

Friday, June 19, 2020

TO: Sponsors and Supporters of The Africatown International Design Idea Competition

FROM: Vickii Howell, President / CEO, M.O.V.E.. Gulf Coast CDC
Renee Kemp-Rotan, CEO, studio|rotan, Professional Competition Advisor

SUBJECT: **The Africatown International Design Idea Competition Rescheduled** from Juneteenth (June 19) 2020 Amid Global Covid-19 Concerns

A. COMPETITION UPDATE

WE WRITE THIS LETTER TO INFORM OUR SPONSORS AND SUPPORTERS that The Africatown International Design Idea Competition, originally scheduled for launch this Juneteenth (June 19) 2020, will be rescheduled for launch Juneteenth (June 19) 2021 due to the impact of COVID-19 on business conducted within design academies and architectural practices worldwide.

AS ARCHITECTS, DESIGNERS AND PLANNERS, we have no higher professional responsibility than protecting the communities we serve. We are an interconnected and integrated society and *this pandemic proves how interpersonal our global community has become*

DESPITE THE POWER AND PROMISE OF THE AFRICATOWN STORY, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted how we live, work, and compete for attention and resources. And now, the world's attention is riveted on current civil unrest around the May 25th death of George Floyd and other unarmed African Americans at the hands of police. Their tragic deaths unleashed a global tidal wave of pent-up grief and frustration over these extra-judicial killings. It also exposed and tore open unhealed, 400+ year-old wounds of inequality and injustice in the USA based on misguided notions of race.

Therefore, like everyone else, we had to re-evaluate our priorities. We made the difficult decision to re-schedule this global design event for the following reasons:

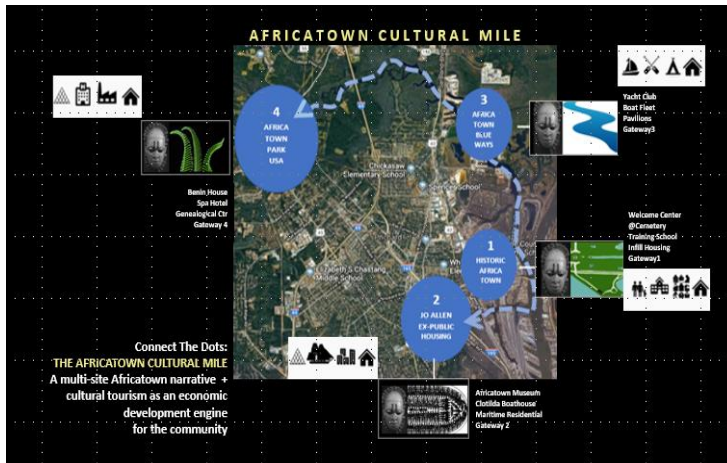
- **Major opportunities to promote the Competition** at national design conventions, such as the American Institute of Architects' annual convention have been cancelled;
- **Architecture schools** and design academies rushed to close out their final semester while making hard decisions about logistics for the upcoming 2020-21 academic year;
- **Architecture offices and professional design practices** are physically closed but professionals toil to maintain current clients, carry workloads and schedule meetings online; they are hard-pivoting to keep their businesses alive;
- **The Africatown International Design Idea Competition** would be buried under the greater need of global public health concerns;
- **The Competition would be best launched at a time** when the revitalization of Africatown can receive the kind of international attention its rich history deserves. **No piecemeal development or poorly designed buildings, please. The Competition will provide the best ideas the world has to offer, especially in times such as these.**
- **No one knows when things will get back to what will obviously be a new "normal,"** or what new terms the world sets for its post-pandemic future. **BUT, THE AFRICATOWN INTERNATIONAL DESIGN IDEA COMPETITION is well worth waiting for!**



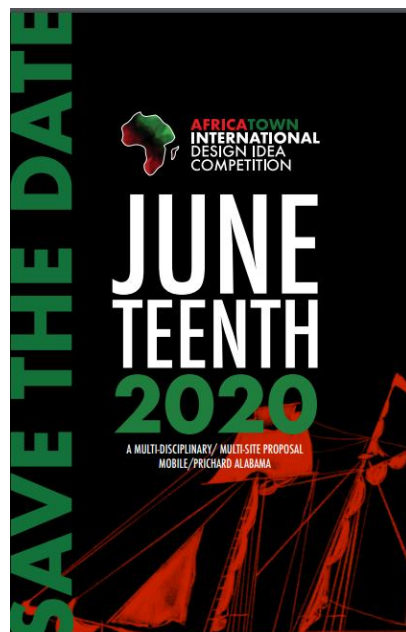
B. OUR COMMITMENT TO EXCELLENCE CONTINUES

WE, THE COMPETITION ORGANIZERS, REMAIN COMMITTED TO THIS PLANNING PROCESS AS A GALLANT ADVOCACY AND ORGANIZING TOOL that leverages the Clotilda discovery to stimulate and guide future cultural and economic revitalization of the Africatown community and surrounds. **Therefore, while awaiting competition re-launch; we will use this "down" time to:**

- **Develop The Africatown Cultural Mile Theme** as a major driver of Culture & Commerce in Africatown, the key objective of the Competition.
- **Transform the Competition website (www.AfricatownDesign.com) into an online magazine/Quarterly**, that keeps the public informed on Africatown’s community's revitalization plans—
- **Solidify ties** with The International Union of Architects (UIA) African Union of Architects (AUA)
- **Promote Competition & Strengthen ties with schools of architecture**, especially in Africa
- **Globally Promote the Competition's Juneteenth 2021 Launch**
- **Continue fundraising for marketing and promoting the Africatown International Competition.**



Africatown Cultural Mile 4 sites/16 venues



Original competition invite/ postcard. Dates to be re-scheduled for Juneteenth 2021.



