

General Comments and Suggestions:

Suggestions are indicated in italics.

Welcome to Portsmouth to America in Bloom this your first year to be visited by a team of America in Bloom judges. Portsmouth, Ohio has a long and rich history. Its motto “where southern hospitality begins” applies to the many warm and caring people the judges met while on tour. The America in Bloom entry this year was sponsored by Portsmouth’s Main Street program. The downtown and Boneyfiddle districts were the only areas considered during the judging. The judges adjusted the scoring grid to remove the residential components. Therefore, the judges’ comments focus on these two areas. The score has been adjusted to reflect the percentages that would be appropriate.

Portsmouth is a city that has gone through numerous transitions over the years. They have seen years of boom and years of famine. From our observation they are on the move upward. While there is still much to be done, there are many positive signs throughout the community that point to an economic resurgence. In 1980 Portsmouth was cited an All American City by the National Civic League. A plaque on the front of city hall announces the award. The award given by The National Civic League is in consideration of community’s best efforts to promote health, equity, safety, and well-being through collaborative problem solving and public engagement. That can-do spirit is still there.

2015 will be the bicentennial year of Portsmouth’s establishment as a city. It is truly an opportunity to bring the community together to not only clean up but also to celebrate its rich history. This will be a chance to show off the rich Appalachian roots of the community.

In 2006 Portsmouth commissioned a Downtown Revitalization Plan. The firm of Jacobs, Edwards and Kelcey interviewed community leaders and residents to crystallize some concepts for the community to showcase itself. Their findings are still relevant today. These include:

- Site improvement
- Phase streetscape
- Activities
- Way finding
- Recruit new businesses
- Crime prevention and public safety
- Parking

As the city pulls the enthusiasm together this plan needs to be considered.

As America in Bloom becomes better known in the community it would be advantageous to add a link on the city website to America in Bloom’s website.

America in Bloom promotes community partnerships. One such partnership the judges were introduced to was the Community Health Incentive of Southern Ohio Medical Center. The health initiative goal is to get all ages outside and active in a life style that promotes health. They focus on the physical activities of walking and biking and moving around in general. They endorse bike trails and walking routes and encourage healthy food choices and will assist residents with gardening projects. The City Health Department has similar goals. The Chamber of Commerce assists start-ups and existing businesses in many ways. *Brain storm with them for community partnership for these businesses and others on ways they can contribute to the betterment of the community.*

With the large number of cyclists passing through Portsmouth, housing may be another element to consider providing. Hostelng is a clean, safe and low cost alternative to consider for tourism. Hostelng International, www.hiusa.org is one organization to look at. They have quality standards that are required for hostels that are enforced for either directly operate or license (affiliate).

There are numerous groups throughout the Portsmouth doing volunteer work throughout the year. Some organizations like the hospital track this information and relate the hours of service to a dollar amount. Gathering this information from the variety of organizations and events relating it to a dollar value, would tell a story of citizens giving back to the community. Such information is a powerful tool when writing grants or promoting the positive efforts going on in Portsmouth.

The judging team met so many wonderful passionate people who care for their community. During the judges visit there was a lot of conversation, questions and suggestions. Not all have been related in this report. The city council and staff are struggling to find ways to make things happen. There is much discussion and citizen input into decision that affect the community. Special recognition must go out to Sue Burke, Sarah Surina, Hilda Drake, Suzette Rhea for their guidance and organizing such a thorough tour of Portsmouth. City Manager Derek Allen, Kim Bauer, Lisa Carter, Chris Smith, Regina Chabot, Wendi Waugh and Scott Moore were among the many people we met in providing the judges with a picture of the city. *Name tags would be helpful when meeting so many individuals willing to share their love of community.*

One last thought for the committee to consider. Annually select a young person to act as an ambassador for the community. This individual can be part of the program that sells Portsmouth's past and future.



