



RURAL DEVELOPMENTS

BEN BOOZER GIVEN HONORARY DEGREE BY CLEMSON UNIVERSITY

STORY BY WALTER HARRIS

Ben Boozer has been honored by Clemson University with an Honorary Doctor of Education Degree at its December commencement exercises. This honor caps a long career of devotion to communities across South Carolina.

Through his work at the SC Downtown Development Association and later at the Clemson Institute for Economic and Community Development, Dr. Boozer devoted tireless energy to South Carolina's rural communities. At the tiniest crossroads communities and in the largest metropolitan areas, community leaders know exactly who Ben Boozer is.

They know Ben as the guy who cares deeply about their issues and dreams and doesn't know how to say no. In fact

he almost always says yes. Yes, he could help facilitate a plan for the community. Yes, he would bring in needed resources. Yes, he would drive from one end of the state to the other (at night) to attend just one more meeting of the group.

He is also the guy who takes the most diverse set of circumstances, resources and people and figures out how to make something positive happen.

During his commencement remarks he called on the graduates to get involved in their communities and continuously ask the important, "What if?" question. He explained that asking "What if?" will enable them and their community to move forward with an actionable vision of the future.

Dr. Boozer is enjoying his retirement in Columbia while occasionally taking on an urgent project or two for the CIECD.



THE STIMULUS BILL; POTENTIAL IMPACT ON WATER AND SEWER IN SC

STORY BY WALTER HARRIS

Every day we read in the popular media about the huge spending bills working their way through congress. The media tell us that a large portion of the funding will be spent on infrastructure. Infrastructure, of course, involves a great deal more than just water and sewer. Traditionally, infrastructure has been defined as "hard investments" such as

roads, bridges, public buildings, etc. In recent years the definition has expanded to "soft" investments such as other important issues such as training and health care.

The key question for community leaders facing water and sewer infrastructure needs is: What do we do now to get ready for all of this new infrastructure funding?

No one knows for sure exactly what form the funding will come, or for sure if it is coming. However, during discussions with

key water and sewer funding organizations, a few basic elements seem logical.

1) Good things will not come to those who wait. Every policy maker and administrator wants to see the money spent effectively and quickly to achieve the economic stimulus planned. That means that projects that are "shovel ready" will probably move to the head of the line. Shovel ready projects should.. continued on page 2

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BEST PRACTICES TO FOLLOW IN PREPARING FOR A CHARRETTE PROCESS

In a charrette, a group of designers draft a collaborative solution to a design problem. In downtown planning, charrettes are unique in that the general public is invited to participate in brainstorming and vetting ideas, in a process that has become a technique for consulting with all stakeholders.

A successful charrette promotes joint ownership of solutions and attempts to defuse typical confrontational attitudes between residents and developers.

For insight into the best practices that downtowns should implement when conducting a charrette, Downtown Idea Exchange recently spoke with Randy Wilson, director of design services with the Mississippi Main Street Association, and president of Community Design Solutions.

ASSESS REAL ISSUES AND NEEDS, NOT JUST PERCEIVED ONES

First, take time to assess the very real issues and needs that a downtown has from a planning perspective, not

just the perceived needs or widely assumed needs, like more parking.

Too often, municipalities hire a downtown consultant without first determining for themselves what their underlying challenges are. About halfway through a superficial trends analysis and planning exercise, they'll uncover key issues that need to be addressed ahead of aesthetic enhancements, and a lack of personnel to deal with them.

"Many times I've been called in to mop up after a planning exercise, because they went into it only thinking that they were going to do a streetscape design. And halfway into it, they realized, 'We need wayfinding signage to go with that streetscape.' Well in order to do wayfinding, you need to do branding. And in order to do branding, you need to do a public input process. By the time it's over, they realize they don't have the right team," he says.

"So, number one, take whatever time is necessary to carefully assess downtown, to

figure out what the true needs and issues to be addressed are, not just the assumptions or the perceptions," Wilson says.

CRAFT A TEAM WITH EXPERTISE TO ADDRESS EACH CRITICAL ISSUE

Once you really know what downtown's most pertinent development issues are, conduct a request for proposals process to find and hire the team that has the specific personnel to address them.

"If you have to wait to afford that team, better to wait than to start a process and only be able to address part of the issues," Wilson says.

