



SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: Tuesday, April 7, 2026.** Please include this submission form as the first page of your electronic entry. Contact [Gage Harter](#) with any questions.

PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: Pulaski

Program Title: From Vacancy to Vitality: Pulaski County's Adaptive Reuse Initiative

Program Category: Community Development, Economic Development, & Land Use

CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: John Crockett

Title: Director

Department: Community Development

Telephone: (540)980-7714 Website: <https://www.pulaskicounty.org>

Email: jcrockett@pulaskicounty.org

SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Jonathan Sweet

Title: County Administrator

Signature: 

From Vacancy to Vitality: Pulaski County's Adaptive Reuse Initiative

In the years following the COVID-19 pandemic, Pulaski County saw a growing inventory of vacant and underutilized public facilities. For decades, these buildings had functioned as community anchors and vital public institutions, but were left vacant as a result of consolidation efforts and shifting operational demands. Many of these were historic buildings that had served generations of residents, functioning not only as schools and public spaces, but as longstanding centers of community identity. While consolidation improved long term efficiency, it created an immediate and compounding challenge of how to manage a portfolio of substantial, aging structures that no longer served their intended purpose.

This challenge was particularly acute in Pulaski County, a community already contending with longstanding blight and disinvestment. Without intervention, Pulaski was facing the addition of multiple, particularly large, vacant buildings to the County's existing inventory. Sure to accelerate decline and place further strain on surrounding neighborhoods and public resources, Pulaski County knew they needed to take action to save the facilities. These highly visible and often centrally located structures had the potential for further disinvestment, safety concerns, and diminished market confidence.

At the same time, Pulaski County was navigating a range of evolving community and economic needs. Addressing these challenges individually would have fragmented efforts and limited long term impact. Instead the County advanced a coordinated programmatic strategy that viewed these properties not as isolated liabilities but as a collective opportunity to stabilize neighborhoods, attract investment, and return key sites to productive use through adaptive reuse.



INDUSTRIAL AND INNOVATION-FOCUSED USES



As part of this broader effort, Pulaski County strategically positioned select facilities for industrial and technology driven uses, aligning each site with market demand and long term economic opportunity. Rather than pursuing a single redevelopment model, the County worked to match buildings with users whose needs could be supported by the scale, layout, and location of these former institutional spaces.

This approach recognized that many of the County's vacant facilities were uniquely suited for more than traditional redevelopment. Their size, infrastructure, and central locations made them viable candidates for emerging industries, research applications, and advanced manufacturing. By leveraging these characteristics, the County was able to reposition 2 underutilized buildings as assets capable of supporting economic growth.

One such example is the reuse of Newbern Elementary, now occupied by Trova Commercial Vehicles. Trova focuses on the electrification of commercial vehicle platforms, developing battery and electric solutions that improve performance while reducing emissions and operating costs. The facility provides the space and flexibility needed to support assembly, testing, and operations, allowing the company to establish a presence in Pulaski County while returning a vacant building to productive use.

In a similar vein, Jefferson Elementary has been repositioned through a partnership involving MOVA Technologies. This site supports the development of advanced air capture and filtration technologies, along with the installation of innovative indoor grow environments. These efforts reflect a unique blend of research,

environmental technology, and applied agricultural systems, demonstrating how legacy public infrastructure can support forward-looking industries.

Together, these projects highlight a key strength of Pulaski County's approach of flexibility. By aligning each building with an appropriate end use, the County has attracted emerging industries, supported regional partnerships, and generated new economic activity from previously underutilized assets. These efforts reinforce the County's role in fostering innovation while ensuring that prominent vacant structures are returned to active and productive use.

COMMUNITY SERVICES AND WORKFORCE SUPPORT



Building on this effort, Pulaski County identified opportunities to reposition select facilities to directly support community services and essential programs. Rather than viewing these buildings solely through an economic lens, the County recognized their potential to serve residents in more immediate and impactful ways related to early childhood education, workforce support, and access to critical services.

A key example is the reuse of the former Riverlawn Elementary School, now occupied by New River Community Action (NRCA). As an established regional nonprofit, NRCA provides a wide range of services including early childhood education, housing assistance, energy support programs, and workforce development initiatives. The building's layout, accessibility, and familiarity within the community made it well-suited for these uses.

Through this transition, the facility has been reactivated as a hub for service delivery, including the continued operation of Head Start programming. This ensures that families in Pulaski County have access to early childhood education and supportive services in a location that has historically served that purpose, while expanding the building's role in meeting current community needs.

By aligning vacant facilities with established nonprofit partners, the County has been able to return these spaces to active use in a way that delivers direct, measurable benefits to residents. This approach reinforces the importance of community-centered redevelopment and demonstrates how public assets can be leveraged to strengthen service delivery, support families, and enhance overall quality of life.

COMMERCIAL AND RESTAURANT ACTIVATION



In addition to industrial and community service uses, Pulaski County recognized the role that locally driven commercial activity can play in revitalizing small communities and activating underutilized spaces. By supporting uses that draw both residents and visitors, the County was able to reestablish activity in prominent locations while reinforcing local identity and sense of place.

