



YOUR TOWN:

Citizens' Institute on Rural Design

Update

Design Program - National Endowment for the Arts

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From the Editor

Richard Hawks and I are pleased to report that we've successfully wrapped up another round of workshops and are getting ready for the next round. This summer, Your Town workshops were held in Eads, Colorado; Driggs, Idaho; Ottawa, Kansas; and Blue Mountain, Mississippi. They focused on a range of issues that many rural communities share, regardless of location and size—including downtown revitalization and redesign, heritage tourism, and containment of sprawl. Reports on selected workshops are included in this newsletter.

We sent an RFP inviting interest in producing a workshop next year to a wide audience and expect to receive many excellent proposals. With the Endowment, we plan to select the locations of workshops for 2005 by early January.

Shelley Mastran, Editor



Blue Mountain workshop participants sketch out potential enhancements to the community.

Your Town: Blue Mountain, Mississippi

Blue Mountain, Mississippi, is located in the north-central part of the state, a little more than an hour's drive from Memphis and not far from Oxford, Tupulo, and Corinth. With a population of less than 500, Blue Mountain is nevertheless home to a historic women's college and hopes to play a role in the revitalization of the region. The theme of the Blue Mountain Your Town workshop was "Creating Connections: The Mississippi Hills Heritage Area."

Coordinated by the Carl Small Town Center at Mississippi State University in cooperation with the Mississippi Hills Heritage Area, the workshop focused on ways to enhance and connect the multiple resources of Blue Mountain and the surrounding region to provide a base for expanded heritage tourism. Speakers delivered inspirational messages on the topics of authenticity of architectural design, new

urbanism in small-town settings, heritage marketing, and rail-trails.

Like many communities, the small downtown of Blue Mountain has a number of abandoned buildings and some struggling businesses. Yet it is adjacent to Blue Mountain College; along a busy north-south highway; and close to Holly Springs National Forest. With some visionary investment of money, time, and TLC, Blue Mountain can become a commercial focus for the college and local community. Much of the energy of the workshop centered on strategies to improve the downtown and link it with the heritage resources of northeast Mississippi—including William Faulkner's history, the Civil War, musical traditions, and natural springs and forests. Workshop participants devised trails to connect the town with the National Forest and proposed a rail-trail along a nearby abandoned rail line.



A fire recently destroyed three structures on Driggs' Main Street. The local community turned the vacant lots into a "bison in the bason" sculpture park. Sometimes "programming" space is the first step toward recovery, including this lecture by Ed McMahon during the Your Town dinner.

Your Town: Driggs, Idaho

Jeff Speck, the new Director of Design at the Endowment, attended his first Your Town workshop in Driggs, Idaho, July 22-24. The City of Driggs, at altitude 6,200 feet, is home to approximately 1,300 people. Expanding its role as a bedroom community for Jackson, Wyoming, and other resort towns, Driggs experienced a 74% growth rate between 1990 and 2000.

The workshop was held about 20 miles from town at the Grand Targhee Ski Resort in the breathtaking Grand Teton Mountains. Doug Self, the Planning and Zoning Administrator in Driggs, gathered a terrific faculty and ran an organized workshop. Ed McMahon (see featured article in this newsletter) gave an

inspiring talk on the importance of design to quality of life. Some of the workshop problems focused on issues unique to the Mountain West and particularly to communities dependent on largely single-season resort economies. Jeff Speck rolled up his sleeves and put his new urbanist background to work in an impromptu charrette exploring alternative designs for a new commercial development proposed on Main Street.

Doug Self says, "The Driggs Your Town Workshop imparted not only a new palette of ideas and design skills, but also a wave of positive and creative energy that has carried the community into several exciting new initiatives over the last four months.

Before the workshop was officially ended, the city had contracted with one of the core faculty members, Wendy McClure,

Chair of the University of Idaho Architecture Department, to utilize a student team to address several design problems in downtown Driggs. During the workshop, Wendy had presented student design assistance as an economical method for developing conceptual designs and exploring alternatives. She told participants that 'student projects provide highly visual information in the form of digital and physical models and drawings that can help a community better visualize alternatives and potential outcomes.' This has certainly rung true for Driggs, as we now have several design alternatives for a new community center, including models, site plans, elevation drawings and floor plans, that have inspired community dialogue and involvement in the project.

Another initiative taken by the city is the creation of a Design Review Subcommittee
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tee to revise the city's design standards and incorporate concepts related by design professionals during the workshop. Working closely with this subcommittee is a newly created Urban Renewal Agency, which will encourage development of vacant properties and restoration of historic buildings. The members of both entities were participants at the Your Town Workshop and are carrying ideas and principles from the workshop into their respective plans and projects.

The city has continued to cooperate with community groups such as Valley Advocates for Responsible Development and Teton Valley Trails and Pathways to bring in design experts, such as Dan Burden of Walkable Communities, to address street and streetscape design. The city has also pursued and been awarded a grant from the National Park Service Rivers and Trails Program to develop a Greenway Plan along Teton Creek, one of the common planning elements proposed by each workshop group."

