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Feature Article

Oscoda Charter Township Bicycle & Non-Motorized Pathway Plan: A Photo Essay

2010 APA STAR Planning Awards: Outstanding Comprehensive Plan or Special Project Plan

By:

Alan Bean, AICP, Spicer Group, Inc.

Located on the Great Lakes shoreline of Lake Huron on the sunrise side of northern lower Michigan, Oscoda Township is a big summer draw for vacationers – it has over six miles of Lake Huron shoreline and the AuSable River is a major destination for canoeing and fishing enthusiasts. Oscoda Township has a population of 7,200 and most of the land in Oscoda Township is forested, managed by the U.S. Forest Service and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and Environment, and is home to the River Road National Scenic Byway.

Ongoing planning efforts in Oscoda Township consistently identify key placemaking strategies to link future development and community investment to the area's natural assets such as the Lake Huron shoreline, the AuSable River, and the River Road National Scenic Byway.

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Oscoda Township is located in Iosco County on the shores of Lake Huron on the sunrise side of northern lower Michigan. *Imagery: Google Earth Pro.* The Oscoda Charter Township *Bicycle and Non-Motorized Pathway Plan* identifies over 40 miles of future non-motorized pathways to be implemented throughout Oscoda Township.

From the Chair

Dave Gattis

Recession and the Small Town Planner

The National Bureau of Economic Research has announced that the recession is officially over, as of June 2009. I am eternally optimistic, but I'm not sure I feel like we've recovered yet. How about you? The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that in June 2010, unemployment in nonmetropolitan counties was slightly better than the nation as a whole, and was improving at a faster rate. Here in my part of Texas, there are signs that retail activity has stabilized or improved slightly. Unfortunately, my town relies primarily on property taxes, which has a one-year delay between appraisals and taxes received. The economy may be getting better, but local government resources are not.

Many of our STAR colleagues have been hurt by the recession through loss of their job, or loss of support for APA (and STAR) activities. I've always argued that planning is one of the most cost-effective functions of government, but we all know it is often the first to be cut. In addition to the stress on our members and colleagues, the recession is hurting our Division. Membership and attendance at conferences is down. STAR dues have not increased in over a decade, while the higher fees assessed by APA and the Division Council have reduced funds available for STAR programs. Luckily, we have been prudent in spending your funds so we have moderate reserves available to carry us over until times are better. But as prudent stewards of your dues, we are also reevaluating the programs we fund so that Division's finances are sustainable over the long term.

One of the casualties is the small grants program that has been available as seed money for projects meeting STAR's objectives. We've funded numerous projects, but we are suspending the program for a year so we can evaluate our oversight and performance measures for the grants, and our financial capability to fund them. Hopefully, we can resume the program in the future, or redirect our efforts toward other programs that promote innovation in small town planning.

We'll be sending a membership survey soon to assess your satisfaction and desires for other STAR activities and programs. Please respond so we can best serve you. The optimist in me says that now is the time to be planning for the growth in small town and rural planning and for STAR.



Dave Gattis, FAICP,
Deputy City Manager
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Working for the Future of Rural America: USDA National Rural Summit

By Sarah Hultine Massengale, Community Development Specialist, University of Missouri Extension

The Rural Summit, held June 4, 2010 in Hillsboro, Missouri, was a chance for participants to discuss the challenges facing Rural America, and present ideas for “creating a more prosperous and more promising future for rural America.” I was pleased to participate and have the chance to network with other participants who are working on rural issues throughout the U.S. Some of the highlights from the day’s events included the following:

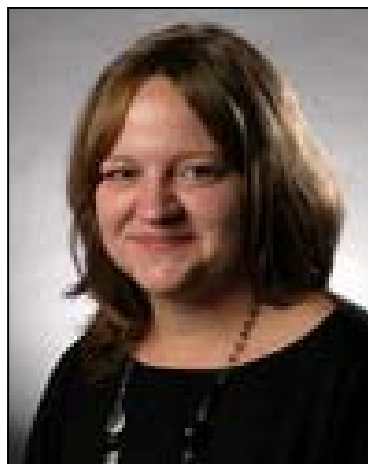
- Morning addresses promoted the values seen in rural communities that benefit the nation, including a strong work ethic, community pride and service.
- Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack discussed with the audience that federal agencies are working to find ways that programs, grants and other opportunities can be community-driven rather than application-driven, so that there is flexibility to address the wide range of needs and strategies of rural communities.
- There is a new focus on collaboration between federal agencies to facilitate a better process for communities looking for funding or assistance from national agencies. One example given was that the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture and Small Business Administration are working together to make sure that if a community or organization applies for funding through USDA but didn’t qualify, their same proposal would be transferable to SBA, instead of starting fresh with a new application for their programs. The agencies will also work to be aware of the other agencies’ programs and opportunities, so they can help direct people to suitable assistance within other agencies. This collaboration will be a significant help to

reduce the complexities of the federal assistance process for rural communities relying on limited staff time or volunteer assistance.

- The discussions during the regional food systems and nutrition track focused on how to assist small producers with marketing and sales of their products, including the need to develop regional infrastructure for food distribution.

The Rural Summit provided a significant forum for rural residents to strategize about the issues facing rural communities with representatives from USDA and other local, regional and national organizations, and while one day is much too short, this was an important start to providing public input into future programs and policies. Priority topics discussed during afternoon breakout sessions included Regional Food Systems and Nutrition, Infrastructure, Rural Business Opportunities, Renewable Energy, Farm Competitiveness, and Forest Restoration, Rural Recreation and Private Land Conservation.

For more details about the Summit and videos of plenary speakers, visit www.usda.gov/ruralsummit.



Sarah Hultine Massengale is a Community Development Specialist with University of Missouri Extension, working with nine rural counties on projects including leadership development, local food systems, health and tourism.

