



# YOUR TOWN: Citizens' Institute on Rural Design

A National Endowment for the Arts Leadership Initiative

# Update

Vol. XVII, No. 2—Fall 2011

## *From the Editor*

This fall, four Your Town workshops were held across the country: in Coos Bay, Oregon; Harrodsburg, Kentucky; Mart, Texas; and Pendleton, South Carolina. Each workshop brought together local leaders to work on unique design and development problems, but all shared an enthusiasm, positive spirit, and commitment to making planning and design changes for the betterment of the community.

This newsletter includes descriptions of the four workshops as well as a special follow-up workshop in Elkhorn City, Kentucky. We also bring you up to date on National Endowment for the Arts evaluation of the Your Town program and the program solicitation currently posted for the next cooperative agreement.



*Figure 1: Workshop participants in Mart, Texas engaged in a house and street exercise.*

*Shelley*

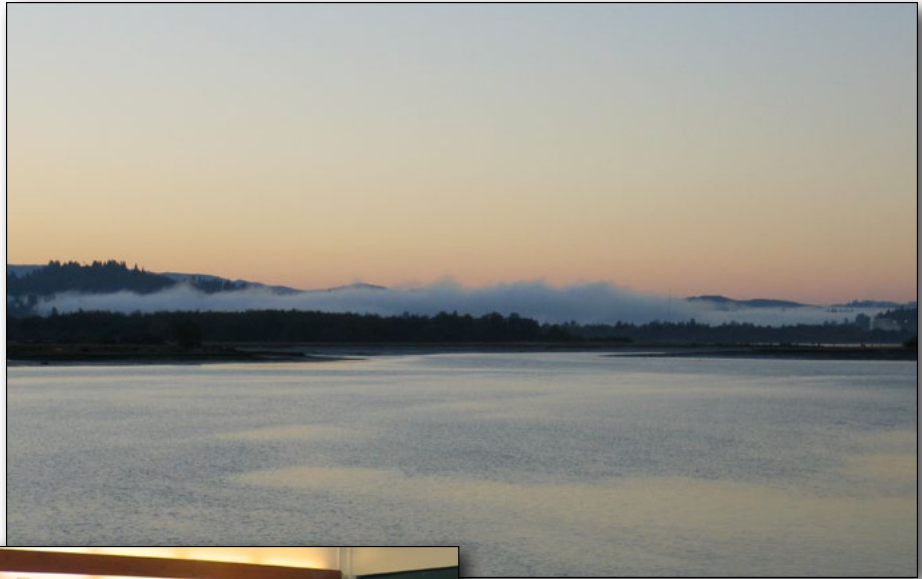
Editor  
Shelley S. Mastran



*Figures 2 & 3: Before and after design for an abandoned vacant lot in Harrodsburg, Kentucky.*

## Your Town: Coos Bay, Oregon

The workshop in Coos Bay, Oregon, organized by the South Coast Development Council and held October 12-14, focused on downtown revitalization of seven towns in Coos County. This beautiful region has suffered economic decline from changes in the timber industry, and its isolation from large cities and the Interstate has hampered growth. The area, however, has remarkable scenic, historic, and social assets to build upon. The workshop concentrated on strategies for enhancing the seven downtowns through design problems specific to Coos Bay and neighboring North Bend, both on the bay.



*Figure 4: Early morning mist over the hills around Coos Bay, Oregon.*

Highway 101 runs straight through the middle of both communities, and each is largely cut off from its waterfront by roads, a railroad, and industrial uses. Workshop speakers addressed strategies to tame a highway, focus retail, develop infill, and improve the waterfront. Scott Day of Urban Development Services in San Antonio was the keynote speaker and informed much of the workshop with his



*Figure 5: Workshop participants brainstorm ideas for downtown enhancement.*

downtown development expertise. Todd Scott of King County, Washington and Mary Bosch of Marketek, Inc. in Atlanta, similarly provided excellent insights into second-floor space, design guidelines, and marketing. At the end of the workshop, participants signed on to pursue unanswered questions toward implementation. We look forward to hearing about next steps in Coos Bay.

