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ArchitectureBoston

The Once and Future Neighborhood

Hipsters in the Woods

Outsize, Outside

neighborhood

SPRING 2009



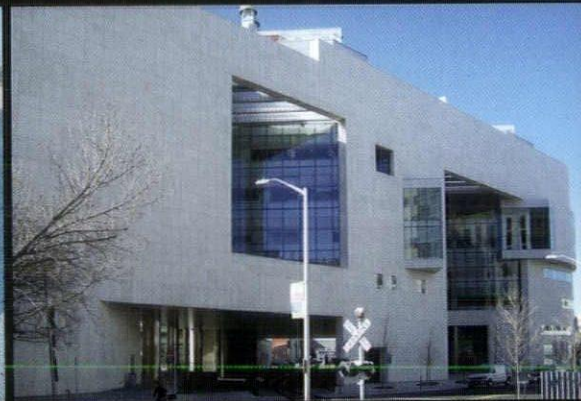
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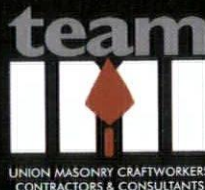


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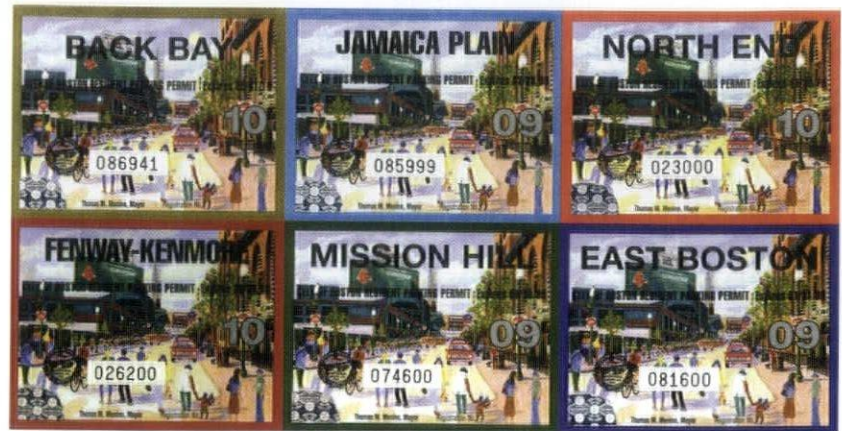
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Cover: *Place (Village)*, 2006–08, Installation by artist Rachel Whiteread from Museum of Fine Arts, Boston exhibition *Rachel Whiteread* (October 15, 2008–January 25, 2009). Courtesy the artist and Gagosian Gallery, London. Photograph © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

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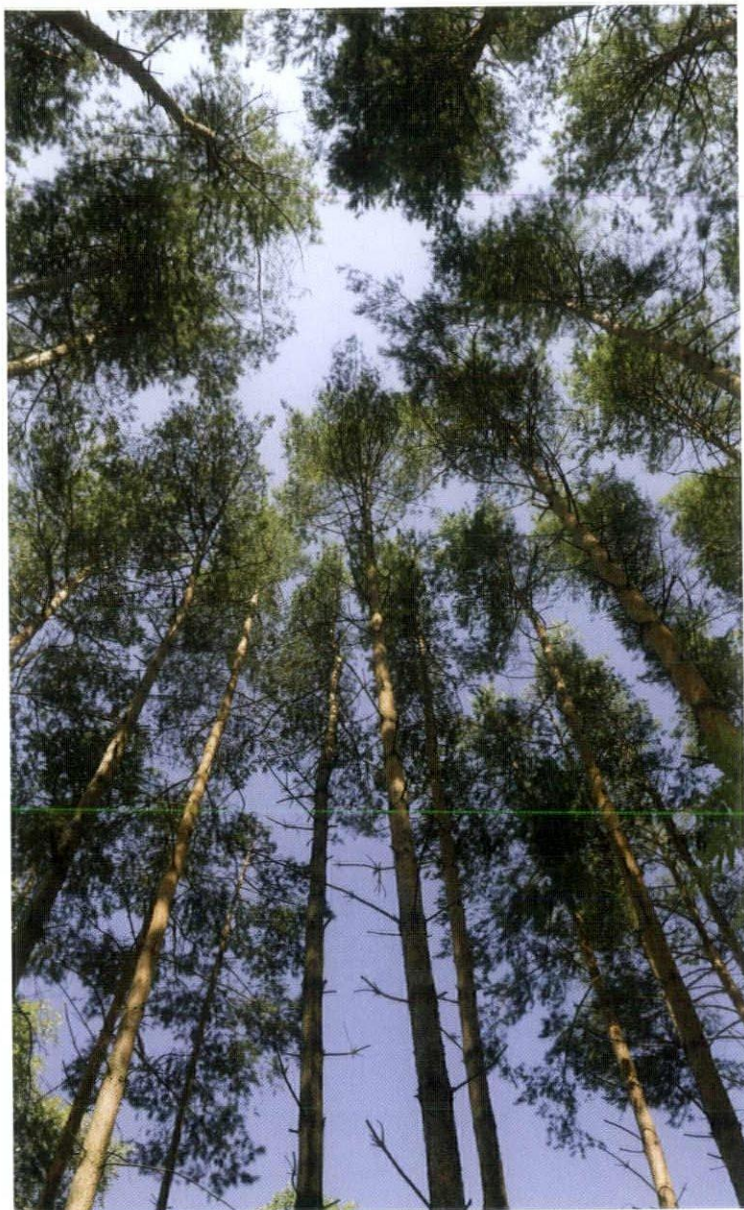
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What's in a Name?