Boneyfiddle logo on window

1. Floral Displays Flower beds, containers, baskets, window boxes. Arrangement, originality, distribution, location, diversity, balance, harmony, quality of maintenance. Use and integration of annuals, perennials, ornamental grasses, bulbs, and seasonal flowers.	Max points	Actual Score
Municipal		
Leadership and plan of action for floral displays	20	10
Concept and design, variety of plantings, overall effect	20	10
Maintenance and quality of displays	20	12
Design for all seasons	15	8
Business		
Concept and design, overall effect	15	12
Maintenance and quality of displays	15	12
Residential		
Concept and design, overall effect	0	n/a
Maintenance and quality of displays	0	n/a
Community Involvement		
Volunteer involvement in design, planting, and maintenance of floral displays	20	15
Financial and in-kind contributions to floral displays	20	15
Total (the fields automatically calculate – do not type in them)	145.00	94.00

Comments and suggestions:

Flowering pots and hanging baskets in the business district add color and interest to the streetscape. Continue to expand the number of floral displays, window boxes and ground boxes. The nonbinding ‘Gentleman’s’ Agreement’ with the sponsoring agency, Main Street Organization requests business owners to a commitment to water and weed the floral containers in front of the business. Because of this compliance the program is demonstrating success. *Work with merchants to create planters themed to their business.* Other communities would be envious of this cooperation. As this program continues consider expanding to include small gardens around town.



The flowering pots in front of city hall were outstanding. They demonstrated an amount of dramatic flair for “Thrill, Spill and Fill”. *A fundraising suggestion for the committee would be to have a competition between community “celebrities” to create flower-filled containers and then auction them off.*

Expand the plant palette of the community by creating a demonstration garden suitable for flowering containers or some other theme, in the vicinity of the farmers market.

The River View Retirement Center located in the Boneyfiddle Business District was a very welcoming area. It is used as a picture backdrop for proms, weddings and visitors to the district. *Enlist volunteers to donate and plant bulbs in the common area.*

In cooperation with the schools and Southern Ohio Medical Center, give away or sell seed packets at a nominal price. Provide classes in nutrition, food preparation and storage of homegrown vegetables to participants with an emphasis on the types of seeds sold.



The lamp pole flower baskets are colorful and make a positive statement. The use of the hanging baskets on the sides of buildings was a nice touch of color and was inviting. *Recognize the volunteers who water the baskets and planters with a plaque on the planter or pole.*



2. Landscaped Areas Overall design and suitability of landscape, turf and ground covers. Use of native plants. Overall design and suitability for location/use; good use of design principles (i.e., balance of plant material and constructed elements, harmony, color, texture, shape, etc.). Sustainability. Integration of hardscapes, lighting, site features, sculpture. Maintenance (weeds, mulching practices, edging); site rejuvenation and rehabilitation. Efforts in strategic planning. Community gardens, children’s gardens, public gardens and zoos.	Max points	Actual Score
Municipal		
Overall design and planting of landscape, turf and groundcovers	15	9
Environmental management of sports fields and turf	0	n/a
Quality of landscape maintenance	15	9
Sustainable management, naturalization and eco-design	15	9
Business		
Overall design and planting of landscape	15	11
Environmental management of turf and groundcovers	10	5
Quality of landscape maintenance	15	8
Residential		
Overall design and planting of landscape	0	n/a
Environmental management of turf and groundcovers	0	n/a
Quality of landscape maintenance	0	n/a
Community Involvement		
Volunteer involvement in funding, planting, and maintenance of landscaped areas	15	12
Participation in future planning (committees, councils, and advisory boards.)	15	13
Total (the fields automatically calculate – do not type in them)	115.00	76.00

Comments and suggestions:

There are numerous vacant lots throughout the city. *In particular, there are lots along Second Street that might be adaptable for other purposes such as sitting parks, public art, festival activities, community gardens or urban agriculture. Some have been designated brown fields and are site ready and waiting for that opportunity.* Portsmouth uses land banks to address vacant and abandoned properties to gain ownership and eventually return the property to the community for development. Grants from the State of Ohio give the city the ability to take down 25–30 abandoned homes. While this is a small percentage of properties that have been identified, the city is addressing the issue with the resources at their disposal.



