



*Feature Article*

December 2009

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# The Act of Planning for Sustainability:

## Williamston, North Carolina

By Kevin A. Fletcher, Ph.D. and Suzanne Zakowski  
Audubon International



Skewarkee Rail Trail, Williamson, NC

Becoming a more sustainable community isn't easy. It would seem that the benefits far outweigh the effort, for sure, but it takes determination and persistence to make real and lasting changes. A community faces an even greater challenge when economic forces threaten to undermine its progress. An unstable or distressed local economy can turn the path to sustainability into a case of "one step backward for every two steps forward."

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## From the Chair

Dave Gattis

Happy Holidays! It's been a tough year for many of us, but I hope your coming year will be productive and secure.

### CM Webinar on February 19th

STAR is sponsoring a CM Webinar on "Talking the Property Rights Blues" by Harvey Jacobs (see the June 2009 STAR newsletter.) As a member of STAR, you can participate in this and other webinars for CM credit at no cost. Go to [www.utah-apa.org/webcasts.htm](http://www.utah-apa.org/webcasts.htm) for more information and to register.

### Plan Now for New Orleans

Believe it or not, its already time to start thinking about the APA National Conference in New Orleans on April 11-13, 2010. In an effort to reduce costs, APA has shortened the conference by one day, and has unbundled the receptions from the conference registration (though it still not cheap.) The reduced schedule means that STAR is limited to only one session this year, but we are also offering a STAR-sponsored mobile workshop again. Of course, in true APA fashion, they've scheduled them both at the same time. Here are the STAR-related events in New Orleans:

#### Monday, April 12

- 8:00 AM to 12 Noon – Mobile Workshop (W038), "Conflicting Rural Land Uses," a tour of rural land use issues in St. Bernard Parish following Hurricane Katrina, organized by STAR member Clifton Cottrell.
- 9:00 AM to 10:15 AM—Session (S501), "Rural and Small Town Design Guidelines," addressing design elements and approaches to preserve small town and rural character, organized by STAR member Bob Barber.
- 6:30 PM to 8:30 PM—STAR Annual Business Meeting and Awards Presentation. Suitable hors d'oeuvres and liquid refreshments will be available, and we'll let you out in time to hit the town. See the Awards Nomination form beginning on Page 13.

Hope to see you there. Early registration ends February 18th. Go to <http://www.planning.org/conference/index.htm> for more information

### It's Election Time

Look for your ballot for STAR officers for the next two years. The electronic ballot should arrive by the end of January. Thanks to Past STAR Division Chairs Dale Powers, John Keller and Jim Segedy for serving as the Nominations Committee. Please take time to vote.



Dave Gattis, FAICP,  
Deputy City Manager  
City of Benbrook, Texas

## STAR Division

### 2008 - 2010 Executive Committee

**Chair, Dave Gattis, FAICP, CFM, ICMA-CM**  
City of Benbrook, Texas  
[dgattis@cityofbenbrook.com](mailto:dgattis@cityofbenbrook.com)

#### Vice Chair – Programs

**Mickey Rhoades, CZA**  
Town of Manassas, Virginia  
[mrhoades@ci.manassas.va.us](mailto:mrhoades@ci.manassas.va.us)

#### Vice Chair – Communications

**Alex Ikefuna**  
ACI International,  
Coeur d'Alene, Idaho  
[iyiokuzu@gmail.com](mailto:iyiokuzu@gmail.com)

#### Secretary/Treasurer

**Joni Graves, AICP**  
UW-Madison Department of  
Engineering Professional  
Development  
[jhg@southhill.cc](mailto:jhg@southhill.cc)

#### Immediate Past Chair

**Dale Powers, AICP**  
Zia Planning Consultants  
[dalepowers@ziaplanning.com](mailto:dalepowers@ziaplanning.com)

# Small Town and Rural (STaR) Planning Division Awards: Things You Should Know (History and Hints)

By Dale Richard Powers, Immediate Past Chair

In 2007, the Small Town and Rural (STaR) Planning Division of APA renamed its four long-standing awards that recognize the efforts of small town and rural planners in the practice of their profession after four of the most influential small town and rural planning practitioners. They are:

planning at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana that taught hundreds of students the exciting world of planning. Dr. Segedy currently is the Director of Community Planning for the Pennsylvania Environmental Council in Pittsburgh and Chair of APA's Environmental Planning Division.

