



YOUR TOWN: Citizens' Institute on Rural Design

Design Program—National Endowment for the Arts

Update

Vol. XV, No. 2—Winter 2009–10

From the Editor

Your Town workshops are taking place in profusion this year, in part because some of last year's workshops had to be postponed. The year began with a successful Your Town in Zapata County, Texas, in February. Held on a spacious ranch outside of town, the workshop featured Jeff Speck, former Director of Design at NEA, as keynote and focused on developing county-wide design guidelines.

In March, a workshop was held in the Bitter Root Valley of Montana. The main interest of this Your Town was Highway 93 and the protection of the agricultural and cultural landscape of the region.

In June, the Wyoming Main Street program coordinated a Your Town in Wheatland, north of Cheyenne. Featuring Ed McMahon as keynote, the workshop focused on downtown design issues for the fledgling Main Street communities of Platte County. Also in June, a Your Town was held in Fellsmere, Florida. This workshop

emphasized design standards, community identity and gateways.

Other workshops include:

- Wahiawa, Hawaii—Sept. 10-12
- Shinnecock Indian Nation, Southampton, Long Island, NY—early 2010

We will be issuing an RFP for Your Town workshops in 2010 in November. Everyone on our mailing list will receive a copy of the RFP.

Shelley

Editor
Shelley S. Mastran

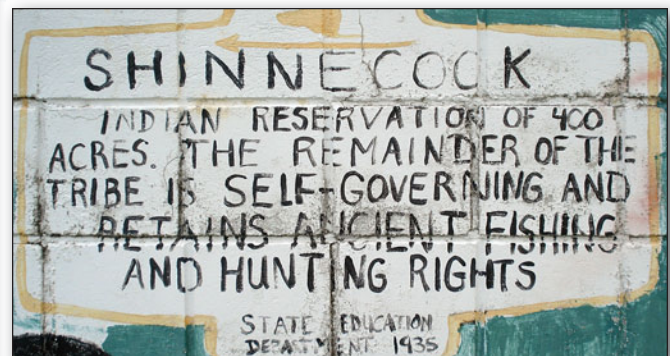


Figure 1: The Shinnecock Nation has preserved their land, including dunes overlooking Shinnecock Bay, as well as their history and culture in the thriving community center.

A Focus on Design Guidelines in Zapata County, Texas

In February, 2009, participants from Zapata County along the Rio Grande convened at a private ranch outside the town of Zapata to wrestle with issues of community building, gateways, streetscapes, zoning, and design guidelines. Zapata County is the first unincorporated county in Texas to receive authority to develop zoning and other ordinances. The county is very rural, with a total population of about 15,000; its economy is largely dependent on ranching and natural gas.

Jeff Speck, former NEA Director of Design, was the keynote speaker.

Jeff stayed throughout workshop to inform and facilitate the proceedings. John LaMotte of The Lakota Group spoke about design and development issues and assisted Jeff in wrapping up the workshop. Richard Tangum of the University of Texas, San Antonio, also contributed design expertise throughout.

The principal outcome of the workshop was a blueprint of clear steps for the County to follow to implement the existing Vision Plan and the zoning and design guidelines. The River Pierce Foundation, one of

the major sponsors of the workshop, has received a \$30,000 grant from the National Park Service to conduct a Historic Structures Report (HSR) on the Trevino Fort in San Ignacio on the Rio Grande. This historic village is a National Register district with more than 100 contributing buildings and one of the few remaining ranching outposts in the region. The HSR will guide the restoration work that will be funded by the Brown Foundation and the Save America's Treasures program.

Montana's Bitter Root Valley Holds a Your Town

The Bitter Root Parkway workshop was sponsored by the Bitter Root Cultural Heritage Trust and the Montana Preservation Alliance. The workshop was held in the town of Hamilton, but individual representatives participated from five communities connected by Highway 93.

The workshop was a challenge in the beginning. It was originally scheduled for fall of 2008, but the County Planning Shop asked for a delay so that the

community would be better prepared. The workshop focused on integrating intrinsic mapping and heritage tourism development.

Grant Jones, of Jones and Jones Architects, Landscape Architects—Planners, delivered an impassioned keynote address on the intrinsic value of placetitled “Making a Marriage with the Land—Montana's Bitter Root Parkway”. The content was perfect for the beginning of this Your Town workshop, given the

dramatic nature of the Bitter Root Valley. His message was that people need to understand and respect the landscape as an organizing element to planning and design. The audience was visibly moved by Grant's presentation. The lecture was followed by a reception which included a variety of locally made pies. The Montana NPR station covered the event with interviews and commentary—the audio is available at http://www.mtpr.net/program_info/2009-04-02-132 (the piece begins at the 15 minute mark).

