# A NEW LIFE FOR THE OLD BRANSON HIGH SCHOOL







INTRODUCTION	1
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	4
COMMUNITY PLANNING	6
SITE CONCEPT & URBAN DESIGN	13
LEVERAGING THE SITE	24
FOSTERING CIVIC ENGAGEMENT	29
THE VISITOR EXPERIENCE	37
TEAM ROSTER	43



#### **INTRODUCTION**

In December of 2010, Branson, MO submitted a proposal to the American Institute of Architects (AIA) for a Sustainable Design Assessment Team (SDAT) to assist the community and its citizens in addressing key issues facing the community. The issues included adaptive reuse, community planning, sustainable design, and economic feasibility. The AIA accepted the proposal and, after a preliminary visit by a small group in September 2011, recruited a multi-disciplinary team of volunteers to serve on the SDAT Team. In December 2011, the SDAT Team members worked closely with local officials, community leaders, technical experts, non-profit organizations and citizens to study the community and its concerns. The team used its expertise to frame a wide range of recommendations, which were presented to the

community in a public meeting. This report represents a summary of the findings and recommendations that were presented to the community.

# The Sustainable Design Assessment Team (SDAT) Program

The Sustainable Design Assessment Team (SDAT) program focuses on the importance of developing sustainable communities through design. The mission of the SDAT program is to provide technical assistance and process expertise to help communities develop a vision and framework for a sustainable future. The SDAT program brings together multidisciplinary teams of professionals to work with community stakeholders and decision-makers in an intensive planning process. Teams are composed of volunteer professionals representing a range of disciplines, including architects, urban design professionals, economic development experts, land use attorneys, and others. Today, communities face a host of challenges to long-term planning for sustainability,



including limited resources and technical capacity, ineffective public processes and poor participation. The SDAT approach is designed to address many of the common challenges communities face by producing long-term sustainability plans that are realistic and reflect each community's unique context. Key features of the SDAT approach include the following:

- Customized Design Assistance. The SDAT is designed as a customized approach to
  community assistance which incorporates local realities and the unique challenges
  and assets of each community.
- A Systems Approach to Sustainability. The SDAT applies a systems-based approach
  to community sustainability, examining cross-cutting issues and relationships
  between issues. The SDAT forms multi- disciplinary teams that combine a range of
  disciplines and professions in an integrated assessment and design process.
- Inclusive and Participatory Processes. Public participation is the foundation of good community design. The SDAT involves a wide range of stakeholders and utilizes short feedback loops, resulting in sustainable decision-making that has broad public support and ownership.
- Objective Technical Expertise. The SDAT Team is assembled to include a range of
  technical experts from across the country. Team Members do not accept payment
  for services in an SDAT. They serve in a volunteer capacity on behalf of the AIA and
  the partner community. As a result, the SDAT Team has enhanced credibility with
  local stakeholders and can provide unencumbered technical advice.
- Cost Effectiveness. By employing the SDAT approach, communities are able to take
  advantage of leveraged resources for their planning efforts. The AIA contributes
  up to \$15,000 in financial assistance for each project. The SDAT team members
  volunteer their labor and expertise, allowing communities to gain immediate access
  to the combined technical knowledge of top- notch professionals from varied fields.

















The SDAT program is modeled on the Regional and Urban Design Assistance Team (R/UDAT) program, one of AIA's longest-running success stories. While the R/UDAT program was developed to provide communities with specific design solutions, the SDAT program provides broad assessments to help frame future policies or design solutions in the context of sustainability and help communities plan the first steps of implementation. Through the Design Assistance Team (DAT) program, over 500 professionals from 30 disciplines have provided millions of dollars in professional pro bono services to more than 200 communities across the country. The SDAT program leverages the pivotal role of the architectural community in the creation and support of sustainable livable communities.

The following report includes a narrative account of the Branson SDAT project recommendations, with summary information concerning several principle areas of investigation. The recommendations are made within the broad framework of sustainability, and are designed to form an integrated approach to future sustainability efforts in the community.

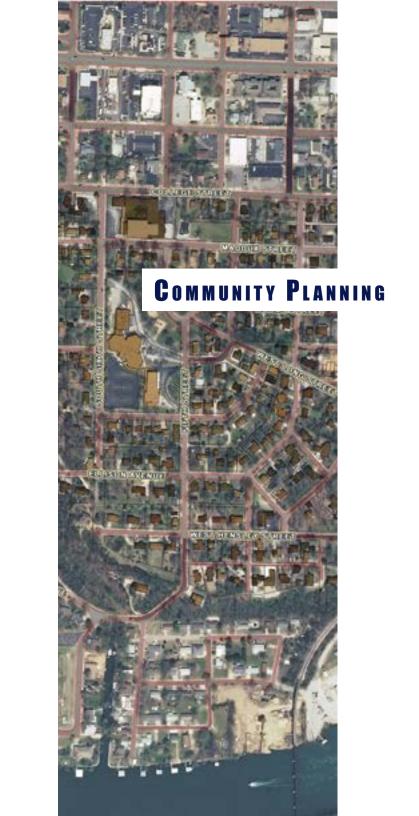


First of all, the Branson SDAT Team would like to thank the citizens of Branson for the valuable insights and wonderful hospitality they shared with us during our visit last winter. Furthermore, our entire team wants to extend our sympathies to the Branson community for the losses suffered during last spring's tornado. As tragic as the losses were, this does produce a unique opportunity - due to the damage suffered by the former Branson High School, something must be done. Sitting by idly is simply not an option anymore. Therefore, the community is faced with a question - what do we do? In our limited time in Branson our team identified a series of actions that can dramatically transform the community and make Branson a better Branson.

During the time we spent in Branson it became readily apparent that the community is well accomplished at creating a pleasant, inviting experience for visitors, with an emphasis on traditional values such as faith, family and patriotism. If there was a criticism of Branson that could be identified, it would be that Branson has done such an excellent job of creating a hospitable, welcoming environment for your guests that it seems that you've forgotten at times to focus on your own community. Our team believes that the old Branson High School recently purchased by the city can act as a catalyst to help establish and strengthen the bonds of community and stabilize the historic downtown core. By repurposing the old Branson High School, we foresee the City of Branson working to reclaim its historic urban core and reenergizing one of the few walkable communities in Branson. Emphasizing a walkabale neighborhood can have a supportive effect on the surrounding neighborhoods, creating further

demand for the modestly scaled, pedestrian friendly neighborhoods adjacent to the business district and Branson Landing

Contained within this document is a series of recommendations that we believe can help affect this transformation. Some of the recommendations will be easy to implement, and some of them will require investments in time and money to succeed. Together, we believe that implementing these recommendations will create the positive change that the citizens of Branson desire



# MAKING SUSTAINABLE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN THE COMMUNITY, THE NEIGHBORHOOD, AND THE PROJECT SITE

Guidance for reuse of the former high school site at College and Sixth Streets is found in the Draft 2030 Branson Comprehensive Plan. This is a well-written document developed with extensive public input that offers sound planning principles for evaluating the reuse of the project site and revitalization of the neighborhood through environmental, economic, and social connections that promote sustainability.

According to the Draft 2030 Comprehensive Plan, the predominant land uses in the community are commercial, planned development and wilderness areas.



Branson has a substantial entertainment and commercial market with a relatively small permanent resident population.

Development patterns have created a huge reliance on commercial sales tax revenues.

The community's Future Vision is for an affordable entertainment destination and a healthy and balanced community enjoying economic, environmental, and social sustainability.

### **Community Values**

The Community Values for Neighborhoods from the Comprehensive Plan include:

- Residential areas serve as the building blocks of the community.
- Neighborhoods should be walkable and connected, with a mix of housing types.
- Neighborhoods should be within walking distance of destinations including schools, parks, civic and neighborhood commercial uses.



# **Goals and Policy Actions**

Goals and Policy Actions are outlined in the Comprehensive Plan to help the City realize the long-term vision for many aspects of the community. Key themes for neighborhoods include:

- The community will have an infill and redevelopment focus with a mix of uses and a variety of housing types.
- Neighborhoods will be cohesive, diverse, attractive, and safe.
- Pedestrian oriented streetscapes will provide linkages with streets, sidewalks, and trails.
- Community engagement and greater informed participation will foster good neighborhood relations, cultivating a sense of community pride and involvement.

# **Neighborhood Actions**

These specific Neighborhood Actions drawn from the Comprehensive Plan support making connections between the community, neighborhood, and project site.

**Neighborhood Actions: Identity** 

- Maintain neighborhoods as treasured community assets.
- Work with neighborhoods to develop an action plan and form neighborhood organizations.
- Gateways or signage that reflects the character of each neighborhood.

### **Neighborhood Actions: Streetscape Design**

- Design neighborhood streets to discourage speeding and cut thru traffic.
- New development retains size, lot pattern, and building character of neighborhood.
- Sidewalks on at least one side of the street, separated by a landscape strip.
- Residential buildings that:
  - o address the street
  - o encourage pedestrian activity
  - o minimize the visual impact of garage doors and driveways



# **Project Objective**

The Project Objective is to create a viable alternative for the old high school and its environs that will serve as a catalyst for redevelopment within the core neighborhood as well as the surrounding area. The intent is to build on the strengths of the surrounding area and help re-establish the community. Achieving this objective

requires planning for connections between the community, neighborhood, and project site. These connections should link the environmental, economic, and social aspects of the community- the three pillars of sustainability.

# **Neighborhood Character: Existing Land Use**

The core neighborhood's land use is primarily single and multifamily residential in contrast. A mix of other uses is present, from churches and non-profit, faith-based social services to commercial and office uses. The neighborhood has felt the effects of changing uses, including the loss of the elementary, middle, and high schools and an increase of dwellings converted from owner-occupied homes to rental properties, many of which are suffering from a lack of maintenance. City staff estimates that the neighborhood is approximately 40% rental. This rate is similar to the 2009 real estate analysis of Branson, which indicated 44.7% owner-occupied units and 36.7% renter-occupied units as shown in the chart below from the Comprehensive Plan.

