

Soap Lake, Washington

Population 1,574

“We’re a rural community that’s been in decline for decades,” says Mayor Raymond Gravelle. “This was do or die.”



The revitalization started a handful of years ago with a Complete Streets policy and bike lanes on the state highway that runs through town. The community is working on connecting those bike lanes to the regional bikeway and the next community, seven miles away. Extra-wide sidewalks and pedestrian-scale lighting brought in far more pedestrians, particularly in the summer tourist season.



The town, whose master plan was collecting dust, got assistance from the Rural Communities Design Initiative at Washington State University. Citizens learned about good design, collected community input, and put in the hours of work to go about saving their town.

The mayor goes on to say this was one of the “most rewarding projects I’ve worked on in my life—to see the community come together.” Benefits have included an overall improvement in the community’s appearance, as well as new interest from developers and businesses. The community saw such success from working together that they are updating their park plan.

Steps:

1. Identify funding sources
2. Put together a team of citizens who understand the criteria to meet funding requirements
3. Have team carry the ball far enough to know you’ll qualify, then get lots of citizen input

Thank you to and photo courtesy of Mayor Raymond Gravelle