



YOUR TOWN: Citizens' Institute on Rural Design

Design Program - National Endowment for the Arts

Update

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From the Editor

As 2007 has ended, we have brought another round of Your Town workshops to conclusion. It was a busy year for Your Town, with workshops in Weld County, Colorado; Columbia, North Carolina; Granbury, Texas, and finally Plains, Georgia, famous home of former President Jimmy Carter. We described the Weld County workshop in our previous newsletter and share descriptions of the other three in this newsletter.

In mid-November, we issued an RFP for another round of workshops in 2008. The deadline for proposals has been extended to February 4, 2008, and the RFP is available on the website. We hope to receive another excellent round. We'll keep you posted on the sites selected via our web site, www.yourtowndesign.org.

Shelley

Editor

Shelley S. Mastran

Eastern North Carolina Workshop

In early September, the 4-H Center near Columbia, North Carolina, on the banks of Albemarle Sound, was the setting for the Eastern North Carolina Your Town. The venue was certainly among the most attractive places we've ever had a workshop. The 4-H Center had light and spacious meeting space, and participants could wander outside, down to the gazebo and docks along the water.

Coordinated by Laura Williamson of the Foundation of Renewal for Eastern North Carolina (FoRENC), the workshop brought together residents of several small towns from the region: Edenton, Hertford, Plymouth, Murfreesboro, and Columbia. Most of these towns are located on the water (a river or sound), and all are historic, but most of them are struggling to redevelop their downtowns and bring residents and visitors to appreciate their remarkable settings.

Ed McMahon delivered the keynote address with his classic slide presentation, using dozens and dozens of images to suggest strategies for conservation and better ways for communities to build. The audience

really appreciated his remarks, particularly his examples of franchise design that breaks the typical mold. Other noteworthy speakers included Tom Hylton, author of *Save Our Land, Save Our Towns* and Kris Krider, planner with Davidson, N.C.

A major focus of the workshops was strategies for introducing diversified housing into small rural communities—whether as infill or redevelopment. A panel of four speakers offered examples of such affordable housing strategies, from new urbanist communities with a specific affordable housing component to Hurricane Katrina homes to rehabilitating dilapidated properties. These creative examples offered inspiration to local N.C. residents.



Workshop participants gather along Albemarle Sound in early evening for social hour.

Your Town Workshops, con't.

The three design problems challenged participants not only on diversified housing but also on integrating mixed use into their downtowns and building on the natural amenities of eastern N.C. communities to enhance tourism and quality of life.

ForENC plans to provide each participating town with the outcomes of the design problem sessions in written format and will work with them to enlarge and enhance the plans produced. At least one town, Plymouth, expressed interest in bringing some of the speakers back for a mini-workshop for the towns' elected officials and others.

Granbury, Texas Workshop

Representatives of more than 15 rural towns and communities in Texas participated in a Your Town workshop in September coordinated by Historic Fort Worth. The workshop was held in Granbury, 35 miles southwest of Fort Worth. Most of the participants came from small towns south and southwest of Fort Worth, an area that is experienc-

ing diverse challenges caused by rapid growth and suburban sprawl associated with one of the most rapidly growing cities in the country.

Mary Saltarelli of Historic Fort Worth worked with Michelle Weaver Jones, of the Carl Small Town Center at Mississippi State, and Daniel Carey, director of the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Southwest produce the workshop.

The roster of speakers was as expansive and impressive as Texas skies can be. It included Ed McMahon, Pratt Cassity, Fritz Steiner, Fernando Costa, Daniel Carey, Marcel Quimby, Dennis Wilson, and Kimberly Brown. Ed spoke in Fort Worth as the featured speaker at Historic Fort Worth's annual Samuel Benton Cantey III Historic Preservation Lecture to an audience of about 150 people. "I was on the edge of my seat," wrote one participant. "So much of what he said resonated with me and my colleagues. If Mr. McMahon could speak to every community in Texas, we would be the No. 1 tourism state." Pratt's presentation was similarly lauded with such compliments

as, "fabuloso," "excellent," "powerful," and "entertaining."

The small-group work on design problems was the highlight of the workshop. The problems dealt with infill development on a vacant church property located near Granbury's courthouse square; mixed-use zoning and transportation designs; and the development and conservation of rural open space outside Granbury. All of the drawings and problem solutions prepared by workshop participants were presented to the mayor of Granbury by Historic Fort Worth for the town's use.

