

A Case Study
Assessing the
Possibilities

Booneville, Mississippi



The Small Town Center 1997

Booneville, Mississippi

A Case Study Assessing the Possibilities

This work includes a series of newspaper articles that we have written over the course of the Fall 1997 semester. These articles include ideas and observations that were made from the Fall of 1996 through the Fall of 1997. This collection of information serves as the final report for the City of Booneville.

From the fall of 1996 to the fall of 1997, Mississippi State University architecture students and members of the MSU Center for Small Town Research and Design (Small Town Center) spoke to many of you, participated in round-table discussions, photographed and sketched various aspects of your town and developed areas of research. In March we made a presentation to the Rotary Club and placed the presentation in a gallery at the Northeast Community College for a couple of months. We then ran a series of articles describing some of the things that we discovered and ideas that we had heard from some of you. We want you to continue to share your opinions: are we still presenting ideas that you think have potential and that you'd like to see the leaders of your community pursue or ideas that you believe would never work? Your opinions and continuous involvement in this process are essential. Planning a city is an

Whittlers on the Prentiss County Courthouse lawn.





Market Street, est. 1900; photo courtesy of Tom Vanstory.



Church Street, est. 1900; photo courtesy of Tom Vanstory.

1. From William Morrish and Catherine Brown, *Planning to Stay*, Milkweed Editions, (Minneapolis, 1994.) p. 118.

2. From "Points of Departure," by Shirley Hazzard. Cited by William Least Heat-Moon in *Prairie Erth*, Andre Deutsch Ltd, (Great Britain, 1991) p. 9.

Courthouse Building; photo courtesy of Tom Vanstory.



act of community participation and an expression of belief in its future. The work that we are going to present attempts to show how considering the places we live in might play a larger role in generating more choices and better decisions for your city. While our approach is based upon examining the physical character of your neighborhoods, physical solutions by themselves will not solve social and economic problems. But neither can healthy economic and social conditions be sustained without a supportive physical environment. This work seeks to help you begin to design solutions that:

- Generate innovative, creative options
- Fit into the community
- Build upon the positive, physical aspects of the place
- Create a physical environment that addresses economic and social problems
- Are both functional and beautiful

We have been greatly inspired by your organization of the community-wide construction of the Children's Park; by the establishment of a beautification committee; by your becoming a Main Street Community; and by the commitment of your leaders and citizens to communicate their ideas with us. Your 1998 Program of Work is very impressive and has addressed many of the things we had discussed in 1997. We found this statement in a book called *Planning to Stay* by William Morrish and Catherine Brown and have adapted it to you because we believe that it is a good benchmark from which to proceed:

We, the citizens of (Booneville), have been given a great physical legacy. The gift of our city has been built block by block, layer by layer, for more than one hundred years by those who came before us. Spreading outward from our downtown core--and helping to sustain it--are homes, infrastructures, services and the diverse social fabric, which is our commonwealth. But we recognize that our city is at a turning point. Therefore, we declare our stewardship of this legacy and pledge our efforts to ensure safe neighborhoods, stable schools, affordable housing, amenable streets, resourceful development, equitable access to goods, services, and jobs, and an integration of the natural environment. Let our acts not diminish this gift, but leave it greater, better, and more beautiful than it was given to us. This ground--our common ground--is a good place to start¹.

What Have You Inherited?

The moment comes: we intersect a history, a long existence, offering it our fresh discovery as regeneration.²

In exploring one's heritage, past priorities of a society are discovered and begin to help us understand how our current perceptions and principles have been shaped. Each of you has your own personal history which has helped to form what we know as Booneville's history. In clarifying historic identity we should not be working towards identifying a

