



# IDEASWA

*volume 2* SPRING 2014

## **PUBLIC SPACE +**

IDEASWA is a design journal with contributions by members of SWA, a leading international landscape architecture, planning and urban design firm. This issue focuses on the public realm, where we put our most compelling ideas to the test in cities as diverse as Tulsa, Anaheim, Honolulu and Houston.



## PUBLIC SPACE



Public spaces are rapidly evolving. The integration of clean energy and mass-transit alternatives plus new attitudes about water conservation and ecological performance are all significant transformative measures within the public realm today. The movement of vast numbers of people is a critical factor in these scenarios, and, by the year 2050, it is predicted that 90 percent of the U.S. population will be living in cities. How we treat the 21st-century streetscape is increasingly important as these regions become denser and streets need to perform as multi-functional public spaces.

The examples here describe large and small innovations answering requirements in cities as diverse as Los Angeles, Dallas, Oakland, Tulsa, San Francisco, Houston and Anaheim. They represent collaborations between various design and engineering professionals and address the agendas of policy makers, local residents and merchants. And while the projects are rooted contextually and offer no one-size-fits-all solutions, the common language of community infuses each and extends its potential value beyond any geographical boundaries.

IDEAS keeps us looking forward. **Enjoy.**

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# IDEASWA

## PUBLIC SPACE

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## Market Mile

### INDETERMINATE GROWTH & PLANNING FOR UNCERTAINTY

Natalia Beard

Out of 400,000 square feet of retail located within the district, 46 percent are flea market vendors located along the district's main economic corridor, Airline Drive.

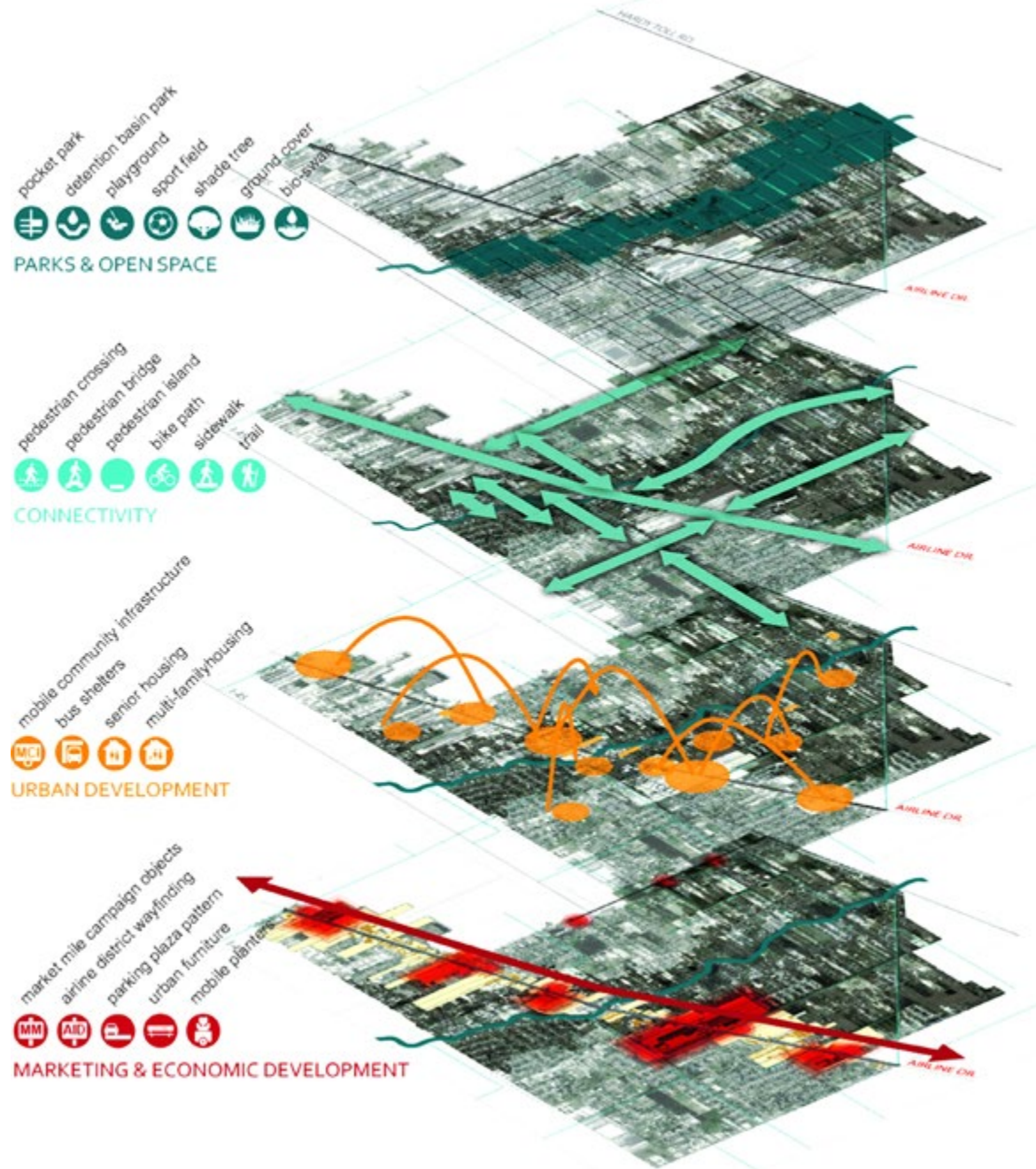
Houston, TX

Market Mile is a response to critical urban planning issues facing Harris County's Airline Improvement District. It responds to the site-specific cultural, environmental and economic conditions of the unincorporated 4.2-square-mile district and provides a branding and networking strategy for the community. A key to this project is providing a backbone upon which separate interests can collectively realize infrastructural and economic improvements more expediently. Inspired by the resourceful nature of entrepreneurial activity located in this area, this planning project gives district residents and local businesses the ability to mold their own community while maintaining the existing grassroots and organic flows of goods and services.

Born out of Houston's Livable Centers Initiative, funding was provided for planning studies targeting areas positioned for urban growth, but which need infrastructure improvements. As a hub between major transportation centers, the Airline Improvement District is a strong candidate for Livable Center planning funds. A potential future light rail connecting George Bush International Airport to downtown Houston additionally makes it more attractive as a study area.

The district currently suffers from a number of serious blockages that slow new development: It lacks city water service, suffers from serious bayou flooding, affords only

limited district police patrol and is poorly connected by roads built for rural traffic. For these reasons, the economy and local housing stock have stagnated. As with many communities that struggle with issues of poverty and poor resources, designers here used positive community components as building blocks to improve upon negative conditions; in this case, the desirable outcome is a livable center that encourages people to live, work and play within the district. To achieve this goal, major infrastructure and economic improvements are crucial. The concept for Market Mile capitalizes on the district's positive attributes through a communally organized branding and networking campaign address the current development roadblocks.



It is within the flea markets and the symbiotic businesses surrounding them that we found opportunity for advancing the district's quality of life while maintaining the area's unique cultural character.



### PLANNING APPROACH

The Airline Improvement District possesses some of the largest and most active flea markets in Houston's metropolitan region. Out of 400,000 square feet of retail located within the district, 46 percent are flea market vendors located along the district's main economic corridor, Airline Drive. Every weekend tens of thousands of people converge on these flea markets not only to shop and enjoy live entertainment but, more importantly, to participate in an intensely unique and sensually rich cultural experience. With many residents living below poverty level, these flea markets serve as incubators for entrepreneurial growth and communal pride. While this activity is the district's strongest socioeconomic asset, the district management team currently lacks the connective relationships needed with market vendors to grow the economy.

Because of the need for basic community services and economic growth, as well as the district management's desire to connect their work with the community, SWA designed a programmatic structure to bridge the political disconnect and bring new services to the area. This structure, called the Market Mile (MM) and Mobile Community Infrastructure (MCI), leverages the concentrated entrepreneurial and social activity surrounding the flea markets and creates a new kind of partnership between businesses, residents and District management.

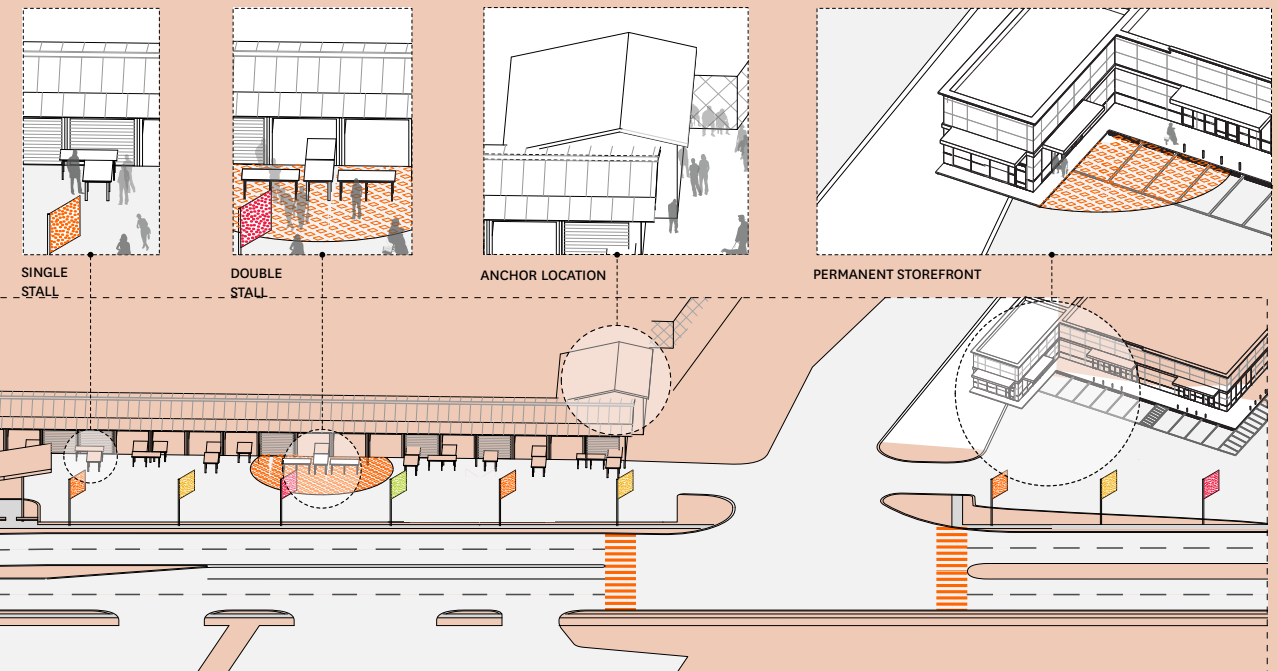
What differentiates the idea from other neighborhood branding campaigns is the coupling of physical and social infrastructure. The social infrastructure builds an organized foundation to leverage existing district activities, while the physical infrastructure provides services that enhance and redefine the district.

Where the Market Mile begins the dialogue between business and District management, the Mobile Community Infrastructure program extends that conversation to locations not always associated with the commercial spine of Airline Drive. Learning from existing conditions and how people currently use their space, MCI takes shape as a fleet of small trucks, providing soft services like computer labs, finance and language classes, a library, music/dancing venues, an art gallery, grocery store and other community amenities. The mobile nature of MCI is inspired by the mobile food and retail services that currently operate successfully within the vacuum of public service and regulation there.

Business, nonprofit and government partnerships formed through this agreement help realize the MCI mobile store/community amenity trucks. Deficiencies in hard infrastructure which won't be resolved for years to come are bypassed through this inclusive strategy.

MCI formalizes a community network by seeding it with basic services, cultivating its culture and providing educational opportunities. As the physical infrastructure is developed and the area undergoes change that is both desired and inevitable, the community is able to take ownership of the area and become an integral part of the planning conversation.

INFORMAL PATTERN OF SMALL BUSINESS GROWTH IN THE AIRLINE DISTRICT



# Urban Activists BETTER BLOCK

Interview by Carrie Van Valkenberg,  
Leah Hales and Jean Pierre Casillas



Jason Roberts goes to work on a local street.

**“I tell people—don’t be afraid to get out there. Everyone is waiting for someone else to do something.”**

Dallas, TX

Two years ago, IT consultant Jason Roberts decided to stop waiting for someone else to create the kind of community he dreamed of living in. He partnered with his then employer SWA Dallas to initiate small yet bold changes to neglected sites in his own Oak Cliff community of Dallas, Texas. This collaboration resulted in the formation of the Better Block organization and ultimately garnered a National ASLA Award. Team Better Block fundamentally broke down the big idea of urban revitalization into quick-fire, block-sized community events. By virtue of its simplicity and practicality, the Better Block methodology has since flourished elsewhere, both domestically and abroad, with demonstrations being performed in over 40 American cities and soon at sites in Chile, Australia and France. Better Block has received press coverage from the *New York Times*, *Dwell* magazine, TED Talks and NPR, as well as honors from the White House, which granted Jason a lunch with First Lady Michelle Obama and named him a 2012 Champion of Change. Team Better Block was also showcased in the US Pavilion—Spontaneous Interventions—at the 2012 Architecture Venice Biennale. We caught up with Roberts, now a full-time urban activist, to get his personal perspective on the profound success and rapid evolution of his efforts.

**SWA: What is your background and how did it evolve into a career in Urban Activism?**

**ROBERTS:** For 15 years, my day job was as an IT consultant—including for SWA Dallas—however, I spent a majority of my nights and weekends leading a number of activist projects within Oak Cliff. Those projects ranged from revitalizing the historic Texas Theatre and advocating for improved bicycling infrastructure to serving as founding President—and lone member—of the Oak Cliff Transit Authority, which resulted in landing a \$23-million stimulus grant to implement a modern streetcar system in Dallas. Additionally, while I was employed as an IT consultant at the SWA Dallas office, I was exposed to landscape architecture, urban design and planning and often discussed projects and ideas with [SWA Dallas Principals] Chuck McDaniel and David Thompson. It was during one of these discussions that we decided to collaborate and perform the second-ever Better Block in Oak Cliff. After that initiative we began our social media outreach through blogging, You-Tube, etc. Soon, Better Block went viral and I was asked to speak at TED Talks, and shortly after that cities began contacting me about performing their own Better Block projects. Within a year, I was slowly stepping out of IT and leading Better Block installations throughout the country.

**SWA: What inspired you to make a difference in your community? Was there something that you saw that wasn't working that you wanted to change?**

**ROBERTS:** After studying a number of cities, I became fascinated by the commercial nodes that were nestled into communities. Specifically, in pre-war cities I found these nodes existing along streetcar lines. In the present day, many of these enclaves are boarded up and are no longer in use, so I started asking questions. Through research I learned that these storefronts were once the eyes of the streets: barbershops, butchers, florists, markets and delis—where everyone knew each other. I then asked why they were no longer used in that capacity and found that zoning had changed to promote a more auto-centric city. Naturally, as energy and cars became more affordable people began to embrace this new sprawling form; the downside was that a majority of those small businesses began to fail and the social fabric of the community was lost. So I asked why we can't change the zoning back. How did we design cities when energy was more expensive, cars weren't as easily accessible, and you had to walk? My answer was just a few blocks away from the enclaves I had



*A local craftsman installs a temporary art piece.*

been investigating. The Bishop Arts District, only a block in size, was also a streetcar stop and built to old form specs that zoning doesn't allow anymore. What remains is a vibrant public space with small shops, narrow streets, lighting, sidewalk cafes, shared parking facilities and street trees. So I asked myself, what if there was an easing of regulations in order to make that happen again?

**SWA: Do you pick out a "perfect" site to do an installation?**

**ROBERTS:** We've transformed bridges, suburban spaces, market squares and plazas. The sites that have proven the most successful date from the 1910s through the 1930s and have a historic wall built right up to the sidewalk. It was a fascinating time in our history when transportation was multi-modal. Cars were present and people were walking and biking, but over half of transportation was via streetcar. Things were built at a smaller, human scale, which resulted in a great pedestrian environment. Our goal through Better Block is to incorporate all modes of transportation, which is why we have also found it beneficial if the existing street is wider, as it allows for street-tree medians, sidewalk cafes and bike lanes. Great streets have it all.



*A three-lane street was transformed to two lanes by a planted median, street trees and a shared seating area.*

**SWA: What can practicing professionals learn from your successes and findings with Better Block?**

**ROBERTS:** The biggest take away is the power of an experiential approach. The idea that it's one thing to see a rendering of a public space and it's another to build-out a small portion of it so that the community can touch it, feel it and experience it so that it becomes tangible. Many cities have experienced a bit of rendering-fatigue. It's not the fault of architects or designers, but the beautiful images and plans they create are often used as leverage to secure more public funds. After four or five renderings have been proposed, a suspicion begins to form and the community questions if the project will ever happen or not. We have also found it incredibly effective that Better Block is temporary. The public has a fear of permanency, thinking that they don't have the time or funds to waste if the project fails. As a result, many of our plans have become watered down and based on worst-case scenarios. Better Block is able to go in for only three to seven days and, in an incredibly innovative way, transform the community. We have found success in treating Better Block more like an art installation. Doing so has enabled us to perform our work free of permits and certificates of occupancy. It's not really a coffee shop, it's an artist rendering of what a coffee shop would be like if it were here and just happens to really serve coffee. People still challenge our ideas, and that's okay because if we fail at least we have proof of the scientific method on our side; if we're wrong we've learned something and it will influence our design for the better. As I tell people, don't be afraid to get out there. Everyone is waiting for someone else to do something.

**SWA: As people all applaud the work that has been done by Better Block, has there been any policy change as a result of an installation?**

**ROBERTS:** Dallas has taken a long time to adopt these changes, but bike infrastructure has been installed in Memphis and Fort Worth stemming from Better Block projects. A major advancement that we've been able to make locally is having a participant in our first Better Block project elected to Dallas City Council. He has made it his charge to peel back antiquated zoning regulations. As a result, a number of zoning and ordinances that we identified as detrimental to the area are being overturned right now.

There is so much that we can all learn from the efforts of Roberts and other urban activists like him. Grassroots projects are happening all over the U.S. and have demonstrated an impressive ability to implement change, from increasing one's sense of community to updating city regulations. Roberts encourages everyone to become involved, and, most importantly, to do it now.