Real Estate (Census and MERIC)		
2010 Housing Units	8,599	
2010 Occupied Housing Units	4,688	
2009 Owner-Occupied Units	44.7%	
2009 Renter-Occupied Units	36.7%	
2009 Median Home Value for Owner–Occupied Housing	\$151,982	
2009 Persons in Household	2.21	
2009 Average Family Size	2.83	
2009 Median Age	44.6	

The former elementary and middle school sites nearby in the neighborhood have been reused for non-profit, faith-based services for people in need.

This grouping of social services with an overlapping client base has raised concerns with some neighbors about an over-concentration of these uses.

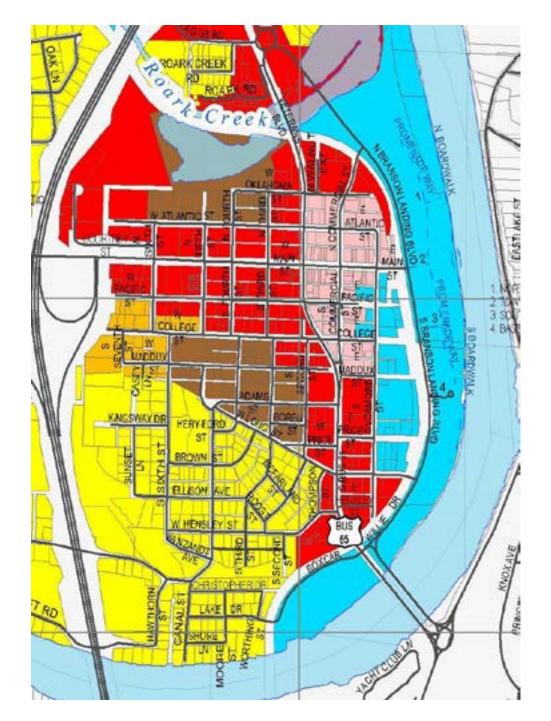
These land use issues can be addressed by:

- Enforcing the City's property maintenance code.
- Fostering two-way communication between social services and residents to build trust and partnerships.
- Creating a neighborhood watch and/or advisory board.
- Reusing the former high school site for a complementary mix of uses.

# **Neighborhood Character: Existing Zoning**

The former high school site at College and Sixth Streets is zoned R-3 Multifamily Residential. R-3 allows one-, two- and multifamily residential units. R-3 extends one block east to downtown Commercial zoning and one block south to R-1 Single Family Residential zoning. The project site adjoins Commercial zoning and R-2 Two Family Residential zoning on the north and west.

Reuse of the site for any non-residential use will require rezoning. On-street and off-street parking, loading and deliveries, site design and landscaping standards will need to be considered depending on the mix of new uses.



#### **Neighborhood Character: Urban Design Issues**

The project site consists of a vacant high school building with multiple levels and entries on a site that slopes toward downtown. The site's parking lots lack screening to differentiate them from the street; they lack landscaping to soften their "sea of asphalt" appearance. The school yard amenities include a courtyard, picnic tables, trees, shrubs, and green space.

The project site is in the oldest neighborhood in Branson. It is a well-established residential neighborhood with primarily single and multifamily residential uses. Homes are modest in size, many with front porches to engage the street.

There are no gateways or sense of arrival to the area, however. The neighborhood has a number of vacant lots as well. These undeveloped parcels and an overall lack of a sense of place represent further uncertainty to a neighborhood in transition. These issues could be addressed by:



There is a significant grade change toward downtown. The grade change in this one block is taller than the funnel of the Titanic building on the Strip.



- Creating a design overlay and/or form-based code to maintain fabric and character of homes.
- Installing sidewalks, street trees, & landscape strips.
- Adding landscaping, trees and decorative fencing along and in parking lots.

# **Neighborhood Character: Traffic Issues**

Cut-through vehicular traffic in the neighborhood reduces cohesiveness. The reuse of the project site could ultimately result in an increase in traffic generation.

Lack of a consistent sidewalk network with parkways (planting areas between the sidewalk and curb) pushes pedestrians into the street rather than along a sidewalk where neighbors can meet and greet each other. Opportunities for improved pedestrian connections exist with the addition of a sidewalk connection on one or both sides of the streets, separated from the curb with a parkway to allow for landscaping and street trees, thus filling in the gaps in the neighborhood's sidewalk network. Traffic issues could be addressed by:

- Installing a complete sidewalk network, with landscape strips:
   "take back the street for people".
- Creating traffic calming mechanisms, including bump-outs, speed bumps, and on-street parking.
- Mixing the various neighborhood uses in order to create different peak times of day and week.

#### Recommendations

The Goals and Policy Actions for Neighborhoods in the Comprehensive Plan provide a development framework to understand and address the neighborhood's character and issues. This framework in turn fosters ways to make sustainable connections between the community, the neighborhood, and the project site that meet the project objective.

# **Project Site Recommendations: Zoning**

The current zoning allows one-, two-, and multifamily residential uses. A vacant school building and parking lots without landscaping or screening are offset by a courtyard, picnic tables and green space. Reuse of the site for any non-residential use will require rezoning. The SDAT recommends the rezoning of the site to Planned Development to facilitate a flexible, mixed use redevelopment in the school building. This is a custom zoning application that allows for flexibility in range of uses and parking options. Standards for parking, loading and deliveries, site design and landscaping treatments, incorporation of "green" development tools, lighting, and other site characteristics can be set forth on the Planned Development regulations for the site. For example:

Use on-street parking along the site frontages and shared parking among
uses with different hours to minimize the impact and cost of additional hard
surface parking on the site. These parking options respect the neighborhood's
predominantly residential character while accommodating the transition to
mixed uses.





- Use low maintenance landscaping (native plants / perennials) along and in parking lots to increase stormwater infiltration on-site and reduce/control runoff.
- Use the courtyard and green space as site and neighborhood amenities, extending the site and helping re-establish the sense of community in the neighborhood through these social and physical connections.





# Project Site Recommendations: Physical Connections

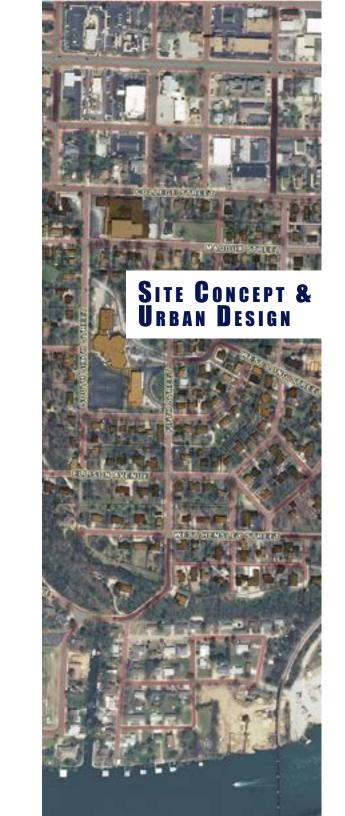
The Goals and Policy Actions for Neighborhoods in the Comprehensive Plan provide a development framework to understand and address the neighborhood's character and issues. This framework in turn fosters ways to make sustainable connections between the community, the neighborhood, and the project site that meet the project objective.

Two-way physical connections that link the site with the neighborhood, the neighborhood with Downtown, and Downtown with the Landing generate synergy and sustainability. Linkages can be made using a variety of methods, including:

- Encouraging the use of alternate transportation modes: walk, bike, and Downtown trolley.
- Providing sidewalks, crosswalks and pedestrian-activated crossing signals.
- Extending the route of the Downtown trolley to the site and neighborhood.
- Adding gateways and wayfinding signage at all entries into the neighborhood for a sense of place and arrival.

Two-way social connections that link the residents with the landlords and with the neighborhood institutions, service agencies, and the City also generate synergy and sustainability. These connections can be made using a variety of methods, including:

- Engaging citizens in neighborhood planning.
- Promoting safety and involvement by fostering good neighborhood relations.
- Cultivating a sense of community pride and involvement through community policing, neighborhood associations or advisory boards, block parties, and "meet & greets".



#### **PROJECT OPTIONS:**

**Clean Slate:** Remove the building and its site improvements for full redevelopment in the future.

**Adaptive Reuse:** Create a complimentary and flexible mix of uses that reinforce each other (neighborhood catalyst project).

*Mothball:* Maintain the building in a minimal state for future redevelopment.

#### **BUILDING CHALLENGES**

- Vacancy
- Level Changes
- Abatement
- Renewal
- Entry Choices
- Location
- Sloping Site
- Courtyard
- Surrounding Site

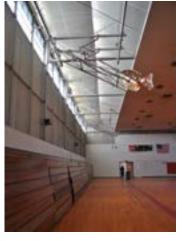
#### **BUILDING ASSETS**

- Solid Building
- Sunlight & Views
- High Ceilings
- Clear Spans
- Gym and Stage
- Entry Choices
- Location
- Sloping Site
- Courtyard
- Surrounding Site

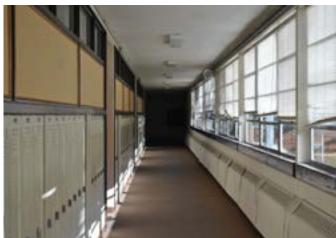
Given our analysis of the building and the site, the Branson SDAT strongly recommends that the City reuses the existing building, establishing appropriate new uses in the building, and using the new development as a catalyst to help establish and strengthen the bonds of community and enhance the city as a whole.