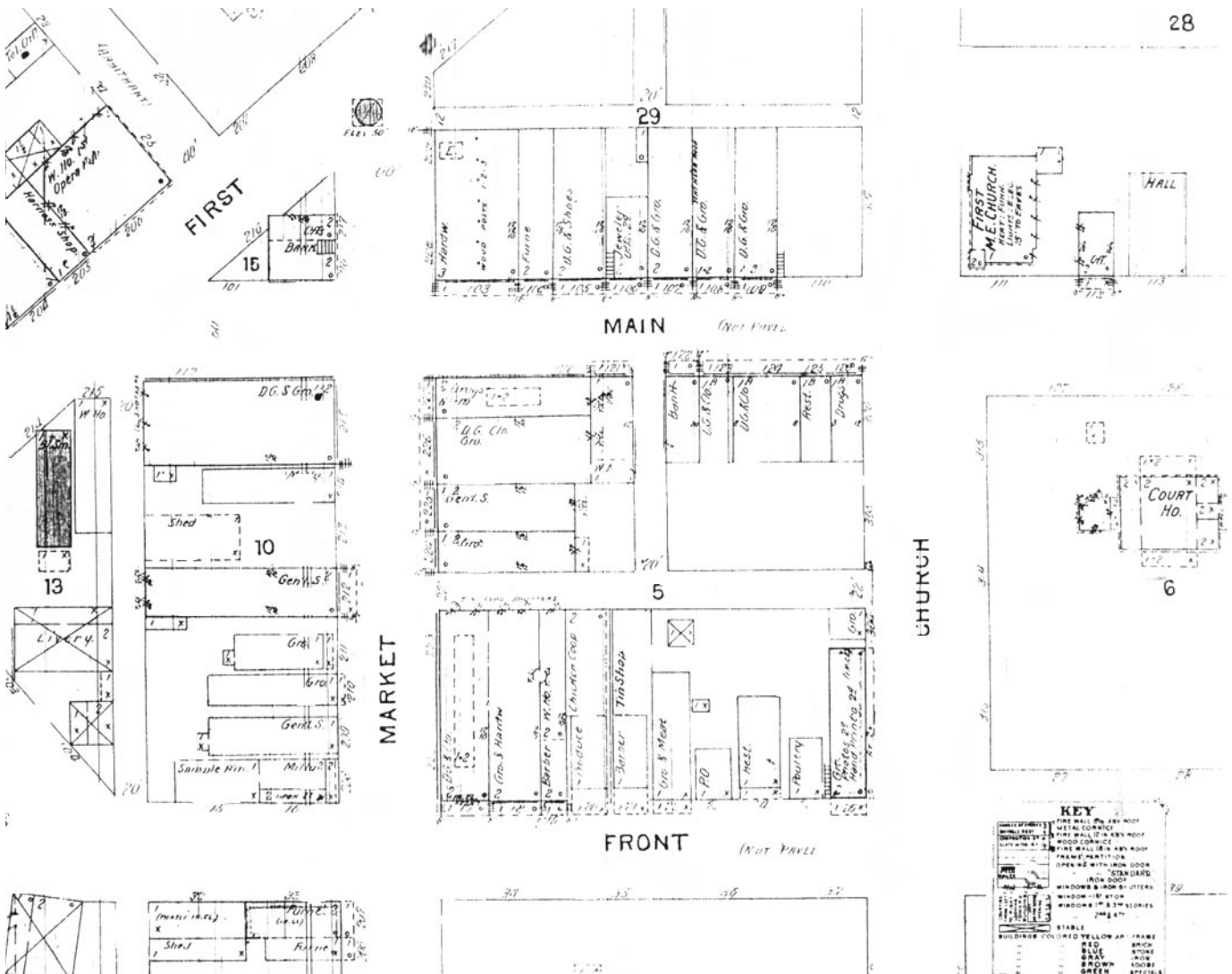


Map of State from 1883; image courtesy of Mississippi Department of Archives and History.



Historic photo of Market Street; photo courtesy of Tom Vanstory.

Sanborn Map of 1904; Map courtesy of Mississippi Department of Archives and History.



