

Steve Austin

Neighborhoods and Planning

For over 30 years, I've been fortunate to be able to combine my passion for building community with my design, research, and writing abilities. My training as a landscape architect and lawyer has been vital to my work as an urban planner.

I've been an executive director of a planning commission in one of the fastest growing cities in the USA, responsible for over \$2 billion in investment, and leaving a legacy of a people and environmentally friendly community through innovative policies and actions.

Through my consulting practice, I have created beautiful and enduring neighborhoods with creative design, worked closely with empowered citizens to craft comprehensive and strategic plans, and authored numerous significant and thoroughly researched studies.

As a land use lawyer, I have written detailed codes and ordinances, as well as represented clients before citizen groups and governmental bodies.

As a community organizer, I have worked with underserved communities to ensure equity in planning and development decisions, led fund raising efforts to implement community visions, and helped people connect ideas to action.





NEIGHBORHOODS

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South End Park

Lexington, Ky

***"The largest redevelopment project in
Lexington's history."***

I was part of a team to address an environmental justice requirement for a road relocation through Lexington's most impoverished neighborhood. As our work progressed, it became evident that there would be no way to mitigate the road's impact without creating a new neighborhood.

Meeting with local residents and stakeholders over a period of several months, the concept for this new neighborhood emerged. "Remain in place," was the first principle - no resident would be displaced against their wishes.

The resulting plan created a variety of housing types both rental and for purchase, with a minimum of 25%

reserved for low income residents to ensure every current resident could stay.

The master plan added new shops and offices, with a focus on locally made goods and services, including social services, created a church as a centerpiece of the "neighborhood square," and protected the community park. A Community Land Trust was created to be the instrument to insure adherence to the project's goals.

The project won a Practice Honor Award from the Kentucky Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects.

Townley Center Lexington, Ky

This infill development was the first in Lexington to incorporate mixed-use New Urbanism principles. A commercial retail area was planned as the literal heart of the new development. I was responsible for influencing the planning concepts for the neighborhood. Neighborhood streets link mixed-density residential areas to this center: walkability is very high here. Garages and services are located on alleys. A symbolic piece of public art stands at the center of the development.





Old Todd's Road Townhouses

Lexington, Ky

The design challenge on this infill project was how best to accommodate the desire for density without the entire site being dominated by cars. The solution was to have garages and service areas set behind the units, while the units themselves fronted onto two greens. The greens become the focal point of the

development, focusing attention inward, away from the unsightly surroundings. These greens serve as community builders, bringing people together. The greens also protect existing trees on the site. These are the first formal greens in Lexington in over 100 years.



Signature Estates

Lexington, Ky

The challenge on this site was to develop a design that allowed maximum single family dwelling density at minimal sacrifice to the scores of mature trees on the property and without the loss of character to the historic 150 year old house, once home to Henry Clay's brother.

I ensured that a sensitive road alignment, restricted building envelopes, and delicate grading would protect the trees. Strict

architectural controls were adopted to ensure compatibility with the historic house. To achieve the exact road alignments, I literally drove where the roads needed to be and then had those locations surveyed and incorporated into the engineering. In order to ensure the arboretum-like aspect of the development, over 150 large trees were planted to provide seasonal interest and, over time, canopy replacement.

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The Champion Trace

Jessamine County, Ky

This is a large-lot residential and golf course development. The course was designed by Arthur Hills, and it has hosted numerous significant golf events, including a PGA tour stop in 2018.

My primary responsibility was to design the road and lot layout. As a key strategy, I used a rise in elevation along

the entrance drive to hide, and then reveal, the lake, course, and clubhouse to visitors. I also used existing tree rows to create "rooms" throughout the residential areas.

I was also responsible for the design of several site features, including areas of the course and the main entrance walls.



Village on the Green

Jessamine County, Ky

Kentucky's first open space conservation subdivision in which 80% of land remains open space. Here, the developer wanted to create a sense of community too often lacking in rural developments, which typically are like conventional suburban developments on steroids.

