

STaR Digital News

STaR Division Electronic Newsletter, March 20, 2006



Small
Town
& Rural
Planning

A Division of the
American Planning
Association



Editors note:

The main article in this, our first electronic STaR newsletter, builds upon the most recent STaR mailing. As promised, we have interesting material that may help, inspire or inform our members and are sending that information out on a timely basis. Hope you enjoy it. Please, don't be a stranger, send more our way and tell your personal or community story to other STaR members.

Ohio State University planning assistance in Harrison County, Mississippi

By: Jennifer Evans-Cowley, PhD, AICP

Harrison County, Mississippi received substantial damage as a result of Hurricane Katrina. The Mississippi Renewal Forum (<http://www.mississippirenewal.com>) is an example of planning effort that reached out to assist communities along the Mississippi Gulf Coast plan for rebuilding. However, the unincorporated towns have largely been left out of planning efforts. Harrison County invited Ohio State University to bring a technical assistance team to work with unincorporated areas of the county.

“We wanted to reach out to the residents, property owners and business owners in the unincorporated areas to hear their ideas for the future development and rebuilding that is necessary in their communities,” said Pat Bonck, Harrison County Zoning Director. “A lot of work has been accomplished in the rebuilding effort and it is important for our unincorporated areas to play a part as well.”

The County Board of Supervisors selected the communities of DeLisle (pop. 1,300) and Saucier (pop. 10,000) for community plans and to have sections of the zoning ordinance revised. Based on the Supervisors request, a technical assistance team was formed. The technical assistance team included a professor, three planning professionals, and twelve students.

During the month of December the team worked with their Harrison County contacts to collect background information and prepare to meet with the communities. The technical assistance team arrived in Harrison County on January 1. The team toured the communities and began collecting data. As part of the planning process, town hall meetings were held in each community. “We believe citizen input is vital to the process of rebuilding,” Bonck said. “We know the task before us is enormous. This is a chance for any community member in DeLisle and Saucier to be heard and play a direct role in the future of his/her community.”



Damage from Hurricane Katrina

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As part of the town hall meetings, citizens were provided with an electronic voting device (<http://www.turningtechnologies.com>) that allowed citizens to vote on what types of uses would be acceptable in the community. Citizens were asked to rate on a scale of one to five whether an image would be acceptable or unacceptable in their community. After voting, the results were displayed instantly. The citizens loved the visual preference survey. In one meeting the citizens took to booing and cheering when others in the crowd agreed or disagreed with their own responses. After the meeting citizens commented that it was a really great way for them to learn about what other people want for the future of the community. The town hall meeting also included a written survey and small group discussion to identify critical issues in the communities.

The technical assistance team returned to Ohio on January 8th, but the citizen engagement didn't end there. The town hall meeting was just the first step in the planning process. To help continue the dialogue from a distance, the team established a 1-800 number to record citizens' comments or questions. Citizens are able to record messages up to ten minutes in length. The messages are available on-line for the team members to listen to



Ohio State group in front of the SS Hurricane Camille including:

Back row from left: Nick Seivers, Justin Goodwin, Michael Curtis, Project Manager Jennifer Evans-Cowley, Corrin Hoegen, Matthew Hinkle, Team Leader Kris Hopkins, (Cuyahoga County, OH), Robert Lemon, Team Leader Chris Snyder (Miami Township, OH), Brett Davis;

Second row from left: Ellen Marrison, Keisha Walker, Carla Marable, Jeffrey Jacobs;

First row: Amelia Costanzo and Andrew Taylor.

(<http://www.instantaudio.com>). This allows each of the team members to hear the responses without waiting for one person to convey the information. Additionally, the team established an on-line discussion community at (<http://home.learningtimes.net/ms>). The County Board of Supervisors assisted in forming community steering committees to provide feedback to the planning team throughout the planning process.

At the beginning of March, draft plans were released to the citizens for comment. “The feedback from the communities has been incredible. The citizens of DeLisle and Saucier provided valuable information about how to best address their community issues.” Project Manager Jennifer Evans-Cowley said. The planning team returns to Harrison County **March 19th through the 22nd** to hold more town hall meetings to assist the community with the implementation of the community plans.

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While the community plans are important, implementation is critical. To assist with implementation, the zoning team worked throughout the project to develop ordinances in response to community desires. For example, the community of Saucier is concerned about light pollution ruining their view of the stars at night. The team has prepared a Dark Skies ordinance to reduce light pollution. The team has also developed ordinance amendments to respond to Hurricane Katrina. The team has developed zoning ordinance amendments related to home occupations, modular housing, and accessory housing units to help address critical needs as citizens begin to rebuild.



Damage from Hurricane Katrina

This is just the start of our planning efforts,” Evans-Cowley said. Ohio State University will continue to assist the rural communities of Harrison County over the next two years. The technical assistance team was made possible through a \$17,000 grant from Ohio State University, a **\$2,000 grant from STaR** and a \$500 grant from the Ohio Chapter of APA. OSU’s planning program will soon receive a \$300,000 grant from HUD to extend their work into other communities in Harrison County over the next two years. Bonck hopes “that this project is just a starting point that will lead to a long term relationship with Harrison County, Mississippi as it rebuilds.”

For more information about this project, contact Jennifer Evans-Cowley, PhD, AICP at (614) 247-7479 or

cowley.11@osu.edu For more information about the efforts in Harrison County visit <http://www.co.harrison.ms.us/departments/zoning>.

Evans-Cowley is an Assistant Professor of City and Regional Planning

From this article:

How cool is that? A Dark Skies ordinance, boing and cheering in community meetings (on purpose!), instant voting results, a 1-800 number for 10 minute citizen rants & raves and great e-mail links to resources.



STaR News you can use...

1. **STaR Reception** in San Antonio Tuesday, 4/25/06, 5:30 pm to 9:00 pm, Henry B. Gonzales Convention Center, Conference Rm. 9
2. **Advertise** in this Newsletter for \$30.00 per issue, business card size, full color, contact the Editor at tkaters@msn.com
3. **Update** your member records at the APA website—don't get left out of STaR
4. A Committee is being formed to work on **STaR Awards** and **Scholarship** programs, please see page 4.

STaR Speaker's Bureau

The **STaR** Division is forming a Speaker's Bureau and hoping to create a list of small town and rural planning experts that can give presentations at Leagues of Cities and Counties conferences, as well as any organization that would like to know more about small town and rural planning.

If you are interested in being a speaker, e-mail **STaR** Division Chair Dale Powers at dpowers@co.kendall.il.us with the following information: name, address, contact information, area of expertise, where you are willing to travel and what expenses you might need to have reimbursed.

STaR Awards Committees

The **STaR** Executive Committee has decided to institute (or re-institute, in some cases) an annual award program. The awards include:

- (1) Outstanding small town and rural planner;
- (2) Outstanding small town and rural plan; and
- (3) Student award.

STaR is looking for volunteers to serve on a committee to determine criteria for these awards as well as whether there should be one award per year or multiple awards. There will be one committee per award, for a total of three committees. The Committees should be prepared to forward their recommendations to the **STaR** Executive Committee no later than July 31, 2006. If you are interested in serving on one of the committees, contact **STaR** Vice Chair – Programs Dave Gattis at dgattis@cityofbenbrook.com.

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Where we work

Places where STaR members plan...



City of Idaho Springs, Colorado, looking west



Clay County, Missouri