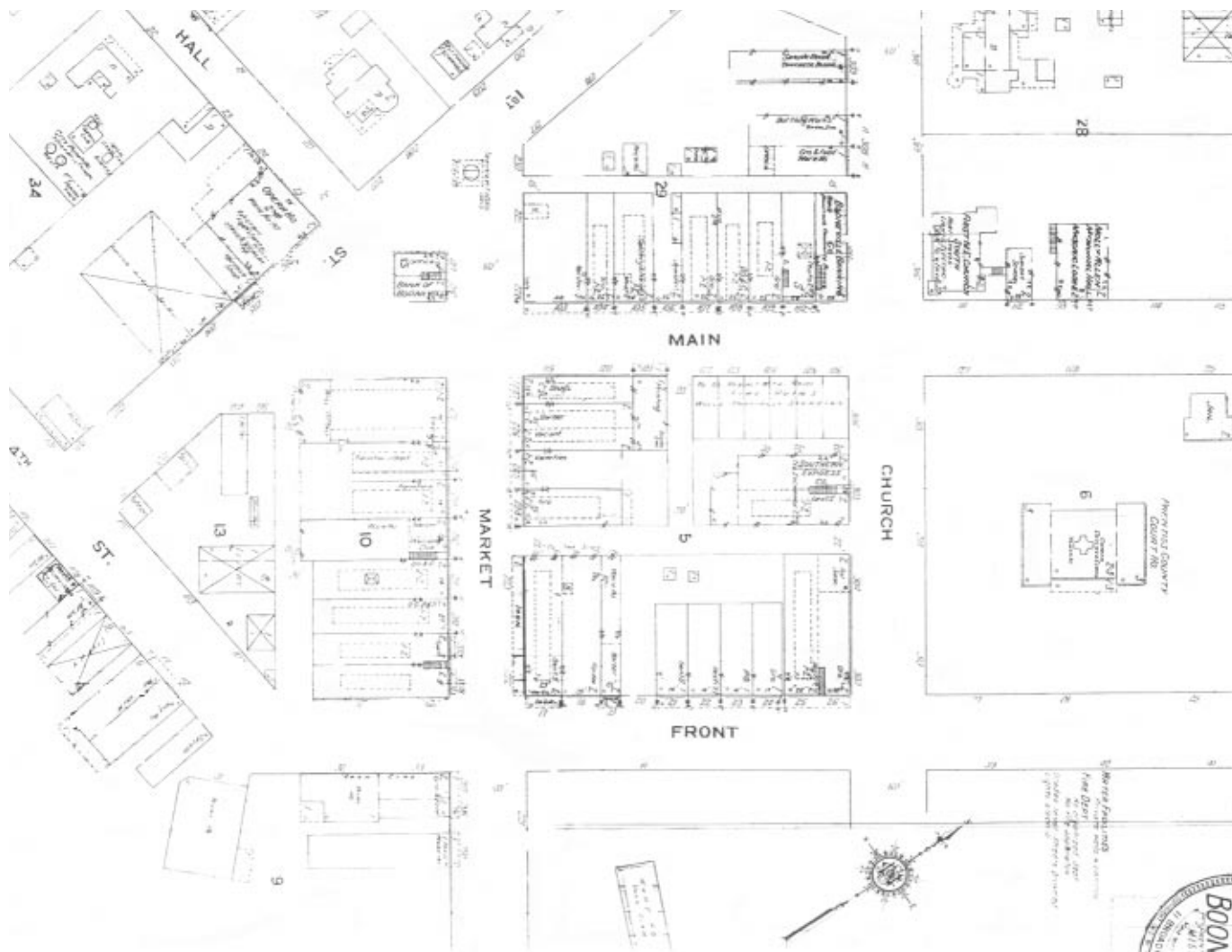
From there, we went to Mississippi State University's Mitchell Library and found a Sanborn map of Booneville dated 1910. The Sanborn Map Company was an establishment in New York which documented towns and cities across the country for insurance companies. These maps are beautifully made with an incredible amount of detail describing buildings and civic infrastructures. We then traveled to the Mississippi Department of Archives and History and found three other Sanborn maps on microfiche dating 1904, 1921, and 1943.

While at the MS Dept. of Archives & History we also found a dozen files describing public and private historic structures: the Prentiss County Courthouse, the old Booneville High School, First Methodist Church, First Baptist Church, the old U.S. Post Office building, the Booneville Hardware warehouse building, the Price Home, the Richard Berry Smith Home, the Patrick Place and the entire exchange of letters and newspaper articles between Mayor Murphy, the Mississippi Dept. of Archives & History and historic archaeologist Jack Elliott (see Appendix). A discovered text (also,



Historic photo of Main Street; photo courtesy of Tom Vanstory.

Sanborn Map of 1910; Map courtesy of Mississippi Department of Archives & History.





