

In the planning stages of a campus-wide revitalization and improvement of Appalachian State University, a public university in Boone, N.C., surrounded by views of the renowned mountain chain, Duda|Paine Architects worked with the school to hold a design charrette that connected the staff and surrounding community in discussing the project and sharing ideas. This design charrette directly affected the final rendering and will ultimately dictate the end result.

The process started in October 2016, when Appalachian State University staff and students, along with community members, were invited to attend the Master Plan 2025 Design Charrettes. These were short, intensive planning sessions that helped create a vision for campus development. The charrette format and process provides a forum for ideas and immediate feedback to members of the design team, including architects from Duda|Paine. During the event, members of the Appalachian State community and the town of Boone were encouraged to ask questions and provide additional comments to the design team.

Turan Duda, founding principal of Duda|Paine, knew the Appalachian State campus well due to a prior visit with his son when he was deciding which college to attend. This helped offer an insider view when it was time to analyze the campus design and determine what changes were necessary.

"Visiting the university and the campus as a parent, you immediately learn what challenges there are in terms of orientation," he said. "The first thing I discovered was that I couldn't find the [main] door to the campus. There were many doors, many entrances, but none of them clearly stated a ceremonial entrance to the campus, which is where you find and orient yourself. [When developing the campus redesign], we felt this was a missing piece, and we worked very hard to find appropriate space for that. We thought a lot about how to go about campus as a visitor."

Other design elements Duda felt needed to be addressed were pathways that connect different areas on campus, as they appeared disjointed. Thing like landscaping and art pieces, he said, serve as landmarks so people know where they are and where they are going. In addition, there was a significant challenge in bridging the campus across a major roadway that subdivides the school. "One of our goals was to downplay the roadway as purely a vehicular connection, and figure out how to amplify the natural setting of both sides of the roadway," he explained. "The road itself is less significant when it is straddled on both sides by beautiful landscape that really defines this campus. The rugged terrain is very much a characteristic [of Appalachian State]."



## A GROUP EFFORT

Duda|Paine Architects revamped the master plan for improvements at Appalachian State University with the help of a design charrette comprised of community members.

ABOVE + BELOW The design charrettes that took place to help evaluate the Appalachian State University master plan allowed students, school staff, and community members to work together and truly get involved with the process that Duda|Paine started. The architectural firm took a step back and gave the reins to those who would be directly affected by the redesign.

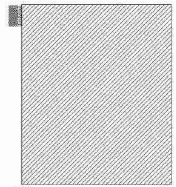


Duda|Paine is no stranger to charrettes, having participated in a number of these joint efforts to create master plans for universities. Duda noted that with the way most higher-education environments operate, with a number of stakeholders and varied voices and opinions, it is often difficult to reach a consensus. "We knew [Appalachian State] had a master plan already in place, but we didn't feel it really engaged the entire community. And not just within the campus, but with the outside community as well. The goal of the charrette was to open up dialogue. As an architect, I've heard plenty of times, 'I've always wanted to be an architect, but I couldn't do the math and couldn't draw a straight line.' But a lot of what an architect does involves bringing critical thinking to situations. We have to be able to create dialogue that generates the most input and is the most informative."

In embarking on the charrette process, Duda|Paine makes it a point to find out more about the environment surrounding the project, including the overarching culture and defining characteristics. "We discovered a long time ago that if you ask any person on a campus where they feel their home is, they can pretty much draw a line for you," Duda explained. "We call it a 'precinct.' Someone in the sciences, for example, has a science precinct and can tell you where the boundaries are. For someone in the arts, it would be different. It is the feudal state of a campus, complete with fiefdoms, boundaries, edges, and walls."

The charrette process is best for identifying these important elements, Duda noted. Through that phase of "discovery," participants present concerns

▶ continued on page 22







ABOVE Creating a Sense of Space: Sanford Mall + The Academic Core



ABOVE Unifying the Campus: The Eco-District + Arts Walk

that are more pragmatic: Where can I park my car? How far will I have to walk to my usual workspace? Then there are those inquiries that will be “almost philosophical”: How can we bring arts and sciences together in one campus? “The questions can be quite broad,” he said. “We love how, with the [approach] we’ve created for the charrette, we can step out of the way. We are leading the process, but we can let stakeholders have the conversation.” Duda|Paine divides its charrette process into three parts:

**1. A LISTENING SESSION.** “No images, no drawings, and no artifacts in front of participants,” Duda said. “We take notes on what everyone has to say: concerns, hopes, dreams, ideas. Then we make that ‘piece of evidence’ available to everybody.”

