small-Town Feel



Family Friendly



Local Business
& Community Events

LONG TERM ACTIONS

18 Months or Longer

Improve Marketing



- **What:** Create promotional videos about Carbondale focused on outdoor recreation tourism
- **Who:** Greater Carbondale Chamber of Commerce, CRT National League of Cities, Anthracite Hotel, City of Carbondale, DiscoverNEPA, and Lackawanna County Visitors Bureau
- **How:** Contract marketing video and promote online through partners

Hire an “Ambassador of Fun”



- **What:** Create a paid recreation planner position to coordinate events and recreational activities
- **Who:** City of Carbondale, Carbondale Public Library, and Carbondale YMCA
- **How:** Include position as part of Blueprint Communities process for Elm Street or Main Street Manager

Create Boat Launch



- **What:** Establish boat launch that connects Carbondale residents to the Lackawanna River
- **Who:** Lackawanna Heritage Valley, Carbondale YMCA, PA Fish and Boat Commission, PA Department of Conservation and Recreation, and Lackawanna River Conservation Association
- **How:** Lackawanna Heritage Valley lead plans and application for grant through PA Fish and Boat Commission

Conduct Outdoor Education



- **What:** Create skill share among residents around topics such as fishing, orienteering, wild food gathering, or biological surveys
- **Who:** NeighborWorks NEPA and Carbondale Chamber of Commerce
- **How:** Modeled on program of nearby Archbald, select community leaders attend NeighborWorks Community Leadership Institute to identify programs, topics, and needs

Improve Accessibility



- **What:** Make recreation areas ADA accessible
- **Who:** Lackawanna County Parks and Recreation, PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, and Carbondale YMCA
- **How:** Create comprehensive parks needs assessment, including cost estimates for upgrades. Provide funding through Office of Economic and Community Development funds or grants through PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

Create murals downtown, including one that incorporates our Heart and Soul Statements



- **What:** Create murals that add tourism interest, highlight uniqueness of Carbondale, and incorporate Heart & Soul statements and values
- **Who:** Valley In Motion, Arts Thrive, and Lackawanna County Department of Arts & Culture
- **How:** Create Steering Committee to lead process, including identifying locations and selecting themes. Valley In Motion to apply for grants and manage project.

Phase 4:

TAKE ACTION

We asked people who live, work, and play in Carbondale to tell us the stories that defined their experiences in the community. We intentionally asked positive questions to elicit their aspirations, values, suggestions, and hopes for the future:

- **Get official buy-in:** City Council adopted our Heart & Soul Statements in an official resolution on July 17, 2023, agreeing to use these statements to guide future decision-making.
- **Create a stewardship team:** The core team that guided us through the planning process has transitioned into a stewardship team tasked with ensuring our plan is put into action. Other community partners that will be critical to implementation have already been added to the stewardship team and more are welcome. The team will meet quarterly to share successes and track our progress.
- **Map out objectives and tasks needed for each action.** This schedule of tasks will be available publicly so team members can report on progress to the community.
- **Develop a budget and list of potential funding sources.**
- **Incorporate action items into broader community development efforts, including:**
 1. Aligning priorities with those in the already completed Outdoor Town Action Plan.
 2. Participating in the Federal Home Loan Bank of Pittsburgh's Blueprint Communities program and using the opportunity to develop a detailed plan for improving Main Street and supporting local businesses.
 3. Becoming a DCED-designated Elm Street community through the PA Department of Community and Economic Development.
- **Raise the funds necessary to implement this plan:** Some implementation funds have already been secured through the PA Department of Community and Economic Development's Neighborhood Assistance Program (NAP), Keystone Communities, and Local Share Account (LSA) grants. The City of Carbondale and its partners will continue to seek out funding for this important work and hope to establish a sustainable long-term funding stream through the Neighborhood Partnership Program.

Help us put our plan into action!

It's not too late to get involved. To learn more or volunteer, contact Project Coordinator Todd Pousley at carbondaleheartandsoul@gmail.com or follow [@carbondaleheartandsoul](https://www.facebook.com/carbondaleheartandsoul) on Facebook and Instagram

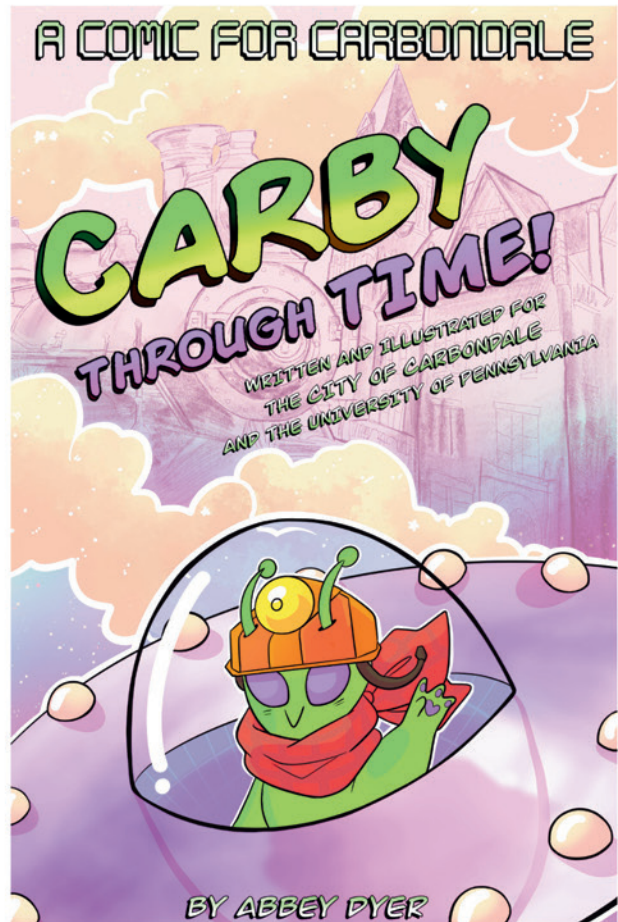
SENSATIONAL STUDENT IDEAS

A student team from the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate Program in Historic Preservation capitalized on Carbondale's Heart & Soul process to develop their own ideas for building on the city's history in service of its future. Although these ideas didn't come from Carbondale residents, they align with our Heart & Soul statements and are worth considering. Below are some of their ideas!

Create an Industrial Heritage Park south of Russell Park



A Comic for Carbondale: Carby Through Time!



Make Carbondale a Cycling Hub

