



YOUR TOWN: Citizens' Institute on Rural Design

Update

Design Program - National Endowment for the Arts

Vol. XI, No. 2 - Fall 2005

From the Editor

Periodically the National Endowment for the Arts is required to re-bid the cooperative agreement to direct Your Town: the Citizens' Institute on Rural Design. Earlier in 2005 the Endowment issued an RFP and received bids to manage the program.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation, which has co-directed Your Town with the Faculty of Landscape Architecture at SUNY Syracuse since 1991, decided to focus its rural programmatic efforts on a new initiative funded by the Kellogg Foundation and opted not to re-bid Your Town. Instead, SUNY partnered with the Carl Small Town Center at Mississippi State University and Shelley Mastran, editor of this newsletter, to submit a bid. Our proposal was accepted, and we are already working to shape plans for next year's workshops.

Richard Hawks and I are pleased to be working with Kimberly Brown, director of the Carl Small Town Center (CSTC). (Kimberly helped oversee the Your Town workshop in Blue Mountain, Miss., last year, and the Small Town Center coordinated the Mississippi Delta Your Town in 2000.) The CSTC is a non-profit research, design, and planning organization affiliated with the College of Architecture, Art, and Design at Mississippi State. CSTC is dedicated to studying, addressing, and improving the architectural conditions of Mississippi's small towns.

(continued on page 2)

■ Your Town: Lewes, Delaware

Sussex County, Delaware, one of the fastest growing counties on the Eastern seaboard, was the site of a Your Town workshop hosted by the Lewes Historical Society in Lewes, September 7-9, 2005. The purpose of the workshop was to bring key leaders from multiple interest groups across the county together to reach some consensus on the future growth of Sussex County—what to preserve, where growth should go, and what it should look like.



The Lewes workshop was notable for the high caliber of speakers who presented. Delaware's Governor Ruth Minner addressed participants and answered numerous questions for nearly an hour. Connie Holland, director of the State Planning Office, attended the workshop, as did LeeAnn Walling, Policy Advisor to the Governor. Michael Kinsley of the Rocky Mountain Institute and Judge William Chandler, long-time county resident, delivered keynote addresses. Ed McMahon of the Urban Land Institute, Jeff Speck, Director of Design at the Endowment, and A. Elizabeth Watson, executive director of the Stories of the Chesapeake Heritage Area, were among those who gave presentations.



Lewes workshop participants work hard to design Sussex County's future

The outcome of the three-day workshop was a new conceptual plan for Sussex County. Working in small groups and then in a plenary session, participants came to agree on broad areas of the county that should be kept in agriculture or other preserved open space; targeted areas for redevelopment and development, including new town centers; and transportation linkages.

As follow-up to the workshop, a self-selected group of participants will continue to meet and share the conceptual plan with town officials and various interest groups across Sussex County. The goal is to inform the comprehensive plan update scheduled for next year.

(From the Editor, page 1)

Kimberly has a Master of Architecture degree from Yale University and Bachelor of Architecture from Mississippi State. She has worked for architecture firms in New York and Chicago and has participated in numerous architectural and planning projects.

For 2006, we plan to solicit interest in four more Your Town workshops, including one specially targeted for rural communities in Mississippi and Louisiana that were damaged or destroyed by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. In addition, we will be

developing a Your Town Web site (long overdue)



Shelley Mastran, Editor

■ Your Town: Spring Green, Wisconsin

The Wintergreen Conference Center in the hills of Spring Green, Wisconsin, near Taliesin, was the site of a recent Your Town workshop, September 28-30, 2005. The focus of the workshop was *regionalism*—building a vision for the future across jurisdictional boundaries.

Organized by Alicia Acken and Sue Thering of the University of Wisconsin (River Falls and Madison), the workshop brought together speakers and participants from across the state to wrestle with issues of visioning, planning, and designing across local boundaries. The keynote speaker was Parris Glendening, former Governor of Maryland, whose Smart Growth initiatives have won wide recognition and awards and who is helping to spearhead the new Governors' Institute on Community Design (see article in this newsletter). Glendening provided inspiration to Your Town Spring Green on interjurisdictional cooperation and better ways to grow and develop.

