



Lexington Herald Leader
Editorial “The Devil is in the Detail”
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Spring is here, and nature continues to remind us of the Bluegrass’ unrivaled beauty and potential. Our rolling green pastures dancing with foals, calves, and foliage; blooming trees lining our neighborhood sidewalks; and downtown streets teaming with outdoor concerts, markets, and cafes are just a few of my favorite local scenes of the season.

Indeed, we live in one of the premier destinations in the world—and the following adage squarely applies to Lexington, its citizenry, and leadership: **to whom much is given, much is expected.**

As Lexingtonians, we are unabashedly aware of our blessings—sensing that our beloved town is good, but could be great if only....

Last week the Creative Cities Summit visited Lexington, and with it came scores of presentations on what makes cities great in today’s economic climate. We know that our recipe for success is quality of place—the key to recruiting and retaining a bright workforce. In fact, over 70% of workers now pick city first and job second.

Winning cities are places with strong leadership, healthy public and private sector partnerships, inclusive and transparent decision-making bodies, and planning processes that enhance beautiful natural and built environments. As a result, “creatives” feel as though they can make a difference, want to stay in the community, and fuel small, medium, and large-scale businesses—all while generating economic and cultural wealth.

During the summit, we saw countless presentations detailing other cities’ success stories. Engaging urban landscapes, interesting human-scale buildings, vibrant parks, pedestrian and bike friendly transportation networks, racially and age-diverse populations, and thriving art scenes were the order of the day. As Mayor Joe Riley of Charleston would say, they were places that “make the heart sing.”

So what gives? Why does Lexington struggle to flourish under this proven “quality of place” approach? It seems the devil is in the details.

We congratulate ourselves on being a good city because we are making solid strides in improving our quality of life through urban revitalization, a growing local arts scene, trails, environmental programs and other community initiatives. We are not as bad off as other cities, right? Coupled with our remarkable rural landscape, our Lexington is a very attractive place to live.

Yet, this logic leads to complacency—and consequently we, along with leadership, overlook the critical details needed to achieve an unparalleled “quality of place” here in the Bluegrass.

As we learned at last month’s Gaines Center lecture, city employees in Charleston S.C. polish the corners off sidewalks to create the desired, orchestrated effect of a historic streetscape. It is this attention to detail and identity—often going the distance the last 10% of a project—that makes the difference between Charleston’s “goodness” vs. “greatness”.

Undeterred by our collective failings such as the CentrePointe development process, the Blue Grass Airport and Public library scandals, and the allowance of drive-thru CVS in our “walkable” downtown, Lexington must wake-up and learn from these sobering oversights.

We must focus on the details, and create a world-class urban environment that, according to expert economist Rebecca Ryan, brings out “creativity in each one of us.”

Indeed, our town, our farms, and our future depend on it.