

Small Community Visioning Pilot Initiative

Fact Sheet

Supporting Small Communities for the Future

Throughout our history, America has been defined by the small communities that dot the landscape. Although the diversity of our urban and rural fabric represents one of our greatest strengths, most Americans still call small communities home. According to the Census Bureau, approximately 93 percent of Americans live in communities with fewer than 25,000 residents. As small communities retain their central importance to our nation, many have faced significant economic, demographic, social, and environmental challenges.

Helping Communities Meet These Challenges

The challenges small communities face are significant, but small communities can meet them by bringing their residents together to talk about the issues most important to them and how they can address the most pressing needs together. Many small communities have the will and the energy to develop a vision for their future, but they often lack sufficient staff or the essential technical resources required to successfully facilitate intensive public participation and develop the graphic and visual products that help make the community's vision tangible.

Community visioning is a process by which planning and design assistance is given to communities to help to identify needs, set goals, envision solutions, and develop conceptual plans to implement a shared vision for the future.



COURTESY THE CENTER FOR RURAL DESIGN/UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

The Center for Rural Design at the University of Minnesota aids dairy farmers as they evaluate expansion options.



COURTESY SMALL TOWN DESIGN INITIATIVE/MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

The Small Town Design Initiative at Michigan State University engages residents to develop a vision for their community.

Landscape architects play a critical role because they are especially skilled at translating the community's vision from the written and spoken word into designs—sketches, concepts, or digital maps that overlay the many factors that influence land use and other decisions. When local residents agree they want to “create a gateway” to their community or “revitalize their downtown,” landscape architects have the skills and experience to help them visualize a range of options to achieve their goals.

Agriculture

Maintaining the viability and vitality of family farms and ranches is not only important to the economic health of many small communities but to their core identity as well. Community visioning is being used to support efforts to ensure that production agriculture can grow compatibly with other community goals, including environmental stewardship.



COURTESY LIVING ROADWAYS PROGRAM

Lisbon, Iowa, transformed its downtown with assistance from the Living Roadways Program.



For example, the Center for Rural Design at the University of Minnesota, in partnership with the Minnesota Milk Producers Association, has developed comprehensive systems and tools that allow dairy farmers, local leaders, and others to map areas most suitable for expanding dairy farms.

Community and Economic Development

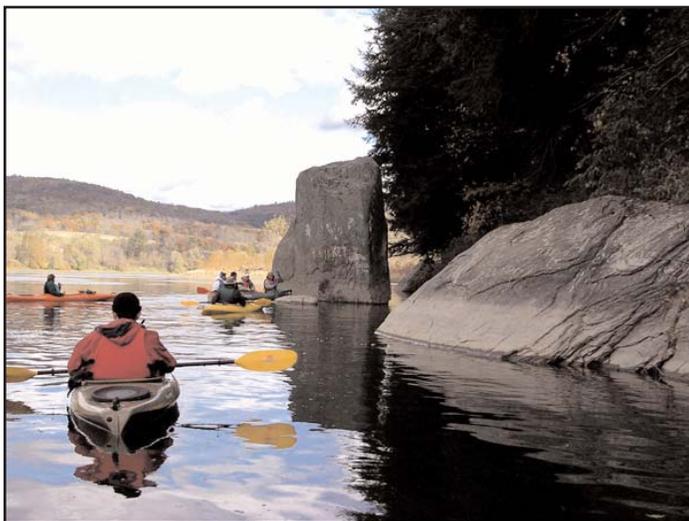
The broadest application of visioning today addresses community and economic development needs. Almost every vision is directly tied to the community's landscape—its parks, open space, downtown, roads, rivers, and neighborhoods.

Since 1996, Iowa's Living Roadways Community Visioning Program—a partnership between Iowa State University, the Iowa Department of Transportation, Trees Forever, and professional landscape architects—has helped more than 125 small communities to effectively plan transportation enhancements. Projects include downtown streetscapes, community entryways along major roads, and recreational trails.

Recreation

Attracting and retaining residents depends in part on providing services and amenities that families and businesses value, including recreational resources. Many visioning efforts focus on trails, greenways, and parks.

Landscape architecture students from Penn State have worked with the Susquehanna Economic Development Association Council of Governments, the Pennsylvania Environmental Council, and the Endless Mountains Heritage District to develop analyses and initial concepts for a greenway corridor for the entire 500-mile-long Susquehanna River system.



COURTESY PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY

Students from Penn State developed initial concepts for a greenway corridor that will provide recreation opportunities for residents and tourists.



COURTESY COMMUNITY DESIGN ASSISTANCE CENTER/VIRGINIA TECH

In Mount Jackson, Virginia, the Community Design Assistance Center at Virginia Tech helped to identify the best site for a new town hall.

Investing in the Future of Small Communities

Today, university-based programs in several states are providing assistance along with landscape architects and other professionals working pro bono. Most programs stitch together funding from states and foundations and generally require communities to contribute as well. In many areas, demand for help outstrips the resources available to provide the technical assistance that small communities need.

Small Community Visioning Pilot Initiative

ASLA proposes a national pilot program to support small community visioning efforts. The program is modeled upon well-developed programs run largely by land grant colleges and other universities with participation from private sector professionals. This approach could augment these programs and make resources available to provide similar services in other regions of the country.

ASLA's legislation would:

- Establish the Small Community Visioning Initiative with in the U.S. Department of Agriculture and authorize \$5 million annually for the initiative.
- Provide grants to small communities (with fewer than 25,000 people), Native American tribes, Alaskan native villages, land grant colleges, and other universities to support community visioning projects.
- Facilitate visioning efforts that are participatory and community driven and involve partnerships between communities, universities, and private sector professionals.
- Encourage community support by requiring grant recipients to invest local dollars or make in-kind contributions to cover a portion of the costs associated with the visioning process.