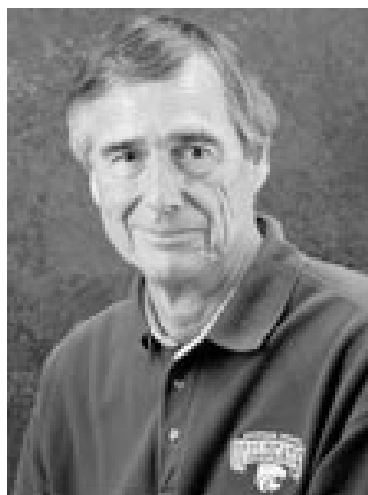


Vernon Deines, AICP

Jim Segedy, FAICP

The **Vernon Deines, AICP Award** is given to an outstanding comprehensive planning project. Dr. Deines was a leader in the discipline of regional and community planning at Kansas State University as well as in the State of Kansas and nationally. For nearly 20 years, Dr. Deines was head of the K-State Department of Regional and Community Planning, where he led a nationally recognized curriculum focused on professional practice, especially in smaller communities and rural regions. Vern was one of the original founders of the STaR Division and served as Chair in the early 1980s.

The **Jim Segedy, FAICP Award** is given to an outstanding student project. James A. Segedy is a planner, teacher, mentor, and champion of small town planning. His greatest accomplishment is the legacy he has left through his students. Jim has made a difference in the planning world because he has made a difference in the lives of hundreds of planning students and professionals who are making great communities happen. Dr. Segedy, a long time STaR Chair, was a professor of urban



John Keller, FAICP



Carol Thomas, FAICP

The **John Keller, FAICP Award** is given for an outstanding planning initiative. John Keller has nearly 30 years of experience in teaching, research, and professional planning. His dedication to state and national APA stands as an example for many young professionals. His scholarship and research have contributed to increase awareness and understanding of rural and small time planning — both to the growing number of non-metropolitan international professionals and to his students of the past two decades.

The **Carol Thomas, FAICP Award** is given for an outstanding planning practitioner. Ms. Thomas, a planning pioneer, practitioner, and educator, has spent more than 40 years advancing the cause of planning, from New England to China. She has served APA well, including a term as President of AICP.

The awards are presented each year at the Division's annual business meeting. For 2010, this meeting will be held during the APA National Conference in New Orleans April 10-13.

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*STaR Awards—continued from Page 3*

Submissions are reviewed and evaluated by the STaR Awards Committee, chaired by STaR Vice Chair-Conferences and Programs Mickey Rhoades. The Awards Committee recommends to the STaR Executive Committee those submissions that have best exemplified the mission of the Division to promote the planning successes of small town, rural, and nonmetropolitan areas of America and the world.

Mickey has new Committee members for this awards cycle, and it was suggested that I interview previous Committee members who have had the responsibility to review awards submissions for their thoughts on how they are evaluated. I had the opportunity to discuss these thoughts with former Committee members Paul Bednar, RLA, ASLA, AICP, Parks Development Coordinator for the City of Elgin, IL, and Jon Sevald, AICP, County Planner for Sherburne County, MN.



Paul Bednar, RLA, ASLA, AICP, City of Elgin, IL



Jon Sevald, AICP, Sherburne County, MN

### Hints for Submissions

Paul and Jon's comments revealed the following:

1. Good submissions are well organized. The Committee found it "annoying" when a submittal was received in pieces paper clipped together. It was very helpful when a submission came in as a unit (e. g. a 3-ring binder with a CD in the pocket). Most submittals came as a CD, which created concerns with the Committee due to the additional expense of printing it out.
2. While reading the submission on the CD, quite often Committee members would reference a map of the surrounding area (e. g. Google Earth) to see what location influences might affect the jurisdiction. This is because this information was "oddly" excluded from the submission.
3. Good submissions were dynamic visually – but visuals aren't everything. Realistic implementation was key. One of the comprehensive plans the Committee reviewed included a great implementation piece – but the Committee was not convinced that the jurisdiction would actually implement the plan. Plans that end up as expensive "paperweights" most likely would not be recognized.
4. When putting together a submittal, agencies should be cognizant of the Committee's time pressures. It is rare that submission review can take place during regular business hours – especially so in times of constricting human resources creating additional stress on everyone. Invariably, submissions are reviewed on the personal time of the members. A submittal that is put together well – without a lot of unnecessary moving parts – makes it easier for the Committee to review.

The STaR Executive Committee would like to thank all of the previous Awards Committee members – Bednar, Sevald, and Leanne Harter, AICP, Community Development Director for Story County, IA – for their service. If you have any questions about the STaR Awards, contact Mickey Rhoades, Chair of the Awards Committee, at [mrhoades@ci.manassas.va.us](mailto:mrhoades@ci.manassas.va.us).

**The 2010 STAR Planning Award Entry Form can be found on pages 13-15 in this issue.**

# One Community - One Vision: North Olga Prepares For The Future

By: Allison D. Megrath, AICP



Allison Megrath, AICP

LEE COUNTY, FL - The residents of North Olga will benefit this year by having the opportunity to prepare a community plan for their area, thanks to the support and a grant from the Small Town and Rural Planning Division of the American Planning Association.