Oscoda Charter Township Bicycle & Non-Motorized Pathway Plan

Continued from Page 1

In 2008, Oscoda Township secured grant funding assistance from the Michigan Coastal Management Program to develop a comprehensive bicycle and non-motorized pathway plan. Led by a road and sidewalk advisory committee, planners reviewed the Township’s existing plans, including the Oscoda Cool Cities Blueprints Plan, Safe Routes to School Plan, the Oscoda Township Parks and Recreation Master Plan, and the River Road Scenic Byway Corridor Management Plan. The committee also collaborated with the Iosco County Road Commission, the Michigan Department of Transportation, Oscoda Area Schools, the Huron-Manistee National Forest, and adjacent AuSable Township. Each of these groups had their own goals, and by sharing their plans, Oscoda Township was able to coordinate various pathway projects into a shared vision of a highly connected community.

Adopted by the Oscoda Township Board of Trustees in 2009, the *Bicycle and Non-Motorized Pathway Plan* studied the Township’s existing sidewalk and pathway system, and identified ten separate projects to help make the area more pedestrian-friendly and highly connected over the coming years. It identifies over 40 miles of future non-motorized pathways to be implemented throughout Oscoda Township.

Overall primary responsibility of implementing the *Bicycle and Non-Motorized Pathway Plan* lies with Oscoda Township. Additional communities and agencies have a role with the implementation of the proposed projects, depending on where a pathway goes and who has controlling authority of access points and road right-of-ways. The other communities or agencies having a role with implementation include AuSable Township, Plainfield Township Oscoda Area Schools, Iosco County Road Commission, Huron-Manistee National

Forest, Michigan Department of Natural Resources and Environment, Michigan Department of Transportation, Consumers Energy, and the Iosco County Heritage Route Committee.

The following photos highlight the planning process, issues that were considered, and demonstrate how Google Earth was instrumental to clearly define proposed pathway locations.



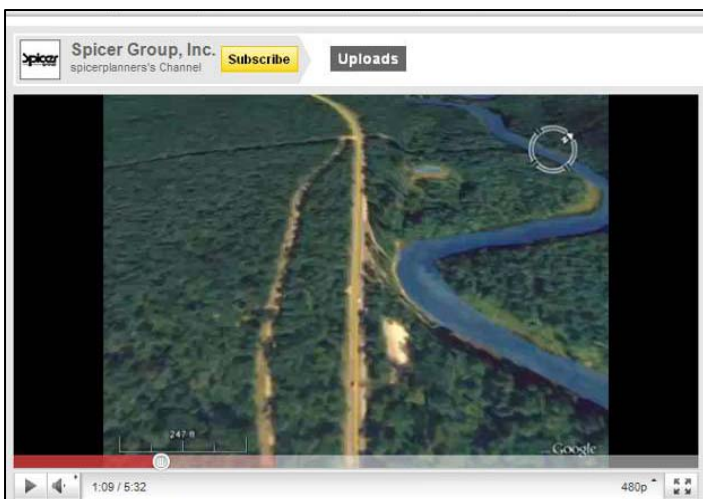
There are great views of the AuSable River along the River Road Scenic Byway. *Photo: Alan Bean.*



The quality and character of sidewalks and pathways in Oscoda Township varies. *Photos: Alan Bean.*



Existing pathways are popular with Township residents. Here, a morning walk at Huron Sunrise Park along the Lake Huron shoreline provides an opportunity to get active while enjoying nature. Currently, this pathway is not yet connected to the existing system in the Township. The intent of Project I is to bring connections to this pathway. Photo: Alan Bean.



Google Earth was used to make a video fly-through of the River Road Scenic Byway and was shared with the community via YouTube.

Survey: What's on Your Mind?

In the coming month STaR members will be receiving a request to complete a "member survey." This will be used to help the Executive Committee serve your needs better in the coming year. So please find some time to complete it when it hits your Inbox.



