URBAN ASSETS ADDS VALUE TO MADISON’S VIBRANT COMMUNITY

The mission-driven consulting firm has helped expand community services and urban infrastructure.

Melissa Huggins, AICP, wanted to focus on projects in Madison after working as a principal at a consulting firm with all out-of-town clients. She didn’t feel connected to her community prompting her to start Urban Assets Consulting.

The idea for Urban Assets started with a mission: focus on projects that add value to the Madison community either through urban infrastructure or expanding community services.

With her wealth of experience as an urban planner, Melissa began to take on projects, anything from pre-development strategy to fundraising, later realizing she didn’t know how to build a business from scratch. Looking for a mentor, she reached out to Michelle Somes-Booher at the Small Business Development Center (SBDC).

“When you grow a business, if you’ve never done it before, everything is new,” Melissa said. “Michelle has been there the whole way advising what direction and sequence to take.”

Michelle’s first piece of advice: hire someone to help you. That’s when Quinn Heneghan, now the business manager and partner, joined. Melissa says she and Quinn balance each other out as they have different priorities and viewpoints in their roles at Urban Assets.

And the work keeps coming for Urban Assets. They’ve taken on projects determining and implementing land use opportunities for Ho-Chunk Gaming Madison, and assisting to develop a new home for Domestic Abuse Intervention Services (DAIS) on the east side of Madison.

Urban Assets has remained mission-driven, with support from Michelle, Quinn said. The mentorship has helped the pair find a balance between giving back to the community and practicing good business. They have been able to take on impactful and meaningful projects.

“We do what it takes for our clients,” Melissa said. “Non-profits are usually skinny on staff and with DAIS we took them through the entire process of building a new facility, even helping them pack and move in.”

“I don’t think we’d be where we are today without Michelle and the SBDC. Not only her guidance but we’ve also taken advantage of their classes building skills in leadership, communication, HR and taxes.” Michelle and the SBDC have fostered steady, thoughtful growth in Urban Assets, Quinn said. The mentorship and the services are focused on the big picture.

Now, they’re thinking about what’s next: a larger office and hiring another urban planner, beyond the four full-time employees currently on board.

“As we grow as an organization, we recognize our gaps,” Melissa said. “So we’ve taken advantage of the expertise and classes [at SBDC] so we remain a strong organization that’s attractive to employees.”

Thinking ahead to how they can next help Madison grow successfully, Urban Assets has begun working with Madison College to open a south Madison campus by fostering community engagement and discussions surrounding programming and design.

With larger projects and a new addition to the team to be hired soon, Urban Assets holds its deeply rooted mission of community understanding and advancement as a strong focus for what it can, and should, tackle next.