



YOUR TOWN: Citizens' Institute on Rural Design

Update

Design Program - National Endowment for the Arts

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Your Town: Elkhorn City, Kentucky

From the Editor

This year promises to be another exciting one for the Your Town: Citizens' Institute on Rural Design program. From the applications we received at the end of 2004, we selected four workshop communities: Elkhorn City, Kentucky; Block Island, Rhode Island; Lewes, Delaware; and River Falls, Wisconsin.

The workshop in Elkhorn City, Kentucky, took place April 2-4. See the article in this newsletter for more information.

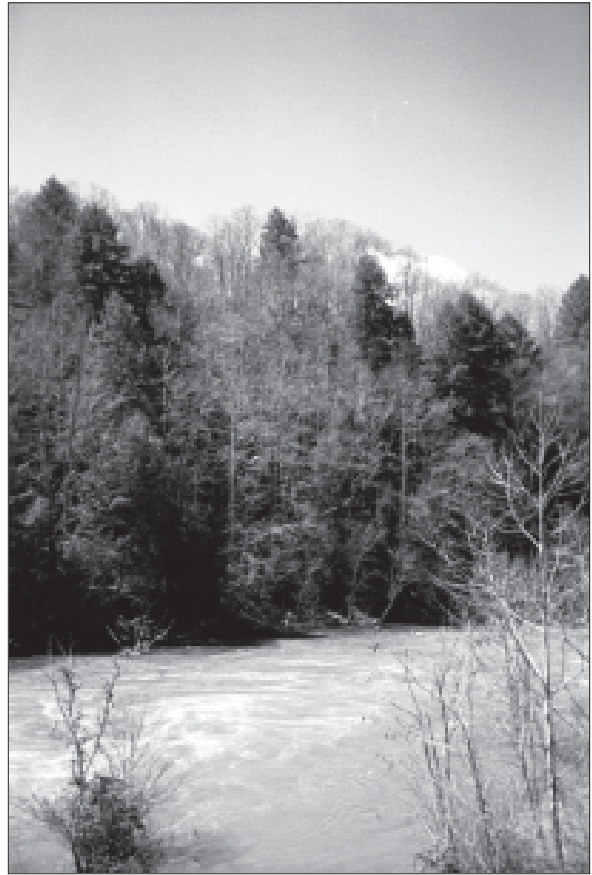
The Block Island workshop will take place June 3-5 on Block Island. Like other coastal areas of New England, Block Island has been experiencing a wave of new housing construction, too often out of scale with the 19th century farmhouses that predominate on the island. The focus of this workshop is designing compatible new development and techniques for protecting Block Island's scenic resources. Ed McMahon will provide the keynote address. Other featured speakers include Philip Herr, Lane Kendig, and Richard Youngken. The Orton Family Foundation has generously offered to provide the Community Viz technology for the workshop to allow participants to visualize alternative futures for Block Island.

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In early April, nearly 60 people gathered at The Breaks Interstate Park high in the mountains on the Kentucky-Virginia line for a Your Town workshop focused on designing trails along the Russell Fork River. This region is the core of Appalachia—magnificently beautiful, with seemingly endless folds of lush mountains and rushing rivers but poor and environmentally abused by decades of timbering, coal mining, methane gas mining, and other depredations. Yet residents have a strong attachment to the region, the Russell Fork River, and the mountains, and a number are returning there to retire. Community pride in Elkhorn City is palpable.

The Elkhorn City (Kentucky) Area Heritage Council, an advocacy organization that celebrates the community's heri-

tage and seeks to revitalize the region on the basis of its heritage assets, organized the workshop. Peggy Pings, with the Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance program of the National Park Service, oversaw the workshop's organization and is working with Elkhorn City to establish a hiking trail along the river. The workshop had very special assistance from the 606 Studio in landscape architecture at the California Polytechnic Institute in Pomona, California. Three graduate students who had chosen to work in Elkhorn City used the vehicle of the Your Town workshop to gather data, involve citizens,



Russell Fork of the Big Sandy River

and build networks for a comprehensive watershed greenway plan.

The workshop's keynote speaker was Grant Jones, founder of Jones & Jones in Seattle. Grant provided an inspiring talk on the importance of understanding landscape components in doing good planning. He offered examples of successful landscape inventories and projects in both Washington State and Kentucky. Other featured speakers included Jeffrey Hunter, Tom Horsch, Al Fritsch, Mark Dennen, and Joanna Hinton.

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(Elkhorn City, Kentucky)

Participants were offered field trips that took us to points of access and beauty along the Russell Fork River. Most local participants are familiar with the river, either through hiking, kayaking, canoeing, or tubing; but for the outsiders, the field trips were real eye-openers to the potential of the river corridor for recreation and tourism. The small group sessions focused on this potential, and

the final designs lay out a blueprint for a comprehensive plan.