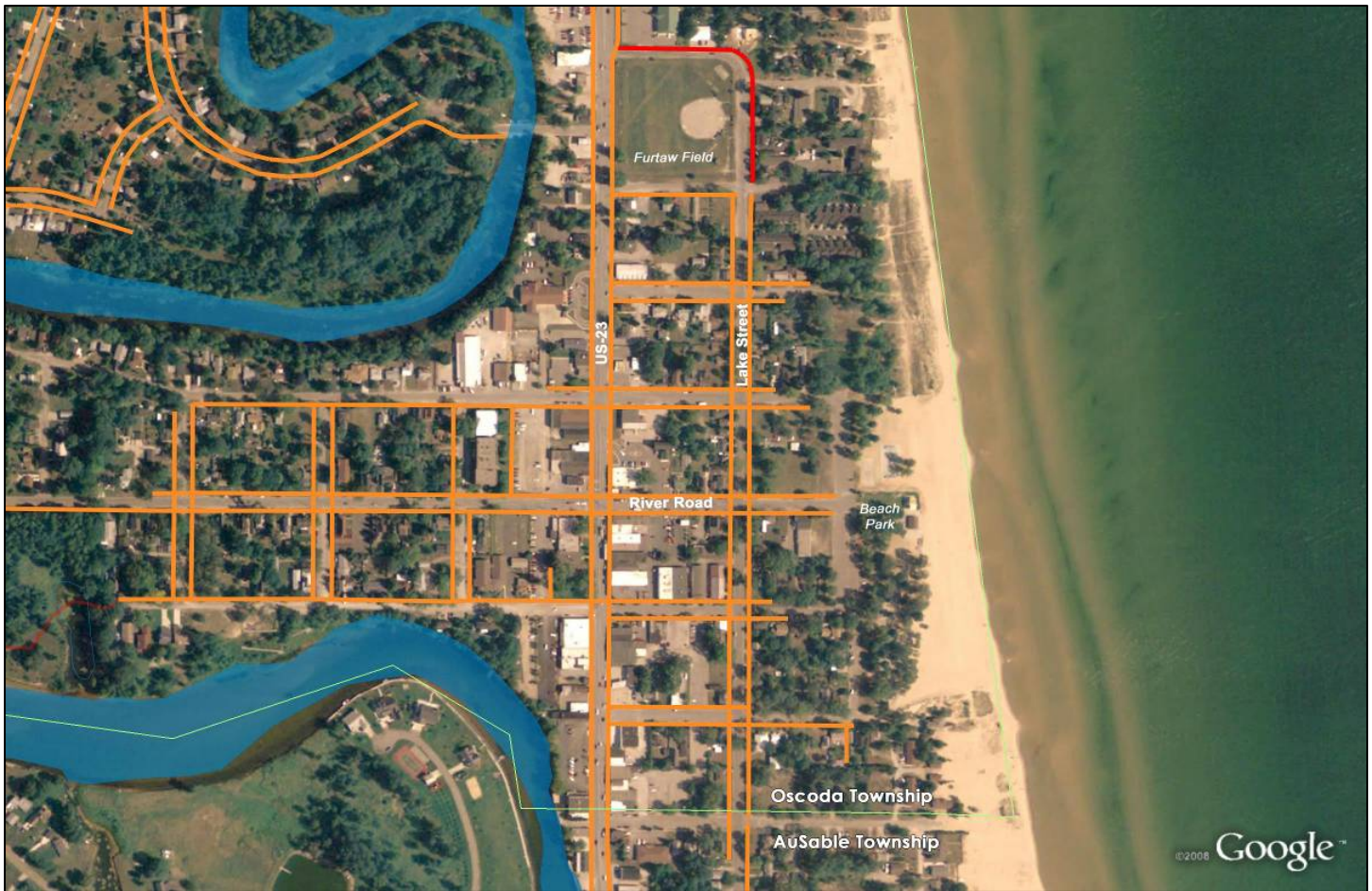
Map as presented in the plan for a project to connect River Bank Park to the existing sidewalk system, including a boardwalk connection along the AuSable River to Dwight Street. This particular project will provide a major connection from the town center to the planned pathway in the River Road Scenic Byway. Imagery: Google Earth Pro.



Input from the community provided valuable insight into the consideration of future paths. Photo: Alan Bean

"Oscoda" Photos Continue on Page 6

"Oscoda" Photos Continued from Page 5



Inventory of existing sidewalks in Oscoda Township. Note the location of Beach Park right off River Road along the Lake Huron shoreline *Imagery: Google Earth Pro.*



Beach Park, at the heart of Oscoda Township, is well-served by an existing network of sidewalks.

Photo: Alan Bean.