OK, so it's a cliché to pine for the Old Neighborhood. But how about this: I miss my old online neighborhood.

Back in the day — the pre-Web, pre-broadband day (in this case, the late 1980s and early 1990s) — CompuServe was the dial-up online service of choice. Sure, AOL was available: flashy, sometimes trashy with its ubiquitous free-trial offers, it was bigger and eventually more successful. CompuServe was a little more expensive, but it appealed to a lot of smart, inquisitive people (perhaps a given in the early days of online services) who were attracted to the quality of its forums. These forums — essentially discussion groups moderated by “sysops” who were compensated on the basis of their forum success — focused on specific interests. I belonged to writing and journalism forums, in which writers, editors, and agents discussed professional concerns, offered advice, critiqued work, and developed friendships in the process.

Forums, of course, are common today on the Web; many of them even sustain a strong sense of community. And though I frequent several, I have rarely found the equivalent esprit of my old CompuServe community. CompuServe members in theory had anonymity — the original addresses were numbers — but within these writers' groups, most real names were known. Really known. I could pick up major newspapers and recognize bylines, or walk through bookstores and find bestsellers by my CompuServe pals. I once found a novel by a new mystery writer — our forum had given her advice on the title.

With corporate changes, competition, and the growth of the Web, eventually members began to move away, as do residents of any neighborhood. I moved, too — both my virtual and my physical neighborhoods. And suddenly my virtual and “real” lives were weirdly similar. I had left a neighborhood in a historic district in a small city — the sort of place where you know every house and have been to parties in most of them — for a woody suburb, where my work was interrupted one afternoon by the sound of sirens. Rushing across the street, I found my neighbor's house on fire; people ran from houses nearby to offer help. I didn't know many of them by name — I was new. But I

was shocked to realize that even people who had lived there for several years didn't know one another. As the house burned, we made introductions.

The question of what makes a neighborhood (and the related question of how to create one) has long occupied planners and architects. Technology, a mobile society, economic conditions, and demographic shifts have all recast the discussion, rendering it more urgent — even as we as individuals have adapted, satisfying our need for community in different ways. Previous generations discovered that the urban neighborhood could replace the village; similarly, we now find ourselves at home in virtual neighborhoods at work and online.

I was shocked to realize that even people who had lived there for several years didn't know one another. As the house burned, we made introductions.

Whatever their form, most neighborhoods share some attributes, a fact that is underscored in a remarkable book, *The Last Days of Old Beijing* by Michael Meyer. Written by an American schoolteacher who lived for two years in a shared courtyard house on one of Beijing's *hutong* (lanes), it is the story of life in a centuries-old district under threat of demolition. Despite differences of culture, history, and architecture (the courtyard houses often present blank walls to the street), Western readers will recognize the sense of neighborhood in Meyer's *hutong* and perhaps come away with a fresh understanding of a neighborhood's essential ingredients: density (a critical mass sharing space, whether real or virtual); shared interests or values (which might be based in religion or ethnicity, activities, local schools, or something as mundane as a condo agreement or threat of development); and social intimacy. A community is a place where you recognize and smile at familiar faces. A neighborhood is a place where you know the faces by name and ask after the family. ■

Elizabeth S. Padjen FAIA
Editor

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I would add a sense of urgency to Jean Carroon's engaging case for the importance of historic preservation in creating sustainable architecture ["A Building Is a Terrible Thing to Waste," November/December 2008]. We must immediately reduce our impact on the environment by our buildings, or the environmental destabilization to which they contribute will render the earth hostile to life by the year 2050. We must give up on our impulse to hermetically seal ourselves off from the environment, and re-engage our history. We need to remember how to be hotter, colder, and darker than we have grown accustomed to in our modern, unsustainable buildings. We must remember what it was like to live and work in the same place.

