

Memphis Regional Design Center

September 2009 Newsletter

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Greetings!

Thank you for taking the time to read our third newsletter updating you on MRDC programs and other news throughout the region.

In this newsletter, in addition to updating you on our past programs, we are excited to share an update on the Overton Square Project.

The "Regional News" section focuses on several exciting initiatives to improve the quality of urban design and planning in the region.

The MRDC is a community organization very dependent on input from all concerned design-enthusiastic neighbors in the region, I urge you to forward this to as many friends and co-workers as possible, encourage them to subscribe to this newsletter, and support the Memphis Regional Design Center. We will also like to hear from you about the things you would like to see in the newsletter.

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New Program: Overton Square

On Friday, July 24th, the Memphis Regional Design Center (MRDC) held its first public meeting to start a dialogue on Overton Square. Over 80 attendees gathered at Memphis Heritage's Howard Hall and spent all day sharing their ideas about the future of Overton Square. After a quick tour of the square, Neighbors, business owners, architects, planners and other concerned citizens spent all day sharing their vision of a revitalized Overton Square and putting their ideas to paper, designing several conceptual

schemes for potential developers to consider.

The MRDC held a follow-up meeting at Playhouse on the Square on August 25th to present the conceptual plans prepared at the charrette, and to obtain additional feedback from people who were unable to attend the previous meeting. More than 70 people attended to voice their opinion. In addition, a website has been created at

www.squaretalk.org to allow

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Message from the ED



I recently met with the potential developers of Overton Square to review their plans. Not surprisingly, they intend on demolishing all of the buildings south of Madison Avenue between Cooper and Florence. A 53,000 s.f. grocery store will be built in the southwest corner of the site at Monroe and Florence. Three new buildings will be built along Madison and around the corner at Cooper.

The majority of the site along Cooper will be left as open parking, maximizing the site lines to the grocery store. The existing site slopes approximately 18' from Cooper to Florence giving them the opportunity for parking beneath the grocery store without going underground. Additional parking will wrap the grocery store. Developers plan to ask the City of Memphis to close Trimble, providing them with more onsite parking.

Although the two new buildings lining Madison and the one on Cooper will be pedestrian scaled and pedestrian friendly, overall the site plan is very automobile oriented which is disappointing to this Urban Designer. A mix of retail, restaurant and office uses are planned for the liner buildings, however no residential is planned for the site. Unfortunately, this is a missed opportunity to help make this area of midtown more dense.

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My biggest concern for this development is the quality of construction materials proposed. Currently, the entire grocery store is wrapped with EIFS also commonly called Dryvit. Although many developers call this "stucco" it is not the same as the historic stucco seen on many midtown homes and businesses. Not enough brick or other masonry is proposed in any of the buildings. My fear is that the new construction will look cheap and will not be a good alternative to saving historic buildings that were built to last. I've shared my concerns with the developer and will keep my fingers crossed hoping they will consider some of my suggestions in their revisions to the current schematic plans. As soon as plans are made public, we'll be sure to share them with you.

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concerned citizens to review the findings of the MRDC from the public meetings, and continue to share their ideas about the future of Overton Square by participating in a forum and filling out an online survey.

These efforts eventually led to discussions with the developer group Sooner Investments, which currently has an option on the property. By facilitating an unbiased conversation between groups with varying interests in the redevelopment of the Overton Square, the MRDC hopes to see a sustainable development proposal that is a win-win for everyone involved.

UD 101



The Memphis Regional Design Center (MRDC) has begun its Fall session of Urban Design 101. A diverse mix of 25 professionals and community leaders are currently attending 8 weekly sessions with presentations by seasoned local and out-of-town professionals, and discussions focused on various aspects of

Urban Design. The course specifically introduces the basic concepts, vocabulary, and techniques of urban design as reflected in a variety of contemporary place-making initiatives in Memphis and across the country.

Although it is exciting to see a spike in individuals interested in taking advantage of the program, some people have had to be turned down because of limited capacity of the class. MRDC is exploring new ways to meet the need. Be on the lookout for future programs that will accommodate more participants. Additionally, the last class on **November 3rd** will be opened up for public to attend. The guest lecturer that evening will be Richard Baron, Co-founder,

Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of McCormack Baron Salazar based in St. Louis. He is also a recipient of The Urban Land Institute J.C. Nichols Prize for Visionaries in Urban Development (2004), and serves on the advisory board for the Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy of the Brookings Institution. Mr. Baron will be joined by a panel of other experts discussing how their programs strengthen neighborhood social structures in partnership with community organizations and how their emphasis on community building encourages socio-economic and physical revitalization. A notification will be sent around soon with specific details.

