

Project Category

NSBF Byway Community Award: Beautification

The Appalachian Byway of Ohio is a winner for its "Save the Historic Islands in Downtown Woodsfield, Ohio!" project, served to protect and preserve the cultural and historical assets of Downtown Woodsfield, OH. Partners from The Appalachian Byway of Ohio in Monroe and Noble Counties led an effort to bring attention to the importance of the downtown Woodsfield historic traffic island structures at risk of being eliminated in an Ohio Department of Transportation Safety project. The islands, in place since 1929, provide a sense of grand entry and serve as a focal point for the length of the public square

Project Name

Save the Historic Islands in Downtown Woodsfield, Ohio!

Partners from The Appalachian Byway of Ohio in Monroe and Noble County led an effort to bring attention to the importance of the downtown Woodsfield historic island structures, that were at risk of being eliminated in an Ohio Department of Transportation Safety project.

Byway Name

Appalachian Byway of Ohio

Overview

Partners from The Appalachian Byway of Ohio in Monroe and Noble County led an effort to bring attention to the cultural importance of the downtown Woodsfield historic island structures, that were at risk of being eliminated in an Ohio Department of Transportation Safety project.

Byway leaders led a grassroots effort to get online petition signatures and hard copy petitions to The Ohio Department of Transportation – District 10 and Byway leaders, Woodsfield Village Council, Woodsfield Village Administrator, Ohio Rep. Jack Cera (96th District) and Ohio Senator Frank Hoagland, as well as The Ohio Historical Society to bring attention to the importance of the downtown along the Byway. The petition effort brought about an online public forum and window for public comments which was also well attended. ODOT also coordinated a Section 106 Consulting Party for the project (MOE – SR-26-16.85 PID 110443).

The Consulting Party included the Appalachian Byway of Ohio manager and local Historical representatives who provided written comments on the importance of the historic downtown to the Appalachian area and to the Byway, which links several other similar downtowns (Caldwell, which recently received its Historic District designation, McConnellsville, home to the famed Opera House on the Registry, as well as Nelsonville with its famous star bricks). As part of the Section 106 process, Byway leaders attended the Consulting Parties Meeting. In addition, ODOT also conducted an historical review of the downtown providing the outcome that the downtown was eligible to apply for an Historic District through the US Parks with the islands and light features noted as “contributing features.”

As of Feb. 4, 2021, The Ohio Department of Transportation alerted the Section 106 Consulting Party that “We understand your concerns regarding impacts to the media islands within the National Register-eligible historic district. Based on your input ODOT will continue to look at potential alternatives in an effort to avoid or minimize impacts to the islands.”

ODOT is also contracting with a second consulting firm to ensure all options have been fully considered. The firm will “be scoped to identify alternative that could both alleviate the safety concerns at the intersection and avoid an adverse effect to the eligible historic district.”

Intrinsic Qualities

Every community has a unique sense of place. Accentuating the community's historical, cultural, assets enhance its sense of place to residents and to guests, a sense of history is one of the most identifiable things making a community unique. To save the significant transportation elements of historic downtown Woodsfield, Ohio, was directly aligned with the cultural resources' intrinsic quality. One consultant indicates, "Woodsfield's Public Square is one of the community's defining features. There is no other like it in Ohio." The consultant nominated Woodsfield to the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Most endangered places list, a designation that calls attention to the most threatened sites <https://savingplaces.org/americas-most-endangered-historicplaces#.YBf30-hKguU>.

In downtown Woodsfield, Ohio, one of the most unique and identifiable historic assets are the islands. They have been in place since 1929 and provide a sense of grand entry and serve as a focal point for the length of the public square. They are central to historic images and videos. They are part of the Christmas décor, holiday parades, Alumni events, a location for Monroe Central High School teams to feature players, and to provide a heightened sense of seasons with floral beauty provided by the Garden Club. The islands provide a sense of community entry. They make a first impression. A news article in the newspaper, *The Spirit of Democracy*, on September 25, 1929, noted that "few cities can boast of a finer public square or Main Street."

