

The Vitality and Livability of Small Communities

Much of the smart growth conversation is focused on metropolitan areas, which is understandable since metro areas represent over 80 percent of the U.S. population and 90 percent of the country's economy (as measured by GDP). But there is a lot of living occurring in rural areas, which by federal definition account for 80 percent of the nation's land and about 50 million people. Implementing smart growth ideas can bring great benefits to these small and rural places, and larger cities may be able to learn a lesson or two from the successes of small towns.

Personal perceptions of what is rural and what is a small town may vary among people, and reality is more difficult to classify than statistics. While there would be general agreement that a town of 2,000 people surrounded by farm country is a small town, what about a town of 20,000? And a town of 20,000 in an isolated region is much different economically and socially than a similarly sized town that is in the orbit of a big city and derives most of its income from the metropolitan economy. But these places share some of the same challenges — maintaining their character; attracting and keeping jobs and retail activity; paying for public services; and providing a good way of life for current and future residents.

The fate of very small towns is the most perilous. A town that served as a marketplace for the agricultural world of



the 19th century may have little economic reason to exist today. But across the country, community leaders are joining together to bring new life back to small towns. They are doing it by focusing on the existing assets of a community — its history, culture and landscape — or by creating a new source of vitality, such as by encouraging artists to flourish or by undertaking creative placemaking. Bringing new life to small and rural places is a winning smart growth strategy that will benefit millions of Americans now and in the future.

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Summer 2013

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Main Street

USA

REVITALIZING THE HEART OF SMALL TOWNS

By Brad Broberg

Woodbine, Iowa, was like a lot of small towns. It was small and getting smaller. The population fell by 150 people between 2000 and 2010 — a trivial loss for a large city but a 10 percent tumble for tiny Woodbine, population 1,459.

Merchants in the downtown business district were turning out the lights. Meanwhile, enrollment in the local school district was ebbing to the point where consolidation with another district — an unthinkable blow to the town's identity — seemed inevitable.

"It's the kind of thing that sneaks up on rural communities," says Deb Sprecker of Woodbine. "It wasn't anything overnight. It was kind of a creeping decline."

Today, Woodbine is on the rebound. A total of 18 new businesses — including the town's first year-round restaurant — have opened and school consolidation is off the table because enrollment is growing. "We're definitely on the upswing," Sprecker says.

Chalk up another success story for the Main Street movement. Initiated by the National Trust for Historic Preservation (NTHP) in 1977, the Main Street movement is all about helping communities help themselves by maximizing one of their greatest assets

The Main Street movement is about helping communities maximize their traditional downtowns.



(Below) Artisan, one of the buildings participating in the CDBG Facade Master Plan project, underwent both a storefront rebuild as well as extensive interior rehabilitation. Home for more than 50 years to the local weekly newspaper, The Woodbine Twiner; it now houses a cooperative gallery and art education space including a glass hot shop in the rear annex. The Twiner moved to a smaller, more efficient office suite two doors down.



Courtesy of Woodbine Main Street

Small towns have authentic neighborhoods, distinctive business districts and a strong sense of place.



Photos courtesy of Woodbine Main Street

Before and after photos of revitalization efforts in Woodbine, Iowa.

— their traditional downtowns and neighborhood commercial districts. Time and again, the history, culture and architecture found there have been powerful catalysts for economic development.

Woodbine joined the Main Street movement in 2008. Since that time, more than \$9 million in public and private funding has been invested in the downtown area and 36 buildings have been renovated or newly built. “Woodbine wasn’t going to be a rural community that fell off the map,” says Michael Wagler, who coordinates Main Street Iowa for the Iowa Economic Development Authority. “They were going to do something about it.”

The survival of a place like Woodbine means plenty to the people who live there, but in the grand scheme, one small town’s fate is not very significant. Yet the survival of small towns as a whole is significant because they are the kind of places where development makes sense.

Small towns are typically compact and generally walkable. They have authentic neighborhoods, distinctive business districts and a strong sense of place. And they have the

capacity to focus growth where services and infrastructure already exist. Put it all together and it spells smart growth.

The Main Street movement and smart growth go hand in hand. “The intersection of Main Street and smart growth has always been there,” says Valecia Crisafulli, acting director of the Main Street program for the NTHP. “Our focus on preserving historic commercial areas makes a town attractive and creates a competitive advantage that sprawl development cannot.”

The emphasis on preservation also leads to a more sustainable style of development. “The greenest building is the one that’s already built,” Crisafulli says.

The NTHP has helped more than 2,000 communities of various sizes from Maine to California revitalize slumping commercial areas through its signature Main Street Four-Point Approach. The four points — organization,

The Main Street movement and smart growth go hand in hand.

promotion, design and economic restructuring — provide a structured framework for carrying out a preservation-based economic development strategy.

Communities that follow the strategy apply to a national network of coordinating programs like Main Street Iowa for designation as a Main Street community. Once designated, communities can count on the coordinating program in their state, city or region for advice and information about planning, executing and funding their revitalization vision.

Woodbine started the way every Main Street community starts — with merchants, property owners, historic preservationists, city government and other stakeholders coming together to establish an organization, raise funds, hire a Main Street director and create volunteer committees and a board of directors. After reviewing the commercial district's needs and opportunities, participants use the four-point approach to formulate a long-term plan — everything from design standards to new zoning to

tax incentives to marketing campaigns — and keep the ball rolling in the future.

In Woodbine, which was founded in 1866, the need and opportunity was centered in three-square blocks of historic buildings with a growing number of vacant storefronts. “They’re wonderful turn-of-the-century buildings, but they’re expensive to renovate and maintain,” Sprecker says. “We decided if we wanted to save some of them we needed to get going. So we did.”

Becoming a Main Street community — and hiring Sprecker to lead Woodbine Main Street Inc. — was the first step. In 2010, Main Street Iowa helped Woodbine win a Community Development Block Grant to support a Downtown Revitalization Facade Master Plan that faithfully restored the exteriors of 23 buildings and made them more energy efficient. The \$500,000 grant paid for more than half of the \$900,000 project and the city and property owners supplied the rest.



Photo by AnneCN



West Des Moines, IA



Photo courtesy of IA Tourism



Photo by Jason Mrachina

“The net result is that it has energized the downtown,” Sprecker says. “And we’re seeing young families that moved away coming back. They want their children to grow up in a small town where they can walk to school and ride their bikes to the park.”

One of the most exciting outcomes is the addition of 30 units of upper-story housing above downtown storefronts. Adding residential to the downtown mix is good for business and — because downtown is attracting older residents moving from elsewhere around the city — it’s building school enrollment by putting more family homes on the market. “That’s a neat dynamic that’s really working for us,” Sprecker says.

The Evolution of West Des Moines

The city of West Des Moines, Iowa, became a Main Street community in 1987. The city’s historic Valley Junction business district was mired in a downward spiral that began decades ago when two railroad yards — the city’s main employers — moved and the area degenerated into a red light district. Although Valley Junction eventually became less bawdy, competition from a new mall stunted its recovery, perpetuating the area’s reputation as “somewhere you didn’t want to be after dark unless you were up to no good,” says Clyde Evans, director of Community and Economic Development for West Des Moines, a suburb of Des Moines with a population of 56,609.

Despite Valley Junction’s vacant storefronts, crumbling buildings and seedy bars, West Des Moines was not ready to give up on the district. “This city has very strong roots and a great deal of affection for the Valley Junction district,” Evans says.

The community formed the Historic Valley Junction Foundation to revitalize the district Main Street style. The district runs for five blocks along Fifth Street. Many of the one- and two-story buildings that line the street are 100 or more years old. The spark that ignited Valley Junction’s rebirth came when the city expanded a repaving project into an extreme streetscape makeover that added new sidewalks, lighting, trees and other improvements.

Although it didn’t happen overnight, Valley Junction evolved from a collection of antique shops, flea markets and part-time businesses into a place where “hip meets

We’re seeing young families that moved away coming back. They want their children to grow up in a small town.

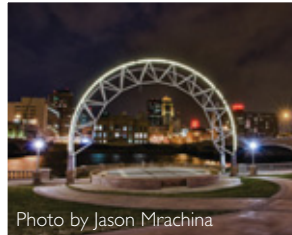


Photo by Jason Mirachina



Photo by AnneCN



Photo by Jason Mirachina

West Des Moines, IA



Photo by IABoomerFlickr



Downtown in Bath, Maine

history” filled with more than 150 specialty shops, restaurants and services and the single largest collection of independent businesses in the region. Valley Junction hosts numerous special events from a farmer’s market to concerts to gallery nights — the promotion component of the Main Street Four-Point Approach that is critical to keeping a revitalized commercial district vibrant.

“People just like going there,” Evans says of Valley Junction. In the years to come, more people may live and work there, too, as the Historic Valley Junction Foundation strives to bring more housing and offices to the district. “We’re seeing tech businesses look at Valley Junction right now,” Evans says.

Bath Capitalizes on Its History

Few towns beat Bath, Maine, for keeping history alive. Located on the west bank of the Kennebec River with a long legacy of shipbuilding, the city was incorporated in 1781 and a handful of buildings from that era are still standing. The existing downtown, which was established in the 1830s, is home to many buildings that are 150 or more years old.

Bath, population 8,514, became an official Main Street community in 2001, but revitalization began in 1991 when local merchants formed the Bath Business Association (BBA) to address the problems bedeviling downtown. A number of years earlier, the community rejected a plan to convert downtown Bath into an open-air shopping mall. The good news was most of the historic architecture remained intact. The bad news was it did nothing to stem the defection of major retailers to outlying shopping centers and the decline of downtown.

Rather than butting heads with the shopping centers, the BBA focused on beautifying downtown, promoting its character and filling vacant storefronts with unique businesses that could only be found in Bath. When a Main Street coordinating program sprouted in Maine, the BBA morphed into Main Street Bath, broadening the base of stakeholders supporting the revitalization effort, says Jennifer Geiger, Main Street Bath director.

Once known as the City of Ships, Bath now goes by a new nickname — Maine’s Cool Little City — and downtown is the coolest place of all.

When downtown rebounded, so did the residential neighborhoods around it.

“People are always remarking about how much they like to go downtown because they run into somebody they know,” Geiger says.

When downtown rebounded, so did the residential neighborhoods around it. “People started buying homes and fixing them up,” Geiger says. “Bath became a more attractive place to live.”

Paducah’s Prospering Downtown

Paducah, Ky., population 25,024, sits at the confluence of the Ohio and Tennessee rivers. Founded in 1827 by William Clark of Lewis and Clark fame, Paducah became a Main Street community in 1989 when a streetscape project helped keep the historic downtown alive after the loss of several large retailers to a shopping mall.

“Downtown matters. It says a lot about the health of your community,” says Lisa Thompson, executive director of the city’s Main Street organization, the Paducah Renaissance Alliance (PRA). “When a business looks at coming to Paducah, they don’t say, ‘Let me see your Wal-Mart.’ They say, ‘Let me see your downtown.’”

Lower Town is a neighborhood of classic Victorian and Greek Revival homes adjacent to downtown that had fallen into disrepair. In 2002, the neighborhood was drawn into the PRA’s orbit through the Artist Relocation Program. After the city acquired 80 properties via condemnation or foreclosure, it sold them to artists around the country for a token amount with the provision they rehab them into first-floor studios with second-floor living spaces. A local bank offered zero-down, low-interest loans for the full cost of upgrading the dilapidated properties. The city now has a critical mass of galleries, arts-related businesses and an arts school.

Next up for Paducah is a riverfront redevelopment project that just got underway. With the addition of this area, the PRA is now shepherding a 70-block swathe of the city toward a dynamic future as part of a comprehensive Renaissance Area Master Plan.

Downtown matters. It says a lot about the health of your community.



Downtown Paducah thrives with its redevelopment initiatives.



Paso Robles nursed its century-old downtown back to life as a vibrant shopping and entertainment destination after becoming a Main Street community.



Photos by Steve Wilson



Paso Robles, Calif.



Paso Robles - A Vibrant Center

Paso Robles, Calif., is a city of 26,793 nestled in the coastal mountains of the central part of the state — wine country. Norma Moye, executive director of the Downtown Paso Robles Main Street Association, recalls what the downtown was like 25 years ago after suburban shopping centers sucked the life out of it. “It was so dead you could shoot a cannon down the street and not hit anything.”

Not anymore. Paso Robles, founded in 1886, steadily nursed its century-old downtown back to life as a vibrant shopping and entertainment destination after becoming a Main Street community in 1987.

To quickly rally public support, revitalization began with two highly visible projects — improvements to a downtown city park and a Facade rehabilitation program that subsidized improvements to 12 buildings but led property owners to improve 43 others without assistance. When an economic downturn and the arrival of an outlying Wal-Mart later threatened to undo downtown’s progress, the Main Street program helped galvanize additional projects.

A new library/city hall complex was constructed next to the park, a Community Development Block Grant funded seismic retrofitting of vacant unreinforced buildings and a new movie theater was enticed to open by vacating a street and providing \$360,000 in public improvements.

The lesson? “Revitalization doesn’t happen without some struggle,” Moye says, “but you don’t ever want to give up.” ●

Brad Broberg is a Seattle-based freelance writer specializing in business and development issues. His work appears regularly in the Puget Sound Business Journal and the Seattle Daily Journal of Commerce.

REALTOR® LEADS EFFORTS TO REVITALIZE A MAIN STREET

The pieces fall in place to rejuvenate Seville, Ohio



By Christine Jordan Sexton

Rick Stallard is a self described “believer.” A convert, no less. A REALTOR® for 24 years, Stallard was feeling a little uneasy last year at the NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS® (NAR) Washington, D.C. meeting when he was advised to consider working with The National Trust Main Street Center on a plan to revitalize his hometown of Seville.

The village of Seville — which will celebrate its bicentennial anniversary in 2016 — is 2.6 square miles and has a population of just under 3,000 people. Reflective of its near 200-year history, the village of Seville has architecturally significant buildings throughout the downtown area and has residential neighborhoods immediately adjacent to the commercial area.

The village of Seville was in danger of becoming another blighted downtown.



It is the typical downtown in Small Town USA. And from Stallard’s perspective, it was in danger of becoming another blighted downtown.

After hearing the advice at the NAR meeting to work with the National Trust Main Street Center (NTMSC), the process conjured up certain images in Stallard’s head, he confesses. His first thoughts were of restrictive review boards, oversight committees and property owners having to fight for their rights.



Medina County Board of REALTORS® received a \$15,000 NAR Smart Growth Grant.

To him, it seemed contrary to what he had advocated over the years in his capacity as a REALTOR® and member of the Medina County Board of REALTORS®, Ohio Association of REALTORS® and, most recently, as a village of Seville Councilman. In those roles, Stallard said, he has been an advocate of private property rights.

Nonetheless, he considered the advice sage and wanted to pursue the process and available funding that would help the village of Seville remain an economically viable community well into the 21st century.

So Stallard left the NAR meeting in Washington and returned to Ohio to work with the Medina County Board of REALTORS® to apply for an NAR Smart Growth Grant. The Medina County Board of REALTORS®, which represents 618 REALTORS® in north eastern Ohio, requested and received a \$15,000 grant.

