



CONTACT INFORMATION:

Shelley Jones

601-649-3031

shelleyj@edajones.com

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Laurel-Jones County Welcome Center in Progress

The Laurel Housing Authority has partnered with the city of Laurel, the Economic Development Authority of Jones County, the Jones County Board of Supervisors, Laurel Main Street, and the Lauren Rogers Museum of Art to bring a welcome center and cultural history museum to Laurel with the creation of the Laurel Jones County Welcome Center. The center will be in a remaining structure that was one of Mississippi's first public housing units, located at the I-59 Exit 95C at Leontyne Price Blvd. The project renovation, designed by Laurel architect Michael McKinnon, is expected to be bid for construction in the next 30 days with an estimated 10 months for completion.

The project spearheaded by the Laurel Housing Authority, secured approval from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Mississippi Department of Archives and History to preserve one of the original buildings from one of the first public housing projects in Mississippi. The Laurel Housing Authority will be providing the bulk of the funding for the project along with funding from the city of Laurel and the Jones County Board of Supervisors. Alrick Young, director, Laurel Housing Authority, states "This project will allow the Laurel Housing Authority to preserve important history while also providing a much-needed service to the area. We want visitors to take this exit into Laurel and have a great first impression."

McKinnon's renderings pay homage to the history of the original building and site. The unit facing I-59 exit 95C will be remodeled into the Laurel-Jones County Welcome Center. This is the prime location to greet visitors and guide them down the Leontyne Price corridor into Downtown. Laurel Mayor Johnny Magee says "The Welcome Center will provide a great opportunity to educate visitors about the history of the city and the people who live here. We

want people to enjoy their time in Laurel and learn something new about what makes our city unique.”

Johnny Burnett, President, Jones County Board of Supervisors, adds “The whole county will benefit from the people coming to visit Laurel. This welcome center will allow us to connect visitors with attractions and experiences all over the county and inspire them to return.”

George Bassi, Director, Lauren Rogers Museum of Art has connected the project with an artist who will install a mosaic sculpture adjacent to the Welcome Center. Bassi comments “It is important to us that we represent the history of this building and the people who it once served as a home. LRMA is excited to facilitate this public art project to be created by residents of the Housing Authority community. The Welcome Center has great potential to service our tourism needs while also displaying the artistic character of Laurel.”

Trip planning information about the area including local attractions will be available inside. Ross Tucker, President, EDA of Jones County, says “The Laurel Jones County Welcome Center will fill our need for a first point of contact with travelers. The tourism department of the EDA has been searching for the best way to effectively greet and inform our visitors for the past few years. It very is unique to be able to showcase the rich history of our county while also providing information and direction.”

The welcome center will have a public restroom and dog area available for travelers. Susan Ladd, Director, Laurel Main Street, “LMS is thrilled to be a part of this great project. Having a dedicated welcome center will address some long time needs of downtown Laurel.”

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