



CASTING THE VISION FOR THE FUTURE OF LETCHER COUNTY, KY  
NOVEMBER 2022

# IMAGINE LETCHER

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ACTION PLAN



University of Kentucky Senior Capstone Studio  
**Fleming-Neon: RISING**

## A Way Forward

Envisioned by  
**Fleming-Neon City Government**  
And Citizens of the  
**Headwaters Communities**

Appalachian Kentucky conjures many images: mist rising over densely wooded hills, winding streams, curving roads, strip mines, sub-standard homes, or the faces of people with a faraway look in their eyes.

Media coverage about the region tends to examine challenges and depict stereotypes. Whether the focus of the story is about declining employment in the coal industry, the opioid crises, poor health or a myriad of other concerns; the overarching message is nearly always the same – a story about a place and people struggling to survive hard-scrabble times.

### But, what story do we tell ourselves?

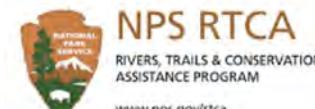
Despite the pervasive challenges facing this region, leaders in Fleming-Neon and surrounding communities are united by a fierce belief in their residents and their ability to play a significant role in



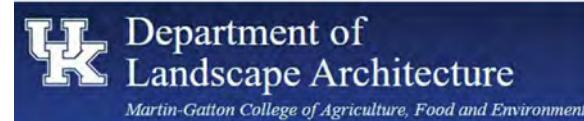
advancing achievement, economic development and community vitality. It is true that very real challenges exist and cannot be discounted. Leaders choose to view this situation through a lens of **abundance versus scarcity** and view themselves as a vital catalyst impacting the future.

This strong **belief in and connection** to place and people drives a collective commitment to develop solutions that are led by the good minds and hard work of local folk and trusted partners. The work is informed by research and best practice examples and engages the broader community in creating solutions for ongoing transformation.

1



**NPS RTCA**  
RIVERS, TRAILS & CONSERVATION  
ASSISTANCE PROGRAM  
[www.nps.gov/rtca](http://www.nps.gov/rtca)



**Department of  
Landscape Architecture**  
Martin-Gatton College of Agriculture, Food and Environment

# Schedule

5:00-5:10 Welcome and Introduction

5:10-5:25 **1 Trail Town**

- Sam Pauly
- Aileena Roberts

5:25-5:35 Questions & Comments

5:35-5:50 **2 Downtown Revitalization**

- Taylor Lacy
- JaKobi McPherson

5:50-6:00 Questions & Comments

6:00-6:15 **3 Green Infrastructure**

- Anna Del Rio
- Kendall Shockley

6:15-6:25 Questions & Comments

6:25-6:40 **4 Community Wellness Hub**

- Karli Jo Childers
- Chloe Scoggins

6:40-6:50 Questions & Comments

6:50-7:05 **5 Neon Heights Housing**

- David Dronsellia
- Matthew Duvall

7:05-7:15 Questions & Comments

7:15-7:30 **6 Goose Creek RV & ATV Resort**

- Emmanuella Braide
- Evan Baldridge

7:30-7:40 Questions & Comments

7:40-8:00 Final Thoughts and Farewell

In the most severely impacted communities, **14-16 inches of rain** fell over a period of four days. This amount of rainfall represented more than **600% of normal totals** and was estimated to be a **thousand-year flood**, a flood with a 1 in 1,000 chance of occurring in any given year.



## A Way Forward

Envisioned by  
**Fleming-Neon City Government**  
And Citizens of the  
**Headwaters Communities**

Appalachian Kentucky conjures many images: mist rising over densely wooded hills, winding streams, curving roads, strip mines, sub-standard homes, or the faces of people with a faraway look in their eyes.

Media coverage about the region tends to examine challenges and depict stereotypes. Whether the focus of the story is about declining employment in the coal industry, the opioid crises, poor health or a myriad of other concerns; the overarching message is nearly always the same – a story about a place and people struggling to survive hard-scrabble times.



### But, what story do we tell ourselves?

Despite the pervasive challenges facing this region, leaders in Fleming-Neon and surrounding communities are united by a fierce belief in their residents and their ability to play a significant role in



advancing achievement, economic development and community vitality. It is true that very real challenges exist and cannot be discounted. Leaders choose to view this situation through a lens of **abundance versus scarcity** and view themselves as a vital catalyst impacting the future.

