



YOUR TOWN: Citizens' Institute on Rural Design

A National Endowment for the Arts Leadership Initiative

Update

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From the Editor

Last fall we issued an RFP for 2010 Your Town workshops. We received 32 proposals, from which we selected four communities. The selection process was competitive due to a wide range of compelling proposals, and as always we strove in our deliberations to balance the design issues involved, the capacity of the applying organizations, and geographical distribution. The four communities selected were:

Douglas, Michigan
Ione / Amador County, California
Luzerne County, Pennsylvania
West Memphis, Arkansas

The Douglas (MI) and Ione / Amador County (CA) workshops took place in August 2010, and are both reviewed in detail in this newsletter.

The West Memphis (AR) workshop took place September 29-October 1, 2010 with a theme of "Gateways, Greenways, and Broadway" (Broadway is the main street through town).

Kennedy Smith, co-founder of Community Land Use and Economics (CLUE) Group, LLC and an expert on commercial district revitalization and development, was the keynote speaker.

Addressing a variety of agricultural issues, the Luzerne County (PA) workshop occurred September 30-October 2, 2010 and was organized by Krista Schneider, President of the Center for Landscape Design and Stewardship. The Department of Landscape Architecture at Penn State offered concurrent studios focused on design and planning issues facing Luzerne County. The students who participated in the workshop brought additional energy before, during and after the event, and Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Thomas Hylton gave the

keynote address. His book, Save Our Land, Save Our Towns, is a plea for comprehensive planning to save our cities, towns and countryside.

Also included in this newsletter is a review of the Your Town workshop in Taos, New Mexico, a community that was selected the year prior but held its workshop in March 2010.

Editor
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Figure 1: Left: Luzerne County participants design a new development that also protects valuable farmland.

Figure 2: Right: Workshop participants visited farms in the Luzerne Valley to learn about the issues they face.



Your Town: Taos, New Mexico (March 25-27, 2010)

In March 2010 a Your Town workshop was held in Taos, New Mexico. In the high desert at the base of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains in the northern part of the state, Taos has a history that draws on Native American, Spanish colonial, and ranching and railroad heritage, as well as the arts. Since 1900 Taos has attracted painters, sculptors, writers, and other artists to this remote, beautiful, and almost mystical setting.

The New Mexico Main Street program, in cooperation with the Friends of New Mexico Main Street, the Taos Arts & Culture District, the New Mexico Economic Development Department, and the University of New Mexico Design and Planning Assistance Center, proposed a workshop on design issues in downtown Taos. The specific design issues focused on Taos' historic plaza, gateways into the city, and strategies for making the downtown more pedestrian friendly. The New Mexico partners worked assiduously to pull together a workshop in the spring in order to engage University of New Mexico landscape architecture studio students.

The workshop brought together 35 community members who had not

typically worked together in the past. They included business owners, artists and gallery owners, elected officials, planning staff, educators, and long-time residents. In addition, 12 University of New Mexico landscape architecture students assisted workshop participants with the design problems and helped put ideas into graphic format.

The workshop involved a series of presentations by University of New Mexico faculty members as well as special talks by local artists and community leaders. Unlike other Your Town workshops, the Taos workshop was a charrette. Groups of participants worked on one of five related design problems: the main plaza, a downtown pedestrian network, infill and reuse of buildings, Kit Carson Street and its *placitas*, and Ladoux Street, which is filled with galleries and shops but is tucked away from the plaza and hard to find. The laboratory – downtown Taos – was right there, so participants were able to walk the town to study the problems at hand. A lot of good energy was applied to design, with concrete results that translated to a much

more active plaza, a new network of pathways and sidewalks, proposed infill development, and connections to streets that radiate off the plaza.

After the workshop, the University of New Mexico students used the design solutions as the basis for further design work. Working with the community, the students expanded on the workshop designs to produce a full-color booklet, *Weaving Together Past, Present and Future: Identifying Opportunity within the Arts & Culture District of Taos, NM*. The book provides detailed drawings that elaborate on the ideas generated at the workshop as templates for implementation.



Figure 3: Participants discuss design issues in the downtown plaza.



Your Town: Douglas, Michigan (August 11-13, 2010)

Douglas, Michigan, is a small town on the shores of Lake Michigan and Kalamazoo Lake, which is a widening of the Kalamazoo River before it flows into Lake Michigan. With a population of approximately 1,200, the village was originally established as two towns that joined in 1870 to form Douglas. The village retains buildings from the late 19th century as well as structures from the Arts and Crafts era. Today Douglas shares the role of resort community with Saugatuck, just across Kalamazoo Lake, and in 2009,

the two were named one of America's Dozen Distinctive Destinations by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. (Saugatuck's Dunes, along Lake Michigan, are also among the National Trust's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places because of development threats.)

Douglas is a quiet and lovely town, however the village is divided by the four-lane Blue Star Highway, has empty downtown lots that cry out for infill, and has waterfronts that are

largely underdeveloped. The Douglas workshop was organized by Ryan Kilpatrick, Director of Community and Economic Development, who hired Dan Burden, Executive Director of the Walkable and Livable Communities Institute, to help coordinate the workshop. Its main focus was increasing the walkability of Douglas through traffic calming measures and pedestrian walkways, crosswalks, and trails. In addition, workshop participants examined the potential for waterfront revitalization and redevelopment.

Burden’s approach to Your Town was less structured than is typical; the design problems evolved from discussions among participants and an extensive walking tour of the village. The Mayor of Douglas, the city manager, and most of the planning commissioners and city council attended the workshop, as well as library staff, business leaders, gallery owners, and artists. The group was very engaged in the design problems and discussion of Douglas’s planning issues.