The community of North Olga is located in Southwest Florida, east of the City of Ft. Myers in northeastern Lee County. The community is rich in history with documentation stemming back to the late 1800's. Many of the ancestors of original settlers still live in North Olga. Stories abound about the hard life of cattle running, citrus farming and trips along the Caloosahatchee River with the likes of Thomas Edison that helped to shape the culture of the area. The residents have a well-rooted commitment to the area and desire to preserve its heritage and establish a framework for its future.

In 1922, the Olga Bridge opened, providing easy access between the north and south sides of the Caloosahatchee River. Commerce activities began to increase in the area and it seemed as though the future of the area was strong. However, the opening of a new bridge to the east of North Olga in 1962, along with other road improvements, the realignment of the Caloosahatchee River, the removal of the Olga Bridge and other transportation-related advances, seemed to signal a different agenda for the area. These changes meant that vehicles would by-pass the community to get where they were going faster and easier. These modern activities, along with the more progressive community of Alva, almost 10 miles to its east, seemed to leave North Olga behind. As Cathy Chestnut, a historian who recently wrote about the community stated, *"Olga was largely forgotten, except for the people who live it and breathe it."*

History is repeating itself today in North Olga. Sandwiched on three sides by established Lee

County communities, each of which has an approved community plan of their own, and bounded to the north by the approved future Town of Babcock Ranch (with plans to build approximately 19,500 dwelling units on 17,000 acres of land) in Charlotte County, the 12,000-acre community of North Olga is left to fend for itself. None of the four adjacent communities included North Olga in their plans.

Looking to the future of the area and the inevitable growth pressures they would face due to the surrounding communities, the residents of North Olga decided to take control of their own destiny and create a community plan. In May of 2009, they formed the North Olga Community Planning Panel and retained Land Planning Solutions, a Bonita Springs-based land planning consulting firm, to assist them with this grassroots, community-planning effort. The preparation of the North Olga Community Plan will become a guide for the future of North Olga.

The seven-member Planning Panel met over 12 times over the course of five (5) months and participated in four (4) community outreach meetings. All meetings were open to the public and facilitated by Land Planning Solutions, Inc. Land Planning Solutions also conducted research, collected data, held over 30 private stakeholder interviews, worked with County staff and the Board of County Commissioners, engaged the Florida Department of Community Affairs and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission to solicit input prior to drafting the Community Plan.

The Plan recommends potential opportunities for future development and identifies areas not suitable for additional development. Recommendations were based on existing environmental conditions, the community's need for local goods and services, current land use designations, as well as projects in the immediate vicinity of and within the study area that have already received land use entitlements.

The draft Plan was submitted to Lee County in late September 2009, kicking off a lengthy governmental review process known as a Comprehensive

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*One Community, One Vision, continued from Page 5*

Plan Amendment. The hope is that revisions will be made to the Plan to fine-tune the draft policies and that after the formal review by Lee County staff and State agencies has concluded and additional public input has been made, the Lee County Board of County Commissioners will adopt the policies into the Lee Plan. This adoption would mean that residents of North Olga would know if, where and how development would occur in their community in the years to come.

For more information about the North Olga Community Plan including the project schedule, meeting agendas and minutes or to view the entire draft of the Community Plan, please visit [http://www.landplanningsolutions.us/projects\\_highlights.html](http://www.landplanningsolutions.us/projects_highlights.html).

#### **About Allison Megrath & Land Planning Solutions, Inc.:**

Allison Megrath, AICP, is the President & Principal Planner of Land Planning Solutions, Inc., a land use planning, zoning and permitting consulting firm. Based in Bonita Springs, Florida, Land Planning Solutions is a state certified Woman/Minority Business Enterprise (W/MBE). Ms. Megrath has been a professional land use planner since 1993. Ms. Megrath served as a delegate for the State of Florida with the National American Planning Association (APA) in 2006 & in 2008 and was the Chair of the Promised Lands Section of the Florida APA from 2007-2009. She now represents the Section as Immediate Past Chair. Ms. Megrath sits on the Lee County Smart Growth Committee and is a member of the Urban Land Institute of Southwest Florida Sustainability Committee. She is also a member of the American Farmland Trust.

All planners at Land Planning Solutions are certified by the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP) and LPS has a LEED Accredited Professional on staff. LPS is committed to the preservation of Florida's agricultural industry & heritage, natural resource conservation, the creation of sustainable communities and the public participation process. Visit [www.landplanningsolutions.us](http://www.landplanningsolutions.us) for more information about LPS, who we are or for project examples.

