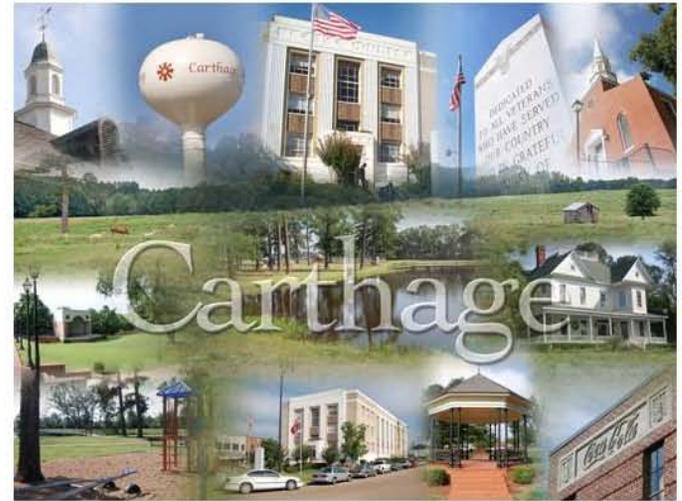


WAEM TOWN Workshops
 WAEM-WIRED Initiative in Louisville, MS



The Montgomery Institute: West Alabama-East Mississippi WIRED Initiative

REPORT SUBMITTED BY:
 THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA CENTER FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

MAY 2010

SUMMARY

The University of Alabama Center for Economic Development (UCED) and The Montgomery Institute (TMI) entered into a two-year contract in May of 2008 to provide planning services, technical assistance and training to elected officials, community leaders and WIRED Community College staff from communities and small towns in the West Alabama and East Mississippi WIRED Region (WAEM). UCED has managed the project, provided mentoring to the technical assistance delivered by WIRED staff, and has served as the primary point of contact during the two-year period. The deliverables resulting from this project include the following:

- Three WAEM Mayor Network Events
- Six Mississippi WAEM charrettes
- Seven Alabama WAEM charrettes
- Two WAEM YourTown workshops
- Orientation and Training of WAEM WIRED staff through YourTown workshop, inclusion in STDI and WAEM charrettes, mentoring on assigned follow up of implementation projects

This report will serve as the overall and final summary for the project.

The three main objectives of the project include:

- 1) Provide training and expert support in the delivery of the assets-based illustrative master planning process and methodology that has been developed through YourTown Alabama and the Auburn Urban Studio Small Town Design Initiative (STDI) Program.
- 2) Identify implementation support needed in WIRED communities, and provide training, mentoring support and guidance to WIRED Community College staff in their technical assistance efforts; and
- 3) Provide training and support to create a WAEM Mayor network.

WAEM-WIRED INITIATIVE

The Auburn University Urban Studio worked with eight towns in Alabama and three towns in Mississippi as part of this Department of Labor WAEM-WIRED Initiative. The work in each community was based on our Small Town Design Initiative community planning methodology. This

assets-based approach is grass roots, engaging with the community's citizens and stakeholders in town hall style meetings with the goal of an illustrative master plan that can become a road map for the community – positioning them to leverage their assets; build partnerships, constituent support, a volunteer base; and a competitive edge in attracting an array of new and sustaining resources.

The Urban Studio team facilitated a minimum of three community meetings in each of the Alabama towns.

The first meeting was information gathering – seeking to understand the assets of the community from the citizen's and stakeholders' perspective. In the second meeting, the team presented a series of concepts and ideas that could become the basis of an overall illustrative master plan for the community. These concepts were developed as a result of the town input in the information gathering meeting and the investigations and analysis of the expert team. During this meeting the team asked the community for feedback on the validity of the concepts, for other ideas that these concepts might generate and on what resonated with the community.

This input was integrated into design development of the master plan which was then brought back to the town for a final presentation. The final meeting included all of the base material – topographic maps, aerial photographs, flood plain maps, Sanborn maps, parcel maps, etc. – that contributed to the project development; location diagrams; analysis diagrams; concept diagrams; illustrative community plans; illustrative downtown plans; connectivity and open space diagrams; before and after recommendations for downtown building fronts; and a concise description of the town's assets, opportunities and concepts for advancement. All of these original drawings have been returned to the community at the completion of the project along with digital copies that can be incorporated into reports, web-sites and project promotion.

Feedback from the final meeting becomes the basis for a 22" x 34" full color poster that provides a snap shot of the overall master plan. The community received 5000 copies of this poster and were encouraged to distribute one to every household, to local stakeholders and business owners in the community, and to post copies at City Hall, in the post office, in store fronts, at the churches and in the local schools. They are also advised to deliver posters to their regional partners, to representatives and agencies at the State Capital, and to mail copies to all potential partners in Washington, DC. The poster is designed to fold to 8 ½"x 11" so that it can be easily incorporated into grant applications, promotional and recruiting material and all partnership building efforts. The poster and the plan position a community to be more competitive and more directed in their efforts to manage economic development and the development goals of the town. The poster also becomes an excellent tool for benchmarking and annual reviews of progress in the community.

