

## Sulphur Springs TX... A Quintessential Character Town

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## In Sulphur Springs, Texas, a Community-Driven Vision Sparks Downtown Revitalization and Pride

Two years of collaborative planning produced a \$6.3 million renewal of the rural city's four-acre civic square and main streets...By: **Anne-Marie Lubenau**

**Metropolis** has partnered with the Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence (RBA) [[Rudy Bruner Award](#)] to showcase the program's five finalists for 2019 Gold and Silver Medals, which will be announced in June. **RBA director Anne-Marie Lubenau** is the author of this series.

Like many small cities, Sulphur Springs' (population 15,000) downtown faced a slow decline, and development shifted to its perimeter following the 1970s construction of nearby interstate I-30 and the conversion of its main streets to one-way. Compounding these challenges, the city's historic square, framed by the picturesque 1895 Romanesque Revival Hopkins County Courthouse, was converted into a surface parking lot.

In 2007, seeking professional expertise to revive its public realm and improve social and economic exchange and development, the city engaged Ian Lockwood, a livable transportation engineer now affiliated with [Toole Design Group](#), to develop a revitalization strategy. Over two years, Lockwood led the community through a series of interactive meetings, public presentations, and design charettes. The process yielded a 100-year vision plan focused on a reconstructed public square and enhancement of the downtown's central streets as key to the city's renaissance.

Completed in 2013, the core of [Sulphur Springs Downtown](#) includes a new, landscaped plaza featuring a Veteran's Memorial, splash fountain, and unique public restrooms with mirrored, one-way glass walls. Brick paving, on-street parking, and bump-outs slow traffic on the surrounding streets, which are once again two-way. Designed with flexibility and pedestrian accessibility in mind, the curbsless, flush streets can be closed to expand the square for special events. Broad sidewalks with street trees and furnishings entice pedestrians to linger at shops in renovated buildings and sidewalk cafes that evoke small town charm.

Now referred to as "The Celebration City," Sulphur Springs hosts more than 300 events and festivals a year. The once-deserted downtown is bustling once again with new residents and businesses, attracting visitors from the surrounding area and across the world and inspiring other rural towns and cities in Texas to consider similar interventions.

"The impact has been profound," observes city manager Marc Maxwell. "No longer do the locals refer to Sulphur Springs as 'Suffering Springs.' The citizens are elated and proud of their city now. It is incredible what the project has done for our collective self-image."

*You may also enjoy "[In New Orleans, Skateboarding Youth Partner with a Community Design Center to Create a Skate Park Under a Highway Overpass.](#)" Would you like to comment on this article? Send your thoughts to: [comments@metropolismag.com](mailto:comments@metropolismag.com)*



Sulphur Springs Square (before and after) Courtesy Toole Design Group, Cindy Roller

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The Bruner Foundation was founded to create opportunity for others and to inspire meaningful social change.

The foundation currently operates three programs: The **Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence**, a national design award that recognizes transformative urban places distinguished by their economic and social contributions to America's cities; the **Bruner Loeb Forum**, a partnership between the Rudy Bruner Award and the Harvard Loeb Fellowship that advances creative thinking about placemaking in American cities; and **Evaluative Thinking** (formerly Effectiveness Initiatives), which creates and shares new methods for improving the evaluation and effectiveness of non-profit service delivery.

The Bruner Foundation invests its resources in its programs rather than active grant making. We regret that we cannot accept or consider unsolicited inquiries or proposals.

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