



EDITORIAL

Our view: 'Blueprint' is bigger than South Park

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By Dayton Daily News

Sunday, May 20, 2007

A week ago Saturday,

Dayton's South Park showed what city neighborhoods do best when they are at their best:

They gather, think, plan, discuss, fight, worry, imagine, mobilize and celebrate — together, with infectious energy.

South Park's recent example was aided by a remarkable gift from the Dayton chapter of the American Institute of Architects. As part of the national AIA's celebration of its 150th birthday, local chapters asked neighborhoods to apply to become the sites of major service projects.

The projects, which are being organized across the country, are called "Blueprint for Your Neighborhood." They involve teams of local architects and designers working with residents for free. The neighbors sit down, envision and decide where, as a community, they want to go — tomorrow, next year, 10 years from now. The professionals guide the discussion and capture the possibilities and details in a comprehensive plan.

South Park submitted Dayton's winning application. Beginning in January, scores of neighborhood residents joined in and, for the past nine weeks, have been working with the professional volunteers. The results were unveiled last week, and the importance of what they produced extends far beyond South Park's 24 blocks.

The process — even more than the plan's specifics — offers insight and inspiration to any community interested in tackling tough problems and mapping a shared future from the grassroots up.

Tony Costello, the AIA's national chairman of the "Blueprint" project, pointed to older suburban communities — with moribund, '60s-era strip malls and declining housing values — as places that can benefit from these kinds of planning processes, provided local leaders engage and energize local residents.

Consider how this Dayton neighborhood and the volunteer professionals organized their project:

South Park — bordered, roughly, by Wyoming Street (to the south), Wayne Avenue (to the east), Burns Avenue (to the north) and Alberta/Nathan streets (to the west) — has it all. Its housing stock includes finely renovated mansions, modestly maintained cottages, and abandoned, boarded-up buildings whose futures are hard to see. Residents range from the affluent professional to the abject poor. Some public spaces are well-tended, but others

are weedy eyesores.

Nearly 30 design professionals from about a dozen firms divided into five teams: commercial, residential-infill, residential-rehab, boundaries and green space. Their plans and drawings reflect ingenious, common-sense attractive ideas, not pie-in-the-sky hopes.

Think bike paths, public gardens, order through decorative fences, practical rehab plans for many styles of architecture, colored lights illuminating a highway underpass, dramatic murals brightening drab commercial buildings.

Then there's the caution — offered by the architecture institute's Costello: Beware of inflated expectations that come of beautiful professional plans and drawings. And be prepared to hustle because the real work begins when the planning process ends — priming the pump for private financing and public support from outside the neighborhood.

But as one of two private investors behind this year's RehabaRama in South Park (set for October) points out, these obstacles are steadily being overcome — not just with help from City Hall and its planning department, but by tapping resources such as the Dayton Home Builders Association and Wright State University's Center for Urban Planning and Administration.

South Park, in other words, is marching ahead, one step at a time — together.

[Watch a video](#)

Participants in the project

APG Office Furnishings

E. Lynn App Architects, Inc.

Edge & Tinney Architects, Inc.

Elements IV Interiors

Greg L. Lauterbach, LLC.

Jeff Wray Architects

Levin Porter & Associates, Inc.

Lorenz Williams, Inc.

Rogero Buckman Architects

Sharp Conway Architects, Inc.

The Architectural Group, Inc.

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