*—Interview conducted September 2012*

**To learn more about Team Better Block visit: [betterblock.org](http://betterblock.org)**

# San Francisco's Central Corridor

## CREATING AN ECO-DISTRICT IN A DENSELY DEVELOPED AMERICAN CITY

Charly Nelson and Jessica Rossi-Mastracci

San Francisco, CA

San Francisco's Central Corridor presents a unique challenge that highlights specific issues found in living within a densely developed American city. Unlike many new developments, the Central Corridor is a functioning district that has a rich cultural and architectural history and an urban identity—one that developers and designers aim to preserve. The district's urban grid is intact and buildings are occupied. It is accessible through public transportation and has recently seen developmental interest and economic investment due to construction of a new subway line. This area is in stark contrast to the "clean slate" urban development strategy seen in new cities around the world. So, how does San Francisco transform? What opportunities are there to work within an existing urban fabric?

**During SWA's 2012 annual internship program, students set out to define the site and issues. They explored how landscape architecture can bring diversity to the design process and to the creation of an Eco-District for San Francisco's Central Corridor.**

The concept of an Eco-District is vague, the phrase itself ambiguous. Ecological in what sense? For planners, it encompasses land use, density, transportation connectivity, energy efficiency and water reuse. To engineers, it translates to system efficiencies and productivity. Architects define it in terms of building efficiency and design. But each of those definitions lacks the concepts of public space, pedestrian access, ecology and natural processes—all of which fall within the realm of landscape architecture.

Students researched examples including one substantial precedent found at the Portland Sustainability Institute (PSI) in Oregon. PSI's framework for creating an Eco-District includes high-impact and district-scale projects, linking buildings and influencing infrastructure and behavior to achieve neighborhood sustainability and broader city goals. It embraces both innovation and the ability to replicate by looking at how systems and techniques can be implemented throughout a large district. Most uniquely, Portland's concept of an Eco-District envisions the urban environment as one integrated system in which each discipline can key in and play a distinct role whether through producing and conserving energy, capturing and filtering run-off water or streamlining mass transit and overall connectivity. The end goal is to improve system performance, strengthen community involvement and identity, embrace technology in an urban environment and focus on economic development and job creation. Notable international precedents include the Western Harbor in Malmö, Sweden, and Dockside Green in Victoria, Canada.



### THE CENTRAL CORRIDOR

Through site visits, the students documented the current Central Corridor as a block structure much larger than the rest of San Francisco, comprised of large old warehouses and industrial buildings. Wide streets are juxtaposed with narrow alleyways. The western terminus of Interstate-80 bisects the site and joins the multitude of public transportation modes slated to inhabit the Central Corridor in the near future. These include a new subway/light rail line and the northern terminus of the proposed high-speed rail line that will connect San Francisco with Los Angeles. The site is currently at a scale oriented to the automobile, is not conducive to pedestrian activities and contains little public open space.

The cultural enclaves of Moscone Center, Yerba Buena Gardens, and SFMoMA frame the northern edge of the site, drawing in locals and visitors alike and creating an intriguing bridge between the corridor and the downtown financial district. Warehouses in the Central Corridor have established a culturally rich environment of technology, industry and people making complex projects out of cheap or free materials for art, technology or general innovation. Additionally, most neighborhoods in San Francisco have access to countless parks and green spaces. This neighborhood is limited to one such place, South Park, which is a successful park, albeit small (approximately 100ft x 500ft).



*SWA principals Ying Yu Hung and Joe Runco discuss student Gwen McGinn's "maker alley" landscape Eco-District proposal. Each student design was reviewed and guided by principals and staff from the multiple SWA offices.*





Katie Jenkins, University of Virginia  
Eco-District as Public Space



Utilizing research and analysis provided by the San Francisco Planning Department, the students homed in on the site's potentials. They also considered community input gathered by the planning department, such as concerns about safety, lighting, pedestrian access and the lack of open space. After an initial period of collaborative site discovery, the students worked on projects of their own design at ever smaller scales to develop various interpretations of what an Eco-District can be. These ideas were shared with the City and add to discussions about the future of San Francisco's Central Corridor.



Jihee Chung, Iowa State University  
Eco-District as Natural Process Utilities

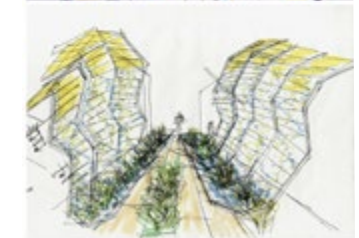


FUTURE OBJECTIVES

The objective of SWA's 2012 Summer Internship program was both to work on a proposal with real significance and direction with the City, and to develop an understanding of a landscape architecture approach to ecological planning and systems design. The fresh perspectives each student brought to the table increased the options in tackling this issue of creating an Eco-District in San Francisco's Central Corridor. The student proposals circulated through city agencies and have been added to the list of eco-innovation implementation options available.

The projects were shared with the public in a presentation at SPUR in August of 2012. This included a conversation with the City and Kate McGee of the San Francisco Planning Department, and a screening of the video that documented the student's designs, process and eco-district research.

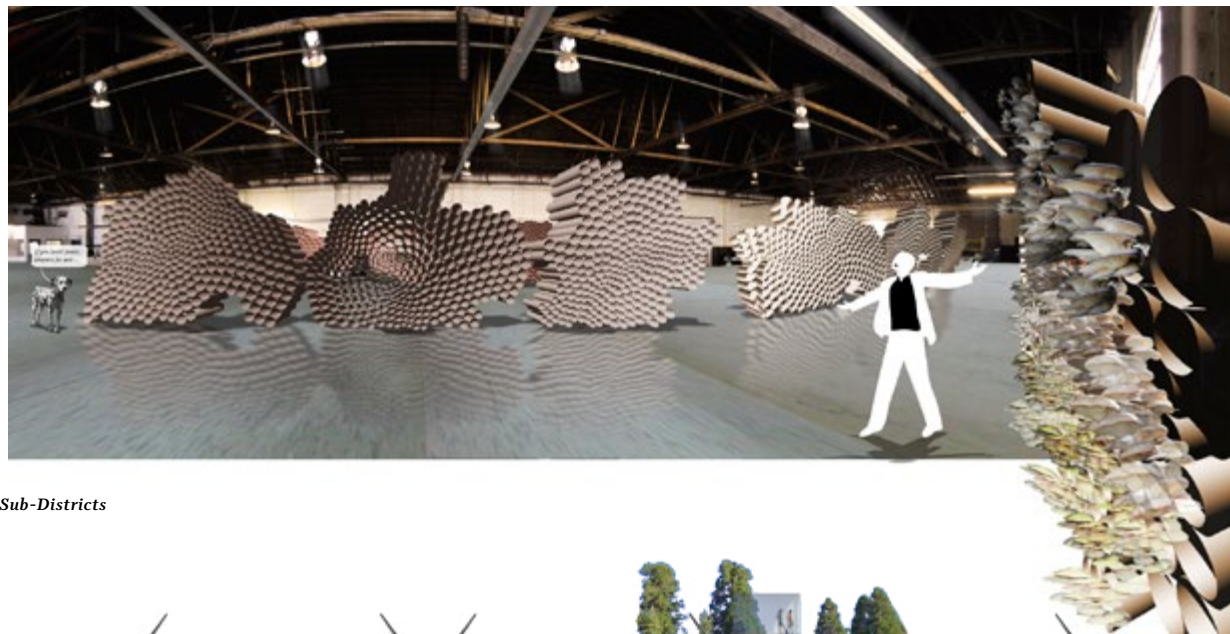
[youtube.com/user/SWAGroup](http://youtube.com/user/SWAGroup)



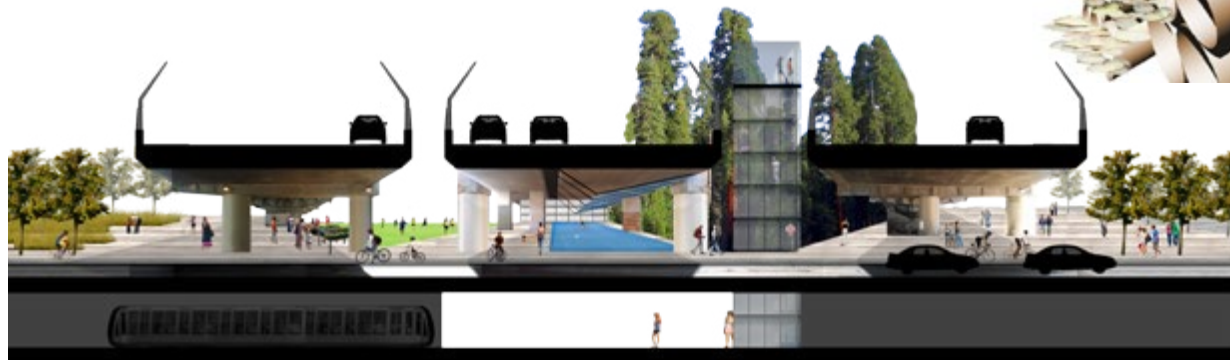
Tina Chee, University of Southern California  
Eco-District as Process Display



Frank Hu, Harvard GSD  
Eco-District as Specific Sub-Districts



Jessica Rossi-Mastracci, University of Pennsylvania  
Eco-District as Systems and Infrastructure



Tim Campbell, University of Texas-Austin  
Eco-District as Generative Networks



Gwen McGinn, University of Virginia  
Eco-District as Culture





The campus will establish an open-space network that functions as a complex and multilayered system that will solve multiple environmental issues for the campus and help contribute to the overall environmental health of the region.

San Diego, CA

## Generative Urban Corridors

Kevin Slawson

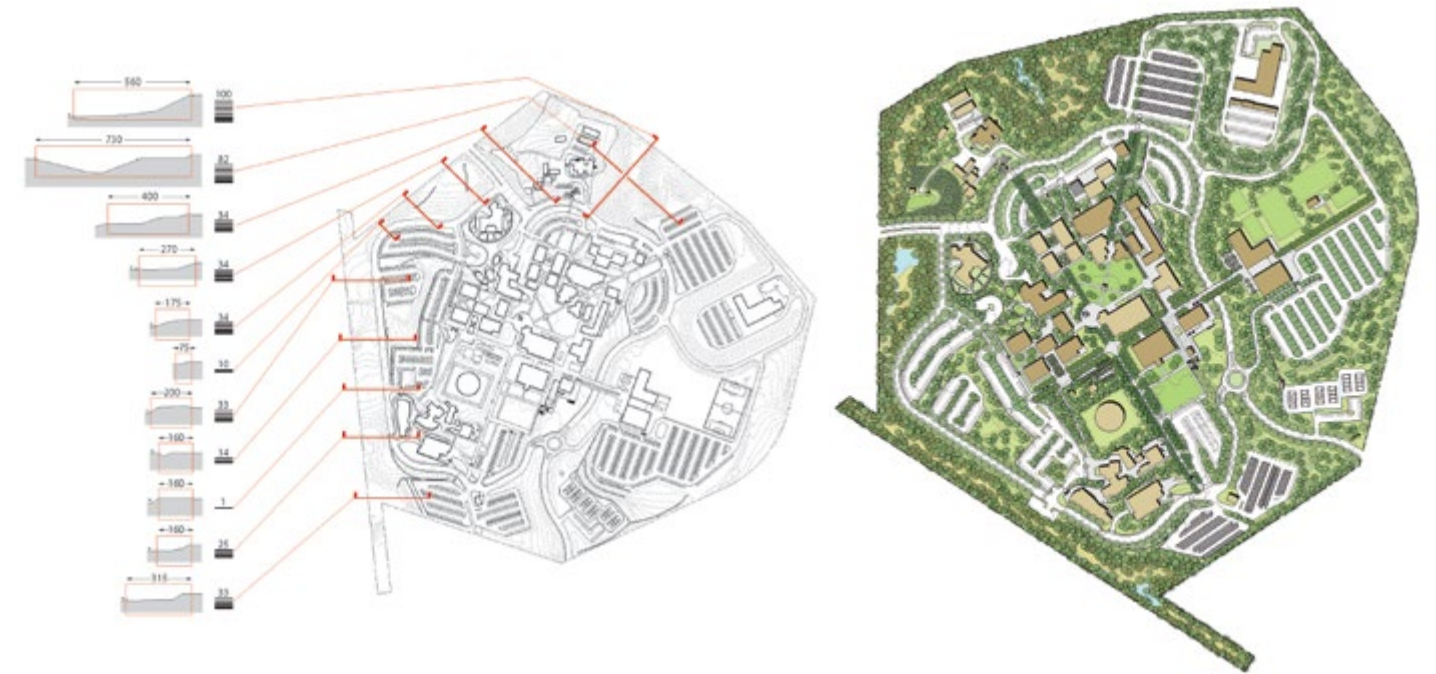
Mundane and ignored patches of unused land can yield ecological surprises. The picture that emerges is thus one of discovery, of an urban society beginning to look at its immediate surroundings with fresh eyes, seeing new possibilities in old things. A radical change in perception is created. —David Nicholson

We live in this paradox where the city is the center of enormous concentrations of energy (infrastructure, cultural resources, financial institutions, etc.), yet the urban landscape is often ecologically sterile and unproductive. This is especially true within the “designed” landscape where mowed turf, plazas and fountains depend on high-energy inputs to maintain social relevance. How can we exploit the characteristics of the aesthetic landscape and combine the performative qualities of native open space? How do we

merge this traditional notion of landscape as “amenity” with the more functional properties of derelict and forgotten landscapes, which typically contain greater floral and faunal biodiversity with virtually no cost or care? This objective, to derive the most social and environmental benefits from the least amount of energy and maintenance effort, must be a central objective in contemporary planning and urban design practice.

As development pushes against its geographic limits, increased pressure will be placed on existing urban/suburban infill development to maximize the full potential of the land. This increased efficiency will yield financial gains with higher density and performative landscapes that simultaneously serve multiple infrastructural needs. As this future wave of infill development expands across Southern California, careful planning and policy decisions need to be made to ensure the environmental health of the region. This scenario is currently playing itself out in Northern San Diego County with the Mira Costa Community College District Master Plan, whereby strategic landscape interventions can become a case study for future planning and development strategies.

With over 2,000 acres of fresh- and salt-water lagoons, Northern San Diego County is home to some of the most



Graded Site Elevations: The new master plan will redirect perimeter drainage into detention basins within the adjacent utility corridor that will help filter pollutants before reaching the nearby wetland and ocean.

Site Plan

productive wildlife habitat areas within California. This same area has also seen unprecedented residential and commercial growth over the past 30 years that has been detrimental to the environmental health of the region, and resulted in more rare, threatened and endangered species than in any other comparable land area in the United States.

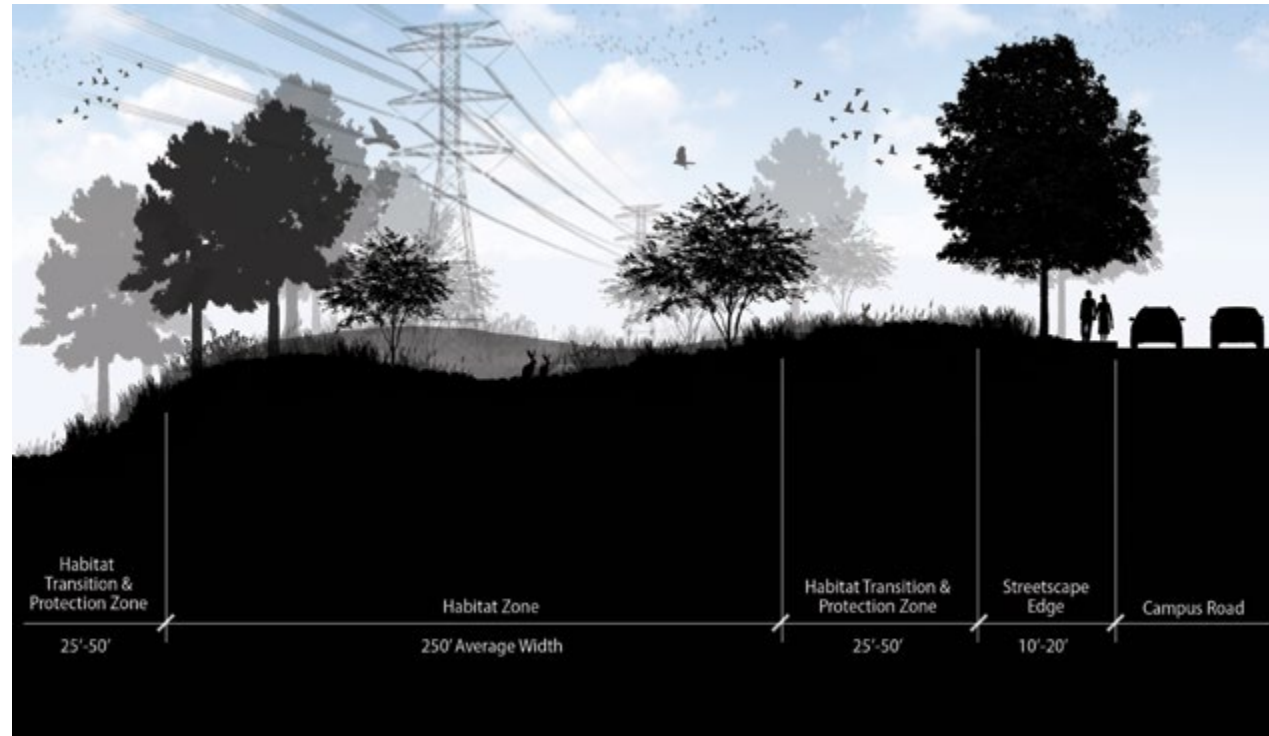
In 1991, California passed the Natural Community Conservation Planning Act (NCCP), which set up four sub-regional habitat conservation areas within San Diego County with the goal of maintaining natural biological communities and species native to the region. This planning approach replaced the previous project-by-project biological mitigation process—in which widespread habitat loss was created by piecemeal mitigation efforts—with a comprehensive plan that identified priority conservation areas with high levels of biodiversity.

