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Preservation, development can work together

By JODIE KRAFFT, Herald Staff Writer

Historic preservation and heritage development do not equal anti-growth for Ottawa, a leading preservationist said. It does, however, lead to a unique and attractive community.

Carroll Van West, director of the Center for Historic Preservation at Middle Tennessee State University and director of the Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area, will come to Ottawa to present his ideas about historic preservation during an August workshop.

The three-day workshop called, "Your Town: The Citizens' Institute on Rural Design," will feature interactive sessions about design and planning topics relevant to Ottawa.

West and graduate assistant Sarah Martin plan to speak on heritage areas and heritage development partnerships. Mary Allison Haynie, director of the Ottawa Main Street Association, said one purpose of West's session is to prepare Franklin County for being named a National Heritage Area.

Haynie said legislation has been proposed that would highlight the several counties in eastern Kansas for their sites pertaining to the mid-19th century pre-Civil War period known as Bleeding Kansas. In the meantime, West said Ottawa also can explore the development of heritage partnerships.

West described heritage partnerships as reciprocal deals among property owners, non-profit organizations, businesses and public agencies.

"My mantra is, 'shared goals, shared resources and shared responsibility equals long-term success for all of the partners,' " he said.

West said he wanted participants to explore partnerships that would be the most useful for Ottawa, key resources to be promoted and what key resources are sacred to the community.

Participants in West's session will tour several local historic sites related to the history of Bleeding Kansas, including the site of John Brown's Pottawatomie Massacre near Lane.

West said historic preservation is important because in the past few decades, many cities have lost their individuality through mass marketing and the spread of chain stores. That makes it especially difficult for small towns to compete for business, he said.

For this reason, historic preservation adds a sense of identity and pride to a community, which makes it attractive to visitors and incoming businesses, West said.

But West said preservation does not mean anti-growth in a community. For example, in Tennessee, some of the fastest-growing cities have the strongest preservation programs, he said.

"People want to live in distinctive, meaningful, nurturing communities," he said.

"Historic preservation is one of the key components of creating that type of place."

To sign up for this session or any other session during the workshop, contact Haynie at the Ottawa Main Street Association at (785) 242-2085. The deadline to apply is July 30.