*Planning for Sustainability, continued from Page 1*

Consider, for instance, Williamston, North Carolina – a rural community in eastern North Carolina where the median salary is 22% below the national average; where the unemployment rate is 67% above the national average; and where one in five people live at or below the poverty level. Williamston, a town of about 6,000 residents, is a place where economic forces could theoretically prevent sustainability from ever getting off the ground. Yet, it has made great strides in a short period of time to become more sustainable — a model perhaps.

What Williamston needed at the start was a strategy that would engage its residents and still meet three important criteria: 1) inexpensive, 2) easy to implement, and 3) responsive to residents' needs and concerns. The town also wanted the chosen strategy to raise awareness about sustainability and local environmental issues and motivate residents to participate in helping to address those issues. Over three years, the town has worked to include its residents in identifying sustainability indicators and developing a strategic plan that responds to environmental, social, and economic issues simultaneously.

Williamston has made tremendous strides in raising public awareness about sustainability and in demonstrating on-the-ground results that will have a real and positive effect on the community and its residents. To members of the Steering Committee assembled to initiate this process - a cross-section of members of the community and local government leaders - the effort has been to create a community-wide acceptance of these sustainability goals through active public projects, while driving a community-led planning effort as well.

Through the Audubon International's Sustainable Communities Program (SCP), the Town completed a plan under fifteen focus areas called *Williamston 2020*. The plan outlined goals for the region, partners, resources, and timelines. To achieve certification, the number of short term projects that were completed must be greater than those not yet completed. While working to document the progress, Dr. Tom Ward, Williamston's sustainability coordinator, found that each of the one hundred and twenty seven goals, ranging from short term to long term, had a partner associated with it along with unique resources. It was not the sole responsibility of the municipal government to work towards progress; citizens, through individual actions and local organizations were completing the

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*Planning for Sustainability, Continued from Page 6*

tasks. Each goal has a chosen measurable, 'sustainability indicator,' which helps the coordinator determine how much progress has been made.

### Accomplishments to date

"Audubon International's Sustainable Communities Program (SCP) has made us realize that we, the citizens of Williamston, are responsible for our future," says Dr. Ward. "As our small town seeks to compete in today's global economy, we've increased our focus on the pillars of sustainability: our environment, our economy, and our people. We've realized that two of our significant strengths are our caring community and our undisturbed natural resources. As a result, we want to take care of our land, water, wildlife, and air as never before, because they will define our future."

Yet, action on specific "sustainability indicators" for the community has helped to make the planning process real to citizens of the Town. For instance, some of Williamston's accomplishments to date include:

- **School & Youth Involvement** - Students have constructed and continue to maintain a water quality project on campus including cisterns, rain gardens, eco-swales, permeable pavement, and riparian buffers. The project further calls attention to the diminishing fresh water supply in the Town.



Rain Garden at High School, Williamston, NC

- **Water Quality and Storm water** - To address the large amounts of runoff from

parking lots and roads, the Town has constructed numerous eco-swales and bio-retention ponds. All new developments must use permeable pavement, as adopted into the Town Code. The Town has worked with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to protect wetlands and natural areas surrounding the Roanoke River, and has held several educational seminars for residents.

- **Health and Quality of Life** - Several new trails have linked the Town to recreational opportunities, including new Rail Trails, bike paths, and River Boardwalks. All of these linkages are mapped and available to the general public.
- **Infill Development** - The Town has implemented codes to reduce sprawl and encourage the use of existing structures. The Arts Council and Technology Center, Economic Incubator, and the Roanoke Landing and Technology Center have occupied existing buildings, and the Downtown Facade Grants Program encourages the use of downtown buildings. A down-payment assistance program encourages the purchase of existing homes.
- **Agriculture** - Williamston is located in rural Martin County, with a lot of the land dedicated to agriculture. The Cooperative Extension has helped with outreach and education so that seventy-five percent of the farms use strip-till or no-till farming methods. A farmers' market venue has been constructed so area farms can sell excess produce.
- **Economic Development** - A large percentage of equestrian tourists has led to the construction of an Equestrian Center, and several area businesses have adjusted hours to accommodate the tourism.
- **Recreation** - In partnership with several agencies and organizations, the Town has purchased a majority of the land adjacent to the Roanoke River. Several birding paths linked to the North Carolina Birding Trails, educational signage that highlights the historical significance, camping platforms, boat launches, and recreational opportuni-

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*Planning for Sustainability, Continued from Page 6*

ties along the newly constructed boardwalk are just a few of the completed projects that draw in residents and visitors.



Roanoke River Camping Platform, Williamston, NC

- **Arts and Culture** - As the Martin County seat of government, the Town's arts and cultural organizations are active county-wide. Several non-profit cultural organizations hold events monthly in renovated downtown buildings owned by the Arts Council and Historical Society with help from donations and grants.