The workshop was based on a hypothetical Your Town—Green Valley, Forestville, and the Town of Prairieville. Spring Green's participants were enthusiastic in exercising their new design skills, and picked up magic markers and trace more eagerly than most Your Town participants are willing to do. Their design solutions were colorful, creative, and insightful.

■ Your Town: Purcellville, Virginia

In June, a three-day charrette, "Downtown in Motion," took place in Loudoun County's Purcellville, one of the fastest growing areas in the U.S. Funded by the Endowment's Design Program, the charrette permitted town leaders, businesses, property owners and citizens with the help of Hill Studio, a talented design team, to develop specific design concepts for compatible infill development and redevelopment within the town's historic downtown core. The charrette also provided owners of historic downtown buildings with ideas for facade improvements that would enhance the value of their

property and return the facades to more historically appropriate designs.

Property owners and potential investors have already begun discussions to begin implementing some of the ideas from the charrette, and the town is submitting a TEA-21 grant application for the first phase of streetscape improvements based on charrette plans. The Purcellville City Council also approved an historic corridor overlay zone over the arterial entrances into town, and survey work is getting underway for the Purcellville Historic District State and National Register nominations.



One of Hill Studio's conceptual drawings of infill design in Purcellville

The Governors' Institute on Community Design

The Governors' Institute on Community Design is a new initiative to support governors' leadership in good community design and innovative planning. Created in partnership with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the Institute consists of a series of workshops that initially will be held up to four times a year, pairing governors and their cabinets with top planning experts and practitioners to identify strategies for well-designed planning which will have a positive effect on American life.

The Governors' Institute builds on the success of the NEA Mayors' Institute on City Design (MICD), which since 1986 has gathered mayors and designers to generate ideas on better city planning. The MICD has graduated more than 675

mayors and resulted in many specific physical improvements, from restored waterfronts to downtown revitalization projects. Through the Governors' Institute, the NEA hopes to inspire state leaders to capitalize on their roles as chief state "designers" to identify innovative design approaches that improve the way people live in cities, suburbs, and countryside. "For 20 years, the NEA has championed excellence in public design at a city level through our Mayors' Institute," said NEA Chairman Dana Gioia. "Today we are delighted now to expand our program to the state level with the Governors' Institute."

Former Governors Christine Todd Whitman of New Jersey and Parris N. Glendening of Maryland will spearhead

the new Governors' Institute on Community Design. Whitman and Glendening serve as co-chairs of the advisory council to Smart Growth America, a coalition of nearly 100 non-profit organizations working to support citizen-driven planning that coordinates development, transportation, revitalization of older areas, and preservation of open space and the environment. Former Governor Angus King of Maine, who is working closely with GrowSmart Maine, also has agreed to be part of the Institute's future workshops.

For more information on the Governors' Institute, call 202-207-3355, ext. 24, e-mail hregoning@govinstitute.org or jfrece@umd.edu, or visit www.govinstitute.org.

Your Town: Alabama

YourTown Alabama is based directly on the Endowment's Your Town: Citizens' Institute on Rural Design initiative. Alabama's first YourTown workshop was held in June 1998 as a direct result of the efforts of an ad-hoc steering committee convened by Paul Kennedy of the Cawaco Resource Conservation & Development Council in partnership with the National Endowment for the Arts' YourTown Program. Paul had participated in a YourTown workshop in Geor-

gia and saw how effectively this concept could support Alabama's traditional regional planning and development resources that were stretched to capacity.

Like the national program, YourTown Alabama was conceived to provide a forum in which grass roots decision-makers and technical assistance providers could share their ideas and learn new techniques to aid their work in communities. The first workshop, an unequivocal success, led to a second workshop and, in spring 1999, to the creation of YourTown

Alabama, a nonprofit organization dedicated to an ongoing program of workshops across the state.

