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Collaborating to create community in Pittsville *WEDC Secretary's visit includes Thrive Rural, Vibrant Spaces projects*

PITTSVILLE, WI. MAY 30, 2025 – A community's vision for its downtown doesn't just come from one source. It's the product of collaboration between all stakeholders in the community—government leaders, local organizations, and residents—who all share their vision of what needs to be included to create the best version of downtown.

And in the case of Pittsville, that vision was the outcome of listening to the input of many over the course of nearly a decade.

"The downtown is really a woven fabric of different visions," Pittsville Alderman Mike Hobbs said. "My hope is to foster a place where people feel welcomed to gather and have a variety of business opportunities for them to pursue their dreams. Others focus on bringing music to the greenspace or having a farmers' market. Some groups have planted flower planters and sponsored chalk art for the sidewalks. Ultimately, it's about saying yes to what the citizens want to see in their downtown in a way that is inviting to as many people as possible."

Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) Secretary and CEO Missy Hughes and other WEDC leaders are visiting communities throughout Wisconsin this year to celebrate their successes in building an Economy for All, by creating communities where everyone has the opportunity to thrive.

Hughes was in Pittsville Friday to learn how local leaders, school officials, and residents are teaming up to harness their collective resources to build a bright future for their community.

"It's exciting to hear about the collaborative approach Pittsville is taking to their downtown," Hughes said. "They know that there's no one-size-fits-all approach to a downtown, that each downtown has to be tailored to an individual community's needs and desires."

Wood County—where Pittsville is located—is one of 10 communities from around the state that are participating in WEDC's Thrive Rural Program, which provides communities help in meeting economic development needs and planning for long-term goals.

Under the program, Wood County is working with the city of Pittsville and the Pittsville School District to establish a nonprofit community development organization and create outdoor recreation and housing plans.

This includes the creation of a community hub that will serve as a gathering space, foster new business development, and provide housing. CranCity Corner is establishing a charitable foundation that will support future projects and needs in Pittsville.

LOOK FORWARD ►

"The Pittsville project is a community group project," said Hobbs, who is also a small business owner and works on the Thrive Rural project. "The city, county, and WEDC have been tremendous help in bringing about the vision of a group of citizens."

The project speaks to the value of collaboration among various groups in a community and how it's necessary to get things done. It's the backbone of Pittsville's past and future.

"Pittsville has had numerous groups throughout its history that have come together to initiate economic activity," Hobbs said. "The Thrive Rural project will be to create a lasting foundation that has the structure to be an economic development partner and advocate for the Pittsville area."

While in Pittsville, Hughes heard how the city will use a \$29,000 Vibrant Spaces Grant to create a market village, which will include four small vendor booths with vintage commercial facades. It's a space that will serve as a micro-incubator for businesses.

"For many would-be business owners, the initial hurdle of purchasing a commercial building is too much to overcome," Hobbs said. "Having a small location can provide valuable experience, allow product testing, and minimizes the risks of an expensive lease or building purchase."

The space will also serve as an attraction for visitors who are looking for a special experience. It will serve as the backdrop during community events and programs, such as the farmers market and Christmas in the Center celebration.

"There are different stories always being created in downtowns. Looking ahead to what could be next and giving new stories a chance to begin is always important to maintain the vibrancy of our communities," Hobbs said. "Many things in downtowns are done by individual businesses or even groups of people, but occasionally there are projects that need more structure, guidance, and resources. They don't necessarily have a return on investment in the business sense, but they're important to repair and maintain the vibrancy of the downtown as a whole. The downtown is a community asset and people have a need to feel connected."

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