Carroon rightly concentrates on embedded energy, but there are other sustainable features associated with historic buildings. Many buildings built before 1910 utilize inventive passive systems that conserve as much energy as some of the latest technology. Preserving these structures not only puts those systems back in the service of sustainability, but also provides a catalogue of best practices that can also be applied to new construction.

This effort must be linked to LEED. LEED has proven itself strong enough to move us quickly forward, and is particularly effective when certification brings tax-incentives, quick approvals, and easier access to loans and grants. Still, the relationship between LEED and historic preservation must be strengthened. A refined new standard for historic buildings (LEED-HB) should be developed; this is something your readers can act on immediately by contacting the United States Green Building Council.

As Carroon makes clear, sustainable design and historic preservation must collaborate. Preservation must allow for green intervention and modernization. Architecture must stop prizing individuality and novelty over conservation and embrace historic preservation. States and municipalities must be flexible with codes and regulations to allow this synergy to take place.

We need to remember that the best buildings — in the past and the future — are both machines for living and works of transformational art. While we are perfecting our technology and standards, we must create a new aesthetic of sustainable beauty that we can pass on to future generations.

Daniel Snyder
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Fairfield University

Jean Carroon's excellent article reinforces the initiatives now underway to save Boston City Hall. Building a new city hall — or, even worse, tearing down the present building — is the ultimate expression of wasteful, unsustainable practices characteristic of the 20th century. At the invitation of Boston City Councilor Michael Flaherty, we have been testifying in support of sustainable practices for the planning of a revitalized, green, and well-loved city center.

In 1996, as co-chairs of the BSA's Architects for Social Responsibility committee, we received an award from Mayor Menino for our work on promoting sustainability. With that encouragement, as faculty members at Wentworth Institute of Technology, we offered a course on the sustainable renovation of City Hall. Our continuing research makes a compelling case for retaining City Hall.

The building can be made much more efficient by reclaiming 130,000 square feet of space by enclosing the now-open space on the fourth floor and adding a new roof level covering most of the top floor. The building can take advantage of this new atrium by integrating a new state-of-the-art heat-recovery ventilation system, low-VOC materials, and plant bio-filters and water features. The substantial savings gained by upgrading mechanical systems and insulating and air-sealing the existing building, coupled with the additional income from the new real estate, will finance the construction cost for this renovation in

less than nine years. By using best practices, future operating costs along with the energy use and carbon footprint of the building can be reduced by up to 75 percent.

The unfinished, unappreciated, but sophisticated armature of City Hall can be completed and thus transformed into an attractive home for the City by adding better lighting, color, and finishes to humanize the interiors. By better connecting the inside with the outside with windows and arcades cut into the base, the building can lose its fortress-like character. Plantings and greenery can soften it with "living" walls.

City Hall is well located at the city center, allowing for easy access. There is much less disruption and cost associated with keeping City Hall than with moving and building in a new location. With the embodied energy equivalent to about seven million gallons of gasoline, plus the substantial additional energy and pollution associated with tearing it down, the building should be saved. A truly sustainable City Center should be redesigned in an open competition with the participation of citizens and neighborhood groups.

If we are unable to reverse the current trends of global warming, scientists inform us that City Hall could become waterfront property, with Quincy Market and much of the Boston area flooded from a potential sea-level rise of at least 10 feet. To avoid this horrific scenario, we believe that Boston must seize this opportunity to provide leadership and act as a model for the rest of the city and country to follow, by the greening and saving of Boston City Hall.

For more information: BASEA.org/GreenBCH.php.

*Franziska Amacher, Henry MacLean AIA,
Gerry Ives, Mark Kelley
The Green City Team
Boston*

Luis Carranza's thoughtful article

"Un-Modern" [November/December 2008] causes me to reconsider thoughts I've had since I began travelling to Havana nine years ago. I agree with Carranza's

words “perhaps our newly-found hybridity is one that reconciles our embrace of modernity with our desire to leave it.” In the case of Cuba, this takes on a new twist.

