

Design Workshop, Inc.
Landscape Architecture
Land Planning
Urban Design
Strategic Services

Attn: Olmsted Medal Nominations

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Ms. Carolyn Mitchell
Honors and Awards Coordinator
American Society of Landscape Architecture
636 Eye Street, NW
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Asheville
Denver
Lake Tahoe
Phoenix
Salt Lake City
Santa Fe
Santiago
São Paulo

Dear Ms. Mitchell,

I would like to take this opportunity to nominate Elizabeth “Boo” Thomas and the Center for Planning Excellence for the Olmsted Medal. Having grown up in Louisiana, I have a first hand knowledge of the challenge of accomplishing creative land planning and landscape architecture in a relatively poor region of the country and one in which private property rights are paramount. It is a testament to Mrs. Thomas’ tenaciousness and creativity that she has been able to accomplish so much to advance the profession of landscape architecture in the state and to bring quality planning to a region in great need.

A non-profit organization, the Center for Planning Excellence (CPEX) was founded in 1998 as an outgrowth of an initiative called Plan Baton Rouge to create a redevelopment strategy for the downtown area. The plan, which demonstrated Smart Growth principles and the leveraging of public investment to drive new private investment has proven to be a great success. In 2005, the group led a neighborhood planning effort for a new Hope VI project in old South Baton Rouge. CPEX continues to oversee both the Plan Baton Rouge and Hope VI efforts.

In 2004, CPEX participated with the Environmental Protection effort in an examination of the East Baton Rouge Parish comprehensive plan. This audit led to updated codes and new standards for development to encourage Smart Growth. The effort could not have proven to be more timely.

In 2005, hurricanes Katrina and Rita hit south Louisiana, the greatest natural disaster in our nation’s history. In January 2006, Plan Baton Rouge officially became The Center for Planning Excellence and was called upon to play a larger planning effort within the state. The statewide recovery planning process called Louisiana Speaks: Our Voice, Our Plan, Our Future was led by the organization.

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This is the largest regional planning effort and public involvement process ever undertaken in the United States. In 2008, Louisiana Speaks received the Gulf Guardian award from the Environmental Protection Agency. The effort received an honor award in communications from the American Society of Landscape Architects.

Since that initial effort CPEX has led comprehensive planning efforts in Tangipahoa, West Feliciana, Point Coupee, East Baton Rouge, Ascension, and St. Charles parishes. Their ongoing efforts to create a Coastal Development manual will expand and leverage their efforts in Louisiana to create development standards of national, if not international significance. These projects have further raised the profile of landscape architecture within the state of Louisiana.

The work of the organization has been nothing short of phenomenal. In a state whose political history is legendary, to have accomplished so much is remarkable. To have done so in response to one of the greatest natural disasters in our country's history is a blessing for the people of Louisiana.

None of this could have been accomplished without the exceptional patience, persistence, and grace of Mrs. Thomas. Her work provides an example to all landscape architects of the finest our profession has to offer. Her stewardship of the natural and cultural environment of the state of Louisiana is clearly in the tradition of Frederick Law Olmsted for whom this honor is named. It is with great enthusiasm that I nominate Elizabeth "Boo" Thomas and the Center for Planning Excellence for the Olmsted medal.

Sincerely,



Kurt Culbertson
Chairman