Within this context lies the Mira Costa Community College, covering 125 acres and serving almost 20,000 students. With the emergence of increased environmental awareness and the pending green technology boom, the college is trying to position themselves as a leader in environmental vocational education. In an effort to forward Mira Costa’s strong commitment to the environment, it commissioned

a Landscape and Facilities Master Plan to be grounded in environmentally sensitive practices that guide future development and help establish Mira Costa College as an educational leader in environmental research and stewardship.

One of the primary goals of the Mira Costa Landscape and Facilities Master Plan is to break down the landscape into its core components and thoroughly understand how it functions in order to highlight opportunities that can improve efficiency and maintenance costs. This process will establish an open-space network that functions as a complex and multilayered system that will solve multiple environmental issues for the campus and help contribute to the overall environmental health of the region.

The Oceanside campus is located along the eastern edge of the NCCP mandated Multiple Habitat Conservation Plan (MHCP) wildlife corridor that extends north to Camp Pendleton and south to the 78 freeway. This corridor serves as the last remaining natural open space linkage within the Oceanside subarea, and is therefore a vital component to the regional habitat matrix. The five-mile-long corridor is a key habitat for protected California Gnatcatcher populations.

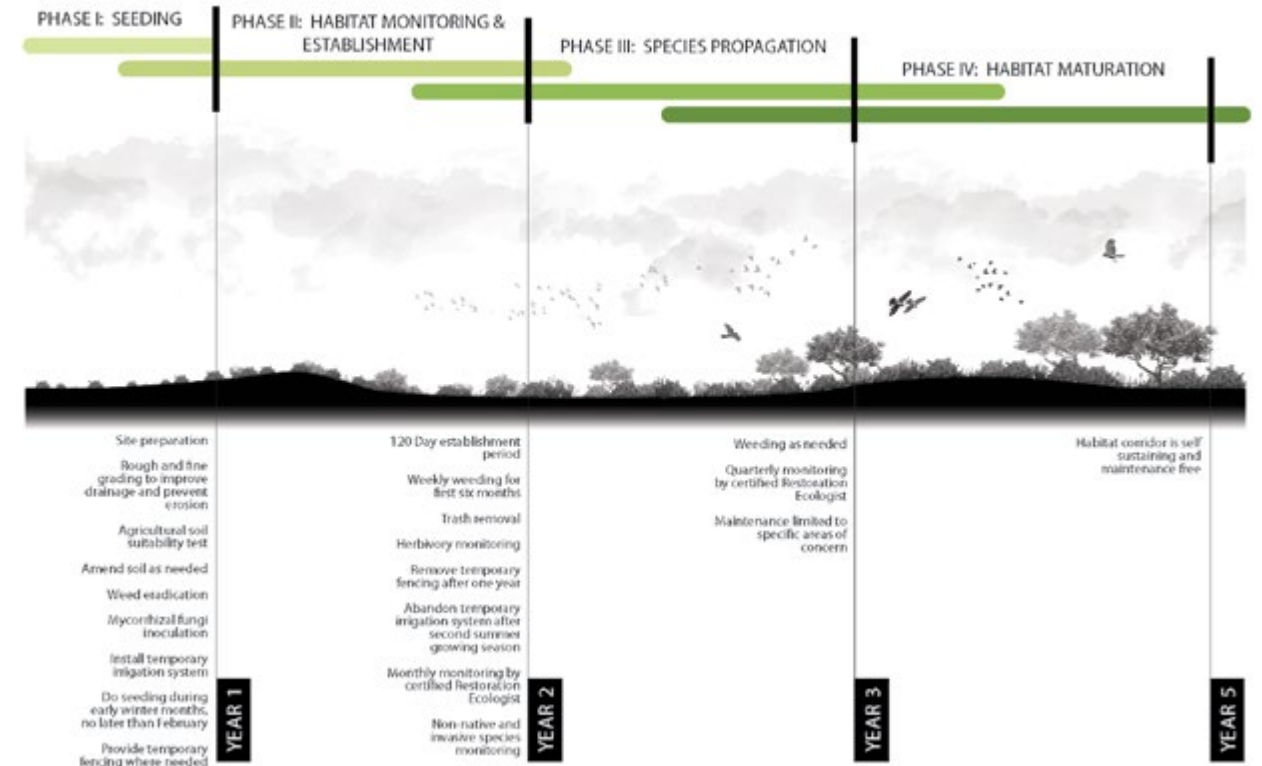


Located along the western edge of campus is an existing SDG&E utility corridor that travels through the heart of the MHCP wildlife corridor and continues north into Camp Pendleton. SWA worked with college administration to relocate future parking areas to the east side of campus which gives the utility corridor an opportunity to play a vital role in campus education and increase awareness of the regional ecosystem of northern San Diego County. The Landscape Master Plan will repurpose the existing underutilized utility corridor as a functional habitat that can be linked into the larger regional matrix and contribute to a healthier environment while providing a tangible educational tool for students and the local community.

Establishing a habitat on campus can be done in four phases over five to six years. To ensure success, the master plan calls for a certified restoration ecologist to be involved with the design and maintenance of the habitat and linkage corridors to guarantee high levels of heterogeneity that promotes species movement and biodiversity. Even more important is the district's commitment to preserving land and allowing it to establish itself and flourish into a productive habitat that contributes to the MHCP goal of regional ecosystem health. Once established, this land may be used as an outdoor laboratory for both students and the community to showcase the environmental processes that help support our daily lives.

Repurposing the SDG&E utility corridor on the Oceanside campus will result in over 18 acres of productive habitat with the goal of becoming a registered member of the National Wildlife Federation Campus Ecology program. This designation will enable the college to establish and restore permanent natural habitat reserves on campus and contribute to the repopulation of the California Gnatcatcher, Golden Eagle, Northwestern Pocket Mouse, Black Tailed Jackrabbit and many other protected species. With the district leading by example and taking the first steps in establishing a habitat corridor, the community and local government agencies can learn and hopefully emulate its efforts in extending the habitat far beyond the campus boundaries.

Campus hydrology will also play an important role in ensuring that pollutants do not contaminate downstream resources. Rainwater falling on the campus core is currently channeled into an underground storm drainage system and directed into several detention basins that are connected to the municipal storm drain. These detention basins help minimize pollutant discharge into the municipal system, however rainfall along the sloped perimeter of the campus is not directed into detention basins and therefore flows into the Buena Vista Lagoon, a designated ecological reserve. The "first flush" at the start of the wet season is freighted with debris that has built up over the dry season and emptied into



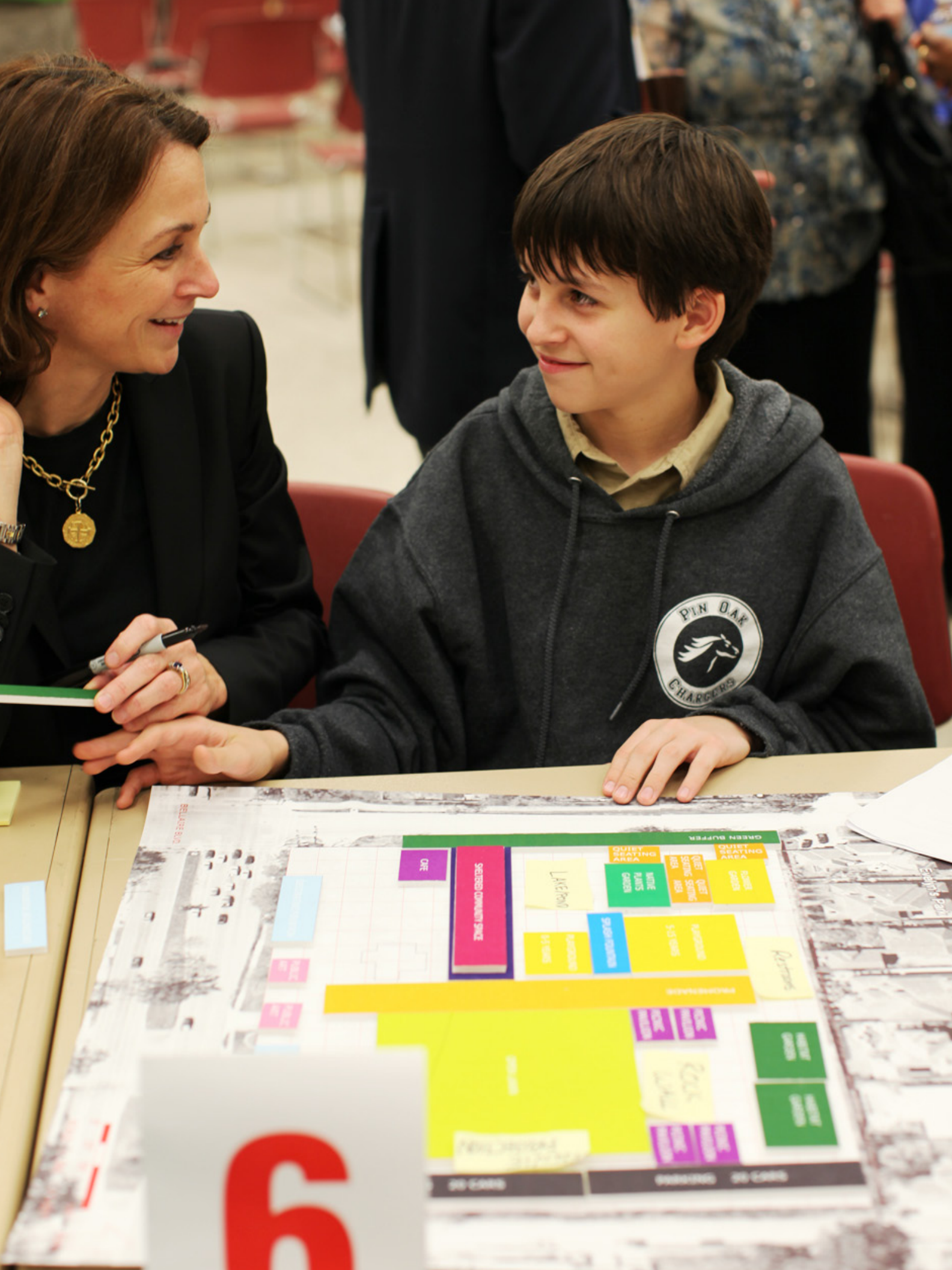
the lagoons and ocean. This causes elevated bacterial levels and exposes wildlife to harmful debris and chemicals. The new master plan will redirect this perimeter drainage into detention basins within the adjacent utility corridor that will help filter pollutants before reaching the nearby wetland and ocean.

Another key goal of the Landscape Master Plan is to enhance environmental educational opportunities by creating a landscape framework that promotes stronger physical and programmatic connections throughout campus. This open-space hierarchy will create space that encourages classroom instruction to extend beyond the confines of classroom walls. A living environmental research laboratory will highlight environmental processes and sustainable practices that students are learning about in the classroom, offering a new way of teaching and learning whereby students begin to comprehend the interrelationships between geology, horticulture and biology.

Understanding these interrelationships will equip students with a stronger analytic foundation to help them succeed later in their careers. The outdoor classroom also has the ability to open up environmental education to the surrounding community via weekend workshops and lectures. After careful study of the college's curriculum

and course offerings and several meetings with faculty and administration, SWA developed an outdoor classroom map that highlights specific locations on campus where classes can meet individually or collectively with other classes to explore a collaborative hands-on learning process. Once these open-space corridors are understood as being an integral part of a larger regional matrix, they will take on an identity that can be preserved, maintained and improved over future generations.

With over 154,000 miles of electrical-transmission line corridors existing in the United States today and over 1,000 miles being added annually, new prototypes are needed to move beyond the current regulatory processes that results in fragmented open space with no identity. Landscape architects are uniquely qualified to program this seemingly ad-hock assemblage of latent open-space parcels with a diverse mix of uses simultaneously occurring in close proximity. This new open space will serve as a richly layered social and environmental amenity that begins to address many of the problems generated by urban areas within the city, and prevent further harm to the larger natural environment. Furthermore, these "generative utility corridors" may begin to allow for new urban prototypes that weave housing open space, habitat and infrastructure together, producing low-impact developments that improve the regional ecosystem.



## Evelyn's Park

### ENGAGING THE PUBLIC TO DESIGN BELLAIRE'S FRONT YARD

Natalia Beard

Houston, TX

The historically and geographically prominent five-acre tract on Houston's busy Bellaire Boulevard has potential to become not just a social center, but an identity builder for the city, an area where creative place-making can greatly improve upon the ubiquitous suburban park settings of typical playgrounds and sport fields. An urban park design, inspired by a suburban metaphor of "Bellaire's Front Yard," was made possible by a gift of historical land to the City by the Rubenstein family in honor of their late matriarch, Evelyn. More visible references to the area's authentic past and distinctive artful features that brand the city can help strengthen Bellaire's community as well as make it an exciting destination for the rest of Houston's residents.

Through a series of public workshops, the park's vision was developed directly by engaging the region's citizens. This public process provided a better opportunity for designing a place that would be loved, well used, and would help create momentum for the private fundraising campaign slated to ultimately fund the park's building and operations.



**Bellaire Boulevard has potential to become not just a social center, but an identity builder for the city of Houston.**

**OPENING THE DESIGN PROCESS TO THE PUBLIC**

An interactive design process was crucial to envisioning Bellaire residents' aspirations for their park, and the payoff of a public engagement approach became evident early on, when more than 150 people came to Bellaire City Hall to take part in a workshop. A simple board game with park pieces was used as a tool so residents could grasp the scale of the project and build their own versions of Evelyn's Park. It became more than a design exercise as the community gathered for face-to-face conversations about what was essential to increase the quality of life in the city by means of creating a public park.

Illustration of a broad set of programmatic components educated the residents to the design possibilities and ultimately developed the initial framework through an informed and inspired dialogue. What community activities could take place on a great lawn? What food venue could support park activities and become a destination in and of itself? What is the appropriate character for water features, playgrounds and garden elements, and what are the necessary accommodations for onsite parking?—these among other issues were addressed in the community

meetings over several months. A series of public workshops, focus group meetings, tours of the property, online surveys and SWA's personal availability for comments from individuals all aimed at bridging the typical disconnect between public expectations and the internal design process.

Design iterations of the plan were vetted through additional public meetings, and the resulting vision was able to balance contextual sensitivity to the residential neighborhood with ambitions for an urban public space along Bellaire Boulevard. Traffic and food service experts were brought onboard to develop parking and a small cafe concept and help alleviate fears of potentially incompatible [disturbances??] and traffic overflow. Guiding this open design process in a manner that was not narrowly prescriptive, nor blindly responsive to outside input, elevated the quality of public engagement and instilled a sense of ownership among the project's eventual users and beneficiaries. Gaining intimate knowledge of the site and the local cultural dynamics and eccentricities through open dialogue with residents helped achieve the ultimate goal: the park would reflect the best qualities of the Bellaire community now as well as what it wants to become in the future.



**PROJECT FRAMEWORK**

Recognizing that the presence of the park will extend beyond the five-acre tract and will become a catalyst for branding the City as a unique destination meant extending design thinking beyond the site boundary to the median of Bellaire Boulevard and other major streets and public places. Iconic architecture and the prominence of public art at the park's site near the gateway to the city would potentially set the aesthetic standard for future way-finding and urban furniture elements.

The prominence of the park's location turned out to be an opportunity and a challenge at the same time. The site is precarious precisely because of its promise of becoming a successful public place by virtue of its immediate adjacency to quiet residential streets, potentially un-accepting of traffic overflow and activity associated with active public parks. Therefore, the design framework for the project had to leverage aspirations of urbanity against suburban values of safety and tranquility.

Layering program into a sequence, from active urban areas along Bellaire Boulevard to quiet suburban and non-disruptive areas next to private residential streets, meant having a zoning strategy for future events and taking



advantage of the urban edge by breaking the typical Houston pattern of frontage parking. As the framework clearly established major zoning relationships on the site, it kept a consistent design attitude as the project evolved but was also flexible enough to accept a variety of programmatic building blocks.

In Houston, endless miles of sprawl have obliterated conditions for the bundling of social, programmatic and architectural diversity. As access to an urban lifestyle is increasingly embraced, citizens of Bellaire—an unincorporated city within a city—seized an opportunity to create an urban place that would serve as a center of gravity for their tranquil suburban enclave.



Above: Existing site and downtown context.



# Victoria Ward Urban Village

Elizabeth Shreeve

Honolulu, HI



**Bridge, n. *Uapo* [Hawaiian]:**  
*A connecting, transitional, or intermediate route or phase between two adjacent elements, activities or conditions.*

Honolulu's new urban village, Victoria Ward, demonstrates how private development can revitalize urban districts through physical improvements that embody a true spirit of place. The master plan transforms an underutilized, suburban-style shopping area and

warehouse district into a mixed-use, high-density urban hub with new affordable and market-rate housing, local- and visitor-serving retail, high-speed transit and entertainment uses. The project's urban design and landscape proposals—including vibrant mixed-use street corridors, new parks, plazas and waterways—provide a framework for community gathering and integrate aspects of the site's earlier history of fishing, salt harvesting and waterfront industry.

Located in the Kaka'ako area between central Honolulu and Waikiki, the 56-acre site was named for Victoria Ward, a major landowner and important cultural figure in the mid 1800s. The district is one of Oahu's many historically named ahupua'a, pie-shaped sections of land running from mountain to sea. Dredging in the early 20th century accompanied the transition from fish ponds and salt pans to settlement for an industrial, working class neighborhood that included native Hawaiians, Portuguese, Chinese and Japanese. This mixed population took pride in self-sufficiency and a shared culture of music, food and education. In later decades, however, the residential population disappeared as the area converted to its current patchwork condition with "big-box" discount stores, high-speed arterials and limited connectivity between the waterfront and marina on the south end toward the ocean. Government and business/bio-tech destinations popped up inland to the north and the mountains. The result was an auto-centric commercial development with limited walkability and bikeability that lacked the requisite density for an active street scene.