The example of two Cuban men refilling an aerosol can is evidence of the continuing entrepreneurial will of the Cuban people. Those of us who have visited Cuba can quote myriad such examples. Adversity is the reason the Cubans have been able to keep their 1950s US cars running, although many have been converted to diesel engines and run with handmade parts replacing the original failed mass-produced components. Scarcity is the reason the Cubans save and recycle nearly everything. But this culture, shaped to a great degree by the forces of adversity and scarcity, has become what we may now classify as “modern.” In many instances, Cuba has what we here in the United States want. Aside from the American dislike of Cuban Socialism (and Fidel Castro), it might now be an appropriate time to have a second look.

We are all too familiar with the Cuban model of free healthcare, childcare, and education, but as we in the United States struggle to find a more sustainable lower-carbon-footprint-lifestyle, it would do us well to see what Cuba has achieved since 1959. Adversity and scarcity has continued to shape life in Cuba but ironically these challenges have also caused a natural movement toward a completely sustainable lifestyle. Cuba is a place where nothing is wasted; where the recycling of aerosol cans and gift-wrapping paper are as natural to Cubans as it is for average Americans to fill the gas tank of their latest model SUV. Limited mobility, due to the scarcity of automobiles, has caused most of the Cuban population to work near their homes, without the need for a lengthy commute. Rapidly improving modes of public transportation are, however, encouraging greater mobility, particularly in Havana where the great majority of Cubans have always depended on shared autos and taxis as well as public transit. In the context of our rapidly warming planet, which of the two cultures is really more modern?

It is interesting, and unfortunate, to see how quickly the Cubans are now moving toward an oil-dependent lifestyle, caused largely by their access to (for the time being?) low-cost Venezuelan oil and their desire to become more “modern” as they

gain personal wealth in a post-Fidel Castro economy. As Cubans rush headlong into an obsolete definition of “modern,” they would be well served now to re-evaluate their options by reconciling their embrace of their new-found modernity with their desire to leave it.

*Leland D. Cott FAIA, LEED
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We were dismayed to read the cursory reference to the cost of the Newton North High School project in the “Periodical Roundup” section of the November/December 2008 issue. In professional architectural journals, we have a right to expect a higher standard when discussing complex building issues, rather than just repeating a tiring line from the mass media. A more thorough review in comparing cost of this project to other public schools would reveal: it is a big project — over 400,000 gsf with extensive site development, including a turf stadium; it has an elaborate program — “clues” include an indoor track, natatorium, vocational/tech ed, and instructional kitchen with a public café; its costs include demolition and remediation of a 460,000 gsf existing school; it has extensive and extremely costly remediation of hazardous materials spread throughout the site after the 1960s demolition and burial of old building debris; and it had an extended public review and referendum process which delayed the project for a year when cost escalated over 10 percent.

It does our profession little good to repeat popular misconceptions in the BSA’s wonderful architectural journal.

*John A. Prokos FAIA
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Gund Partnership
Cambridge, Massachusetts*

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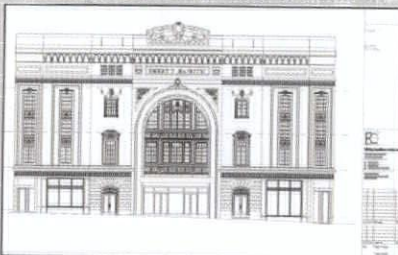
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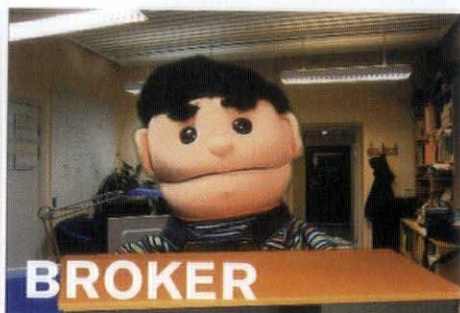
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Predatory Tales (video produced in cooperation with Lawrence Community Works).

Red Lines, Death Vows, Foreclosures, Risk Structures

MIT Museum Compton Gallery

September 9–December 21, 2008

The sound and smell as one enters the windowless black-box space is reminiscent of another Cambridge venue, the American Repertory Theatre — prepare to be intrigued. This rendering of the causal relationship between housing finance and the residential built environment is as much theater as art installation.

You and I look at a house, and we see a house. This creation of Damon Rich and his Brooklyn-based Center for Urban Pedagogy looks at a house and sees everything but the house — appraisals, interest rates, government-sponsored enterprises, subsidies, bankers, real estate agents, stocks and bonds, politics and policy. A taste:

- A walk-in topographical model of a human head takes us into the mind of an appraiser.
- A plywood graph of the prime rate since 1929 forms a rectangular corral surrounding the S&L Railroad — a model train with a portion of its circular track laid conveniently “out of state.”