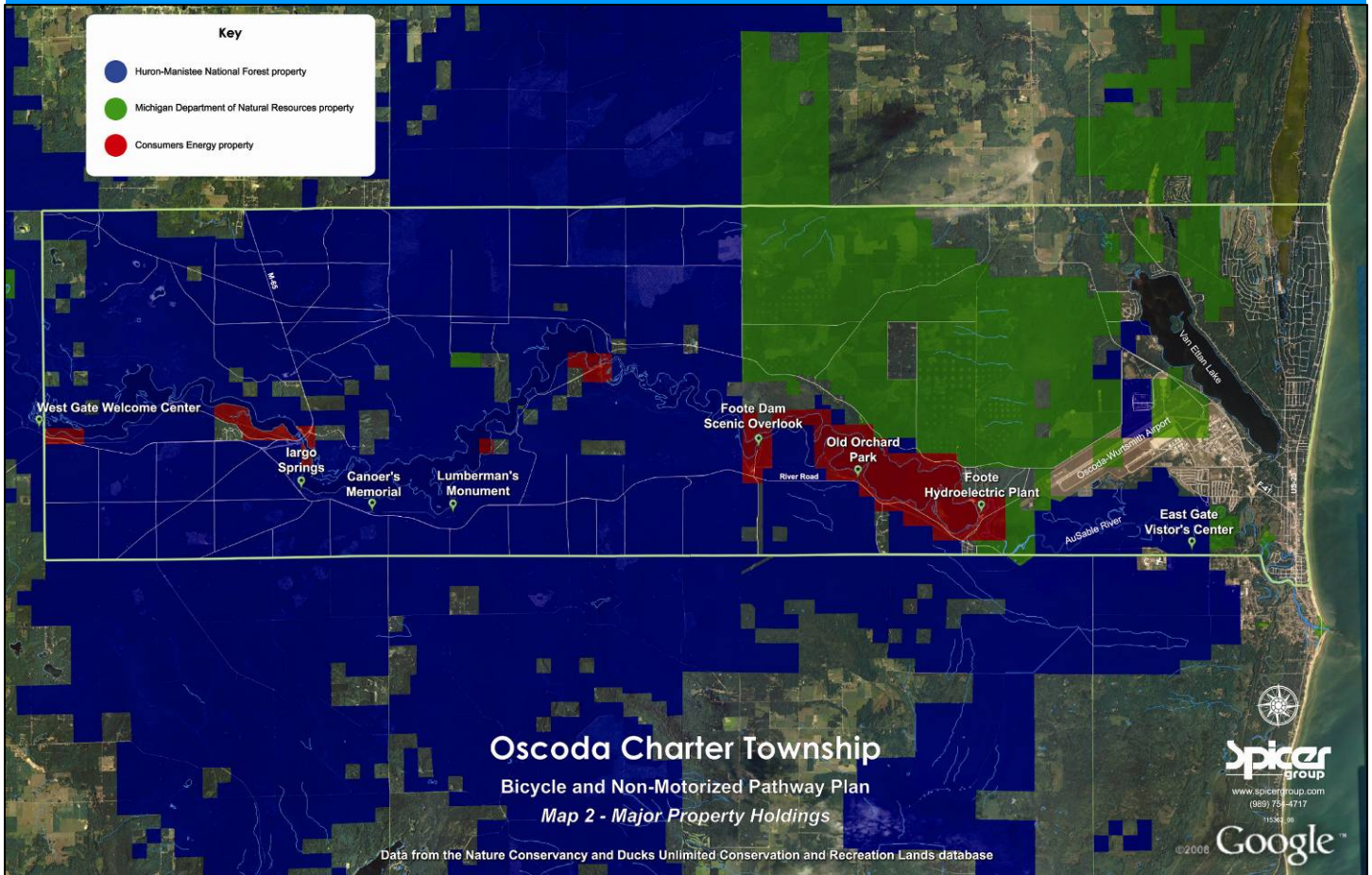


The Lumberman's Monument, part of Huron-Manistee National Forest, is a popular attraction, and can be accessed from River Road.

Photo: Alan Bean.

Want to Help Out?—Join a STaR Committee!

Members of STaR are invited to participate in one or more of the committees. For more information, please contact Dave Gattis, Chair of STaR at: dgattis@cityofbenbrook.com



Major property holdings in Oscoda Township. This map also identifies some of the attractions that can be accessed from River Road, which follows the south side of the AuSable River for over 20 miles. Currently, the River Road corridor is designed for vehicles only. Projects aim to enhance River Road with non-motorized pathways to be located within the road right-of-way. *Imagery: Google Earth Pro. Data: The Nature Conservancy and Ducks Unlimited.*

Find STaR Online!

You can now follow APA-STAR Division on LinkedIn (www.linkedin.com) and Facebook (www.facebook.com). Both services are free and allow members to exchange ideas.

LinkedIn Group Name: Small Town and Rural (STaR) Planning Division—American Planning Association

Facebook Group Name: APA-Small Town and Rural Planning Division

The APA also has Division-specific websites, including one for STaR:

www.planning.org/divisions/smalltown/

We encourage all members to login today!

Alan Bean, AICP, is Project Planner for the Spicer Group, Inc. He has a background in environmental and community planning and has consulted with small communities for over seven years on projects ranging from master plans to zoning ordinances, as well as recreational pathway planning and design. He can be reached at:

alanb@spicergroup.com



12 Things: Thoughts from the Vice Chair of Programs

As I write this for STaR, I'm looking at the following "to-do" list for the day:

1. Wondering if I am registered for my APA chapter conference next week (Northern New England, I think I'm good to go).
2. Preparing a PowerPoint for a talk on affordable housing in rural communities for the Federal Home Loan Bank Leadership Summit next week.
3. Reviewing an ad for a remand to the Planning Board (sigh).
4. Reviewing a zoning draft for commercial agriculture, agri-tourism, stables, pigs, roosters, etc.
5. Planning a tour for the NYC Economic Development Corporation to see pier operations on cruise ship days
6. Preparing a press release as the Public Information Officer on a wind storm coming overnight and into tomorrow
7. Thinking about a problem statement for the Project Advisory Committee for a context sensitive solution project for Route 3
8. Getting text and old photographs for place-making signage at a town park
9. Assembling comments from task force members on a very early draft Economic Development Plan
10. Review lots for dimensional standards for a proposed residential subdivision
11. Review a site plan for an expansion of a non-conforming hotel
12. Finalize an RFP for reuse of a town-owned building

I am sending this "to do" list to you not for sympathy (honest, yours is likely longer, right?), but because it must look familiar to you. It's what's great (and challenging) about being a small town planner, you do everything. That's why groups like STaR are important— a place to share our "to do" lists. So, prep for Boston. We're planning on a STaR-sponsored session on the Gateway 1 project here in Maine that you are not going to want to miss! I am also working on the Sunday night Division dinner, and our business meeting will be a Tuesday morning for breakfast, so don't make it too late a night on Monday. Keep up the great work you do and remember to put Boston on your "to do" list!

Anne Krieg, AICP, Bar Harbor (Maine) Planning Director
Vice-Chair of Programs and Conferences;

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STAR Newsletter Submission Requirements

December 2010 Deadline: November 15, 2010

Up to 1,400 words—also photos and caption or shorter pieces (500 words) accepted.

Must be single space and in Microsoft Word.

JPEG pictures (publication quality) preferred if submitted with the article.

A brief biography (1-2 sentences) of the author.

Email to: kfletcher@auduboninternational.org

Member Highlight/Members in the News

If you have been promoted, got a new job, received an award and/or commendation, deployed to the war or returned 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
kfletcher@auduboninternational.org.

Forecasting Areas for Growth in Jefferson County, MS

By Woodrow Muhammad

Where should growth take place? This is a common question in communities across the country. The STaR Division recently funded my work to help explore this question for Jefferson County, Mississippi. The project was conducted in order to do a thorough analysis of the regional landscape components of the Town of Fayette, in the County in order to ascertain the suitability of the landscape for potential uses in the future growth demands of the Fayette. Through GIS analysis, the goal was to determine where future growth should take place and to determine the lands suitable for agriculture, conservation, and urban use in the county, and to compare the resulting preferences to determine the most likely locations for future conflict.