Since that time, more than 300 citizens, elected officials and decision makers from more than 100 communities have participated in the program. Participants have returned to their communities invigorated and armed with tools for capturing the potential of their special place in Alabama.

For more information, see www.yourtownalabama.org.

Updates from Recent Workshops

Elkhorn City, Kentucky (April 2005) Peggy Pings (NPS) reports that the Blue Line Trail in downtown Elkhorn City has been completed and was dedicated on October 8th. All three artists who had worked with residents on the trail, Suzanne Lacy, Susan Steinman, and Yutaka Kobayashi, were in town for the event. They cut the ribbon with the Elkhorn City Area Heritage Council President Tim Belcher and State Senator Ray Jones.

On October 14-16, the Blue Line Trail was featured in an international environ-

mental artist exhibit and conference entitled "Groundworks: Environmental Collaboration in Contemporary Art" held at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, Pa. The Your Town program was highlighted to the audience of more than 60 environmental artists.

Block Island, Rhode Island (June 2005) - James Bailey, a presenter at the Block Island Your Town, gave an updated version of his presentation to the annual meeting of the Block Island Conservancy in October. Bailey has developed a computer program that provides a detailed

look at how development proposals would affect the landscape and viewsheds of Block Island. He argued against the importation of mainland values and blockbuster houses that would destroy the historic character of the island.

According to Mary Newhouse (Scenic Block Island), her organization and the Block Island Conservancy are working to get a professional town planner for the island. If they are successful, the planner can lead the way in applying Commu-

(continued on page 4)

nity Viz and other visual tools introduced at the Your Town workshop. Meanwhile, the local historical society is working with the Historic District Commission to inventory all historic buildings in preparation for expanding the historic district.

Eads, Colorado (June 2004) – Janet Frederick tells us that the town of Eads received a technical assistance grant through the Colorado Department of Local Affairs and Colorado Community Revitalization Association to participate in their Community Revitalization Partnership Program, a one-year pilot to provide assistance relating to downtown. A group of design experts will come to assess the downtown and make recommendations for improvement.

Kiowa County received Great Outdoors Colorado grant funds to renovate Horseshoe Park, located on Maine Street in Eads. New horseshoe pits, shuffleboard areas, outdoor chess tables, landscaping and lighting will all be installed.

The Kiowa County Economic Development Foundation formed the “Downtown & Around Town” Action Team, to work on revitalization projects throughout the county. Since August, six buildings have been painted and awnings installed on another.

The Kiowa County Historic Preservation Council has formed and begun an inventory of historic resources. The group is also working with the Eads Youth Council in hopes of restoring the historic theatre on Maine Street.

Driggs, Idaho (July 2004) – According to Doug Self, community leaders are applying lessons learned from the Your Town workshop in the preservation and revitalization of the historic downtown core. The city has posted an RFQ for new commercial design standards to protect the district’s historic character and to ensure new development is safe and attractive for pedestrian access. Driggs is also continuing with a plan to redesign Main Street and has received preliminary funding of \$3.5 million from the Idaho Transportation Department to widen sidewalks, add bulb-outs and bike lanes and to improve the street’s general appearance.

Meanwhile, as new residential pressure continues in the Teton Creek corridor, Driggs has partnered with the Teton Regional Land Trust and federal agencies to hold a landowner workshop that will focus on design innovations for protecting creek resources, including the dwindling Yellowstone cutthroat trout.

Ottawa, Kansas (August 2004) - Mary Allison Haynie reports that the National Register Nomination for downtown Ottawa will be finalized in February 2006.

Blue Mountain, Mississippi (September 2004) – Kent Bain writes that the Mississippi Hills Heritage Area initiative received \$100,000 over three years from the Mississippi Development Authority’s Tourism Division. Meanwhile, efforts continue to designate the region a National Heritage Area.

NATIONAL
ENDOWMENT
FOR THE
ARTS

Your Town National Center

c/o Faculty of Landscape Architecture
SUNY ESF
331 Marshall Hall; 1 Forestry Drive
Syracuse, New York 13210
(315) 470-6544