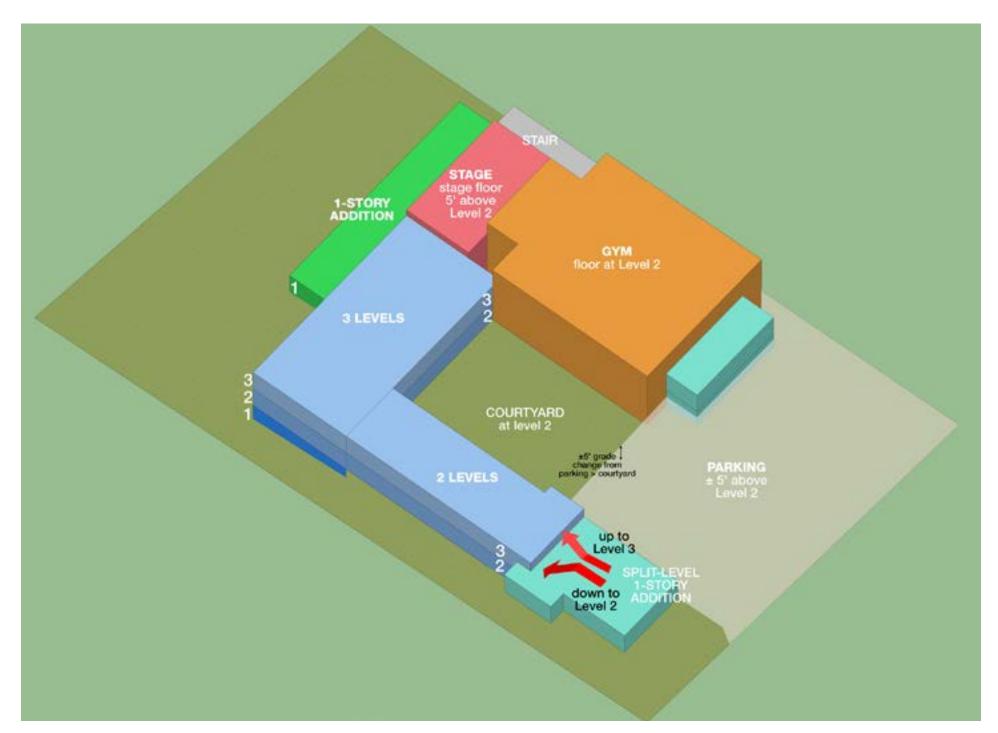




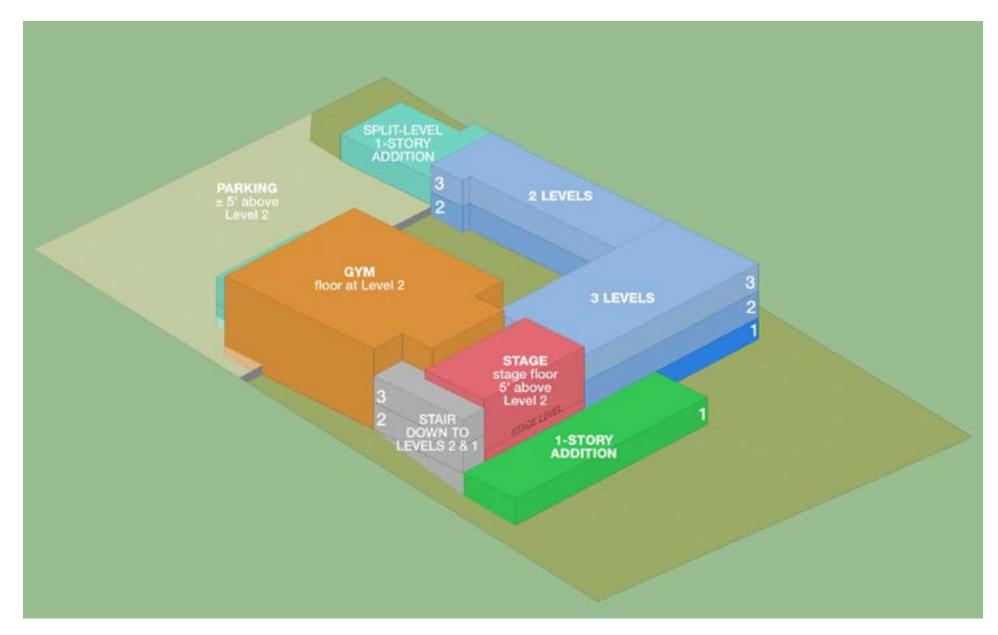




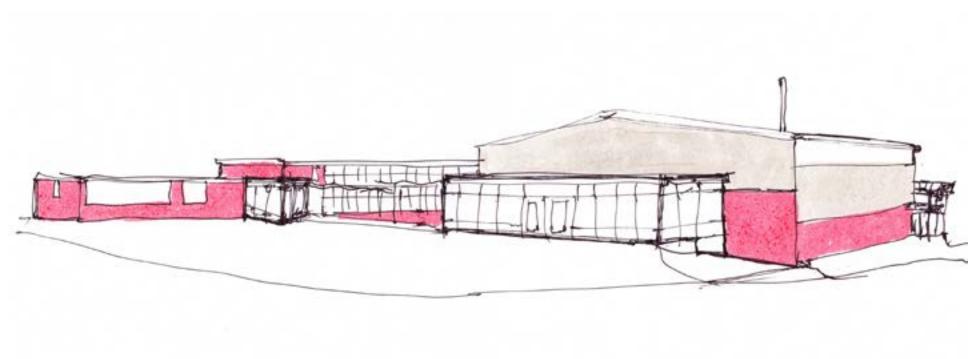




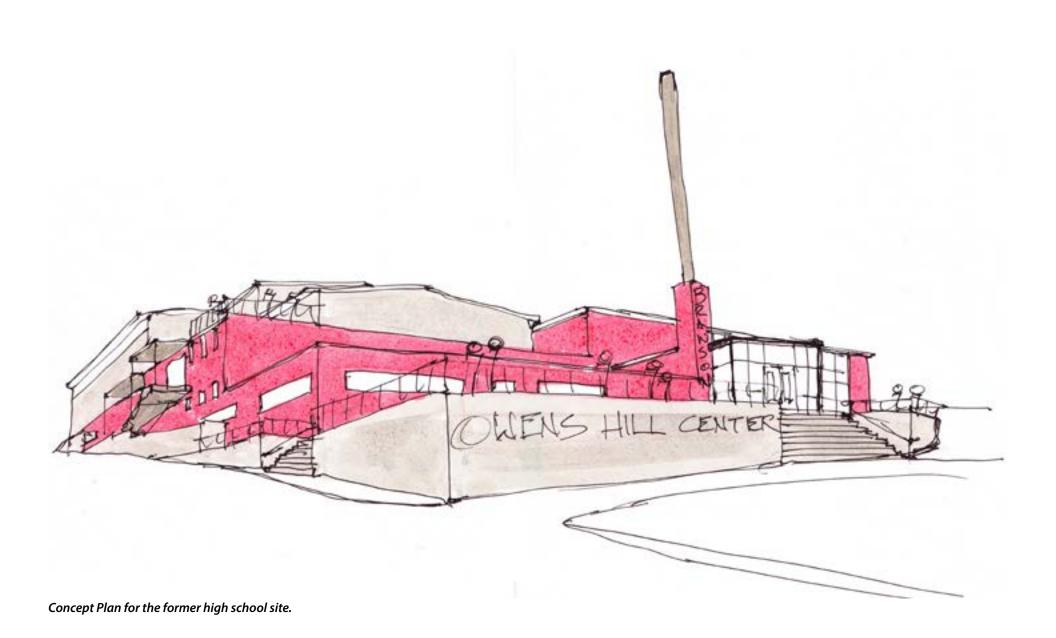
Site view from the northwest.



Site view from the southeast.



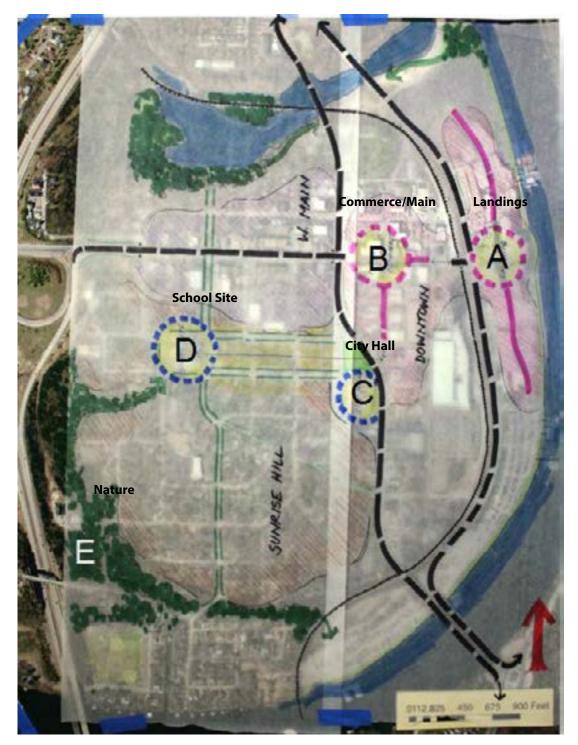
Concept Plan for the former high school site.



#### **CREATING CONNECTIONS**

For the school site's revitalization to be a key ingredient in Branson's downtown residential neighborhood's transformation, it needs to be connected to what is already working. The good news is Branson's downtown already has a variety of regional and local landmarks and commercial nodes that work well and serve a broad spectrum of tourists and locals. It is this broad range of users that allows a wide range of possibilities to be developed for the challenging school site that most towns of 10,000 could never imagine let alone realize. The world comes to Branson; the neighborhood must use that to this project's advantage.

The bad news is these established landmarks are located more than 150' down a steep hill from the School site. Yet in the end, the steep hill is the secret that will allow just enough tourists and regional visitors to visit the site to allow it to prosper as a neighborhood anchor for locals.