Your Town: Ottawa, Kansas

On August 5-7, the Ottawa, Kansas, Main Street Association hosted a workshop on the Ottawa University Campus. Located in a historically agricultural region in eastern Kansas, Ottawa has experienced substantial growth in recent years as nearby Kansas City and Lawrence sprawl outward. Mary Allison Haynie, the Ottawa Main Street Executive Director, gathered an excellent faculty and speakers, including Randall Arendt, Peter Swift, Dennis Domer, and Carroll Van West. New faculty to Your Town included Al Zelinka and Susan Jackson of the Urban Design Studio. They introduced their community design process *Place Making on a Budget*. The design issues included a highway by-pass with a focus on entry corridors; conservation design and new urbanism; Main Street revitalization; and heritage tourism.

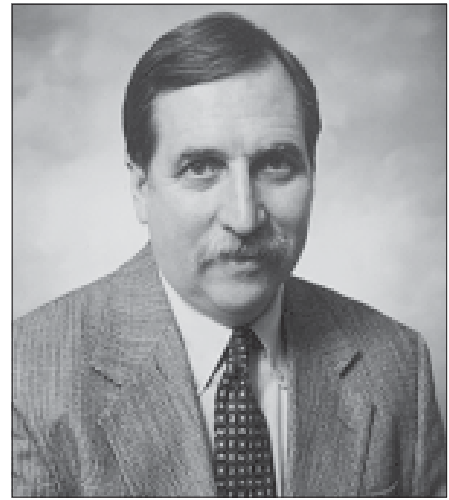
Mary Allison Haynie says, "On Wednesday, November 10, 2004, the Ottawa

Main Street Association hosted a Your Town reunion with presentations to the public on the design ideas for the intersection of First and Walnut and Haley Park. Also, efforts are underway to secure local ownership of several properties at the intersection of First and Walnut so that public and private improvements can take place on them.

The second presentation described the process, boundaries, and logistics of creating a downtown commercial historic district to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Ottawa Main Street has applied for a Historic Preservation Fund Grant from the Kansas State Historic Preservation Office in order to hire a consultant to complete the nomination. Our goals are to continue press coverage of the activities and ideas generated from the Your Town workshop. A one year communications project concerning the groups' study topics will continue in order to broaden public support and understanding for design ideas and planning processes that will support and enhance good design in the community. Next, we hope to engage the Youth Action Council, Art Guild, and Arts Council in promoting some of the design projects involving public art."

News from the NEA

2004 was a busy year at the National Endowment for the Arts, with applications in the design field up significantly from 2003. In addition, through its *Challenge America* grants category, the Endowment funded workshops for two extra *Your Town* applicants above and beyond the four budgeted through the program itself. *The Mayors' Institute on City Design* remains a thriving leadership initiative of the Endowment; mayors attended this past year from over fifty cities including Anchorage, Denver, Miami, Minneapolis, Seattle, and Washington D.C. Finally, the Endowment is in the process of selecting a cooperator to administer its newest design initiative, a Governors' Institute on the topic of smart growth. With any luck, this initiative will join the *Mayors' Institute* and *Your Town* as an ongoing program with a legacy of positive influence.



Ed McMahon

Spotlight on Ed McMahon

Many of you have heard Ed McMahon speak—either at a Your Town workshop or some other conference or event. Just this year Ed delivered the keynote address in Eads, Colorado, and Driggs, Idaho. His enthusiastic message about how we can plan, design, and build better, and his many examples of where good development is being done today, are welcome in rural, suburban, and urban communities.

Ed recently joined the staff of the Urban Land Institute (ULI) in Washington, D.C., as Charles Fraser Senior Resident Fellow for Sustainable Development. Ed's charge will be to conduct research and educational efforts related to green and sustainable development practices. ULI hopes that Ed will help the organization bring environmentally responsible development closer to the mainstream and improve development patterns on the urban fringe.

Ed left his position as Vice President of The Conservation Fund to join ULI. At the Fund, Ed headed the American Greenways Program and published numerous articles and books, including the recent *Land Conservation Funding* (Island Press, 2004), *Better Models for Commercial Development* (Conservation Fund, 2004), and *Better Models for Development in Delaware* (Conservation Fund, 2004).

Ed's change in position will not alter his commitment to the Your Town program. In fact, we plan to have him speak at all the workshops next year.

New Publications from the National Trust

Preservation Books, an arm of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, is advertising a list of new publications that may be of interest and help to your community preservation efforts. These include:

Layperson's Guide to Preservation Law: Federal, State, and Local Laws Governing Historic Resources (revised and updated 2004) - \$15.00

Preserving Rosenwald Schools - \$8.00

Protecting Older and Historic Barns through Barn Preservation Programs - \$6.00

Protecting Older Neighborhoods through Conservation District Programs - \$15.00

Road Trips Through History: A Collection of Essays From Preservation Magazine - \$15.95

What Style Is It? A Guide to American Architecture - \$17.95

These and more can be ordered from Preservation Books at: www.preservationbooks.org or by calling 1-202-588-6296. If you are a member of the National Trust, you will receive a discount from the above-quoted prices.

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