An analysis of the property revealed the ideal location for a grouping of homes around a central, formal green space.

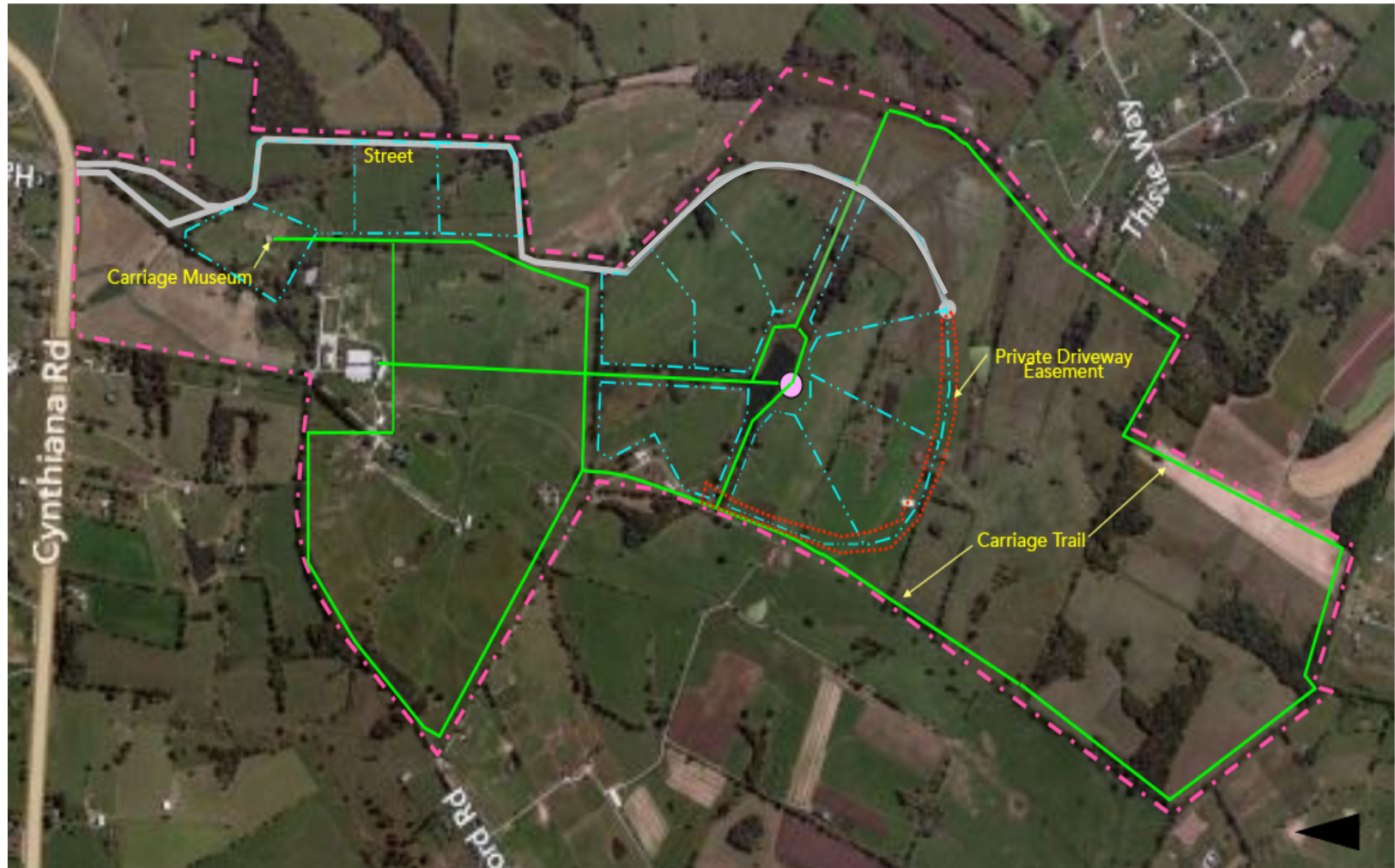
This location was out of the primary viewshed of the highway as well as in an environmentally appropriate area. The design also respected the nearly 200 year old farm house, which became the focal point at the end of the entry drive vista. Walking trails were developed on the eighty acres of the property that remained undeveloped.