Your Town: Douglas produced a series of proposals for walking and biking trails that

link the village across the Blue Star Highway, roundabouts to calm traffic and lead visitors into downtown, and a boardwalk along the Kalamazoo River and Lake to tie the area’s natural resources to the heart of the village. Workshop participants formed an



Advisory Committee that will meet regularly in order to refine and implement the design ideas.



Figure 4: Left: view of Mount Baldy across Kalamazoo Lake.

Figure 5: Right: Dan Burden explains traffic calming to participants.

Your Town: Ione / Amador County, California (August 19-21, 2010)

The city of Ione is located in the heart of California’s Mother Lode region on the west side of the Sierra Nevada mountain range. With a population of 7,000, Ione is the largest city in Amador County. This historic community embodies the unique character and lore of the old west as represented by the many historic towns and cities, ranches, farms, mines and cultural sites located throughout the county.



Figure 6: Ione Main Street.

The workshop was coordinated by Renee Chapman under the umbrella of the Amador Community Foundation, and the keynote speaker was Ed McMahon, senior resident fellow at the Urban Land Institute (ULI) and a nationally renowned authority on sustainable development, land conservation and urban design.

The recent economic downturn and closure of the area’s largest employer has hit Amador County exceptionally hard. Community and business leaders saw the Your Town Workshop as an excellent opportunity to strategize and prepare for the future of their county through all manners of planning and design. The workshop started with somewhat broad problems to be addressed, but the participants quickly defined their scope. The five participating groups included:

- City-County Cooperation
- Designing a Healthy and Strong Community – Trail Park to Howard Park Loop
- City of Ione Work Group

- Designing with Historic Preservation
- Downtown Main Street

Coordinator Renee Chapman wrote recently: “I was just thinking of you all today regarding our new Viewshed Protection Committee and their work. This is 100% due to the Your Town Workshop and the connections/relationships that people developed during the 2 ½ days we convened and looked at our county as a region. So many other regionally focused discussions have taken place since this workshop it’s absolutely wonderful!

And, the bonus is that we’re inviting Ed McMahon back! One of the workshop attendees has even convinced the Board of Supervisors to clear their calendar during one of their weekly meetings to accommodate Ed’s presentation and discussion! We’re VERY excited about this event and all the changes the Your Town workshop has made on our county—it’s GREAT—people are still energized and carrying many things back to their city councils, non-profits and other groups.”

New Endowment Design Director

In May, Jason Schupbach became the new Director of Design at the National Endowment for the Arts. Jason came to NEA from Massachusetts, where he was the Creative Economy Industry Director for the state Office of Business Development. Prior to that position, Jason was director of ArtistLink, in which he managed a statewide artist space development initiative. He is a national expert on the development of artist studio space and housing. He has a B.S. in Public Health from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and a Master's degree in City Planning from MIT.

Updates From Previous Workshops

BitterRoot Valley, Montana

One outcome stemming from the 2009 Your Town workshop in the BitterRoot Valley of Montana is the renaming of a pedestrian pathway along Highway 93 as the "BitterRoot Parkway." This paved path is more than just a place to bike; with benches and shelters, it is integral to the long-term vision of the BitterRoot Cultural Heritage Trust to establish a network of roads and trails throughout the valley that will link visitors to historic and cultural sites. Explains Trust president Kristine Komar, the idea is to showcase the BitterRoot Parkway as a wonderful way to experience the valley region.

Wahiawa, Hawaii

At the Your Town workshop in Wahiawa, Oahu, Hawaii, held in the summer of 2009, students from the University of Hawaii's Community Design Studio participated along with community residents. After the workshop, the studio further developed the ideas introduced at the workshop. In particular, the students focused on the need for infill development,

shared parking, and a revitalized town center. They built upon ideas for a roundabout at the entrance into town, enhanced street corridors, and a pedestrian bridge. They recently published full-color drawings that bring these ideas to life in a booklet that Wahiawa can use to educate the community and work toward implementation of the workshop vision.

New Publications and Resources

Heart and Soul Planning, Ed McMahon

Many of you have heard Ed McMahon, Senior Fellow at the Urban Land Institute, speak at Your Town workshops or other events. In a recent online contribution to Changemakers, McMahon writes about the importance of "community differentiation" and working with communities to grow without destroying quality of place. To read the full article, visit: <http://www.changemakers.com/node/86324>

Putting Smart Growth to Work in Rural Communities, ICMA

The International City/County Management Association (ICMA) has released a new report, "[Putting Smart Growth to Work in Rural Communities](#)," which focuses on how to adapt smart growth strategies to rural areas. Funded by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Sustainable Communities, the report examines the challenges rural communities face, including rapid growth at metropolitan edges, declining rural populations, and the loss of working lands. It highlights smart growth strategies that can help guide rural growth while preserving the unique character of existing communities.

The report focuses on three central goals: 1) support the rural landscape by creating an economic climate that

enhances the viability of working lands and conserves natural lands; 2) help existing places to thrive by taking care of assets and investments such as downtowns, Main Streets, existing infrastructure, and places that the community values; and 3) create great new places by building vibrant, enduring neighborhoods and communities that people, especially young people, don't want to leave. Featuring case studies from across the country, the report highlights how local governments, states, and non-profits have successfully implemented smart growth strategies to support rural lands, revitalize existing communities, and create great new places for residents and visitors.

To read the full report, visit: www.icma.org/ruralsmartgrowth. Hard copies of the report will be available shortly; check ICMA's website for ordering information.

Your Town 2011—Request for Proposals

We expect to announce the Request for Proposals for 2011 in January. Please help us identify communities that you think would benefit from participating in a Your Town workshop.



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