Your Town in Fellsmere, Florida

The city of Fellsmere, founded in 1911, is a small town of about 5,000 people until it is time for the citrus to be picked. Then the population nearly doubles. If you have heard of Indian River Citrus – this is where it comes from. Fellsmere is surrounded by thousands of acres of citrus trees and an equal amount of state-owned preserve and water management lands. The city is a place of historical structures and small town sincerity within a rural setting. It is a place whose urban core still is home to unpaved roads, mobile homes, and the famed citrus farms. In the context of coastal Florida's expanding devel-



Figure 2: Fellsmere workshop participants gather in the Marsh Landing Restaurant located in the historic Fellsmere estate building.

opment, Fellsmere has maintained a rural flavor while encouraging well planned growth to promote economic development.

Although stymied in the short run given the economic crisis, investment and growth are highly anticipated throughout the region as the gradual, northerly coastal migration of many South Floridians continues. Fellsmere is positioning itself to capture the next wave of migration and has annexed over 22,000 acres of rural land. With its lack of an employment base causing an average one-way commute

of 25 miles, and median incomes of \$23,000, Fellsmere needs to define new ways to integrate these lands; create employment centers, diverse housing, and new recreational opportunities; and blend the “old” and “new”. Nearly one-third of the City’s residential units are mobile homes.

Over the last decade a shift has occurred in the demographic makeup of Fellsmere, which now has a 70 percent Hispanic population. It also has the highest concentration of low to very low income households in Indian River County and lowest education levels.

Jeff Speck delivered the keynote address: “Fail to Plan/Plan to Fail.” Jeff emphasized that if the community does not take active control of planning, future sprawl is the likely result. There are two fundamental models for development; sprawl and neighborhood. The lack of community design can have unforeseen effects. For example, a few decades ago 48 percent of children walked to school. Today it is 17 percent. The Mayor and all the City Councilmen attended the workshop, which gave the design ideas generated an additional level of community “buy in” and political commitment.

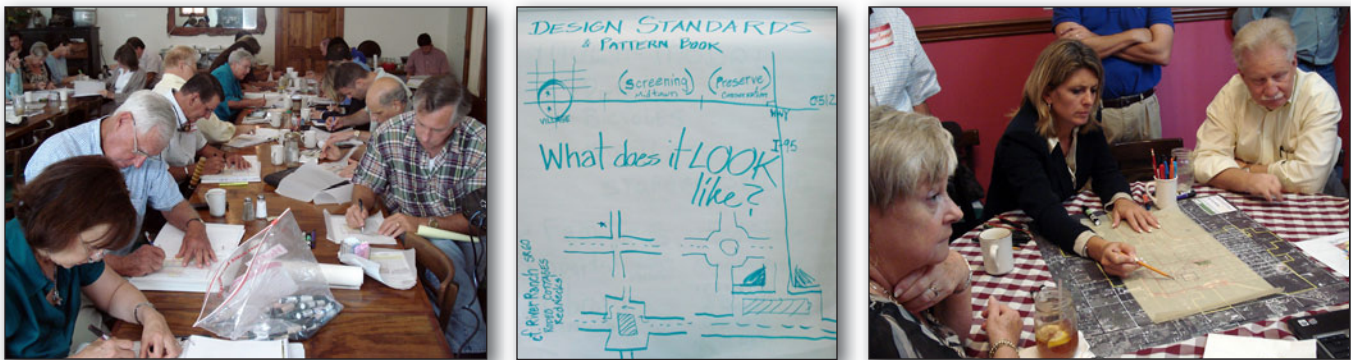


Figure 3: Fellsmere workshop participants eagerly engage graphic and design exercises.

Wyoming Main Street Hosts a Your Town in Platte County

Platte County, north of Cheyenne, is emblematic of the High Plains. Its sweeping hills and plains, mountain views, wind, and wide skies have a special beauty and history. Platte County boasts wagon ruts on the Oregon Trail, clearly visible indentations in the stone where thousands of wheels crossed, and cliffs where travelers etched their names. The Wheatland Irrigation District was one of the first in the U.S. Platte County was part of the Swann Land and Cattle Company, a ranching empire along the Front Range. But over time Platte County has steadily lost population, historic buildings, and businesses. Today the county is hoping to revitalize its economy through the state’s Main Street Program and heritage tourism. The Your Town workshop in Wheatland focused on those very issues.