The grant money was supplemented by the Seville Chamber of Commerce, which committed another \$2,500 for the assessment and strategies to implement NTMSC's Main Street Four Point Approach®.

"I am now a believer," said Stallard who on October 8 through 10 met with two members of a National Trust Main Street Center assessment team — independent urban planner and owner of Washington-D.C.-based Civic Strategies Group Doug Loescher and National Trust Main Street Center senior program officer Teresa Lynch.

NAR Managing Director of Community and Political Affairs Joseph Molinaro also joined the assessment team which, met with Stallard, school officials, downtown businesses, residents and any party that had an interest in revitalization efforts.

Loescher said that Stallard's initial parade-of-horribles reaction is not unlike many others'.



Photos by TourismOhio, www.DiscoverOhio.com



Photos provided by Joseph R. Molinaro

An old garage waiting for a brownfield designation in downtown Seville



Seville's closed elementary school has the potential to be developed into a mixed-use project.



Main Street Seville, Ohio
Photos provided by Joseph R. Molinaro

An attractive residential neighborhood immediately adjacent to downtown Seville



“The perception that preservation and preservation groups are going to hinder development is very common and widespread,” said Loescher, who added, “I feel one of my jobs is often to go in and try to dispel some of the apprehensions.”

The negative reaction usually stems from a local experience, he said, adding the more local the preservation movement, usually the more restrictive the ordinances and rules.

“The national preservation movement typically is more of education and technical assistance programs,” said Loescher.

Specific to the village of Seville the NTMSC assessment team was asked to look at three particular areas of worry for the city: two brownfields at the edge of downtown; high vacancy rates for downtown ground retail; and the closing of a 68,000-square-foot school built in 1916. It issued a 36-page analysis complete with dozens of recommendations.

In the five months since following these recommendations, which Stallard describes as a blueprint, improvements in all three areas have been made.

“They gave us the blueprint in how to go forward. We have been following those steps, implementing them one at a time, and it’s really starting to pay off,” he said. “There’s a resurgence and things are going in the right direction again.”

What Stallard calls a blueprint, The National Trust Main Street Center calls the Main Street Four Point Approach®. The methodology has been applied in 45 states, has helped funnel \$53.6 billion to 1,200 Main Street commercial districts, and nearly 230,000 buildings have been rehabilitated since the program was launched in 1980. The efforts also have helped create nearly 105,000 new businesses, according to the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

The national preservation movement typically is more of education and technical assistance programs.

In short, the approach stresses four points for long term commercial revitalization: Design; Promotion; Economic Restructuring and Organization. The Main Street Four Point Approach® also includes eight overarching values that apply to the four core principles — including involving the public and the private sectors in decision making and taking an incremental approach that begins with small projects.

A key recommendation, said Stallard, was something that no one in Seville had previously considered, despite its near 200-year history: apply for and establish a National Register Historic District for downtown.

It is key, Stallard said, because the city can fully leverage potential funding, tax credits and other incentives. Additionally, the honorific designation can lessen the burden on property owners interested in making property improvements because they won't be required to meet the building code requirements that apply to new construction.

That's been a draw, Stallard said, to property owners and tenants willing to locate the businesses downtown.

“The more lax building requirements have helped people feel safe about investing, going forward and locating their businesses here,” he said.

Perhaps the thorniest issue for Seville and the biggest impediment for redevelopment were the brownfields, both of which were the sites of two former gas stations. While the assessment report notes that the gas stations are an eyesore to some, the assessment team found that the gas stations — built in the 1920s and 1930s during the Art Deco era — have “architectural details which could enhance their potential for redevelopment.”

The properties are in foreclosure and in need of remediation. National Trust Main Street Center recommended that Seville contact the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency for guidance on the process to be followed and potential funding available. The NTMSC also noted that neither gas station was listed in Ohio as a brownfield.

Medina County has received Environmental Protection Agency grants that can be used for brownfield evaluations and Stallard said the village of Seville will



Photos provided by Joseph R. Molinaro





apply for \$4,000 in grant opportunities to have the two gas stations' tanks assessed. The evaluation will determine the status of underground gas tanks and whether any hazardous substances have been released into the environment. The assessments will give the two gas stations brownfield status, meaning they will be entered into a statewide database. That will trigger correspondence with property owners who will be notified of compliance requirements.

When Stallard originally requested assistance from the National Trust Main Street Center, downtown Seville's vacancy rate for ground floor retail in an eight-block commercial area had spiked to 33 percent. Helping drive those numbers was the shuttering of the large multi-storefront property which once served as the town's general hardware store, the requisite business for a downtown in rural America.

Along with a hardware store, other staples of the traditional downtown are grocery stores and schools but those, too, closed down in Seville. In 2012 the village closed the 68,000-square-foot Seville-Guildford school. While there was fear the vacant school could be a white elephant because of its size, it was recently sold at auction for \$42,000 to an investor who has

bought several vacant schools in Ohio with the aim of redeveloping them.

"He likes the idea of revamping them, fixing them up and repurposing them," said Stallard, who is working with the developer on a potential mixed-use project for the building.

"I don't know if it was just a perfect storm that we got this grant to do this and then the synergy picked up downtown and the economy started coming back. But you know, I'll take lucky any day of the week."

Today, Stallard said, there are just two vacancies. The recommendation by the NTMSC that the existing cluster of antique and local craft stores be expanded is working and that the new businesses that have filled the downtown storefronts fit the bill. ●

Christine Jordan Sexton is a Tallahassee-based freelance reporter who has done correspondent work for the Associated Press, the New York Times, Florida Medical Business and a variety of trade magazines, including Florida Lawyer and National Underwriter.

TRIBAL HOUSING

Is Improving Around the Country



By Brian E. Clark

It's been nearly two decades since the federal government gave tribes the right to determine and deal with their own housing needs.

Though much remains to be done on some reservations, there has been significant improvement in American Indian housing in tribal communities — thanks to passage of the Native American Housing Assistance and Self-Determination Assistance (NAHASDA) act in 1996.

In many cases, homes, apartment projects and other community structures are now greener and culturally more significant to tribes and their members.

Prior to NAHASDA, a federal Housing and Urban Development (HUD) program, many of the tribal dwellings built since World War II were spec-style subdivision homes, said New Mexico architect Jamie Blosser.

“While they were a well-intentioned attempt by HUD to address housing needs, they ultimately had nothing to do with the fabric of those communities,” added Blosser. She is founder of the Sustainable Native Communities

Every Native American community had its own traditional way of settling.

Collaborative (SNCC), a multi-year effort dedicated to improving the quality and sustainability of affordable housing in Native American communities.

“In fact, you see the same HUD homes around the country — no matter the climate or the culture,” Blosser said. “Unfortunately, a lot of the housing helped to create a sense of disconnect from traditional, more-focused settlement patterns.

“Every Native American community had its own traditional way of settling. In the Southwest, for example, the Pueblo Indians had a multi-family mixed-use, mixed-income, highly clustered way of life around plazas. Then the HUD housing came in with its suburban-style homes. And because of that investment, you start to see a disinvestment in traditional cores.”

Blosser said the SNCC collaborative provides solutions for culturally appropriate, green and affordable

Tribal housing authorities become very interested in environmentally sustainable housing design and construction.

housing on tribal trust land by “working with American Indian communities to develop a road map to sustainable development.

“Through technical assistance and research of best practices, we can help a community to reduce its impact on the natural world, gain self-sufficiency and provide healthy and affordable housing.”

Blosser, who works at Atkin Olshin Schade Architects in Santa Fe, said there is an urgent demand for more and better housing throughout Indian Country. She said the collaborative was started “because we were seeing a lot of tribal housing authorities become very interested in environmentally sustainable housing design and construction. At the same time, they wanted to celebrate and preserve their cultural heritage.”

In a best-case scenario, she said housing in Native American communities can be a powerful catalyst for other projects, “and that’s when it can get really exciting.

“We’re not just talking about urgent need and quantity — which is important — but also working toward long-term sustainability on many levels.”

Prior to NAHASDA and the HUD 184 Indian Home Loan Guarantee Program, there was no way for tribal members to get loans to build their own homes because traditional banks had no idea what to do on tribal lands. With the HUD mortgage guarantees, the collateral was the homes and not the tribal trust land.

The collaborative is now completing a paper, funded by HUD, focused on exemplary tribal housing nationwide. The projects they will be showcasing range from an urban development in Phoenix to a forest-based housing complex in Maine to a rehabilitated 700-year-old pueblo in New Mexico.

The Owe’neh Bupingeh Preservation Project, featured in the March issue of “Architectural Record,” used the Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo’s cultural preservation philosophy to restore the plaza around which community life is focused. The effort also won a 2012 SEED (Social, Economic and Environmental Design) honor and this year’s HUD/American Planning Association Empowerment and Opportunity award.

“There had been a lot of deterioration, in part because the HUD homes were set in subdivisions far from the historic core,” Blosser indicated. “It was still used, though, and is the center of the pueblo where they hold their ceremonial dances and feast days.

“The exciting thing about this project is that we are now using HUD funds on work that is culturally appropriate. That’s a nice reversal because of NAHASDA and other legislation.”

In Phoenix, the Devine Legacy development focused on Native American working families. A 65-unit LEED



Photo by Kate Russell

Owe’neh Bupingeh, the traditional name for the village center of Ohkay Owingeh, is believed to have been occupied for 700 years. This multiphased project balances the rehabilitation of the plazas, according to self-determined preservation values, with functional renovations of homes, permitting contemporary life and cultural traditions to comfortably coexist and bringing families back to live in the sacred core of the Pueblo.

Housing in Native American communities can be a powerful catalyst for other projects.

Platinum project, the apartments are adjacent to a light rail stop. An organization called Native American Connections is the developer and has its offices next door. The project uses a plaza concept, with an interior courtyard.

In Maine, the Penobscot Indian Nation Housing Authority worked to bring young families back to trust land by helping them get mortgages with the U.S. Department of Agriculture and then designing a LEED Gold project that connected them to their forest heritage.

The tribe developed model lending and foreclosure documents and conducted a series of workshops to make sure people understood what was involved with homeownership.

Blosser said, “The site planning was neat because it includes a nature path with native plants along it and a boardwalk through the forest to the village, with sweat lodges and a ceremonial multi-use space within it. The ceremonial grounds have 23 stones that represent the original 23 clans.”

Daniel Glenn, a Seattle-based architect and member of the Crow tribe, has worked on many Native American developments during his 25-year career. His first tribal project involved the Little Bighorn College Campus in Montana, his native state.

“I designed the whole campus there, including the Drifting Lodges Learning Center and the library, archive and administration building complex. That was master planned in 1998 in a process with grad students while I was a professor at Montana State University,” he said.

Glenn, whose firm is called 7 Directions, said the buildings were designed for LEED certification and the campus includes a central dance arbor at its center.

“It’s focused around the concept of a teepee encampment and buildings are placed in relationship to their importance and link to the cardinal directions as well as the summer and winter solstices,” he said.

The cultural learning lodge faces the rising sun on summer solstice, which is northeast, while the library faces true east. Other structures point to other key directions.

“That was where I started to be able to do this culturally responsive kind of work for tribes,” he said. “I began working with my own tribe as a young man with my father’s firm — John Glenn Engineers Architects and Constructors — back in the 70s. But I’ve really only had

The Penobscot Indian Nation Housing Authority worked to bring young families back to trust land by helping them get mortgages.



Sustainable Native Communities Collaborative

The Penobscot Indian Nation Housing Authority (PINHA) built 12 Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Gold single-family homes. The project has helped to bring young, low-income families back to the community, reuniting them with a strong cultural and traditional heritage, including a nature path, native plants, a forest, a boardwalk to the village, sweat lodges, and ceremonial multiuse space.

an opportunity in the last 15 years or so to do this culturally responsive kind of work.”

In Lapwai, Idaho, he provided technical assistance on an 18-unit Nez Perce housing community that will begin construction this summer.

“It started out as a standard housing development, but became quite a green, super-insulated, straw-bale project that received tax credits through the state of Idaho,” he said.

The homes in the development are divided into three clusters that form a circle of buildings like a traditional teepee grouping.

“Each of these encampments faces east and all the doorways have a vestibule that is oriented to the east,” he said.

In addition, the homes have a carport that is designed as a shade structure that a traditional lodge would have outside to provide shade for cooking and camping.

The space inside the 1,000-square-foot homes is as open as possible in a relatively small unit, he said, with a combined cooking dining and living space with high ceiling “that alludes to a central gathering place of a lodge.”

The pitched roofs are oriented towards the sun so that they have a passive solar function. That design also provides height and space for cooling ventilation and more daylight in the inside of the units as well.

Glenn explained, “We worked with Ecotope, a Seattle company that did energy modeling of the original homes, which were designed by a local architect named Jerry Brotnov.

“He provided the drawings for us, and we developed energy models using a computer program that allowed us to analyze and make an array of choices for the clients regarding benefits of different materials, window types, orientation, and different heating and cooling systems, which allowed them to weigh the different positives and negatives and cost benefits of each of those.”

Working with the Puyallup tribe in western Washington State, Glenn renovated a gymnasium and added a

community center addition to create a building modeled after a traditional longhouse.

The three-phase development in Tacoma, which is nearly complete, also features 20 units of new housing — designed with a longhouse theme — and the renovation and weatherization of 27 other townhomes to make them more efficient. The development was a LEED for Homes project of the Year in 2012 and also won a Social, Economic and Environmental Design (SEED) award.

“This was the first effort that I’m aware that tried to build a modern version of the longhouse,” he said. “We developed the project in a workshop process with the Puyallup Housing Authority and tribal members.”

Glenn described the longhouse as a traditional communal structure in which “everyone lives in one space with a central gathering area in the middle and people sleeping along the walls separated by curtains.

“Obviously with a modern longhouse, we couldn’t emulate directly that kind of communal lifestyle because it is no longer something that people are comfortable with.

Buildings are placed in relationship to their importance and link to the cardinal directions as well as the summer and winter solstices.



The Spirit Lake Tribe developed a forward looking plan for future development that will be oriented around smart growth and sustainability principles.

“So we interpreted the longhouse as a row house concept in which we have a shared central linear courtyard. And on either side of that courtyard are one- and two-bedroom townhomes that face each other and are connected by a structure above that ties them all together, providing partial shade and rain protection.”

The new units are being built as longhouses, which form a cluster around a central, circular dance arbor that also serves as a playground. They open onto a trail system that loops through the forest and leads to a sweat lodge, the traditional healing and ceremonial structure for many tribes, including the Puyallup.

In North Dakota, planner Harrison Rue and Blosser worked with the Spirit Lake tribe to develop what he called a “forward-looking plan for the tribe’s future development that would be oriented around smart growth and sustainability principles.”

Rue, a principal with ICF International, said the tribal lands are on the southern shore of Devil’s Lake, which has been hit by flooding in recent years.

“It’s in a basin,” he said. “Water comes in and doesn’t go out, so there are impacts on housing, roads and other facilities.”

The project team met with the tribe in the spring of 2012 and returned in the fall to develop a strategy that will be culturally sensitive as well as sustainable.