The success of the community gardens at Doyle Park can be replicated in the Boneyfiddle and Main Street District. *With the assistance of the schools and community health network along with city government vacant properties, with permission from property owners or a short term lease, can be turned into community gardens or for enterprising individuals an urban agriculture business model.*

Vacant land in the Boneyfiddle district or other areas of town can possibly be turned into temporary parks. Mow vegetation, put down some mulch add a bench or two and you have a parklet. Invite artists from Boneyfiddle Art Gallery to display their recycled art.

Main Street renovated and maintains Alexandra Park, a neighborhood riverfront park. The memory benches in this park make it a great spot for reflection and relaxation. *Label plants and use themed floral displays to encourage people to stop by often.*

Enlist the local newspaper to run a weekly column providing gardening tips. This would be a good fit with one of the local plant retailers located on Second Street.

3. Urban Forestry Distribution, variety and suitability of trees; new plantings; urban tree program; qualified personnel or access to trained individual(s); inventory or database; frequency of tree surveys; care and maintenance programs; preservation of heritage trees and woodlots; scheduled succession plantings. Efforts in management, planning, maintenance, improvement, and innovation. Written policies, by-laws and regulations, long and short term plans.	Max points	Actual Score
Municipal		
Overall plan of action, tree planting programs, variety of species, inventory	20	15
Tree maintenance	15	9
Preservation and restoration of natural areas	15	8.5
Tree protection/planting regulations and by-laws	15	10
Business		
Overall planting program	20	15
Tree maintenance	15	9
Residential		
Overall planting program	0	n/a
Tree maintenance	0	n/a
Community Involvement		
Volunteer involvement in funding, planting, and maintenance of trees	20	14
Volunteer involvement of youth in tree programs (i.e., Arbor Day, etc.)	0	n/a
Total (the fields automatically calculate – do not type in them)	120.00	80.50

Comments and suggestions:



Portsmouth has a tree commission whose influence has been sporadic over the years. Currently they are an active and involved group of citizens. They are working with Ann Bonner, the State Urban Forester for their region. Work with her to develop a list of recommended trees specific to Portsmouth. She is enthusiastic for Portsmouth to have a vibrant, healthy tree canopy. *The tree commission may consider investigating funding sources related to the urban forest. Possible sources might have to do with the topic of*

storm water runoff controls. Other potential resources can include but not be limited to the USDA Forest Service www.fs.fed.us; Public Works Association www.apwa.net; and The Tree Fund www.treefund.org.



While there is a tree ordinance, it is haphazardly enforced. The urban forest is a mix of good and not so good. Trees along Second Street were in need of pruning suckers from the main trunks. There were several trees that needed to be removed. Empty tree pits along the sidewalk were hazards waiting to trip people up and lastly several trees along streets had poison ivy mixed in with other weeds.

Yet, the Linden trees along Chillicothe Street were pruned up above sight line, weed free, and appeared to be in good health. *Some solutions for tree maintenance may come from various sources. As a spin-off of the flower pot concept where a gentlemen's agreement is done for the care of flower pots in front of business, you might extend this concept to trees in front of businesses. An alternative might be to find a Boy Scout or Girl Scout who wants to earn merit badges by taking care of the trees in a designated block. A high school student looking for a community service project as a requirement for graduation might also be an option.*

The formation of a Junior Tree Rangers club will engage young kids from age 10 thru 13 to take care of designated trees. They will be able to plant little gardens of their choice around the tree pit and take care of them for a season. They can be awarded a hat, shirts and other prizes for their efforts.

The justice system could also come into play. Individuals who damage trees, whether it is by automobiles or other means can be assessed a cost for the replacement of that tree. A tree ordinance is in place to enforce it.



Arbor Day and Earth Day projects and programs with students will enhance the community. *Plant a tree downtown, sponsor an essay contest on the importance of trees in Portsmouth and you will create a group of new volunteers!*

Encourage businesses and civic organizations to Adopt a Tree. They would work with the local Tree Commission on pruning, mulching and maintaining a designated tree.