#### THE IMPORTANCE OF CONNECTIVITY

So why does the site need to attract visitors in the first place if the challenge is to revitalize the surrounding residential neighborhood? In short, if things remain as they are, the market has given its answer in that the building and site has been vacant for a number of years. Tapping into the visitor traffic that comes from around the world enhances the site and buildings market potential.

Connecting existing traffic flows to the site is not a difficult task for the following reasons:

- It is 2 blocks from the portion of Main Street that is adjacent to Highway 65,
  the limited access regional artery. 5th Street is the most direct route to connect
  the school and Main Street. The 5th / Main Street Intersection is scheduled to
  become a signalized intersection, further increasing access to the school by
  allowing easier left hand turns, slowing traffic, and offering further signage
  opportunities.
- Streets are wide enough for two-way traffic use, on street parking, and streetscape improvements including adding continuous sidewalks.
- College Street offers a direct connection between Commerce Street and the School site.

#### **URBAN DESIGN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- The unifying goal should be to make it easy, intuitive, safe and visually attractive to move from downtown to the school site.
- Transit Trolley: Add a loop that covers College, 5th, Main and Commerce

- Motorized Transportation Connections: Invest in streetscape improvements
  on Main, College and 5th to provide improved lighting, designated on-street
  parking, aesthetics and way finding. Continuous sidewalks on College and 5th
  in a first phase will serve not only the school site, but the existing residential
  population as well.
- Non-motorized Transportation Connections: At a minimum, there should be 8' lighted sidewalks on the south side of College (3 street crossing vs 5 on the north side) and on both sides of 5th Street connecting to Main Street with benches every 400'. Explore the creation of a bike trail to encourage connections to other neighborhoods. Also explore creating a greenbelt that connects the site to Alexander and Sunset Parks via the existing woods adjacent to the east side of Highway 55.
- Signage: Create auto and pedestrian signage plan to connect the School site to visitors in the Main and Commerce portion of the downtown.
- Walkway: When the school site is converted and operational, determine the
  feasibility of a grade separated walkway above N. Veterans Boulevard connected
  Commerce Street and College Avenue. Existing parking lot adjacent to City Hall
  is an ideal spot for a landing zone for walkway and a pocket park.

#### LAND USE RECOMMENDATIONS

There are numerous under-utilized and vacant lots surrounding the school site. If the community's investment is going to maximize its impact, those lots need to be filled with families. The existing fabric of single family bungalows and cottages allow for a density up to 16 units per acre. While 16 dwelling units is higher than the existing density, the hilly terrain allows for a variety of parking layouts and housing formats that will not violate the existing architectural cohesiveness and character of the area.

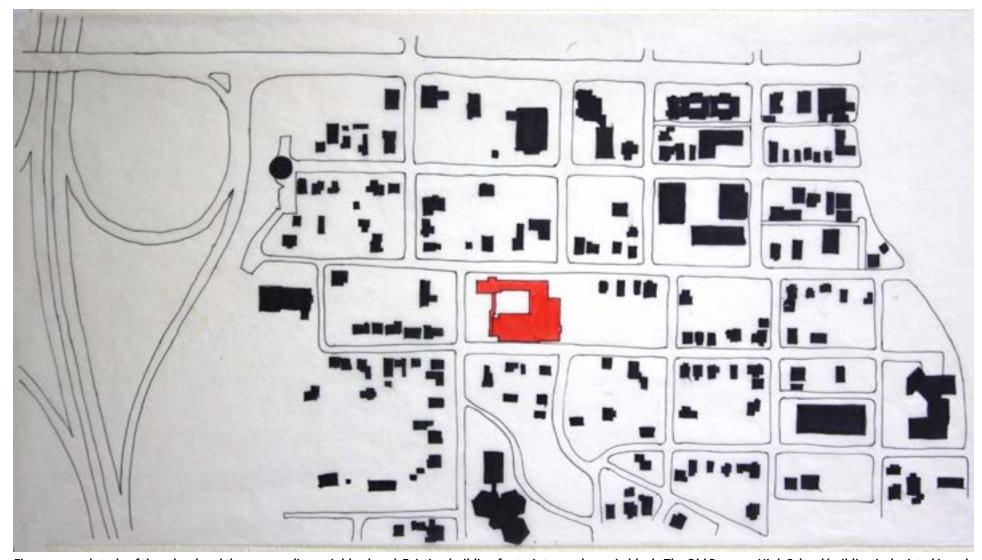


Figure ground study of the school and the surrounding neighborhood. Existing building footprints are shown in black. The Old Branson High School building is depicted in red.

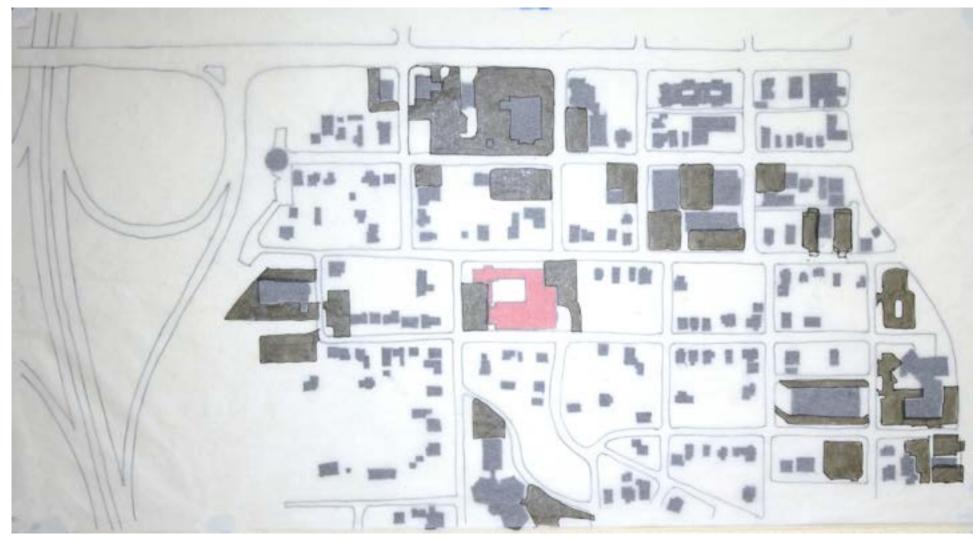


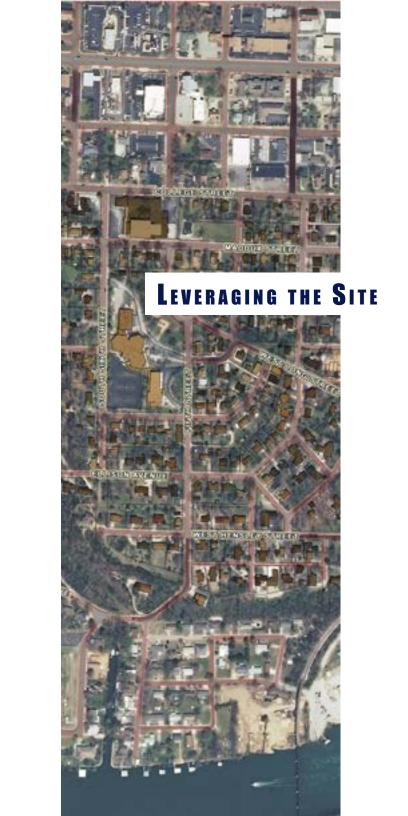
Figure ground study of the existing parking lots in the project area surrounding the school. Surface parking lots are shown in black.

The higher density designation can cover the areas lots and parcels served by College and Maddux streets. Over time, if the higher density formats prove to be successful in the eyes of the market and community, Long Street would also be a good candidate as it already has town homes and it connects to 5th street near the school site in a diagonal manner. While parking is already a problem at certain times (Sunday mornings for example), the striping of on-street parking will help alleviate any capacity issues related to visitors to the school site, churches or higher density residential developments.

The lots across the school site on 6th street also afford the opportunity for even higher densities. A location adjacent to what is proposed to be the main entrance plaza into the renovated school building will create an active setting. Permitting town homes will help define the space by framing the plaza. Town homes should not be allowed to have more than 3 stories, with the first 2 built with setbacks not to exceed more than 10 feet from the sidewalks.

- Overall Goal: In an architectural appropriate manner, re-densify the neighborhood with potential school site users. More houses and families in the area will make it safer throughout the day.
- Rezone areas adjacent to the school site and along College and Maddux streets to allow density at 16 dwelling units per acre.

Convert the City Hall parking lot between College and Maddux Streets into a
neighborhood pocket park. Consider relocating the playground equipment
from the park at 5th and Adams Street to the new pocket park site. The police
station and City Hall right across the street and an essentially flat site make it an
ideal location for young children.



#### LEVERAGING THE OLD BRANSON HIGH SCHOOL BUILDING AND SITE

The AIA team was charged by the City with evaluating alternative uses for the old Branson High site that would be catalytic, and would at the same time leverage that publicly owned asset to the benefit of the surrounding neighborhood and greater downtown.

Public control of the site with a 46,000 square foot building in a close-in neighborhood offers the City a phenomenal opportunity to return the site to vibrant, economically viable uses, and to influence development patterns around it. The City has two pivotal options it must initially consider: 1) take the building down and make the site available for redevelopment; or 2) let the building stand and make the building and site available for redevelopment. If the latter, the city then has a timing choice: 1) evaluate current redevelopment options and their benefits/costs; or 2) mothball the building for some future consideration.

The SDAT examined the pivotal options and recommends that the City retain the building and finds an appropriate catalytic redevelopment strategy that brings uses capable of further leveraging assets of the building and site. The team believes these options are available now and that mothballing the site only leaves it more vulnerable to damage by the elements and/or vandalism which both increases the City's liability and costs, as well as impedes further revitalization of the neighborhood.

