

City Eyes Artistic Streetscape Design

Public Art Displays to Be Part of Downtown Revitalization Project

By R.A. Walker
Sun-Gazette Staff

In terms of immediate impact, a Saturday morning scouting mission around downtown Williamsport by a group of local artists amounted to little more than a walk in the rain.

Over the long-term, however, the insights gained could be more substantive, although no one may remember Saturday's walk or who took part.

Only about a dozen people gathered at the tiny Gallery 152 on William Street about 9 a.m. Saturday and then spread out to walk the streets and alleys from Elmira Street to Mulberry Street and Little League Boulevard to Via Bella.

At the center of it all was George Dickie, an urban

Participants included local art professors whose assignment was to suggest potential locations for public art displays.

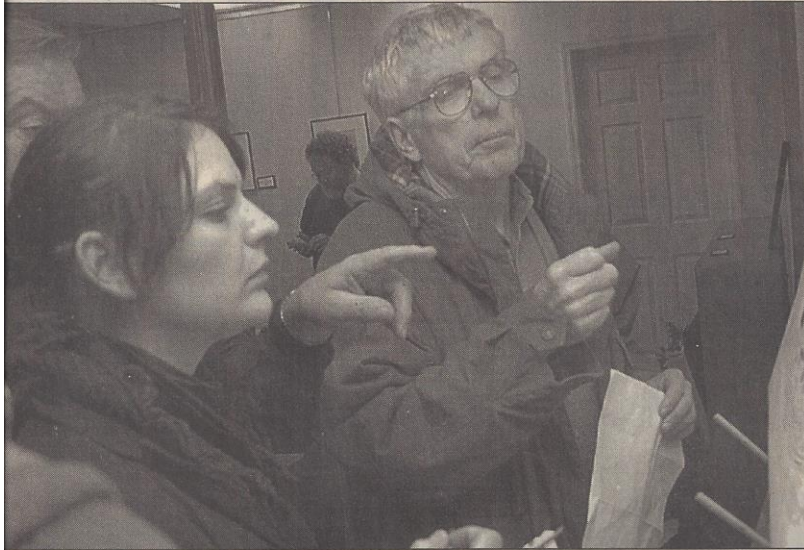
designer drafting a conceptual design for streetscape improvements in the downtown.

Dickie's streetscape design is part of the effort to reshape and revitalize the downtown in con-

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LOCAL ARTIST BRIANNE DOPIRAK DISCUSSES THE RIVERFRONT PROJECT ... with Lycoming College sculpture professor Jon Bogle during Saturday's meeting

BRENT SHIRK/Sun-Gazette Correspondent

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junction with the state's replacement of the Market Street Bridge.

As unveiled earlier this year, the downtown vision includes large-scale set pieces — a walkway tying the downtown to the Susquehanna River, a conference center linking several hotels, a third parking deck with ground-floor retail space and multiscreen cinema.

The downtown project is being driven by a partnership that includes the city and county governments and community players like the Williamsport-Lycoming Chamber of Commerce and Our Towns 2010.

Saturday morning's gathering was a low-key event orchestrated by Judy Olinsky of Williamsport's Main Street and Downtown Review committees.

The State College-based Dickie was present seeking input on sites in the downtown that could be designated for public art — sculptures, murals, wall relief works and flower gardens.

The participants included art professors from Pennsylvania College of Technology and Lycoming College and several local artists. Their assignment was simple — suggest potential locations for public art displays.

Among those present was retired Lycoming College sculpture professor Jon Bogle, who has been involved with 2010's efforts to develop the city's connection with the river.

He believes the placement and selection

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Judy Olinsky,
of Williamsport's Main Street
and Downtown Review committees

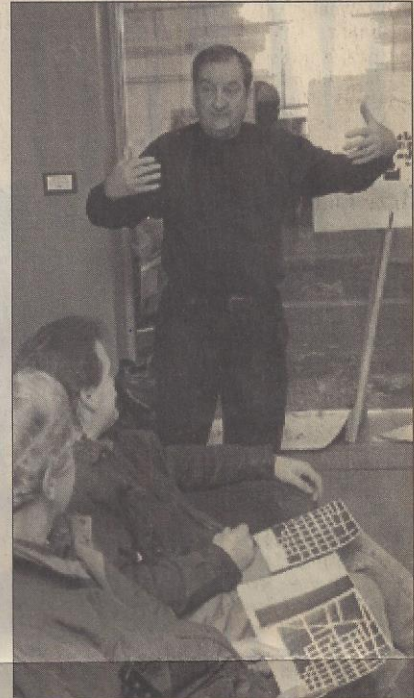
of public art requires an organized, public process because — unlike art on display in a museum or gallery — public art is out in the open, and people don't have the options they have while deciding whether they want to enter a museum or gallery to view works of art.

Bogle has recommended that each project go through several stages, one of which — by necessity — will involve taking the project to the community to allow people the opportunity to express their opinions and raise red flags.

The selection of any work of public art, he added, should be made by as unbiased a group of people as possible.

"Even if you end up not liking a piece at least you'll know there's been an organized process," he said.

Dickie left the meeting with a downtown map on which he marked the sites recommended by the participants in Saturday's exercise and their recommendations for the type of art that would be



BRENT SHIRK/Sun-Gazette Correspondent

URBAN DESIGNER George Dickie discusses plans for integrating public art into the downtown area to Roger Shippley, front, Lycoming College art professor and Brian Flynn, Penn College art professor, during Saturday's Riverfront Project meeting. The meeting allowed local artists to brainstorm ideas for beautifying the downtown area.

appropriate.

Most of the recommendations involved "residual" sites. Penn College art professor Brian Flynn, for example, suggested use of the wall of the bank building along the walkway between Laurel and Pine streets.

Another group suggested using the city parking lot at Mulberry and East Third streets for something thematically tied to the Russell Inn, which was located on the site and was the city's first commercial structure and courthouse.

"It's going to take 10 to 15 years for this whole process," observed Olinsky.

Many of the recommendations made Saturday may never be used and alternative ideas are likely to surface.

There will be time for many ideas, and people were urged to keep their ideas coming as the process evolves.

"This doesn't close the door," Dickie explained as the meeting came to an end.