A specific GIS model, L.U.C.I.S. (Land-Use Conflict Identification Strategy), was used for this analysis. LUCIS is a goal-driven GIS model that produces a spatial representation

Jefferson County (MS): Fast Facts

- Population = Just under 10,000
- Total square miles = 519.39
- A density of 18.75 persons/square mile.
- Between 2000 to 2005, it had a 2% loss in population.
- Per capita personal income = \$13,305 (lowest per capita income in Mississippi and the 17th lowest in the United States)
- Jefferson County had the highest percentage

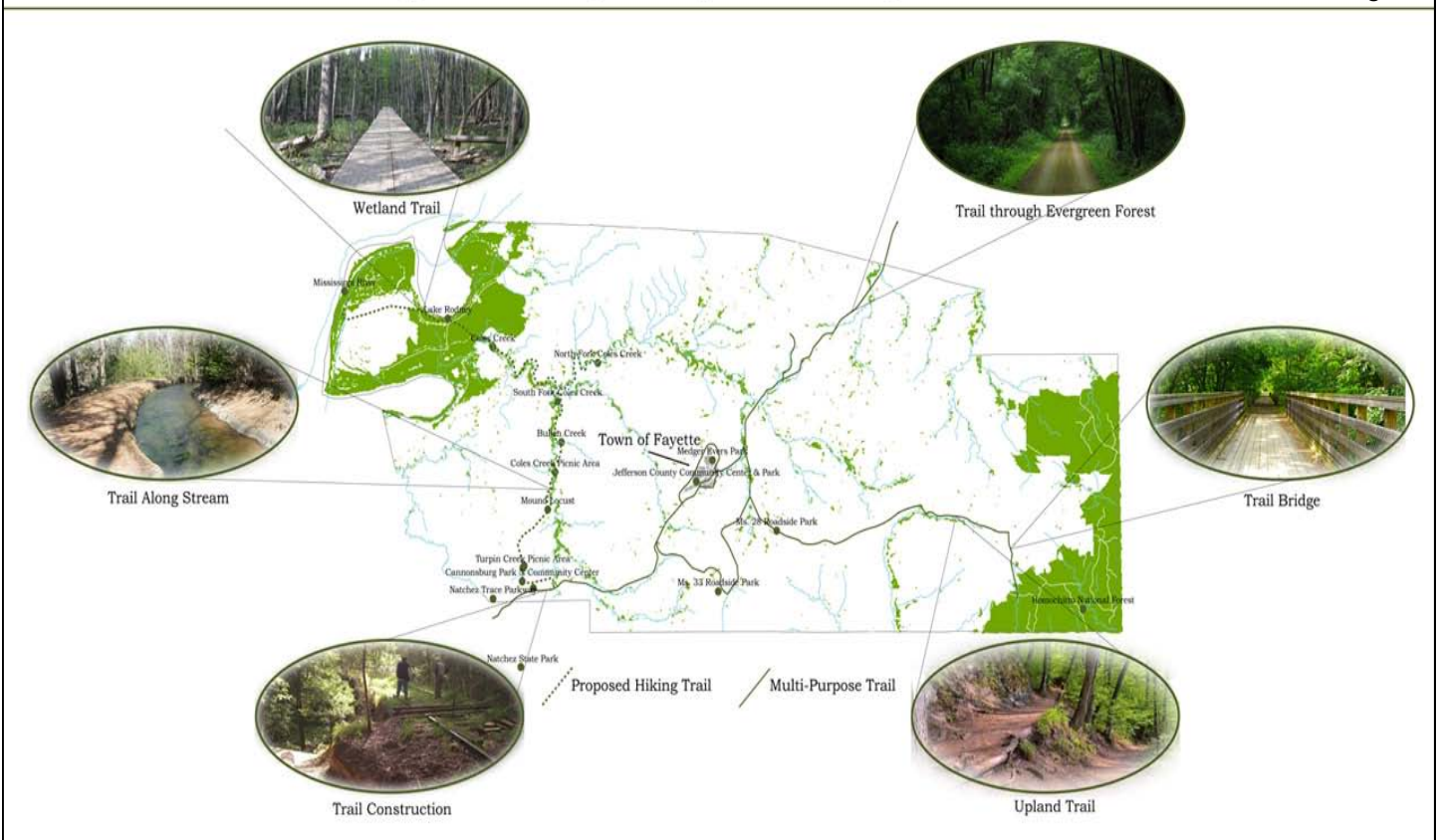
of probable patterns of future land use. There are five steps in the LUCIS process:

Goals and objectives: Define goals and objectives that evolve into criteria for determining land use suitability.

Data Inventory: Identify data resources

Jefferson County Conceptual Trail Infrastructure

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Best Practices + Investment = Downtown Success

By Jill Bahm, AICP

Community activist Jane Jacobs once said, “the greatest asset a city or neighborhood can have is something different from every other place.” Building upon the unique features of a place leads to long-term sustainability as these efforts enhance the quality of life and provide business and employment opportunities. Small towns often overlook the economic development opportunities that exist downtown and resist making public investment of time and money. While there are investors, businesses and residents who may be drawn to pick up cheap property in depressed areas, the vast majority will want to go where property values have remained stable and the community presents itself as clean, attractive, and well-functioning. It is crucial to present to community decision-makers a well thought out strategy for investment that makes sense to the community, then make the case for public investment downtown to leverage and sustain economic development.

Downtown is a Community Quality Indicator

Downtown gives the small town identity. That identity is typically based on perception (which may or may not be based on actual experiences) and affects the attitudes of residents, businesses and visitors. Even if a business is not located in the downtown, there is a recognition associated with the address of the city. Over the last several years, communities without traditional downtowns have adopted this idea and are exploring ways to create a special area that can serve the role of a downtown or community core, giving a sense of place and identity to the community where none previously existed. It will be those traditional and non-traditional downtowns that move forward with planning and investment activities that are successful in the future.

Strong Downtowns Improve the Local Economy

The National Main Street Center (NMSC), a downtown revitalization organization affiliated with the National Trust for Historic Preservation, has maintained reinvestment statistics for its 2,200+ communities since 1980. The statistics show how public investment into physical improvements can leverage private investment and job creation downtown. In fact, the NMSC reports over \$48 Billion in public and private investment, along with a nearly 400,000 net gain in jobs and 88,000 net gain in businesses in its program communities.