With bluegrass musicians to entertain us each evening, weather that changed from snow flurries to brilliant early-spring sunshine, deer grazing near the door of the meeting room, and good spirits and camaraderie, the Elkhorn City workshop was thoroughly stimulating. The workshop

brought together Kentuckians and Virginians who share the same resources but seldom communicate, much less plan together, and participants agreed to continue meeting every month hereafter. We look forward to hearing about the Russell Fork Greenway that will result from their good work.

Good Design Matters

Travel teaches you many things, not the least of which is that the world doesn't have to be ugly.

I first learned this lesson while serving in the U.S. Army in Germany during the 1970s. Heidelberg, where I lived, was clean, compact, and dripping with history. The town center was packed with shops and sidewalk cafes. Missing were cars, which you really didn't need because you could walk from one end of town to the other in about 20 minutes.

The countryside outside of town was gloriously free of strip shopping centers, billboards, and overhead power lines. The roads were lined with trees and cyclists. Children walked to neighborhood schools and senior citizens visited friends after strolling to the pharmacy or corner store.

This is not to say that Germans and other Europeans don't love their cars. They do. But they don't have to use them all the time. They can ride the "clean as a whistle" electric trolleys and high speed trains that go everywhere, or they can ride on an extensive network of bikeways. They can even walk.

Footpaths! An entire network, extending all the way from the edge of town, up the hillsides, into the forests—eventually linking up with trails that crisscross the entire country

I often think back to Heidelberg and other European cities when I observe the changes we are making here at home.

From California to Carolina, we've been tearing up the good stuff and replacing it with the banal and worse. We've let look-alike fast-food emporiums, soulless subdivisions, and cluttered commercial strips turn our communities into what author James Howard Kunstler calls the "geography of nowhere."

America can't imitate Europe, and we shouldn't try, but we can learn some lessons. One important lesson is that good design matters.

Challenge anyone to name his or her favorite place and then ask why. Many of the reasons that attractive places are attractive have to do with design. Without thoughtful attention to design, a town will become "Anywhere USA." Design of a community communicates what it is.

Design is also important because it relates directly to economic development and equals cold hard cash for many communities. Mayor Michael Polovitz of Grand Forks, North Dakota, observed that "Design reflects on the city as a whole. How a city looks to new businesses is very important to whether or not a business locates in your city." Likewise, Mayor David Musante of Northampton, Massachusetts, noted, "Design relates directly to an impression of livability and economic vitality. It has a major impact on our city.

Good design is especially important to those communities seeking to attract tourists and their dollars. This is because the

more a community does to protect and enhance its unique characteristics, whether natural or man-made, the more tourists it will attract. On the other hand, the more a community comes to resemble everyplace else, the less reason there is to visit.

While good design can mean more tourists, increased jobs, a better tax base, increased property values, and a better quality of life, bad design or no design can lead to polarization and citizen opposition to new development. Without doubt, there would be far less opposition to new developments, of all types, if builders, developers, and public officials paid more attention to the appearance, design, and compatibility of the new development with the existing natural and architectural character of our communities. Good design does matter. All we need to do is to look around to see that this is true.

Travel teaches us that those communities that have retained their unique character are places that use vision, planning, and design to preserve the features that make them special. It also teaches us that progress does not demand degraded surroundings. San Antonio can grow without destroying those things that make it unique.

Edward T. McMahon, Senior Resident Fellow at the Urban Land Institute in Washington, D.C.

(From the Editor)

In May key Your Town faculty and Block Island representatives attended a two-day intensive training session on Community Viz. The training was both exhausting and exhilarating. Everyone came away from the session committed to incorporating the program into the workshop and envisioned it might become a new tool in the Your Town Program. If you would like to know more about the Orton Foundation and Community Viz go to <http://www.orton.org/>.

The Your Town workshop in River Falls, Wisconsin, to be held August 5-6, is structured largely around farmland preservation strategies. It will focus on the University of Wisconsin-River Falls' "Lab Farm" as a microcosm of development pressures on prime agricultural land in regions where "quarter section and a farmstead" is the traditional land use pattern. The workshop promises to break new ground, since the Your Town model will not be applied to a town, per se, but rather address a rural area that has no traditional centers.