“We tried to understand what is really of value to the tribe. That was the basis of the whole plan, not just the green part,” Rue explained.

Though no housing or buildings are yet planned, he said there was a major focus on location in keeping with traditional historic district centers and using natural materials native to the region.

“The comprehensive plan isn’t fully developed yet,” he said. “But it’s based on what is most important to the tribe. We have the principles and process to create the rest of it. And that’s a big step, because most tribes have not had guidelines in the past to guide their growth.”

Nick Tilsen, executive director of the Thunder Valley Community Development Corporation in South Dakota and member of the Oglala Lakota Sioux tribe, echoed Rue’s sentiments.

“We initially were looking for master-planning funding for a 34-acre development,” explained Tilsen, who said his tribe needs as many as 5,000 new dwelling units for tribal members who live on the Pine Ridge Reservation.

“The tribe ultimately created a consortium of 13 organizations that received a major HUD Sustainable Communities grant in 2010 to develop a much larger plan for the tribe.

“We’d seen that other places, like Greensburg, Kansas — which was devastated by a huge EF5 tornado that leveled 95 percent of the city and killed 11 people in May of 2007 — had used master plans to rebuild community.

“Then we heard talk of interest in sustainable communities by federal government and figured that was a good fit for us.”

Puyallup housing designed with the longhouse theme in Tacoma, Wash.





The tribe created a consortium of 13 organizations that received a major HUD Sustainable Communities grant.

Tilsen said the planning process is now complete and was recently approved as the official sustainable development plan for the Oglala tribe.

“This is the first time in our history that our government has something like this,” he said.

“The most positive thing the grant gave us was the resources to convene our people,” he said, noting that the next step is to create a regional tribal planning office.

“That will be the glue that holds this all together,” he continued. “Much of what ended up in the plan is what many of the organizations were already considering.”

The housing authority soon will begin work on 18 houses in what he described as the first energy efficient and live/work community development on the reservation.

Though the tribe has massive funding needs of at least \$750 million to provide adequate housing, the regional plan is a step in the right direction.

“If we are going to solve our housing and economic development problems, we have to create bigger strategies, bring in new money and partner with the private sector,” he said. “That may take some doing, especially with the federal budget tightening.

“Nonetheless, this whole process helped us have discussions about the future of our nation, which we’ve never had here. So in that sense, it’s been a very positive experience.” ●

Brian E. Clark is a Wisconsin-based journalist and a former staff writer on the business desk of The San Diego Union-Tribune. He is a contributor to the Los Angeles Times, Chicago Sun-Times, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, Dallas Morning News and other publications.

He said the consortium worked closely with Scott Moore of the Kansas City based BNIM Architects “because most of us had very little or no experience with regional planning.”

The effort began by bringing together representatives from a myriad of organizations ranging from the tribal president’s office to the housing authority to the tribal environmental protection department to HUD, as well as private-sector representatives.

“We said, ‘here’s the opportunity, what do you want for the future of Pine Ridge?’” explained Tilsen, who said the reservation covers more than 3 million acres.

“That was a question that for the most part had never been asked to our people. So we began collecting data and opinions to create a vision statement. Hundreds of people participated in the process.”

The tribe also discussed the role the reservation plays in the greater region, the fact that it has no shopping center, and how to leverage its economic power.

If we are going to solve our housing and economic development problems, we have to create bigger strategies, bring in new money and partner with the private sector.



CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT

Crafting Vibrant, Rural Places Through Art

By John Van Gieson

When Elisa Korenne moved from New York City to New York Mills, Minn., population 1,195, for an artists' residency program, she wanted the full Minnesota experience, including the canoe camping she read about in a guidebook.

Local outdoorsman Chris Klein, who arranged the trip, suggested they either call it off or cut back to a day trip when other participants cancelled, but Korenne insisted on a real canoe camping expedition, including sleeping in a tent under the stars.

Now, six years later, Korenne is happily married to Klein and is a proud resident of rural Otter Tail County, Minnesota — a far cry from Brooklyn. A singer-songwriter, Korenne is writing a memoir about her experiences titled *100 Miles from Nowhere*.

Among the shows she performs in Minnesota and North Dakota is one called "Oy Vey is Jewish for Uff Da,"



Paradise Garden in Summerville, Ga.

Rural communities all over the country are turning to the arts to revitalize declining areas.

a term conveying disappointment that was brought to the Upper Midwest by Norwegian immigrants. Her experience, however, has been anything but "uff da."

"The ironic thing is that my career is better than ever," Korenne said. "I have opportunities in rural Minnesota that I never would have had in New York City. I have a wonderful husband, I have a really wonderful career and a wonderful lifestyle."

Rural communities all over the country are turning to the arts to revitalize declining areas that have lost jobs and population, and in some cases, been devastated by natural disasters. The goal is economic development, creating

The arts can advance public agendas from job creation and transit-oriented development to cultural preservation and regional competitiveness.

vigorous communities that attract jobs, new residents and tourists. Leading advocates call the movement “creative placemaking.”

Community Support for the Arts

“Leaders across disciplines are recognizing that the arts can advance public agendas from job creation and transit-oriented development to cultural preservation and regional competitiveness,” said Kelley Lindquist, president of Artspace, a Minneapolis organization that develops arts facilities around the country. “I travel probably 26 weeks a year, and wherever I go, people are ready to talk about arts-led community transformation under the umbrella of ‘creative placemaking,’ and they are ready to have a complex, nuanced exchange.”

Artspace is developing a showcase project in Minot, N.D., which was devastated by a flood in 2011 and faces a severe shortage of affordable housing because of an oil boom. The \$9.4 million Minot Artspace Lofts development, which is expected to open in the fall, will feature



Elisa Korenne, an artist originally from Brooklyn, N.Y., moved to New York Mills, Minn., after obtaining a rural arts grant.



The Kaddatz Gallery in downtown Fergus Falls, Minn. The building was under threat of demolition until ArtSpace bought it in 2001. In addition to the gallery, the upstairs has affordable artist live/work spaces.

34 work/live units that will be rented to artists at below-market rates. It’s the first new building in downtown Minot in 30 years.

The project will feature a gallery dedicated to the Turtle Mountain Tribal Arts Association, which represents members of five tribes in the Dakotas. Backers hope the focus on Native American artists will turn Minot into the “Santa Fe of the North.”

Michele Anderson, rural project director for Springboard for the Arts in Fergus Falls, Minn., said mobilizing community support is essential to the success of rural arts projects.

“I think the key to getting started is getting people from all sectors of the community, not just artists, but business folks, nonprofits and city council people to come together,” she said.

Springboard for the Arts is working on an Artist Resource Center in Fergus Falls, population 13,000, and a Rural Arts and Culture Summit at the University of Minnesota, Morris. Arts advocates have renovated an old Fergus Falls hotel as a work/live space for artists and are restoring an old theater for performing artists.

The rural arts, or creative placemaking, movement took root in the late 1980s and has accelerated in recent years, encompassing many diverse art forms. There are painters, sculptors, wood workers, glass blowers, musicians, actors, weavers, writers — even artisans who make herbal tinctures in the mountains of Western North Carolina.

Our mission is to grow economies through crafts.

“Our mission is to grow economies through crafts,” said Gwynne Rukenbrod, executive director of HandMade in America. Based in Asheville, HandMade in America supports economic development through the arts in 13 small towns in western North Carolina.

A 1995 study reported that crafts artists had a \$120 million economic impact on the 25 counties in the North Carolina mountains — four times greater than tobacco, the No. 1 agricultural crop at the time, Rukenbrod said. By 2006, she said, that figure had increased to \$206.5 million.

John Davis, a guru of the rural arts movement, reported similar economic benefits in two Minnesota communities, New York Mills and Lanesboro, where he led revitalization efforts. Davis is an artist who moved to New York Mills in 1987 after living in Minneapolis and New York.

“It wasn’t with the idea of bringing arts into a small town,” he said. “I went there to get away from Minneapolis. I just painted barns and houses in New York Mills to survive.”

Davis said he became interested in expanding access to the arts in small towns and got the idea the arts could

promote economic development. He initiated the New York Mills artist residency program that changed Korenne’s life.

Before the program started, Davis said, a survey indicated 60 percent of respondents said it was a bad idea and they would not support public funding. Town officials contributed \$35,000 anyway, he said, and a year later 68 percent said they supported the arts program and annual funding by the town.

Five years after he launched the program, Davis said, 17 new businesses had moved to New York Mills, creating more than 200 new jobs, a 40 percent increase.

In 2000, Davis left New York Mills to direct a new rural arts program in Lanesboro, population 754, in an area of Southeastern Minnesota known for biking trails and canoeing and kayaking on the Root River.

Davis is taking a unique approach in Lanesboro. Instead of housing arts facilities in a single building, he wants to turn the whole town into an art center. “We’re shifting the paradigm so that every part of a small town becomes an art center,” he said.

(Below) A big crowd for the Exhibit Opening Reception for the “Cutting Edge” Stained Glass show by internationally acclaimed Lanesboro artist Barbara Benson Keith.

(Right) Downtown Lanesboro, Minn.



We’re shifting the paradigm so that every part of a small town becomes an art center.



The Farm Art D'tour Fermentation Festival near Reedsburg, Wis.

The mission is to integrate culture and agriculture to build rural communities.

One of his ideas is to turn the municipal parking lot into a “poetry parking lot” where poems written by local, regional and nationally known poets would be posted on signs.

Davis is seeking a grant from Artspace which recently named Lanesboro one of America’s Top Small Town Art-places. Lanesboro is in heady company as the list includes famous art resorts such as Taos, N.M., and Marfa, Texas, and art-oriented ski or summer resorts such as Stowe, Vt., and Highlands, N.C.

There are as many approaches to rural arts development as there are communities seeking revitalization through the arts. Some examples:

- **Wormfarm Institute** in Reedsburg, Wis., which is located on a working farm, requires artists in residence to work in the garden. It displays large, temporary art works in farm fields during its annual Fermentation Fest.
- **Paradise Gardens** in Summerville, Ga., features the work of the late folk artist Howard Finster, a preacher who created more than 46,000 works of art.



Courtesy of HandMade in America

- **HandMade in America** taps methane from an old landfill to fuel kilns for ceramic artists, furnaces for glass blowers and a greenhouse at its Energy Exchange program near Bakersville, N.C.

Co-founder Donna Neuwirth said Wormfarm Institute’s mission is to “integrate culture and agriculture to build rural communities. It’s a living laboratory of arts and ecology and fertile ground for creative work.”

Neuwirth and her partner Jay Salinas are former Chicagoans who founded the Institute in 2000 on a 40-acre farm in rural Wisconsin, naming it after Charles Darwin’s quote: “Every fertile grain of soil has passed at least once through the gut of an earthworm.” Salinas coined the term “cultureshed” to describe their community.

A cultureshed is: “1.) A geographic region irrigated by streams of local talent and fed by deep pools of human and natural history; 2.) An area nourished by what is cultivated locally; and 3.) The efforts of writers, performers, visual artists, scholars, farmers and chefs who contribute to a vital and diverse local culture.”



(Above) Culture stands sell produce on some days and other days feature puppet shows at the Wormfarm Institute. (Right) Paradise Garden in Summerville, Ga.

Last year, an artists-in-residence program in Wisconsin brought in well over \$1 million in direct spending.

Neuwirth said the Institute selects two to four artists at a time for residencies ranging from three weeks to six months. Unlike most residencies that serve as a “retreat,” theirs is an engagement in the life of a working farm.

The artists build multi-purpose roadside “culture stands” that can be used one day for selling produce and the next for cultural events such as puppet shows, she said.

Wormfarm holds an annual 10-day Fermentation Fest in October, featuring agricultural products that ferment, from grain to beer, milk to cheese and cabbage to sauerkraut, Neuwirth said. The main event is the Farm/Art DTour that takes place along a 50-mile drive through scenic farmland from Reedsburg through three other small towns. The landscape is punctuated with large, attention-getting art installations and roadside culture stands in farm fields along the route.

Neuwirth said the Fermentation Fest attracts 8,000 to 10,000 visitors. A University of Wisconsin–Extension

study reported that each agricultural tourist in the state spends an average of \$137 in the communities where agritourism events are held, she said.

“Based on that number, last year we brought in well over \$1 million in direct spending and that doesn’t include indirect,” she said.

Maintaining a Visionary’s Legacy

Chattooga County, home of Summerville in Northwest Georgia, “was the most depressed county in Appalachian Georgia” about three years ago, said Jordan Poole, executive director of the Paradise Gardens Foundation.

“Everyone who is connected with this project realized we were not going to allow our town to die,” Poole said. “We were going to enhance our town. We have a lot of local crafts that have been handed down from generation to generation, and we’re able to give these people a showcase.”



A Center for the Arts is fixing up a theater in Fergus Falls, Minn., to use as artist studio spaces.

The centerpiece of the revitalization project was the restoration of famed folk artist Howard Finster's Paradise Gardens. Finster was a local preacher who said he was called at the age of 59 to devote the rest of his life to celebrating God through folk art creations. When he died in 2001 at the age of 81, Finster left behind a huge body of work at his Paradise Garden near Summerville.

In 2011, Chattooga County purchased the deteriorating site, and the Paradise Garden Foundation was created to restore it.

"Paradise Garden is a maze of buildings, sculptures and displays," the Foundation's website says. "The Gardens were built from found objects and recycled materials ranging from bottles, bathtubs and toilets to bicycle frames and cast-off jewelry."

Poole said the restored Garden has brought an estimated \$500,000 into the community since the Foundation launched the restoration project.

A Critical Mass of Crafts Artists

Rukenbrod, a glass artist, said the HandMade in America program grew out of a meeting that Asheville Chamber

Rural arts programs are both personally rewarding and enrich the participating communities.

of Commerce officials had in New York on an economic development mission in the mid 1990s.

"They got into a conversation about asset-based economic development," she said. "Continuing the process, they discovered that one of the biggest unknown and uncelebrated assets of our area was crafts artists."

More than 4,000 crafts artists live in the 25-county mountain region in Western North Carolina, she said.

HandMade in America offers those artists entrepreneurial training and works with them to develop markets for their works, Rukenbrod said. The program works with local officials to revitalize their communities, some of which offer artist residency programs, through the arts.

HandMade in America has leveraged \$10 million in public funding over the past 15 years with \$40 million in private grants and donations, Rukenbrod said.

She said the Energy Exchange near Bakersville offers three-year residencies to two glass artists and four ceramicists at a time.

"We create business incubator opportunities for artists to be exposed to different markets," she said. "We teach them how to enter the wholesale market place and do booths at a wholesale trade show. We feel like our approach is a holistic approach where we teach crafts artists how to be more successful."

HandMade in America also works with 650 fiber artists and farmers who raise the animals and grow the plants the artists need to create their products, Rukenbrod said.

From an artist's perspective, said Minnesota singer-songwriter Korenne, rural arts programs are both personally rewarding and enrich the participating communities.

"I and many artists like myself make life here more rich, more interesting," she said. "It really makes the area a much more diverse, engaged, community-oriented place." ●

John Van Gieson is a freelance writer based in Tallahassee, Fla. He owns and runs Van Gieson Media Relations, Inc.