Many businesses know that a down economy is the best time to increase market share. A 2008 issue of the *Harvard Business Review* notes, “It is well documented that brands that increase advertising during a recession, when competitors are cutting back, can improve market share and return on investment at lower cost than during good economic times.” This philosophy can be applied to downtowns: residents and business owners will seek to spend their time and money in communities that seem to be weathering the storm and moving forward with a positive vision for the future. Public investments made downtown encourage private investments in downtown and in other parts of the community.

Deciding What Actions to Take

There are six steps for improving downtown:

- 1) Identify your stakeholders,
- 2) Revisit your vision,
- 3) Conduct a downtown assessment,
- 4) Choose your benchmarks,
- 5) Create an Action Plan, and
- 6) Measure progress then reevaluate regularly.

When it comes to stakeholders, keep an open mind; don’t underestimate who might be a stakeholder. Business owners, artists, church leaders, and school district representatives have a vested interest in downtown’s success

as it impacts their “customers.” Any and all actions that might be taken will be most effective with broad-based public support; stakeholders can help win that support. Success is much more predictable with consensus on what to do, having a manageable number of things to do, and a champion for each action (someone to take the lead and stick with it).

Once stakeholders are identified, recommit to the vision for downtown revitalization. The vision is the ruler by which any future actions should be measured. Perhaps this exercise was done long ago, or maybe it was just done last year; the more often the vision is restated and confirmed, the more buy-in is likely generated, and the less likely there will be for opportunities to derail future actions and projects.

A useful tool to put your town on track is a downtown assessment that looks at downtown’s strengths and weaknesses. Downtown assessments can be accomplished as a self-help activity by communities with a well-organized volunteer base. The University of Wisconsin Center for Community and Economic Development has a First Impressions tool that is available for communities who wish to undertake this task on their own. In some cases, however, community members cannot see the forest for the trees and a new set of eyes can help a community capitalize on unique opportunities found downtown. Sometimes an outside, objective viewpoint may offer a more rapid and direct pathway to improvement. Birchler Arroyo Associates, Inc. recently completed a downtown assessment, called NEXTSTEPS for Downtown™ for the Village of Holly, Michigan. The resulting assessment, engaging with its full color photographs, provided the village with unbiased views of the downtown area, highlighted strengths, pointed out weaknesses and suggested strategies for improvement. Suzanne Perreault, then-DDA director for the Village of Holly noted that the report “confirmed some of the suggestions” she had been making, as well as “gave some good new ideas” for downtown projects.

Assessment in hand, the community should set implementation strategies through the lens of its vision statement, identifying strategies that best reflect that vision. Once priorities are set, finding quick projects that require little or no investment paves the way for tackling bigger challenges in the future. Who does the work? Hopefully the downtown organization has a working board with committees in charge of implementation. Using a four-committee structure such as that encouraged by the National Main Street Center is a comprehensive way to ensure that revitalization efforts are balanced, effective and sustainable.

Consider Best Practices for Inspiration or Direction

There are six areas that address the physical aspects of the downtown—relating to how it looks and how it functions: buildings, circulation, land use, parking, signs, and streetscape. Codes are important to review as well—they contain the rules, regulations and standards by which new development occurs.

Downtown buildings frame the public realm and provide the physical context for human activity. Some of their aspects that should be addressed include:

- Massing: Buildings should be designed to reinforce the street wall, creating a comfortable and interesting environment. Changes to the vertical and horizontal planes of buildings affect how people perceive the mass of buildings and are an important element in building design.
- Architectural materials and details: A wide variety of quality architectural building details that fit within the context of individual buildings and the block as a whole is encouraged to create an interesting downtown.
- Ground floor features: Ground floor elevations are the most important building element for pedestrians as they are a point of interaction. Ample transparent display windows, recessed doorways, quality doors and door hardware, awnings, and other interesting architectural details draw

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potentially relevant to each goal and objective.

Land Use Suitability: Analyze data to determine relative suitability for each goal and objective.

Preference: Combine the relative suitabilities for each goal.

Conflict: Compare the three land-use preferences to determine likely areas of future land-use conflict.

The study began with compilation of data about the natural systems and existing conditions of the region of Jefferson County. Accurate information about geology, hydrology, soils, plant ecology, agriculture, and wildlife was used. Likewise, the areas, places, buildings and spaces that have become part of this valuable history and physical identity of the existing development were understood.

Land-use suitability was divided into three broad land-use categories: agriculture, conservation, and urban. Urban was then subdivided into residential, commercial, and industrial land use. One of the defined goals in the conservation land use category was to identify lands for a trail or greenway system for resource based recreation—thereby helping to address the poor health conditions prevalent in the county. The suitability analysis was the basis for: A) locating a county-wide trail system and B) identifying future land uses for the growth of Fayette, the county seat of Jefferson County, in an environmentally sensitive manner. The greenway system will preserve sensitive areas defined in the suitability analysis, help determine the land uses pattern that should be linked to it, and interconnect open-space within the Town of Fayette and its surroundings. In the urban category the final goals for residential, commercial, and industrial land-use was a combination of lands economically and physically suitable for each respectively.

The preference step of the LUCIS GIS model is where community needs were integrated to determine land use preference.

