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Strategic Community Plan
Charts Future for Phillips County

HELENA, AR (August 8, 2005) -- Under the banner of “Together We Can” the Strategic Community Plan for Phillips County 2005-2010 today was unveiled, with the promise of restoring this Mississippi River county to prosperity and transforming it into a regional economic and cultural force.

Also announced was the construction of a new \$1.3 million apartment complex to replace substandard housing in West Helena, which is one of the strategic goals of the plan.

The announcement, attended by organizations, public officials, citizens and people from across the state, took place in the historic restored Malco Theater in Helena.

The comprehensive plan, part of the Delta Bridge Project initiative, lays out the long-term vision for Phillips County into 46 strategic goals and 190 action items.

“This is not a plan that reports on what should be done to revitalize Phillips County, but rather a step-by-step plan of what is, and what will be done,” said Dr. Steven Murray, Chancellor of Phillips Community College of the University of Arkansas and Chair of the steering committee. “By building on existing strengths and opportunities that currently exist, Phillips County will emerge in the next few years as an economically strong community and a model for other Delta communities to build and to restore themselves to vibrant, sound places to work and to live.”

The plan is the culmination of more than thirteen months of work by 300 Phillips County residents and several organizations including Southern Bancorp, a community development bank holding company and the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS). The plan was funded by a grant from the Walton Family Foundation and is the first comprehensive, community-led, action-oriented, visionary economic development plan for Phillips County.

It has also been formally endorsed by more than 80 public, academic, business, nonprofit, civic and faith-based organizations, and public officials and business leaders.

“This plan was developed through the unique collaboration of many organizations and diverse groups of people,” said Governor Mike Huckabee. “Now it’s time to implement the plan and I want to challenge everyone who wants to see Phillips County become a regional center for Arkansas to become involved. There’s a lot of work to be done the next few years.”

U.S. Senator Blanche Lincoln, a native of Helena, vowed her support for the plan “to achieve our dreams” by making the goals of the plan a reality.

“The recent vote to consolidate the cities of Helena and West Helena demonstrates the unified vision of a community that is stepping confidently forward to build economic and social opportunities,” said Lincoln. “Every goal in this plan is reachable. Progress is up to each of us here today.”

Progress in the works is the construction of Southern Place Apartments, one of the strategic goals of the plan, that will be completed and ready for occupancy by March 31, 2006. The \$1.3 million, 20 unit complex will provide affordable, quality housing that will replace substandard housing.

The plan focuses of five key areas of development:

1. Economic Development – Tourism, and Business and Job Creation
2. Housing Development and Redevelopment
3. Education
4. Leadership Development
5. Health Care

Economic Development – Tourism

A first step in redevelopment of Phillips County is to develop a viable tourism industry capitalizing on the historic nature of Helena, its cultural heritage, Civil War battles, blues music and the Mississippi River. In addition to developing specific marketing and image campaigns, efforts will include redeveloping historic downtown Helena, creating and developing four additional major tourist events in addition to the already successful annual King Biscuit Blues Festival and the Wild Hog Rally, increasing development efforts along the Mississippi River, and expanding emphasis on arts and entertainment.

Economic Development – Business and Job Creation

In addition to concentrating on retaining and growing existing business and strengthening new and large scale industry recruitment efforts, the plan outlines a process for creating a biodiesel industry, creating a Sweet Potato Distribution Center, improving transportation infrastructure, expanding and creating the functionality of the slack water harbor (The Port of Helena is the third largest on the Mississippi), and providing services to businesses by implementing programming in Phillips Community College's Small Business Incubator.

Housing Development and Redevelopment

The ability of a community to attract customers and recruit businesses is vital to successful development. But to do so successfully in a historic area such as Phillips County, these areas and adjacent neighborhoods must be revitalized and improved.

General clean-up and code enforcement will be an important part of housing development and redevelopment, in addition to a comprehensive housing study in Helena, West Helena, Marvell and Elaine to determine the need for additional housing. Other goals will include implementing neighborhood specific revitalization plans and developing a homeownership program that will enable people to purchase a home and better maintain them. Also included in the plan are neighborhood safety programs, and specifically the redevelopment of the historic M.M. Tate School in Marvell into a multi-use facility. Replacing substandard housing in the Helena historic corridor is already underway.