This strong belief in and connection to place and people drives a collective commitment to develop solutions that are led by the good minds and hard work of local folk and trusted partners. The work is informed by research and best practice examples and engages the broader community in creating solutions for ongoing transformation.

## VISION

A resilient, healthy, thriving community where every resident is valued, and ingenuity drives ongoing improvement and is recognized nationally as a model for innovation in small town rural America.



## A Way Forward

Envisioned by  
Fleming-Neon Government  
And Citizens of the  
Headwaters Communities

Appalachian Kentucky conjures many images: mist rising over densely wooded hills, winding streams, curving roads, strip mines, subdivision homes, or the faces of people with a faraway look in their eyes.



Media coverage about the region tends to examine challenges and depict stereotypes. Whether the focus of the story is about declining employment in the coal industry, the opioid crisis, poor health or a myriad of other concerns; the overarching message is nearly always the same - a story about a place and people struggling to survive hard-scrabble times.

### But, what story do we tell ourselves?

Despite the pervasive challenges facing this region, leaders in Fleming-Neon and surrounding communities are united by a fierce belief in their resilience and their ability to play a significant role in advancing achievement, economic development and community vitality. It is true that very real challenges exist and cannot be discounted. Leaders choose to view this situation through a lens of abundance versus scarcity and view themselves as a vital catalyst impacting the future.

This strong belief in and connection to place and people drives a collective commitment to develop solutions that are led by the good minds and hard work of local folk and trusted partners. The work is informed by research and best practice examples and engages the broader community in creating solutions for ongoing transformation.



CASTING THE VISION FOR THE FUTURE OF LETCHER COUNTY, KY  
NOVEMBER 2022

I M A G I N E  
L E T C H E R  
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ACTION PLAN



# NPS RTCA

RIVERS, TRAILS & CONSERVATION  
ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

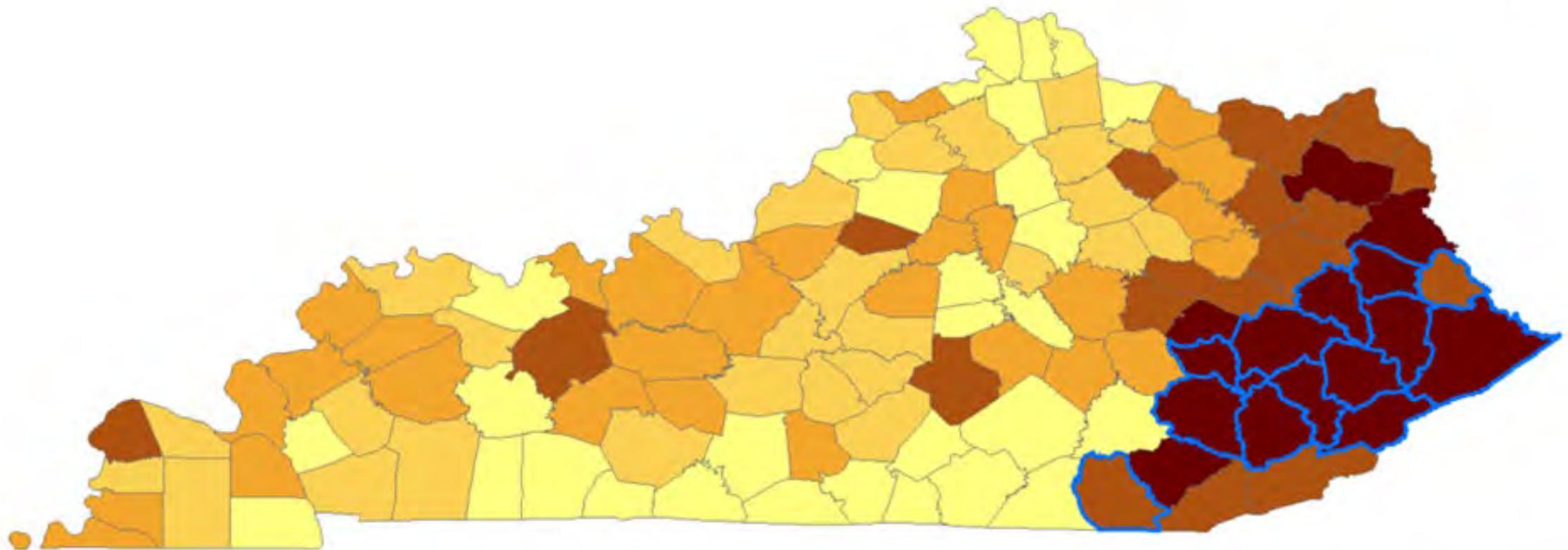
[www.nps.gov/rtca](http://www.nps.gov/rtca)





