



YOUR TOWN: Citizens' Institute on Rural Design

Design Program - National Endowment for the Arts

Update

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From the Editor

In late fall 2006 the National Your Town Center issued an RFP for interest in hosting a Your Town workshop in 2007. We received twelve excellent proposals from across the U.S., including the Alabama Black Belt Heritage Area; Idaho Falls, Idaho; Jim Thorpe, Pennsylvania; and Penn Center, South Carolina. After extensive deliberations, our review committee selected four sites for this year's workshops: Weld County, Colorado; Columbia, NC, for six towns in eastern North Carolina; Plains, GA, for rural Hispanic communities in the state; and Granbury, TX, for several towns southwest of Fort Worth.

The **Weld County, Colorado**, workshop, which took place May 17-19, is featured in this newsletter. It focused on maintaining agriculture and ranching in a rapidly growing area north of Denver.

The **North Carolina** workshop will take place at the 4-H Environmental Education Conference Center on the Scuppernon River near Columbia, NC, September 6-8. The workshop is being coordinated by the Foundation of Renewal for Eastern North Carolina (FoRENC). It will bring together residents of six eastern North Carolina towns that share historic downtowns, an orientation to water and a strong agricultural

heritage—Ayden, Edenton, Hertford, Murfreesboro, Plymouth, and Tarboro.

Eastern North Carolina is experiencing a boom in residential development that threatens the preservation of the region's unique community character.

The six towns involved in the workshop have an opportunity to reinvest in their historic infrastructure, build capacity, attract heritage tourism, and grow in compatible ways. The workshop will focus on specific issues of natural resource amenities, affordable housing, and mixed-use development that respects local culture.

The **Georgia** workshop will take place in Plains, GA, September 6-8. Coordinated by the University of Georgia Center for Community Design and Preservation, it is intended to bring together Hispanic rural community leaders from across the state. Georgia has experienced a 400 percent increase in Hispanic population since 1990, and Hispanics are settling in rural as well as urban places.

Many southern rural communities are struggling with such issues as downtown decline, a shift away from agriculture, a lack of environmental regulations and zoning, a lack of affordable housing, and general sprawl. All too often Hispanics are an underrepresented group in working on these planning issues. The Plains Your Town workshop will be dedicated to inspiring and

educating Hispanic community leaders about the importance and role of community planning and design. Former President Jimmy Carter, whose home is in Plains, will deliver the workshop's keynote address.

The **Texas** workshop will take place in Granbury, Texas, September 26-28. Coordinated by Historic Fort Worth, with assistance from the Carl Small Town Center at Mississippi State University, this workshop is the first Your Town ever in Texas. Its focus is on several rural communities south and west of Fort Worth that are threatened with encroaching sprawl. These include Granbury, Weatherford, Glen Rose, Stephenville, Mineral Wells, and Cleburne. With major roadways planned around Fort Worth, virtually uncontrolled big-box sprawl, the spread of McMansions across fields, and the fragmentation of the rural landscape, the region is struggling to keep historic rural towns intact. The Your Town workshop will feature design problems that address these difficult issues and will offer strategies for better ways of community building and more effective land use.

Richard Hawks (SUNY), Jane Greenwood, Cari Varner (Carl Small Town Center) and I look forward to working with this year's workshop coordinators and participants.

Editor
Shelley S. Mastran

Your Town Weld County

Weld County is the Number 1 agricultural producer in Colorado and ranks in the top 10 agricultural counties in the U.S. Weld County is also in one of the fastest growing regions of the country—the Front Range of the Rockies. According to Rob Lang with Virginia Tech’s Metropolitan Institute (one of the workshop’s speakers), Weld County is in one of 20 or so “megapolitan” areas that will absorb much of the next 100 million Americans. According to a recent edition of the *Rocky Mountain News*, along the Front Range north of Denver, “building projects are springing up like mushrooms after heavy rain.” Thus, in many ways, Weld County is a perfect storm waiting to happen—a collision of economic and demographic forces that will have long-term consequences for the region and the state.

Weld County is directly north of Denver, stretching from the foothills of the Rockies north to Wyoming and east across the plains. Twice the size of Delaware, it is largely devoted to irrigated farming, feed lots, and cattle grazing. Since the last decades of the 19th century, Weld County has tapped into the relatively rich water resources of the South Platte River Basin. However, over the last several decades, growth from Denver, Boulder, and Fort Collins has spread into Weld County principally along the I-25 corridor.

The location of Denver International Airport directly to the south promises to continue growth pressure for decades to come.

Much of the threat to Weld County’s agricultural future is not from the subdivisions and shopping centers that have spread into the county. Rather, it is from the ability of far-away urban users (like Aurora, Colorado) to acquire water rights from Weld County property owners. Consequently, the county’s development vs. conservation dilemma is much more complicated than in other parts of the country.

Weld County is in the process of updating its Comprehensive Plan. The Your Town workshop fits integrally into the update process, bringing together all 15 members of the plan’s Technical Advisory Committee as well as county commissioners, municipal mayors, and other local leaders. The principal issues that the workshop addressed included:

Towns in Transition - community identifiers and separators; how to preserve the identity of Weld County’s historic towns;

Rural Residences - the design of 9-lot rural subdivisions, allowed by right in rural areas, versus traditional farms; and

Watering Crops and Towns - the competing water interests of urban and non-urban uses.