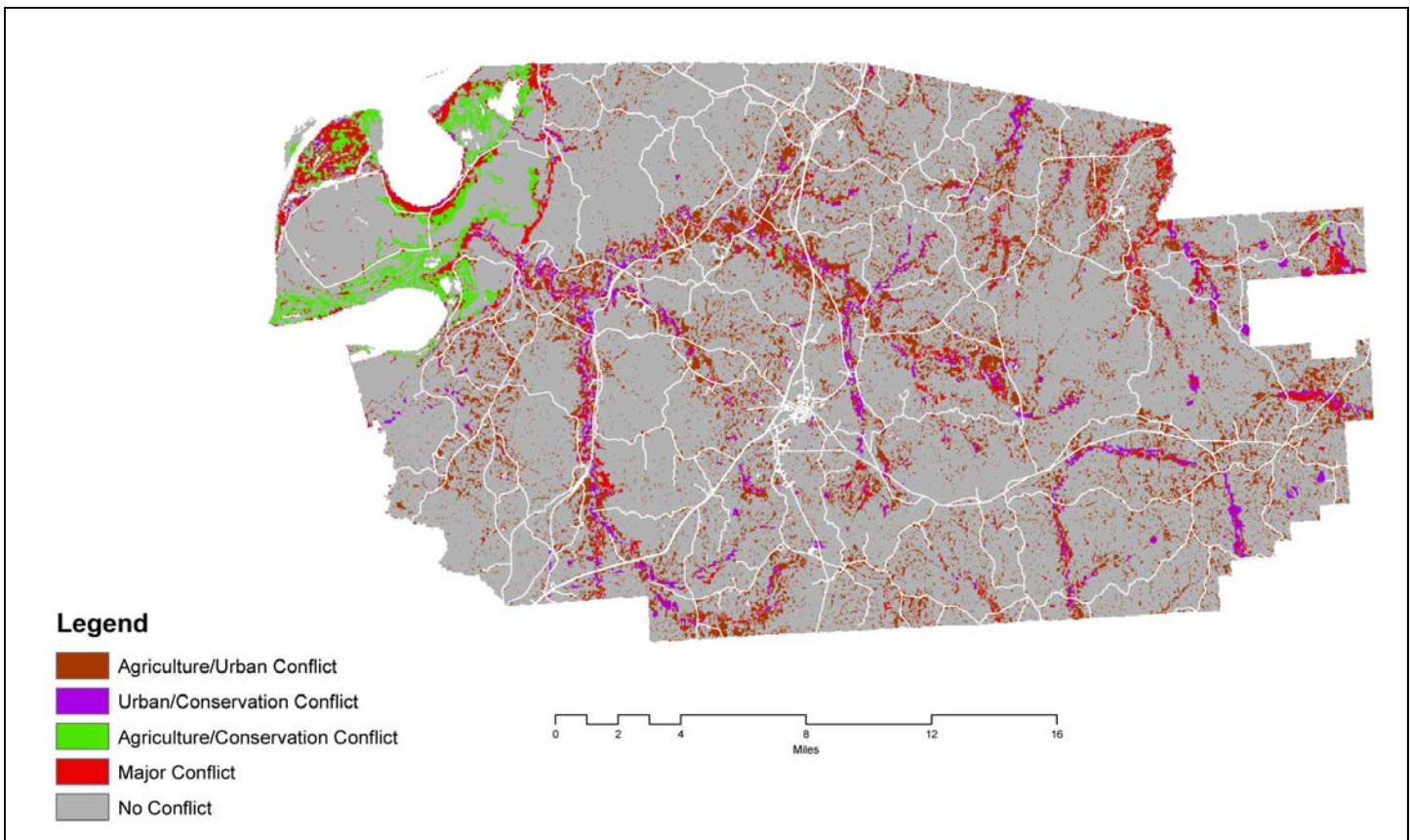
Based upon a limited survey, there are two outstanding needs of Jefferson County: land for active recreational use and land for economic development. In this step, the resultant suitability maps for each goal were added together based upon an assigned weight. For example, within the conservation land-use there were four goals:

1. Identify lands suitable for protecting native biodiversity.
2. Identify lands suitable for protecting surface and groundwater quality.
3. Identify lands for trail and/or greenway system for resourced-based recreation.
4. Identify lands suitable for protecting important ecological processes.

Goal 3 was assigned the highest weight or percentage at 35%. This means that 35 percent of the final value of the conservation preference map is derived from values suitable for trails and/or a greenway system. In the urban land-use, industry was given the greatest preference because industry generates the highest tax revenue for municipality. The final urban preference shows approximately 230,000 acres of Jefferson County suitable for urban development. This study accounts that nearly 70 percent of Jefferson County can be potentially urbanized.

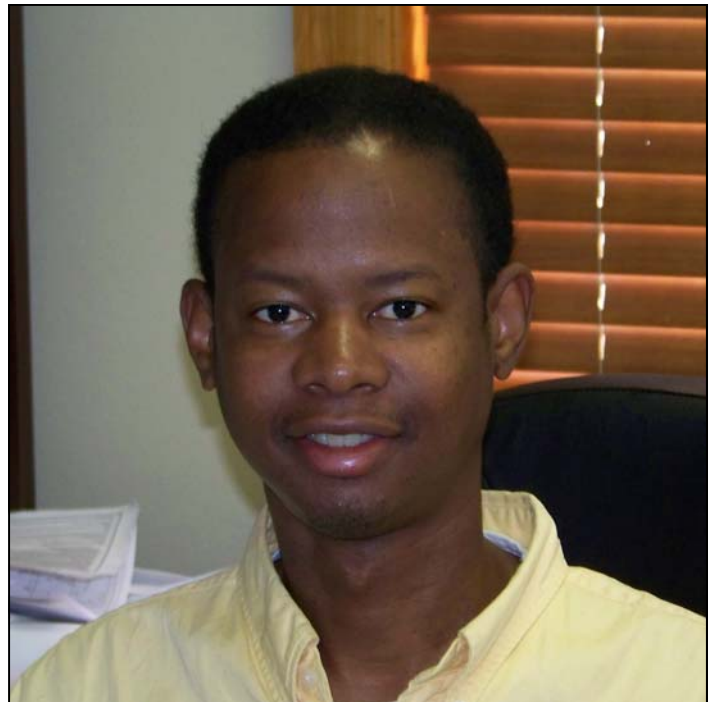
The final step of LUCIS entails potential land-use conflict. To determine conflicting land-uses, the land-use preference maps were overlaid. Conflict occurs anytime a land-use shares the same spatial location. Areas of no-conflict describe which land-use category "won". The map (page 13) shows where a future land use plan could begin.