The partners in each community - the WAEM-WIRED Initiative community college staff – helped to: mobilize the community for town hall meetings; coordinate the flow of information; and identify local and regional partner agencies and stakeholders.

BEVILL STATE COMMUNITY COLLEGE AND THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA

The agreement was amended for the final year of the WIRED grant, given UCED's responsibilities as set forth in the original document, Beville State Community College (BSCC) to assign its WIRED staff responsibilities to UCED to assure strong coordination as well as to best pursue sustainability opportunities beyond the grant period for BSCC's district. The scope of work was amended to transfer the WIRED Goal 1 position from BSCC and related responsibilities and funding to UCED.

As a result, WAEM staff worked closely with leaders from six (6) cities (Fayette, Carrollton, Pickensville, Guin, Aliceville, and Gordo) and six (6) counties (Fayette, Lamar, Pickens, Marion, Walker, and Franklin) to offer better and more opportunities to the communities of the WAEM region. Staff members met with individual city and community leaders in order to facilitate progress and share information on available opportunities. The staff members attended the charettes and followed up with meetings and workshops catered to each community's needs. Some of the workshops that were held include the Economic Development Association of Alabama's (EDAA) Community Leadership Training (CLT), the Alabama Department for Economic and Community Development's (ADECA) "A Toolbox to Successful Grants" Workshop, and training workshops for the new choosealabama.net website which was developed by Auburn University and The University of Alabama.

WAEM staff also worked with comprehensive planning firms and development groups to assist the WAEM region. Staff members coordinated with a comprehensive planning firm (KPS Group of Birmingham) to provide a discounted rate to the four (4) communities (Carrollton, Fayette, Pickensville, and Gordo) in the tri-county development region made up of Fayette, Pickens, and Lamar counties. WAEM staff, along with the Mayor of Guin and the Economic Developer of Aliceville, also met with a development group called Design Initiative to discuss bringing affordable housing and sustainable neighborhoods to the Guin and Aliceville areas. WAEM staff made contact with the Walker Area Community Foundation in hopes to begin working with local Chambers of Commerce, Economic Developers, and community leaders to regionalize and partner with Walker, Fayette, Lamar, Marion, Winston, and Franklin counties along the I-22 Corridor.

Please see Beville State Community College full report for further information.

WAEM TOWN WORKSHOPS

During 2008 - 2009, as part of the grant, Your Town Alabama, Inc. staff and volunteers brought its asset-based planning workshop to the WAEM-WIRED region. The Your Town Alabama planning process is a proven methodology for helping small towns and communities develop strong competitive tools for revitalization, promotion, recruiting, partnership building and managed decision making and development. Your Town Alabama, Inc. began in June 2008 by training fifteen (15) WAEM-WIRED staff people to facilitate and organize a workshop. Subsequently, two WAEM TOWN workshops were held in Mississippi, where these fifteen people were used as secondary facilitators and presenters to share methods of building on a community's assets in an educational format. Your Town Alabama also accommodated twenty-three WAEM-WIRED participants at its annual June 2009 workshop.

Towns, villages and neighborhoods in Mississippi, Alabama and across America face an uncertain future – a future which is increasingly threatened by large scale economic changes, population shifts, land policy changes, the impact of electronic commerce and mass merchandising. In the face of these changes, communities find themselves struggling to maintain their vitality and even their sense of identity. The workshop aims specifically to introduce small town, neighborhood and rural decision makers and technical assistance providers to the role of design in community planning.

The dates, location, and number of attendees involved in the West Alabama East Mississippi Your Town training and workshops throughout the span of the grant are as follows:

<i>Workshop Name</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Number of Attendees</i>
2008 Your Town Alabama	June 2008	Alabama	15
2008 WAEM TOWN	October 2008	Mississippi	31
2009 WAEM TOWN	April 2009	Mississippi	39
2009 Your Town Alabama	June 2009	Alabama	23
TOTAL PARTICIPANTS			108

At the June 2009 Your Town Alabama, twelve (12) of the graduates listed above received WAEM scholarships as part of the WAEM-WIRED grant; eleven (11) others also attended from WAEM-WIRED Counties without the benefit of a scholarship. Across the four workshops, twenty-five (25) additional people were registered but either cancelled at the last minute or did not show up. Taking all of these participants into account, Your Town Alabama’s efforts exposed a total of one-hundred thirty-four (134) community leaders in forty-four (44) communities across the WAEM-WIRED region to the concept of asset-based planning.