# Historic Kentucky Flood Events by County (1967–2022)

N  
↑



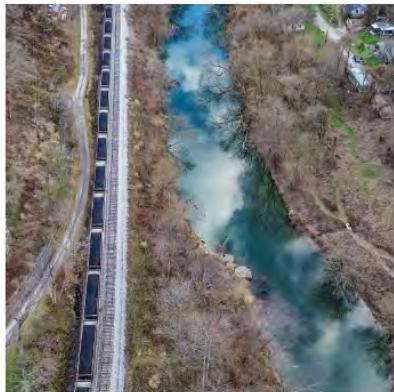
## Number of federally declared disasters

2 - 8
9 - 11
12 - 14
15 - 20
21 - 33
Flood impacted counties (July 2022)

# Shared Learning



## Latest Episodes



Feb 27, 2024

### RISE Episode 10

Do surface mines and mountaintop removal sites worsen flooding in Eastern Kentucky coalfield communities?

▶ LISTEN • 52:48



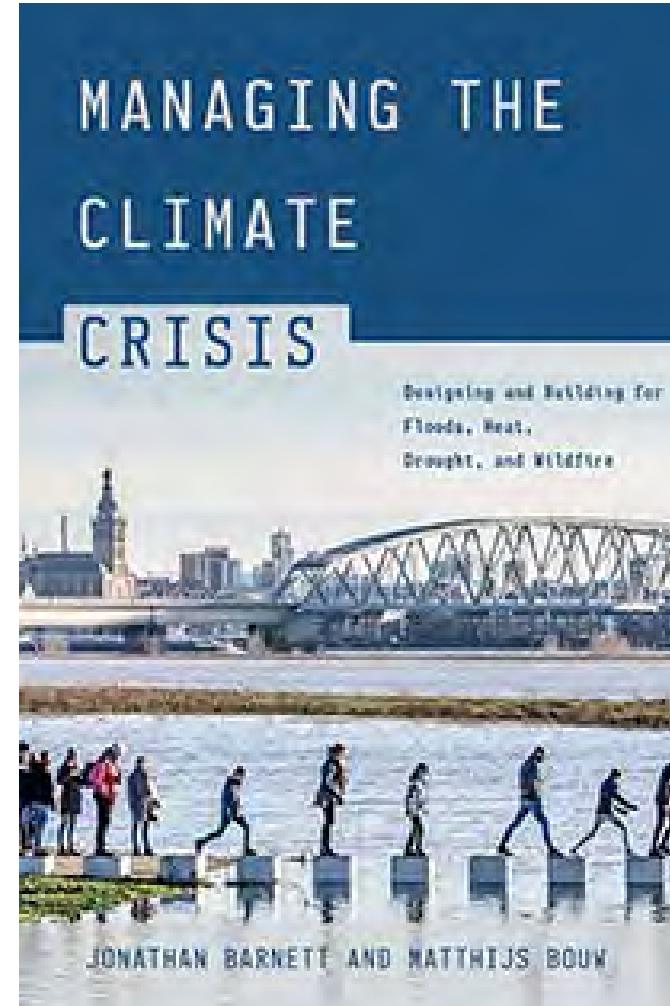
Aug 8, 2023

### Rise Episode 9 - The Flood One Year Later

We take a look back at the 2022 Eastern Kentucky Flood

▶ LISTEN • 52:59

<https://weku-rise.org/>



<https://islandpress.org/books/managing-climate-crisis#desc>

# Sustainability: Environmental Stewardship



Goose Creek: reforestation opportunities

