

Workshop Notes

Equity Forum: Upending Cultural Displacement

A first-of-its-kind live technical assistance workshop for communities working on the theme discussed at the Equity Forum

Community of Royal (Royal, FL)

Description:

- Royal is one of Florida's oldest African-American communities, formally established in 1865. Oral histories from elderly informants, historical documents, and evidence note the existence of free black people dating back to the 1830s. The community has since grown into a strong and vibrant rural agricultural community. And today, many of the descendants of previous Black agriculturalists continue to occupy the buildings and properties developed by their ancestors.
- New development including Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT)'s proposed turnpike extension and a new industrial park, pose a threat to the community's culture, vibrancy, and livability. These developments also threaten to displace residents and potentially destroy farmland businesses, and the community's historical integrity.
- The residents developed a Community Plan back in 2017, but that plan doesn't address many of their current issues, however, it is in the process of being updated.

Workshop goals:

- Looking for guidance on how to protect and preserve the community's rich history and continue to create cultural experiences that enrich the lives of future generations
- Questions for panelists
 - Can the UDA take Royal out of their area?
 - What can they do to convince FDOT to stay out of Royal?
 - Can the community's plan be adopted as part of the County's comprehensive plan?
 - How can they stop industrial & heavy commercial development while allowing neighborhood development within its boundaries?
 - How to ensure that future interstate roadways are not proposed through Royal?
 - How does the community approach outside landowners to regain ownership of lost parcels?
 - How to develop future viable enterprises for community residents?
- [View full application](#)

Team participants:

- **Beverly Steele**, Founder Young Performing Artists (YPAs), Inc.
- **Ralf Brookes**, Advocate
- **Jane West**, 1000 Friends
- **Brad Cornelius**, Wade-Trim
- **Meghan Gilmore**

Additional application materials:

- [Royal-Community-Heritage-Plan-Final-June-2017.pdf](#)
- [Florida-News-article-Pittman.pdf](#)
- [Royal-Community-with-Parcel-Number-Key-with-Oak-Hill-Cemetery.pdf](#)

Designated panelists and SGA staff members:

- **Ebony Venson**, Smart Growth America
- **Benny Starr**, US Water Alliance
- **Katharine Burgess**, Smart Growth America
- **Mollie Dalbey**, Transportation for America
- **Kristin Jeffers**, The Black Urbanist

MEETING NOTES:

Community Threats presented by Royal team:

- Proposed divisive, harmful DOT infrastructure that will take land from the community and disrupt historic cemeteries
 - The community learned about the DOT highway proposal via predatory outreach by eminent domain lawyers
 - The DOT is considering an alternative route to “lessen the impact on Royal”
- Lack of recognition of history, culture, and significance of Royal
- Encroaching development and surrounding county demographics are almost entirely white (98%), Republican. The surrounding community anticipates a doubling or tripling of the population.
- Located within an unincorporated part of the county - ‘at the will’ of county commissioners
- Anticipate any infrastructure investment will lead to community members leaving/selling their land, homes and farms and can cause a potential domino effect

Community Response

- Two 501c3s representing the community’s needs and interests, Young Performing Arts, Community of Royal
- Created Community Plan - seeking to embed this within the county’s Comprehensive Plan

- Creating Oral Histories, offering Historic Tours (since 2015, lots of interest)
- Community opposition to DOT plans is supported by a lawyer and 1,000 Friends of Florida (creating storytelling can be collateral)

Panelist Advice & brainstorming

- Legal advice is critical in the face of DOT action
- There is potential for national interest and coalition building
 - Consider marketing to future Black retirees
- Potential partnerships
 - National Trust for Historic Preservation African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund: <https://savingplaces.org/african-american-cultural-heritage#.Ys8VuezMJs8>
 - Acres of Ancestry: <https://acresofancestry.org/> - Benny Starr created a film on preserving black family land.
- Scale up/commercialize tours for revenue. This will help the community gain more exposure and build support to protect residents' land and unique history
 - Increase fees amount for virtual tours
 - Consider marketing to people coming to tourist who are travelling through the area.
 - Explore opportunities with AirBnB
 - Reach out to churches and others who might organize a trip to the community