The project aims to restore the previous generations' vibrant neighborhood culture by emphasizing sustainability, connectivity, local food and a shared public realm of formal streets and parks with a higher density that appeals to both local residents and visitors. When it breaks ground in 2014, the development will represent Hawaii's first urban master-planned community, with a maximum 3.5 FAR (Floor Area Ratio,) approximately 20 residential towers (70-foot tall podiums with residential and parking over ground floor retail), a 350-room hotel, and approximately 9 million square feet of gross building area. New housing—including over 4,400 units, of which approximately 868 will be below market rate or "reserved"—will bring residents back to the area, while nearly 785,000 square feet of smaller, local-serving retail will foster neighborhood shopping. A future elevated rail line will provide transit connections and two stations within or near the project area, reducing the dependence on cars and fostering a bike friendly and walkable urban village.

**The project's urban design and landscape proposals—including vibrant mixed-use street corridors, new parks, plazas and waterways—provide a framework for community gathering and integrate aspects of the site's earlier history of fishing, salt harvesting and waterfront industry.**

To foster connectivity between the mountains and Pacific Ocean, the team established view corridors by staggering the placement of the towers and reinforcing routes leading inland from the shoreline highway (Ala Moana Boulevard). Road realignments, a careful hierarchy of streets, and frequent plazas and parks foster a pedestrian-friendly urban neighborhood. Generous sidewalks with tree-lined streets, lushly planted parkways and ample areas for streetside dining convert the existing suburban style streets into social spaces for mingling, strolling and enjoying major retail and entertainment destinations along with smaller traditional “mom and pop” stores. Phased development retains two commercial buildings and a theater, while constructing new housing, retail, restaurants and entertainment uses (including affordable, below market rate) housing near a future transit station offers direct access to downtown Honolulu and Waikiki.

Open space plays a key role in establishing the project's “urban village” identity. A gateway park, framed by twin towers connects the waterfront to a central plaza at the heart of the project, with specialty shops, entertainment and food cabanas along a waterway spine and a hotel tower and lawn at the mauka (mountain-side) terminus. Smaller parks at key intersections contribute to a total of over six acres of open space.

Throughout the 16-block site, Victoria Ward's streets are designed to be safe and attractive, with clearly defined zones for pedestrians, cyclists, motorists and parking set within a unifying landscape of hardscape and planting. Buildings step down to the street and plaza levels, with generous setbacks for patios, balconies, water features, planting and wide sidewalks that foster an active street life. Streets offer retail frontages and lobby entries for the towers, which

include private pool and recreation terraces for residents. A major design challenge was the requirement for finish-floor elevations of proposed buildings to be above the 100-year flood plain, resulting in raised streets to achieve a desirable urban experience.

A lush, indigenous landscape palette establishes a distinctly Hawaiian character for Victoria Ward, creating comfortable outdoor spaces and clearly defined corridors, courtyards and building entries. Within the central park, a series of pools and fountains recall the fish ponds and salt pans of days gone by. Together these landscape elements serve as a bridge between past and future, evoking the area's rich Hawaiian culture and industry while fostering the 21st-century housing, transit, jobs and commercial destinations of Honolulu's new urban village.

In addition to the master plan framework for Victoria Ward Urban Village, SWA continues to provide ongoing master planning services to the client and is currently working on plans for one of the first three projects, A'eo, which will be Honolulu's newest mixed-use tower on the iconic Ala Moana Boulevard. Named for a slender shorebird endemic to Hawaii, the tower combines ground floor retail in a residential high rise with exclusive villa townhomes. The landscape design features a prominent terraced water element that surrounds the lobby arrival court, making the tower appear to emerge from an intertidal reef. Other landscape amenities include a rooftop recreation deck, private villa gardens and pools, a retail plaza and public realm landscaping along three streets that border the site as one of the gateway projects to this currently underdeveloped region. The proposed project received approval from the Hawaii Community Development Authority in August 2013 and is scheduled to begin construction in 2014.



Above: Wide sidewalks and lush vegetation create pedestrian-friendly streets

Below: Rendering for A'eo Tower





## Jack London Square

### A WATERFRONT CITY REENGAGES ITS EDGE

by René Bihan

Oakland, CA

PROJECT  
profile

Jack London Square: The very name evokes an air of richly layered experiences and American history. Long-standing expectations in the City of Oakland for a thriving waterfront finally came about after a 40-acre, mixed-use development expansion and complete redesign of the landscape activated the walkways and embraced Oakland's history.

Debuting in 2009, at the depths of the economic downturn, a steady drumbeat of leasing, waterfront activities and increased pedestrian visitors have made Jack London Square once again one of the East Bay's most popular public spaces. Prior to the redesign, the property had few spatial boundaries, with no clear beginning, ending or edges. The redevelopment of Jack London Square provided an incredible opportunity to embrace local and global scales that interface with the public. The site is not densely urban, though the city grid gives it form; it is not regional, though you have the infrastructure of various industries passing through it. The site is local in linking residents and visitors to Oakland's waterfront; it is regional in serving local transportation networks for people by ferry, private boat, bus, car and on foot; and its global identity is owed to its role as a vital import and export hub of container shipping.

**SWA's design approach was like a haiku—very short but very concise moves which, when taken together, heightened the sense of a unique Oakland space.**







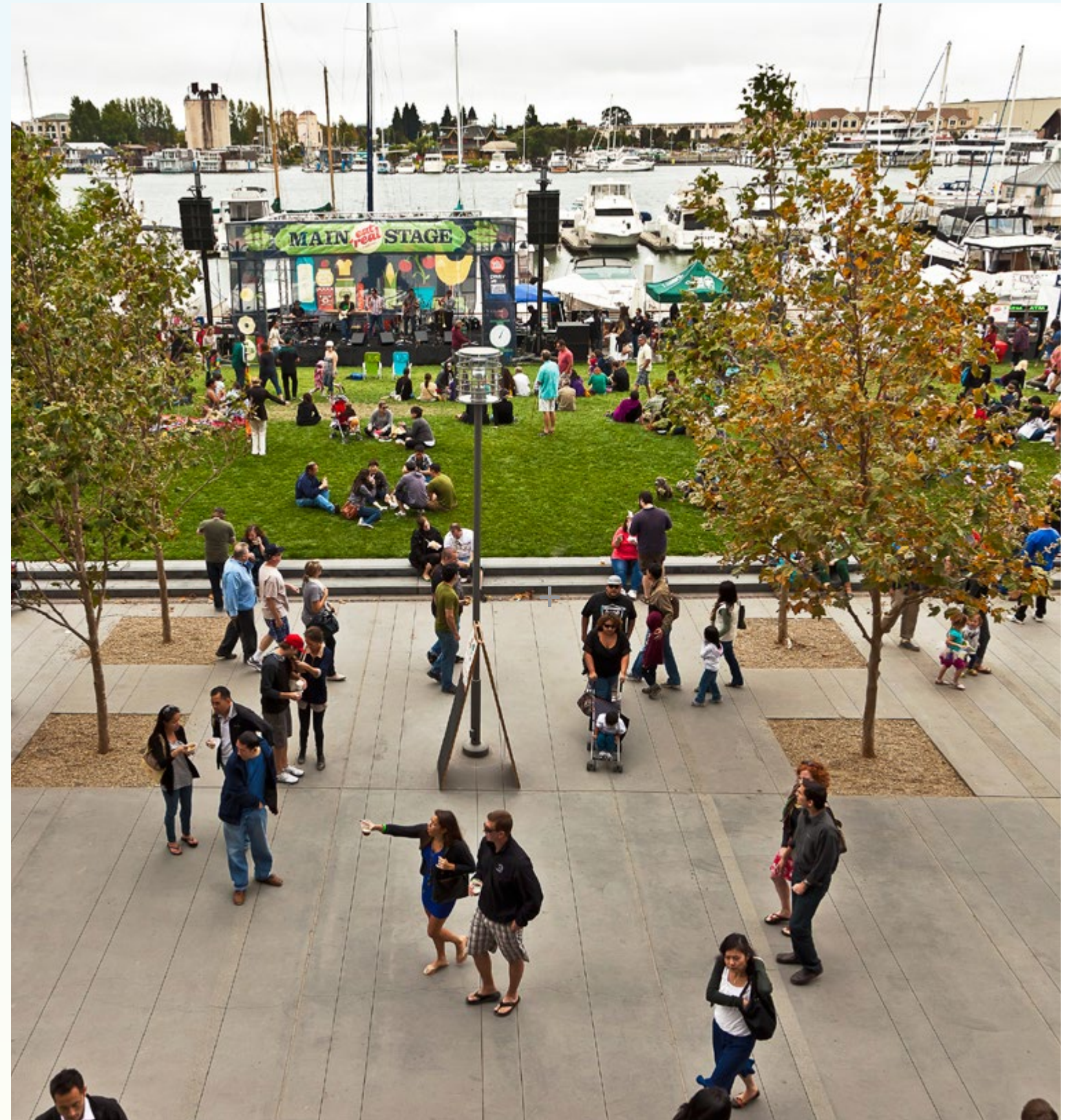
**The largest of several festival events, the annual Eat Real Festival, drew nearly 100,000 food lovers and locavores over a single weekend in September 2011.**

The design had to work across all of these complex networks, while promoting the essential pedestrian-scale experience. SWA's approach was like a haiku—very short but concise moves which heightened the sense of the unique Oakland space. It drew from its past and serves today's worker, shopper and visitor. HOK, the project architect, created a master plan consisting of five infill buildings and four building renovations. Under cost constraints of the recession, strategic moves were made to stitch the spaces between old and new, making the design flexible to the times. For example, a large, iconic cargo ship anchor, originally supposed to move 100 feet at the cost of \$50,000, was instead left as a central force that informed the design decisions around it.

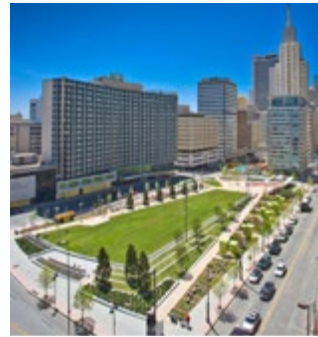
In fact, the spaces between the old and new pieces held the project's most exciting opportunities. And this strategy gave way to an idea of nesting—bringing a garden scale to the surfaces of the site: creating rooms within rooms, spaces within spaces, places that could adapt and be inhabited by events both large and small. A macroscopic seasonal plant palate gives the site a perennial effect of growth and rejuvenation throughout the year. The adaptive landscape brings life to the site through various scaled and themed events such as the long-standing tradition of the Christmas tree on view in the winter, a boat show in the spring, the Eat Real festival and weekly farmers markets. All these events take advantage of the programmatic grid layout and eye-catching tall palm trees planted at an exact width to accommodate either three parked cars, a series of food stalls, or boats parked for the boat show.

The beauty of this site is that its location and space allow for the borrowing of landscape from surrounding areas. Layers of shade create garden-scale experiences that frame key views of the San Francisco skyline and industrial port operations; "Broadway at Jack London" offers a small space within a large space, a sanctuary to gather on a daily basis; tree alignments create view corridors to the historic Alameda Naval Base and Downtown Oakland.

Growth for one key tenant is noteworthy: The Last Chance Saloon, a tiny one-room bar frequented by the great fiction writer for whom the square is named, has reported its business has tripled since the redesign. For years it was seen as a quaint, gritty holdover that seemed an odd fit to many observers. The recent improvements expanded the Last Chance's outdoor seating area and plaza to integrate it with the overall visitor experience and welcome more patrons. New office buildings are filling up, three restaurants that opened in the past year are thriving and the plazas and promenades are busier than ever. The largest of several festival events, the annual Eat Real Festival, drew nearly 100,000 food lovers and locavores over a single weekend last September. The landscape at Jack London Square is keeping the site's historic and richly layered spirit alive while catapulting Oakland's waterfront into the 21st century.



*Pedestrian visitors have made Jack London Square once again one of the most popular public spaces in the East Bay.*



Main Street Garden

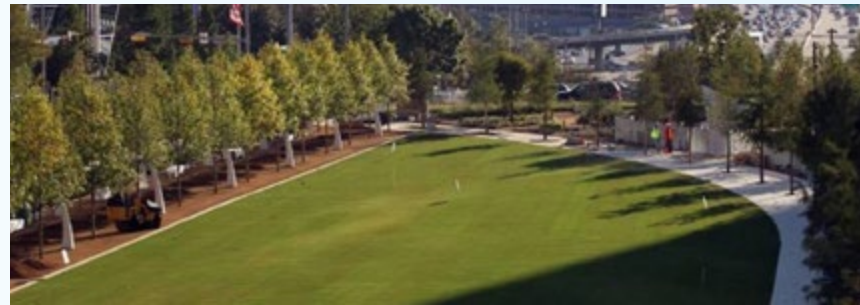
To revitalize the park space a partnership between the Uptown Public Improvement District and the City of Dallas was established. The relationship allows for a method to fund park improvements and share responsibility in park maintenance.



Klyde Warren Park



Belo Garden



Klyde Warren Park



Klyde Warren Park



Griggs Park Monument



Belo Garden



Main Street Garden

# Urban Park Revitalization

## GRIGGS PARK

Jeff Craft

Dallas, TX

Cities face numerous challenges in upgrading and maintaining urban parks, from diminished capital funding and reduced maintenance budgets to meeting the recreational needs of the public. A recent Issue Brief released by the National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) noted that current deferred maintenance costs for public parks total over \$1 billion in many large cities—an already significant sum that is growing every year. Accompanying this challenge is the public perception that access to urban parks and recreation programs should remain free and without fee for use to offset operating costs. That means that a number of US cities such as Dallas, which is enjoying a major renaissance of its city center, have had to rethink how they can meet public demand for park space with limited funds.

Since 2002, an approximate \$2.3 billion dollars in investment and redevelopment has been injected into the Dallas core, connecting islands of activity throughout. More than 5,300 new residential units (equaling over 8,000 residents) have brought people and businesses back to the city center. This population surge has increased the demand for public park space, and resulted in a need to take innovative approaches to programming, designing and ultimately paying for parks—from initial capital costs to long-term maintenance funding. The Dallas boom has created a paradoxical problem: more urban residents generates a demand for more park space, which creates more parks and, in turn, supports incoming urban residents, who again, demand more urban park space and cause costs to go up. The result is a catch-22, wherein revitalization is itself a catalyst for revitalization.

Three significant urban parks—Main Street Garden, Belo Garden and Klyde Warren Park—have opened in downtown Dallas within the last five years. Each has been alternatively funded from outside the City’s general fund, via park bonds, grants or through private donations from individuals and foundations, and with special mechanisms established for program oversight, marketing, events, future improvements and ongoing maintenance.

Main Street Garden, a 1.7-acre, city-owned park site located on a parcel previously occupied by a vacant building, was funded primarily by park bonds but is managed and maintained by the Downtown Dallas Partnership, a nonprofit entity.

Belo Garden Park is a 1.5-acre city park jointly funded by the City of Dallas Parks & Recreation Department, the Belo Corporation and the The Belo Foundation. Additional funding was provided to clean up toxins on site by state and federal agencies in the form of grants. The park is maintained by Downtown Dallas, Inc. through a \$1.5-million endowment established by The Belo Foundation, Belo Corporation and A.H Belo Corporation.



The newly revitalized space reflects the evolving urban culture and developing artistic neighborhood that surrounds it.





Klyde Warren Park, a 5.2-acre deck park, was jointly funded by the park bonds, state highway funds and over \$50 million in private donations, including a substantial sum by the family of the park's namesake. Park management and programming is the responsibility of the Woodall Rodgers Park Foundation, which has provided an endowment for maintenance.

A more current example of neighborhood revitalization efforts is the largest of all downtown parks, Griggs Park. Located in Uptown Dallas, Griggs Park is a historically important open space that has not kept pace with the ever-evolving urban culture and developing artistic neighborhood that surrounds it. The newly revitalized space, designed by SWA Dallas and currently under construction, reflects changes in urban uses and the vibrancy of a young and energetic neighborhood while paying homage to a vibrant history.

The original three-acre lot was established in 1915 as one of Dallas' first parks dedicated for use by African American residents. Originally called the Hall Street Negro Park, it was renamed in 1922 in honor of the Reverend Allen R. Griggs, a minister and leading educator in the black community. The park eventually grew to eight acres, and has evolved to include active recreational elements such as a swimming pool, ball fields and a playground. The historic importance of the park in the daily life of Dallas' black residents is evidenced by an article in the *Dallas Morning News* that reports the city had one acre of dedicated park space for every thousand black residents and sixty-four acres dedicated park space for every thousand white residents in 1944. This disparity of available public open space made Griggs

Park an essential part of the social and cultural fabric in a major segment of Dallas society. Over time, the park fell to disuse and neglect, and although it maintained its sports fields, little evidence remains of the pool and playground that were once at the heart of the park.

Four main factors influenced the need for the redevelopment of Griggs Park: a commitment by the city for park development and improvement in the general quality of life within the central business district; the change of neighborhood structure and its proximity to the burgeoning Dallas Arts District; the construction of the highly programmed Klyde Warren Park; and the push by Uptown residents to have a usable park space that reflects the evolving recreational needs of current and future neighborhood residents. In a neighborhood comprised mostly of dense, three-story townhomes and midrise apartment buildings, a desire for more passive open space and diminished needs for sports facilities was articulated by the residents. They requested that the City re-designate the park as a neighborhood park instead of retaining its current use as a community park per the Parks Master Plan.

At eight acres in size, the potential for a high number of users per square foot instead of single uses such as ball fields was great. In addition, the recently opened Klyde Warren Park met the recreational needs for actively programmed space. Programmed uses that were more appropriate to the neighborhood's changing identity were evaluated and residents indicated that they wanted a more pastoral feeling to the park.

Easily seen from the elevated freeway, the park is visually and functionally less accessible to visitors on foot. When approaching from Clark Street (west), an eight- to fourteen-foot grade change happened from the street. Views were limited and any sense of arrival was diminished. If approaching from Ellis Street (north), visitors were met with a dead end street, on-street parking and decaying sidewalks. Within the park, the focus was concentrated on the adjacent, and dominant, elevated freeway with its constant roar of traffic. The reversal of these experiences and a desire to maintain the existing large tree canopy, were the primary goals of the new design.

