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APA OHIO PRESENTS OHIO APA GREAT PLACES IN OHIO

Four communities recognized as great places across Ohio

CLEVELAND, OH (October 8, 2020) – The Ohio Chapter of the American Planning Association (APA Ohio) is pleased to announce winners of the 2020 Ohio APA Great Places awards. The biennial awards program honors outstanding physical spaces that planners have made permanent through careful planning and unbridled imagination in Ohio.

APA Ohio presented the following awards at the 2020 Virtual Planning and Zoning Conference on October 8, 2020. APA Ohio Board Member Matthew Schmidt, AICP, noted that the Great Places Awards “2020 designees were selected from submissions for great commercial districts, parks and public spaces, and neighborhoods from communities large and small from across the state. The entries represented beautiful designs, inspiring stories, and community-led transformations that honor their unique histories.”

Twenty award nominations were submitted, representing areas throughout the state, with multiple submissions in each of the three categories. The applications were reviewed and scored by members of the Awards Committee of the Ohio-APA Board that have representation throughout the state. They evaluated the nominations based on the following criteria:

- Character, personality of place
- Uniqueness of the place
- Special history
- How the space is used
- Planning initiative
- Visual attributes through photographs

The following four nominations were selected as the 2020 Great places of Ohio Award Winners.

Commercial District – Downtown Cuyahoga Falls:

Settled along the adjacent Cuyahoga River in 1812, Downtown Cuyahoga Falls grew into a successful business district that supported a growing community. However, with

suburbanization and the change of its main street into a pedestrian mall in the 1970s, the importance of Downtown Cuyahoga Falls was inadvertently tarnished.

In 2018 the City reestablished the Downtown's importance and sense of place by reopening Front Street to vehicular traffic and embracing historic preservation. The Downtown is attracting new culinary, microbrewery, and retail businesses, complimenting it's thriving public event spaces.

Reviewers of the application were especially impressed with how multi-faceted the planning was, including economic development and infrastructure initiatives, while staying rooted in planning. The City has added yet another chapter into the long history that makes Downtown Cuyahoga Falls a great place.

Parks and Public Space – Promenade Park in Downtown Toledo

Located on the Maumee River, Promenade Park has been considered the heart of Downtown Toledo since it was established through the vision of a local activist – Betty Mauk – in 1972. Ms. Mauk's vision grew from a small parcel to an expansive riverfront promenade.

Unfortunately, like many cities, disinvestment in the surrounding Downtown also effected the park. But spurred by ProMedica deciding to relocate their headquarters and over 1,000 employees to the adjacent riverfront, significant effort went into planning a modern district while maintaining the early vision of Promenade Park. The park continues to host the city's largest events, including the ProMedica Summer Concert Series that draws 10,000 people Downtown. While an event lawn and LED screen are the setting for family movie nights, local sports viewing, and community events like yoga.

The review committee was impressed by success of this comeback story for the riverfront, and how Promenade Park has become not just an amenity for Downtown workers, but a central draw for the entire city.

Parks and Public Space – Oyler Community Learning Center in Cincinnati's Lower Price Hill Neighborhood

Built as a school in the 1930s, by the early 2000s the Oyler School was failing, with 85% of its students never making it to 10th grade. After extensive community engagement and lobbying to Cincinnati Public Schools and beyond, in 2012 the Oyler Community Learning Center was formed through funding by the Facilities Master Plan a tax levy and philanthropic resources.

Not only did this expand the school to a high school, but a hub for the whole community. The Oyler Community Learning Center model provides a myriad of services to students and community members alike, such as early childhood education; mental health, primary, vision, and dental services; case management services to help parents navigate resources such as housing, employment and food security; as well as mentorships and tutoring - while becoming a catalyst for the holistic revitalization of the community.

Since its transformation, the Lower Price Neighborhood has graduated more students in the last 7 years than in its entire 90-year recorded history, with an estimated 97% graduation rate in 2019-2020. The multi-generational approach to this place especially impressed the review committee, and how it has created an activity hub that has made the community as a whole a better place both today and into the future.

Residential Neighborhood – South Fountain Neighborhood in Springfield

The residents of Springfield's historic South Fountain Neighborhood, situated immediately south of downtown, have worked hard for over 20 years to rehabilitate the Victorian homes at the core of the neighborhood. But they realized the health of the historic district was inextricably linked to that of the surrounding communities that were still struggling.

While residents knew the issues facing their historic neighborhood, they realized the city needed a strong vision for the larger, surrounding community. With the help of the City's head planner, residents were able to convince public and private city leaders that despite challenging economic hardships facing the local government, community engagement that builds a sense of trust and planning is, in fact, a basic city service.

Working together, South Fountain's Engaged Neighborhood Plan was developed, and includes 40 initiatives across 5 topics areas (physical improvements – government policy changes – private financing – marketing and branding – and civic infrastructure and implementation) and has become a model already being deployed in the adjacent community. The review committee was struck by the leadership residents have taken to not only preserve their neighborhood, but also persevere to see that its success grows and influences the lives of more and more Springfield residents. Through their dedication South Fountain's heritage has been preserved, neighborhood festivals have been created, grants for capital improvements won for such things as the preservation of the Gammon House (once a stop on the Underground Railroad), and the community once again gained an appreciation for neighborhood planning.

APA Ohio offers the utmost congratulations to this year's Great Places in Ohio designees – Downtown Cuyahoga Falls – Promenade Park – the Oyler Community Learning Center – and South Fountain Neighborhood.

Please visit the Great Places page on the APA Ohio website to see our previously designated Great Places, where this year's designees will be added. But most certainly, go and visit each of these, and we hope you'll be as inspired as we are by what has made them Great Places.

Because we plan, great places exist all across Ohio.

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About APA Ohio:

APA Ohio is a statewide, non-profit association of citizens and professional planners committed to promoting and enhancing planning and the quality of planning for all governmental entities in order to maintain and improve the quality of life for all Ohioans. APA Ohio is a state chapter of the American Planning Association (APA). APA Ohio encourages legislation and action programs to enhance sound planning at the state, regional and local levels. APA Ohio operates under the guidance of a volunteer

Board of Trustees elected from the general membership. Chapter sections include Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Miami Valley and Northwest. Visit www.ohioplanning.org for additional information.