#### Market Context

Before advancing with any rehabilitation strategy, the City needs to be mindful of conditions in the area real estate market so that it can better assess the viability of various uses (figures are from 2011):

- Retail- The city has approximately 1.7 million square feet of retail space with a vacancy rate of approximately 12%.
- Office-There's about 280,000 square feet of office space in the city with a vacancy rate in excess of 30%.
- Hotel/Motel-There are more than 18,000 temporary lodging rooms in Branson.
- Retail and Office Rental Rates- Due to factors associated with the larger recession and considerable local vacancy rates, both retail and office rents are down considerably.

These factors, when combined, contribute to making financing new development and redevelopment more challenging, but not impossible

# **Catalytic Opportunities**

Recognizing the school building's size and configuration, site conditions, and locational attributes (proximity to downtown, availability of nearby redevelopment parcels, transportation access, etc.) the SDAT drew on its knowledge and experience in other communities that have wrestled with similar situations, keeping in mind Branson's economic context as it examined various re-use options for the property. While the City and its redevelopment partners should explore a broader range of possibilities, the AIA team believes that the building and site lend themselves to multiple uses that re-enforce one another and would help stimulate redevelopment

of the larger area. Many of these uses may be offered by for-profit as well as non-profit providers, and many lend themselves to sharing some spaces in the building as well as parking on site and off.

The preliminary set of uses should be further explored for interest, compatibility (not all may fit in the building or find its location beneficial for their clients/customers), and ability to contribute financially to the redevelopment efforts success (rent and/or redevelopment financing). Uses include but are not limited to:

- A Community YMCA, which would offer potential for exercise, day care, and other functions, with family memberships made available to all income categories.
   The Y would be able to fund raise and help finance redevelopment as well.
- A Community Theatre would offer affordable performance options for community residents as well as visitors, further providing an opportunity to grow local talent.
- Music and Dance Camps would provide year-round programing for a wide range of age groups and would also provide the opportunity to hone local talents.
- While the current library is located only a couple of blocks away, the City could
  explore a range of options to facilitate library expansion, from a relocation of
  some functions into the school building to a land swap.
- A Business Incubation Space would offer individuals and small firms with new business ideas a place to better grow their ventures that would have a range of assistance functions such as business planning and marketing counseling provided by community colleges, access to equipment and meeting rooms, etc., at more affordable prices

- A Shared Commercial Kitchen would offer area residents and small business
  entrepreneurs facilities to produce their culinary endeavors in larger quantities
  and prepare them for market, with possible assistance from agricultural
  extension service providers or a community college (Hart, Michigan serves as a
  good example of this model).
- "Third Spaces" would offer neighborhood residents (as well as visitors from the larger community) friendly, welcoming places away from home to enjoy small gatherings or alone time over food and/or drinks (see McMeniman's adaptive re-uses of the Kennedy School in Portland or Old St Francis School in Bend, OR, both of which offer community rooms and lodging as well as eateries and neighborhood brew pubs).

These are the types of uses other communities have embraced to not only help save older valued buildings, but also to help revitalize the areas around them. There are numerous examples of successful ventures throughout the country that should be studied by both the City and its private and public partners.

# From Vision to Strategy

Having an agreed upon vision about adaptive re-use for an older building is a necessary step in the process. Realizing that vision, however, requires that the City and its partners adopt a viable redevelopment strategy, and assumes that financing can be found in this economically challenged environment. The redevelopment strategy will involve the city and its partners in making key decisions about items such as:

• Who continues to own the building and land?

- What are the benefits and cost of selling versus ground lease?
- Who will be involved in determining the disposition strategy of the building and site (the City alone, various advisors from the public, non-profit and/or private sectors)?
- What kind of solicitation process will be more beneficial (request for proposals, request for qualification, request for interest, etc.)?
- What kind of on-going role, if any, will the City play in the property?
- What kinds of public assistance would be available to a for- or non-profit redeveloper and/or user of the building?
- What options or other nearby sites might the City or its partners want to secure?
- What's the timeline for selecting a development entity and how long will that entity have to complete a redevelopment concept, secure users and financing?
- And, what happens if the selected redevelopment entity can't succeed for whatever reason?

# Redevelopment Costs/Revenues & Financing

The SDAT realizes that its work on the school site is conceptual and that any cost projections for rehab, as well as income projections are, at this stage, very preliminary and will require considerable refinement and subsequent adjustment as a concept evolves into an actual development program.

To start the discussion about what may be viable, the AIA team (based on discussions with local real estate and development professionals, as well as team member experience with similar projects) projected one scenario that looked at rehab costs and potential income. The team then examined what the current private financing market would likely require to make that rehabilitation possible. Not surprisingly, the

team found a sizable gap in the ability of the private market to address the project's financing and therefore offered a number of potential resources that the City and its partners might consider in order to close the financing gap. Below are concept level financials:

## **Concept Level Rehabilitation Cost Estimates**

- 46,000 square feet X \$150/SF in hard costs = \$6.9 million
- 20% soft costs (design/engineering fees, permits, etc) = \$1.4 million
- Total building rehab = \$8.3 million
- Site improvements not included (enhancements to parking, plantings, sidewalks, additional structures – if any, etc.)

#### **Estimate Lease Revenue**

- While there are 46,000 gross square feet in the building, the leasable square footage is about 23,000 (wide corridors, stairs, bathrooms, boiler room, etc. are excluded from rental revenue, but will all require rehab expenditures).
- Overall rents are estimated at \$8/leasable SF/year or \$.67/SF/month.
- Total estimated revenue \$184,000/year.

# **Private Financing Approach**

- Total building rehab cost = \$8.3 million (without site improvements).
- In today's market, lenders will expect approximately 40% equity (cash from one
  or more entities). Equity investors expect to be repaid based on their perceived
  level of risk in a project. Equity investors often get between the low teens and
  mid twenty percent for their equity participation. In our conceptual example we
  need \$3.3 million in equity.

- In today's market, private lenders will provide about 60% debt financing (if a building meets pre-committed occupancy levels). In our conceptual example we need \$5 million in debt.
- We assume that the \$5 million in debt is borrowed for 25 years at 6% interest.
- Monthly payments on the debt loan = \$32,200.
- Annual payments on that loan = \$386,000.
- Projected annual lease income from above is \$184,000.
- There's a gap of \$202,000 in the ability to service the debt portion alone in this
  private finance scenario. And we haven't yet addressed responsibilities to the
  equity provider(s).

#### **Alternative Financing Approach**

- Building rehab cost remains at \$8.3 million.
- One option involves determining whether the school building can be placed on the national register of historic place (once it's 50 years old or more it may have this potential). If it meets historic requirements, it's possible to secure historic tax credits from the national parks service and the state for up to 45% of the eligible rehab costs, which could mean up to about \$3 million. These funds serve as the type of equity in the project that effectively does not have to be repaid by the project.
- If historic tax credits are secured, the rehab effort needs to raise an additional \$5 million. There are a number of potential funding options that should be explored to determine which could be the best fit for closing the overall financing gap.
   Below is a starting list (many of these financing sources can be explored with or without the historic tax credit injection):
- 1. Grants and donations: Securing these from individuals, corporations, foundations, trusts and others should be among the first options considered.

- Non-profit revenue bonds: These low interest rate bonds can be used by eligible non-profits such as YMCAs, museums, art institutions, etc. to provide financing for up to 100% of a project. There must be sufficient revenue from the project, however, to repay the bonds.
- 3. Real Estate Transfer Tax: This funding source, which derives its revenue from a small percentage fee (usually about 1%) on the sale of commercial and/or residential properties, can be used to pay for new development or redevelopment that is in the public interest. In Missouri, the RETT can only be used in a Charter City.
- 4. EB5 Foreign Investment Loan: these funds are secured from higher income foreigners who wish to immigrate to the US. They essentially invest \$500,000 into an eligible development project that meets US job creation requirements. Their funds are usually provided as a very low interest rate loan which is normally repaid at the end of five years. Depending on the number of jobs created EB5 can be used for up to 80% of a project costs.

The AIA team believes that the City has a remarkable redevelopment opportunity ahead, one capable of recycling and activating a tired building and of generating interest in quality redevelopment for the neighborhood around it. It will require securing agreement on a vision for the building and area, as well as a committed strategy based on the potential for public, non-profit and private players to effectively collaborate and finance in achieving a changed environment.



#### DOWNTOWN BRANSON'S OLDEST NEIGHBORHOOD

The area surrounding the old Branson high school offers a unique opportunity to create a community institution that not only serves the residents of one of Branson's oldest downtown neighborhoods, but also the City as a whole. This project also provides a catalyst by which the neighborhood, the City, and local non-profits can come together to discuss the future of this facility as part of an overall strategy for the revitalization of this truly unique neighborhood in the City of Branson.

**NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATIONS** 

Neighborhood Associations are the most common and effective way for communities to organize themselves in order to address a common concern within a certain localized area. Although neighborhood associations can be defined by the local government for planning or development purposes, or are created as part of a subdivision, most often they develop more organically based on social, economic, physical, and geographic conditions. The benefits of organizing a neighborhood association range from being able to generate civic pride or community spirit to addressing complicated issues in order to influence local government policies and/or securing resources that benefit those that reside within the neighborhood. Neighborhood Associations vary from being simple block clubs or street adoptions, to more formal Home Owner's Associations that collect dues and have a fiduciary responsibility to members and residents by providing services with its elected leaders serving as a de facto Board of Directors.

Regardless of the reasons behind the formation of a neighborhood association, there are numerous advantages of forming a Neighborhood Association including:

- Community Identity to foster civic pride and civic engagement.
- A unified voice when addressing community issues, concerns, or activities.
- An identifiable constituency that can communicate with local government leaders agencies.
- Leadership and communication structure to convey, receive, and distribute information to the localized area.