**2. INVITE DELEGATES OR STAKEHOLDERS.** People like department chairpersons, administrators, student reps—the ambassadors of the campus in all different categories are welcomed to the table to have a discussion about their wants and needs.

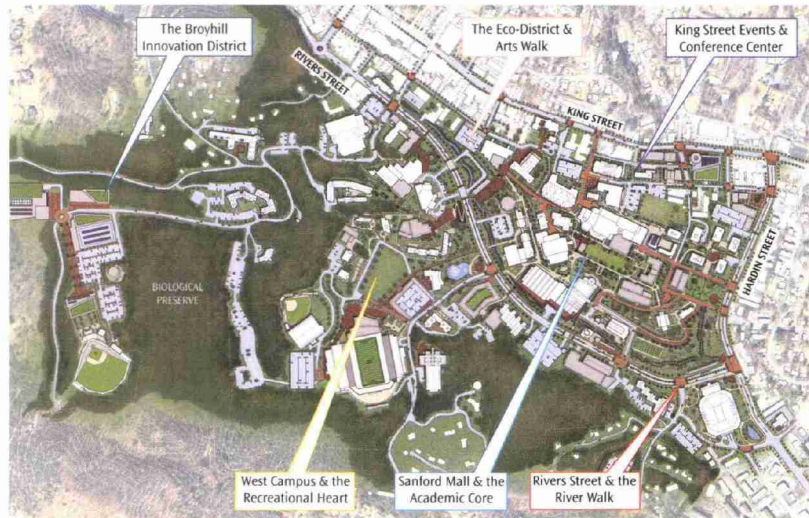
**3. THE PUBLIC CHARRETTE.** In this stage of the process, community members are invited to join the charrette, which includes mayors, delegates, retailers who may be neighbors to the university, and others. “We love to think about how the charrette process can lead to a master plan that can be a bridging element in that it [connects] ‘the town and the gown,’ essentially the campus and the surrounding city,” Duda said. “This approach can also be a bridging element between different departments on campus. It can also be, especially in this particular case, a literal bridge between topographic changes. The Appalachian campus is very hilly, with many barriers that are physical in terms of connecting different parts of [the landscape]. One of the students told me the biggest issue for him on campus—and the reason he had trouble getting places on time—was having to climb mountains to get around.”

Leading up to the public charrette, Duda|Paine made sure it gave ample notice of when the gathering would be held and what the process would entail. The firm wanted to ensure it offered the opportunity to get involved to all parties who may

be interested. “We [confirmed] Appalachian sent out invitations, published and posted them, and sent an email blast,” said Lindsey Trogdon, a Duda|Paine associate who has been heavily involved with the Appalachian project. “We were really trying to get the word out. We were impressed by the amount of people who showed up. It was great to have them there. They have a different kind of ‘outside-looking-in’ viewpoint. That vantage point and working with university stakeholders was really enriching overall.”

Duda added, “‘Transparency’ is the word I would use. We wanted this process to be transparent and public. All notes from the listening sessions were made public. No surprises were given.”

The Appalachian State Board of Trustees adopted the final master plan created by Duda|Paine in March 2017. The team has been working on advanced planning concepts for an athletic mixed-use village on campus, and is currently in the process of conceptualizing a main gateway (making the entrance to campus clear). “By the year 2025, if [Appalachian State] can get most of [the master plan] in place, they will have succeeded,” Duda concluded. “Most master plans are living documents, which means that we have to build in enough flexibility to implement parts and pieces, and maybe even change some things. But the core idea of the master plan is still the same.”



ABOVE The master plan of the Appalachian State University campus includes layout visuals that indicate various areas. The charrette process analyzes how they are indicated and connected in person.