## Your Town: Harrodsburg, Kentucky

The Harrodsburg, Kentucky workshop, held October 13-15, was coordinated by Dr. David Arnold of St. Catharine College, and Professors Ned Crankshaw and Allison Carl-White of the University of Kentucky. Harrodsburg, population 8,014 and founded in 1774, is the oldest city in the Commonwealth and is located in the heart of Kentucky's Bluegrass Region. The workshop took place quite literally on Main Street; the lectures were held in the Ragged Edge Theater and



*Figure 6: Main Street, Harrodsburg, Kentucky.*



**Figure 7:** The theater where workshop lectures were held.

the breakout design groups met in a church and in empty store fronts. The meals were provided by restaurants on Main Street. The location on Main Street created a sense of energy in the community, which resulted in many non-participants hearing and seeing the activities. The design problems addressed included bikability, walkability, gateways, wayfinding, and historic districts. Although the design and planning ideas were clearly generated by local citizens, the final visual presentations demonstrated a level of refinement not possible

without the involvement of faculty and students from the University of Kentucky departments of Landscape Architecture and Interior Design. A highlight of the workshop was a presentation by Tim Belcher, president

of the Elkhorn City Area Heritage Council, Inc. Tim coordinated a Your Town workshop in Elkhorn City, Kentucky in 2005. Elkhorn has a population of fewer than 1,000, yet has been able to implement many of the design and planning ideas generated in the workshop.



**Figure 8:** Left: Harrodsburg group meeting in a vacant store front.



**Figure 9:** Above: view of participants (way finding team) conducting field work in Harrodsburg, Kentucky.

## Your Town: Pendleton, South Carolina

The Your Town workshop in Pendleton, organized by the a.LINE.ments studio in Landscape Architecture at nearby Clemson University, brought together more than 30 community members around two major design issues: Pendleton's historic downtown square that has been compromised by the widening of a state highway along one side of the community, and the entrance into town, which features a cluster of strip centers and auto-oriented uses.

Ed McMahon provided a stirring keynote address to an evening audience, and Pratt Cassity of the University of Georgia and Craig Barton of the University of Virginia were among other key speakers.

The Pendleton workshop had a heavy emphasis on graphic design and visual representation of their ideas. Participants worked extensively in five small groups and produced colorful drawings of the improved

town square and signage for the gateway into town. The town has been struggling with these design issues for years, and the workshop provided a forum for bringing together disparate community perspectives, including developers and business owners, to discuss realistic possibilities. The Clemson students will provide Pendleton with detailed drawings resulting from the design problems and a list of ideas that participants had for next steps to move forward.

## Your Town: Mart, Texas

The Mart, Texas Your Town workshop was held November 3-5. Mart, once known as Willow Springs, is a small incorporated city 18 miles east of Waco. The workshop was coordinated by Paula Gerstenblatt, School of Social Work, and Lynn Osgood, Community and Regional Planning, both of the University of Texas, Austin. Mart reached its heyday around 1929 when it was a thriving regional commercial center, but decreased rail service and changing economics resulted in a slow decline. Today, Mart's population of 2,415 faces challenges common to many rural southern towns: a high concentration of poverty, a history of racial segregation, and a deteriorating built environment. The Your Town workshop built upon the Mart Community Project (MCP), a program that started in 2010 and is designed to inspire individual and community transformation, promote economic revitalization, and encourage educational innovation. The MCP, funded by the Mildred Dulaney Foundation, is driven by a unique collaboration among residents of

Mart, international artists Muhsana Ali and Amadou Kane Sy, the Baylor University Oral History Institute, and the departments of Social Work and Rhetoric and Writing at the University of Texas at Austin.



**Figure 10:** Participants acting out the design issues such as vacant lots.

The workshop was held at the Summers Mill Conference and Retreat center about 30 miles outside of Mart. The workshop focused on the intersection between community arts, community development, and planning, and tackled three primary design challenges. The first was to define a vision for the future Central Business District along Texas Avenue, including streetscape design, preservation and

restoration of historic buildings, tourism, and gateways to the community. The second focused on creative solutions to vacant lots and how they can be turned into beautiful and productive assets for the neighborhood. Finally, the group tackled the ways an abandoned high school football field could be reenvisioned as a public space that touches on the themes of health, history, and community.