- Realtor lawn signs framing photographs of housing in Detroit are set out geometrically by neighborhood.
- The sound track of a large-format, 40-minute split-screen video discourse involving 22 individual mortgage stakeholders — owners, lenders, bureaucrats, and politicians — fills the gallery as both the glue that ties the exhibition together and an insistent interruption to comprehending the rest. FHA, CRA, FHLB, FNMA, FHLMC, NTIC, HOLC, GNMA, MBA, ABA, and so much more — you get the picture. They are all here. They relate to one another and, like it or not, it’s why financing is where the home is, and therefore, the heart.

Finley H. Perry, Jr. is the founder of F.H. Perry, Builder in Hopkinton, Massachusetts.

(The exhibition will be at the Queens Museum of Art in New York from May 31–September, 2009.)

Illuminale Boston

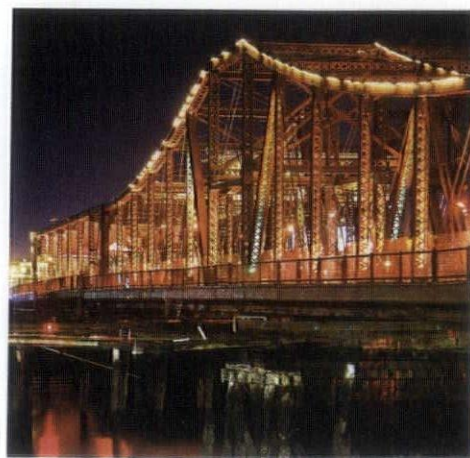
October 1–5, 2008

(www.illuminaleboston.com)

The Boston waterfront was aglow with light during the five-day Illuminale Boston festival. The brainchild of Lana Nathe of Light Insight Design Studio, this ambitious project was intended to promote awareness of lighting in the night-time urban environment by creating innovative and energy-efficient temporary lighting schemes for Boston landmarks. The festival coincided with the inauguration of the Rose Kennedy Greenway, and featured 10 sites, including the four bridges across Fort Point Channel, the Custom House, Grain Exchange, Rows Wharf, South Station, 175 Federal Street, and Legal Sea Foods building.

Some sites were more successful than others; lighting on the Northern Avenue Bridge, designed by Ripman Lighting Consultants, in particular drew enthusiastic attention. The permanent conversion of the Custom House lighting from halogen to LED was probably the best example of energy efficiency. With plans to expand the festival to more sites and to make it an annual event, the future is, yes, looking bright.

Lance Keimig is a photographer specializing in night photography (see photo below) (www.thenightsskye.com).



Designing For Life: Medellín | Caracas

Wentworth Institute of Technology
Symposium: September 22, 2008

Step One: Get into power. Step Two: Transform the city. Sounds easy, right? It certainly couldn't have been that simple, but the essential strategy is clear, and powerful. At the keynote lecture of Wentworth Institute's "Designing For Life" symposium focusing on the lessons and successes of Medellín and Caracas, Sergio Fajardo Valderrama PhD, mathematician-turned-mayor of Medellín, described the extraordinary series of public-works projects his administration accomplished. Just 15 years ago, the Colombian drug wars made Medellín the most dangerous city in the world. Since then, homicides have decreased significantly, yet poverty and corruption still prevail. Mayor Fajardo was elected in 2004 pledging honesty, transparency, and dignity for all citizens.

As his administration reduced violence,

it created social opportunities and made the political decision to invest community resources in good design. With equal parts Olmsted and Obama, Fajardo "turned fear into hope," using infrastructure improvements to build great parks and public facilities. The poorest neighborhoods received expanded public transportation systems as well as five award-winning libraries, dozens of schools, daycare centers, and art galleries, dramatically making a statement to residents about the dignity of their daily lives. Few professionals had dared to imagine that such buildings might ever be built in the barrio; still fewer citizens had ever seen buildings like these, much less built for their use. "Here are your taxes at work!" the mayor boldly and passionately proclaimed.

The son of a prominent architect, Fajardo explained in his lecture that he was simply a mathematician who decided to get involved. He saw corruption stealing opportunities and furthering deep social inequalities, and he wanted this to change. Medellín has mandatory term limits; Fajardo had only four years to deliver.



▲ Parque Explora [Exploratorium Park] in Medellín. Architects: Alejandro Echeverri and Grupo de Trabajo. Photo by Carlos Tobon.

(He left office with 80-percent approval ratings and is now a presidential candidate for 2010.) Again and again, Fajardo showed symposium attendees stunning before-and-after photos, reiterating how design sends a very important message to all citizens that they, in turn, will live up to. The underlying theme was that architecture is political; with progressive leadership, it can be wonderfully and inspiringly so.