The keynote speaker, Ed McMahon, inspired participants with visions of how to build better communities and capitalize on heritage assets. Scott Day was a key speaker who provided Main Street expertise throughout the workshop. Other speakers addressed heritage tourism, building local economies, and design. A walking tour of downtown Wheatland reinforced awareness of the assets from which the community can build. The day of intense work was topped off with a catered barbeque dinner in Hartville (population 77).

It’s hoped that the Your Town workshop will help lay the framework for the Main Street Program in Platte County and provide a base of ideas and inspiration to build on. For more information, contact Evan Medley at evan.medley@wybusiness.org.



Figure 4: Wagon ruts along the Oregon Trail outside Guernsey, Wyoming.

Updates From Previous Workshops

Elkhorn City, Kentucky

Much progress has been made in Elkhorn City recently. (A workshop was held there in 2005.) In February, 2009, the McLaughlin Whitewater Design Group completed a concept plan for a whitewater park on the Russell Fork River through Elkhorn City. The plan focuses on ways to make natural changes in the river to create rapids and pools for kayakers that would help make Elkhorn City a year-round tourist destination for whitewater fans. Implementation is estimated to cost about \$1 million or less.

Also, the Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program of the National Park Service is working to close the gap in the Great Eastern Trail between Pine Mountain Trail and the Appalachian Trail by routing it through Elkhorn City into West Virginia, then east to the New River.

Plains, Georgia

Plains, Georgia, home of President Jimmy Carter and site of two previous Your Town workshops, has a small welcome center. Because of the state's budget gap, the governor proposed saving \$186,000 by shutting the center down. The center is a small museum and rest station that has been tourists' first stop in town since 1977, when Mr. Carter's inauguration made Plains a national landmark.

The visitors' center has been saved through lobbying efforts and citizen action. President Carter is working to have the National Park Service, which manages Carter's Boyhood Home, partner with the state to also manage the center.

Mississippi Hills

On April 14, 2009, Senator Roger Wicker announced federal legislation designating the Mississippi Hills National Heritage Area, one of 49 in the nation. The NHA is a 30-county region in northeast Mississippi with a rich heritage rooted in pioneer settlement, the Civil War, literature, and music. A Your Town workshop took place in Blue Mountain, Mississippi, in 2004 to build a base for the NHA concept.

According to Senator Wicker, "Gaining national heritage area designation for Mississippi Hills will boost our state's economy by increasing tourism opportunities. There are unique stories of cultural and historical significance all across Northeast Mississippi. I'm glad this cultural history is being recognized by Congress so that this area of Mississippi can be promoted and shared with a larger audience."

For more information, contact Kent Bain at kentbain@mshills.org

Southwest Virginia

Since the Your Town workshop held in Southwest Virginia in September 2008, several participants in the New River Valley area have engaged Giles County leadership in a tourism development plan that included several elements of the design principles from the workshop and a joint marketing project in which the County featured the Appalachian Trail and the national forest for the first time in its ads. The idea for an AT Ramble, one of the outcomes of the workshop, continues to drive local planning.

The workshop also galvanized a group to focus on the development and design of an outdoor education center to be based in Grayson Highlands. The Blue Ridge Discovery Foundation is actively working with local leaders in the Grayson area on this concept.

For more information, contact Laura Belleville at the Appalachian Trail Conference at belleville@appalachiantrail.org

Your Town Request for Proposals—2010

Once again we'll be seeking rural non-profit institutions or local governments to produce Your Town workshops in 2010. We can award four new contracts next year. Communities that are working on specific design issues, updating comprehensive plans, or trying to revitalize downtowns or manage growth should consider applying. The RFP will be issued in November with proposals due in January. To download the RFP, go to our website, <http://www.yourtowndesign.org> and click on the RFP notice in the left-hand column.

NEA application deadlines for 2010 are expected to be announced in early January of 2010, but anyone interested in NEA funding opportunities may sign up for an RSS feed at our web site at <http://www.arts.gov/about/NEAFed.html>. Additionally, Chairman Landesman's has announced a new "Art works" theme, with an Art Works blog at www.arts.gov/artworks. The blog will feature speeches, interviews, reports from the field, audio and video—the first post is Chairman Landesman's keynote speech from the Grantmakers in the Arts conference on October 21, 2009.