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Vital Sites Hires First Executive Director

Vital Sites, a preservation and community redevelopment nonprofit, has hired its first executive director after a nationwide search. Heath Seymour has been selected to serve the organization and brings a background in business, economic development, arts, and preservation to the position. He was most recently the director for downtown development in the mountain town of Brevard, North Carolina. Before this role, he helped with improvements in several Kentucky towns, as well as in Georgia, while working with the National Main Street program, a revitalization program started by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Seymour has a BFA in Painting from Western Kentucky University and an MBA in Entrepreneurship from the University of Louisville.

Experience with development in historic areas include recent improvements in downtown Elizabethtown, where he worked closely with the mayor and other officials to acquire key properties and bring in development to blend with historic preservation projects. He also made a successful push for a “road diet” in the downtown area, which reduced the scale of the highway and led to increased investment in the downtown.

He previously worked in Hodgenville to help prepare the town for the Lincoln Biennial event, with a focus on buildings and infrastructure in the downtown area. Within three years from concepts to completion there were major improvements to most downtown buildings, and all roads, sidewalks, and infrastructure in the main downtown corridor were redesigned and replaced. Another notable project was a national search for Hodgenville’s next Lincoln sculpture, and this project led to other Lincoln-related arts projects throughout Kentucky. He also worked on similar projects to bring business, development, and streetscape improvements to other towns such as Scottsville, Kentucky and Statesboro, Georgia.

Vital Sites provides solutions to encourage investment in and development of historic properties, creating value in Louisville’s neighborhoods. The organization’s first major venture, East Broadway Row, has resulted in the rehabilitation of five late nineteenth-century shotgun houses on East Broadway near Baxter Avenue and Cave Hill Cemetery. The vacant houses were donated to Vital Sites by the former owner of the Phoenix Hill Tavern instead of being demolished. East Broadway Row presents a new paradigm for preservation in Louisville: the partnership of Vital Sites, a nonprofit, with a private landowner and a private developer. This creative private-nonprofit partnership is a model of how large-scale new development and smaller scale renovation can work cooperatively and creatively to revitalize neighborhoods.

In 2015, the National Trust for Historic Preservation named Louisville the first citywide member of its National Treasure portfolio. Vital Sites has been developed with the guidance of the Research and Policy Lab (formerly the Preservation Green Lab) of the National Trust, which has used Louisville as an urban laboratory for the past four years. Vital Sites is the rebranded name of the Louisville Preservation Fund, a revolving fund created at the time Whiskey Row was saved from demolition in 2012. The public-private partnership has transformed a declining block of Main Street into a thriving center of restaurants, residences, museum, and hotel and is a model Vital Sites seeks to duplicate in the future. Vital Sites absorbed Preservation Louisville, Inc. in 2017.

About Vital Sites: Vital Sites is a nonprofit launched to use adaptive reuse and development as tools to build healthy, sustainable communities in Metro Louisville. www.VitalSites.org

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sustaining healthy communities