Gretchen Schneider, Assoc. AIA, is the principal of Schneider Studio in Boston.

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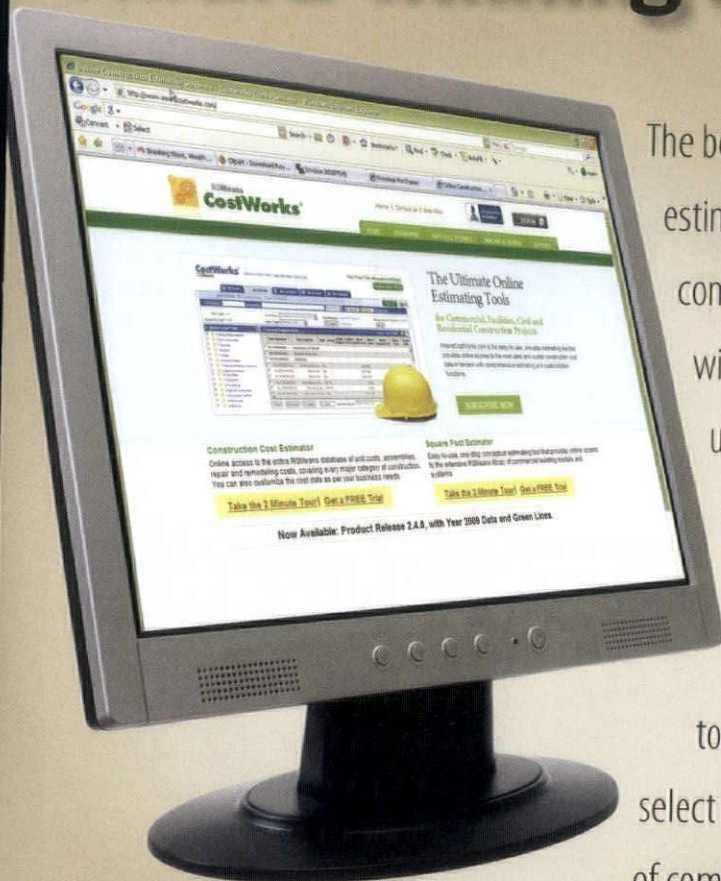


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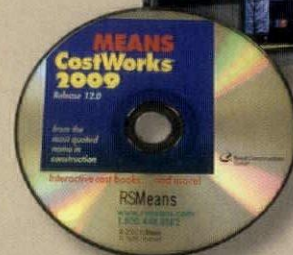
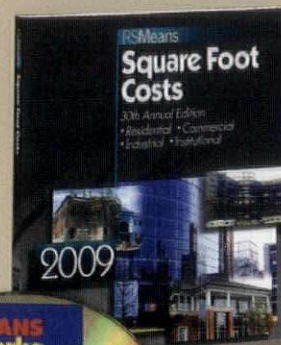


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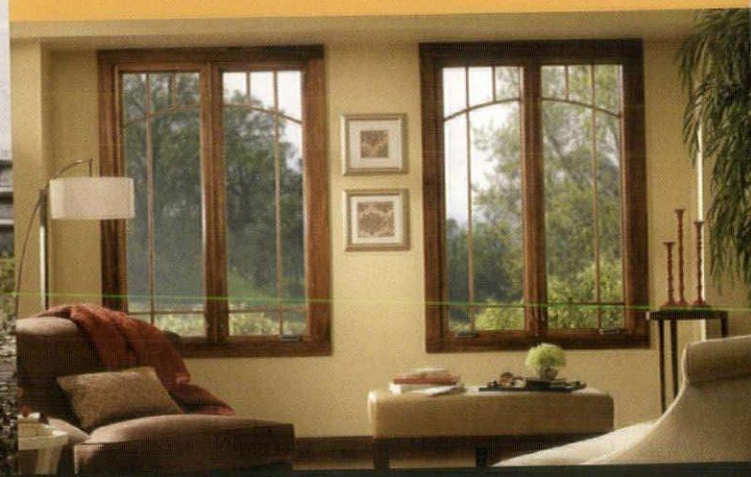
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The place: The Institute for Human Centered Design, a nonprofit organization devoted to creating, promoting, and researching universal design — sustainable places that work for everyone, regardless of physical or cognitive ability.

What you notice first about the office: It's gorgeous. Sleek, warm, spacious, and light, with a long row of windows running along the street.