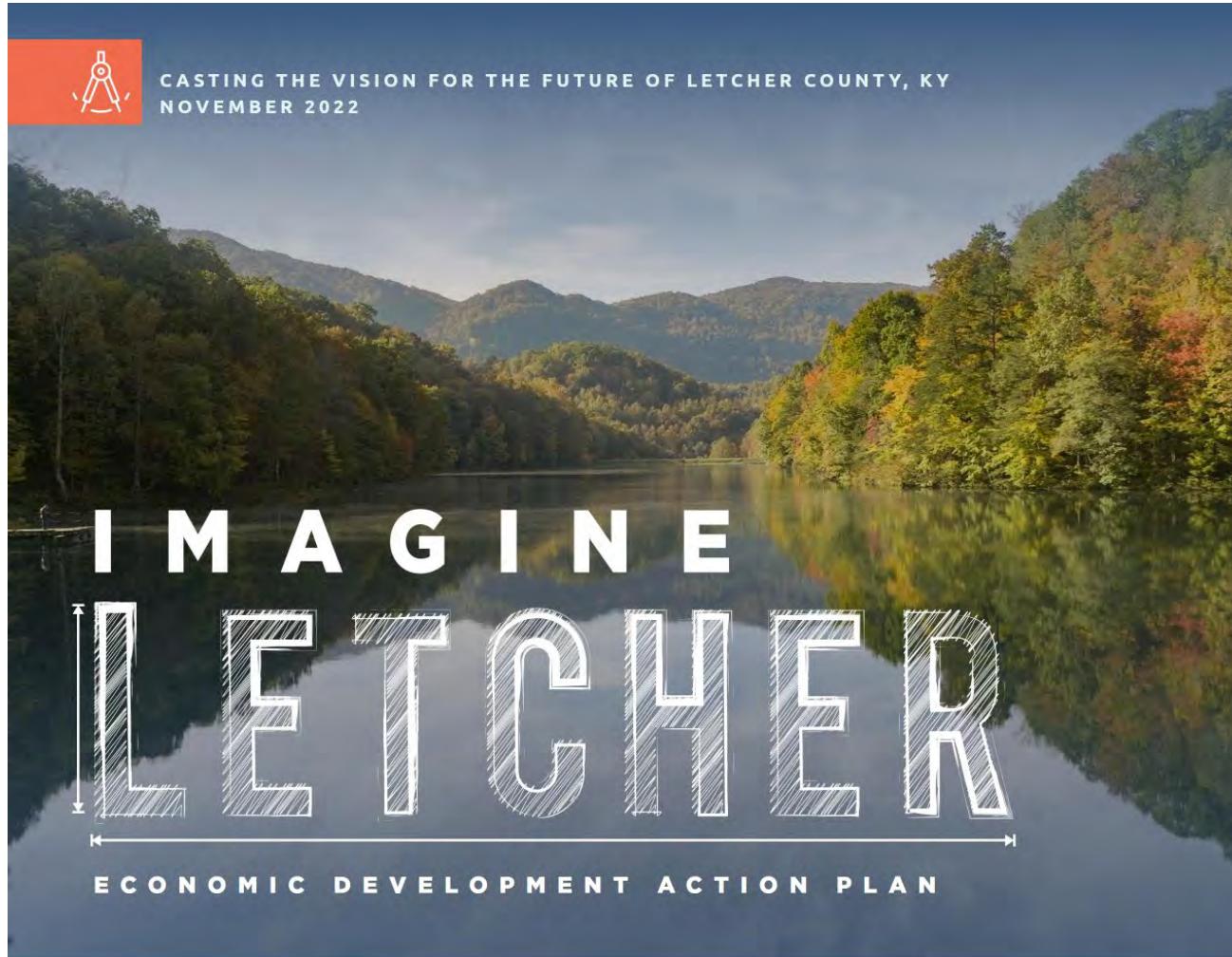


Downtown: reduce impervious pavement



<https://www.njfuture.org/issues/environment-and-agriculture/water-sewer/green-infrastructure/>

# Sustainability: Economic Equity



BY BILL ESTEP

UPDATED APRIL 22, 2024 11:08 AM

On the 60th anniversary of the War on Poverty, the economy of the region is in transition. Healthcare and remote work have added jobs.

<https://www.kentucky.com/news/politics-government/article287488580.html>

# Sustainability: Social Inclusivity



Health & Wellness.  
<https://dirtworks.us/portfolio/camphill-ghent-elder-care-initiative/>



Housing. <https://www.pilotcove.com/>

# Process

Trip 1: Look, Listen & Learn

Trip 2: Share, Collect & Reflect

Trip 3: Final Presentations

Thank you for sharing your time, voices and ideas.