If downtown is fortunate enough to have multiple excellent responses to an RFP to choose from, a good rule of thumb is to "hire the team that will engage the public the best," he says.

"Any planning in a downtown needs to engage the citizens who will be affected...continued on page 4

STIMULUS BILL, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

be defined as those that are ready to go out for bid and have already gotten all of the necessary permits.

2) The money will be funneled through existing funding organizations such as USDA-Rural Development, EDA, CDBG, SRF, etc. New organizations will not be created to handle the new money and most likely the money will add extra

funding to existing programs. It might be prudent at this time to ensure that you are very familiar with the guidelines of the various programs so that you can conform your projects to meet those standards.

3) It is a good bet that most of the funding will in the form of loans and not grants. We can also safely bet that match money for

grant programs will not be dropped completely even if they are reduced. The bottom line for local leaders is, don't wait around waiting to see what happens. Get your projects designed and permitted and aligned with the guidelines of one or more of the various funding agencies.



UPCOMING EVENTS

*SC Rural Summit, February 22-24. This year it will be held at the Conference Center and Inn in Clemson, South Carolina. For additional information check the web site at www.scommerce.com or call Flora Atchison at 803-737-1876

*SEDC "Meet the Consultants", March 24, 2009 in Atlanta. For additional information www.sedc.org or call 404-523-3030

UPCOMING DEADLINES FOR USDA-RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

STORY BY WALTER HARRIS

Several very important programs under the USDA-Rural Development Office have traditional deadlines of March 31st coming up. The Rural Business Enterprise Grant (RBE) program provides the most versatile funding under USDA-Rural Development. It provides funding to finance and facilitate the development of small and emerging private business enterprises. Public bodies, private non-profits and tribal groups may apply.

The Energy Grant and Loan programs have traditionally had a deadline of March 31. While the Notice of Funding Availability has not been published, potential applicants need to be doing their homework now to be ready. Grants are made for both energy production in bio-fuels, solar projects, etc. and energy efficiency. Both Agricultural producers and rural small businesses are eligible for these energy efficiency grants. A loan or loan guarantee combined with these grant programs can make a very attractive package for businesses involved in either energy production or efficiency projects.

The Value Added Agricultural Product Market Development Grant Program can assist independent agricultural producers

to enter into activities that add value to their crops. The expected deadline for this program is also March 31st. It can provide grant funding to plan for new products and to provide working capital.

The Innovation Center at Clemson University's Sandhill REC in Columbia is prepared to assist potential applicants for these and other programs. They can help navigate the maze of the



application process. If you need such assistance or have questions about these programs, you should contact either Walter Harris or Stan Perry. Walter can be reached at (803) 788-5700 ext 43. Stan can be reached at (803) 528-9892.

You can, of course contact your nearest USDA-Rural Development Office.

IS 2009 YOUR YEAR TO SHINE?

STORY BY HELEN MUNNERLYN

Most financial advisors tell you to concentrate on learning new skills and polishing up on rusty ones during a dwindling economy. Is 2009 your time to develop your potential?

As the state's oldest and most recognized leadership program, Leadership SC is accepting applications from all geographic areas of the state, especially the non-metropolitan areas for including in our next class that begins in August. Deadline for applying is May 1st.

Leadership SC provides a forum for a diverse group of individuals to explore and share differing perspectives on issues facing our state now and in the future. Topics covered include: South Carolina's legislative structure, education, poverty, job creation, the economy, healthcare, work force development, natural resources and the environment – all subjects that key policy makers and business leaders will address in the coming year.

Leadership South Carolina is located and supported by the Clemson Institute for Economic and Community Development in Columbia.

To download an application, go to: www.LeadershipSouthCarolina.net or call Heather Ann James (803) 788-5700 ext 35.

MARKETMAKER UPDATE

STORY BY R. DAVE LAMIE

In the last issue, we described SCMarketMaker, a web-based tool designed to help the South Carolina food industry with target marketing of niche, value-added food products. SCMarketMaker is also designed to help those seeking South Carolina originated food products, whether they be household consumers, chefs, restaurants, schools, hospitals, food processors, or retail grocery stores. SCMarketMaker will launch as soon as

there is sufficient producer registration, expected by mid-March. Farmers markets, food processors, grocery stores, restaurants, and other food-related business information is already collected. All businesses will have an opportunity to register their business and to establish a user account that will allow them to modify their information to keep it accurate and fresh. The address for the site will be www.scmarketmaker.com. This same address is currently being used for producer and food business registration.

