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AIA Launches "Blueprint for America"

Nationwide community service program marks 150th anniversary

The AIA launched a nationwide community service program, titled "Blueprint for America: A Gift to the Nation," on May 19 by funding the first 60 grants for collaborative visioning initiatives between AIA architects and their communities created to produce a shared vision for a more livable future. The AIA will provide \$2 million in the next six months to fund more than 200 grants.

The Blueprint for America initiative is the primary program and main focus of AIA150, a yearlong observance in 2007 that will mark the 150th anniversary of the founding of the AIA. This nationwide initiative will empower citizens to share in creating a vision for their communities' design priorities. From Lubbock to Rhode Island, Birmingham to Puerto Rico, AIA architects and members in more than 160 communities will participate in Blueprint initiatives that use community engagement in a collaborative process and quality design as keys to improving a community's livability. Blueprint initiatives are a gift to the community from the members of the AIA, and the members' participation in the initiative is provided *pro bono*.



Creating a vision

"The Blueprint for America is primarily about a vision of what's possible for communities," says AIA President Kate Schwensen, FAIA. "It's about helping communities see what is possible when architects,

mayors and other civic leaders, and fellow citizens work together to tackle such issues as brownfields, accessibility for the disabled, affordable housing, sprawl, and environmental sustainability."

"The Blueprint for America is our one chance to make a significant, substantive difference in the future of our nation's communities. And AIA members, working through their state and local components, are key to the program's success," says George Miller, FAIA, chair of the AIA150 Committee. "We've undertaken the important task of launching these initiatives and uniting architects in service to their communities by providing the necessary resources for this bold undertaking to be successful."

See the complete list of the first 60 Blueprint for America grants recipients. [[12kb PDF](#)]

Celebratory events for the AIA's 150th anniversary will include National Architecture Week, April 9–14, 2007, in which AIA architects across the country will concurrently host such events as architecture-related lectures, exhibits, K-12 programs, and architecture week proclamation ceremonies. For more information, visit the AIA150 Web site. [▶](#)

The drawings in this article are from the Pleasant Grove, Utah R/UDAT, which took place in January.

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"With the launching of this community service initiative, a simple but clear message emerges," Schwensen says. "The Blueprint for America is about doing things with your community, not for it. While the distinction may seem minor, indeed it can change the way the entire community process works."

Myriad ways to help our communities

Of the 60 initiatives selected to receive funding grants, the issues addressed include revitalizing a downtown, designing a master plan to save a historic community, dealing with homelessness, working with state legislators to build a coalition focused on green design, and rezoning land along a light-rail system. Among the initiatives selected to receive funding grants are:

AIA Columbus, for the Multimodal Transit Station Design (MTSD) Initiative:

In 2007, the AIA Columbus Livable Communities Committee will implement its seventh community design charrette: "MTSD Initiative." The charrette will focus on developing passenger facilities that bring together multiple forms of transportation (air, light rail, buses, streetcars, taxis, rental cars, bikeways, etc.) at three or four locations. The initiative will focus on a downtown site, an urban neighborhood, an established suburban neighborhood, and an airport.

AIA Nebraska, for The Flatwater Metroplex: Envisioning Regional Design:

This AIA member initiative will engage regional stakeholders in a collaborative series of local forums and charrettes in which architects, citizens, and community leaders come together to address a region's distinct needs. AIA architects will lead and facilitate the creation of smart-growth visions that promote regional-scale sustainability in five domains: environment, society/culture, technology, economics, and public policy. This comprehensive community service program is designed to facilitate consensus among stakeholders, increase public awareness about building livable communities in a climate of rapid change and growth, help communities imagine solutions, and increase citizen/stakeholder participation.

AIA East Tennessee, for Magnolia Avenue Corridor Study: A Revitalization Initiative for East Knoxville:

This initiative involves a planning study and implementation plan for Magnolia Avenue, the main east-bound corridor connecting downtown Knoxville with the predominately African-American neighborhoods of east Knoxville. This corridor is historic and was previously an affluent, vibrant corridor for commerce and housing. The goal of the study is to provide a blueprint for the public and private sectors as they seek to invest in the corridor's revitalization. An early thought is to enact a restoration project to a building on Magnolia Avenue currently owned/occupied by a nonprofit or community service agency. The goal is to demonstrate that the restoration can serve as a catalyst for additional improvement projects along the corridor.

AIA Vancouver, for the Vancouver USA Streetcar Feasibility Study:

AIA Vancouver invited the City of Vancouver to partner in drafting a shared vision. The initial plan is to introduce a small and local streetcar loop system within the downtown vicinity that provides opportunities for smart, efficient, and sustainable expansion in the years to come. This would provide immense public transportation benefits and an opportunity to bring vibrancy and increased foot traffic to local businesses and downtown Vancouver. The streetcar system will be strategically

located to unify currently planned amenities, improve Vancouver's livability, and provide an alternative transportation option while encouraging community partnerships.

"The enthusiasm, dedication, and creativity represented by these examples are testimony to the power of a vision to unite architects in a common cause, that of creating safe, healthy, sustainable, livable communities," Miller says. A



key requirement of the Blueprint for America initiatives is that they are guided by the AIA's "Ten Principles for Livable Communities," which challenge architects to demonstrate how good design is an investment and that well-designed communities attract and benefit residents, businesses, and visitors and meet the needs of present and future generations alike.

Blueprint for America initiatives will evolve over the next three years and beyond. In 2006, AIA members begin engaging local leaders, defining the issues, and preparing to launch the eventual program. Local AIA component initiatives will be developed in 2007, the anniversary year. In 2008, the AIA national component will compile initiatives and release the national Blueprint for America.

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