#### CREATING NEIGHBORHOOD IDENTITY

**Establish Neighborhood Boundaries:** Identify the area that reflects the neighborhoods social, economic, physical, and geographic boundaries. Often times, neighborhoods that are designated by a local government or a not-for-profit do not reflect the true sense of the 'community'. That being said, the neighborhood should consult with agencies such as the City Planning Department or the Community Development Department to determine if there are any existing boundaries and if so, the neighborhood should discern the nature, purpose and rationale for creating those boundaries. Typically, government imposed boundaries may have some planning or funding implications that should be understood by the organizers and taken into consideration. A careful analysis of the proposed boundaries will also help avoid potential conflicts with existing associations or groups. Additionally, organizers should think carefully about including/excluding areas. Though boundaries are technically artificial and sometimes ill-conceived lines, to include or exclude a section



of the community could disenfranchise or alienate an area next to your neighborhood, a fracture that could then hold future implications.

For example, problem properties could potentially be excluded from a neighborhood association because organizers do not want to deal with the owners. However, by instead including that problematic property, the neighborhood organizers can extend the option of involving the owner in being a part of the community and its eventual progress. Additionally, by including the property within the boundaries, it gives the association greater standing in making the case to Code and/or Law Enforcement that the property is a blighting influence since it is within the neighborhood. Civil Actions can often be brought against property owners by community associations in court, with attorneys providing pro bono legal services to assist in these efforts. Also,

by including certain businesses and other non-residential entities, neighborhood associations can make them feel a part of the community and tap into both their financial and institutional resources.

The neighborhood should consider designating the area bounded by US Highway 65, North Veterans Blvd, Cliff Drive/West Hensley, and West Main Street as the potential neighborhood district. Further meetings and discussions with the City, organizations, businesses, and residents of the targeted area may modify this boundary. However, it could serve as a starting point for conversations surrounding the neighborhoods boundary. Though this area could be designated as "the Hill District", it should still be considered as an extension of the downtown area.

**Establish a Neighborhood Name:** A thoughtful name could invoke a sense of history and pride in the community and thus galvanize support for this effort. Names are often based on geography or historical figures. Names such as "Sunrise Hills"; "Owen Hills", "Taney Hills" or simply "The Hill District" evoke some sense of place based on these factors. The name will eventually become synonymous with the boundary as the neighborhood becomes more readily identifiable.

#### CREATING CIVIC ENGAGEMENT ON A NEIGHBORHOOD LEVEL

Identify a Core Group: Establish a Core Group of volunteers that are willing to assist with organizing. Volunteers could be assigned to selected blocks (preferably ones they live on) to be "block captains" for certain geographic areas. This should be done

in order to ease information distribution particularly in the early stages. Door to door is the best method since 'face time' will be important in building interest and trust from those that live in the targeted area.

Identify Roles, Key Resources, and Partners: Determine how formal or informal the association will be. In the early stages, informal is ideal since the association is just getting started. But as interest grows along with the level of activity, a more formal structure with elected officers, operating procedures and other such guiding documents may become essential. At a minimum, meeting dates should be published and held in a public place (e.g. a church, school, or other public facility located within the neighborhood) especially if a formal action/decision is going to take place that has neighborhood implications. Informal meetings such as planning and strategy sessions can be held at the homes of the organizers. Seek assistance from churches, businesses, and local government agencies in developing flyers, advertising means,







hosting meetings, and donating supplies for meetings to encourage participation, emphasizing that such support also provides them with good publicity as well.

**Host a Neighborhood Event:** Hosting a Neighborhood Event/Activity is a good way to get information out about the organization's efforts. It can also be an excellent way to expand membership by collecting names and contact information from the surrounding residents in addition to encouraging networking and neighborly interaction.

**Address Neighborhood Issues:** In conjunction with the neighborhood event/activity, organizers should be prepared to have a brief session either at the event or shortly afterwards where residents are invited to informally discuss neighborhood issues or concerns. These issues could become the basis of the Neighborhood Planning efforts, outlining

short and long term issues, resident interest, activities, and strategies. Identify doable short term items (for example cleaning a vacant lot, removing graffiti, replacing street signs, etc.) and begin to engage the relevant agency immediately. It is important for residents to see some immediate results to build the credibility of the association and its efforts.

**Create a Neighborhood Plan:** This plan becomes the vision and guiding document to guide activities in and around the neighborhood. Neighborhood Plans vary in complexity from community to community, so the parameters of the plan should be discussed and coordinated with the local government and other stakeholder groups/organizations operating in the neighborhood. The plan should be based on the information collected from the community, the city, and other stakeholder organizations, and should be prioritized and updated periodically.

#### CREATING CIVIC ENGAGEMENT THROUGH DOWNTOWN BUSINESSES

**Downtown/City Newsletter:** Promote "the Hill District" in the Downtown/City Newsletter. Provide real estate listings, local events, community spotlight articles to encourage interest in the neighborhood as an extension of the downtown area.

**Local Incentives:** Provide a local financial incentive (such as 'Branson Bucks' or 'Hill Bills') both to residents of "the Hill District" as well as all other Branson neighborhoods to encourage residents to shop local and to patronize "their" downtown.





Extend Trolley Service: Consider extending the Trolley Service up College Street to 6th Street past the Branson High School property and the Church Army Thrift Store. Then it could travel down 6th Street to West Pacific Street, south past the Taney Hills Library and the 200 block of West Pacific Street (near Cottage Row, the craftsman cottages that have been converted to commercial use), before ultimately joining the existing route along N. Veterans Blvd.

**Technical Assistance:** Provide Technical Assistance to commercial property owners, particularly in "the Hill District", on how to rehab and market their business/property as an extension of downtown. Focus on 'Cottage Row' and the Church Army Thrift Store by facilitating the creation of a more organic tourist experience at these locations for those visitors and residents interested in a more authentic or nostalgic side of Branson. This could be coordinated with groups such as the Chamber of Commerce





and Downtown Branson Main Street Association. For Example, the Church Army often assists clients who are musicians. These musicians could perform outside of the store during peak tourist season in an effort to encourage tourists to get off the bus and venture into the store. Allow local artists, many of whom may be from Church Army, to display their works (particularly paintings, quilts, or sculptures) outside the store. The furniture could be moved into the back of the store behind the fence. Coordinate with local artist or community groups to place a mural or art wall along the Church Army Thrift Store fence that is along 6th Street to create visual interest in the site.

**Contribute to Neighborhood Events**: Downtown promoters such as Downtown Branson Main Street Association should incorporate "the Hill District" in their marketing of Downtown Branson, and partner with the local neighborhood association in sponsoring neighborhood events. This could be promoted by the Main

Street Association to those interested in more local flavor as part of their Downtown Branson experience.

#### CREATING CIVIC ENGAGEMENT THROUGH NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

Citizen Advisory Board/Committees: Organizations currently operating in "the Hill District" should consider creating a subcommittee comprised of neighborhood representatives, or, alternatively, adding residents from the neighborhood to their respective Boards. This will improve communication and potentially strengthen the relationship between the neighborhood and these organizations. The nonprofits could also provide technical assistance in assisting the neighborhood in creating a formal Board structure for the neighborhood organization given their expertise and knowledge in structuring these types of organizations.

**Community Service:** Provide services to the surrounding neighborhoods. Groups

to engage the neighborhood association and conduct joint activities such as clean-ups, educational sessions on important key issues such as taxes, health care/screenings, rental/foreclosure assistance to the residents of the surrounding neighborhood to



improve relationships and collaboration, ultimately resulting in these organizations role as a resource to the community. Also consider using the nonprofits' 501 c 3 Tax Exempt Status to assist the neighborhood in applying for grants both locally and nationally.

**Meeting Activity Space:** Offer space for meetings and events for the neighborhood association.

#### CREATING CIVIC ENGAGEMENT THROUGH THE CITY GOVERNMENT

Increase participation in the Citizens Academy: Continue to support the Citizens Academy as a mechanism to enlighten residents about the purpose, role, and structure of various city agencies and programs.

Expand Citizens Academy to include a 'Leadership Academy': Explore creating two Leadership Academies, one for adults and the other for teenagers, in an effort to foster community spirit and civic engagement for the next generations of community leaders. Utilize resources from Ozark Tech, the College of the Ozarks, and Branson Public Schools to create the curriculum and to teach the courses. Offer volunteer or public service credits to public school students that participate during the course during the summer.

**Formal Recognition of Neighborhoods (Proclamation or Resolution):** Create a formal application process by which a neighborhood association is created and

recognized by the City of Branson. This process should request certain information and deliverables from the neighborhood to insure that they are being inclusive and forthright in their effort to organize their community. The application, along with its proposed boundaries, should be reviewed by relevant city agencies, and a public hearing date should be advertised and set (if applicable). The purpose of the city review, advertisement, and subsequent proclamation is to insure that residents are aware that this activity is taking place while also alerting city agencies that this neighborhood is being created and will be engaging the City.

**Technical Assistance with Neighborhood Plans:** Provide technical assistance with the creation of neighborhood plans to address key community issues or concerns. This should be offered to "the Hill District" and any other neighborhood association that formally requests to organize and be recognized by the City of Branson.

# CITY INCENTIVES TO ENCOURAGE NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION FORMATION

**Offer Mini Grants:** The City of Branson can offer grants of various denominations to Neighborhood Associations that have been officially recognized by the City. These mini grants should require applicants to demonstrate that the grants are going to be used for activities that continue to foster civic engagement, community revitalization, and neighborhood pride.

Organize an Annual Bulk Trash Pick-Up Service: The City could provide bulk trash pick-up services to officially recognized neighborhoods within the City of Branson. Encourage residents to clean the interior and exterior of their properties and move the debris to the curb. Coordinate with nonprofits such as Church Army and other local groups to move materials off of properties for the elderly or disabled that are willing to receive their services.