A Case for Place

By creating places that attract people, Michigan is using the concept to boost communities.



Courtesy of the Michigan Municipal League

By Tracey C. Velt

When you think of Michigan, it's natural that you think of automobiles. "We're the auto-centric capital of the world," says Gilbert M. White, a REALTOR® and placemaking consultant in Haslett, Mich. "We [the state of Michigan] were good at producing sprawl and now we want to build people habitat," he says.

"Michigan remains a state with some small industries that revolve around manufacturing. That won't change," says James Tischler, community development division director for the Michigan State Housing Development Authority in Lansing, Mich. "But we need to diversify now that the recession is over. The current administration has established a high priority for re-establishing prosperity in the state."

They'll do that through placemaking, a growing international movement that capitalizes "on a local community's assets, inspiration and potential, ultimately creating good public space that promotes people's health, happiness and well being," according to the Project for Public Spaces.

In the Beginning

"Out of the recession came a governor who readily embraced this movement," says Tischler. So, the state started benchmarking, not just economic policies, but talent, as well.

"The data was startling. When you research where the millennials and entrepreneurs were migrating, they were moving to a number of metros. Where in those metros they were going, got us to recognize place," he says. "They're not going to the suburbs, and that's a national trend."

In fact, the NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS® (NAR) and the Michigan Association of REALTORS® (MAR) confirmed that trend in recent studies. All of this led to creating places in Michigan cities and

Placemaking is a growing international movement that capitalizes on a local community's assets, inspiration and potential.

If we save our cities, by definition, we save our farms, fields and crops. Placemaking brings more people to our cities, increasing job growth and economic prosperity.



downtowns that would attract people. From renewing a park to full-scale place planning, this concept will, according to Tischler, “help us ecologically. If we save our cities, by definition, we save our farms, fields and crops. It also brings more people to our cities, increasing job growth and economic prosperity.”

White agrees. “Michigan is uniquely qualified because we recognize the need to change our economic model,” he says.

It’s Working

Placemaking as a concept is working in Michigan, says Tischler. “Would you believe that in the past two years there have been more than 11,000 new workers in downtown Detroit? There are 35,000 residents, 42 percent of whom are millennials. Residential vacancy in downtown Detroit is at 4 percent, and in midtown Detroit it’s at 2 percent,” he says. “Our No. 1 concern is that there’s not enough supply for the demand.”

Much of that, says Tischler, is thanks to Rock Ventures, the development arm of Quicken Loans, which owns 17 buildings in downtown Detroit. Rock’s placemaking plan is centered on creating six distinct and unique destinations that draw people to the region, give them an experience that will make them want to return frequently and where they will want to spend more time.

“Their strategy is to bring in a couple thousand millennial interns each summer. About half stay. This summer they’re ramping up pop-up retail which is adding to the activity mix, and it’s all about placemaking,” says Tischler.

Because placemaking begins at the community level, it made perfect sense for the REALTOR® Association to get involved. After all, REALTORS® are the

Because placemaking begins at the community level, it made perfect sense for the REALTOR® Association to get involved.

eyes and ears of communities. “Real estate is local,” says Kathie Feldpausch, senior vice president of the Michigan Association of REALTORS®. “REALTORS® are in the neighborhood all the time and are aware of or directly involved with the groups doing these projects. They sell place.”

White agrees, “Consumer preferences and demographics are changing. There are opportunities for REALTORS® based on the fact that the market is demanding information on desirable places with great people habitats. Just look at the popularity of Walkscore.com, and you’ll see what I mean.”

Micro-Level Placemaking

With that in mind, MAR decided to support placemaking on a micro level. The association adopted Lighter Quicker Cheaper (LQC), a concept promoted by the organization Project for Public Space, which offers small grants to community members and organizations so that they can do smaller placemaking projects in their communities. Grants provided by MAR, with funding from NAR, of \$500 to \$1,500 are given to projects deemed

suitable for the LQC concept. The idea, says Feldpausch, “was that these smaller projects would energize the project as a whole. You must go through incremental steps first, and the best use of our resources was as a supplement to the larger projects.”

White adds, “The LQC model is a bottoms-up approach to placemaking. We’re taking small, incremental steps where the community resident is the expert, not the planner, politician or engineer. This is directly connecting the REALTOR® with those people living in these communities on a daily basis. If you’re successful with it, you increase values and demand because you have better neighborhood.”

Placemaking is essential for real estate, says White, because, “As a matter of public policy, and for a variety of reasons — social, economic and environmental — the state of Michigan recognizes the importance of creating and maintaining great places. And, who better in the private sector to lead the way than the REALTOR® community?”

Placemaking is essential for real estate.



Photos courtesy of the Michigan Municipal League



Placemaking is already happening all over Michigan.

The first phase of MAR's LQC concept was implemented in Lansing in fall 2012. Each of the chosen projects had a REALTOR® sponsor, a clear concept and a community-wide resolve to see it through, according to Feldpausch.

Grants were given to individuals and community organizations for projects that would contribute to bringing people to a specific area. For example, one grant went to Friends of Reutter Fountain Park in downtown Lansing. They used the money to hold weekly concerts to encourage people to visit the park and the famous fountain. Another grant went to the Lansing Downtown Neighborhood Association to use for homemade and highly designed signs to announce meetings and encourage residents to attend.

"We have a park across from our office that is underused, why not hold a weekly yoga class?" says Feldpausch. "Building place doesn't always mean building; you can use the built form that's already there and encourage its use. By doing this, you don't have empty streets and that translates into safety." In fact, she says, projects can happen in a big city or a small town and be rural or urban. There are no boundaries.

Phase one was so successful that MAR is ready to launch phase two with six local associations across the state.

It's vital that communities have both the strategic-level placemaking and the micro-level placemaking happening.

Photos courtesy of the Michigan Municipal League

"They'll use the template we developed to run the program at the local association level," she says. Once phase two is up and running, MAR plans to give NAR the template so that other associations can download the packet of information and implement the LQC grant program at their local association.

Age Old Concept

The truth, says Tischler, is that placemaking is already happening all over Michigan. "Our strategy is to link them together, then model how the processes and activities occur to encourage more activity from a state level in developing the model."

It's vital that communities have both the strategic-level placemaking and the micro-level placemaking happening. "Even some award-winning architectural and landscape designs fail miserably in placemaking. If you're not attracting people, it's not a great people habitat," says White. By bringing in both the community residents and the strategic thinkers, these places will help rehabilitate neighborhoods.

Great form along with the concepts of placemaking increase activity.

“A study conducted by the Knight Foundation and Gallup shows that how you feel about your community is vital to its growth. Those communities that had the highest satisfaction scores (community attachment scores) also had the highest growth in gross domestic product (GDP),” says White.

The truth, says Tischler, is “people have an inherent sixth sense when it comes to great places. It must have great form, which is the arrangement of mass and space within

a neighborhood.” Great form, he says, along with the concepts of placemaking, increase activity.

Of course, when any community has activity, it increases the livelihood of local businesses and prosperity. “Quite simply, placemaking is a simple concept with huge impacts,” says White. ●

Tracey C. Velt is an Orlando-based freelance writer specializing in business and real estate

Some Other Examples of MAR Placemaking Projects

Historic Building Connections

Preservation Lansing is recognizing those who have taken on urban blight and made the old new again. The group will award plaques to one residential and two commercial building renovation projects and celebrate the successes with “Porch Parties” at each, inviting the public, city leaders and associated business to come together and spread the word that renovation builds strong cities.



Neighborhood Art Installation

One of Lansing’s oldest neighborhoods, Genesee, is recreating itself and making a place for some nearly-lost-art by nationally known artist W. Robert Youngman. The six concrete panels will grace the neighborhood’s Corner Community Garden and may be the only remaining panels from the original 1972 Washington Square urban renewal project.



Barnes Street Community Garden

Combining seven accessible raised-bed gardens, a commissioned sculpture, meeting space and a working shed, this new community garden will serve the entire neighborhood. The project is part of ongoing placemaking activities to create a new sense of place within the Village Summit Community and will provide fresh produce as well as a meeting place for all to enjoy for years to come.



Quite simply, placemaking is a simple concept with huge impacts.

Trowbridge Village Neighbor Station

Capitalizing on past efforts to beautify the busy Trowbridge area, the project will create an oasis by transforming an existing covered walkway into a public area for sharing books, games, skills and friendship. A local artist will engage children to help with murals, volunteers will install comfy artistic furniture and the local grocery store will help keep the space clean.



Old Town Honorarium Sculpture Park

Former Old Town Mayor Robert Busby will be memorialized when residents install a statue of him in once-blighted Burchard Park, the first of many sculptures to come. This community-wide project will include landscaping and flower beds using plants collected by volunteers and from Busby's own gardens. The sculpture park will become a welcoming space among other Old Town attractions like the Brenke Fish Ladder, Cesar Chavez Plaza and the River Trail.



Historic Dimondale Walking Tour

Significant aspects of Dimondale's 164-year history will be featured on a walking tour with the installation of new signage and benches throughout the village. Signs will depict significant buildings and events from the past while embracing the present and the future with QR codes linking smart phone users to the village's website. The tour will tie a rich past with a bright future, expressing the community's culture and pride.



Farmers' Market Expansion

The South Lansing Community Development Association will expand and enhance the market with local performers, hot food vendors, interactive children's activities and local business resources. These activities will boost social interaction at the already vibrant market.





CAPITALIZING ON OUR HISTORY

Courtesy of Arkansas Dept. of Parks & Tourism

Heritage-based programs spur economic development

By Brian E. Clark

From the Arkansas Delta to the wine country of southeastern Washington State and beyond, rural regions around the country are conserving, rehabilitating and developing cultural and historic assets to fuel economic development.

Dubbed “heritage-based development,” the goal is to build sustainable communities and strengthen regional economies by promoting farmsteads, buildings, districts and landscapes, as well as local arts, crafts, music, food and events.

Jim Lindberg, field director in the Denver Office of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, said the current effort sprang from the success of the national Main Street program.

“That work in the 1980s launched the idea that our heritage is not only important to us culturally and historically, but it is an asset that we can build upon and create sustainable economic development. Main Street was a way to re-enliven historic buildings in small towns and find new uses for them. It’s worked extremely well.”

In many ways that approach has helped many small downtowns bounce back.

Heritage-based development’s
goal is to build sustainable
communities and strengthen
regional economies.

When many rural communities
looked at what might attract
travelers, history and culture
are near the top of the list.

“We successfully married the idea of economic development and heritage,” he said.

Lindberg explained the National Trust and other groups have been involved with heritage tourism for many years, citing the “Barn Again” program in New England that also dates to the 1980s.

“When many rural communities looked at what might attract travelers, history and culture are near the top of the list,” he said

Connecting Heritage to Economic Development

About seven years ago, his organization focused on regional heritage-based rural development with two projects: One in an eight-county region of central Kentucky and another in 15 counties in Arkansas along the Mississippi Delta.

“Each had different challenges and assets economically,” he said. “In Kentucky, it was an area with growth pressure from Louisville and Lexington. There was a loss of farmland and rural character with the economic base shifting because of the loss of tobacco subsidies. The program was dubbed ‘Kentucky Crossroads.’”

This approach starts with the conservation of an existing asset like a barn, historic building, landscape, neighborhood or whole downtown.

Communities involved in this program included Bardstown, Campbellsville, Danville, Greensburg, Harrodsburg, Hodgenville, Lebanon, Perryville and Springfield. During the first three years, it led to 57 new businesses, 255 net new jobs, \$12.2 million in private investment and \$42.5 million in public investment in these Main Street towns. Though no figures are available for recent years, he said the economic growth has continued.

In one case, the owner of the Hatchett Vineyard in Washington County, Kentucky, replaced his tobacco crop with grape vines. The man wanted to convert an old barn into a tasting room and he was able to get the structure listed in the National Register of Historic Places so future rehabilitation work could be eligible for state and federal tax credits.

In another locale, the Crossroads program staffers helped another farmer use these same tax credits to repair an 1897 mule barn and other historic farm structures. To keep the farm viable, Lindberg said, the family has shifted from

raising mules to cattle and opened a bed and breakfast in the historic farmhouse on the land to tap into the growing agritourism market in the area.

“This approach starts with the conservation of an existing asset like a barn, historic building, landscape, neighborhood or whole downtown and then looking at ways to connect commerce and economic development to that those assets and reusing them as places for business and tourism draws,” he said.

“A lot of older buildings are a great fit for small businesses because the capital expense for occupying them may not be as great as it would be to build new. Moreover, when assets are already in place and connected to existing infrastructure, you reduce the need to spend more dollars and spread out into the landscape. So there is transportation efficiency that comes from this sort of thing.

“And we really see a triple bottom line with the social and community benefits of this work, too, because it will only be successful if it is community led. We spend a lot of time building new leadership and that piggybacks



Courtesy of Tourism Walla Walla



Photo by Dave Thompson

Johnny Cash Boyhood Home in Dyess, Ark., during and after rehabilitation. Photo provided by Beth Wiedower, National Trust for Historic Preservation



As part of the heritage tourism effort, we wanted to create unique and authentic destinations that would attract visitors and their dollars.

on a sense of pride that communities have in important assets that they believe are worth saving and celebrating.”

Arkansas Attracts Tourism through Its Unique History

The economy of the Arkansas Delta, which experienced an agriculture boom from the late 30s through the 50s, went into a decline in the 1960s. Mechanization of agriculture led to the out-migration of people, capital and resources.

Lindberg said the area, filled with unique food traditions, a rich musical heritage, two National Scenic Byways and a colorful history, was left without a significant employment base. As a result, apathy and hopelessness became common in many Delta communities.

Beth Wiedower was the field director of the Arkansas Delta Rural Heritage Development Initiative.

“As part of the heritage tourism effort, we wanted to create unique and authentic destinations that would attract visitors and their dollars while preserving heritage resources that are unique to the rural region. There were 16 different projects under that one strategy.

“So we created the Arkansas Delta Music Trail and published a CD for visitors that highlighted 14 tracks of music with everyone from country singer Johnny Cash to Louis Jordan, called the ‘father of Rhythm and Blues.’”

She said they also developed a driving tour highlighting key Civil Rights locations in the Arkansas Delta and worked with groups to promote African American homecoming events.

A second strategy was to help launch local businesses.

“To do that, we worked with local lenders to educate them about incentives and resources for historic properties and entrepreneurs who wanted to locate in the downtown area of their communities,” she said.

Another program was called “Arkansas DeltaMade,” which she said bridged a significant gap between entrepreneurs and small businesses in the Delta and the resources they needed to grow and expand their marketing and branding efforts.

“That’s been one of the key successes of our work in Arkansas in terms of promoting unique wares based on the heritage of the region, such as pottery, music, food and a lot of products like BBQ sauce, tamales, fried pies, pork knuckle gravy and other traditional southern food specific to the Delta,” she said.

They also worked on education and advocacy, which included the successful passage of legislation through the state Legislature of the Delta Ecotourism Tax Credit, a 25 percent tax credit for entrepreneurs and property

We successfully passed a statewide tax credit for historic preservation and rehab.

owners who undertake a heritage tourism related business in one of the 15 designated Delta counties.