The two main entries into the park, Clark Street (west) and Ellis Street (north), will be preserved, but redesigned to be more inviting and provide a genuine sense of arrival. The Clark Street entry incorporates recent streetscape improvements, which includes a stone wall bearing the park's name. This modified entry added an ADA accessible walkway that curves around a specimen tree and up the slope to a new seating area. A major monument has been designed celebrat-

ing the unique history of the park and will be the focal point at the Clark Street entrance. The monument tower will be constructed of stainless steel and pinpoint lights will be placed on a block of granite. It will be dedicated to Reverend Griggs and his transition from slave to educator and publisher of the state's first black newspaper. This rectangular terrace acts as a memorial and reflection plaza in honor of Reverend Griggs, the history of the neighborhood and the partnership between the City of Dallas and the Uptown District.

Entrance at Ellis Street provides an open space for gatherings and events, structured around a central node comprised of paving patterns of sweeping arcs. These arcs contrast with the rectangular grid and represent an abstracted form of the city's urban framework. The most dramatic redevelopment of the space is the sculpting of the land at the center of the park. The existing elevated and flat plane will be re-graded into a significant earthen form developing a "valley and hill" interpretation. There is a large cut starting at street level on the western street frontage that moves upward to a "hill" rising over sixteen feet above the existing grade. This grade transition opens the park to the west, an operation that will form a panoramic doorway connecting the park frontage to the neighborhood. The resulting landform wraps from the northeast and parallels the highway to the southern parts of the park. It visually screens the highway and greatly reduces traffic noise. This alteration also promotes dramatic views of the Dallas skyline without having to raze existing mature trees.

Following the large strokes of grading are simple sweeping pathways that connect the various entry points and provide movement between new park amenities. Along the primary pathway four seating areas comprised of curved concrete walls are carved into the slopes. These provide niches of round granite benches and views out into the meadow. A secondary path sweeps through the "valley" and connects the park to adjacent residential buildings and the bordering street frontage. A large trellis structure will be located on this path and will anchor itself as the primary architectural element. Its sculptural form is both aesthetic and functional and will be a comfortable space to sit and rest while viewing the playground area.

In a case study of Chicago's Millennium Park, the NRPA reported that the "economic impact of Millennium Park is staggering. The estimated total value of residential development attributable to the park over a ten-year period is \$1.4 billion dollars. The expanding residential population and the influx of four million annual visitors is attracting new business and enhancing the existing

businesses adjacent to the park. As a result, there are more jobs, increased tax revenue, demand for retail space, expanded hotel occupancy and increased visits to the area's cultural institutions." This major piece of urban infrastructure, which cost \$490 million dollars funded jointly by the City of Chicago and private donations, is a stunning example of how parks can act as a catalyst to urban renewal, but it also offers lessons that may be applied at much smaller scales, including neighborhood parks.

From the beginning, a partnership between the Uptown Public Improvement District and the City of Dallas was established with a particular emphasis on re-programming the park, redesigning accessibility, views, and, most importantly, connection to the neighborhood. The relationship helped establish a method to fund park improvements and a sharing of responsibility for maintenance. Using tax increment funds as the seed, the District is continuing to seek additional capital from corporate and private sponsors to supplement initial capital and find a viable financing solution to the issue of maintenance costs. Capital improvements are funded through first-phase construction, and mechanisms are being established to ensure sufficient funding for long-term maintenance costs—responsibility which will be jointly shared by the Uptown Improvement District and the City of Dallas. A fundraiser to raise capital for additional phases has added momentum that is certain to ensure the completion of the park.

Like Millennium Park, the revitalization of Griggs Park is made possible by a number of factors: the designer's understanding of the way people socialize and recreate; creative funding that includes private sector investment and donations from individuals or foundations; a financial plan for long-term maintenance with improvement funding separate from municipal budgets; planning and design that is flexible and encourages input from users, donors and ever-changing budgets; phasing that considers monetary flows and helps open sections of the park to encourage new donations; and the involvement of entities other than just municipal agencies in the park's management, programming and maintenance.

The evolution of Griggs Park—a once vibrant and socially important recreational space to a little-used and poorly maintained environment—is an all-too-familiar example of the evolution of the modern American city. The good news is that with the reinvestment and vibrancy of the redeveloped Uptown area, residents have been able to find a way to make meaningful improvements representative of the new dynamic that is urban Dallas.

# Guthrie Green

REVITALIZING URBAN  
DISTRICTS WITH NEW  
PUBLIC OPEN SPACES

Elizabeth Shreeve

Tulsa, OK



“Any fool can make something complicated. It takes a genius to make it simple.”  
—Woody Guthrie



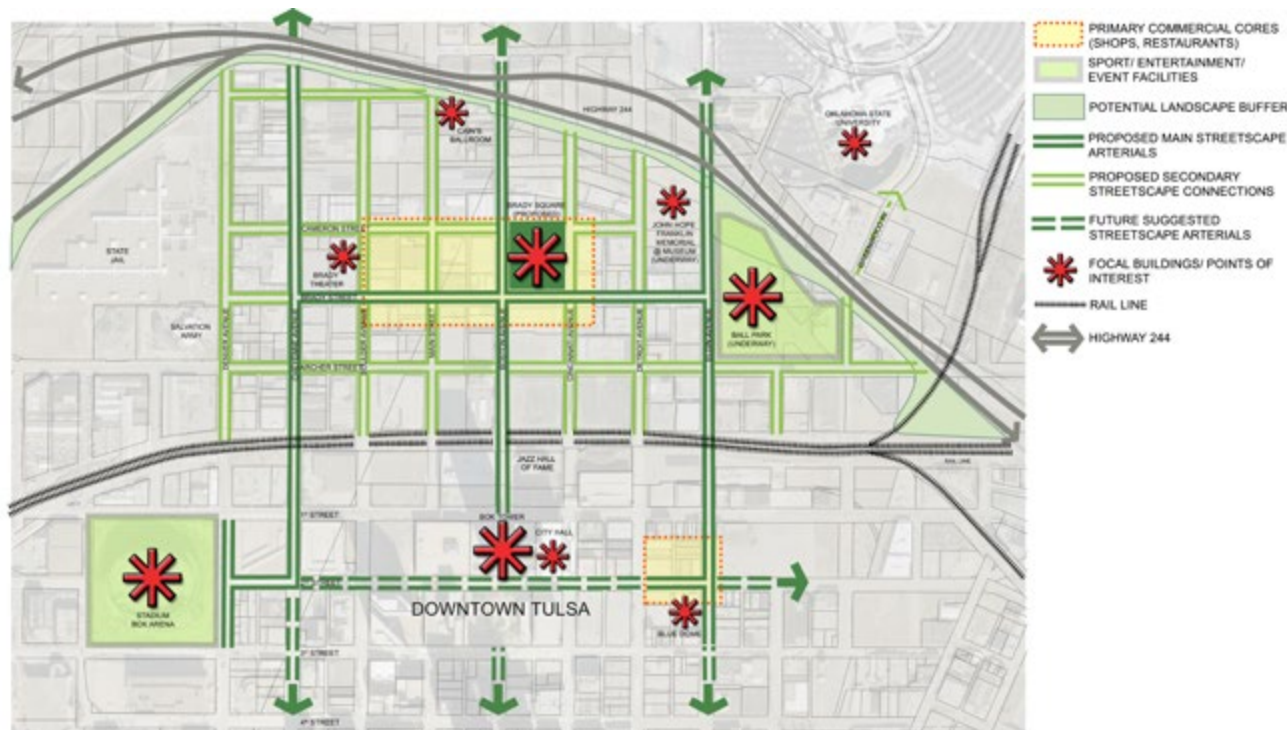
Officially opened in September 2012, this 2.7-acre urban park represents the culmination of efforts by a local private foundation, the City of Tulsa and numerous local nonprofit organizations—combined with federal, state and local funding—to catalyze redevelopment and establish a benchmark for sustainable landscape design.

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**Tulsa’s new Guthrie Green demonstrates the power of public-private partnerships in revitalizing urban districts through creation of new public open space.**

The story of Guthrie Green began with a district-wide urban design study sponsored by Tulsa’s George Kaiser Family Foundation (GKFF) to renew the 19-block Brady Arts District, a downtown neighborhood that includes industrial and underutilized properties as well as historic theaters, warehouses and the famous Cain’s dance hall. The urban design team, including SWA in conjunction with Bing Thom Architects and Wallace Engineering, identified key pedestrian connections and proposed new destinations within the district. These included streetscape improvements to Brady Street, the primary east-west route that links Tulsa’s BOK Arena to the new ONEOK Field baseball stadium.

To further reinforce the district’s emerging identity, the design team convinced the client to purchase a truck-loading facility along Brady Street and convert it into a new town square. The site’s central location offered the perfect opportunity for an outdoor “living room” to attract and serve the district’s future artists, urban professionals, students, families and visitors. It also sat directly across from the Tulsa Paper Company building, a historic warehouse that GKFF was repurposing as a cultural center for the Eugene B. Adkins Collection of Native American and Southwestern Art. The building now houses the Woody Guthrie Archives as well as galleries, classrooms, studios and a wine bar for the University of Tulsa’s Zarrow Center for the Arts.





Children enjoy the central fountain at sunset.



Input from an extensive community outreach processes—led by GKFF and including local business owners, cultural organizations and city officials—supported park programming for community events and the performing arts. SWA responded with a flexible design offering a multipurpose lawn for performances and festivals, an outdoor stage with vine-covered “green rooms,” gardens with interactive fountains and an 11,200- square-foot cafe pavilion that repurposes the former truck loading dock.

In addition to addressing these community goals, the design team conceived of installing a ground-source heat pump system under the park. Consisting of 120 wells drilled to a 500-foot depth, the resulting “geo-exchange” system will generate 600 tons (7.2 million BTU/hour) of heating/cooling distributed via underground pipes to serve 120,000 square feet of nearby nonprofit users as well as cafe pavilion and bathrooms. Photovoltaic panels on the pavilion roof will supply power for the heat pump system, which enables a 60% reduction in energy demand, with investment payback in five to seven years. As originally intended by GKFF, this savings will reduce operating costs for local nonprofit tenants. This sustainable approach garnered public funding including a \$2.5 Million ARRA Energy Demand Reduction Grant, \$125,000 State ODEQ Brownfield Development Grant and additional local support.

Today, the project’s grid of gardens, lawns, paths and fountains reflects the geometry of the geo-exchange well

field lying invisible under the park’s surface. The cafe pavilion offers a cafe, restrooms, open gathering space and wide stairs that invite visitors to look southward over the central lawn. A new stage defines the site’s southern boundary, providing a transition from Brady Street’s new wide brick sidewalks into the park; the street can be closed for special markets and exhibitions. Bioretention swales along the east and west areas create the spines of garden corridors, with more formal spaces along the western edge and a landscape buffer to protect against heavy vehicular traffic on the east side. A major circular fountain provides lively entertainment, while smaller fountains carved from granite cubes express the seeping, misting and jetting characteristics of water.

GKFF maintains ownership and maintenance of Guthrie Green and is actively programming the park to provide a robust schedule of artists, films, market days, health and wellness events and other park amenities. Local nonprofit groups performing at Guthrie Green include the Circle Cinema (film), the Living Arts (contemporary art), Horton Records (a local label), Tulsa Roots Music and the Tulsa Symphony and its associated Youth Orchestra.

At its September 2012 opening, Tulsans celebrated Guthrie Green with performances, fireworks, and food—the fruits of a collaborative vision for this new urban park.

Left: Bioretention swales and natural gardens help handle storm water runoff and provide a pleasant buffer from vehicular traffic on the eastern side of the site.



# Building Soft: A New (Landscape) Infrastructure for Los Angeles

OPTION STUDIO AT THE  
HARVARD UNIVERSITY  
GRADUATE SCHOOL  
OF DESIGN  
FALL SEMESTER 2013

Gerdo Aquino & Ying Yu Hung

Cambridge, MA

“Essayons!” meaning “Let us try” in French was the motto first used by the United States Army Corps of Engineers in 1775. The motto has since evolved to “Building Strong,” reflecting its mission to “strengthen the nation’s security, energize the economy and reduce risks from disasters.” The notion of “Building Soft” presents a new paradigm, arguing that the parameters presented by the Corps could be achieved through a more integrated approach, one which takes into consideration the social, economic and ecological priorities playing an equal part in the conception and reconstruction of our infrastructural systems.

“Building Soft” was the focus of an immersive Harvard Design Studio led by SWA principals Ying-Yu Hung and Gerdo Aquino. Students were challenged to envision the Los Angeles River playing a pivotal role in transforming the City of Los Angeles, where ecological systems are synchronous with development, infrastructure, and popular culture. As an extension of their recently published book, *Landscape Infrastructure: case studies* by SWA, Hung and Aquino positioned the studio as

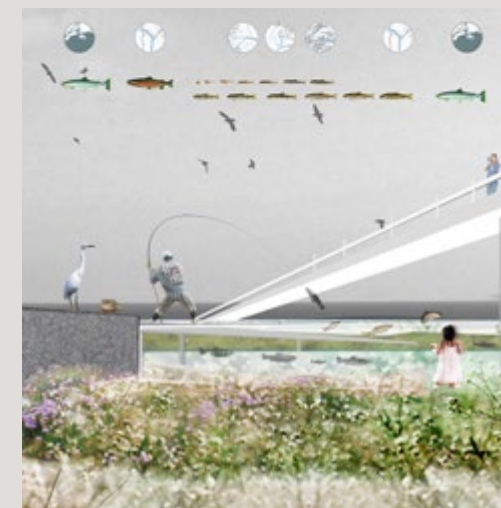
**ABOVE:**  
Master of Landscape Architecture student, Erin Wythoff proposes an iconic water veil stretching across the river and promising kayakers an immersive experience.

The studio environment calls for speculation, risk taking and challenging conventional thinking.

an ongoing investigation into the potential of existing and new infrastructure as polyfunctional systems supported by ecological, social and cultural phenomena. With assistance from Carol Armstrong (City of L.A. Planning), fourteen disparate sites inextricably linked to the L.A. River infrastructures—flood control channels, power lines, freeways and rails—were identified by the City and the US Army Corps of Engineers as areas ripe for exploration and research. Through a series of fieldtrips, workshops and lectures in Los Angeles, students sought opportunities to redefine new open-space typologies, including river-specific recreation venues, habitats for avian and aquatic species, air pollution filtration machines, development scenarios and infrastructure as spectacle.

Local public agencies and nonprofit groups were also invited to participate in the studio, providing the students with substantial background data and statistics, community input and historical points of view. In addition, the preferred “Alternative 20,” outlined in the recent Army Corps’ “Los Angeles River Ecosystem Restoration Integrated Feasibility Report,” suggested projects to be undertaken, which provided the students with further proof that the path towards transforming the LA River is close at hand. Estimated to cost in excess of \$800 million, “Alternative 20” will provide the City of Los Angeles with the most comprehensive approach toward habitat restoration and will fulfill the city’s need for open space. To further deepen the students understanding of the river’s potential, Josephine Axt of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and Ana Petrlc of the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority, provided the students with lectures and a rare opportunity to kayak the river and experience its more natural section (soft bottom), known as the Glendale Narrows.

As a repository of creative ideas, the studio environment calls for speculation, risk taking and challenge against conventional thinking. As a result, the river’s potential is revealed through the lens of those who are unencumbered and devoid of preconceptions. Some of the ideas proposed by the students included a migrating bird habitat, by Vivien Chong, and a gigantic smog vacuum looming over one of the major highway interchanges, proposed by Miao Yu—the variety and depth of their explorations complemented the scale and the complexity of the issues at hand for a city of nearly nine million people spanning 500 square miles.



Considering that none of the 14 students was from the L.A. area, the range of design proposals was incredibly thoughtful and visionary. The final week culminated with a day-long review of the student work, followed by a mini-symposium where invited guests, faculty and students shared their collective thoughts on design, ecology and the latent optimism that surrounds the future of the river and the diverse communities it will undoubtedly serve.

Master of Landscape Architecture student Shengyi Yue proposes a return of the steelhead trout to the Los Angeles River via an engineered aquatic habitat. Elevated boardwalks provide community access to views and recreational opportunities.

One of 14 reviews (mid-review jury, Erin Wythoff presenting; jurors left to right: Ken Smith, Gerdo Aquino, standing, Omar Brownson and Ying Yu Hung).

Students kayak the Los Angeles River accompanied by Steve Dwyer of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority and SWA landscape architects.



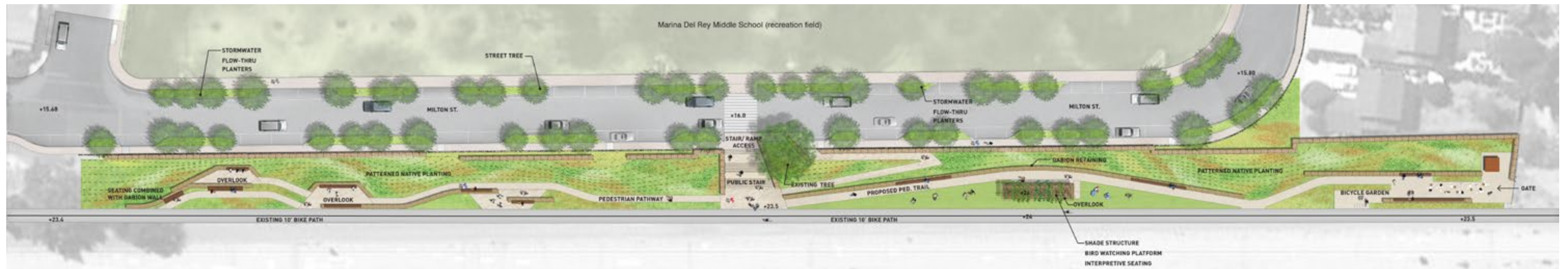
# Channeling New Park Strategies in Los Angeles

## MILTON STREET PARK

Na Ra Park

Los Angeles, CA





The urban infrastructure of cities, while designed for high efficiency, is often limited to a mono-functional use. In the proper context, this is appropriate for freeways and railways where safety, access and ease of maintenance rely on the single function. However, other infrastructures such as storm water channels are questionable as single-use corridors. The opportunity to embed overlapping functions within these channels presents a significant design strategy for urban cities today. Los Angeles is comprised of miles of underutilized waterway infrastructure waiting to be discovered and repurposed for the benefit of natural resources and the sustainability of the city.