Arts Council Building on Main Street, Williamston, NC

- **Local Government** - The Town has implemented sustainable practices and policies into the framework for government. In addition to zoning codes, the Town has revised the permitting process for new development to include sustainable practices, prioritizes beautification projects, provides incentives to homeowner and business practices, encourages waste reduction and recycling, and emphasizes preservation.
- **Businesses** - Several local businesses are educating residents and visitors about sustainable practices. For instance, it was the Martin County Chamber of Commerce that originally helped to bring Audubon International to the Town to provide assistance.

The Town of Williamston has demonstrated a strong commitment to the ideals of sustainability – economic vitality, environmental protection, and social responsibility. With the surrounding natural landscape of Eastern North Carolina and a rich heritage, Williamston has much to celebrate. It is a unique place filled with residents, businesses, and community organizations that care deeply about the place they call home. Yet, it is this set of visible actions and accomplishments that has helped to drive the whole planning process from within the local government and with involvement from the community. For more information, visit [www.auduboninternational.org](http://www.auduboninternational.org) or [www.sustainablecommunityinitiative.com](http://www.sustainablecommunityinitiative.com).

**About the authors:** Kevin A. Fletcher, Ph.D., is Executive Director for Audubon International, a nonprofit educational organization working to help foster more sustainable communities by providing people with the tools and assistance to become better stewards of the environment where they live, work, and recreate.

Suzanne Zakowski is the Manager of the Sustainable Communities Program and worked directly with the Town of Williamston to develop the sustainability indicators and sustainability plan for the community.

**STAR Internships Awarded**

Congratulations to Amanda Campbell and Richard Cox, both students at UNC-Chapel Hill, for being awarded the first STAR Internships. Amanda will be serving in Chatham County, NC and Richard will be working in the City of Asheboro, NC. Look for more information in the next newsletter.

# Williston, VT: The Small Town with the Big Tool Box

By: Lee Nellis, AICP, Round River Planning

The Small Town and Rural Planning Division's 2009 John Keller Award for Planning Initiatives recognized Williston, Vermont for its effort to create the first designated growth center in that state in 2007. Significant as it was, however, Williston's growth center effort was just the most recent of the town's progressive planning efforts. Williston shows that even small communities can effectively manage growth when they have the will to do so.

This article begins with a quick history of planning in Williston through 2004, and explains how the town built on its previous efforts to create an effective growth management program that uses almost every tool in the box.

## Williston's Land-Use History, 1962-2004

**Exit 12.** Williston's growth management odyssey began in 1962, when Exit 12 off I-89 opened access to the rural area locally known as Tafts Corner, including connections to the Burlington Airport and the then-new IBM manufacturing plant in Essex Junction. At the time, Williston was thoroughly rural, with a population of less than 1,500 scattered around a quiet village center. The first residential subdivisions, zoning, and subdivision regulations all arrived in the mid 1960's. Minor strip commercial development followed the new homes, but Williston grew slowly into the 1970s.

**Pyramid Mall.** The first challenge to the local hope that change would not accelerate came in 1977. The Pyramid Corporation proposed an enclosed shopping mall at Exit 12. Nearly two decades of controversy preceded development on that site, which eventually became Maple Tree Place, a quality center built around a large green. But the wastewater disposal issues that plague every recently glaciated landscape led the town to construct a central sewage collection system in 1983. Development followed. Both the schools and the new sewerage system neared capacity before the decade ended.

**Growth Management Begins.** Williston responded with three growth management initiatives in the late 1980s and early 1990's, a period when the town also welcomed its first town manager.



The first was to appoint a Conservation Commission and create a local purchase of development rights program. The second initiative was to begin a capital budgeting process and the third was to establish a competitive growth management system that allocated the remaining capacity of the sewerage system and schools. Residential development was limited to 80 units each year. The growth management system also included an urban services boundary and differential allocations of units within and outside that boundary. Litigation followed.

**Wal-Mart "Endangers" Vermont.** While the town's residential growth management system was being modified to reflect court rulings, Tafts Corners Park – which had been platted as an industrial park – was proposed as the site of Vermont's first Wal-Mart. This led the National Trust for Historic Preservation to declare the entire state (the last state to have a Wal-Mart) "endangered" in 1993. After years of controversy, Williston's Wal-Mart opened in 1996. Commercial development blossomed and residential development continued apace. The population was approaching five times its 1960s level and the number of jobs in Williston began to exceed the number of residents.

**Growth Management Gets Specific.** Vermont's liberal courts were kind to

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Williston's residential growth management system, finding it to be valid in principle while sometimes requiring it to be modified in application. But it isn't as easy to ration commercial development, so the reaction to the overwhelming volume of commercial development - Williston had become Vermont's number one retail sales center - began with highly specific development agreements, including the 1996 settlement that cleared the way for development of Maple Tree Place. These agreements flirted with the limits of the town's authority and proved both difficult to enforce and even counterproductive. The agreements were followed by a series of restrictive form-based zoning code amendments that eliminated most new retail development.