Amerson Townhomes Concept

Georgetown, Ky

35 acre development. Key design strategy is creation of connected neighborhood greens. These greens are modeled after those in The Kentlands, Maryland. The Greens are defined by Plane trees and fencing to create room definition.



Gayla Farm

Scott County, Ky

700 acre working farm. The client desired to incorporate large lot homesteads in order to create a community devoted to carriage driving. My challenge was to create a way to add those lots without compromising the existing farming operations while at the same time creating carriage driving trails of great interest.

The preferred solution placed a narrow lane on the perimeter of the

lots, then letting the carriage trails become the true focus of the development. This plan included the creation of a stone bridge across the lake at the center of the development.

I was also tasked with creating conceptual plans for a museum and display garden for the client's collection.



Village at Greathouse Farm

Lexington, Ky

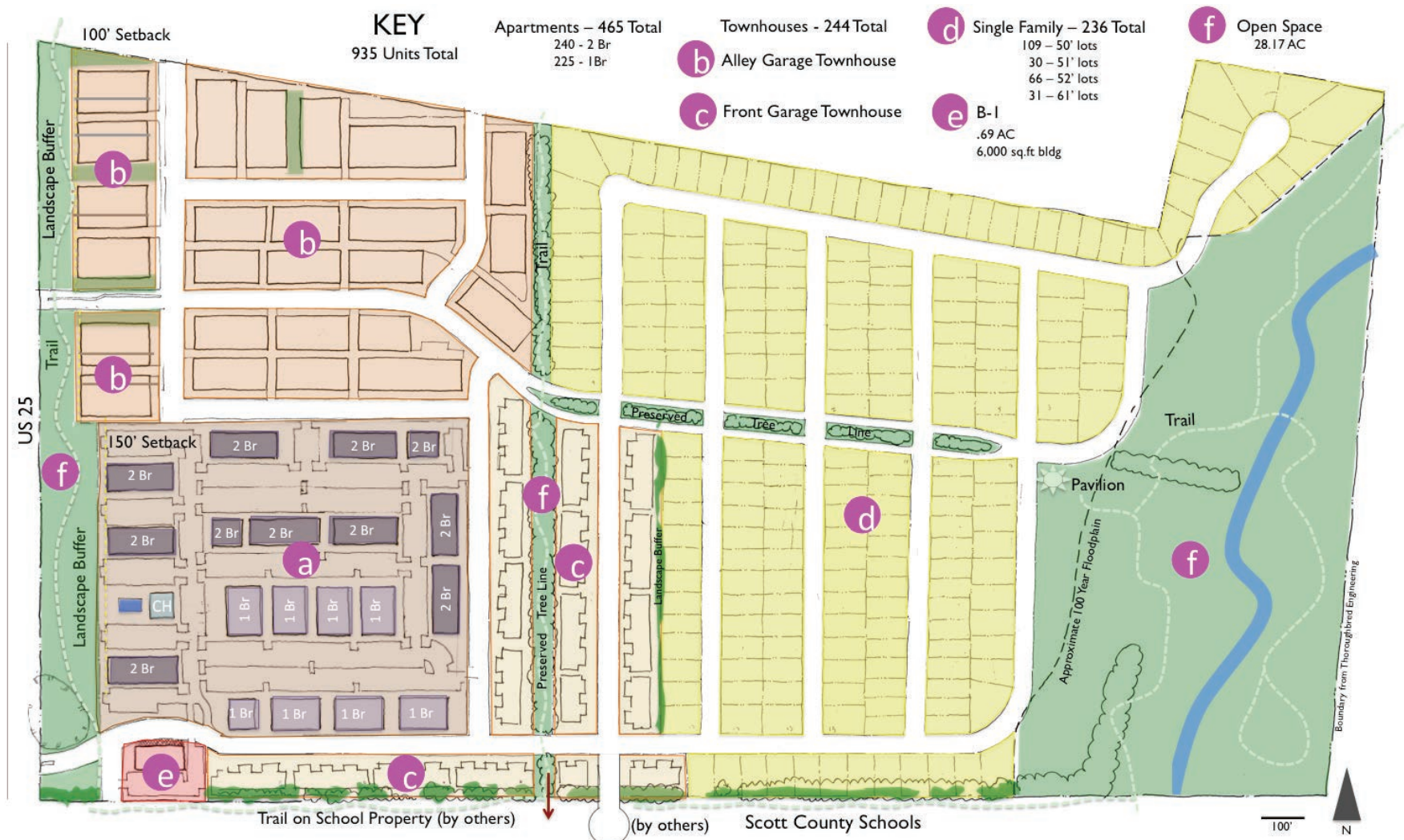
55 acre neighborhood with community green as focal point in mixed use center. Housing units address streets and front onto large neighborhood park with lake, ensuring that open space doesn't seem privatized. Interior trail connection ties into larger network. Outlot impacts are minimized.