Today the Ballona Creek passes through an urban area of three million people and drains directly into the Santa Monica Bay. While channelization has facilitated flood management, it has simultaneously modified natural hydrologic functions, decreased plant and wildlife diversity and degraded much of the surface and ground water quality within the area. Socially, parts of the creek have become invisible; perception of these areas as unsafe, and with the potential for crime, has classified much of the waterway as lacking in identity.

The Ballona Creek Watershed is the third largest urban watershed in the Los Angeles metropolitan area, encompassing 337 square kilometers, including all or part of Los Angeles, Beverly Hills, Culver City, Inglewood, Santa Monica and West Hollywood. Centuries ago, the watershed's primary conduit was used by Native Americans for transportation and fishing. Later, settlers used the creek for irrigation and transformed its banks into viable lands for agriculture and ranching. By the 1920s, rapid development of the city created an impervious surface area so significant that the creek became a seasonal flooding nuisance inhibiting everyday life. In response to this dilemma the once meandering stream running through the Ballona Creek Watershed was converted to a 14.5 kilometer flood control channel stretching from the Santa Monica Mountains to the Pacific Ocean. In 1935, for safety and the efficiency of moving storm water, the creek was straightened and the banks were paved by the Army Corps of Engineers. A few years later, rocks quarried from Catalina Island were used to line the bottom of the creek. These rocks were eventually paved over with concrete, solidifying Ballona Creek as the largest all-concrete storm drain within the watershed.

**By revealing the sites' invisible ecologies, the park and its infrastructural systems—water, circulation and plants—might nurture a new sensibility.**





Milton Street section view

**This open space provides the community with a place to picnic, observe the Creek itself and hold outdoor classroom sessions.**

At present, the concrete embankments of Ballona Creek serve two general purposes—ongoing storm water management and an active bike path. One side of the creek has been maintained as a Class 1 bike path connecting the “Strand” (beach bike path) in Playa Del Rey to Culver City and into Los Angeles. At eight miles in length, the bike trail runs parallel to the Creek and was one of the first in the region to be used by cyclists, runners, strollers and skaters on a daily basis for both pleasure and commuting. Increased usage of the trail and community-backed initiatives to restore the creek (based on recent success with the Ballona Wetlands) into some semblance of its former ecological profile prompted the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) to identify a parcel of land along the creek. This parcel could serve as the recipient for the changing views of the creek and its potential both as a natural resource and as a viable recreation corridor. It was the MRCA’s intention to establish a fresh precedent for a new urban park that could address a diverse user group, mitigate storm water, improve water quality, create habitat and increase open space and access points for passive and active recreation.

An undeveloped linear parcel of land along Ballona Creek near the bottom of the watershed was identified and proposed as a linear park. The project became a joint effort between the MRCA, community stakeholders and SWA to embark upon the incremental transformation of the creek, beginning at this pilot site. Community involvement was a central part of the design process and the landscape architects in conjunction with the MRCA conducted numerous community meetings, including a public charrette to ensure design consensus. Through a series of public meetings and presentations, the project developed a program-based identity, the aim of which was to enhance the bike trail with

**The opportunity to embed overlapping functions within these channels presents a significant design strategy for urban cities today.**

a public park, reinforce native plantings, create a bird watching/creek platform, introduce seating areas, facilitate storm water management and create educational opportunities via interpretive ecological habitats.

Throughout the design process it became clear what the park really needed was a robust, multi-functional identity rooted in the reestablishment of native ecologies and open to a myriad of users. With this framework, the approach to the landscape was to weave together active and passive recreation programs with structured ecological systems. They would take on the immediate sub-watershed and encourage a kind of viable ecology that can be observed and understood by all participants in the park. This open space provides the community with a place to picnic, observe the Creek itself or hold outdoor classroom sessions and serves as a space for events and gatherings. Multiple paths allow easy access between the recreational fields to the north and Ballona Creek to the south. Slopes and embankments along the park are planted with native species that promote sustainability and habitat creation. The planting plan establishes continuity throughout the park while offering opportunity to educate visitors about the different ecological communities of the region. Plants chosen belong to the Coastal Sage Shrub ecosystem, which includes coastal prairies, riparian vegetation and chaparral/oak woodlands.

By revealing the sites’ invisible ecologies, the park and its infrastructural systems (water, circulation and plants) might nurture a new sensibility in urban park design for the area. By instilling ecological meaning and program into a small park next to this channelized waterway, the intention is to help people envision what the entire corridor along the Ballona Creek could become.



URBANISM IN THE R.O.W.  
Keystone XL pipeline

Kinder Baumgardner, Natalia Beard,  
Michael Robinson and Jason Pierce



By all accounts, the Keystone XL pipeline will create an environment that won't be beautiful, useful, or necessarily safe. We must therefore move beyond typical, one-dimensional thinking and set a precedent for imagining a better-built infrastructure, one that folds into and enhances the reality of our everyday lives.

As the public debates over the extension of Keystone XL pipeline\* wind down, and the northern leg of the project is likely to be approved by the current administration, there's an opportunity made available to look at the controversy in a different light. US energy policy and environmental considerations aside, the longest pipeline application deliberation in history has unearthed the process of making some of the longest continuous space in the name of infrastructural utility. The newly established, 50-foot-wide right-of-way will cross climatic zones, rural and urban lands, cultural regions and ecologies; and even though it's not technically collectively owned, the well-maintained cross-continental oil pipeline corridor has the potential to become a conduit for a different kind of flow. This unique American transect could attract adventure seekers experiencing the land in a way that no other cross-continental road trip could ever promise. An architect's "pipe dream" of a hike-and-bike trail in the Keystone XL right-of-way would release the potential of the corridor to be folded into the cultural and social landscape beyond its solely infrastructural purpose. Patrols of TransCanada maintenance crews and occasional pump stations along the way would remind visitors of the true nature of the line, while the American backwoods in all their glory of farming communities, refinery towns, disgruntled ranch owners, hostile trailer-park operators, park rangers, and wildlife—now all seamlessly linked with this line—could become a tourist destination featuring an alternative system of urban and regional landmarks.

This proposition speaks to how we formulate a vision and define new territories for practice. Spatial implications of infrastructural circuitry in many ways define our everyday work, and, for the projects in the public right-of-way, that means literally targeting infrastructural conduits or fields for improvement or complete retrofit of uses. The goal, of course, is to foster a public realm in spaces previously considered off the table for design intervention.

KXL oil pipeline is just another line in the invisible but dense hydrocarbon transmission and distribution network. The highly politicized path towards its implementation has created an unusual opportunity for this type of corridor to be reconsidered in the context of social desires and "public good." If the invisible line is made legible as a connector at an unprecedented scale, it will engage communities in its path in a richer way than the eminent domain laws and lease agreements would ever allow. Regional "super-neighborhoods" will have not only the distinction and legacy of compromising their interests to the oil-company's agendas, but the ability to embrace the pipeline right-of-way as a potential amenity and identify their own stake in the transcontinental shortcut.



## On Board with BRT: Suburban Transportation Evolution

### HOW UPTOWN HOUSTON WILL LEAD THE GREEN PATH TO CONNECTING THE CITY'S GROWING NEEDS

Lauren Fasic

Houston, TX

“Traffic is like obesity. It gets worse as society gets richer. A good city is not one where even the poor can use a car. It’s one where even the rich use public transportation.”  
—Enrique Penalosa, former mayor of Bogota

Houston, Texas, was recently named the “coolest place to live” in the United States by *Forbes* magazine. The city has been experiencing a period of job growth and economic density with an increasingly youthful population. Undoubtedly, a growing infrastructure of natural systems, parks, art, fashion and cuisine have become the cultural fabric that complements its economic stability. Yet, as the economy and population increases, the need for efficient transportation is also on the rise. High oil prices and suburban sprawl have led to long and costly commutes for most of the city’s working population.

Imagine a city that was able to advance in innovative modes of transportation concurrent to population increase. Imagine a place where residents have affordable

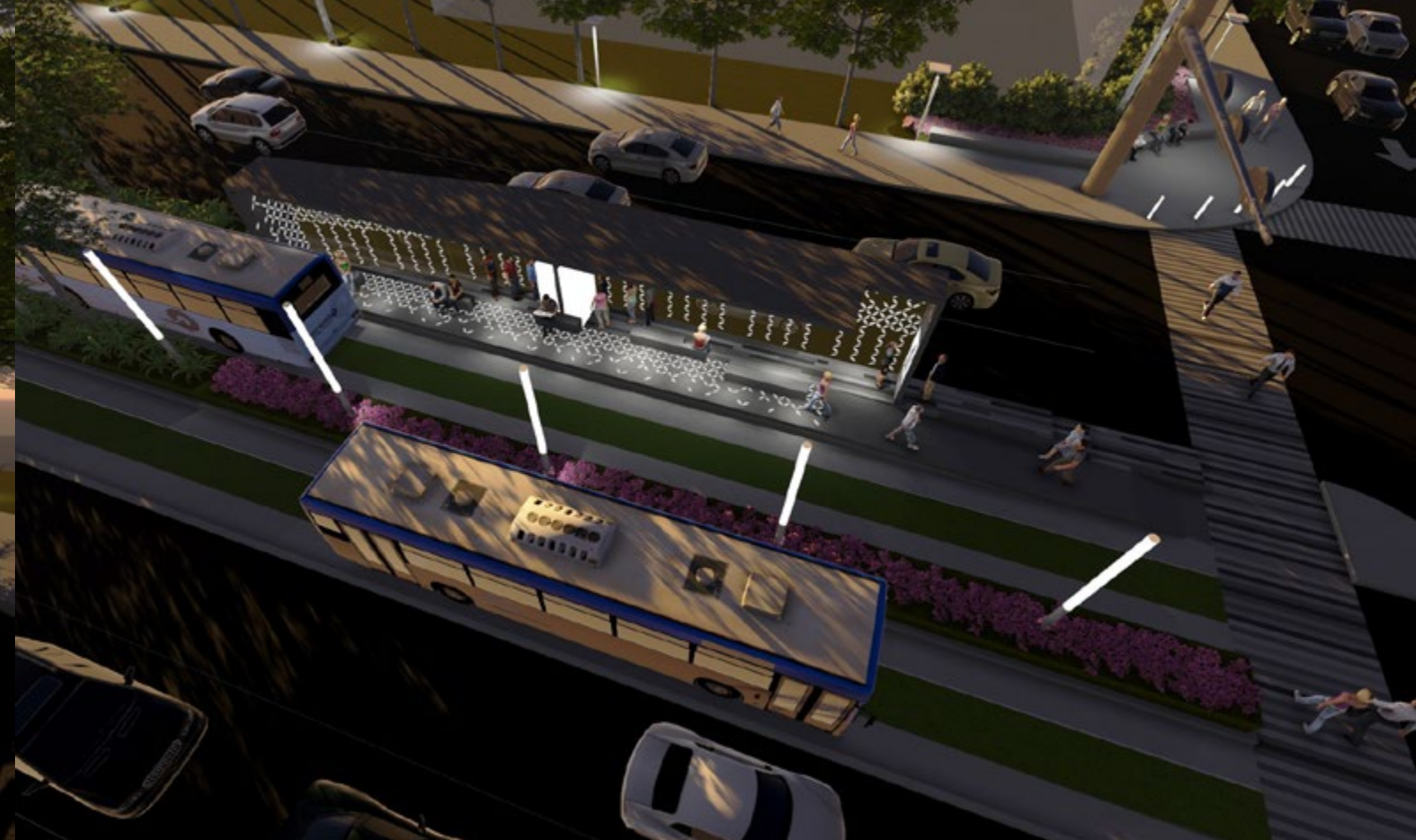


options for transportation alongside the luxury of a low-cost housing market and a booming job market. Imagine a transportation infrastructure that’s “green” in both the experience and in its zero emissions to the atmosphere. These ideas are soon becoming a reality in Houston and they are beginning in its Uptown District. Uptown Houston is leading the green path by introducing Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) with plans underway to transform the transportation system.

Bogota, Curitiba, Hangzhou and Sao Paulo are just a few cities that come to mind when speaking of places that have created the face of Bus Rapid Transit around the world. Undoubtedly, their stories of how strong political leaders put successful transportation plans into effect



Perhaps an oak-lined vehicular free boulevard will be the image of Uptown Houston.



are widely respected achievements. These cities have responded with innovation to urbanization, which is essentially the result of people migrating to one location looking for opportunity, sometimes by choice and more often by necessity.

Houston, however, has a different type of transportation necessity: a response to the effects of suburbanization. Suburbanization in this case is defined as the migration of people dwelling outside of city limits as an effect of low land costs and stable central economic systems. Where is the problem? We are all still working in the same place and commuting to get there. People living just outside of Houston's 610 Loop experience 60- to 90-minute one-way commutes every day. Ashley Cope, a marketing director who works in Uptown, takes the 610 Loop to San Felipe, a major thoroughfare, and experiences a painful 1.5-hour commute on heavy traffic days.

Now, more than ever, creative solutions need to be found that will provide affordable transportation to connect these different districts as communities. The modern vision for a better transportation system actually began in Houston fairly recently, around the time of its boom in the oil economy.

In 1973, Houston METRO was formed and started planning for the expansion of the city and proposals for rail lines within Houston. In 1983, Houston received the funding to purchase 130 rail cars, but voters shot rail down. The idea of introducing rail to Houston was explored for decades. Finally, in 2001, the first light rail line was built to connect Downtown Houston to the Medical Center, a route that also takes in Rice University.

In 2000, SWA re-designed the spine of the Uptown District's Post Oak Boulevard to accommodate light rail. This process followed an earlier plan anticipating that "rail is right around the corner!" The decades passed and funding never seemed to be available to build the light rail system. Last year, SWA developed a conceptual plan to facilitate a BRT system. Along with the BRT transportation, the design includes a revamping of the roadway so it becomes a green boulevard reminiscent of the grand boulevards in France and the oak-lined St. Charles Avenue in New Orleans.

John Breeding, President of the Uptown Development Authority says, "Uptown 1.0 was the Galleria and the Williams Tower. Uptown 2.0 was the branding of what we identify Uptown as today...the stainless steel rings, the pedestrian improvements and lighting design. Uptown 3.0 is the next chapter. All you will see is green." The 1.5-mile

BRT streetscape design includes ten planned stations, including a stop at the Galleria Mall, a global hotspot for shopping, Waterwall Park and an iconic landscape in Uptown Houston. The corridor project treats transportation as the catalyst for development along the boulevard, resulting in a connected urban design.

Over \$85 million in funds have been allocated for the Uptown BRT so far and motions are in place to bring the plan to fruition over the next few years. As Jamie Lerner, the visionary mayor of the Brazilian city of Curitiba advised about budget and action in transportation, "If you want creativity, cut one zero from your budget. If you want sustainability cut two zeros. If you want to make it happen, do it fast."

But what happens when we introduce BRT to a city that already depends on cars? Unless it will be cheaper, faster, more reliable and enjoyable to use, the working middle class will never be drawn to it. Securing ridership will depend on the quality of the interstitial experiences between vehicle, station and destination. BRT as a new suburban transportation infrastructure can stimulate development and further contribute to the economic stability in Houston. Centers that surround heavy traffic stations and park-and-ride areas should be developed as

urban living centers where people desire to grab a cup of coffee, leave their car behind and jump on the bus for work. Luxuries such as free wi-fi, air conditioning and comfortable seating can transform a frustrating commute into a productive 30-minute ride.

BRT on Uptown Houston's Post Oak Boulevard is expected to break ground before 2017. Meanwhile, the process of inventory and tree relocation from within the existing right-of-way will begin as early as Spring of 2014, led by SWA, Houston's Park Department and the Uptown Development Authority. In Fall 2013, an interdisciplinary team of designers was officially selected to represent ideas on the boulevard's design. As the construction of several major residential and mixed-use high rises are currently underway, the residential population in Uptown Houston area is expected to increase by approximately 20,000 in the next few years. The lines drawn today can evolve with the city and connect to other existing and planned light rail lines in Houston. And perhaps in another 100 years, an oak-lined, vehicular-free linear park will be the image of Uptown Houston. One thing is certain: the evolution of Houston's transit system will never follow a straight line.