Greenways

More than sixty people representing 46 organizations across the Greater Memphis Area attended the greenways pre-summit meeting held at Shelby Farms on August 27, 2009. This event was planned by a steering committee comprised of members from the Urban Land Institute District Council Memphis (ULI Memphis), the Memphis Regional Design Center, Hyde Family Foundations, Community Foundation of Greater Memphis, and representatives from the regional planning and greenways community (Memphis MPO, West Memphis Planning Department, Hernando Department of Planning, DeSoto Greenways, Mississippi River Corridor Tennessee, Wolf River Conservancy, and the Greater Memphis Greenline). Frank Ricks, ULI Memphis' Regional Dialogue Initiative committee chair, and Rusty Bloodworth, current ULI Memphis chair (both members on the Board of Memphis Regional Design Center) provided invaluable leadership to the process.

Participants of the pre-summit overwhelmingly endorsed the idea of a regional greenways dialogue focused on developing greater connectivity between greenways efforts and developed an expansive list of the benefits of regional greenways connect-

tivity that includes the following:

- Regional greenways connectivity helps -
 - promote a more efficient use of resources
 - recognize the increasing importance of collaboration for targeted funding
 - increase the possibility of connected greenways as a mode of transportation
 - provide community with a common, cohesive approach that can be recognized and supported
 - bring groups together to strengthen community
 - provide opportunity to encourage movement toward sustainable growth patterns
 - attraction and retention of people in the region

Dr. Bridget Jones, executive director of Cumberland Region Tomorrow, heads a similar process for the 10-county region around Nashville. Dr. Jones shared some lessons learned from her Middle Tennessee experiences and helped to lay the framework for more substantive work in the future.

A clear outcome from the pre-summit meeting was the need to develop a regional "greenprint" that would include conceptual connections between existing and proposed greenways. The Memphis Regional Design Center will be a key resource in helping with this issue.



Additionally, Mississippi River Corridor Tennessee will support a fall program featuring regional leaders from the National Scenic Byways program. This program is tentatively planned for November 18, 2009. Pre-planning efforts suggest a program that includes presentations by the six (6) river advocacy/conservation groups in the region, a presentation by the "greenprint" team, and discussions led by National Scenic Byways national and regional program leaders. Topics of discussion will include how the recreational and tourism benefits of greenways stimulate local economic growth and enhance attraction and retention of a skilled workforce.

Special thanks to Hyde Family Foundations and the Mississippi River Corridor Tennessee for their financial support of this program.

For further information, please contact Andrew Trippel, ULI Memphis District Council Coordinator at 901.568.4423.

Regional News

The Towne Center at Soulsville

The Towne Center at Soulsville (TCS) development is currently under construction on historic McLemore Avenue across from the STAX Museum and Music Academy. The project is financed by the LeMoyné Owen College Community Development Corporation (LOCCDC) with 15% equity and further funding provided by Wachovia Bank, City of Memphis, Shelby County Government, US Department of EDA, US Department of HUD\ HBCU and US Department of HHS\ OCS. The total project cost is \$11,750,000. According to Jeffrey Higgs, President and CEO of the LOCCDC, the idea of TCS started about five years ago, first stemming from a long-range strategic plan. He is glad they were able to secure financing before the recent financial meltdown across the nation and beyond.

The TCS will provide about 77,500 s.f. of office, retail, and commercial space. Among other uses, the facility will include a food court, a medical center for the community, a neighborhood environmental court, a 25,000 s.f. grocery store, and a local national bank. Also included is space dedicated to facilitate an incubator for small businesses. Tennessee Capital and Development will provide direct technical assistance to help setup and maintain financial records, identify and market products, and provide general business growth and development assistance for those small businesses. Incubator businesses owners will be selected from participants of a free 10-week small business training class provided by LOCCDC and other interested neighborhood entrepreneurs. All businesses will be encouraged to hire residents from the Soulsville community to take advantage of renewal community tax credits.



In addition to a robust mix of businesses, the development also boasts of several good urban design principles incorporated in the design such as wide sidewalks, reduced setback to support walkability, shared parking for efficient land use, and increased transparency on the façade to provide eyes on the street as well as to add interest to passers-by. Other principles such as rhythm and scale have been used to enhance the pedestrian feel of the development. Project architect, Juan Self of Self Tucker Architects, Inc., is hopeful that this development will replace a missing link in the community and will be a great economic engine for the area. The development is scheduled to be complete by late October or early November.

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Sustainable Shelby

Sustainable Shelby is the first sustainability plan for the Memphis region. The plan responds directly to the call by Mayor AC Wharton for a plan of action that "ensures that sustainability permeates every decision that we make and that we stop looking at decisions as 15 or 20-year choices but as the 100-year choices that they are."

That's why Sustainable Shelby addressed a quilt of issues, including land use, neighborhood revitalization, energy creation, green building practices, conservation and the overall environmental health of Shelby County.