4. Environmental Efforts Sustainability practices. Recycling (paper, glass, metal, plastic, electronics, etc.), policies and by-laws, sustainable development strategies, waste reduction, hazardous waste minimization and collection (oil, paint, chemicals, used batteries, etc.), water quality and conservation, energy conservation, environmental cleanup activities, reducing carbon footprint, environmentally friendly transportation, LEED certification, air, noise and light pollution, rain gardens and rain barrels, composting, energy efficiency, youth programs, etc. Events such as Earth Day, Recycling Days, Bike to Work Days, etc.	Max Points	Actual Score
Municipal		
Leadership in environmental initiatives	25	17
Effective communication of environmental strategies and initiatives	25	17
New programs, improvement and innovation	25	17
Business		
Participation in environmental efforts	20	14
New programs, improvement and innovation	10	5
Residential		
Participation in environmental efforts	0	n/a
New programs, improvement and innovation	0	n/a
Community Involvement		
Volunteer involvement in environmental efforts	20	14
Youth participation in environmental activities	20	13
Total (the fields automatically calculate – do not type in them)	145.00	97.00

Comments and suggestions:

Downtown Portsmouth and the Boneyfiddle District have a lot of recycling potential. Business owners in that area are actively recycling cardboard, aluminum and paper on their own on a very small scale. *Recycling pick-up efforts by the city either with curbside recycling or drop-off locations within the city would decrease the amount of recyclables taken to landfills and make recycling convenient for business owners. Screening of dumpsters, wherever possible, would help to create a neater look in the downtown area.* Parking lots and off street parking was behind many businesses making their back door an alternative entrance. Businesses are enthusiastic about the positive changes that are being made!

There is excitement in the community and a valuable resource for change will be to involve elementary and high school students in all of your efforts. These are your volunteers in Portsmouth in the next 20 years! *Work with local school personnel on recycling curriculum in all grade levels.*

The Portsmouth Chamber of Commerce is active in the community. *It is suggested they work with their membership to become Green Business Certified. <http://www.gbcertified.com>.*

As the bike trails become a reality the city needs to become proactive and begin placing bike racks in the downtown and Boneyfiddle area. Portsmouth is already a bicyclist destination and will grow as the Connex project develops throughout the city connecting the seven parks and routes through town starting with the mural district. There are numerous partners that can add to the voice to make this and other connecting routes. The police department can promote bike safety, school parent organizations can promote safe routes for school children to ride their bikes to school, and high school students can promote safety for road sharing. The city does have a bike ordinance that went into effect November 2013. Walk to school programs are the next step in becoming an energized community! Walk bike to school is an organization that can assist with educational programs on biking www.walkbiketoschool.org.



The art community in Portsmouth is very active in reuse and upcycling. The artist gallery was full of items made by local artists out of recycled materials. There was a rain barrel auction going on during the judge's visit sponsored by the Scioto Soil and Water Conservation District and advertised in the window. Barrels were donated by G&J Pepsi Bottling Company.



5. Heritage Preservation	Max Points	Actual Score
Historical, natural, agricultural, and cultural heritage. Preservation and restoration of buildings, homes, churches, cemeteries; heritage sites and/or monuments; heritage parks, historical gardens and heritage trees; artifacts; historical society; heritage advisory committee, museums, archives, history books, and interpretative programs; ordinances and policies. Resource availability. Farmers markets, festivals and parades.		
Municipal		
Leadership in preservation and restoration initiatives	25	17
Legal protection of heritage sites	25	15
Resource availability for preservation and restoration	25	19
Business		
Conservation, restoration, and rehabilitation of properties	15	12
Participation in and support of heritage/cultural activities	15	12
Residential		
Conservation, restoration, and rehabilitation of properties	0	n/a
Participation in and support of heritage/cultural activities	0	n/a
Community Involvement		
Volunteer involvement in cultural, historical, and natural heritage activities	20	15
Youth involvement in heritage activities	20	10
Total (the fields automatically calculate – do not type in them)	145.00	100.00

Comments and suggestions:



58 mural panels painted on the river levy tell Portsmouth’s story from its earliest footprint of man to current days. These murals are accented with interpretative signs to enhance the journey by foot. QR codes have been recently added for additional depth to the story. Yearly maintenance is done on the murals and the result is first class. All work on the murals is paid for by donations from the community. The mural panels are also available in book form for purchase at the Visitors Center. *The addition of benches and bike racks on the mural and riverside of the flood wall will become necessary as increased traffic is realized!*

The Boneyfiddle and downtown area is rich in its history and architecture. The city is able to assist business owners with Community Improvement Program funds to make improvements to properties that had been neglected for years.