A highlight of the workshop was the involvement of artists, theater performance, and storytelling as methods for engaging participants in the creative process.



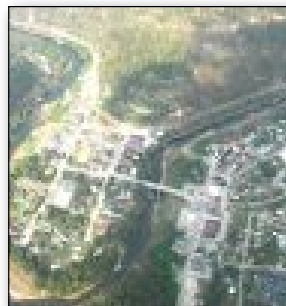
**Figure 11:** Clay exercise.

## Elkhorn City, Kentucky, Follow-Up Workshop

In early December, the Elkhorn City Area Heritage Council held a one-and-a-half day follow-up to the Your Town workshop it held in 2005. This mini-workshop focused on two related economic development opportunities: enhancing the role of the Artists Collaborative Theater that features local talent, and developing the potential whitewater industry. Elkhorn City, on the Russell Fork of the Big Sandy River

on the Kentucky-Virginia border, is a destination for whitewater enthusiasts, but the town has suffered economically with the decline of the coal industry and is hoping to build on its arts and sports potential to lure visitors. Peggy Pings, with the National Park Service's Rivers, Trails

and Conservation Assistance program, helped facilitate the workshop.



**Figure 12:** Elkhorn City straddles both sides of the Russell Fork of the Big Sandy River, and whitewater sports are integral to the town's well-being.

## Updates From Previous Workshops

### **Blairsville, Pennsylvania**

Blairsville is a town of about 3,300 people on the Conemaugh River in western Pennsylvania. Although the river makes a “U” around three sides of the town, there is only limited river access. Blairsville held a Your Town workshop in 2006 focused on trail and riverfront development and has been pursuing grants and other initiatives. Now the town has the funding in place to build a three-mile trail that will run along the waterfront and loop through town, reconnecting townspeople and visitors to the Conemaugh.

### **Eads, Kiowa County, Colorado**

Since the Your Town workshop in 2004, the town of Eads has purchased 800 acres of property south of town (the focus of a design problem) and is developing it for tax revenue but also as a nature trail leading to Jackson’s Pond. On downtown’s Maine Street (yes, Maine not Main), buildings are being rehabilitated, and the town will soon boast a cultural events center, senior citizens’ center, and the visitors’ center for the National

Park Service Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site, located nearby.

### **Douglas, Michigan**

Among the issues raised at the Your Town workshop in Douglas last summer was the role of the arts in economic development and the relationship between Douglas and the neighboring town of Saugatuck across the Kalamazoo River. Those issues have both been addressed with the recent partnering of 24 artists from the two communities in developing a 15-by-10 foot painting that was entered in ArtPrize in Grand Rapids, MI. The painting, consisting of 24 separate pieces of canvas, depicts a scene along the river that was painted by a renowned school of artists decades ago. For more information, see [www.saugatuckdouglasart.com](http://www.saugatuckdouglasart.com).

### Your Town Evaluation

As mentioned in our previous newsletter, the Endowment is conducting a formal evaluation of the Your Town: Citizens’ Institute on Rural Design program. RMC Research Corporation of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, has been hired to

conduct the evaluation. It will be done through a series of telephone interviews with previous workshop coordinators, keynote speakers, and faculty, as well as focus-group interviews with former workshop participants. Interviewees will be selected to represent all regions of the U.S. and workshops over the last seven years. If you are contacted, we hope you will be a willing participant.

### Your Town Program Solicitation

As one of the Endowment’s signature design leadership programs, Your Town: The Citizens’ Institute on Rural Design is managed by the NEA design staff in partnership with a cooperator. Every few years the Endowment is required to open up the opportunity for organizations to compete for the cooperator role to coordinate all Your Town activities nationally.

A program solicitation was posted in mid-November and applications are due on January 5, 2012 at 11:59PM Eastern. For more information visit <http://www.arts.gov/grants/apply/YourTown/index.html>, or contact Jamie Hand, Design Specialist, at 202-692-5566 or [hand@arts.gov](mailto:hand@arts.gov).



**ART WORKS.**  
arts.gov