Plains, Georgia Workshop

The last time Your Town was in Plains, Georgia, was 2002, with a workshop focused on the issues faced by historically African American communities. At that workshop, President Jimmy Carter suggested a future Your Town be focused on the Latino communities in Georgia. From December 13-16, 2007, Su Cuidad (Your Town) hosted 25 community leaders from throughout Georgia. Pratt Cassity, Public Service and Outreach Director from the University of Georgia School of Environmental Design, coordinated the workshop. Joining Pratt were groups of colleagues from UGA that specialized in the issues facing the Latino community.

The workshop speakers and exercises focused on building civic capacity and leadership skills within the Latino community. The design problem addressed the inclusion of manufactured housing into existing community fabric.

Texas workshop participants working on design problems.



Your Town Workshops, con't.

Maurice Cox, the Endowment's new Director of Design, attended the entire workshop. This was Mr. Cox's first Your Town experience, and it was wonderful that he could see the workshop in its entirety. The keynote speaker cancelled at the last moment, and Maurice volunteered to speak. The participants all found his presentation inspirational and perfect for the needs of the workshop.

As we had hoped, President Jimmy Carter stopped by to say hello to the workshop participants. Pratt gave President Carter a symbolic key to Your Town. At 83 years old, President Carter rode his bicycle to the workshop, reinforcing everyone's desire to create more walkable and livable communities.



Pratt Cassity gives President Jimmy Carter an honorary key to Your Town.

Maurice Cox, New Director of Design at the Endowment



Plains, GA Your Town participants including Maurice Cox, first row far right.

In October, the Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts announced the appointment of Maurice Cox as Director of Design. Maurice started part-time until January when he will be full time. He has been Associate Professor of Architecture at the University of Virginia, School of Architecture.

Maurice has a distinguished career in public service as a member of the Charlottesville, VA, City Council. He served for two years as Mayor of Charlottesville.

Educated at the Cooper Union School of Architecture, he recently completed a Loeb Fellowship at Harvard University's Graduate School of Design.

Maurice's first Your Town was the recent one in Plains, Georgia. Check out the Endowment web site for more information on Maurice, see <http://www.arts.gov/news/news07/Cox.html>.

Community Updates from Previous Workshops

Block Island, Rhode Island – Since the Your Town workshop on Block Island in 2005, the community hired a town planner, Jane Weidman, and is making strides toward limiting inappropriate development on the island. The Planning Board is working on new zoning laws that would restrict the building mass and height of residential homes relative to lot size. The Board is also considering a cap on the size of new homes, regardless of lot size. It is planning to institute a coastal overlay that will limit building height along the coast and adjacent to conservation land.

Blue Mountain, Mississippi – The North Mississippi Hills Heritage Alliance has developed a comprehensive plan and launched a new web site: www.mississippihills.org. It has introduced Congressional legislation to be designated a National Heritage Area. The Your Town workshop, held in Blue Mountain in September 2004, has been credited as a defining moment in the development process.

Elkhorn City, Kentucky – Since the 2006 Your Town workshop, Elkhorn City worked through the Kentucky Department of Water (DOW) to win an EPA 319(h) grant to create a watershed plan to clean up the lower half of Elkhorn Creek. The stream was recently listed on the national 303d list as seriously impaired, primarily sewage related. The award exceeds \$365,000 over two years. Once the plan is completed and approved by KDOW, funding will be sought to implement the plan. Elkhorn City has also recently completed a sidewalk project with a \$120,000 T-21 grant.

Most recently, the town submitted an application for funding from the Appalachian Regional Commission for the Russell Fork Whitewater Promotion and Playpark Initiative. The goal is both to educate regional tourism and civic leaders and youth about kayaking on the Russell Fork and to produce a feasibility study to create play features in the river in downtown Elkhorn City.

Picayune, Mississippi – Since the Your Town workshop in fall 2006, a number of beautification projects have been undertaken. These include fencing around the Picayune Tire Service storage yard and new trees around the building; and a new glass and brick storefront on the downtown warehouse. Meanwhile, Picayune Main Street opened a Farmers' Market in August, is helping to build a new Train Depot Intramodel Center in downtown, and is working on downtown plantings and green spaces. Great progress, Picayune! For more information, contact info@picayunemainstreet.com.

Stars indicate the country of origin of Plains, Georgia Your Town participants.