What you notice next: Everything is designed to be universally user-friendly. The space under kitchen counters is unobstructed, to allow for wheelchair access. The microwave and dishwasher are drawers mounted at accessible levels, and are free of knobs that would be difficult to operate for someone with arthritis or carpal-tunnel syndrome. The restroom is equipped with a digital bidet, an assistive device for those who have limited mobility; to help people with sight or cognitive disabilities, the control panel features large, easily comprehensible visual icons.

The executive director: Valerie Fletcher, who joined the staff in 1998 after serving as deputy commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Mental Health.

9:45 Valerie and staff member Maura Parente are looking at carpet samples. The Boston Architectural College is currently expanding into the old ICA building on Boylston Street, and IHCD is creating interior spaces according to universal design principles. The plans include lowering the first floor, so that everything will be at one level, and carpeting corridors to improve acoustics.

The carpet samples are low-pile, easily traversable for someone in a wheelchair. "This is very elegant," Maura says, holding up a sample in shades of muted burgundies.

The carpet is made of recycled, bio-degradable material. Sustainability is key: the Canadian tables Valerie liked for this project were not made of wood certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), so she is negotiating to order the metal parts from Canada and fabricate the tables here, using Massachusetts FSC-certified wood.

10:20 Valerie sits down with a woman named Marian who introduced herself at a conference on public health and the built

environment. Marian's background includes the study of sustainability, work in public health, work as a chef and caterer, work in a group home, "and, oh, yes, I have a master's in counseling. Pretty varied."

"We like that here," Valerie says. As the two talk it becomes clear that they share a strong belief in the value of participatory processes. Valerie begins telling Marian about an upcoming project — to incorporate kid-friendly technology into the South End branch of the Boston Public Library, as part of an overall effort to re-imagine and revitalize the branches. "The players here are the neighbors. We need to go to them. The usual model is: If they can't come to meet at a time and place that works for the project team, then they don't get to play. I have found that to be singularly dumb."

11:14 Valerie interrupts herself as staff member Jennifer Otitigbe walks by. They need to follow up on a focus-group report they've prepared for a Japanese company, evaluating a line of multi-functional printers in terms of universal design.



▲ Photo by Joan Wickersham.

"Jennifer, let's see what time it is in Japan." Valerie looks at her iPhone. "One-fourteen tomorrow morning."

Jennifer: "Probably not a good time to call."

Valerie: "Probably not."

11:20 Valerie's networking session with Marian has morphed into a job interview; she asks whether Marian would like to consult on the library project.

Marian is definitely interested. "I don't understand it completely, but I kind of like that."

Valerie laughs. "There's some brilliant work from different cities, looking at libraries as systems. I'll send you stuff."

11:38 A meeting in the conference room with staff members Steve Demos and Chris Hart. Chris, who was born with cerebral palsy and uses a wheelchair, is IHCD's Director of Urban and Transportation Projects. Steve is an architect. They're discussing Cape Cod Community College, where IHCD is consulting with Sasaki Associates to institute universal design. Current site conditions are extremely unwelcoming: buildings sit on a steep rise, which poses accessibility problems for the disabled and for many elderly people who attend public programs at the college. A state agency has reviewed IHCD's report and is asking for more detail, even though the budget is already stretched thin.

Universal design includes not just mobility issues, but also sensory disabilities — sight, hearing — and cognitive issues, like learning disabilities and autism.

Steve: "Are we bound by our contract, or by what they want?"

Chris: "It seems like they want a punch list for their maintenance people."

Steve: "But it's not within our scope to show an image and say, 'Replace this door-knob with a lever,' and then show another image and say, 'Replace this doorknob, too.'"

Valerie: "They want an ADA transition plan. It's in our interest to respect their request."

1:10 Valerie and IHCD project manager Josh Safdie have a networking lunch at a nearby restaurant with Tom Paine, who is opening the Boston office of a Chinese landscape architecture firm.

They talk of the future. Valerie is interested in China because of its rapid development — and its aging demographic. How to design now for a large population whose needs and abilities will change radically in the near future? "You can't

invest in a project in China without considering where you'll be in 20 years."

"And everyone watches what goes on there," Tom says. "What happens in China doesn't stay in China. But if China doesn't buy in, the rest of the world won't either."

1:47 Valerie: "People think of accessibility only in terms of wheelchairs. But that's only a small percentage of the population with disabilities. The biggest issue is actually aging: arthritis, residual problems from old injuries, deficits that worsen gradually over time. Universal design includes not just mobility issues, but also sensory disabilities — sight, hearing — and cognitive issues, like learning disabilities and autism."