Historic photo of Booneville citizen; photo courtesy of Tom Vanstory.

see map on page 3) from *Hometown Mississippi* by James F. Brieger had an interesting way of identifying the relation between geography, industry and identity:

Booneville owes its existence to the building of the Mobile & Ohio Railroad which was projected in 1948 and completed in 1858. The town was named for Colonel Reuben Boone whose family's names are listed in the town's first census. Booneville is the highest point on the railroad and is said to have been chosen by the Indians as a place of refuge from storms because of its protection from the southwest by the Tippah Hills.³

As we continued our search, we discovered that Mayor Lambert has a collection of photos and that Tom Vanstory also has a wonderful collection

Sanborn Map of 1924; Map courtesy of Mississippi Department of Archives & History.



of black and white photos along with a blueprint of an old town plan, date unknown.

Two Suggested Directions

First, *collect and archive the found information*: Adhering to the Copyright laws, purchase copies of maps. Make photo negatives of old photos and print new copies. We recommend that the public library keep copies and that the Chamber of Commerce have images digitally available for future publications.

Second, *create a Booneville Heritage Week*: Appoint a Town Historian and/or Historical Committee that includes people who have an intense interest in collecting stories, photos of the public schools, and photos of the community college. These things could be collected by the following:



Booneville Fall Festival.

Sanborn Map of 1943; Map courtesy of Mississippi Department of Archives & History.



- Essay contest where children would collect stories of events from relatives and friends of the family about the life in Booneville;
- Photography contest where past and current photographs of landmark buildings and places would be exhibited and awarded;
- Story-telling event where those that have a story to tell would gather with others and exchange the stories--these could be recorded and contribute to the folklore of this place;
- Region-wide bus tour of historic Civil War sites related to the Booneville area battles;
- Bring in a well-known historian or literary scholar to speak about southern culture and its history;
- Series of interviews with long-time residents would be published in newspapers;
- Tours of historic buildings, houses, cemeteries and landmarks;
- Display historically significant newspaper editions that have shaped the local history;
- Gallery exhibit of collected historic photos and maps (each year add to the collection).

History only exists as it can be recalled. Identify means of collecting information, make it alive and meaningful. Develop a Folklore of your place. Keep the search for knowledge of the past alive through many interpretations. The “facts” may sometimes conflict, sometimes they may align--it is this variety of views that helps give a place character.

Shaping an Identity

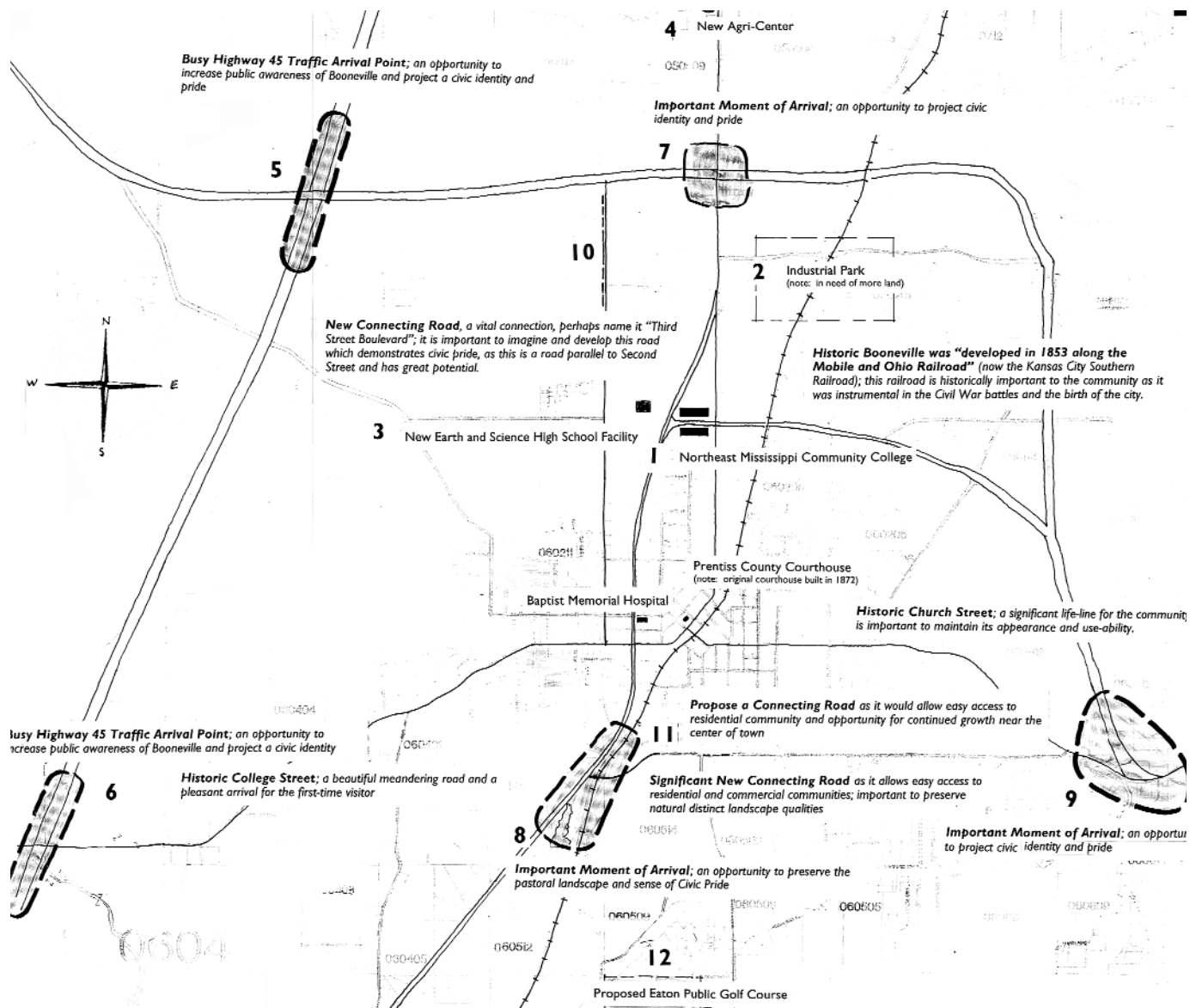
Your identity is inherited by its history, yet it is continually reshaped. It is important to understand Booneville’s role in the larger regional context of the local counties of northeast Mississippi and within the larger tri-state region. This can be achieved by recognizing the strengths of your institutions as well as recognizing the landscape qualities which make your city unique. We have identified aspects of Booneville which are commonly identified among citizens of Booneville and those from other communities. We have illustrated these issues on the map on page nine. Does the following list of items adequately identify the institutions you might list if you were describing this place to a stranger?