“We also successfully passed a statewide tax credit for historic preservation and rehab in Arkansas, which they didn’t have before,” she said.

In addition, they worked with county judges to inform them about the economic impact of historic preservation and heritage tourism.

“In Arkansas, we have a strong county courthouse preservation program that is funded through the state,” she said. “So most of what county judges knew was related to courthouses.

“But our point was to talk to them about why it’s better to place county offices downtown or on Main Street rather than in the strip mall on the outskirts of town next to Wal-Mart. We also worked with district commissions to help designate and create ordinances in towns with a wealth of historic resources.”

Another big success was creating a regional “Arkansas Delta” brand where none had existed before.

“In the past, people here just referred to it as the Delta or Eastern Arkansas. Nationally, people associated the Delta with Mississippi,” she said.

The final strategy was the landmark preservation effort, which was used as a teaching tool for communities on how to save and restore sites.

“We just completed a \$4 million project in Lake Village in the southern portion of the region where the city administration relocated its offices into a historic building downtown,” she said. “Moreover, it’s the first LEED certified building in eastern Arkansas.”

The other significant project that will open this August is the boyhood home of Johnny Cash — one of 14 preservation projects groups worked on.

“As a result of all this, we’ve seen increased economic activity in the region,” Wiedower added. “But more importantly than that, from our standpoint, is the success we had in building the local capacity to continue to do this kind of work.

“These folks are now our foot soldiers for smart reinvestment in historic preservation and rehabilitation as an economic tool for that rural region. A number of things are starting to take off now because of them.”

Mississippi Embraced Its Blues Heritage

Across the river to the east, The Mississippi Blues Trail has attracted national and international attention to that state.

Tushek Building in downtown Lake Village, Ark, during and after rehabilitation. Photo provided by Beth Wiedower; National Trust for Historic Preservation



It began in December of 2006, when three historic Blues-related markers were placed. Since then, as interest exploded, more than 170 markers have gone up.

Scott Barretta, a sociologist at the University of Mississippi who worked on the trail said one of the markers honored Charlie Patton — father of the Delta Blues — near his burial site in Holly Ridge.

“Over the years, we have had grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and Mississippi Department of Transportation. We wanted the first ones to be within a reasonable distance from one another so you could visit them all in a day or two,” he said.

“But there’s never actually been a trail where we said go to this one and that one and then this one,” he chuckled.

Barretta said state and federal grants have helped pay for the markers, which run between \$4,000 and \$5,000 each to install. But local communities support the effort by paying for half the cost.

Barretta said he isn’t sure what the effect has been on the state because it’s hard to gauge the economic impact of roadside markers.

“But one thing we noticed, and this is probably one of the best measures, was that even during the recent recession, tourism tax revenue in the town of Clarksdale went up when everything else was falling in the area,” said Barretta, who noted that actor Morgan Freeman co-owns the Ground Zero Blues Club in Clarksdale. (It’s located next to the Delta Blues Museum).

He said Mississippi has embraced its Blues heritage as a way to promote cultural tourism. Nor did it hurt that director Martin Scorsese made a film on the Blues that focused on the state or that 2003 was declared the Year of the Blues by the U.S. Congress and the state of Mississippi.

“When you drive into Mississippi, signs say ‘birthplace of American music,’” he said. “The standard license plate has a picture of B.B. King’s guitar. And in 2006, a \$15 million museum opened up in Indianola called the B.B. King Museum and Delta Interpretive Center.”

Barretta said he believes the state began promoting the blues over the past decade both for reasons of pride and economic development.

“Before that, people who celebrated blues were music aficionados,” he said. “Now it’s also to promote tourism

and bring money into the state. Both are good reasons to honor this part of our cultural and musical heritage.”

Walla Walla — a Wine Adventure

More than 2,000 miles to the northwest in Walla Walla, Wash., community leaders have used a booming wine industry as a way to pump new energy into the heart of this city of 35,000.

Long known for its wheat and sweet onions, Italian immigrant families grew grapes when they moved to this part of southeast Washington 120 years ago.

“So making wine wasn’t a completely new phenomenon,” said David Woolson, head of the local Chamber of Commerce.

“But the current wine industry as we know it in the valley dates back about 20 to 25 years ago with wineries like Woodward Canyon and Leonetti. And the American

The wine industry as a whole has created \$700 million of economic impact here.



Courtesy of Tourism Walla Walla



Courtesy of Tourism Walla Walla



Photo by Donna Lasater

Viticulture Area designation for the Walla Walla area was established some 15 years ago after people realized there was a unique combination of soil and climate here that lent itself to very high-end red wines and more recently whites,” he said.

Now, there are a whopping 145 wineries within 15 minutes of the city. And 35 of them have tasting rooms downtown — many in renovated historic buildings.

“That’s meant a lot to our town,” Woolson said.

“The wine industry as a whole has created \$700 million of economic impact here. So aside from the direct economy related to the wineries and the jobs that are connected, obviously wine tourism has exploded. On the heels of that, there is a great culinary scene that is growing.”

Woolson, who has been president of the Chamber for about three years, said the wine industry has “transformed” Walla Walla.

“I was born here, grew up in the Walla Walla area and left the day after I graduated from high school vowing never to come back,” said the 56-year-old Woolson, who had a 30-year career in film and television in Los Angeles and Portland.

“But come back, I did. The city has a genuine aspect to it that hasn’t changed. Folks visit and it has a real visceral connection. So, yes, it has changed in a positive way. But it also hasn’t.”

“Underneath that, this is a historic town going back to the 1830s,” Woolson continued. “It was a major fur trading hub for Hudson Bay, near the Columbia River. Marcus

Whitman was an early missionary in the 1830s and 40s and Lewis and Clark came back through here on their return from the Pacific.”

Woolson said Walla Walla weathered the recession fairly well, but the opening of tasting rooms in “spruced up” buildings was a boon to the downtown.

“There is quite an eclectic mix with tasting rooms and personalities behind the counters,” he said.

Having the wine industry only builds on what he said is Walla Walla’s very robust sense of place.

“We are progressive in moving forward, but there is a strong tie in honoring the past and its historical elements. That’s a huge attractor to arts, culture and entertainment as well as people who are looking for a unique lifestyle and climate and wine country.” ●

On Common Ground extends a special thank you to James Lindberg for his contribution to this article. Several of the examples in this article were first identified in the report “Heritage-Based Rural Development” by James Lindberg (National Trust for Historic Preservation, 2011).

Brian E. Clark is a Wisconsin-based journalist and a former staff writer on the business desk of The San Diego Union-Tribune. He is a contributor to the Los Angeles Times, Chicago Sun-Times, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, Dallas Morning News and other publications.



Photo by jimflix

A GRAND VISION

for Northwest Michigan's Future

By Brad Broberg

A decade has passed since the federal government earmarked funds for a bridge in Grand Traverse County, Mich. Although it will never carry any traffic, the bridge is complete. But instead of a steel span across the Boardman River as originally planned, it's a concept called the Grand Vision that connects six neighboring counties to their future.

The Grand Vision is a bridge to what the region wants to look like 50 years from now. Conceived with funds shifted from the Boardman River span after the project was mothballed, the Grand Vision paints a picture of smart growth in the northwest corner of lower Michigan. Infill development, mixed-use urban centers, walkable neighborhoods and public transportation are all part of a collectively imagined future in which growth is focused where development already exists.

"You see this type of thing a lot in metro areas, but this is some pretty forward-thinking for a rural area," says Kim Pontius, chair of the coordinating committee for the Grand Vision and executive vice president of the Traverse Area Association of REALTORS®.

The Grand Vision sprang from a land-use and transportation study in Grand Traverse County that mushroomed into a regional framework for guiding all facets of



Photo by Andrew McFarlane



Photo provided by Michigan Municipal League

(Above) Michigan citizens meet to discuss the Grand Vision

The Grand Vision is a bridge to what the region wants to look like 50 years from now.

The region is looking to the Grand Vision to preserve the area's small-town character.

growth and development — everything from energy to housing to employment. Articulated in a 32-page document and driven by citizen involvement, the Grand Vision is both a plan and a movement that is leading the region's many parts in a common direction.

“We've started to create a culture of systemic thinking where everybody understands that what happens upstream has an effect downstream,” Pontius says. “It's sort of taken on a life of its own.”

More than 340 projects that reflect Grand Vision themes — everything from coordinating transit and rail services to developing a regional marketplace for locally produced food — are in various stages of progress and nearly \$10 million in state, federal and private foundation funding has been leveraged, according to a 2012 report to the coordinating committee. Meanwhile, the Northwest Michigan Council of Governments is gathering information and developing strategies that local governments can use to incorporate the Grand Vision into their policies and planning.

“We've got our direction,” Pontius says. “Now, it's a matter of working together to implement it.”

The six counties that comprise the Grand Vision — Antrim, Benzie, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska, Leelanau and Wexford — are home to 176,000 people spread across 3,300-square-miles of farms and forests along the shores of Lake Michigan. With the six counties expected to welcome 50,000 more people by 2060, the region is looking to the Grand Vision to preserve the area's small-town character, natural beauty and agricultural vitality as it grows.

“Economic prosperity, to a certain extent, comes through growth,” says Evan Smith, senior operations manager at Cherry Capital Foods in Traverse City who's been involved with the Grand Vision from the beginning. “But growth can affect your quality of life. [The Grand Vision] is about minimizing the impact of growth on the things we value and making positive changes where we want to change.”

That's a lot to expect considering the Grand Vision is not a legally binding plan. The region includes 98 units of local government and each county, city, township and village is free to give the Grand Vision the grand kiss off. “Nobody can mandate anything. In fact, that would never work,” Pontius says. What gives the Grand Vision weight with decision-makers is the energy invested in it by the region's citizens.



Photo by jimflix



Courtesy of Travel Michigan

“The concepts clearly have a lot of public support,” says Marsha Smith, executive director of Rotary Charities of Traverse City and member of the Grand Vision coordinating committee. “People here have always known that our future depends on how we take care of this place and how we grow.”

More than 15,000 people took part in the public process that developed the Grand Vision. Many attended one of a dozen planning workshops while more than 12,000 participated in a poll that showed overwhelming support for steering growth to existing population centers and helped establish the Grand Vision’s six guiding principles.

- A regional multi-modal transportation system that supports energy conservation.
- Sustainable energy uses in construction, transportation and economic development.
- Protected and preserved water, forests, natural and scenic areas.
- Unique and vibrant communities that strengthen the local economy.
- Local farms and regional food systems as a viable part of the region’s communities.
- A diverse mix of regional housing choices with affordable options.

More than 15,000 people took part in the public process that developed the Grand Vision.





“The Grand Vision ties a lot of different issues together,” Evan Smith says. “Historically, we were making our decisions in silos (and) starting to create an urban sprawl that is not really the vision most people have for our region.”

The Grand Vision came together without its own staff, office or even phone under the direction of a diverse 32-member coordinating group and is moving ahead with the same collaborative approach to making decisions and providing resources. “There is no entity that is the Grand Vision,” Pontius says. “This was all built on a shared leadership model.”

The Grand Vision’s coordinating committee — dubbed CORE for Communications, Organization, Resource Development and Education — keeps the ball rolling now. It consists of representatives from the Michigan Land Use Institute, Michigan State University, Northwest Michigan Council of Governments, Northwestern Michigan College, Rotary Charities of Traverse City, the Traverse Area Association of REALTORS®, the Traverse City Chamber of Commerce, United Way of Northwest Michigan and the Watershed Center.

Six issue area networks — one for each of the six guiding principles — bring together people from

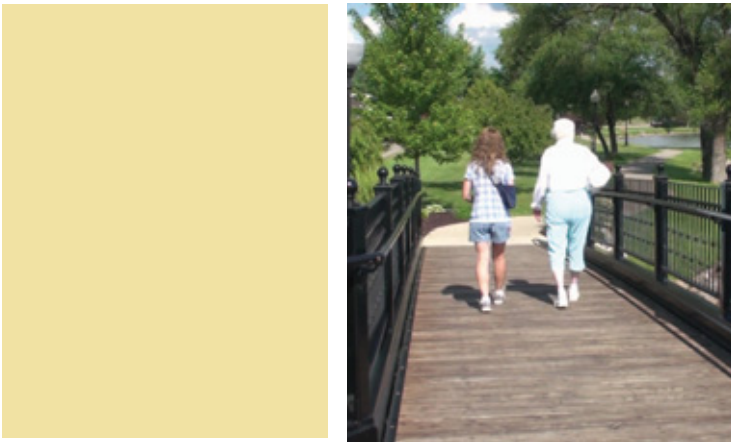
This was all built on a shared leadership model.

various walks of life who have an interest or expertise in those areas. They host workshops, conduct surveys, create educational materials and help both the public and private sectors put Grand Vision principles into practice.

The Grand Vision timeline goes back to 2004 when the Boardman River bridge — centerpiece of a proposed bypass for downtown Traverse City — was shelved amid criticism the bridge would degrade the river and the bypass would contribute to sprawl. Faced with losing the money earmarked for the bridge and bypass, Grand Traverse County convinced Congress to reappropriate the money to help launch a long-term, land-use and transportation study.

The county appointed a study group in 2005. The closer the group looked at the issues the more they realized there was more to consider than roads, bridges and land use. There were also things like housing, economic development, energy and farming. And all of the issues they were studying crossed county lines. As a result, they expanded the scope of their work and ultimately included five other counties in the

What the Grand Vision has done is get people talking about the issues.



process, which along the way came to be known as the Grand Vision.

Consultants were hired in 2007 and an aggressive public involvement campaign was launched before a final Grand Vision document was completed and presented to the community in 2009.

Although there's been no shortage of activity that supports Grand Vision themes, it's not clear that the Grand Vision has had a major impact yet, says Mike Estes, mayor of Traverse City. "It's really too early to tell because so many other dynamic situations are happening at exactly the same time," he says.

Take the recent surge of people moving into Traverse City, the region's largest community with 15,000 people. Are they coming because the Grand Vision encourages growth in existing population centers, asks Estes, or do gas prices make them want to live closer to work? And is the Grand Vision saving the region's farmland from development or is the growing demand for locally grown food responsible?

"To actually see the results of the Grand Vision will take a long time," Estes says. "What the Grand Vision has done is get people talking about the issues — and that really is the first step."

The next step is where the rubber will meet the road. The Grand Vision describes what people want the region to look like. The Northwest Michigan Council of Governments is tackling how to make it happen.

"This is going to be a different conversation for a lot of people — and a tougher one," says Matt McCauley, director of regional planning for the agency. "The Grand Vision took a 30,000-foot view. It's going to become much more [personal] going forward because we're going to be looking at specific communities."

The council is leading a public process to develop a Framework For Our Future that will identify potential growth areas and develop zoning models, policy language and other tools that local governments can use to realize the Grand Vision.



Photos provided by Michigan Municipal League

The council is leading a public process to develop a “Framework For Our Future.”