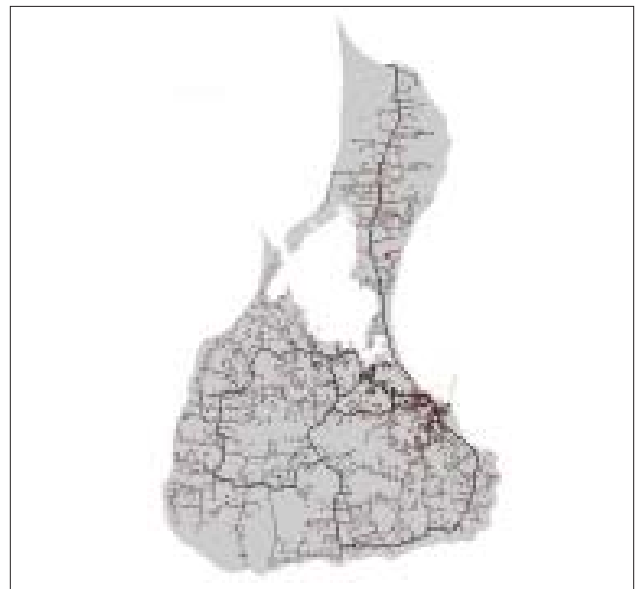
Lewes, Delaware, is a beach resort community north of Rehobeth Beach, at the mouth of the Delaware Bay. Its history as the site of the first European settlement in Delaware and its amazing collection of historic archeology and architecture make it unique in the mid-Atlantic region. Lewes and surrounding Sussex County are fast growing, with farm fields giving way to sprawling subdivisions. Summer beach traffic along the Route 1 corridor is gridlocked. The Your Town workshop, scheduled for September 7-9, will lay the groundwork for a concrete plan of action to preserve the historic character of the region and gain control over sprawl. Keynote speakers will include Jeff Speck, Director of Design at the Endowment, Ed McMahon with the Urban Land Institute, and Michael Kimmerman from the Rocky Mountain Institute.



Shelley Mastran, Editor



Digital 3D Representation of Block Island Southeast Lighthouse using CommunityViz Scenario 360 and Model Builder



Build out scenario for Block Island using CommunityViz Scenario 360 and Model Builder

National Trust's Rural Heritage Development Initiative

The National Trust for Historic Preservation recently announced the Rural Heritage Development Initiative, a project that will work with two rural pilot regions to implement preservation-based economic development strategies. The new initiative is funded in significant part through a \$745,000 three-year grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. Proposals have been solicited from regions that have the capacity to work

collaboratively to develop cultural and heritage assets for economic benefit.

The Rural Heritage Development Initiative will bring together various multi-disciplinary services of the National Trust for intensive work with partners in the pilot regions over a three-year period. Through preservation-based strategies including heritage tourism, local entrepreneurial and business development, barn

preservation, rural land-use planning, and neighborhood housing revitalization, the project will utilize local assets to achieve economic gains in the pilot regions.

For more information, call the National Trust's Center for Preservation Leadership, Statewide and Local Partnerships Office, 202-588-6216.

Updates from Recent Workshops

The town of **Eads, Colorado**, site of a Your Town workshop in June 2004, recently received the 2004 Economic Developers' Council of Colorado's Achievement Award for Small Community of the Year. This award is presented to a community with less than 20,000 people that demonstrates support for economic development through an organized program and strong leadership. The community must also illustrate long-term planning and investment through infrastructure planning and permanent economic development funding and strategies. Eads has been actively working with the Arkansas Valley Marketing Coalition (a five county organization) to establish itself as an expanding community. In conjunction with the soon-to-open Sand Creek Massacre National Historic site, Eads is working with surrounding counties on a coalition tourism project.

The acquisition of the 800-acre Jackson Property on the edge of town continues to create economic opportunities for Eads and Kiowa County. Many groups within the community and county have been involved in efforts to plan how the property might best be utilized. Working with all elected officials, businesses and most impressively, the youth has established a human capacity and formula for success that would be difficult to top anywhere. Congratulations to the town of Eads! For further information, contact Janet Frederick, Kiowa County Economic Development Foundation at 719-438-2200 or kcedf@kcedf.org.

Reedley, California, site of a Your Town workshop in 2003, received a \$5,000 grant from National Park Foundation/Tom's of Maine to construct a stream crossing that connects to the Kings River corridor.

Let Us Hear from You!

What has happened in your community since you attended a Your Town workshop? We would love to hear about any initiatives or projects you have undertaken since then. Have you installed improvements to your downtown? Added new gateway signage? Developed a new plan? Influenced the design of new construction? Defeated an unfriendly development proposal?

Please share your successes (and struggles, if appropriate) with us. Send your information to: shellmast@comcast.net or Shelley Mastran, 11454 Hollow Timber Court, Reston, VA 20194. Photographs, drawings, and other materials are welcome.

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Your Town National Center

c/o National Trust for
Historic Preservation
1785 Massachusetts, Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 588-6000