Established and Evolving Regional Institutions

I. Northeast Mississippi Community College. This college is established within a fairly large territory considering that the other nearby two-year and four-year colleges are Ole Miss, MSU, MUW; as well as out-of-state Jackson State Community College, TN, University of North Alabama and Northwest Shoals Community College, AL. NEMCC serves an important niche in that it gives young people the opportunity to attend school near their home; to pursue a fine two-year degree; or to complete some basic courses before pursuing a degree at a larger University. The college has a clear physical presence within Booneville. Yet, the college seems a bit detached from its community in that those we interviewed weren’t always

Tupelo dance club advertisement near NEMCC.





Important visual landmarks form our Image of the City.

aware of events and classes that they might participate in. How can the potential of this place as a center for cultural events and adult education be fully realized?

2. Industry. Many people that we interviewed were very proud of the quality and number of industries Booneville has attracted, and rightfully so. It makes good sense that Booneville would continue to draw more industry with its convenient location to major connecting highways. As new industry is attracted, where will it be located? What is Booneville's particular niche in the larger regional context? How can the city strengthen its support to industry and industry support civic life? Can a higher quality of life be shared?

3. New Earth and Science Center. The facilities and curriculum of the new Earth and Science Center will establish your community as a leader of public education in the northeast Mississippi region. Such centers are rare and exhibit an extraordinary commitment to a community's future via its



View traveling east on Mississippi Highway 45, a major portion of the route to Booneville from southwest Mississippi.



View traveling along College Street.

Example of needed highway signage.



young people. It will attract young families. What will their housing, commercial, and service needs be? Not only can this center serve the youth enrolled there but might it also serve youth from the larger region? Your community can serve as a leader with its model pilot program among public educators, how can you actively shape this new identity?

4. New Agricultural Center. This new center will allow for larger assemblies and events. Might this facility support industry, public education and college-life activities? Are there northeast Mississippi or tri-state activities that need a location? What is the role of this new center?

Arrival Points into Booneville

5. Well-marked Highway 45 Arrival Point. This entry into the city is well-marked and well-engineered. We believe that more attention could be given to the perceived quality of this entry. In the Spring, the red clover in the median is extraordinary. We believe that it should be more heavily planted at this location and be developed with other types of flowers and seasonal plantings. The concrete islands at the arrival ramps should be redesigned with plantings to make the entry into Booneville more memorable.

