

Historic Opera Block Redevelopment Transforms Downtown Bellefontaine

JobsOhio Inclusive Project Planning Grant Helped Fund Feasibility Study

Built in 1880, the [Opera Block](#) has served as an anchor in the community for over a century. The historic building is prominently located in the heart of downtown Bellefontaine. With 40,000 square feet spread over three floors, it takes up almost an entire city block. Over the years, the structure housed various merchants who supplied everything from groceries to furniture while a Grand Opera house once stood behind the building offering performances by some of the biggest names of the era.

As time went on, the building lost its luster and started to fall into disrepair. In 2019, the unused upper floors were condemned due to health and safety issues. The few existing tenants at street level often lacked heat and hot water due to the

aging boiler system. The community was interested in seeing the property redeveloped, but it posed huge challenges due to its large size and poor condition.

In 2021, the City of Bellefontaine supported the purchase of the property by local real estate firm, [Small Nation's](#), to begin redevelopment. With the help of a \$20,000 [JobsOhio Inclusive Project Planning grant](#), the City of Bellefontaine and Small Nation conducted a feasibility study to understand the building conditions and help define the redevelopment plan's direction and scope. Small Nation identified the most pressing needs and set to work to stabilize the roof, address structural issues and remove 375 tons of debris to begin the revitalization process.

The plan is to turn the upper floors into professional office spaces, retail and possibly even event space while work has been underway to fix up and lease out commercial space on the bottom floor, including thirteen storefronts. Small Nation has already successfully attracted new tenants with several boutiques, a coffee shop, a chocolate and gourmet foods store, a financial services office, and an ax-throwing venue now calling the Opera Block home. The team has been strategic about the types of businesses being recruited, ensuring tenants bring the right mix to create a vibrant experience in the community day and night.

“Bellefontaine needs this project because it’s transformational. We’re bringing new businesses, new places to eat, new places to work. The next step in this journey is to become a destination for tourism, and more people from around the state and even around the country will want to come explore, eat, dine and shop in downtown Bellefontaine,” said Jason Duff, CEO of Small Nation.



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JASON DUFF
CEO of Small Nation

JobsOhio Inclusive Project Planning Program

The JobsOhio Inclusive Project Planning program assists communities with grants for technical assistance to develop catalytic economic development projects.

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