**Big Projects Can't Make an Impact.** Williston's plans had called for the development of a compact growth center in the Tafts Corner area since 1990. But that couldn't happen. The growth management system privileged small projects by restricting not just the total number of new units on a site, but also the number of units per year per project relative to other projects. The math built into the system would not support the infrastructure investments required to build compact walkable developments. Interestingly enough this realization was accompanied by small projects in rural Williston becoming more visible and controversial.

**While Small Projects have Big Impacts.** The woods of rural Williston had quietly soaked up a considerable number of new homes over the years. Then two small projects - one was just a single red house in a very visible hay meadow, the other was a small subdivision that put big homes with big picture windows on a west-facing slope - sparked controversy over rural development. This discussion was both informed and fueled by a regional planning commission study showing that the town's current regulations would eventually permit nearly 1,800 additional homes in rural Williston.

#### **Williston's Current Growth Management Program, 2004-2009**

By 2004, Williston's growth had begun to slow, but the resident population was up over 8,000 and the day-time population, including shoppers and commuting employees, was rising toward 20,000. The town had been successful in protecting considerable open space and also in balancing growth with the capacity of some of its infrastructure. The



Hamlet Going Up

Conservation Commission had used local funds to leverage state funds and protect more than 1,200 acres of farmland and wetlands habitat, as well as to provide better public access and trails. Growth had not quite exceeded the capacities of the schools or the sewage treatment system. In fact, the town was about to add modest capacity to its sewerage system.

On the other hand, added sewage treatment capacity necessitated a review of the growth management system, and while numerous improvements had been made to state and town roads, the transportation infrastructure serving Williston was visibly stressed. The town also needed new public safety facilities. The Police Department especially was impossibly cramped in its existing space. The controversy about rural residential development had some residents promoting and others resisting the idea of a down-zoning. State law required that the town soon start on a comprehensive plan update and there was plenty to talk about.

**Mandatory Open Space Development.** The new plan should have come first, but there was a controversy to resolve. The evolution of Williston's current growth management system began with an effort to address the rural residential development controversy. The Planning Commission and Town Planner launched a campaign to show everyone how rural character and environmental protection goals could be reconciled - in most cases - with landowners' reasonable expectations. The idea of a win-win solution was attractive in a town that had been living with land use controversy for

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*Williston, VT, continued from Page 10*

so long. Mandatory open space development regulations were adopted on an interim basis in September 2004. They have been refined since, but several projects in various stages of approval and even development make it clear that these regulations are resulting in both a better pattern of rural development and an incentive for development within the urban services boundary.

**A Digression.** *Many readers will be curious about Williston's choice of open space development patterns to protect a special rural landscape. This is not the best choice of tools to protect larger-scale, productive farm and forest landscapes, but it does the job quite nicely in the particular landscape of this small Vermont town that includes less than a handful of genuinely productive farms.*

**Re-Thinking Growth Management.** Again, the town plan should have come first, but the addition of new sewage treatment plant capacity required the town to amend its growth management system in at least a minimal way. This need, coupled with the realization that the growth management system was actually discouraging desirable development, launched the Planning Commission directly from its resolution of the rural residential development issue into a growth management revision. The Planning Commission (perhaps they were already tired?) had little trouble with staff's proposals, but attaining a majority vote of the elected Selectboard took months of intense discussion as well as a great deal of "shuttle diplomacy" with affected developers. In the end, the system was revised to discourage (without eliminating) rural residential development, while encouraging compact growth. This led directly to the approval of 600 units of housing that is virtually

all within a 10-minute walk of the theater that is at the center of Williston's growth center.

**The 2006 Comprehensive Plan.** Be glad you were not on the Williston Planning Commission between 2004 and 2006! The Commission met almost weekly for two years AND while resolving the rural development and growth management issues as described above, also produced an entirely new town plan. That document is available on-line at:

[http://www.town.williston.vt.us/website/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=222&Itemid=32](http://www.town.williston.vt.us/website/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=222&Itemid=32).

The plan provides a clear policy foundation and direction for the town's future, beginning with a single-page vision statement and ending with a detailed matrix of implementation tasks and responsibilities. Highlights include the emphasis on pedestrian-friendly, design-conscious, mixed-use development in the growth center; continuing open space conservation (a detailed open space plan is incorporated); and a focus on watershed health that incorporates both the town's storm water management program and its award-winning stream restoration.