The word "sustainable" is a relatively new term, and some may have questions about what it really means. We found the definition used by the State of Oregon and adopted by sustainability visionary and author Doug Farr - who consulted with Sustainable Shelby - to be most telling. "Sustainability means using, developing, and protecting resources at a rate and in a man-

ner that enables people to meet their current needs and also provides that future generations can meet their own needs."

In March 2008, Mayor Wharton issued a call to arms to 130 people from various professions and walks of life that he appointed to draft recommendations that would guide Shelby County in a more sustainable direction. This group was divided into seven committees focusing on the key areas of building codes, environment and natural resources, land use and urban development, neighborhood rebirth, public buildings and public purchasing policies, public incentives, and transportation and traffic.

These groups met for four months to develop specific

strategies in their areas, and their recommendations were then narrowed down to a list of the top 52 recommendations. This process of prioritizing was accomplished in a "digital congress" held at the FedEx Institute of Technology at University of Memphis, where each committee member submitted a digital vote for their top priorities. The committee members' opinions accounted for half of the votes, and the other half were opinions from the public in the first polling on sustainability in Shelby County.

After creating a list of 52 top ranked recommendations, Mayor Wharton appointed a special team to draft actionable strategies. A selected group of planners, the Sustainable Shelby Implementation Team, developed strategies that would work to achieve the intention of the original recommendations. These strategies remained faithful to the original recommendation but identified the who, what, and when of the committees' recommendations.

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Memphis Regional Design Center (MRDC) is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization formed with a mission to increase vitality and economic stability by promoting excellence in urban design and planning. More information about the MRDC is available for you to view at www.mrdcinfo.org

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Imagine 2035



The Memphis Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) is excited to announce the launch of Imagine 2035: Midsouth Transportation + Land Use Plan. Imagine 2035 is a regional visioning and scenario planning process that will encourage community members and stakeholders throughout the MPO area to explore and debate regional growth visions, trade-offs, and alternative futures. Scenario planning will be utilized as a tool throughout the process to identify regional goals, objectives, and investigate alternatives for growth, development, and transportation investment.

Using geographic information system (GIS) mapping and scenario planning software, a trend model will be created to illustrate what growth and development in our region could look like in the future if current trends persist over the next 25 years. Public meetings and workshops will be held across the region to give area residents and community stakeholders the opportunity to participate at each step in the process. After the trend model is prepared, three or four alterna-

tive scenario models will be developed based on community input and technical analysis to show the public what different visions of future land use and growth might look like and what the costs and benefits of each could be. These scenarios will also illustrate how different forms of development affect transportation options now and in the future. The results of Imagine 2035 will be used to help set regional goals for the Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) and provide a better estimation of future land use in the region.

The Memphis MPO will be preparing the 2035 LRTP over the next two years as part of its federally mandated responsibility for regional transportation planning. The MPO area includes all of Shelby County, Tennessee; the four western miles of Fayette County, Tennessee; and the ten northern miles of Desoto County, Mississippi.

MPO staff is currently in the process of gathering data and preparing for a robust and inclusive public participation process. A project website will also be launched in the coming months as an additional tool for increasing public involvement and receiving community input. The project kick-off and first round of public meetings are tentatively scheduled for early 2010. Please contact the MPO staff at (901) 379-7840 for more information.

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The team's strategies were circulated to the members of the committees for their review and input.

The resulting work of the Implementation Team is the Sustainable Shelby Implementation Plan, which was produced in an

environmentally-friendly DVD format with bonus files and interviews. The report was designed by the Memphis College of Art design class and produced as little carbon expenditure as possible.

The Sustainable Shelby Implementation Plan is intended to be a living, breathing document

Grant for E Presley Blvd

There seems to be a windfall of help falling in place to help transform the area around Graceland, arguably the greatest attraction in the Mid-south which enjoys about 600,000 visitors annually.

On August 26th, the City of Memphis was awarded an Enhancement Grant of \$975,312 by the State of Tennessee Department of Transportation to assist with street-scape improvements on the stretch of Elvis Presley Boulevard across from the historic Graceland Mansion. Combined with a local match of \$243,828 by the City of Memphis, these \$1.2 Million improvements are part of an ongoing effort by the City of Memphis to improve and beautify Elvis Presley Boulevard between Shelby Road and I-55.

In September 2007, approximately \$175,000 of Enhancement Grant Funds were awarded for improvements to the intersection of Elvis Presley Boulevard and Brooks Road which forms a major gateway to the Graceland Area. Another \$76,000 of Roadscape Grant Funds were awarded in August 2008. Elvis Presley Enterprises, itself was getting ready to pump in about \$250 Million worth of renovation and improvements in and around Graceland, before the plans got damped by the economic meltdown.



that will be updated on the Web to reflect current and relevant sustainability issues concerning Shelby County.

For a copy of the Sustainable Shelby Plan, please call 379-7840. In addition, an electronic copy will soon be available at www.sustainableshelby.com