Woodsfield also serves as the County Seat for Monroe County. Based on the Ohio State's Historic Preservation Office findings, there are National Register listed and eligible properties adjacent to the project including: Monroe County Courthouse (NR#80003168) and Monroe Bank (NR#80003167). Two other architectural resources were determined eligible including – the US Post Office and The Monroe Theatre – a downtown icon undergoing a restoration as well as its in-process application to the Historic Registry. The Downtown Woodsfield historic district eligible for the National Register of Historic Places was identified. The boundary encompasses the Main St. buildings on all four quadrants of Woodsfield's Square. Within the boundary are 19 components architectural resources. Contributing components include the site of the Woodsfield Square itself containing two center median islands, installed in 1929, and the 1940s-era four-lamp streetlight. In accordance with 36CFR Section 800.5(a), ODOT determined a finding of "adverse effect" applicable to the safety project based on the potential historic district and the contributing components, the islands and streetlight.

Partners

The Byway conservation effort was coordinated with many community organizations and citizens including Monroe County Commissioners, Monroe Arts Council, Monroe Historical Society, Downtown building owners (Gary Rubel, Attorney Dick Yoss and Citizens National Bank) as well as the Byway manager. In addition, information was provided to the Ohio DOT Byways Manager and the Ohio Historical Society as well as local the State Senator and House Representative.

The members serving as Consulting Parties on the ODOT Section 106 process each communicated various perspectives (Byway, Arts, History, Community, Public Square, Transportation history importance.) The members also worked to recruit Woodsfield residents and leaders to share their opinions and voices at the public forums and through emails to ODOT and state legislators.

Byway Best Practice

The outcome of the collective effort to bring attention to the importance of the Byway and Community’s cultural and historic assets shows the “impact that knowledgeable organizations can make on community citizens who care deeply about protecting their resources.” [Taken from NSBF’s Fact Sheet - Byway Resources Conservation and Protection]

It is always a “best practice” for Byways, byway leaders and communities within a Byway to advocate for the protection and preservation of the cultural and historic assets along a byway, when possible. Working through the proper channels, to provide public input, Byway leader input to request consideration and review is also important.

In the case of the Appalachian Byway of Ohio, the importance of the historic downtowns to the Appalachian area provides a culture-rich Visitor experience as it links Woodsfield to several similar downtowns: Caldwell, which recently received its Historic District designation and Jail Museum on the National Registry; McConnelsville, home to the famed Twin City Opera House on the National Registry and its historic statue situated, much like the Woodsfield islands, in the center of SR 78; as well as the Nelsonville Public Square with its famous fountain and star bricks.

Key to Success

Collaboration and communication were key among the partners involved in the protect and preserve effort. The effort used a variety of tactics including social media, traditional media, public meetings, grassroots petitions and more.

The effort researched the cultural and historical significance of the downtown Square and the “at-risk” islands as well as the ODOT (state and federal project process). Collectively, we devised a plan to share the public’s concerns with appropriate leaders at appropriate times in the prescribed fashion. For instance, we were required to request addition to the Woodsfield Village Council agenda, and so we did so in advance of the meeting. One Councilman thanked the Byway representative for attendance indicating she was the first to come in person to share concerns – although they’d heard plenty in the community grapevine, no one had formally registered complaints or concerns with The Village Council.

Sharing the plethora of digital and written petitions with the ODOT District 10 administrative and project staff garnered the option for a public forum and comment period as well as the Section 106 Consulting Party process.

Additional Information

Contact Information

Byway Manager, Gwynn Stewart
Community Development Educator Ohio State University Extension – Noble County
stewart.1818@osu.edu
740-305-3177

Project Year(s):

2020-2021

Website

[Appalachian Byway | Ohio Department of Transportation](#)

Photographs