Roseglade - Concept

Wilmore, Ky

120 acre traditional neighborhood, with mixed housing types and mixed use center. This development is at the entrance to a historic community, so ample greenspace and setbacks are provided to minimize visual impact. All housing units front onto greenspace to ensure community activation. Form based code created to guide development.



Griffith Property - Zone Change Plan

Georgetown, Ky

Responsible for creation of numerous concepts for 125 acre mixed used development. Key strategies included 25% open space, over 2 miles of trails, visible greenspace from every street in the development.



PLANNING

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Toyota Manufacturing Kentucky

Georgetown, Ky

As Executive Director of the Georgetown-Scott County Planning Commission, I was responsible for planning for, and managing the development of, the first significant expansion of this Toyota facility, North America's largest. This four million square foot expansion was valued at well over \$1 billion.

This expansion added thousands of new jobs in to the region. In Georgetown, I instituted an extensive community engagement process in order to find the core values that should guide the Planning Commission's work. From this, I created comprehensive and small area plans, ordinances, and regulations to direct the growth of the community.



Urban Greenbelt Georgetown, Ky

Georgetown has been Kentucky's fastest growing community for decades. As Executive Director of the community planning commission, I was involved in the creation of an urban greenbelt surrounding a portion of the city. The purpose of this greenbelt is to retain Georgetown's unique identity by preventing sprawl from erasing it.

The greenbelt is not public land, but rather private lands

with development restrictions, the most prominent being that no urban zoning can be placed on the properties, and that no urban services, such as water and sewer, may be made available to the properties. The land has thus been kept in productive agriculture. This is the first and only greenbelt created by ordinance in the state of Kentucky and that it has lasted over a quarter of a century is a testament to its effectiveness.



Context Sensitive Highway Design

Bluegrass, Ky

While CEO of Bluegrass Tomorrow, the organization created, in partnership with the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet, a national model for road corridor planning. The "Bluegrass Corridor Management Planning Handbook" was funded by the Federal Highway Administration and is cited by them

as a model for better transportation planning. I utilized the design principles we created in numerous regional road planning projects.



Open Space Development

Bluegrass, Ky

As Executive Director of the Georgetown Planning Commission, CEO of Bluegrass Tomorrow, and with my consulting business, I brought open space development to the region.

I wrote the first open space development regulation, promoted their adoption region-wide, and designed the first development in the region based on open

space principles. All were based on the idea of conserving productive agricultural land while at the same time allowing private landowners to realize economic gain from their property. All developments are based on an 80% open space to 20% development ratio.