The intension of this project was to serve as a template or starting point for a master plan for Jefferson County. Due to the limited scope of this project, however, more could have been done. For example, goals and objectives for the Agriculture land-use category could be expanded to provide



healthy food choices for the community. There could be a re-evaluation of the GIS suitability modeling. Access to roads for commercial and residential land use suitability did not consider the capacity and/or condition of the existing road. This may have skewed the final urban preference map. In addition, economical and physical suitability in the urban land use category, when combined, were weighted equally. In hindsight, economic suitability may require a higher weight.

The final project is currently being edited before it is printed and presented to county officials and interested community leaders. Overall, this project was a good learning experience and hopefully it will be used to better the lives of the citizens of Jefferson County, Mississippi, and assist in planning for any growth pressure in the future.



As a recipient of the American Planning Association's Small Town and Rural Planning Division Grant Award, Woodrow Muhammad conducted this work as his final project for a Master's Degree in Landscape Architecture at Louisiana State University.

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pedestrians into buildings as well as along a street.

Upper floor features: Upper floors make up the “core” of the building and add architectural interest for downtown visitors. The core of the building should clearly reflect a change in the building structure. This can be done by simplifying materials and design on upper floors and by using projections and recesses for certain building elements.

Rear facades: Don’t miss opportunities to create inviting spaces and draw people from rear parking areas to the main street. Make the backdoor as inviting as the front, by adding secondary signage, presenting a clean clutter-free entrance, and where possible, using this semi-public space for courtyards, plazas and outdoor dining.

Historic buildings themselves should be assessed as well for how their maintenance and use contribute to a downtown’s sense of place and history.

Circulation and parking in the downtown are important for visitors, residents and business owners. Pedestrian, bicycle, and automobile flow should be intuitive, convenient and employ common sense design.

Pedestrian and bicycle: Create a welcoming, safe, walkable, and barrier-free environment for pedestrians and cyclists. Locate bicycle racks in areas that are visible to the public for safety and security, as well as to suggest cycling as a transportation alternative. Provide linkages from off-street parking to the commercial core.

Vehicle: Safe and efficient traffic circulation accommodates drivers. Use a variety of curb and paving treatments to slow traffic. Integrate traffic signals into the streetscape, removing overhead wires where possible and installing mast arms. On-street parking provides easy access to businesses, slows traffic for better business visibility, and buffers the sidewalk from the roadway.

Streetscape elements include plantings, pedestrian amenities, and gathering spaces.

Consider the following:

Plantings: Downtown streets should be lined with trees that will shade pedestrians in warm weather, and add color and softness to what can be a harsh environment. Off-street parking lots should be partially screened from view with landscaping or screen walls. Annual and perennial flowers should be found in every direction. Green areas, like public squares, semi-public spaces, and parks should be part of the downtown fabric.

Amenities: Paying attention to the details of a downtown streetscape, such as streetlights, park benches, or a public water fountain, shows the depth of community planning and civic pride in the downtown.

Gathering spaces: When properly designed and located, gathering spaces can provide people with informal meeting places, as well as formal places for community celebrations.

Signs convey a great deal of information to downtown visitors.

Business signs: highlight the downtown’s offering of quality goods and services, illustrate an attention to detail, and contribute to community character.

Wayfinding and directional signs: help visitors find parking, civic uses, business districts and parks. Make them uniform in design and easy to read.

Land uses make downtown amenable for living, working and playing. Successful downtowns have a good variety of pedestrian-oriented uses that generate pedestrian traffic throughout the day and week. The ground floor of most downtown buildings should be a mix of retail uses that serve the nearby population and draw visitors from the region. Civic uses, such as municipal offices, libraries, and museums attract residents, business owners, and visitors, and project a sense of confidence downtown. These uses should be encouraged and maintained, while not monopolizing prime commercial spaces. Consider upper floors for civic uses, and mixing in commercial uses on the ground floor.

Wrap Up

Community leaders and decision-makers who understand the value of downtown will make successful public investments that instill confidence in the private sector. This results in leveraging private investments downtown in a manner that adds value to the whole community. Strategic investment during an economic slowdown can increase market share for the downtown and its individual businesses.

Get started today by aligning the vision for downtown, identifying the downtown area's strengths and weaknesses, setting priorities and moving forward with effective projects. Be inspired by best practices from other communities, but remember to plan for improvements that make sense for your downtown, its history and context.



Jill Bahm (jbahm@birchlarroyo.com) is a principal planner with Birchler Arroyo Associates, Inc. and has many years of planning experience. Prior to this position, she was the executive director of the Highland Township Downtown Development Authority. Jill is a big fan of downtowns and currently serves as the Secretary of the Main Street Oakland County Advisory Board. A more detailed version of this article appeared in the March 2010 issue of *Planning & Zoning News*, a Michigan publication.

STaR Division Tagline: Update

Currently, the tagline for STaR is: "I am the planning department." STaR members recently provided a few alternatives to consider:

"Urban ideas for rural living"

(or)

"Planning for places to call home"

- Lynn Tully, AICP

"Big Skies, Big Plans, Little Budgets"

- Donald Threewitt, AICP

Do you think the current tagline reflects the STaR membership accurately? Tell us what you think.
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