Main Street Portsmouth’s mission is to work to provide service, incentives and collaborative opportunities to promote a healthy economic downtown while preserving the historic integrity.



The beautification efforts that have been implemented are bringing renewed interest to the Main Street district. Businesses are replacing windows, store fronts and improving the sidewalks. *Ghost billboards from a previous time are evident throughout downtown. The production of a brochure/ scavenger hunt published piece to locate the “ghosts” would be a great collaboration with Shawnee State. There is a need for organized activities in the Boneyfiddle area. The area has so much to offer and ample space to draw crowds and events.*

Farming is an important part of Ohio’s culture and Portsmouth has two farmers markets in the downtown area. One is held on Tuesday and another on Saturday. *Educational events around the markets and farming would increase foot traffic for the vendors and draw neighboring residents into the area. A “Taste of Portsmouth” featuring local beverages, foods, sweets and art work is a perfect fit for this area. Consider closing the streets and providing fair activities and music.*

The Development of Chillicothe and Second Street has been ongoing. There is a Historic Design review board but codes are vague and enforcement inconsistent. *City Council and the administration should review historic preservation ordinances and set standards for renovation and rebuilding that are consistent and enforceable.* Portsmouth has two areas on the National Registry of Historic Places. The Main Street Portsmouth board received a grant to re-survey the area. The new survey will provide the tools needed to add more addresses to the registry and open the door for grants.



The 1810 House is a museum to be proud of. Open on Sundays, it is staffed by volunteers. The museum collections consist of a wide variety of household items from the 1800s and 1900s. The story of the Kinney Homestead is told with the help of the family tree. *It is important that the oral history of the family and their contributions to the community be recorded. Using the sources available through Shawnee State and local news media would ensure that this important piece of history is saved.*

As the Bicentennial is to take place in 2015 consider planning events around Appalachian culture and their use of plants for dyes, medicines, tools, building materials, cloth and food.

6. Overall Impression Cleanliness, lack of litter and graffiti. Maintenance of public open spaces, medians and boulevard strips, streets, sidewalks, walking and biking trails, curbs, ditches, road shoulders, unattended and vacant lots, buildings, garbage receptacles; lack of weeds, dog waste policies and receptacles, notices/posters appropriately displayed, vandalism not evident. Maintenance of the hardscape: walls, lamp posts, benches, playgrounds, etc. Appropriate use and placement of graphic elements such as banners, signs and murals.	Max points	Actual Score
Municipal		
Overall cleanliness	10	5
Maintenance of public roads and shoulders	10	5
Condition of public buildings and properties	10	6
Impact of graphic elements - banners, signs, murals, etc.	10	7.5
Business		
Overall cleanliness	20	14
Condition of buildings and properties	20	15
Residential		
Overall cleanliness	0	n/a
Condition of buildings and properties	0	n/a
Community Involvement		
Participation in clean up efforts, adopt-a-spot, annual cleanup days, etc.	15	11
Recognition of volunteer efforts	10	5
Total (the fields automatically calculate – do not type in them)	105.00	68.50

Comments and suggestions:



The Murals of Portsmouth were recently identified by the website Trip Advisor as the top tourist attraction. They tell the story of Portsmouth. The murals are known as the largest single piece of art (2,200 feet and growing) by a single artist, Robert Dafford.

Way finding signage needs improved to assist tourists in finding the attractions they are coming to Portsmouth to visit.

Cyclists pedal to Portsmouth by the thousands. At times the main road ways are packed with cycles and cars. A citizens group, Portsmouth Connex, is currently proposing bike routes through town. Concept plans are being discussed in a public forum to make the city safer and more usable to cyclists of all abilities. *A consideration to include in this conversation is The National Center for Safe Routes to School www.saferoutesinfo.org along with the local police. Both have important resources to share.*

Annual Clean-up days, 'Done in a Day' projects or other organized events could be held to get the community involved in the beautification efforts. Done in a Day projects are half day projects that can be tackled and completed in fewer than six hours. Most people can find two to six hours to make their community a better place to live. Weed removal in sidewalks, trash pick-up and weeding in parks would all be possible projects.