Bluegrass Regional Plan Central Ky

Bluegrass Tomorrow was formed as a regional planning organization to help guide the one-of-a-kind Bluegrass region after the arrival of the largest Toyota manufacturing facility in North America. My tenure as CEO of Bluegrass Tomorrow was devoted to the creation and implementation of the Bluegrass Regional Plan. The Plan represents the collective vision preferred by a majority of the nearly 750,000 people living in the region developed over 2 years of visioning. I wrote and illustrated the "vision book," above, and presented the concepts hundreds of times to thousands of people around the region

Bluegrass Regional Plan Framework Elements

A Regional Outer Greenbelt

To maintain our identity from the sprawling Louisville and Cincinnati metros

Growing Downtowns

The true hearts of our communities are the new frontier of growth

A Great Transportation Network

Including not only roads but alternatives such as walking, biking and mass transit

Protecting Our Cultural Heritage

Working regionally to designate and protect vital landscape and architectural areas

A Regional Open Space Network

To protect our environment and connect our communities

A Fifty-mile River Park

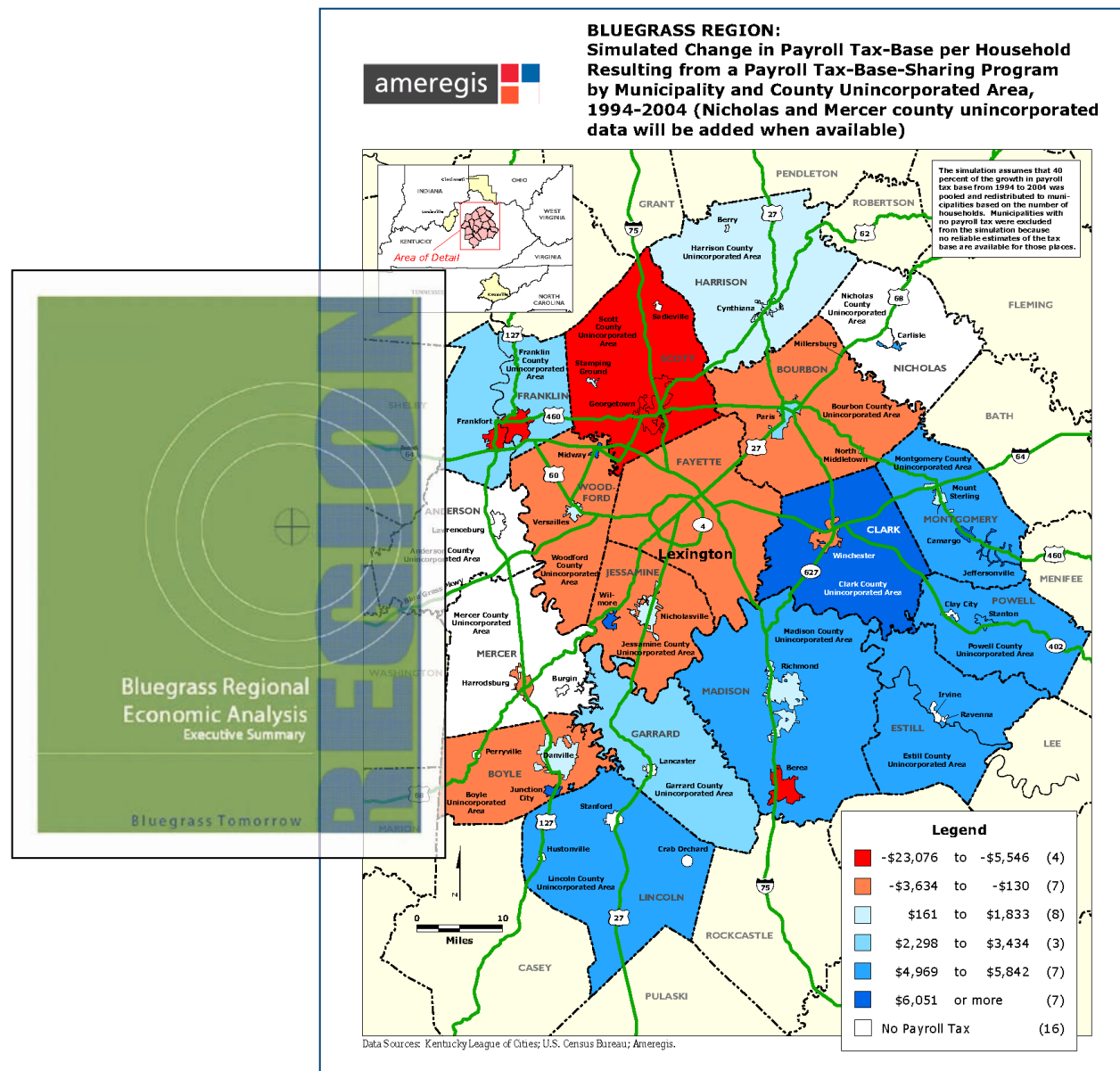
The Kentucky River and its tributaries will connect us