A notable example is the transformation of the former Draper School into The Conery, a \$1.2 million investment that brought a locally owned eatery offering ice cream, coffee, and light fare. The building that was originally constructed as Draper High School, served generations of residents before becoming vacant. Its reuse preserves a familiar and historically significant structure while introducing a new use that is accessible, family-friendly, and rooted in the community.

Today, the facility operates as part of the broader Draper Village experience, a growing destination centered on small businesses, local food, and outdoor recreation. Its proximity to the New River Trail and a newly established community park, repurposed from the school's former grounds and greenspace, positions it as a natural gathering point for both residents and visitors. Enhancements to this outdoor space have further activated the site, creating a complementary environment that encourages extended visits and increased foot traffic.

Beyond its immediate function, the project demonstrates the value of placemaking through small-scale commercial investment. By activating a highly visible and meaningful structure and pairing it with enhanced outdoor amenities, the reuse effort supports surrounding businesses, encourages longer stays, and strengthens Draper's identity as a unique destination within Pulaski County.

This project highlights an important component of the County's broader strategy of pairing strong local partners with meaningful reinvestment in legacy structures. The transformation of this facility required significant effort to restore and repurpose the building while honoring its history as a former school. Today, it stands as a revitalized community asset that supports local entrepreneurship, tourism, and enduring economic sustainability.

RESIDENTIAL REDEVELOPMENT



A stable and diverse housing supply is essential to long-term community vitality. In Pulaski County, much of the existing housing inventory was dated and limited in both type and availability. This was also creating challenges for workforce retention, population growth, and overall economic resilience. Expanding housing options required a solution that could deliver meaningful scale while reinforcing established neighborhoods.

The conversion of former school facilities provided that opportunity. By repositioning these large, centrally located structures, the County facilitated the creation of more than 200 residential units, including a mix of affordable and market-rate housing. These developments introduced new housing types that had previously

been scarce in the local market and helped to meet demand while making efficient use of existing infrastructure.

The redevelopment of Pulaski Middle School into Pulaski Lofts illustrates how legacy buildings can be transformed into modern living spaces without losing their identity. The project retained key architectural elements of the original structure while adapting it to meet contemporary residential standards, resulting in a unique housing option that reflects both the past and the future of the community.

At Claremont Elementary, the conversion into Claremont School Apartments builds on this approach. The project revitalizes a prominent neighborhood site by introducing new residential units while maintaining the building's historic character. Its location and design contribute to neighborhood stability, offering residents a place to live that is both functional and connected to the community's history.

The ongoing redevelopment of Dublin Middle School continues this pattern of reinvestment. This project represents the next phase in expanding the County's housing supply, further demonstrating how underutilized public assets can be repositioned to meet current needs. Its scale and setting provide an opportunity to introduce additional housing while preserving elements of the site's longstanding role within the community.

Taken together, these efforts represent a significant step forward in addressing housing availability in Pulaski County. This \$55million dollar investment resulted in new units at scale and diversifying the local housing stock, directly supporting workforce needs while attracting new residents and contributing to the overall stability and growth of the community.

IMPLEMENTATION AND DELIVERY STRATEGY

Executing these projects required more than identifying new uses; it required a framework that could overcome the financial and structural barriers typically associated with redeveloping large, aging institutional buildings. Traditional private market conditions alone were often insufficient to support these types of projects, given the high costs of rehabilitation, important environmental considerations, and the overall complexity of adapting former public facilities to new uses.

Facilitated and developed by the Community Development office, Pulaski County established a consistent approach to site control and property disposition that reduced upfront development costs while maintaining alignment with community goals. Rather than treating these buildings as surplus assets to be sold to the highest bidder, the County structured transfers in a way that prioritized long term outcomes over immediate return. This allowed redevelopment partners to redirect resources toward construction, rehabilitation, and programmatic elements that enhanced overall project viability.

A key component of this approach involved the strategic use of property value as part of the overall development equation. By reducing or eliminating acquisition costs through negotiated agreements, the County effectively created additional capacity within each project's financing structure. This proved especially important in projects involving housing or specialized industrial uses, where margins are often constrained and upfront costs can be prohibitive.

These agreements were paired with clear expectations regarding project delivery, including timelines, intended uses, and reinvestment commitments. This ensured that properties were not only transferred, but actively repositioned in a manner consistent with the County's broader objectives. This allowed the County to maintain a balanced and flexible approach for development partners with accountability for outcomes.

This model also strengthened the County's ability to attract qualified partners. By lowering initial barriers and demonstrating a willingness to collaborate, Pulaski County positioned itself as a proactive and reliable partner in redevelopment. This, in turn, helped catalyze investment, accelerate project timelines, and expand the range of viable end uses across multiple sites.

Through this approach, Pulaski County established a replicable framework for repositioning underutilized public assets. By aligning property disposition, financing strategy, and long-term community goals, the County was able to move complex projects forward that might not otherwise have been feasible under conventional development models.