In response to Fleming-Neon's ongoing recovery from the flooding of 2022 and process of envisioning a new future, students from the Landscape Architecture Department at the University of Kentucky's Martin-Gatton College of Agriculture, Food and Environment have developed hypothetical design concepts for outdoor spaces in and around Fleming-Neon that have grown out of the community-driven efforts behind the Neon Rising Initiative and the Imagine Letcher Economic Development Action Plan.

#### Opportunities to Participate

To ensure that the students' work reflects and responds to community needs and aspirations, UK's Landscape Architecture Studio traveled to Fleming-Neon twice to share ideas and gather feedback from the community. On our final trip, students will present their conceptual projects and we hope you can join us!

**Trip 1.** February 9 - 10: Students listened to and learned from local high school and middle school students and community members, saw the town and documented their project sites.

**Trip 2.** Friday, March 29 - Saturday, March 30: Students shared preliminary design concepts and collected feedback.

**Trip 3. Tuesday, April 30, 5:00-8:00pm at the Neon Lights Building:** Students have incorporated community feedback from previous trips, refined their designs, and will give final presentations to the community.

5:10-5:35: Trails	6:25-6:50: Wellness Hub
5:35-6:00: Downtown	6:50-7:15: Housing
6:00-6:25: Green Infrastructure	7:15-7:40: Goose Creek

Our sincere thanks to the Neon Rising Initiative and the Neon Lights Building for graciously hosting us and supporting our engagement efforts.

Please join us!

#### VISION:

"A resilient, healthy, thriving community where every resident is valued, and ingenuity drives ongoing improvement and is recognized nationally as a model for innovation in small town rural America."



A Way Forward essay and Imagine Letcher Economic Development Action Plan



 Department of Landscape Architecture

Marin-Gatton College of Agriculture, Food and Environment

 **NPS-RTCA**  
Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program

 **ASLA**  
KENTUCKY

Special thanks to our project partner, the National Park Service - Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance program, and the American Society of Landscape Architects - Kentucky Chapter for their financial support of this studio.

# Community Research

## Economy Before 2022



Figure 1: Employment by Industries

Occupations. From 2020 to 2021, employment in Fleming-Neon, KY grew at a rate of 16.6%, from 193 employees to 225 employees.

The most common job groups, by number of people living in Fleming-Neon, KY, are Sales & Related Occupations (29 people), Healthcare Support Occupations (26 people), and Other Occupations (20 people). Administrative Support Occupations (30 people). This chart illustrates the share breakdown of the primary jobs held by residents of Fleming-Neon, KY and work somewhere else. Census data is tagged to a residential address, not a work address.

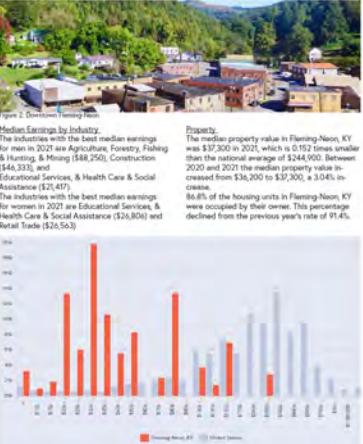


Figure 2: Employment by Industries. A bar chart showing employment in Fleming-Neon, KY, from 2010 to 2021. The y-axis represents the number of employees, and the x-axis represents the years. The chart shows a general decline in employment over the period.

Figure 3: The following chart displays the households distributed between a series of property value buckets compared to the national averages for each bucket. In Fleming-Neon, KY the largest share of households have a property value in the \$30k - \$35k range.

### Employment

BEFORE THE FLOOD

The median property value in Fleming-Neon, KY was \$37,500 in 2021, which is 0.1512 times smaller than the national average of \$244,900. Between 2020 and 2021 the median property value increased by 1.04%, after being down 0.1% from 2019 and up 0.01% from 2018. The median property value in Fleming-Neon, KY was \$37,500 in 2021, which is 0.1512 times smaller than the national average of \$244,900. Between 2020 and 2021 the median property value increased by 1.04%, after being down 0.1% from 2019 and up 0.01% from 2018.

After the flood, the median property value in Fleming-Neon, KY was \$37,500 in 2021, which is 0.1512 times smaller than the national average of \$244,900. Between 2020 and 2021 the median property value increased by 1.04%, after being down 0.1% from 2019 and up 0.01% from 2018.

EMPLOYMENT RATE

The employment rate in Fleming-Neon, KY was 42.6% in 2021, which is 0.0414 times smaller than the national average of 46.74%. Between 2020 and 2021 the employment rate increased by 0.01%, after being down 0.01% from 2019 and up 0.01% from 2018.