6. Potential Extraordinary College Street Arrival Point. We discovered this poorly- identified entry into the city after visiting Booneville a few times. It became our favorite entry into the city with the beautiful historic College Street, a gentle turning road in the rolling pastoral landscape. For the first-time visitor this entry into the city could make a very favorable impression, if the visitor knew that it existed. First, this road should be marked as a historic road leading to the Chamber of Commerce/Tourist Center, not allowing truck thoroughfare. Second, Booneville has a great opportunity to serve the Highway 45 tourist with restaurants, gasoline and hotels and should seek the highway signs that indicate these amenities. Third, this entry could also be highlighted with median wildflowers and red clover, and the concrete islands could be replaced with plantings.

7. Important North Entry Needs to be Developed. At this point the speed and direction of traffic changes. This is a very significant transition point from a higher speed highway into the local traffic roads. We see this point as an opportunity to design plantings, lighting and civic signage which announce the Booneville community.

8. Important South Entry Needs to be Preserved and Enhanced. We recognized a unique condition as one passes the small lake to the east and the rolling landscape rises to the city limits. We believe that the small lake and the pastoral landscape should be preserved and enhanced.

9. Important East Entry Needs to be Developed. This entry into the city seems to be a well-established one and with a little development could be more pronounced. It is unique in that three roads come together here. We recommend that plantings, lighting and civic signage be developed.

Consider New Connections Between Your Institutions

10. New Connecting Road. This new connecting road that is being developed is going to significantly change the traffic flow in the city. We

believe that this road will become a vital connection to the neighborhoods and institutions along Third Street, as well as an alternative path to get from the south side of town to the north side. This street has a wide street width and has the opportunity to become a civic neighborhood boulevard in contrast to Second Street which has a lot of traffic and activity. We recommend that the “Third Street Boulevard” be developed with tree plantings, perennials, sidewalks and lighting to project the city’s pride of its place.

II. Connecting Road Proposal. The dairy road connection has opened up an important connection from old Highway 45 to the east side neighborhoods. It seems that if another minor connecting road were made, as shown on the map on page nine, new opportunities for southeastern residential growth would be established.

12. Proposed Eaton Public Golf Course. In the course of our work in Booneville, Rhett Eaten has suggested that some of his land be developed as a public golf course. This is a generous and outstanding offer the community should rally behind. Its location and public nature would offer the Booneville community opportunities for further established regional identity.

Public Sectors: The Municipal Sector

Perhaps the most readily recognizable of your city’s public sectors is your Municipal Sector. The buildings and spaces that comprise this sector are those that house your civic facilities such as the County Courthouse, the new 4-County Electric building, and the newly relocated Chamber of

Brian Wiginton, a student from MSU, had taken a direction in his research work which was a method of study and inquiry adopting a term *the speculative sector*. Most cities in the United States employ some method of dividing up and “roping off” certain parcels of expanses of land for specific (or at least somewhat specific) uses and purposes. “Commercial, industrial, residential” is the developer’s mantra. These *zones* as they are commonly called, serve both to regulate the influx of businesses, factories and homes into given areas of a city and to protect the property rights of current occupants of said areas of a city. Often, however, these zoning parameters are quite arbitrary and tend to be inhibitive to a city’s growth and maturation; facilitating zoning change is, typically, near impossible.

Cities also divide their territory into *districts* which are typically political divisions. These seem as though they would be useful in that they allow political voice to be distributed among several, smaller regions of a city. Unfortunately, the boundaries of political districts are often carefully drawn out to suit the machinations and agendas of various and powerful institutional actors and special interest groups. The needs of the city at large and the communities that comprise them are rarely sought after. The dictionary defines *zone* thus: “a region or area set off or characterized as distinct from surrounding or adjoining parts”; *district* is even less clear: “a territorial division demarcated or defined for a specific purpose.” In searching for a point of origin for the formulation of a set of criteria as to a successful zone or district, sector is defined: “a *subdivision* of a defensive military position assigned to a commander as an area of responsibility bounded by established lines on the sides and rear and, in front, extending to the maximum range of the weapons of the garrison.” If we sift out the military lexicon and rephrase, we might come up with something like this: “a subdivided area of a city (however large or small), assigned to or appropriated by an institution, organization, or other civic entity, as an area of