The challenge is that each of the 98 units of local government in the region is free to go their own way, but that’s also why creating a Grand Vision with broad support was so important. “It could be viewed as not the most effective way of moving forward,” McCauley says, “but we have to work within the constraints we have for land-use planning in Michigan where it’s done at the city, village and township level.”

The proof of the Grand Vision’s value is that it continues to drive discussion and collaboration throughout the region. “No one thing will make the Grand Vision

a reality,” McCauley says. “It will be an aggregate of many different projects. We’re now in our eighth year and it doesn’t show any signs of being a plan that just sits on a shelf.” ●

Brad Broberg is a Seattle-based freelance writer specializing in business and development issues. His work appears regularly in the Puget Sound Business Journal and the Seattle Daily Journal of Commerce.

DESPITE DEEP RECESSION, SMALL TOWNS ROAR

Mayors in small towns are championing smart growth to create thriving communities.



Franklin, Tenn. Photo by jbc.raleigh



Courtesy of the Michigan Municipal League

By G.M. Filisko

Since the financial downturn, stories of cities in distress have littered the news. That's why the smart growth of a small town like Jena, La., is so striking.

"In the six years since we began implementing our vision, sales revenue in Jena is up 55 percent," says Mayor Murphy McMillin. "We also increased our population from 2000 to 2010, reversing a trend of population decline for three decades. That's a big effort for a little town."

Jena's not the only little town making a big effort. Mini municipalities across the country are teaching big cities a few smart growth lessons. Here are their stories.

Jena: David Works with Goliath

The transformation of Jena began in 2009 with three proposals to expand Highway 84, a multi-state route that runs through the middle of the town. All would have harmed the town — either by allowing traffic to bypass it altogether or by requiring the demolition of historic buildings. But what recourse does a tiny town have when it's facing a powerful state transportation agency?

Mini municipalities across the country are teaching big cities a few smart growth lessons.

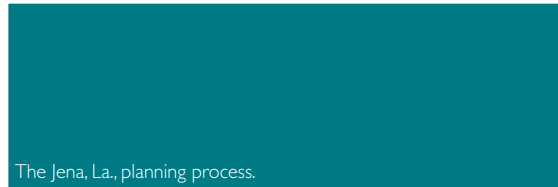
More than you might think. “We looked at those proposals and said, ‘We don’t like any of them; can you give us six months to get a better proposal?’” explains McMillan. “With all due respect to the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development, they listened. They said, ‘You have to give us compelling reasons why you want your proposal versus one of the three we’re presenting.’ They kept using that term, ‘compelling reasons.’”

Jena’s leaders dove in, hiring Austin, Texas-based community planners Code Studio and teaming up with the nonprofit Center for Planning Excellence (CPEX) in Baton Rouge, La., to determine the interests of Jena’s stakeholders. McMillan’s message? Jena must change or die. “We emphasized that if we didn’t break this small-town paradigm and get out of our comfort zone,” says McMillan, “we’d go backward.”

What did residents want? “There was a resounding desire to reinvest in their downtown,” says Camille Manning-Broome, CPEX’s director of planning. “They wanted to come up with an alternate route that wouldn’t have negative impacts on the downtown. There are beautiful trees and forests, and they wanted to make those a destination for bikeways and walking trails. They also wanted to expand the city park and link existing green spaces.”

The 2010 plan that grew out of those priorities won the DOTD over, and Jena’s revitalization is underway. “It’s a 15-year plan, and we’re entering year five now,” says McMillan. “We’ve let people know that quality of life includes quality of health. We wanted to make our streets more walkable and rideable.

We’ve let people know that quality of life includes quality of health, and we wanted our streets more walkable.



The 15-year plan for development in Jena, La.



Before and after photos of the redeveloped downtown area of Jena, La.

Look for assets you can capitalize on, and be realistic about things you need to improve.

Now we have miles of walking and biking trails that go by our creek system. Nobody recognized that as an asset until we sat them down and said, 'We don't have a river, a lake, or the ocean, but we do have a creek.' We moved a grade school downtown, and we're tying all our schools together with walking and biking trails and tying our downtown to the park with trails through a wooded area."

The next stage will create a town square. "We've never really had an organized town square even though we're the county seat of LaSalle Parish," says McMillan. "Somebody donated some land, and we bought another piece of land, and we're starting the process of putting together a town square."

The lessons of Jena are vast. "When decisions are being made that have an impact on your community, you have a responsibility to be part of the discussion," says Manning-Broome. "If you're not, you're making a decision to let what happens happen."

McMillan says small towns' leaders have to look critically at their area. "The assessment phase of your town is most important," he says. "Look for assets you can capitalize on. Don't be overly critical, but look at what you have and compare it to what others have, and be realistic about things you need to set about improving. It's about improving attitudes about where you live, the health of the people where you live, and people's desire to live there."

We didn't want to lose this sense of community that was the hallmark of our city.



Renderings of the proposed Third Street Plaza in Jena.



Greer: Taming the Growth Tiger

Leaders in Greer, S.C., faced the opposite challenge. They weren't stung by a population decline; they had to figure out how to shepherd rampant growth.

"We had a period where our growth was so exponential that we didn't want to lose this sense of community that was the hallmark of our city," says Mayor Rick Danner of the city that grew from 11,000 in 1990 to 26,000 in 2010. "Greer had the classic attributes of a small southern town, and that included a good quality of life and family values. We began to sense we needed to instill this idea that we were still a community that cared for each other. We wanted new residents to embrace that idea, and we figured the best way to do that was to replicate what we knew from the past."

The crux of Greer's tale, says Danner, is the decision to build a new city hall in the heart of downtown overlooking a 12-acre park rather than on the outskirts near a freeway. "In the late 1990s, there was a group of folks who came together as a public-private partnership called the Partnership for Tomorrow," he says. "It was all the normal players — the city, the Chamber of Commerce, our public works commission, and businesses. Ours is an intact downtown with 40-plus buildings on the national registry. But we had a very struggling downtown and a tax base that was very marginal for the things we wanted to do. We agreed to do a five-year strategic plan and raised the money to hire the experts we needed. Truth be told, though it was a five-year plan, it's taken nearly 15 years to complete. We're in the third phase because we've redone it twice, and we're looking at doing it another time."

Donna O. Smith, a native of Greer and broker in charge of two Prudential C. Dan Joyner offices, one in Greenville and another in Simpsonville, joined that partnership. "We had very few stores and activity downtown," recalls the member of NAR's Smart Growth Advisory Board. "We knew our downtown had a lot to offer; we just had to figure out how to get people back down there. So we created a marketing plan and branded Greer. It started with a train station named Greer Station, and then we branded the downtown area as Greer Station."

Today, new streetscapes and the new city hall have created "a quaint, warm little downtown," says Smith. "The city redeveloped the old armory into the



Town of Greer, S.C.

We created a
marketing plan and
branded Greer.



Cannon Centre. It rents those facilities out, and they're packed all the time. We also have walking trails, a gazebo, and a reflection pond. People come, park and walk."

Danner says other small-town leaders sometimes dismiss Greer's story as too big for their britches. "It seems overwhelming that we were able to do this \$23 million project," he says. "They say, 'We'd never be able to do that.' We had some of that same syndrome. We spun our wheels for the first several years determining how we'd get funding and the type of project we'd do. All the while, people kept saying, 'What are you going to do?'"

"We realized bricks and mortar are important," says Danner. "We started doing sidewalks, streetscaping, a facade improvement plan, and a lot of things that had a cumulative effect. You don't have to wait until you have \$20 million. Pick \$20,000 projects, and begin those with some long-term vision in mind. That can be as impactful as anything a big project will have. You don't have to wait

until you can buy the Cadillac. Buy a car and then move up as you can."

Mission: Infrastructure Is Sexy

Faced with an aging population and businesses that didn't always stick around, Mayor Laura McConwell of Mission, Kan., hired a community planning consultant to launch a visioning process for the 9,000-resident, 2.7-square-mile first suburb of Kansas City.

"Mission is a starter place for a lot of businesses, and they tend to move on," says McConwell. "We had small, family-owned businesses where owners were getting old and didn't have good exit strategies. In addition, many businesses were either going to be closing or needed to consolidate space, and we were going to have large parcels being sold. We began to consider what we wanted our town to look like when something new went in those spaces. We also had a mall, and as sort of as



Pick \$20,000 projects,
and begin those with some
long-term vision in mind.





Redevelopment projects in Mission, Kan.



an afterthought, we said, ‘Why don’t you also investigate what the community would like to see if the mall’s not there anymore?’”

Turns out, that was prescient. Once the visioning process got underway, McConwell learned that \$51 million of downtown property was in a flood plain and that the mall’s owners wanted out.

“We realized that as we had new growth, we had to make sure our infrastructure was sound,” explains McConwell. “A lot of it was way older than our city, and often we didn’t know where the water or wastewater lines were. Also, as our city got bigger, rather than expanding the sewer lines, the city added new ones; the sewer lines just meandered.”

Did residents get behind infrastructure upgrades? Indeed, they did. “We talked about the demands new development would put on our existing infrastructure and the fact that it wouldn’t do any good for us to build great new property if we couldn’t get water to it and wastewater away from it,” says McConwell. “We had a lot of pictures and charts, and we’d do inventories of what the infrastructure looked like. Those were worth 1,000 words, and they really told the story of why we needed to do the work.”

Redevelopment in Mission today includes a \$165 million mixed-used development at the former mall site. “The only way to grow is to make sure we have more mixed-used development,” says McConwell.

We realized that as we had new growth, we had to make sure our infrastructure was sound.



Photo by jbc.raleh



Franklin, Tenn.

The only way to grow is to make sure we have more mixed-used development.

“We’re trying to make the city more walkable. We’ve also been working at restoring our green space.”

There have been naysayers, says McConwell, who carp about plans and costs. “It seems like elected officials are afraid to engage the community,” she says. “We’ve included some of our biggest critics, people who were the loudest, people who’d lived here for a long time, and those who had the largest property interests. I’d tell people we’d be like a freight train in that we’d blow our whistle loudly, we’d give everybody input, and we’d be happy to change tracks. But don’t throw rocks when we’re five miles past the junction and tell us we’ve missed something.”

Franklin: Preserving History

Franklin, Tenn., grew 49 percent, to 66,000, from 2000 to 2010, in part because corporations like Nissan and Healthways have made it and its environs their home base.

However, the town owes much of its character to decisions made a half-century ago. “It was probably in the 1960s when people recognized some of our history was being destroyed because people were tearing down homes in the downtown to put up buildings,” says Mayor Ken Moore. “They came together to form the Heritage Foundation of Franklin and Williamson County, our main preservation group.”

Around the same time, property owners and merchants on Main Street came together to fund streetscape work. “They put in underground utilities and did beautification work,” says Moore. “All of the sudden, there was this huge pride in these buildings, and businesses said that’s where they wanted to be.”

Ever since, there’s been an eclectic mix of businesses downtown, with staples on the first floors and more artsy businesses occupying second floors. “It’s an artistic, creative community,” says Moore. “One space is where artists who use Yamaha pianos call for rentals — that’s where Elton John calls if he wants a red piano. A lot of songwriters, country singers, and even some Broadway performers live in that area.”

We have a main street that's alive. No matter what day of the week you're downtown, there are people walking Main Street.

With that unique foundation, the Heritage Foundation has worked to repurpose historic buildings downtown. When the historic Franklin Theater went up for sale as the recession hit, the foundation raised \$8 million and created a 300-seat, multi-use venue that since 2011 has hosted live music, theater productions and movies.

Underway today is a \$3 million public-private partnership to retool the town's old post office. "The city got the building in a swap with the county, and it's had a lot of problems and been a burden for us," says Moore. "It wasn't on our priority list to infuse millions of dollars into that building."

On the drawing board is a renovation of the Old Old Jail, once the town's jail that Moore cautions against confusing with the Old Old Old Jail, a local private event venue. "It's another property the city obtained in a land swap with the county," he says. "It's partially in the flood plain, and it's got lots of issues. But it's in a downtown area that needs some revitalization. There's a strong possibility the foundation is going to raise money to redevelop that building. I don't want to tell you we're going to give it to them, but we're almost going to give it them."

Franklin's downtown is now a huge attraction. "We have a main street that's alive," says Moore. "No matter what day of the week you're downtown, there are people walking Main Street, and tourists are here buying goods from our stores or having a cup of coffee. It's made downtown a great selling point for businesses that want to come here." ●

G.M. Filisko is an attorney and freelance writer who writes frequently on real estate, business and legal issues. Ms. Filisko served as an editor at NAR's REALTOR® Magazine for 10 years.



Photo by jbc.raleigh

Franklin, Tenn.

Tourists are here buying goods from our stores or having a cup of coffee.



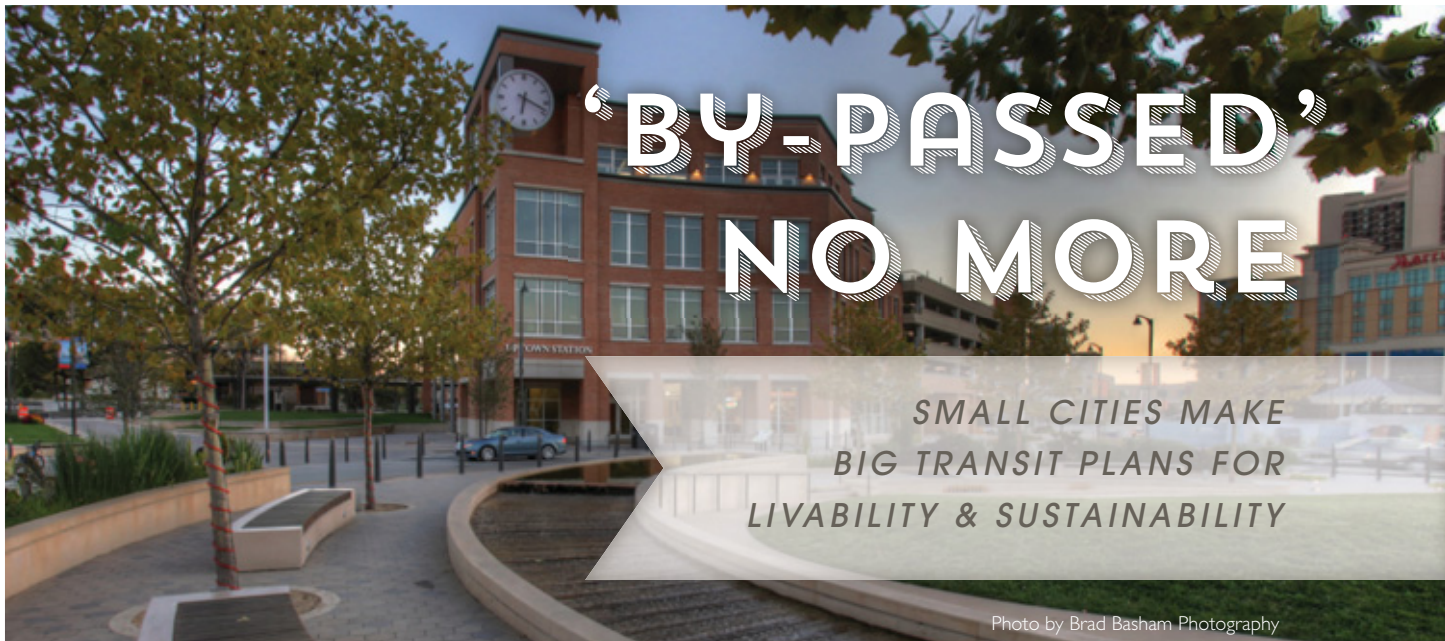
Photo by SeeMidTN.com



Photo by SeeMidTN.com



Photo by jbc.raleigh



By David Goldberg

Small cities and towns are forever being buffeted by the winds of fate. When they are the collection and distribution centers for rural areas, the agricultural economy — changeable as the wind itself — governs all. As a gateway to recreational areas they may fail along with the latest resort to go under, or struggle to maintain their character amid an onslaught of second homes and chain-store commerce. If they are within a longish commute to a major metro area, traffic and sprawl may arrive to swamp a formerly bucolic retreat. Adding to the difficulty, for many years state governments delivered much of their intended economic help in the form of highway by-passes, which often as not drew economic activity away from town centers so that they were by-passed in all senses of the word.