Walking Town Meetings: Continue to conduct Walking Town Meetings with the Mayor and Branson City Council Members in addition to agency representatives in order to monitor existing conditions of the neighborhoods. These tours also provide the opportunity for residents to connect with these officials and neighborhood leaders in the field concerning ongoing issues/activities.

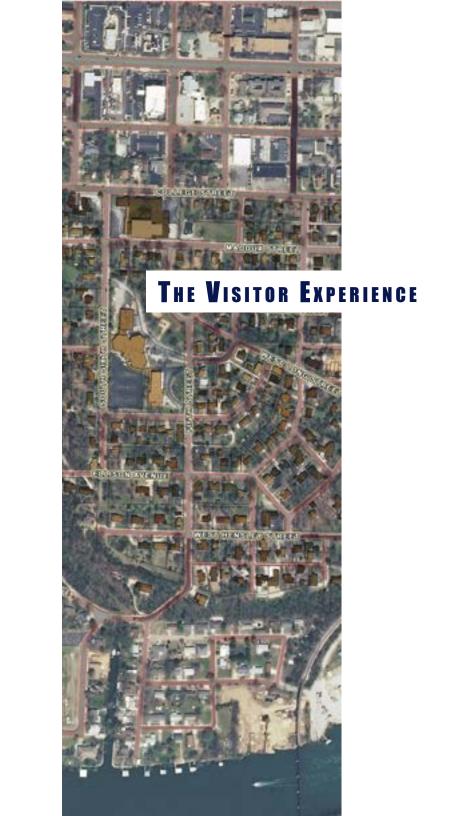
**Offer Live Where You Work Incentives:** Explore the use of CDBG funding matched with funding from local employers to provide down payment and closing cost assistance for employees seeking to live in targeted sections of the City of Branson, such as the downtown and "Hill" districts.

**Rental Inspection Program:** Establish a Rental Inspection Program for rental properties within the City of Branson. Consider requiring all rental properties to obtain a business license that would trigger an inspection when it is up for renewal.

**Neighborhood Design Guidelines (Grants/ Loans):** Develop Design Guidelines for Downtown and "The Hill District" that preserve the historic/unique facades and encourage new construction or renovations to adhere to a set of standards. Provide grants and/or loans to encourage residents/developers to implement the designs.

Incentives for Infill Development: The City of Branson should pursue acquiring derelict or vacant lots and granting or selling them at a reduced price to either nonprofit or for profit developers. These developers must agree to build on these lots based on the established Neighborhood Design Guidelines. These efforts should be particularly focused on the blocks surrounding the Branson School in "The Hill District"

Neighborhood Improvement Districts: Explore the creation of a Neighborhood Improvement District (NID) in an effort to target local, state, and federal resources in "The Hill District" and downtown. NID can be similar to a Tax Increment Finance District (TIF) that utilizes the incremental increase in tax value to fund public improvements such as sidewalk, streetlights, and related infrastructure improvements. Other options include creating a special assessment district as part of the NID where owners would agree to assess themselves a certain amount of money to facilitate the development of public improvements. This could be especially useful in the construction of sidewalks in the Hill District especially if funding is leveraged with CDBG and General Fund sources.



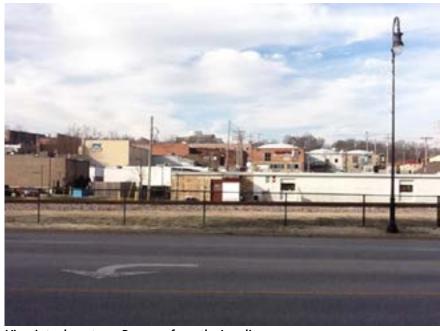
#### CREATING AN IDEAL VISITOR EXPERIENCE

Branson has done an exceptional job of marketing its many entertainment venues, and creating a continuous string of exciting experiences for visitors to the strip. The city could do just as good a job of marketing and integrating another major asset that it has: itself.

A significant market exists for people who are interested in experiencing the historic city of Branson. This kind of cultural and heritage tourism is different from the entertainment tourism at which Branson excels -- it takes place principally on foot, and is made possible by careful attention to the fabric of the city. Without paying attention to the subtleties of this pedestrian experience, and without taking action to improve it in the same way that one would address automobile congestion, the whole opportunity will be lost.

Imagine a visitor leaving the Hilton Hotel at Branson Landing. The view from the front door of the hotel is uninviting: a haphazard array of the backs of buildings, set over a vacant, gravel-lined railway lot, behind a multi-lane thoroughfare. This view does not communicate the fact that something of value lies across the street. While it is not currently available, the railroad lot is of great strategic value. It has the potential to frame the street and create an inviting presence.

Next the visitor walks down the sidewalk to the intersection. To the left, Branson Landing offers visible shopping, enticing music, and a fountain that shoots flame. To the right is a long and plain crosswalk that takes you to Main Street. The crosswalk is not terrible, but it definitely doesn't shoot flame. Which would you take?



*View into downtown Branson from the Landing.* 



Crosswalk leading from the landing into downtown Branson.

Visitors need to be invited across the street. They need to know two critical facts: that the intersection is for them, and that there are exciting opportunities on the other side. There are many crosswalk treatments that can communicate these facts. In fact, the center of the intersection can itself be painted or treated, to activate what is otherwise a huge plain of asphalt.





Examples of creative crosswalk treatments.

As you cross Branson Landing Boulevard, there are a number of barriers that communicate that you should turn around: fences, barricades, blaring signals, and signs that say "Do Not Cross" or "Do Not Park". This corner is both empty and hostile. However, the train station is a beautiful building. It could be converted into a restaurant with outdoor seating, which would activate the corner. Nothing attracts people like seeing groups of other people out having a good time.



As it stands, while there are plenty of cues telling someone what not to do, there is nothing communicating what they \*should\* do. This situation needs to be reversed. An attractive visitor kiosk could be set into one of the currently-empty concrete pads in front of the convention center. This would orient visitors and give them even more reason to be out on the street. This would also counteract the otherwise empty and vacant character of this block, which currently is a gap in the urban fabric. There is no street wall, no sense of already having arrived anywhere. It doesn't belong to anyone, much less to a visitor from out of town.





Examples of creative visitor kiosks.



A view up the hill, toward the former high school.

The heart of downtown Branson is a significant uphill climb, which can present a meaningful barrier to walking. But this hill won't matter if people never reach that point because they decided to avoid the vacant, empty gap altogether.

As our visitor makes his way along Main Street, he reaches the intersection with Commercial Avenue. Commercial is a beautiful street, and could be conducive

to any number of pedestrian-oriented activities to draw people downtown, such as weekend farmers markets or art shows. These are not large events that draw tens of thousands of people once a year; they are more modest events that bring in a few thousand people every week. They create an ongoing sense of vitality, and add a rhythm to the downtown week. Once these few thousand people are downtown for the activity, they will then stay for brunch or window shopping.

By contrast, the intersection of Main and Veterans Highway is designed with wide curb cuts to facilitate car traffic. This means that valuable space that could be dedicated to the pedestrian experience is given over to automobiles. Even so, the pedestrians know in their heart that this space "belongs" to the Main Street experience -- which is why they sometimes take their lives into their own hands and stand in the street.



The gateway to the project area.

The law says this space belongs to cars, but cars don't shop as they're dashing across town. The turning radius should be decreased to give that space back to the shoppers.

For car travels, this intersection is the main gateway to downtown. But there is little about it that creates a meaningful sense of arrival. This intersection should be transformed into a real gateway, which proudly proclaims: "You Are Here. This Place Is Special. Check It Out."

If our visitor has not yet been turned back, he might continue along Veterans Boulevard, with its car-dominated streetscape, to the intersection with College Street.

This oddly-angled intersection has fast traffic, poor visibility,







This oddly-angled intersection *Views of existing downtown Branson pedestrian* and car environment.







Views of potential treatments to make downtown more accessible for pedestrians.

and wide expanses for crossing. Yet it is also a major pathway for city employees trying to get to downtown. This intersection needs crosswalks or bridges to help connect downtown to the municipal building and the neighborhood up the hill.

Assuming our visitor survived the crossing, he might then begin walking along the sidewalk up College. Unfortunately, the sidewalk ends, which would force him into the street. During our time in Branson, we repeatedly heard complaints about people walking in the streets, but this is an inevitable result of the lack of sidewalks throughout the neighborhood. Streets like College are incredibly wide, given how few people live along them and how

little traffic they carry. They could easily receive a "road diet", slimming down to a narrower roadway bounded by ample sidewalks, street trees, and street lights. The existing right of way would easily house all of this, and the result would be much more attractive, friendly, and desirable neighborhood.

The neighborhood is already quite attractive. The houses are appealing, historic, and well maintained. The views of the Lake Taneycomo Valley are delightful, and the streets are quiet. There is no reason why this neighborhood should not be recognized as a valuable asset for the town, with a renovated historic school building serving as its heart. Once it is treated as such by Branson residents, it will be recognized as such by visitors.



# **Branson Sustainable Design Assessment Team Members**

## Tom Liebel, FAIA, LEED FELLOW, NCARB – Team Leader

Tom Liebel, FAIA, LEED Fellow is a Principal with Marks, Thomas Architects, a Baltimore-based multi-disciplinary design firm. Recently elevated to the College of Fellows of the American Institute of Architects, Tom was also one of 34 individuals just named to the inaugural class of LEED Fellows. Tom has been involved in integrating sustainable design principles into a variety of ground-breaking adaptive use and historic preservation projects over the past fifteen years, including the innovative mixed-use projects, such as Miller's Court and Union Mill. Projects Tom has worked on have received multiple local, state and national awards for design, smart growth, sustainable design and historic preservation, including national awards from the American Institute of Architects, Urban Land Institute and the United States Environmental Protection Agency.