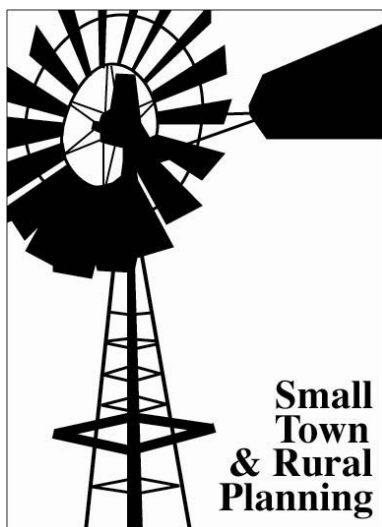
**Williston's Growth Center.** The Vermont legislature created a growth *Continued on Page 12*

### STAR Newsletter Article Submission Requirements

- Deadline for March 2010 issue is – February 28, 2010
- Up to 1,000 words
- Must be single space and in Microsoft Word
- JPEG pictures preferred if submitted with the article
- A paragraph on the biography of the author
- Email your article to Alex Ikefuna, Vice Chair/Communications, at [iyiokuzu@gmail.com](mailto:iyiokuzu@gmail.com)

### Member Highlight/Members in the News

If you have been promoted, get a new job, received an award and/or public commendation, deployed to the war or return from deployment, appointed to a leadership position, or elected to a public office, please send us a paragraph because STaR would like to know. Send your information to [iyiokuzu@gmail.com](mailto:iyiokuzu@gmail.com).





Williston Town Hall

centers program (see Title 24, Chapter 76A of the Vermont Statutes and

<http://www.dhca.state.vt.us/Planning/GrowthCenters.htm>) in 2005. This fit perfectly into Williston's long-standing vision of concentrating activity in a compact area around Tafts Corner, but the new law proved both difficult to navigate and controversial. The Planning Commission and Town Planner spent 14 months securing agreement from statewide conservation and preservation organizations, as well as the regional chamber of commerce, while its application moved painfully through the state's bureaucracy. In the state's defense, this was the first application under a new law that failed to clarify key points. In the end (Fall 2007) Williston's growth center achieved state designation. And this became the basis for the ongoing development and approval of projects that will help transform the growth center from a patchy sprawl of old strip development and isolated box stores into a thriving community center that includes (hopefully) more than a thousand dwellings.

**The Grid Streets.** A key limitation on the infill of Williston's growth center was a lack of access. Much of the area is surrounded by arterial and collector roads, but has no useful internal street network. Previous town plans had noted this and suggested vague alignments for new streets that would provide access and a pedestrian scale of connectivity. The 2006 plan proposed specific alignments and was followed by a detailed study of the traffic flow benefits of building the grid. The grid streets do not solve Williston's transportation woes (and unfortunately the town must rely on the state transportation agency for the remaining solutions); they will make a big difference. The town now awaits the end of the recession and the

creation of a tax increment financing district to proceed with construction.

**The Unified Development Bylaw.** The final major component of Williston's growth management system is a new unified development bylaw that was completed in stages between the fall of 2006 and the summer of 2009. This document is explicitly grounded in the comprehensive plan, reflecting both Vermont's consistency requirement and the commonsense notion that the town ought to be able to point to the reasons for the regulations it imposes. The unified development bylaw also blends elements of conventional, form-based, and performance zoning to address the town's diverse regulatory needs. It is available on-line at:

[http://www.town.williston.vt.us/website/images/documents/planning/development\\_bylaws\\_2009.pdf](http://www.town.williston.vt.us/website/images/documents/planning/development_bylaws_2009.pdf).

Adoption of the new unified development bylaw has already resulted in approval of new development that implements the town's vision, including infill projects that just would not have been possible under the previous regulations.

**From Reaction to Confidence.** The years 2004-08 saw Williston evolve from a community that had been somewhat overwhelmed by growth and was attempting to manage change with counterproductive regulations, into a community that is taking its place as a national leader in open space conservation, watershed protection, sound infrastructure planning, creative regulation, and the redevelopment (given a decade or so) of its "big box" sprawl into a vital, commercial town center.

### Small Towns Can

Williston is not necessarily the typical small town. Its population is affluent and well-educated, and the town has been building experience in growth management for two decades. Still, Williston shows what a small community that wants to celebrate and preserve its rural heritage while embracing its future can do.

If you have questions based on this article, please direct them to former Williston Town Planner, Lee Nellis, AICP, at [lee@roundriverplanning.com](mailto:lee@roundriverplanning.com).