INDUSTRY DEMOGRAPHICS

The industry demographi

CSCE OF 2021 (NATIONAL)

42.6

FLEMING-NEON

# Trip 1: LOOK, LISTEN, LEARN

 14 hr 37 min  
803 miles

## Nashville

## TENNESSEE

Cookeville

Nantahala  
National Forest

Asheville  
Canton

卷之三

## Hickory

Moore

## Concord

## CAROLINA

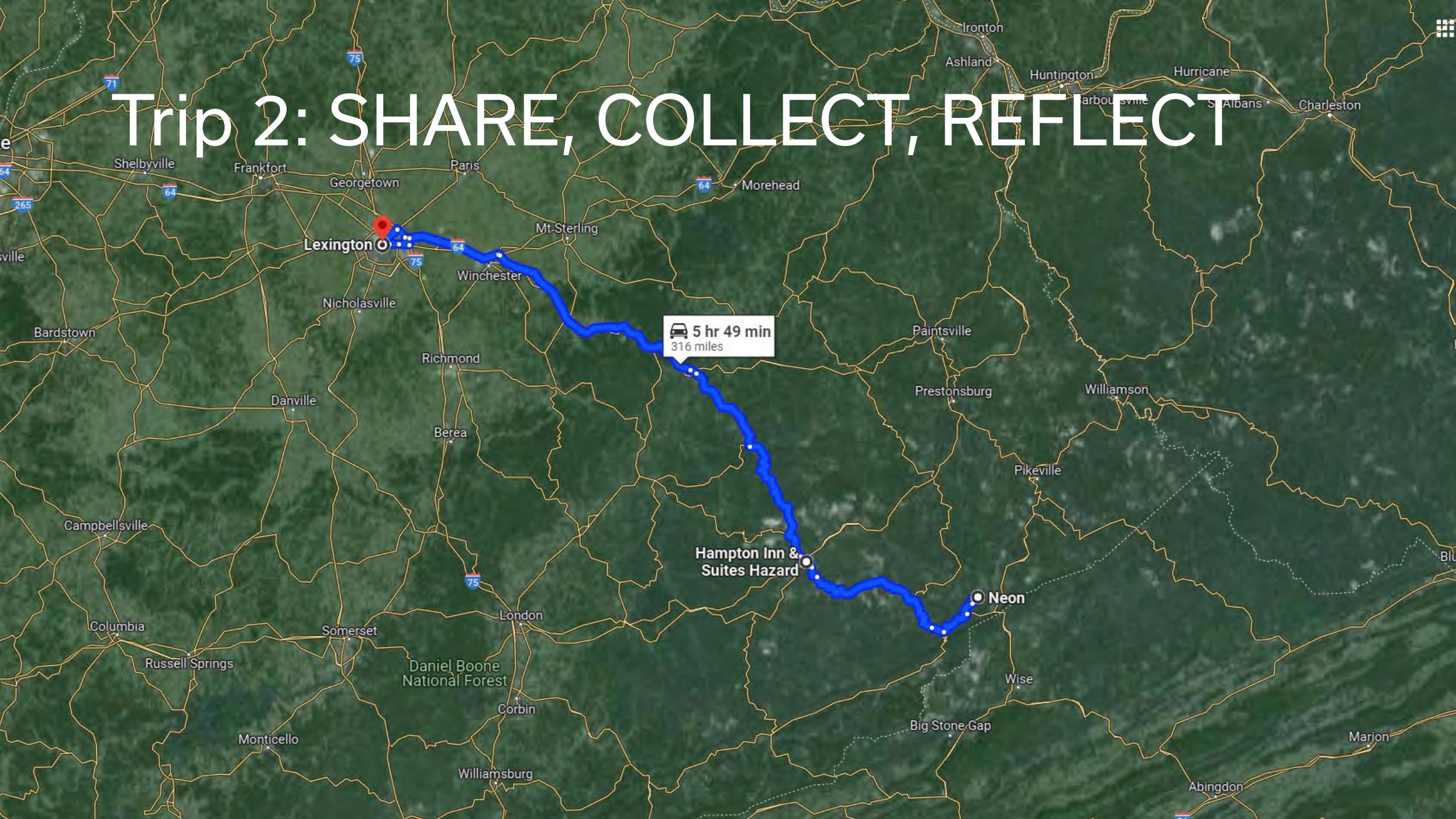
# Trip 1: LOOK, LISTEN, LEARN



# Trip 1: LOOK, LISTEN, LEARN



# Trip 2: SHARE, COLLECT, REFLECT



# Trip 2: SHARE, COLLECT, REFLECT







We were fortunate to draw from the great work already done by the community: December, 2022 Neon Rising Initiative Meeting (above), A Way Forward document (above right), and Imagine Letcher: Economic Development Action Plan (below right). These interactions and documents guided project identification and development.