Tom is involved in ongoing research exploring the relationship between sustainability, preservation and urban design, and has a particular interest in the use of urban adaptive use projects to promote neighborhood revitalization and civic engagement.

Author, critic and mentor, Tom has consulted on green projects nationally and internationally and in 2009 authored a chapter on sustainable design for the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Main Street Program publication, Revitalizing Main Street: A Practitioner's Guide to Comprehensive Commercial District Revitalization.

Most recently, Tom was appointed by the Governor of Maryland to Chair the Maryland Green Building Council.

# Jean Carroon, FAIA, LEED – Adaptive Use & Sustainability

Jean Carroon leads Goody Clancy's extensive preservation and renovation practice. She has received national recognition for her special expertise in applying sustainable design technology to historic buildings and has been appointed to (Boston) Mayor Menino's Green Building Task Force and the Advisory Board of the Green Roundtable's Nexus Green Building Resource Center. Her book, Sustainable Preservation; Greening Existing Buildings, was published in 2010 by John Wiley & Sons. Jean is also a recognized expert in the design of accessibility solutions for historic buildings. She has led Goody Clancy's restoration of some of the most distinguished landmark buildings in the country, including H.H. Richardson's Trinity Church in Boston. She has also directed the renovation of a number of venerated buildings on historic university campuses throughout New England.

Jean lectures frequently on preservation and sustainable design topics to local and national audiences, including the National audiences, including the National Building Museum in Washington, DC. She has participated in panels and symposia for such organizations as the General Services Administration, AIA Livable Communities, the Association for Preservation Technology, and the Green Building Alliance, and is a member of the National Trust for Historic Preservation Sustainability Coalition.

#### Paul Fontaine - Urban Design/Placemaking

Paul Fontaine is a nationally award-winning urban planner and designer who has extensive experience in working on public - private sector partnerships to bolster local economic revitalization and land use strategies. As an instructor at the University of Michigan's Taubman College of Architecture and Planning, Paul creates and co-leads client based urban planning projects that serve as the final studio for graduate level planners. Paul leads Fontaine Urban Design, an urban design firm that specializes in civic revitalization, brownfield redevelopment and grant writing assistance. He started working as an urban designer and planner 20 years ago after obtaining a MS in Urban and Regional Planning from Columbia University. Paul lives in Ann Arbor with his incredible wife and demanding cat. In his off time, he is either looking for a great story -- whether it's from a book, movie, play, opera or good friends, or playing basketball at the YMCA.

#### Abe Farkas – Public-Private Partnerships/Finance

Abe Farkas is the development services director with ECONorthwest. Farkas has nearly three decades of experience in structuring successful public-private partnerships that have improved urban neighborhoods, business districts, and university environments. Farkas is the former Development Director for the Portland Development Commission; Planning and Development Director for the City of Eugene, OR; Economic Development Manager for the City of Seattle; Director of Community Development and Planning for the City of Fort Wayne, IN; and Assistant Professor of Housing and Public Policy at the University of Tennessee. Most recently Farkas was President of the Farkas Group,

a development services company in Portland, OR. Several mixed-use, public-private partnerships projects, which Farkas helped structure, have been transit-oriented developments, achieved LEED certification (silver to platinum) for sustainability, and were recipients of regional or national awards.

#### **Laura Carstens – Land Use**

Laura Carstens joined the City of Dubuque, Iowa in 1989. As Planning Services Manager, she is responsible for administration and enforcement of the City's zoning, subdivision, floodplain, and historic preservation regulations, as well as long and short range planning and grant writing/administration for the community, riverfront, downtown, historic preservation, bike/hike trail system, annexation, census, and other special areas and projects. She coordinates staff support to the Zoning Advisory Commission, Zoning Board of Adjustment, Long Range Planning Advisory Commission, Historic Preservation Commission, Development Review Committee, and Port of Dubuque Design Review Committee.

Laura managed the adoption of Dubuque's first Comprehensive Plan and Future Land Use Map in 60 years, incorporating the three pillars of sustainability – environmental, economic and social — and has overseen two updates to the Plan. She has been involved with award-winning Master Plans for the Downtown, Port of Dubuque, Airport, Washington Neighborhood, and Historic Millwork District. She manages the City's vehicular, pedestrian, and bicycle wayfinding sign systems. She is a member

of the Dubuque County Smart Planning Consortium, developing a sustainable comprehensive plan for the region.

Guidelines". She authored an article on Sustainable Dubuque for the October 2010 "Sustainable Communities" edition of the National Civic Review.

Laura created a Development Review Committee of City Departments to meet weekly with developers and design professionals, and formed a Developers' Roundtable as a forum for open communication and coordination for improving the City's development review process. She coordinated the overhaul of Dubuque's historic preservation program, resulting in stronger regulations, design guidelines, and financial incentives. Laura oversaw of creation of the City's Unified Development Code that incorporates historic preservation, design guidelines, and sustainable design practices with zoning and subdivision regulations. She managed the Dubuque SDAT process and was an SDAT member for Beatrice, Nebraska.

Previously, Laura served as a Planner, and then Community Renewal Coordinator, for the City of Decatur, Illinois, and as Economic Development Director for the City of Maquoketa, Iowa. Laura holds a B.S. in Environmental Studies from Millikin University in Decatur, Illinois, and a Master of Arts degree in Environmental Planning from the University of Illinois - Springfield. She is a member of the American Planning Association (APA) and serves on the Board of Directors for Preservation Iowa.

Laura was a co-presenter at the National Preservation Conference on "Preservation Green Lab Pilot Cities", at the APA National Planning Conference on "Sustainability in the Midwest", and at the National Main Streets Conference on "Greening Your Design

## Chikwe C. Njoku, CPM - Neighborhood Revitalization/Capacity

Chikwe Njoku is the Neighborhood Revitalization Program Coordinator in Arlington County's Neighborhood Services Division. Mr. Njoku it the Program Manager for the revitalization efforts in a neighborhood in the southern end of the County. He is also responsible for working with interdisciplinary teams made composed of various County Staff, to work on special project as it relates to furthering the County's community and revitalization efforts in both residential and neighborhood commercial areas. Mr. Njoku has over 15 years of experience in community development and revitalization planning including managing the US Department of Housing and Urban Developments (HUD) Urban Empowerment Zone Program for the City of Sumter, South Carolina. He has worked extensively in both the preparation and management of various state and federal grants. He has extensive experience in working with neighborhood associations, community organizations, and elected officials surrounding the planning and implementation of community redevelopment plans in addition to developing a managing civic engagement initiatives and strategies such as the Arlington Neighborhood College. This program provides education and leadership training to community leaders and organizers while assisting them in understanding how to navigate the County Government structure.

Mr. Njoku has a Bachelor of Science in Political Science, a second Bachelor's Degree in Economics from Francis Marion University in Florence, SC and a Masters in Public Administration from Troy State University in Troy, Alabama. He is also a graduate of George Washington University Center for Excellence in Leadership Regional Executive Development Program.

## **Brad Rogers – Green Building/Development**

Brad Rogers is the Director of Community Projects for the Eastern Shore Land Conservancy, where he creates transformative development projects in rural towns and cities along the Chesapeake Bay. Previously, he was a real estate developer and co-owner of Baltimore Green Construction, the premier green building firm in Maryland. Mr. Rogers has a Law Degree and a Masters of Environmental Management from Duke University.

# Joel Mills- Director, AIA Center for Communities by Design

Joel Mills is Director of the American Institute for Architects' Center for Communities by Design. The Center is a leading provider of pro bono technical assistance and participatory planning for community sustainability. Through its design assistance programs, the Center has worked in over 200 communities across 47 states. Its processes have been modeled successfully in the United States and across Europe. In 2010, the Center was named Organization of the Year by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) for its impact on communities and contributions to the field.

Joel's 18-year career has been focused on strengthening civic capacity and civic institutions around the world. This work has helped millions of people participate in democratic processes, visioning efforts, and community planning initiatives. In the United States, Joel has worked with dozens of communities in over 25 states, leading participatory initiatives and collaborative processes that have facilitated public-private partnerships and led to hundreds of millions of dollars in new investment. His work has been featured on ABC World News Tonight, Nightline, CNN, The Next American City, Smart City Radio, The National Civic Review, Ecostructure Magazine, The Washington Post, and dozens of other media sources.

In December 2010, he was elected to the Board of Directors for the IAP2-USA. He is also a member of the International Association of Facilitators (IAF), the American Planning Association, the National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation (NCDD), and the Mid-Atlantic Facilitators Network.

## **Erin Simmons- Director, AIA Design Assistance**

Erin Simmons is the Director of Design Assistance at the Center for Communities by Design at the American Institute of Architects in Washington, DC. Her primary role at the AIA is to provide process expertise, facilitation and support for the Center's Sustainable Design Assistance Team (SDAT ) and Regional and Urban Design Assistance Team (R/UDAT) programs. In this capacity, she works with AIA components, members, partner organizations and community members to provide technical design assistance to communities across the country. Through its design assistance

programs, the AIA has worked in 200 communities across 47 states. In 2010, the Center was named Organization of the Year by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) for its impact on communities and contributions to the field.

Erin is a leading practitioner of the design assistance process. Her portfolio includes work in over 45 communities across the United States. A frequent lecturer on the subject of creating livable communities and sustainability, Erin contributed to the recent publication "Assessing Sustainability: A guide for Local Governments". Prior to joining the AIA, Erin worked as historic preservationist and architectural historian for an environmental and engineering firm in Georgia, where she practiced preservation planning, created historic district design guidelines and zoning ordinances, conducted historic resource surveys, and wrote property nominations for the National Register of Historic Places. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in History from Florida State University and a Master's degree in Historic Preservation from the University of Georgia.