This is the tale of two cities in two different settings that have sought to buck the trends and take the reins of destiny in their own hands where transportation and economic development are concerned. They are only a few examples of the dozens of such towns and small cities around the country that are looking at their transportation

networks and development opportunities in new ways. And much of the credit for these changes can go to the Internet, said Roger Millar, who oversees a program of technical assistance to smaller cities as vice president of Smart Growth America.

“What we’re finding in this digital age, when people can choose to live almost anywhere, is that they are,” Millar said. “What happens in small towns is you get these champions who are informed and articulate and effective. What they want for their community is a quality of life. For some it’s more about economic opportunity and for others it’s about a landscape, access to public transit or the social fabric. Many of these towns had a resource economy — mining, timber or farming — that has had to be restructured. People have had to be creative, and there are some very creative people in America.

“It doesn’t take a lot of those people to affect change in a small town,” he added. “These days there are a lot of resources available, from the feds and national groups like ours, or similar statewide organizations ... there are a lot of places people can go to get good ideas.”

Dozens of towns and small cities around the country are looking at their transportation networks in new ways.

It was a surprise that a small city with a tiny staff and budget was the first to turn earth on a project funded in part by the TIGER program.

The New Normal, Ill.

A college town of 52,000 in downstate Illinois, Normal drew some raised eyebrows when their Uptown multimodal station became the first project supported by the federal TIGER program to break ground. First funded in the 2009 “stimulus” act, TIGER — Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery — was something of an experiment: a competitive grant program designed to award and spur innovative, multi-pronged projects. TIGER was meant to fund more complex projects that didn’t fit neatly into federal funding silos — which also meant they were likely to be harder to do and take longer. It was a surprise, then, that a small city with a tiny staff and budget in 2010 not only was among the first 51 of thousands of applicants to win a grant, but also was the first to turn earth on a project.

“The application looked like it was written for us,” said Wayne Aldrich, director of development for Normal’s Uptown redevelopment. “We were truly shovel-ready.” Getting there, however, took more than a decade.

The story began in 1999, when Normal hired Chicago urban designer Doug Farr with an assignment to “do something about our downtown,” Farr recalled. At the time, Farr was looking for opportunities to integrate his interests in new urbanist design and green building. He proposed a plan that recast an area of Uptown Normal from a gas station and dry cleaner at the juncture of a tangle of streets to a central city plaza anchored by a relocated Amtrak station.

The station, topped by offices, would become the hub of several modes and activities. He suggested rewriting design codes so that surrounding buildings would support a walkable center, with active uses like shops or restaurants on the ground floor. And he asked town leaders to stretch even farther, to require that buildings meet green LEED standards, and to use tax increment financing to build public amenities such as a central fountain that would cleanse storm-water runoff.

The city took on almost all of it, Aldrich said, adopting the plan in 2001. Most daunting, it turned out, was financing the multimodal station.

“In 2002 we hired a lobbyist in DC to help us get in the door to get federal funding, because everyone told us we would need that,” said Aldrich. For five years city leaders knocked on congressional doors, eventually winning earmarks of \$10 million — but not enough to build the station.



Photos by Brad Basham Photography

Photos highlight the new Normal, Ill., downtown.



In the meantime, they hired an architect to design the station and did everything they could think of to be ready. “Then in 2008 the economy tanked,” Aldrich said. The 2009 stimulus initially looked like a bust for Normal, because their project didn’t fit prescribed categories. But when the TIGER application process opened in late 2009, Normal pounced on it.

The city stuck to its guns and kept pushing for the station because it was so central to their revitalization concept, Aldrich said. “In a central business district like ours, if you’re going to do redevelopment, you need some kind of transit component,” Aldrich said. “We had Amtrak located away from downtown, and Illinois DOT was talking about higher-speed rail.”

Since opening in July 2012, Uptown Station and its circular plaza have become the new heart of the city. Amtrak now departs from the downtown station, with City Hall relocated to the upper floors of the station building, a children’s museum began drawing families and school visits from miles around and a major hotel has opened. After balking early on, the local bus service has since both rebranded itself and relocated its hub to Uptown Station, and inter-city bus service leaves from there to Peoria, the Chicago airport, Denver and other destinations.

“Chicago has Lake Michigan, San Francisco has the bay, but Normal doesn’t have much beyond rolling cornfields,” Farr said. “You have to make a different statement.

It was kind of unexpected that this would be the place that embraced the green building and urbanism ideas we were developing then, but they did, in a way that a larger community might not be able to.”

“It shows a huge amount of commitment on the part of a smaller municipality,” Aldrich said, “and we think it’s paying off in terms of getting us on the map.”

Making Bozeman, Mont., ‘The Most Livable Place’

How does a small city of 38,000 in the southwestern corner of Montana live up to an ambitious slogan like, “The Most Livable Place”? Part of the answer, it turns out, is a smartly executed public transit system.

Ten years ago, Bozeman was the only key urban center in the state without a regularly operating bus system. True, surrounding Gallatin County had an on-demand system for seniors and a service for the disabled called Galavan, operated by the Human Resources Development Council. And Montana State University (the largest area employer) operated some campus shuttles. But the systems weren’t coordinated and left most of the local population out of the story — including the many tourists who visit the Big Sky ski area and other nearby recreational opportunities.

In 2005, just as city leaders, the university and resort operators were talking about how to create a more comprehensive system, Congress adopted a new federal transportation program that included a special transit program for lower-population areas. Federal funds would cover up to 60 percent of a transit system’s capital and operating costs (larger than most states because Montana

The fare-free service has seen growing ridership every year.



Photo by J. Stephen Conn.



The community made a smart decision to invest in great marketing.



gets a little extra for hosting large swaths of non-taxable federal land). With the university providing most of the local match, the city's Streamline service, with four fixed routes, launched in 2006 in conjunction with the Big Sky resort's Skyline service. The fare-free service has seen growing ridership every year, including a 14 percent jump in fiscal 2012.

"The biggest problem they are having is managing continued growth," said Lisa Ballard, who recently completed a new five-year plan for Streamline. As a Bozeman resident, Ballard was on the original working group that helped found the system. "That's a good problem to have."

Her recent survey of Streamline riders found that well over half are university students, faculty or staff. While 52 percent of riders cannot drive or have no car, fully 41 percent say they have access to a car but choose to take the bus, Ballard found. "Streamline is achieving a meaningful reduction in number of cars on the road by offering a convenient, safe, high quality alternative to driving," the report concludes. Some of the cars being removed might otherwise be operated by intoxicated drivers. Streamline's Latenight route — running Thursday through Saturday nights — gives students and other revelers a safe way home from entertainment areas.

"I think a lot of people were skeptical at first that people would ride in Bozeman," Ballard said. "But now they see it has a real amenity." Faculty and staff can get to their

jobs from the outlying Belgrade community, parents can put their older kids on a bus to the local ski area on weekends, and resort workers can get to Bozeman to shop. Another indicator of success: "Classified ads now point out whether a rental place is near a bus line," said Ballard.

The secrets of success? Free rides help, certainly. And the routes are designed to hit the hospital, university and downtown areas that see high traffic. But Ballard also credits the system's creative and appealing branding, "some of the best I've seen in the country."

"The community made a smart decision to invest in great marketing," she said. The branding built from the buses that were chosen, which are similar to the historic, streamlined style used at Yellowstone National Park. That look inspired the name, which also resonated nicely with the surrounding landscape of mountains and streams.

The recent rider survey showed consistently high satisfaction with — and praise for — the expanded and better-coordinated Streamline service. The biggest complaint? They want more of it. ●

David A. Goldberg is the communications director for Transportation for America, a nationwide coalition based in Washington, D.C. that advocates for transportation policy reform. In 2002, Mr. Goldberg was awarded a Loeb Fellowship at Harvard University, where he studied urban policy.

The Small Town

AFFORDABILITY FACTOR

Community members and creative resources help address affordable housing needs



By Christine Jordan Sexton

Although far from the high-priced big cities, rural communities and small towns have their own challenges in providing affordable housing options. Now, leadership in small towns and rural areas is moving ahead on innovative ways to provide affordable housing opportunities.

A Community Partner Helps Create Affordable Housing

Brattleboro, Vermont is known for many things. Situated in Windham County Vermont, it has been described as eclectic and arty. It's situated near world-class ski resorts and is home to the SIT Graduate Institute.

In 2007, Mother Earth Magazine called out the area as one of the "Eight Great Places You Never Heard Of."

Brattleboro's secret was revealed, though, when a \$12-million renovation of Brattleboro Food Co-Op from a strip mall location to a mixed-use, street-facing development

with commercial space, offices and 24 apartments, received the 2012 National Award for Smart Growth, awarded by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

The redevelopment project, a collaborative effort of the Brattleboro Food Co-op, the Windham & Windsor Housing Trust and Housing Vermont, edged out 46 other entrants from 25 states. It was recognized in the Main Street or Corridor Revitalization category.

Sabine Rhyne is the shareholder and community relations manager at the Brattleboro Food Co-op, a community-owned natural foods market in downtown Brattleboro. The co-op, which now has about 10,000 shareholders, started 38 years ago in a basement in Brattleboro.

"Co-ops exist all over the country and in fact all over the world as a way for individuals to band together to get their needs met," she said. "There are a few principles that they use that mean that they are, by nature, a value-based business. Particularly one of these principles is concern for community."

As the co-operative burgeoned over 30 years and outgrew its downtown location the shareholders had to decide whether to move out of the space into larger

accommodations that were less expensive, but not centrally located, or stay downtown.

Rhyné said it was the sense of “community” that convinced co-operative shareholders that the grocery store needed to remain a downtown anchor. When the land came up for sale the Brattleboro Food Co-Op bought it and partnered with Windham & Windsor Housing Trust and Housing Vermont to offer rental housing options. Given the lack of affordable, vacant rentals downtown, 24 apartments would substantially increase the area’s stock.

The massive redevelopment process, which included moving the co-op from a flood plain and adding a green buffer, and construction of the four-story building, took two years to complete.

Brattleboro Food Co-Op owns the first two floors of the building and the Windham & Windsor Housing Trust and Housing Vermont own the top two floors where the

apartments are rented. The building has green features, including a mechanical system that captures the heat that is produced by the co-op’s refrigeration equipment. The excess heat the equipment puts off is captured and used to heat the entire building.

Windham & Windsor Housing Trust, one of five homeownership trusts in Vermont, sponsors a number of programs to meet the needs of low-income and moderate-income residents in Vermont. The housing trust is increasing its reach to areas surrounding Brattleboro, which is small, but one of the county’s most populous towns. Windham & Windsor has helped provide affordable housing options for other small Vermont towns in the area such as the village of Whitingham with the renovation of the Sadawaga Springs Hotel, where nine reasonably priced apartments were created. The trust also has programs in West Dover and in Guilford.



Windham & Windsor Housing Trust sponsors a number of programs to meet the needs of low-income and moderate-income residents in Vermont.



Photo by Dennis Curran

Photo by StevenM_61



Students, retirees and young professionals share a need for affordable housing.

ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS® in May 2012 to help fund a survey of the community's housing needs. The Ellis County Economic Development Board also contributed \$1,000 toward the assessment, which was conducted by RDG Planning & Design. RDG Planning & Design already was working with the city of Hays on a housing analysis, but the NAR grant allowed the analysis to be expanded.

The Hays Board of REALTORS® was one of 19 states and local organizations in May 2012 to be awarded a Housing Opportunity Program grant from NAR. The grants are made available to programs aimed at promoting and expanding affordable housing opportunities in communities across the nation.

The housing analysis indicated that nearly a third (31%) of Hays households earn less than \$25,000 a year and there was a significant need for housing for low- or moderate-income households. The housing analysis also showed that the median income for the city of Hays is \$44,277 annually, but the median home value is \$137,400. That translates to a value to income ratio of 3:11. The U.S. Census Bureau says any ratio above 3 indicates "significant affordability issues."

A survey conducted as part of the housing study affirmed the need for adequate and diverse housing. Survey respondents identified the cost of housing to income as the most important issue facing Hays in the next 10 years.

And the market isn't fixing itself.

Lyn Klein, owner/broker of Advanced Real Estate Company P.A. has seen a lot of changes in Hays since he graduated from FHSU approximately 40 years ago. For Klein, time is of the essence because the home affordability issue is precluding manufacturers from expanding in the Hays area, knowing that the workers they need to hire for the jobs wouldn't be able to afford a house. Additionally the area has increased pressures from students who are seeking housing. Students have been seeking off campus housing in greater numbers since the university demolished some of its dorms.

Don't Forget the Affordable Needs of Rural America

In the Midwest, the Hays Board of REALTORS® is playing a part in the push for more affordable housing options in the city of Hays in western Kansas. Hays may be a small city, but it is a growing small city. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the city's population has grown by a whopping 30 percent in the last 40 years. Much of that growth can be attributed to three groups — students attending Fort Hays State University (FHSU), retirees relocating to Hays and well-paid young professionals moving to town to work in healthcare and education. These groups may be diverse in many respects, but they often share a need for affordable housing. The Hays Board of REALTORS® decided a detailed housing study was the best starting point in assuring that the city's current and future housing needs would be met.

The Hays Board of REALTORS® received a \$2,000 Housing Opportunity Program Grant from the NATIONAL

Klein has used the survey to start a conversation with city officials, property owners, landlords, developers and FHSU officials about investment and restoring affordable housing opportunities for the city of Hays. The survey identified a Core to Campus Corridor that could provide affordable housing options that were walkable and connected to campus, downtown and the 27th and Hall Street shopping area.