A National Center of Education

To revive our position as "Athens of the West"

Building Beautifully

Great public buildings and spaces, handsome, mixed-use new developments, scenic viewshed protection



Bluegrass Regional Economic Analysis

In 2007, I undertook a groundbreaking study to analyze our region's economy, especially as it pertains to local government revenues. The ultimate goal was to determine if regional revenue sharing was economically feasible.

Our study proved it was not, which led us to recommend that our region led a push to change Kentucky's

constitution to allow for a local option sales tax. That push is gaining momentum.

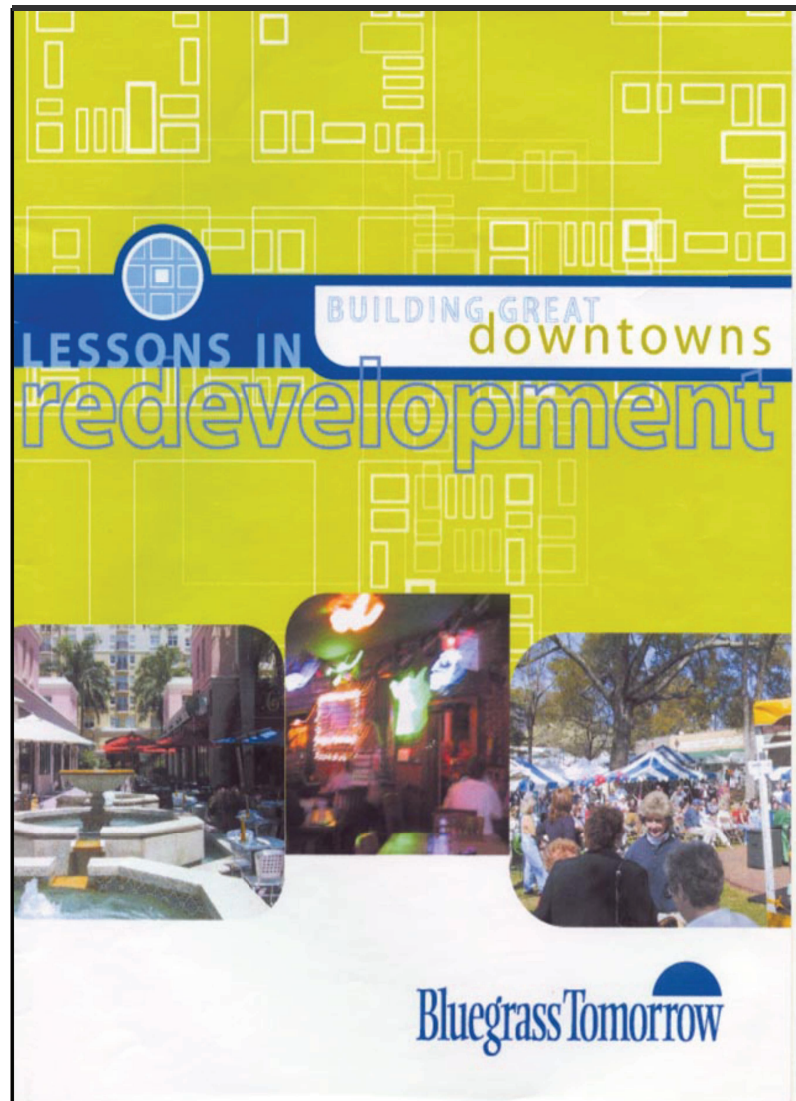
The second part of the report outlines a regional development strategy to improve infrastructure and quality of life amenities. These improvements would be paid for by a collective sharing of the new revenues from local sales taxes.