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by this plan. I'm hoping the days are over where a professional comes in, observes a town, goes away to their office, forms their plan, and comes back to present the plan to the community. Far better to craft the plan on site, in concert with citizen input, so that they feel like they really have got a part in giving their opinion about the future of their place."

ENSURE THE CHARRETTE BE CONDUCTED HOLISTICALLY

Another key quality to look for in selecting a design team to lead a charrette is to make sure downtown works with people who think about and craft their work in a holistic fashion. Wilson always sees to it that design teams he leads include the following four components in each planning exercise.

- Market analysis. Ensure that you understand the market trends and dynamics that affect the places you're planning for. In the absence of the objective data of a market analysis, you don't even know what categories of retail to recruit downtown and to play up in your branding and marketing efforts

- Branding and marketing component. Effective branding and marketing empowers a downtown to tell its story in a very compelling way. This benefits downtown's internal market, by way of building community pride, as well as its external market, the people that you want to attract to live, work, dine, shop, or invest downtown.

- Asset-based plan. It's critically important that whatever the unique characteristics are that downtown possesses, planners highlight and build on those assets to the greatest degree possible. That way, downtown does not foolishly try to turn itself into

some other place. That's very difficult, expensive, and even if you could pull it off, would be very contrived. Rather, it's better to work with downtown's unique characteristics (in terms of its history, architecture, culture, and/or natural resources). This is sometimes referred to as a 'narrative approach' to design.

- Implementation strategy. Most important by far, make sure that whoever downtown hires to lead a charrette emphasizes implementation. "To plan is human. To implement is divine," Wilson says, which is the mantra or guiding philosophy for his design practice. "All the best-laid plans in the world have no value if we can't help the community understand the steps that will need to be taken systematically, in addition to securing the funding sources to make the design recommendations a reality," he says. "If you don't do that, we're really wasting our time. Because all you're doing then is creating pretty reports and plans that are just going to sit on the shelf somewhere."

TIME-COMPRESSED CHARRETTE MODEL WORKS WELL

The charrette got its name from the French word for cart, which used to be how European design students would finish and submit their last-minute plans and drawings — literally on the back of a cart sent to pick up their work.

The appeal of brainstorming ideas in a short period of time hasn't changed. "To deliver a design product in a charrette form means that you are doing the workshop in a very compressed amount of time, maybe three to five days, you do it in the community where you are working, and you have numerous opportunities for public input as well as public feedback," says Wilson.

Typically, a designer will tour a town on Monday, solicit input from target stakeholder groups and individuals on Tuesday, start crafting plans, designs, and drawings on Wednesday, and show the final presentation come Thursday or Friday.

The power in this particular model is threefold:

- Citizens are engaged in the actual planning of their downtown.
- Compact courtesy, meaning that the amount of time between the public sharing their opinions and aspirations for downtown and seeing a product in response to that input is a matter of days.

- 'Wow' factor, in that on Monday, there was nothing, but by Thursday or Friday, downtown has a product to think about, complete with an implementation plan.

Downtown creates momentum, because contributing to a process that evolves before their eyes energizes people.

In the next issue of Downtown Idea Exchange, we'll follow up with common mistakes to avoid in the actual charrette process.

Contact: Walter Harris or Randy Wilson at the Clemson Institute for Economic and Community Development,

This article originally appeared in the December 1, 2008 issue Downtown Idea Exchange the twice-monthly newsletter covering all aspects of downtown revitalization. Additional information on the newsletter and related materials is available at the publication website www.DowntownDevelopment.com.

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RURAL DEVELOPMENTS is a publication of the SC Rural Development Council and the SC Community Development Collaborative. It is designed to promote awareness of the issues confronting rural South Carolina. Rural Developments is supported by the Clemson Institute for Economic and Community Development and a grant from USDA-Rural Development.

The South Carolina Rural Development Council is a federally recognized organization made up of federal and state agencies, non-profit organizations and other organizations which have interests or responsibilities in rural areas.

The SC Community Development Collaborative is made up of organizations interested in effective community development practices in South Carolina. It is facilitated by Clemson's Institute for Economic and Community Development.

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