**A Way Forward**

---

Envisioned by  
Fleming-Neon City Government  
And Citizens of the  
Headwaters Communities

---

Appalachian Kentucky conjures many images: mist rising over densely wooded hills, winding streams, curving roads, strip mines, subdivision homes, or the faces of people with a faraway look in their eyes.

Media coverage about the region tends to examine challenges and depict stereotypes. Whether the focus of the story is about declining employment in the coal industry, the opioid crisis, poor health or a myriad of other concerns; the overarching message is nearly always the same - a story about a place and people struggling to survive hard-scrabble times.

**But, what story do we tell ourselves?**

Despite the pervasive challenges facing this region, leaders in Fleming-Neon and surrounding communities are united by a fierce belief in their resilience and their ability to play a significant role in advancing achievement, economic development and community vitality. It is true that very real challenges exist and cannot be discounted. Leaders choose to view this situation through a lens of **abundance versus scarcity** and view themselves as a vital catalyst impacting the future.

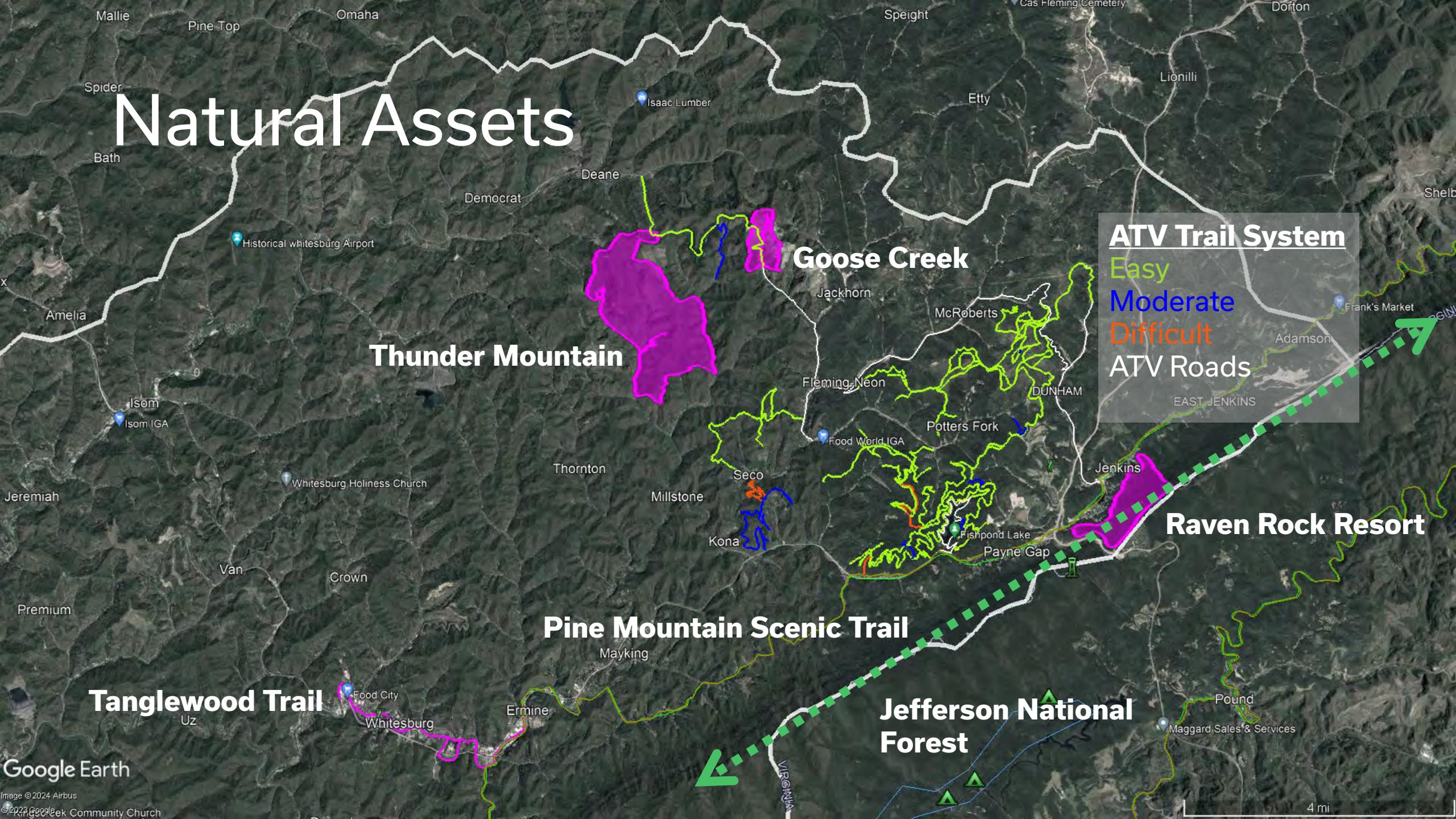
This strong belief in and connection to place and people drives a collective commitment to develop solutions that are led by the good minds and hard work of local folk and trusted partners. The work is informed by research and best practice examples and engages the broader community in creating solutions for ongoing transformation.