New houses spring up on the former farmland in Weld County



Participants discuss alternative ways to maintain community identity



Among the excellent speakers at the workshop were Eric Bergman, Director of Colorado’s Office of Smart Growth; Tom Cech, Executive Director of the Central Colorado Conservancy District; Chris Duerksen of Clarion Associates; Alan Foutz, President of the Colorado Farm Bureau; Rob Lang, Director of the Metropolitan Institute at Virginia Tech; and James van Hemert, Executive Director of the Rocky Mountain Land Use Institute.

Weld County, cont.

The Weld County workshop was unusual in that it incorporated a 6-hour facilitated session on public policy decision-making. John Viola, Visiting Fellow and graduate faculty member of the John McCormack Graduate School of Public Policy at the University of Massachusetts in Boston, led participants through public policy case studies. At the end of the day, participants were challenged to apply what they had learned from the case study discussion to the implementation of the design solutions they had previously developed.

But the workshop wasn't all work. On the evening of Day 1, participants were treated to a performance of "Oklahoma" at the Union Colony Dinner Theater in Greeley, a thoroughly enjoyable and appropriate reward for a long day's work.

We believe that the workshop informed the Comprehensive Plan update process and will help lead to creative and cooperative solutions to the competing demands for water along the Front Range.

Books to Recommend

Several of the distinguished speakers at the Weld County workshop are authors of books you may find of interest:

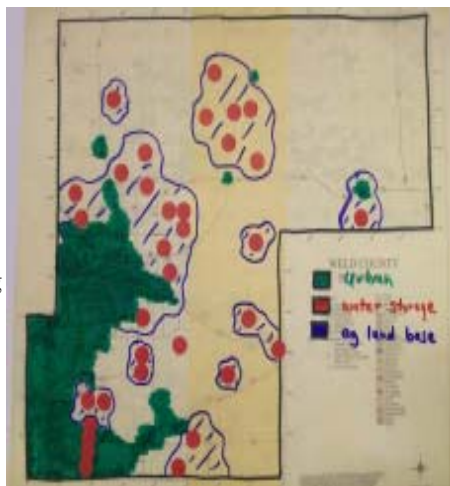
Boomburbs: The Rise of America's Accidental Cities by Robert E. Lang and Jennifer B. LeFurgy (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2007) – a look at the sprawling commercial complexes outside

cities that make up much of the American landscape.

Principles of Water Resources: History, Development, Management, and Policy by Thomas V.V. Cech (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2004) – a college-level textbook on water resources.

True West: Authentic Development Patterns for Small Towns and Rural Areas by Chris Duerksen (Chicago: American Planning Association, 2003) – an analysis of Western settlement heritage and how it can inform subdivision and building styles.

Workshop participants map out different development scenarios for Weld County based on the availability of water.



Jeff Speck Leaves the Endowment

Jeff Speck, who served as NEA's Director of Design since 2003, left his position in May 2007 to venture into private practice as a city planner and urban designer, working as an independent consultant serving public officials, non-profits, and the development industry. He will remain in Washington, D.C., and hopes to get involved in community planning, lecturing, and writing activities. As in his work before the NEA, he is limiting his efforts to projects which promise to be compact, mixed-use, and pedestrian-oriented. He is also working on several books and articles, and lecturing nationally as time permits.

Jeff says that working with the Your Town program has been a true pleasure and a significant learning experience. He is confident that it will continue to thrive in his absence. Jeff can be contacted at jeff@jeffspeck.com

The Endowment is searching for a new design director and has begun interviewing potential candidates. You can see the position announcement from the Endowment's web site: <http://www.arts.gov/about/Jobs/Vacancy119.html>. It is hoped that a new director will be announced before the end of the summer.

News from the Carl Small Town Center

While the Carl Small Town Center (CSTC) continues to search for a new director, the following staff members are providing a wide range of expertise to Mississippi communities looking to identify and initiate strategies for good design.

Cari Varner joined the CSTC staff in January as the Community Development Research Associate. Cari received her BS in Design and Environmental Analysis from Cornell University and a Master of Science and Master of Urban Planning from the University of Michigan. This spring, she taught a design studio that focused on the revitalization of downtown Meridian and a CREATE Common Ground seminar in Fulton. Cari recently attended the Weld County Your Town in Colorado and found the workshop to be a fascinating approach for achieving measurable change in the master planning process.

Visiting Assistant Professor Chris Coper also taught in the Meridian studio with Cari. He has been the project manager for the design-build East Oktibbeha

County High School Amphitheater/Outdoor Classroom project. Additionally Chris has been working with the Central Mississippi Health Services Clinic to provide additional space for a clinic that provides medical care to underserved segments of our society.

Cari and Chris will be leading a team of four student interns this summer as they embark on a facility survey of county-owned buildings for Bolivar County in the Mississippi Delta. They will also continue work in Fulton by providing construction documents for a pavilion and town park designed by a student in the CREATE Common Ground class this spring.

Michelle Jones, Special Projects Officer with the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Historic Preservation Division, has also been providing guidance with the preservation aspects of the CSTC work. Having been a coordinator for six Your Town workshops in Mississippi, Michelle will be assisting Granbury, Texas, with its upcoming workshop in September.

For more information, <http://smalltown.sarc.msstate.edu/> has the latest updates on the work being performed by the CSTC.

NEA Grant Deadline

The National Endowment for the Arts, Access to Artistic Excellence, grant deadline is on August 13, 2007. For more information, see NEA's web site at <http://www.arts.gov/grants/apply/Design.html>.