Lee Nellis, AICP

Round River Planning and former Williston Town Planner



American Planning Association  
**Small Town and  
 Rural Planning Division**

*Making Great Communities Happen*

## CALL FOR 2010 APA SMALL TOWN AND RURAL PLANNING DIVISION AWARD NOMINATIONS

The Small Town and Rural (STAR) Planning Division invites nominations for STAR's Planning Awards to recognize outstanding individuals and projects for their contribution to planning excellence in small town and rural communities. The program is open to any individual, organization, or consulting firm involved in planning for small town and rural areas. Members of the Awards Committee (and their organizations) are not eligible for an award. Nominated plans, projects, programs and studies must have been completed within two years of the nomination submittal date. For Comprehensive Plans and Special Project Plans prepared by consultants, the award recipient shall be the client for whom the planning activity was conducted. The categories are:

**Outstanding Small Town and Rural Planner**, Given to an individual in public service, academia or the private sector that has made an outstanding contribution to planning in their community.

**Outstanding Comprehensive Plan or Special Project Plan**, Given to an outstanding comprehensive plan or special project plan that addressed the development of a neighborhood, community, county or region.

**Outstanding Planning Initiative**, Given to an outstanding initiative or program in public education, workshops, ordinances, or enforcement that promotes planning in small towns and rural areas.

**Outstanding Student Project**, Given to an outstanding project by a graduate or undergraduate class or individual that addresses a planning issue facing small town or rural areas.

Award recipients will receive the award, a one-year membership in the STAR Division, and up to \$700 reimbursement for travel, lodging and/or registration expenses for public sector or academic employees to attend the National APA Conference in New Orleans, LA on April 10-13, 2010. Additional copies of the award may be ordered for support staff and consultants at a nominal cost.

### **Awards Committee**

The STAR Executive Committee has appointed a four-member Awards Committee responsible for evaluating award nominees. All awards will be made at the sole discretion of the Awards Committee. The Committee may grant more than one award in each category.

The Awards Committee will use the following criteria in its consideration of award nominees:

- Innovation,
- Quality,
- Measurable results and implementation,
- Role of Elected Officials,
- Transferability,
- Collaboration/Public Involvement, and
- Long-Term Sustainability and/or use of Smart Growth Principles.

### **Nomination Procedures**

Anyone may place a nomination for any of the awards categories before the Awards Committee. Nominations must be submitted according to the following rules. A complete nomination package must be **submitted (postmarked) no later than Friday, January 29, 2010** using the Entry Form. All submissions are non-returnable and each application package must include:

- Four (4) copies of the award nomination Entry Form;
- Four copies of a 300 to 500 word summary statement indicating why the nominee merits the award;
- Four copies of the plan or project report being nominated, or a resume or biography for an individual being nominated;
- Four copies of letters in support of the nomination;
- Four copies of any supporting reports, plans, articles, newsletters or other supporting documentation (CD-ROM is an acceptable format); and
- A check for the nomination fee made payable to APA STAR Division (\$25 if nomination is made by STAR member, \$100 if nomination is made by someone who is not a member of the STAR Division)

Nomination packets must be submitted to:

Mickey L Rhoades  
STAR Awards Committee  
City of Manassas Dept of Family Services  
9324 West Street  
Manassas, VA 20110

Awards recipients will be notified as soon as possible and invited to receive their award at the STAR Business Meeting and Reception at the 2010 APA National Planning Conference in New Orleans. As a public sector or academic award recipient, STAR will pay up to \$700 for reimbursement of travel, lodging and/or registration expenses to attend the STAR reception. STAR will make other arrangements to present awards to recipients who are unable to attend the 2010 Conference.

For further information, contact Mickey L Rhoades at (703) 361-8277 ext 2328 or [mrhoades@ci.manassas.va.us](mailto:mrhoades@ci.manassas.va.us).

## 2010 APA STAR Planning Awards Entry Form

Award Category (check one – complete a separate entry form for each nomination)

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Small Town and Rural Planner            | <input type="checkbox"/> Planning Initiative |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Comprehensive Plan/Special Project Plan | <input type="checkbox"/> Student Project     |

Project Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Nominee: \_\_\_\_\_

Population of Jurisdiction \_\_\_\_\_

Person Making Nomination: \_\_\_\_\_

STAR Division Member? Yes or No (Circle one)

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Additional Contact: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Application Checklist – Complete application packages should include the following documents: (All submittals are non-returnable)

- Entry Form – Four copies
- Nomination Summary Statement (300-500 words) – Four copies
- Plan or Program Document (Resume or Biography for Planner) – Four copies
- Letters of recommendation – Four copies
- Supporting Materials (reports, news articles, or other materials) – Four copies  
(It is important that four copies are received. Copies on a CD-ROM are acceptable in lieu of large documents.)
- Video tape or other media (optional) – Four copies
- Application Fee (payable to APA Star Division) – (\$25.00 for STAR members, \$100.00 for non-STAR members)

**Submit Completed Entry Packets to:**

STaR Awards Committee  
 Mickey L Rhoades  
 STAR Awards Committee  
 City of Manassas Dept of Family Services  
 9324 West Street  
 Manassas, VA 20110

**Entries must be postmarked no later than January 29, 2010.**