METRO
REGIONS
STUDIED:
Ann Arbor, MI
Athens, GA
Austin, TX
Baton Rouge, LA
Boulder, CO
Bowling Green, KY
Charlottesville, VA
Chattanooga, TN
Cincinnati, OH
Columbia, MO
Columbia, SC
Eugene, OR
Fayetteville, AR
Fort Collins, CO
Gainesville, FL
Greenville, SC
Knoxville, TN
Louisville, KY
Madison, WI
Nashville, TN
Raleigh, NC
Tuscaloosa, AL

After leaving the CEO position of Bluegrass Tomorrow, I was hired as a consultant to create this benchmarking study as a follow up to my previous study of regional economic conditions. I selected 22 comparable regions to the Bluegrass, in terms of regional context, metro size, and as "college towns," and then studied the economic and quality of life attributes of each. From that I created a

set of 25 benchmark indicators that are used to track and compare the Bluegrass's progress. Some examples of the benchmarks included metro area economic patterns, population and demographic trends, crime and environmental data. This study became the platform for Bluegrass Tomorrow's 10 year work plan and is due to be updated next year.



Lesson in Redevelopment

I wrote and illustrated this manual for governments, developers, and citizens interested in revitalizing downtowns. Contains case studies, technical information, and aspirational possibilities for regional communities.



COMMUNITY

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Planning Process

I am absolutely committed to the idea that citizens can and should lead the planning process. I see my role as a facilitator and translator. Throughout my career, I have organized numerous, completely inclusive community listening and visioning sessions, charettes, and workshops. The outcomes have almost always been fantastically positive and community members come away from the process feeling inspired and empowered.



East End Revitalization

Lexington, Ky

As part of the Legacy Projects from the World Equestrian Games, I was deeply involved in many projects in the historically African-American East End of Lexington. One was the renovation of the historic Lyric Theatre, an institution in the African American neighborhood. The Lyric had been allowed to deteriorate under city ownership, blighting the neighborhood.

The building was redeveloped into a state of the art performance venue and cultural center with a small museum dedicated to the the neighborhood. I participated in developing community awareness, fundraising, and programming concepts for the \$25million project.

an "Art Stop" bus shelter in the neighborhood. Both permanent and rotating art exhibits showcase local artists.

With a large grant from the Knight Foundation, I led the implementation of free wireless broadband system in the neighborhood, the least "connected" in the city.

Working with neighborhood leaders, I implemented a neighborhood banner program to help grow the good vibes that were resurfacing in the neighborhood.



Isaac Murphy Bike Club Lexington, Ky

The Isaac Murphy Bike Club was the vision of Frank X. Walker, Kentucky Poet Laureate. I co-founded the Club and acted as secretary and development director. The purpose of the Club is to link inner city kids to the Legacy Trail.