After success was evident at the workshops, some key leaders in Mississippi committed to develop a process for holding future workshops and continuing the education. Virgil Culver, Director of the Mississippi State Community Action Team (MSCAT), has led an effort to create a Your Town Mississippi program through MSCAT, the first of which was held May 18-20, 2010. Other partners in that effort include the Mississippi Development Authority’s Division of Community and Asset Development, The Montgomery Institute and Mississippi Main Street Association, as well as the Mississippi Arts Commission, Mississippi Economic Development Council and Mississippi Heritage Trust.

WAEM TOWN Workshops
WAEM-WIRED Initiative in Louisville, MS

WAEM TOWN Workshops
WAEM-WIRED Initiative in Louisville, MS



WAEM TOWN Workshops
WAEM-WIRED Initiative in Louisville, MS



FORESTRY IN THE WAEM REGION

The WAEM region is blessed with abundant forest resources, which have been the foundation for a strong and diverse forest industry for many years. This industry has been extremely important to the WAEM economy, and although somewhat weakened by current economic events, it remains an important employer and economic engine for the region.

Economic and market trends affecting the forest industry suggest that a slow recovery from the current deep recession is probable. Longer term, the outlook for the region's lumber industry could be promising, given reduced North American industry capacity and a favorable cost structure. The outlook for pulp and paper is generally not as promising, given mature markets and strong international competition. The secondary wood manufacturing sector is too diverse to generalize about the outlook, but there will undoubtedly be both winners and losers going forward. Opportunities in the bioenergy sector appear to be very bright, with considerable investment activity in wood pellets, power generation, and liquid biofuels. The WAEM region is very well positioned to participate in these developing bioenergy opportunities.

A two-part strategy for forest-based economic development in the WAEM region is recommended, which focuses both on supporting the existing forest industry base and on capitalizing on selected bioenergy development opportunities. In order to execute this strategy, it will be necessary for economic developers and community leaders in the region to understand the challenges and requirements for success in both arenas. Focused efforts in this regard will position economic developers and community leaders to provide support and assistance to existing forest products manufacturers, while enabling them to intelligently recruit and develop bioenergy projects that have high potential for creating jobs and economic activity in the region. By virtue of its regional perspective and capacities, the Montgomery Institute is poised to play an important role in facilitating the realization of these opportunities.



MISSISSIPPI MAIN STREET

Mississippi Main Street Association undertook six (6) planning charettes under the WAEM WIRED Initiative in the State of Mississippi. The six charettes were held in the following cities from September 2008 to November 2009.

Carthage, MS (September 2008)

Newton, MS (June 2009)

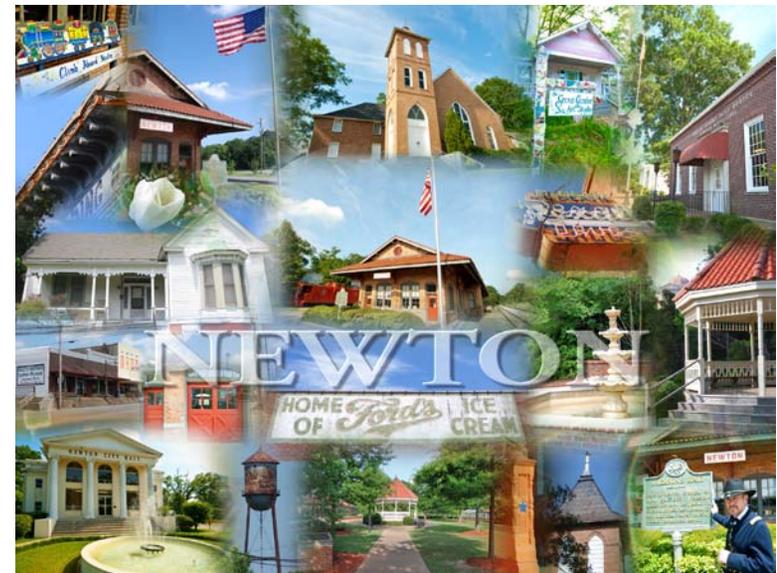
Heidelberg, MS (July 2009)

Columbus, MS (September 2009)

Covington County, MS (October 2009)

Marion, MS (November 2009)

A detailed report on each charette is included, along with PowerPoint presentations, posters, and other materials created from the information gathered at the charettes.



CONCLUSION

This report offers a summation of The University of Alabama Center for Economic Development's participation in The Montgomery Institute's WAEM WIRED Initiative. It is a compilation of the four partner projects incorporated in this summary. We have also included an electronic copy of the complete reports from each project: WAEM WIRED Initiative, WAEM Town, Forestry in the WAEM Region, and Mississippi Main Street.



SUBMITTED BY:
UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA CENTER FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
NISA MIRANDA, DIRECTOR
Box 870138
TUSCALOOSA, AL 35487-0138
(205) 348-7058
FAX: (205) 348-6974
NMIRANDA@AITC.UA.EDU