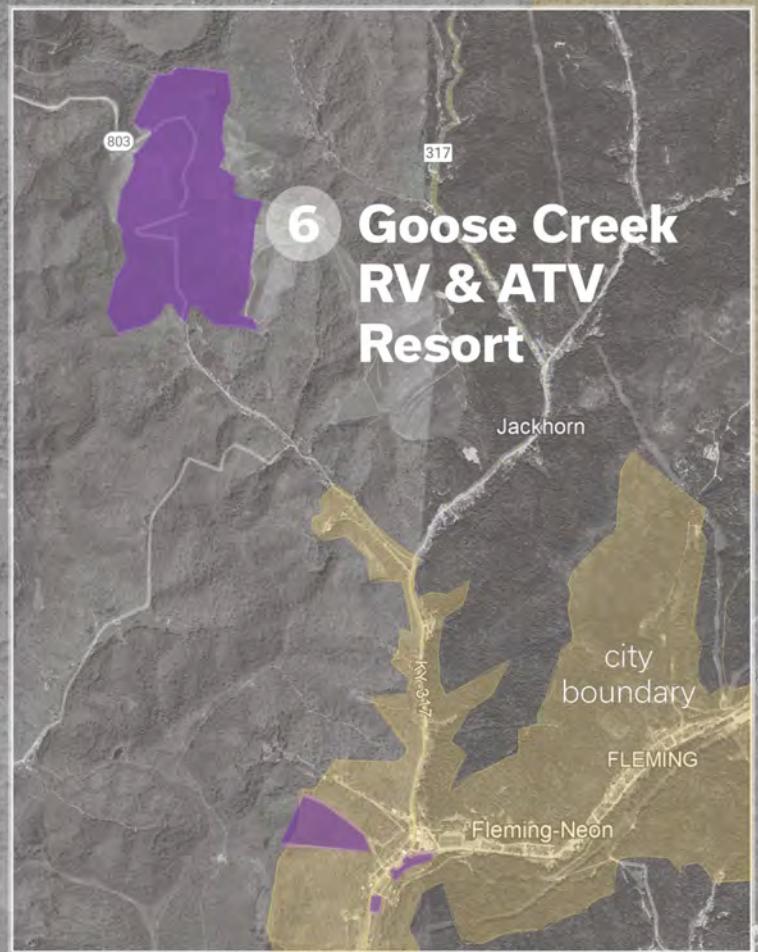
 CASTING THE VISION FOR THE FUTURE OF LETCHER COUNTY, KY  
NOVEMBER 2022

**IMAGINE  
LETCHER**

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ACTION PLAN

# Natural Assets





## 6 Goose Creek RV & ATV Resort

## 5 Neon Heights Housing

## 1 Trail Town

## 2 Downtown Revitalization

## 3 Green Infrastructure

## 4 Community Wellness Hub

FLEMING

# Project Sites

# Thank you

Community & Partners

Neon Rising Initiative

City of Fleming-Neon & Letcher County

UKLA Class of 2024!