Weeds in the pavement of many of the sidewalks downtown detracts from the overall appearance. *Consider using an herbicide and/or pre-emergent to help control them. This will serve to make the premises more attractive while extending the life of the pavement.*

The rise and fall of the Ohio and Scioto Rivers are a strong influence in the community. History has both rivers overflowing their banks leaving behind silt and destruction. At the same time the rivers are a definition for the community. Business and pleasure takes place on the river and along the banks. *Consider brainstorming the potentials for festivals and other events that would bring citizens and visitors down to the river's edge. Work with the US Army Corps of Engineers and other groups who claim a stake in the health of the river for removing woody growth to expose vistas from higher elevations. Revive river sweeps clean-ups to remove debris that might litter the banks. Assistance may come from Ohio River Valley Water Sanitation Commission (ORSANCO www.orsanco.org).*

While the flood wall facing the river is distinctively decorated with stars identifying distinguished community individuals, *consider adding strategically placed signs announcing for river traffic they are passing Portsmouth.* This is an additional entry point for the community.

The farmers market at the Roy Rogers Esplanade is a widely successful venture. The site is busy with people when in season. *Consider a partnership with a scout troop or student organization that will police the area before, during and after the event for trash. Leave the area better than what you found it is an adage that may apply here.*



The Portsmouth Health Department and Chris Smith have a lot of positive programs going on. There is active animal control, a large push for the eradication of urban blight and land utilization is ongoing. *A partnership with Shawnee State student organizations to clean parking lots and sidewalks in the historic Boneyfiddle area would help to enhance the growth of the downtown areas.*

Checklist for Judges and Participants:

Yes	No	N/A	
X			Were the judges given a community profile, itinerary, and map prior to their arrival?
X			Did the itinerary provide for seeing a representative cross-section of the participant?
X			Were the guides knowledgeable about the participant and horticultural aspects?
X			Were the judges able to modify the schedule if needed?
	X		Did the judges meet with the media?
X			Did the judges meet with municipal leaders?
	X		Were the judges asked to give presentations?
X			Were the judges able to meet with and talk to volunteers?
x			Was enough time allotted to complete the evaluation form in a quiet place?

Comments:

The judges were not shown any residential areas so that sector was not scored in any of the criteria. However, that does not affect your overall outcome, as it is a percentage of possible points.

In addition to towns and cities, America in Bloom also has participation categories for neighborhoods, business districts, college campuses, and military installations. Next year, if you enter as a city, please show us residential areas so that you can get the full benefit of the judges' visit. The other option is to enter as a business district. Please be sure to specify how you are entering.

DEFINITIONS

Municipal: City hall and other municipal properties, parks and open spaces, roads, roadsides, sidewalks, cemeteries, schools and sports facilities, empty lots and brownfields, libraries, hospitals, assisted living, churches, universities, and colleges

Business: Commercial and industrial sectors, shopping centers, stores, office buildings, restaurants, mixed use developments, service stations, railway and bus stations, plant nurseries/garden centers

Residential: Single family residences, condominiums, town houses, planned communities, apartment buildings, gated communities, manufactured home communities, trailer parks, residential developments, neighborhoods, graduated care facilities

Community Involvement: Volunteer efforts by individuals, clubs, youth groups, church groups, civic organizations, and social clubs for community enhancement



2014 Special Mention

Participant: Portsmouth, Ohio

General description of the recognized criterion (200 words max)

Heritage Preservation

The Murals of Portsmouth are a top tourist attraction. They tell the everyday life story of Portsmouth over time. Located on the flood wall these images stretch for over 8 city blocks! The murals are known as the largest single piece of art (2,200 feet and growing) by a single artist, Robert Dafford.

Special Project or Initiative (50 words max)

Portsmouth Main Street Good Neighbor offered businesses the pledge of a loan of flower pots for the good faith pledge to:

Keep the flowers watered

Keep the front of their business clean by picking up trash and pulling weeds.

Businesses responded with support for 40 flower pots, 12 window boxes, and 27 hanging baskets.

America in Bloom ... Planting Pride in Our Communities
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