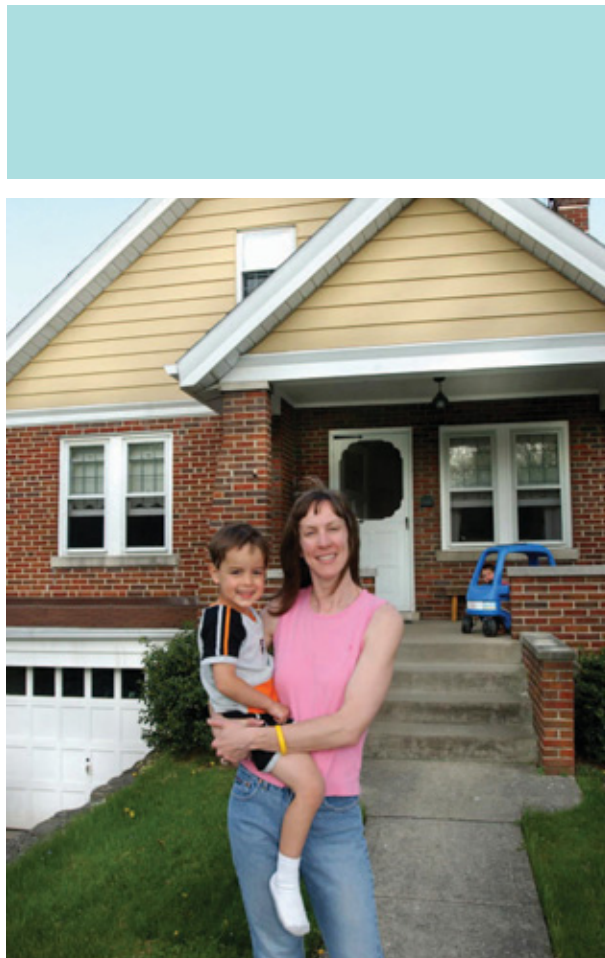
Strategic directions recommended by the housing analysis included preserving existing housing while constructing new options, development of a range of affordable housing choices and ensuring that housing development addressed infrastructure and transportation needs. The key is, Klein said, that stakeholders must work on developing the best use of land for additional housing needs. The analysis identified several opportunities.

“It’s time we do look at these opportunities and see if we need to do something different as a city,” said REALTOR® Lyn Klein.

A Neighborhood Revitalization Program could provide land use options that would protect neighborhood integrity. Rehabilitation funds from various sources and tax rebates could be used for improvements to existing property or for needed infill.

Another of those options could be the development of a Rural Housing Incentive District in Hays. Rural Housing Incentive Districts were approved by the state of Kansas as a way to help increase access to safe affordable housing. The program is designed to aid development by assisting the financing of public improvements. Cities may issue special obligation bonds to fund acquisition, relocation assistance, site preparation, sanitary and storm sewer improvements, street improvements, lighting, utility work within the public right-of-way or sidewalks.

The designation of a Rural Housing Incentive District in Hays would be an important step in the development of adequate affordable housing for Hays’ diverse and growing population. Hays ideally fits the criteria for a district. Districts can only be developed in any city with less than 40,000 residents in any Kansas County with less than 60,000 people. Additionally, Rural Housing Incentive Districts also are available to Kansas counties with populations of less than 40,000 people.



A survey conducted as part of the housing study affirmed the need for adequate and diverse housing.

As the Hays community moves forward with analysis recommendations, local REALTORS®, as members of the Planning Committee, will play pivotal roles in helping meet future affordable housing needs in their city. It’s the type of leadership small cities depend on. And in Hays, the housing analysis has provided an essential tool in understanding current realities and future needs and in identifying workable solutions. ●

Christine Jordan Sexton is a Tallahassee-based freelance reporter who has done correspondent work for the Associated Press, the New York Times, Florida Medical Business and a variety of trade magazines, including Florida Lawyer and National Underwriter.

EVERYONE NEEDS A HOME ...

A local REALTOR® helps develop affordable housing for the disabled

South Brunswick REALTOR® and developer Nick Manis believes everyone should be able to live, work and play in their community. No matter how urban or suburban the town and no matter how able-bodied, or disabled, the person.

Manis played a key role in helping rural South Brunswick, N.J., — population 43,417 in 2010, according to the Census — provide community housing for the developmentally disabled.

He bought a piece of property that for 10 years was an eyesore, a neglected piece of real estate abandoned since the owners' death.

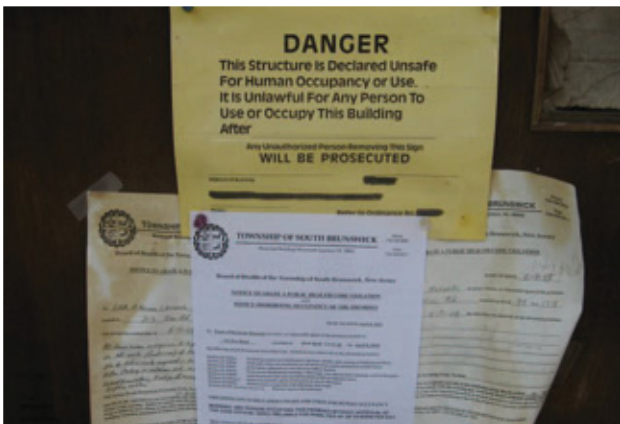
After a handful of meetings between developmentally disabled advocates and South Brunswick Township planners, Manis bought the property with the goal of transitioning it to a developmentally disabled group home.

Per the township's request, Manis agreed to deed restrict the property to be "affordable housing" for the next 30 years. He built the home to the specifications of the nonprofit agency Community Options Inc., which provides residential and employment support for the developmentally disabled.

The 2013 annual report for Community Options notes that the agency has more than 3,000 support staff, and it supports thousands of families allowing the disabled to live and work in their communities. It is the sixth largest nonprofit organization in the state of New Jersey with an operating budget of more than \$81 million.

The 2,100-square-foot, two story-house is painted ecru and has wine berry window panes. The home's statement is its large entrance ways, wheelchair ramps and overall disabled-friendly ease, not travertine tile or brass finishing or other high-end features Manis can easily equip a home with.

"It's built for function," he said noting that, for example, the floors are vinyl, which wear better with



Before and after photos from Community Options



Interior of Community Options' house after remodeling



the pounding from wheelchairs. “They are always going to have three, four, five people living there and they also have staff there. Community Options wanted it very durable.”

New Jersey requires every municipality to provide affordable housing opportunities for households with incomes between 30 percent and 80 percent of the median income for their area. In South Brunswick a family of four could make between \$41,440 and \$82,880 annually and qualify for the program. The program also provides rentals and purchases based on household size and income.

South Brunswick Township has 153 units for seniors and disabled adults as well as 61 units for the developmentally disabled, including Manis’ project, said Linda Norden, municipal housing liaison for South Brunswick. The units are developed and administered by nonprofits, such as Community Options, who receive a subsidy per unit.

South Brunswick Township used its affordable housing trust fund dollars and worked with Manis on the project, said Ronald Schmalz, public relations coordinator, agreeing to subsidize construction costs and expedite required permits.

The trust fund dollars are collected via a new development tax assessed on homebuilders and developers. Schmalz said a surge of development in South Brunswick, located between Trenton, New Jersey and New Brunswick, New Jersey over the last 30 years, helped fill the coffers.

South Brunswick Township already had one community housing option for the developmentally disabled when Manis approached the city. That home, which isn’t far from the Manis development, is “more akin to an apartment complex,” said Schmalz.

It was the first time, Manis said, he has built a home to meet the standards laid out in the Americans with Disabilities Act. But it probably won’t be his last.

Manis, who is a cofounder with the not-for-profit GI Go Fund, may parlay the experience with the developmentally disabled group home into future projects. The GI Go Fund focuses on veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan and helps them find employment and access housing. Manis serves on the board of directors of the charity, which began in South Brunswick in 2006 after a local and high school classmate of Manis’s, Seth Dvorin, was killed in Iraq in 2004.

”There are going to be warriors who come back that are in wheel chairs, unfortunately,” said Manis. “I now, going forward, have the education I need. I can take this experience and help veterans.” ●

REALTORS® Take Action

Making Smart Growth Happen

Maine Commercial REALTORS® On Board with Sustainable Passenger Rail

Imagine a self-sustaining passenger rail system. In Maine, commercial REALTORS® are working to make one such transit opportunity a reality in the Pine Tree State. And that reality could be a vision for the rest of the country.

The Smart Growth Mobility Project – Maine Rail Transit Coalition will transform an existing, publically owned rail corridor into a sustainable transit system that will increase land values, connect thriving economic hubs and enable walkable communities. Development of the 30-mile rail corridor between Portland and Auburn/Lewiston, known as the St. Lawrence and Atlantic rail corridor (SLR), is possible thanks to a unique collaboration of developers and environmentalists; support by local, state and national leaders; and a self-supportable funding plan that combines both public and private investment. The diverse coalition includes the Maine Commercial Association of REALTORS® (MCAR) and Sierra Club Maine.

MCAR was recently awarded a \$15,000 NAR Smart Growth Grant that not only helped fund a Coalition project study, but is encouraging policy changes in state transportation funding. MCAR board member Tony Donovan explains that the project also aligns with a recent EPA report extolling the importance of real estate in the development of sustainable infrastructure transit options. He adds that coalition members are committed to smart growth and sustainability goals.

“The \$15,000 NAR grant probably advanced this project five years. It helped us finish the business plan and get information to everyone involved,” Donovan says. “What is really exciting is that the developers of land — that is the REALTORS® — and the protectors of land — like

the Sierra Club — are working together on this project. We’ve developed a really effective relationship.”

The recently completed Smart Growth Mobility Project study identifies the SLR corridor development as “an economical, local-based transit system connecting to jobs centers along the rail corridor. This strategy includes local planning initiatives, state fiscal incentives/disincentives, and state and local policy changes to encourage development of compact, walkable communities, infill areas and transit-orientated development.”

The SLR corridor currently lies idle, but when suitably developed, will not only connect Maine’s two largest economic centers, but will also maximize non-auto transit options by connecting to existing rail lines that reach popular Maine entertainment and recreational destinations and extend to Montreal, Canada.

Donovan, who is a commercial agent with Fishman Realty Group in Portland, says he envisions that three years from now it will be possible to step on a passenger train in Portland after work, ride the rails north to a popular Maine tourist attraction and return home that same night. Or once completed, passengers will be able to board a modern, efficient passenger train in Portland and arrive in Montreal six hours later.

Public and private involvement is integral to every aspect of the project. Train stations will be privately owned, income-generating real estate investments. Private funds will also be used to purchase the passenger rail cars. The proposed \$20 million in private investment, combined with an anticipated \$27 million state bond will also qualify



the project for federal grant monies. The total project cost is estimated to be \$138 million.

It is anticipated that the project's operating costs will be self-sustaining thanks to a multidimensional funding model called value capture. The Smart Growth Mobility Project study explains how value capture will work. "The transit enhances business and neighborhoods, so it is only fair that those businesses and neighborhoods support the transit." Properties within $\frac{3}{4}$ mile rings around the five rail stations would be subject to property assessments. Real estate within these five transit districts is valued in excess of \$2 billion. Planners predict those assessments, combined with passenger fares will create a sustainable system.

The project is quickly moving beyond the study stage. State lawmakers recently directed the state's Department of Transportation to seek funding for engineering of construction along the 30-mile rail corridor. Legislators will next establish a task force that will identify potential state bonds. And corridor transit districts around the

five communities that will be served by the new rail line will be designated. Economic activity and increased land value created by the presence of rail in each local transit district will make it feasible to implement form-based code and value capture funding.

"Everything is possible by smart growth planning at the community level. It is the local communities' responsibility to do their own land planning," Donovan explains. "Need dictates land use and value. We create value in real estate to fund our mobility needs. And when it comes to understanding local needs and land value, who knows better than the REALTOR® community — both commercial and residential REALTORS®."

Thanks to their understanding of community needs, establishment of innovative partnerships and support of creative financing options, Maine commercial REALTORS® and the Smart Growth Mobility Project are putting Maine on the fast track for livable communities, sustainable transit and smart growth development. ●

REALTORS® Take Action

Making Smart Growth Happen

Inclusion and Education Empowering Planned Growth in Mississippi

It's a misplaced fear. All too often rural property owners and local residents voice concerns about how smart growth concepts could affect property rights. To combat that misinformation, REALTORS® from southern Mississippi's Pearl River County educated local leaders and state lawmakers about the goals and benefits of smart growth concepts at a first-of-its-kind gathering in Mississippi. Pearl River County Board of REALTORS® worked with the Center for Planning Excellence and Placemakers to bring NAR's "Smart Growth for the 21st Century" presentation to a packed house of local REALTORS® and officials. The Picayune, Miss., presentation last fall was one of nearly two dozen NAR smart growth classes held across the country in 2012.

Deborah Benoit, broker with Plantation Properties and member of the Pearl River County Board of REALTORS® decided to help educate area REALTORS® and local officials after attending a smart growth conference and seeing the principles in practice. She knew it might be a hard sell back home, but she realized people would appreciate the opportunity to learn more.

"We have a small, close-knit community and this isn't a real familiar concept here," Benoit explained. "Many people were initially suspicious because they are afraid it could impact local property rights. But everyone who attended went away with a very positive attitude. They all agreed that smart growth was very different than what they had thought."

Approximately 60 people attended the smart growth presentation last fall. The audience included Mississippi State

Senators Tony Smith and Angela Burks Hill, Picayune Mayor Ed Pinero, Picayune city council members, Pearl River County officials and members of the economic planning commission.

"This was the first time any state senator attended this NAR class," said Hugh Morris, with the NAR smart growth program. "In fact, as a result of the success of the Pearl River County class, we were asked to present the program at the statewide convention. That was a nice spillover effect."

Picayune Mayor Pinero supported the Pearl River County educational summit and even opened the meeting. He explained to the Picayune Item, the local newspaper, how smart growth concepts could benefit his community. "In some way you have to manage growth. Things like this can help us manage our placement. Having a vision makes it easier for planners, developers and finally marketers to get the word out about our community and what we have



to offer. The more people we attract, the more money gets spent in our local establishments and that leads to more ad valorem tax we collect to go back into our city.”

Benoit agrees with Mayor Pinero that planned growth is essential to community development and she’s active with the area’s Coalition for Community Excellence, which is examining how to implement appropriate smart growth concepts to help improve community livability. As part of the visioning process to name potential projects, the Pearl River County Board of REALTORS® casually questioned nearly 100 residents about what they would like to see in their community. The vast majority of respondents favored development of family recreational options. The Coalition also drew from recommendations listed in the city of Picayune’s adopted long-range plan.

“We worked with the Center for Planning Excellence in Baton Rouge on a visioning planning session. That was step two in our process,” said Benoit. “We indicated that we can benefit from things like beautification, awareness and a sense of being part of the community. The third step may be a future walkshop — a workshop which includes a walking tour — where areas of blight and potential could be identified. I attended a walkshop in nearby Starkville where we saw firsthand how they are revitalizing old buildings.”

With each step in the process, members of Pearl River County Board of REALTORS® and local officials are realizing that education and inclusion are the keys to long-term success.



Photo by jimmywayne

“We’ve learned a lot over the last two years,” says Benoit “Now I see why it’s so important to start with education. NAR has it right. It’s important to explain what you’re about and what you’re planning to do. The way to get on the right foot is to get everyone involved. It’s a slow process, but we’re seeing real progress. We need to lead by example. We’re lighting the spark.” ●