# Megalopolis

## USING TRANSIT TO INCREASE GLOBAL COMPETITIVENESS

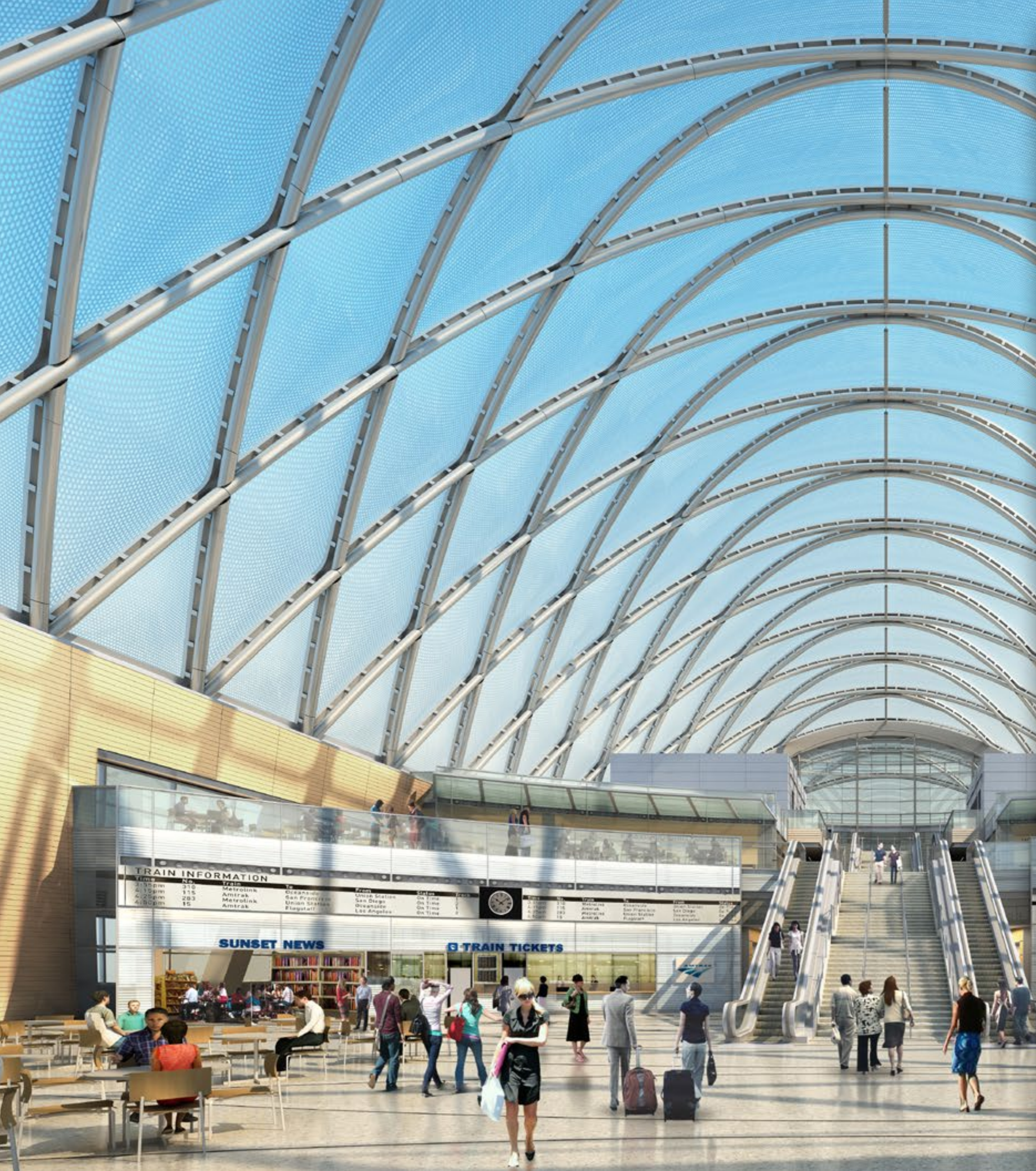
Pavel Petrov and Sean O'Malley

Anaheim, CA

### PROJECT profile

We design what connects cities together—that is, the connective tissue, or infrastructure in the form of roads, open space, drainage and other transportation networks. As markets become more and more competitive, the power of cities to compete against each other often hinges on the collective power of a workforce, be it couched in brute strength (the manufacturing of Shenzhen, China) or innovation (Silicon Valley). Tying local forces together on a regional basis while improving transportation infrastructure increases the adaptability and survival potential of urban regions. Behold the Megalopolis, birthed thru the growing need for connections.

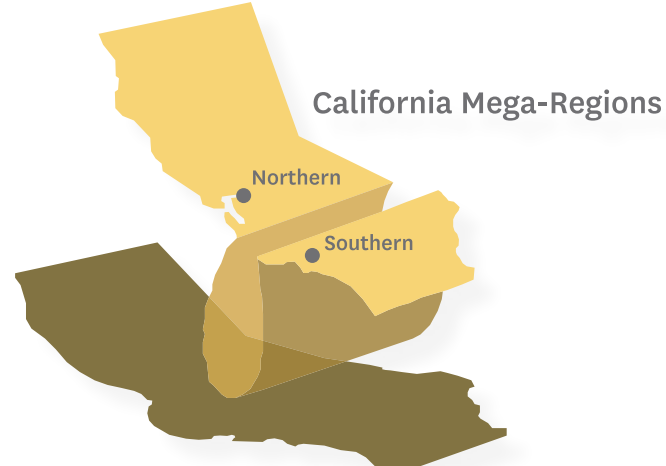
According to the Regional Plan Association, in 2010, 82 percent of Americans lived in cities; by 2050 it will be 90 percent. Cities are responsible for around 66 percent of the energy used, 60 percent of all water consumed and 70 percent of all greenhouse gases produced worldwide. While these figures present challenges moving forward, we need to focus on designing cities to be increasingly efficient, using less and producing more. In a highly competitive and constantly evolving global marketplace, cities that develop strong inter-connected networks will thrive not just economically, but environmentally and socially too.



The Anaheim Regional Transportation Intermodal Center (ARTIC) in Anaheim, California, will serve as a catalyst for economic development just as a city serves as an engine of innovation: creating opportunities for growth through investment. As Charles Darwin said, “It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent that survives. It is the one that is the most adaptable to change.”

**REGIONALISM**

Darwin’s evolutionary logic also applies to a city—a living, breathing organism that must acclimate to shifting sands. The city of Anaheim has instinctively built an iconic transit station along the proposed high-speed rail line. ARTIC will encourage the kind of development and progress the city needs to adapt and survive. A multi-modal transit station, ARTIC combines high-speed rail, regional rail (Amtrak), potential local light rail, bus, taxi and car all under one roof. Cities must be flexible and able to overcome various challenges that arise, whether they stem from environmental, economic or other issues. Regional connections such as ARTIC help formerly discounted cities to corner the market as a destination hub, allowing them to strategically compete and capitalize on a new wave of potential development, jobs and economic stimulus, population growth and tourism dollars.



**CONNECT**

Serving as the heart of Anaheim’s Platinum Triangle Master Plan, ARTIC is a LEED Platinum transportation facility that will allow people to move seamlessly among a variety of transit services to reach recreational venues and business districts throughout Orange County. Its location near I-5 and SR-57 places the center within a short walk to Angel’s Stadium and the Honda Center and within close proximity to major attractions such as Disneyland, Knott’s Berry Farm, Gardenwalk and the Anaheim Convention Center. The strategic move by the City to make Anaheim into an entertainment hotspot generates potential revenue to develop housing and infrastructure that will attract new business into the area, a move that will pay dividends in the coming decades.

To maximize this opportunity, Anaheim should identify a growth plan and development strategy that focuses on infrastructure and transportation, energy efficiency, density and mixed-use development.





#### COLLABORATION

Research shows that urban dwellers produce more inventions and create more opportunities for economic growth. This occurs as a result of access to top-tier universities, vital resources, networks both virtual and physical, and by allowing creative communities to interact and share their research, progress and ideas. Technological advances have brought people together virtually; however, a different and more robust outcome is forged when people physically collaborate in the real world. Following the lead of Google's hallmark approach, Yahoo and Hewlett-Packard, both tech giants in Silicon Valley, have recently abolished their work-at-home policies as research has revealed that face-to-face interaction fosters innovation. These physical networks are critical and will lead to pioneering strategies for environmental and sustainability questions that arise with urban development.

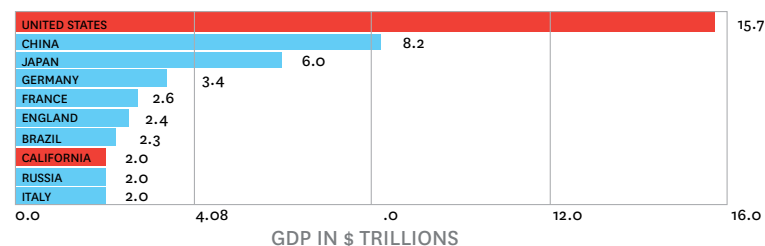
#### ENERGY EFFICIENCY

Luis Bettencourt of the Santa Fe Institute has conducted in-depth research on energy efficiency, finding that often large cities are also the greenest places on the planet because people living in denser habitats have smaller energy footprints, require less infrastructure and consume less of the world's natural resources per capita. The Orange County Business Council has also conducted studies indicating that California spends \$20 billion per year in wasted fuel and time due to traffic congestion. ARTIC, with the 10 transit modes it will serve, expands upon the existing infrastructure, creating increased mobility options for residents, commuters and visitors. This equates to reduced pollution, green house gas emissions and vehicle congestion. Steven Cohen, Executive Director of Columbia University's Earth Institute says: "Economic growth requires the continued availability of high quality natural resources—especially air, water and soil. We need to develop technology, organizational capacity and political will to make the changes necessary to ensure these resources continue. Society requires water, food and energy, and cannot exist in an environment dominated by waste."

#### BIGGER IS ALWAYS BETTER

Compared with suburban or rural areas, cities do more with less. And the larger a city develops, the more productive and efficient it can become. According to David Owen, writing in *The New Yorker*, "If you measure New York City by the square foot, no place in America spews out more greenhouse gases or more automobile exhaust or more trash. But that's the wrong way to look at it. If you look at the city per capita or by residence, New Yorkers pollute far less than anybody else; they use far less energy." ARTIC (together with high speed rail) will help grow and position Anaheim as a bigger and more efficient destination, further connecting the fabric of Los Angeles, Long Beach and San Diego with Anaheim into a megalopolis—one that can compete with any around the world. Without this current innovation, Anaheim would simply remain a "fly-by" district between Los Angeles and San Diego.

#### TOP WORLD ECONOMIES IN 2012



#### COMPETITION

The competition that takes place between cities is important. Countries aren't competing as they did in the past. A shift has occurred as we have all become more interconnected by technological advances, and the city has become the primary arena for this action to take place. As of 2013, the California economy (composed of the northern and southern California mega-regions) was ranked eighth in the world. Political boundaries have incurred less and less impact on economic rankings and performance as the dialogue has shifted towards these mega-regions and their vitality on the world stage.

#### MODEL

In his *New York Times* article "Speedy Trains Transform China," Keith Bradsher discovered that "The high-speed rail lines have, without a doubt, transformed China, often in unexpected ways . . . For example, Chinese workers are now more productive. A paper for the World Bank by three consultants this year found that Chinese cities connected to the high-speed rail network, as more than 100 are already, are likely to experience broad growth in worker productivity. The productivity gains occur when companies find themselves within a couple of hours' train ride of tens of millions of potential customers, employees and rivals . . . Productivity gains to the economy appear to be of the same order as the combined economic gains from the usual arguments given for high-speed trains, including time savings for travelers, reduced noise, less air pollution and fuel savings, the World Bank consultants calculated." The article continues to examine how the new railways connect major cities in China to rapidly urbanizing remote or rural areas. The particular example identified was the city of Changsha, which has seen an enormous burst in development since the station opened in 2009. Bradsher continues, "By 2011, nearly 200 tower

cranes could be counted building high-rises during the half-hour drive from downtown Changsha to the high-speed rail station. On a morning last month, only several dozen tower cranes were visible along nearly the same route. But a vibrant new area of apartment towers, commercial office buildings and hotels had opened near the train station." We have seen this area develop over the last several years firsthand, with SWA collaborating with the local government and design institute on more than half a dozen projects—all within close proximity to the rail station. The efficiency and productivity that has emerged in Changsha is an extreme example of development growth that can occur with this infrastructure implemented. While growth at this scale is unlikely in the United States due to other mitigating factors in China, such as government regulations and ambition, construction schedules, and existing population mass, ARTIC will generate demand for development at a proportional rate.

#### EVOLUTION

ARTIC represents a gateway that is both a reflection of the city's past and a modern hub for the future. Serving as a destination for tourists across the globe, ARTIC will help transition Anaheim into a leading Metropolis by sparking new urban development, growth and ultimately jobs that will continue to cultivate the California economy. As Thomas K. Wright, Executive Director of the Regional Plan Association stated, "Cities must be able to adapt to changing environments—whether this means a warmer planet, higher cost of electricity, or tighter budgets."

To paraphrase Darwin, it is not the richest, strongest, or most beautiful cities that will thrive and survive in the urban century. It is the smartest ones that can best adapt to change.

# Raycom City Rain Gardens

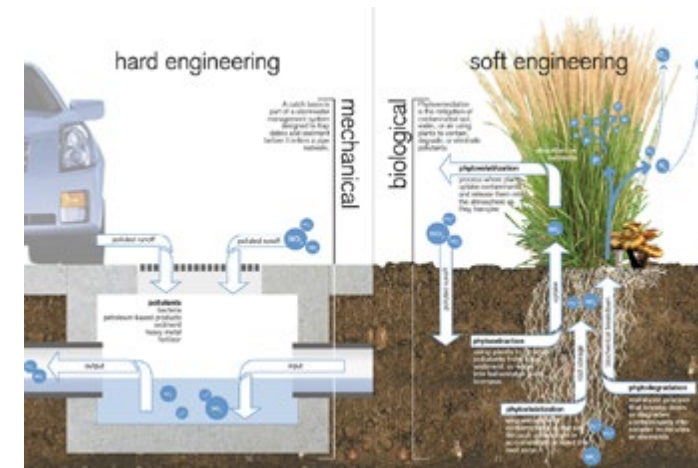
## EXPOSING URBAN HYDROLOGY TO PUBLIC AWARENESS

Chih-Wei 'GV' Chang

Heifei, China



A unique opportunity in Raycom City brought up inspirations, challenges and aspirations of how to integrate natural processes in urban public spaces.



When landscape architects typically get involved in a public right of way, drainage grids and road grades have already been designed by civil engineers. These conventional grid systems collect surface runoff filled with urban pollutants and drain directly to a city's watersheds. Driven by hydraulic efficiency, this "hardscape engineering" can cause more flooding elsewhere and harshly deprives the given hydrology from its natural filtration and percolation processes—a situation resulting in excessive waste, whereby the rainwater is polluted and flushed while valuable portable water is required for irrigation.

Landscape architects and urban designers are fully capable of arranging urban hydrology with a little technical assistance. Through careful "softscape engineering," every drop of rainwater can be directed to uses such as plant growth, bioremediation and recreation instead of being wasted. In this way, the flow of runoff may be orchestrated in the urban settings provide the landscape architect is involved early.

A recent opportunity to test the advantages of softscape engineering came when the Chinese developer Raycom commissioned SWA Group to design the parcels on a largely undeveloped land mass, including its public roads and parks. The master plan of Raycom City defined the one-kilometer-long Hutian Street and five adjacent green spaces as a central park spine. Because nothing was built yet, we were able to propose rain gardens in the spine to replace the original storm pipes underneath the road.

A street without storm pipes needs meticulous site grading to ensure positive drainage. Instead of having a typical road crown, the street needs to be tiled on one side, leading surface runoff to the green space. When water hits the curb, it flows along the gutter before being collected by a very shallow pipe under the sidewalk; the water then drains through a vegetated "buffer" slope before reaching the one- to two-meter-deep rain gardens. On the Raycom site, it drops five meters over a one-kilometer stretch in which a series of rain gardens with large trees and lush aquatic planting retards and treats water flow. A detaining pool in Triangle Park at the base of the slope holds most of the water. This pool is a signature landscape element in the first phase, and was designed to hold different water levels to address storm events and diminish water overflowing into the larger municipal outlet.

The technical breakthrough was to convince civil engineers that our rain gardens perform equal to, if not better than, their original pipes. But the real challenge was convincing the client, the government and the future residents of the viability of this idea. The uncertainties of the performance, management and maintenance of a nontraditional system worry people, and may potentially scare them away. Just as the open-air rain garden system provides an excellent opportunity for public education and awareness of urban hydrology, it will also expose any problems should something go wrong.

To our relief, the first phase looks great and functions well. Its success encourages other unique and handsome neighborhoods and public park systems. Great cities and great districts gain their stature through having an ensemble of iconic special places; thanks in part to the benefits of softscape engineering, Raycom City and its central park spine is one such location.



## Active Landscapes CULTIVATED COMMUNITY WELLNESS AND PREVENTATIVE HEALTHCARE

Kevin Slawson

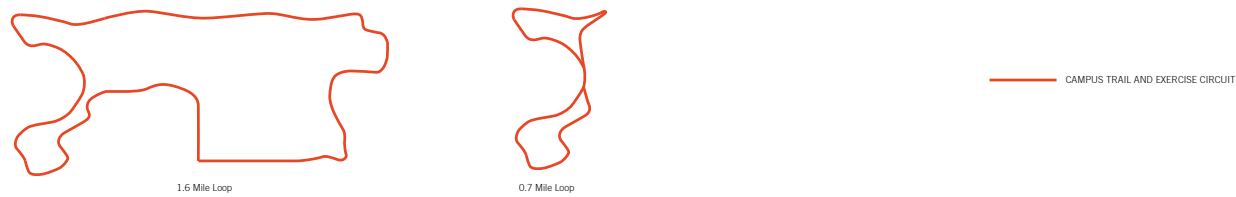
Los Angeles, CA



Much of the political discourse today is focused on the 79 million Americans that will retire over the next 18 years and the strain it will place on our health care system. Unfortunately, this pending retirement “boom” has distracted much of the nation’s attention from an emerging health care crisis linked to rising obesity rates and associated ailments including heart disease, diabetes hypertension and depression. Nowhere is this more important than in our inner-city areas, where the nation’s poor have the most widespread and chronic health problems in the country. Often associated with poor nutrition and an inactive lifestyle, emphasis is beginning to shift away from just treating illness towards preventable health care as one of the best ways to curb this growing epidemic.

Landscape architects can play an important role in helping to shape city planning and urban design to encourage more activity and a healthier overall lifestyle.





Heathcare Facts	
Serving Size Servings per Container	
South Central County	Heathcare
Excess body weight among adults is estimated to cost the U.S. more than <b>\$90 billion</b> per year in healthcare costs. <sup>1</sup>	
Nearly <b>30%</b> of the population is below the federal poverty level and <b>47%</b> of adults have no access to health insurance. <sup>2</sup>	
South and Central Los Angeles have the highest number of deaths due to diabetes, heart disease and lung cancer in the county. <sup>3</sup>	
Mortality	
South and Central Los Angeles County has the lowest life expectancy in the county at <b>75.8 years</b> , verses an average at <b>80.3 years</b> , and highest of <b>87.8 years</b> . <sup>4</sup>	
From <b>1997 to 2005</b> the prevalence of adult obesity in the county increased from <b>14%</b> to <b>22%</b> translating to roughly <b>1</b> out of every <b>5</b> adults as obese. <sup>5</sup>	

The master plan SWA Group developed for the Harbor-UCLA Medical Center serves as a potential model of more broadly based preventative health care. With some of the most alarming health trends in the country, South Los Angeles is the perfect laboratory for a new health care campus prototype.

