Mississippi Smart Growth Lecture Series
PROGRESS REPORT

1. Background Information

To:             Jay Deep
Subject:        Mississippi Smart Growth Lecture Series
Date:           February 12, 2007
Principal Investigator:  W. Brian Wright
Budget Period:   2007-2008

2. Activities Preformed

TPUDC has made travel arrangements to Mississippi for a two-day reconnaissance trip to collect data and images from the specific counties to be visited to be used in a visual preference survey as part of the lecture series and workshops. We have also done a great deal of research online regarding the study area, its demographic trends and physical characteristics.

TPUDC has mapped a route through Pearl River, Stone and George Counties including the towns of Picayune, Popularville, Wiggins and Lucedale. We also plan to visit Hattiesburg and Natchez to the north as both of these towns are significantly larger than any of those found in the study area and will likely contain good examples for the visual preference survey.

TPUDC is working with the Center for Urban Rural Interface Studies and the counties of Pearl River, Stone and George to determine the most effective methods to advertise and solicit attendance at each of the lecture series and workshops. We are also in the process of locating venues in each of the towns to host these events.

TPUDC has started compiling information for the presentations and lectures which will be conducted over the course of a week-long period as a circuit tour in the study area. Each of the workshops will be open to residents and officials from all counties of Mississippi, not only the ones in which they will take place. One lecture and workshop will be conducted each day in a different County. Each lecture will consist of the same introduction so that all parties across the region are privy to the same information, yet the second part of each lecture will focus on a specialized topic relevant to Smart Growth and New Urbanism.
TPUDC has begun preparations to conduct a series of visual preference surveys that will begin to better define and assess what the needs and desires of each of the various counties are. Such surveys will also help to visually illustrate and allow the public to better comprehend the potential impact Smart Growth and New Urbanist principles can have on their specific locations by using actual examples from the audience’s home towns.

UPDATE: Since this progress report was written, TPUDC has made the reconnaissance trip (2/1/08-2/4/08) to all of the above named cities including Hattiesburg and Natchez. Our findings generally approximated the conditions we anticipated. We were surprised however, to discover the apparent economic desertion of each of the four smaller towns. TPUDC is currently conducting further research to understand how this may have occurred in order to develop better strategies to revive them. Although each of the smaller towns has a fragmented urban fabric, we found elements that can be enhanced to act as a catalyst for future growth.

3. Major Findings

Our initial studies have indicated that most of the towns located within the study area are relatively small and appear to possess many common attributes; therefore we believe it is necessary to look beyond the study area to find other towns that will likely possess the examples that will be necessary to conduct the visual preference survey. This is why we intend to study both Hattiesburg and Natchez. One common characteristic of all the towns within the study area are their historical ties to the railroad and the apparent loss of economic activity during the later part of the twentieth century. Now mostly struggling, many of these towns will need both comprehensive urban and economic plans to revive their fleeting sense of place. We intend to develop strategies that these towns may utilize in order to renew themselves and that may be applicable to the greater region.

UPDATE: After visiting each of the towns in the study area it became apparent that our presentations will have to focus both on urban planning and economic development.

4. Problems Encountered

None thus far.
5. Publication/ Presentation

Preparations have begun for arrangements for both the lecture series and mock design Charrette. TPUDC is now working with representatives from each county within the study area as well as the Center for Rural to Urban Studies in order to develop a solid strategy to advertise for the lecture series and mock charrette.