Education

Critical to the success or failure of community development is its education system, and most importantly, student achievement.

Included in the strategic goals for education are improvement of student literacy (reading and math) levels, parental involvement, expansion of the Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP) Delta College Preparatory School (DCPS), comprehensive training of education professionals, engaging the school system with Phillips Community College and providing workforce education and job skills training for adults.

Education has been a major focal point for Phillips County in the past few years. During 2002-03, KIPP DCPS's first year, fifth-graders increased their average language arts score on the Stanford 9 exam from the 17th percentile at the beginning of the school year to

the 49th percentile at year's end. More recently, 40 percent of KIPP DCPS sixth-graders scored at the proficient or advanced levels on the 2004 Arkansas State Exam.

Leadership Development

Community development requires strong leadership at the local level. Strategic goals include instituting an annual Delta Regional Leadership symposium, annual training for emerging leaders, youth training programs and forming a series of Boys and Girls Clubs that will provide recreational activities and leadership experiences.

Health Care

Work has been underway in this area for months with the construction of a new expanded Delta Arkansas Health Education Center facility. The new 25,000-square-foot center, built by the Helena Health Foundation, will be more than five and a half times larger than the current UAMS Delta AHEC. Additionally a health-transportation system must be developed along with health education programs that promote healthy life styles. Plans also call for creation of a medical magnet school to train local youths for employment in the health care industry, the creation of a county-wide health awareness program, and the development of a soup kitchen to help care for the homeless and provide nutritious food at reasonable prices to low income families.

“From an economic development standpoint this is a plan that will work because it builds on the existing resources and strengths of Phillips County,” said Larry Walther, Executive Director, Arkansas Department of Economic Development. “I would encourage every community in Arkansas that is interested in developing and realizing its full potential

to look at the Strategic Community Plan for Phillips County. This plan can be used as a template, not just for the Delta, but anywhere, in any community.

“The research, fact-finding and coordination that went into the development of this plan is remarkable,” said Walther. “I’ve no doubt that the results will be just as remarkable.”

Financing

The price tag for implementing a plan as aggressive and visionary as the Strategic Community Plan for Phillips County will be formidable.

Phil Baldwin, President and Chief Executive Officer of Southern Bancorp, which owns several community development banks in Arkansas and Mississippi and has had an instrumental role in facilitating the plan, said that financing of the plan’s strategic goals will be an ongoing process.

“We have some monies in hand and resources already working, but primarily we will be helping match priorities with funding sources that will include grants, government, foundations and private contributions,” said Baldwin. “There are many agencies and organizations that have committed to helping us find the resources we need to bring this plan to life.

Friends of Phillips County

A support group, Friends of Phillips County (FOPC), is being organized and will be made up of Phillips County natives from across Arkansas and from all walks of life. B. Alan Sugg, President, University of Arkansas System, Sherman Tate, Vice President at Alltel, Senator Blanche Lincoln and Dr. Alonzo Williams, a Little Rock physician, will serve as co-chairs.

“The FOPC will be our cheerleaders, our recruiters, and our voice in getting the word out about the progress we are making here,” said Dr. Steven Murray. “Getting this work done is going to take a lot of people and talent from many backgrounds. The Friends will help us find the right people for the right job.”

In addition to Murray, the Steering Committee that will now coordinate the plan includes:

**Phillips County Strategic Community Plan
Steering Committee**

Chris Allen
Deborah Bland
Walter Cunningham
Ruth Denson
Roosevelt Frierson
John King
Elijah Mondy
Walter Morris
Dr. Steven Murray
Shawn Payne
Virgie Phillips
Kevin Smith
Ed Pat Wright
Jared Zeiser

**Phillips County Strategic Community Plan
Local Development Council**

Lynn Boone
Jimbo Boyd
Susan Cater
Ernest Cunningham
Don Etherly
Brian Miller
John Robbins