Landscape architects can play an important role in helping to shape city planning and urban design in order to encourage more activity and a healthier overall lifestyle. Specific to health care, planning should be more inclusive and define a new role for open space that transcends sceneography and plays an active role in the daily lives of urban residents. The Harbor-UCLA Medical Center Campus will focus on two key aspects of preventative health care: promoting an active lifestyle and proper nutrition through a healthy diet.

Originally planned as a medical facility in 1943 to receive wounded soldiers returning from the Pacific theater during World War II, 80 percent of the Harbor-UCLA Medical Center site contained single-story barracks that currently remain as office and clinical research laboratories. With the master plan consolidating many of the single-story campus uses into new and larger buildings, a significant amount of open space

will become available. Part of this land will be open for future development; however, with the master plan projecting future hospital needs and development out until 2030, this land will remain fallow for quite some time. In an effort to utilize this “new” land for the best social and environmental use and provide a direct amenity to hospital staff and the surrounding community, SWA proposed utilizing the west side of the campus as a 14-acre urban park and demonstration garden.

The medical campus is centrally located within an established residential community with eight elementary schools, one middle school and one high school all within a one-mile radius. These factors position the hospital as a central community resource able to serve a wide variety of needs. As part of the open space master plan, SWA has set up a 1.6-mile continuous exercise trail along the campus perimeter. Multiple variations of this trail can be used by staff and the adjacent community to add variation to their workouts. A series of fitness stations providing areas to stretch and strength train are located throughout the campus, adding further variety. The County and hospital can team up with nearby schools to offer onsite exercise clinics that teach children about the health benefits of daily exercise. In an area with very little community open space,

parks are increasingly important in helping to encourage youth to participate in an active lifestyle. The park and exercise trail can easily be modified as future development occurs along the northern edge of campus, allowing for flexibility over time while serving a public need today.

Another key component of the preventative health care movement is nutrition, which can be a significant problem in several inner-city areas. South-central Los Angeles County is no exception as it has the second-lowest [NATIONAL] ranking of adults (13 percent) who consume the FDA recommended five servings of fruits and vegetables a day, and the second highest percentage (44 percent) of adults that eat fast food at least once a week. Key contributions to the poor diet of inner-city residents are the lack of proper nutritional education and affordable access to fresh produce.

In an effort to help reverse local nutritional trends, SWA worked with the hospital and the County to propose a community demonstration garden along the southwestern edge of campus. This four-acre garden will serve as an outdoor classroom where local schools and residents can learn how to grow their own fruits and vegetables while learning about their associated health benefits. A small

community center is proposed next to the garden that will host cooking classes and help educate the community about produce that is in-season along with simple, healthy cooking techniques and recipes. The adjacent park along the northwest corner of campus can be used to stage a farmer’s market, selling produce from the demonstration garden, and/or host food festivals that celebrate the unique cultural heritage of south Los Angeles’ residents.

By strategically utilizing open space within an inner-city hospital campus, SWA has helped redefine Harbor-UCLA Medical Center’s identity as a community resource, and leader in preventative health care medicine. With over 20 medical centers throughout the Los Angeles area competing for talent, this master plan creates unique amenities within a distinctive environment that will help attract top doctors and foster a strong collaborative setting with local residents—setting a new precedent in local public health care service.



Image Source: Creative Commons

Essay

## The 21st-century Streetscape DISORIENTING, DISHONEST OR DIVERSE?

Ying Yu Hung, Gabe Mason and Rona Karp

Los Angeles, CA

“In seeking visual order, cities are able to choose among three broad alternatives, two of which are hopeless and one of which is hopeful. They can aim for areas of homogeneity, which look homogeneous, and get results depressing and disorienting. They can aim for areas of homogeneity, which try not to look homogeneous, and get results of vulgarity and dishonesty. Or they can aim for areas of great diversity and, because real differences are thereby expressed, can get real results which are merely interesting, and at best can be delightful.”

– Jane Jacobs

What is the role of history and design in the 21st-century streetscape? Creating a sense of place is important, but in trying to revive the appearance and spirit of the historic street, implementation processes create distorted expressions due to new design instruments, philosophies and the will of the client. In Jane Jacobs’ prescient and admirably seditious *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, she lays out three alternatives before her reader. What is striking is that current planning of public spaces in cities, particularly streets, continues to ignore the warnings from one of history’s greatest urban critics. However difficult efforts to enact the third alternative of diversity may seem, a growing body of cities are adopting codes and guidelines known as Complete Streets Policies to extinguish, or at least correct the two other options. Using the landscape of Los Angeles and its surroundings as a window through which to view the real-world manifestations of these alternatives, it is evident that Jacobs’ last option is attainable through the functional design of Complete Streets.

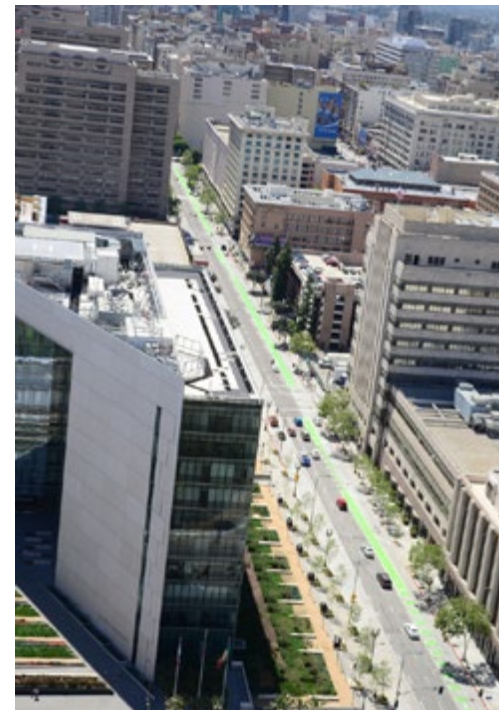
One of the most unrestrained examples of deliberate homogeneity, Jacobs’ first category, can be found in the city of Santa Monica, just inland from the Pacific Ocean on a street known as the Third Street Promenade. The origins of the Promenade date back to the 1960s, when three blocks on Third Street were converted into a pedestrian boulevard. Although this created a new realm for the public, buildings that frame the street are currently devoted to three uses: shopping, dining and entertainment. Over the past 50 years, the personality of the three blocks has slowly been stripped, as chain stores and restaurants subverted what little remnants of individuality—in the form of independent shops and restaurants—existed on the street. As historic establishments shuttered in the wake of new competition from retail giants, the street’s inherent character also diminished. Now a depressing shell compared to the diversity it once fostered, Third Street Promenade is impossible to differentiate from Los Angeles’ other outdoor mall streets such as Universal CityWalk or The Grove.

Designated as a public domain owned by the City, the Promenade is actually overseen by a private 501(c)(3) nonprofit, acting under the nondescript name of Downtown Santa Monica, Inc. Under these conditions, activity on the street is tightly monitored and controlled. As a result, any form of a unique urban experience created through spontaneity and the will of the people is suppressed by a private entity. The power structure of the Promenade is best illustrated by the treatment of street performers who help draw visitors. Any entertainer wishing to perform on the property must first rehearse in front of a panel of judges who then decide whether they are an acceptable addition to the committee’s vision of a pedestrian experience. In similar fashion, an ordinance approved by the Santa Monica City Council bans panhandling and soliciting donations where benches and seating are located within the property line. Such laws are directly aimed at the homeless population, who often use the 100 or so benches and seats to solicit money from tourists and other groups. While all of these restrictions may help make the Third Street Promenade the successful tourist destination that it is, they stifle the street setting’s natural

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Americana, Glendale



Spring Street, downtown Los Angeles

Image Source: Creative Commons, and LADOT

inclination for spontaneity and genuine expression in favor of blanketing a corridor with bland predictability.

The second alternative that Jacobs describes is a mutation of homogeneity, a place that appears to offer a traditional city street, but fails to produce an authentic urban experience because its appearance is not born out of or built around in-situ culture. In Charles Moore's essay, "You Have to Pay for Public Life," the architect attempts to describe such origins of Los Angeles street life. Because there was no significant public realm in Los Angeles, public life wasn't being experienced in the public domain like most cities; therefore people would travel to places like Disneyland, a space purposefully created to have the appearance of a medieval town.

The Americana of Glendale, California, provides a perfect setting to study the condition that Moore describes. Instead of reflecting the local Armenian and Hispanic demographic that has long comprised much of the Los Angeles neighborhood, the Americana has the façade of a traditional street, but displaces cultural diversity, exploiting American urban history for branding purposes. Echoing the Third Street Promenade, the street offers commercial fare from chain stores and restaurants, while providing one movie theatre as a counterweight. But the Americana goes a step further, disguising its commercial nature in a contrived, nostalgic streetscape veneer. Complete with a gigantic elevator shaft of exposed steel beams, signage supported by a wooden structure meant to appear like remnants of some long-

forgotten industrial center, and a soundtrack solely comprised of Frank Sinatra songs emanating from ubiquitous outdoor speakers, the intentions of the space are clear. Internal transportation is provided by a trolley, which navigates through the pedestrian street but is not part of the larger transportation network of Glendale. Its U-shaped circuit spans approximately two hundred yards, making the same brief trip back and forth dozens of times during the day, underscoring the artificiality of the entirely designed experience.

Unlike the Third Street Promenade, the Americana is a mixed-use development with condominiums and apartments. However, this does not justify qualification as a traditional city street, where people of diverse races and income levels are able to organically interact with one another. The Americana's street is instead a disguise, pretending to offer public space, while actually being private property. Taking pictures, unless of friends and family, is prohibited, and private security forces restrict the size of dogs that can enter the space. Like the Third Street Promenade, the Americana's streetscape and buildings face inward, with constant monitoring of the atmosphere and users within. The margins of the Americana consist of massive, windowless walls that create an unwelcoming, austere experience, specifically on the sidewalks of Central Avenue and Colorado Street. Other exercises in exclusivity, which spawn homogeneity, are found by looking no further than the price tags of the residences.

In April 2008, condominiums were listed between the low \$700,000's to over \$2 million, a figure much higher than the \$589,000 median list price for housing in Glendale. Though prices have dropped by almost half since April 2009, residents can expect to pay an additional \$876 - \$939 per year in Homeowner's Dues, which includes valet parking, one-call concierge, sauna, pool, hot tub, gym, barbecue and club room. By pricing out the majority of local residents, the Americana's attempt at resurrecting traditional public space in the form of a town street is compromised, and attempts to hide its homogeneity through design is easily dispelled by the bottom line owners have devised.

So far, expressions of Jane Jacobs' first two alternatives have illustrated how attempts to simplify culture can undermine genuine urban experience. Jacobs' third alternative breathes hope because it does not rely entirely upon nostalgic design or the revival of superficial aesthetics that appeal to our yearnings for the familiar and comfortable. Instead, a design approach that relies on functional aesthetics may perhaps provide the setting necessary for spontaneity, ephemeral events, constant activity throughout the day and those indefinable and interesting moments that create a genuine human experience. According to urban designer John Chase, the best streets "accommodate equal opportunity aesthetics," that is, a blend of formal design and informal grassroots interventions. This establishes a structure from which to build upon, but allows room, literally and figuratively, for individual ownership of the neighborhood. The demonstrated functional design behind Complete Streets offers one method of achieving Jacobs' preferred third alternative.

Complete Streets policies originated as a response to the lack of consideration to pedestrians, their safety and experience in cities, suburbs and rural communities throughout the United States. According to the California Department of Transportation, "(a) complete street matches the needs of travelers to the uses surrounding a street. It provides safe travel for people using any mode of legal travel, including bicycling, walking, riding transit and driving." By designing for function instead of appearance, complete streets provide for a stronger sense of community due to increased interactions in the public realm, while fostering a sense of ownership of the street and feelings of community participation. Ultimately, they lead to a seamless, interconnected transportation system, designing for continuity in each mode so that people can take a "complete" trip throughout their city or town. Another advantage of Complete Streets policies is that there is no singular prescription or definition of what constitutes a "Complete Street" because each one is unique and context sensitive. While a city street may need additional bus stops,



Opening ceremony for Spring Street parklets in February 2013

bike lanes, medians and traffic calming measures, a rural road may be considered "complete" after simply adding a wide shoulder for safe passage of pedestrians and bicyclists.

Spring Street is one example of a de facto complete city street, located centrally in the historic core of downtown Los Angeles. On November 2, 2012 the Los Angeles Department of Transportation unveiled a bike lane spanning 1.5 miles from Cesar Chavez Avenue to 9th Street. Without impacting car lanes, the green painted buffer transformed one of LA's most centralized, famous streets from an urban raceway to a neighborhood street, cutting through civic, commercial and entertainment districts, while connecting them through alternative transportation. In addition to the new bike lane, Spring Street was chosen as a pilot site for a proposed city-wide parklets program. Two metered parking spaces were repurposed as mini-plazas, significantly improving the daily pedestrian experience. The street also hosts the weekly Downtown Historic District Farmers Market and a monthly Art Walk, with galleries opening their doors to the public for evening festivities. These layers of dynamic activity illustrate how small design moves can positively impact the public realm, instantly reversing unfriendly, unsafe conditions for pedestrians and bicyclists and creating a rich environment for all Angelenos. The benefits of Complete Streets extend beyond safety to issues of environmental justice by linking otherwise disparate and diverse neighborhoods together to create a city that is satisfying, livable, whole, and, as Jane Jacobs would call it, delightful.



Public Forum for the City of Elmira, California

Last year, Cinda Gilliland, a Principal at SWA's Sausalito office, initiated an internal discussion on social impact design. The now ongoing talk reflects the efforts of a wider movement among design, planning and consulting firms to branch out from typical private practice into work more often seen in the nonprofit sector, projects prioritizing social or environmental issues over monetary gains.

The landscape architecture profession inherently deals with community and ecology, both considerations that span profit and nonprofit models. The clearest differentiation of social impact design from more typical work to date has been pro bono projects. While social impact design does not necessarily have to be pro bono, let's address the issue of pro-bono work. Why do staff and principals volunteer their free time to projects that do not pay? Typical reasons may include a long-term relationship with a client, a desire to be generous and contribute to our communities, a love of craft or a particular niche interest. When opportunities arise that fulfill our values and interests, we are attracted to the work even if the projects do not result in monetary compensation.

### Why do staff and principals volunteer their free time to projects that do not pay?

While this initiative is clearly great, volunteerism as a firm practice is still challenged by the bottom line and it's too easy to conclude that if a job pays it should take priority over unpaid work. Granted, it's harder to accept the risk associated with investment in volunteer services, but the potential results can strengthen our networks, enhance our public relations and even eventually generate paid projects. The business aspect of pro-bono work is not about the issues that attract us to donate our time, but how our volunteer efforts can turn around and support our livelihood. Strategic volunteerism can improve a company's resilience by opening new relationships and opportunities.

There are potential pro-bono projects everywhere, yet many don't happen either for lack of funding or the poverty of documented social capital and the vision needed to identify improvements. These visions are crucial in the application for and award of grants, and their absence results in a Catch-22: there may be a community need for a project, but no social or financial capital to document this need in order to secure funding; in other words, there is no cash to apply for cash—presenting a prime situation for strategic volunteerism.



## How do we want to embrace social impact design through our practice?

In 2009, Jennifer Ng (of CMG) and I cofounded an organization called DesignConnect in order to target these opportunities. DesignConnect provides visioning services to local governments through student volunteer design partnered with faculty and professional mentors. As a result of volunteering visioning documents, some projects were able to secure funding. In the City of Elmira, for example, a student team mentored by Mike Haas of Haas Landscape Architects worked through a community design process for the refurbishment of the Mark Twain Riverfront Park. This process resulted in the city having a new master plan and a cost estimate to use for grant applications. Since the end of the student involvement, the city secured a grant to hire Haas Landscape Architects for the first phase, and the improved park opened in August 2012.

At SWA, we have the capacity to mentor student groups, offer our services to communities and seek out needs that may one day turn into real change. SWA can continue to use its experience with complex, integrated urban ecology and community design to set up the foundation for longstanding relationships through strategic volunteerism and mentorship. Some of our offices already practice this approach, with projects such as Houston's Buffalo Bayou Promenade serving as a prime example of its success.

The San Francisco office has recently become involved in a community driven pro-bono project in the College Hill neighborhood. Its involvement grew out of the community's desire to transform the San Jose Avenue corridor from a derelict, dangerous and car-oriented road to a safe and active multi-modal landscape that's connected to larger open spaces in the city. Richard Crockett, a member of the project team along with Dan Affleck and René Bihan, shared his thoughts on taking on this role: "SWA's involvement directly with community members has enabled the development of more creative solutions than if we were contracted with an agency for this project. In turn, this has provided the office with a large-scale, local example of our work that is useful in marketing the office as the go-to firm for San Francisco's big landscape infrastructure projects. In addition, the project has given us direct contacts with representatives of city agencies. Although we are continuing to work with the neighborhood on a pro-bono basis for short- and long-term solutions, the effort could very well develop into a full-on master planning and landscape services contract for our office."

Many visioning projects never materialize; many projects are denied funding and never get off the ground. But it's clearly not true that pro-bono projects that do not generate income do not have business merit. When we volunteer and develop visioning documents for undefined projects, we are at the beginning of a potentially long and rich process and working with people who could one day be clients.

To learn more about DesignConnect, visit [designconnectcornell.com](http://designconnectcornell.com)



Cap park concept for San Jose Avenue Corridor.



### ON THE BACK COVER:

**PUBLIC SPACE** can be described as a place for community, or as a medium for discourse between designers and patrons. This dualism inspired a parametric sculpture installed at the entrance wall in the SWA San Francisco Office. Paper is our vernacular as designers, how we communicate with each other, how we work, how we wrestle without plotters. The 3-D elements of the installation were constructed by hand with methods informed by origami and fashion design techniques.





Check out other design concepts at: [ideas.swagroup.com](http://ideas.swagroup.com)  
For business inquiries: [business@swagroup.com](mailto:business@swagroup.com)

**SWA**