Isaac Murphy is considered one of the greatest Thoroughbred jockeys of all time. His homeplace – now the Isaac Murphy Memorial Art Garden – is the beginning of the Legacy Trail, which

ends at his burial place, the Kentucky Horse Park.

The Club, which is funded by donations, provides bikes, helmets, and water bottles, education and training, and healthy eating guidance to children who participate in summer activities. The Club sponsors monthly rides, connects kids to community bike repair, and accepts donation of bikes. I loved providing riding lessons to the first groups of kids.



Keeneland Viewshed Management Plan

Fayette County, Ky

***"Protecting the view from the most beautiful
race course in the world"***

Keeneland is the premier Thoroughbred racing venue in the world. Much of its charm lies in the fact that the entire backdrop to the racing consists of unspoiled Bluegrass landscape. Yet most of that view was owned by other interests, potentially causing disastrous consequences. I was the first to point this out and was immediately hired to create a viewshed management plan to ensure that the view would remain.

This plan outlined land use strategies such as purchase of development rights, tree preservation and replanting, and architectural guidelines for any new development on Keeneland's property. This success attracted the attention of Hollywood: portions of the movies *Seabiscuit* and *Dreamers* were filmed here, in part because of the authentic scenery.



East End Reforestation

Lexington, Ky

I was responsible for envisioning, organizing, and implementing an urban reforestation project in Lexington's most de-treed area, the historically African American East End. Over 300 trees were planted in the initial phase. The overall goal is to plant more than 1,000 trees.

I also championed the development of an Youth Urban Tree Corps, where young adults from the neighborhood would be taught arborist skills and then paid for their work on growing the urban forest during summers.

My philosophy was reported in the *Lexington Heard Leader*: "I firmly believe that everyone should live in an urban forest," Austin said. Living in an area full of trees is "just a better way to live, and it shouldn't just be because you can afford to live that way."



Ashland Park Reforestation

Lexington, Ky

Ashland Park is an 90 year-old neighborhood designed by the Olmsted Brothers firm. An ice storm in 2003 severely damaged many of the mature trees. As the ice was melting, I organized and led a group of residents to begin immediate replacement and regeneration of the tree canopy.

Eventually, our group raised funds to plant nearly 100 trees in the common areas of the neighborhood. Inspired by our success, many more trees were planted by on private lots by residents. This work received a *Gold Award* from the Lexington-Fayette Urban County Environmental Commission.



Suburban Evolution

Lexington, Ky

Southland Drive in Lexington was the first suburban shopping area in the city. But after 50 years, the area had become dated. I initiated a citizen and business-based planning process to craft strategies to update the area. After an extensive charrette process, design ideas were developed that addressed traffic flow, new building regulations, and beautification. I wrote the project report.

To date, over 250 trees have been planted, and new sign regulations

implemented. The area is now home to a fantastic weekend farmer's market.

Recently the area has branded itself as "Bluegrass Row," in honor of the many music businesses that cater to local and regional musicians. Bluegrass concerts and jam sessions are now held weekly throughout the summer.

Within the last year, new gateway signage has been installed, along with a pop-up community space designed by a local student.



Local Food Initiatives

Lexington, Ky



I was very active in Lexington's local food renaissance, from creating design concepts for Lexington's first community kitchen, to organizing a digital food information center – "Foodworks East End" - whose purpose is take advantage of the free wireless in the neighborhood is to connect inner city

residents to information about healthy food. I was a co-creator of the Food Grown Here initiative, that encouraged urban farmers put a sign in their yard to demonstrate how much local food is being raised in the city. I also initiated the "Edible Trail" program on the Legacy Trail, where fruit and berry plants were planted by volunteers.



Bluegrass Tomorrow

PLANNING A
GREAT REGION
COLLECTED ESSAYS

1997-2006

This is a collection of essays I wrote that were previously published in regional newspapers. The ultimate takeaway from the volume is that achieving the results that a majority of citizens desire will not happen by accident, but rather only by careful and sustained community-based planning.