

2022

IMPACT UPDATE

About Us

We are built for resilience, effectiveness, vibrancy, and change. We leverage local assets and through a network of engagement and resourcefulness, create programs and activities that support Chehalis and foster a healthy community. Experience Chehalis is an investment in our shared past, present, and future.

MISSION

We cultivate relationships and celebrate community to deliver a more vibrant Chehalis

VISION

Chehalis is a more prosperous, attractive, and inclusive community for all

VALUES

- Intentionality: High quality and sustainable programs and services
- Ethics: Outstanding quality of life and quality of place for all residents
- Integrity: Strong connection to supporting local businesses, artists, and endeavors
- Dynamism: Vibrant local economy and thriving regional destination
- Innovation: Unique community projects and contributions that serve a purpose





Overview: Experience Chehalis

Experience Chehalis is a non-profit economic development program with a focus on community building and small business support. We champion spaces for people to gather and interact, to feel a sense of community connection, identity, and pride, and to create a safe, vibrant Chehalis. Much has been accomplished since our original Chehalis Renaissance Plan was adopted by the Chehalis City Council in 2009. This multi-year, community-wide effort includes projects and initiatives focused on community promotion, economic development, quality design, and downtown development. Experience Chehalis is tasked with accomplishing the goals outlined in the plan through volunteer leadership, broad community participation, and using disciplined project management. Our goals include:

- Making the Chehalis area a more attractive place in which to live and raise a family
- Enhancing job opportunities and youth involvement in the community, so more high school and college graduates choose to live in the area
- Increasing tourism to support local retailers, hotels, and restaurants
- Increasing retail business to enhance local shopping

Experience Chehalis is an active participant in Washington State's Main Street Program. The program is organized under Washington State's Department of Archaeology & Historic Preservation and supports community efforts in developing strategies to stimulate long-term economic growth and civic pride within downtown communities. This program has provided Experience Chehalis with a successful approach to accomplishing our projects and programs. Our director serves on the Washington State Main Street Advisory Board tasked with leading the development of the program at the state level. Through Main Street, we have gained valuable resources for project ideas, insight into relationship building with partners and businesses, forecasts and trends for local economic development, and the ability to participate in Main Street's B&O Tax Credit Incentive Program.

ECONOMIC VITALITY



- A new Safety and Security Grant was launched in 2022 matching 75% up to \$1,000 for safety and security improvements to buildings in downtown Chehalis. Six grants have been awarded.
- The Facade Improvement Grant Program, launched in 2017, has awarded 40 grants to local businesses and property owners. Nine grants were awarded in 2022. Each award funds 75% of facade improvement costs up to \$2,500. Experience Chehalis has leveraged over \$450,000 in building improvements downtown since the program's inception.
- The Digital Marketing Grant Program launched in spring 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Thirteen grants have been awarded since its inception. It provides matching funds of 75% up to \$2500 to enhance downtown businesses' online presence. Six grants were awarded in 2022.

- Now in its fifth year of operation, our coworking space, Chehalis Coworks, continues to grow and prosper. Experience Chehalis manages Chehalis Coworks as a shared workspace for remote workers, travelers, and other business professionals. We host 25-30 renewing monthly members, on average, and 320+ community members who utilize daily/weekly rates and conference room rentals. High-speed fiber internet, a kitchen, conference room, outdoor courtyard, coffee/snacks, office supplies, and printer/copier are provided to our Coworks members.
- Strengthening our local economic development, Experience Chehalis works closely with community partners including the Port of Chehalis, Economic Alliance of Lewis County, Centralia-Chehalis Chamber of Commerce, and the Centralia Downtown Association.
- Experience Chehalis monitors vacancies downtown and promotes these listings online. Vacancy downtown is at an all-time low with only 1-2 spaces currently available for lease or purchase.
- The Community Priority Improvement Fund is offered to property owners with buildings in Chehalis recognized as deteriorated, dilapidated, unsafe, and/or obsolete. Two matching grants have been awarded to date.
- A working group was established in May to review opportunities on safety and security in our community, as well as decrease trespassing and loitering. As part of this effort, a Safety & Security FAQ guide was produced for local businesses in cooperation with the City of Chehalis Police Department.

DESIGN



- The Chehalis Clean Team launched in 2022 with the support of new volunteer energy to keep our community clean and litter-free. A new annual event, Chehalis Earth Day Community Clean-Up, kicked off the new program in cooperation with the City of Chehalis.
- In 2022, new art downtown included a mural installed at the National Frozen Foods Processing Plant featuring our area's rich agriculture industry and a utility box on Main Street highlighting local flora and fauna.
- Spring flowers were planted in Downtown Chehalis, partnering with Kaija's Garden & Pet and the City of Chehalis staff for the procurement, planting, and care of the flowers.
- Experience Chehalis has developed a self-guided art tour to lead visitors to local art installations and will launch in spring when weather improves.

- The Color Chehalis! Activity Book for Kids created in 2021 was updated and reprinted. The book features a children's version of the historic downtown walking guide. A copy coloring book was sent home to all Chehalis School district students, K-2nd grade.
- Investments in holiday decorations continue as we build an atmosphere of holiday spirit and cheer.





PROMOTION

- In March 2022, the Chehalis Community Renaissance Team officially became Experience Chehalis. The organization went through an in-depth rebranding process resulting in a new organization name, logo, and a suite of comprehensive branding tools.
- The Experience Chehalis website is an up-to-date resource promoting Chehalis' options to eat, stay, and play. The site has listings for all Chehalis retail shops, restaurants, lodging options, and attractions. It features itineraries, a robust calendar of events, and business resources to support local businesses.
- The Experience Chehalis Facebook page is actively managed with over 16,000 likes, and the more recently launched Experience Chehalis Instagram has over 1,400 followers.
- Online feature stories/blog posts promote special events and opportunities to experience Chehalis every month. We contract with a professional writer for stories and photos.
- The Experience Chehalis brochure was produced for local distribution to lodging operators, attractions, and businesses.
- The Historic Downtown Chehalis Walking Tour guide was distributed leading visitors to local historic sites.
- Chehalis promotional cards (5x7 inch) were distributed across Chehalis featuring visitor opportunities.
- A successful ChehalisFest event was held in July. Experience Chehalis worked with local businesses to help promote a car show, beer garden, vendor fair, live bands, kids' area, scavenger hunts, and new selfie stations.
- Experience Chehalis partnered with local businesses to create postcards featuring artwork and photography of local artists. Postcards will be offered to our businesses for purchase in 2023.
- Experience Chehalis featured Small Business Saturday and the holiday shopping season via a social media campaign, blog series, and new this year, Santa BINGO and several Santa mailboxes collecting letters to Santa. Over 40 children received a handwritten reply to their Santa letters.
- The Choose Local First campaign brings awareness to our local businesses, boosts our local economy, and fosters civic pride. Social media campaigns, blog posts, and radio ads support this effort.

IMPACT

Through a focus on placemaking, community engagement, and economic development, Experience Chehalis plays an important role in Chehalis creating a place where people can thrive. Quality-of-life programming and partnerships are aimed at social cohesion, development, and design to support a healthy local community.

We are all about people. Experience Chehalis fosters interpersonal connections, and this type of “social capital” generates stronger community ties and strengthens partnerships across our community. Our programs play a significant role in helping to create a sense of connection, identity, and pride; and a safe, vibrant, and inclusive Chehalis.

Our structure, strong community partnerships, and the volunteers at our core have allowed us to move forward with our efforts with vigor and determination. We look forward to continued success in 2023 accomplishing new programs, activities, and providing strategic and thoughtful support to our Chehalis community.



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