C. COMPETITION ORGANIZERS' ACCOMPLISHMENTS TO DATE (short list):

- **Secured 2 New Grants For Africatown Community :**
 - **The Alabama Historical Commission Grant** to develop blueprints to recreate the Cudjo Lewis House in partnership with Africatown-C.H.E.S.S.;
 - **The Architectural League's American Roundtable Grant**-- in partnership with the National Endowment for the Arts and the Graham Foundation -- to produce a 30-page Africatown Case Study with editorials on Five Gaps in Africatown's Development: Public Health, Public Space, Work and Economy, Infrastructure and Environment (the case study will supplement the Competition's Design Challenge);
- **Assigned 2 Schools of Architecture/Environmental Design** that produced field surveys and site maps for the Competition venues. (Thank you University of Oregon and Oberlin College!)
- **Selected 16-Member Competition Design Jury**, 8 national, international design jurors and 8 local community jurors to select the top designs from final Competition submissions;
- **Planned A Series of Civic Engagement Events for Africatown Community about the Competition** -- Africatown~ C.H.E.S.S., the Mobile County Training School Alumni Association, the Clotilda Descendants Association, the Africatown Heritage Preservation Foundation, and the Africatown Community Development Corporation;
- **Secured Africatown's Blessing to host the Competition on its behalf** at July 2019 community meeting (<http://www.africatown-chess.org/2019/07/africatown-says-yes-to-proposed-architectural-competition-at-chess-community-meeting/536/>)
- **Promoted Competition Nationally via Lectures about Africatown and Its Design Challenges** at major conferences and universities: NOMA (National Organization of Minority Architects), the Africatown (Seattle, WA) Community Land Trust, the Historic Black Towns Settlements Alliance, the Ekdahl Memorial Lecture, and at other venues;
- **Developed Committed Partnerships** with African American Experts on History, Preservation and Design:
 - **Dr. Michael Blakey**, Anthropologist at William and Mary College; Director of research for the New York African Burial Ground Project;
 - **Dr. Natalie S. Robertson**, Africatown historian, author of *The Slave Ship Clotilda and the Making of AfricaTown, USA: Spirit of Our Ancestors*;
 - **Bill Bates**, FAIA, Immediate Past President of the American Institute of Architects (AIA);
 - **Jack Travis**, FAIA, NOMAC, Competition Jury Chair;
 - **Nmadili Okwumabua**, founder of The Community Planning & Design Initiative, which sponsors design competitions on the African continent.
 - **Dr. Deborah Plant, Editor**, Zora Neale Hurston's notes into the NYT best-selling book, *Barracoon: The Story of the Last "Black Cargo"*
- **Created Competition content, marketing and promotions collateral including a website (www.africatowndesign.com)**, jury and press kits, brochures and other graphic artwork to support the Competition;
- **Secured financial support** from the American Institute of Architects, National Organization of Minority Architects, Visit Mobile, Michael and Patsy Dow Family Foundation, and others.

D. BLACK DESIGN MATTERS*

WE UNDERSTOOD THE SIGNIFICANCE OF JUNETEENTH WHEN WE CHOSE THIS DATE TO LAUNCH THE COMPETITION. Juneteenth is the oldest unofficial holiday celebrating the end of slavery in the United States. It commemorates how the news of freedom came to slaves in the remote areas of Texas on June 19, 1865, 2 years after the Emancipation Proclamation technically freed them, and 2 months after the Civil War officially ended.



Despite passing 3 U.S. Constitutional Amendments promising full and equal American citizenship to its former slaves and their descendants 155 years ago, our nation, states and communities still struggle with issues of systemic racism and injustice. Modern-day struggles against these issues gave rise to the Black Lives Matter Movement. Floyd's death -- the direct result of a police officer pinning his neck to the ground with his knee for 8 minutes and 46 seconds -- and the deaths of other black people have turned this national movement into a global one.

Many Americans, appalled at the injustices directed at black people, seek to ensure that the very words upon which our republic was founded -- **that all are created equal** -- truly extends to all its citizens, regardless of race, creed, color or sexual orientation. They are now embracing Juneteenth and its special meaning; it is likely on its way to becoming an official national holiday.

This is now the backdrop of the Competition, focused on a unique black community created as a direct result of the Clotilda slave ship's illegal voyage to Africa. Though it wasn't burned or bombed as other black communities like Greenwood in Tulsa, OK, Africatown remains in dire need of preservation, repair and revitalization.

***SO, the Competition will always be tied to JUNETEENTH and its meaning. Our motto: IF WE CAN SAVE THE SHIP | WE CAN SAVE THE TOWN | BLACK TOWNS MATTER.**

THEREFORE, NOW MORE THAN EVER, WE REMAIN WHOLEHEARTEDLY COMMITTED to further perfecting the Competition's design challenges with Africatown residents, governing groups and officials to ensure that Africatown's preservation and community development concerns -- **as well as its social and environmental justice challenges** -- are clearly addressed. We invite the architecture community's world-class thinkers/designers/developers to join us in rethinking, reimagining, and redesigning what's next for this unique community.



Website as quarterly online magazine | while awaiting Re-Launch

& WHEN WE EMERGE FROM THIS TEMPORARY COVID-19 SETBACK, we can better launch **The Africatown International Design Idea Competition** to deliver high-quality, world-class design challenges, giving architects, designers and planners across the globe a unique opportunity to deliver an outstanding master-planning framework for current plans and the Africatown Cultural Mile, and for a Traveling Exhibit of the Competition's Outstanding Designs as a fundraiser for future Africatown redevelopment activities.