1:49 The restaurant is busy and quite noisy. Tom says he has a hearing problem, and asks the waitress to turn the music down. She yells cheerfully, "You want me to

make it louder? Sure! I love it! Most people who mention it are old farts who want it turned down."

"No, we would like it turned down, please," Valerie says.

"Oh."

1:58 The waitress comes back with the lunch. The music is still loud. "Sorry," she says. "I couldn't figure out how to work the thing."

3:20 Back in the office, Valerie briefs Josh on 20 Rutland Square, a house in Boston's South End that once belonged to artists Joyce and James Reed, the latter of whom used a wheelchair. The Reeds left their house in trust to be developed as a physically, socially, and financially accessible live-and-work space for artists. A wheelchair lift is needed to make the first-floor-and-basement apartment accessible from the outside.

"The logical place is in the back," Valerie explains. "But Mel King, who heads the trust, feels that 'back of the building' has connotations of second-class citizenship."

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She shows Josh a rendering of a lift retrofitted to the bow-front parlor window. "Now we need to figure out how to present this to the Landmarks Commission."

3:40 They continue to discuss the project, where issues of access and aesthetics compete. "We can camouflage the lift somewhat with paint and vegetation, but realistically it's going to be homely."

Josh: "Are you anticipating neighborhood objection?"

Valerie: "I think that's a good possibility."

3:52 Josh suggests using a three-dimensional model for the presentation. He'll think about the design and the problems posed by the tight spaces both outside and inside the house.

Valerie: "The place that is comparable in terms of architecture, and so also in terms of the challenge, is London." She gives him the name of a preservation architect in London who uses a wheelchair.

4:08 A conference call to plan an upcoming Build Boston workshop about the difference

between accessibility and universal design in historic preservation, using examples from religious architecture. Workshop participants Bill Barry and Ray Bloomer agree that preserving a building isn't the same thing as simply leaving it intact.

Ray, who is with the National Center on Accessibility, says, "How much can you alter a historic site to let people in? You look at the Statue of Liberty—they did a huge regrading to let people get in. Same thing with the Lincoln Memorial. These buildings are so important that you *can't* leave everything the same if it keeps people out."

Bill, a preservation architect, says: "You need to balance preservation and inclusiveness. As a client you need to establish clear objectives upfront. You need to weigh when preserving should give way to access, while still minimizing the impact on a building's historic integrity."

Ray: "We need to maintain a building's usefulness for the future. A building is just a building. We don't preserve it for its own sake—we preserve it for people."

4:50 Bill and Ray try to come up with

examples of preservation projects that incorporate universal design. They mention the installation of ramps at the Concord Academy meetinghouse, and of an elevator in Faneuil Hall. "But again, those are just about mobility, not universal design," Valerie reminds them.

Ray asks, "Do you have an example of a place of worship that has accessibility, an enhanced listening system, large-print books?"

Everyone is silent.

Valerie says, "One thing we have underway is an international case-study database. We'll see if we can find some examples from that. And—" she adds, becoming even more animated as she envisions further networking possibilities that this workshop could open up, "this group is likely to include some top preservationists. And they may be able to point us to some stories we don't already know." ■

Joan Wickersham's new book, *The Suicide Index: Putting My Father's Death in Order*, was a finalist for the 2008 National Book Award in nonfiction.

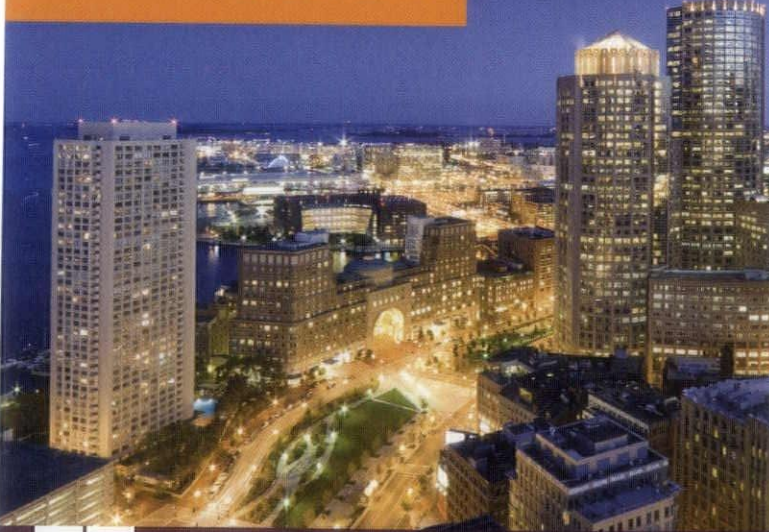
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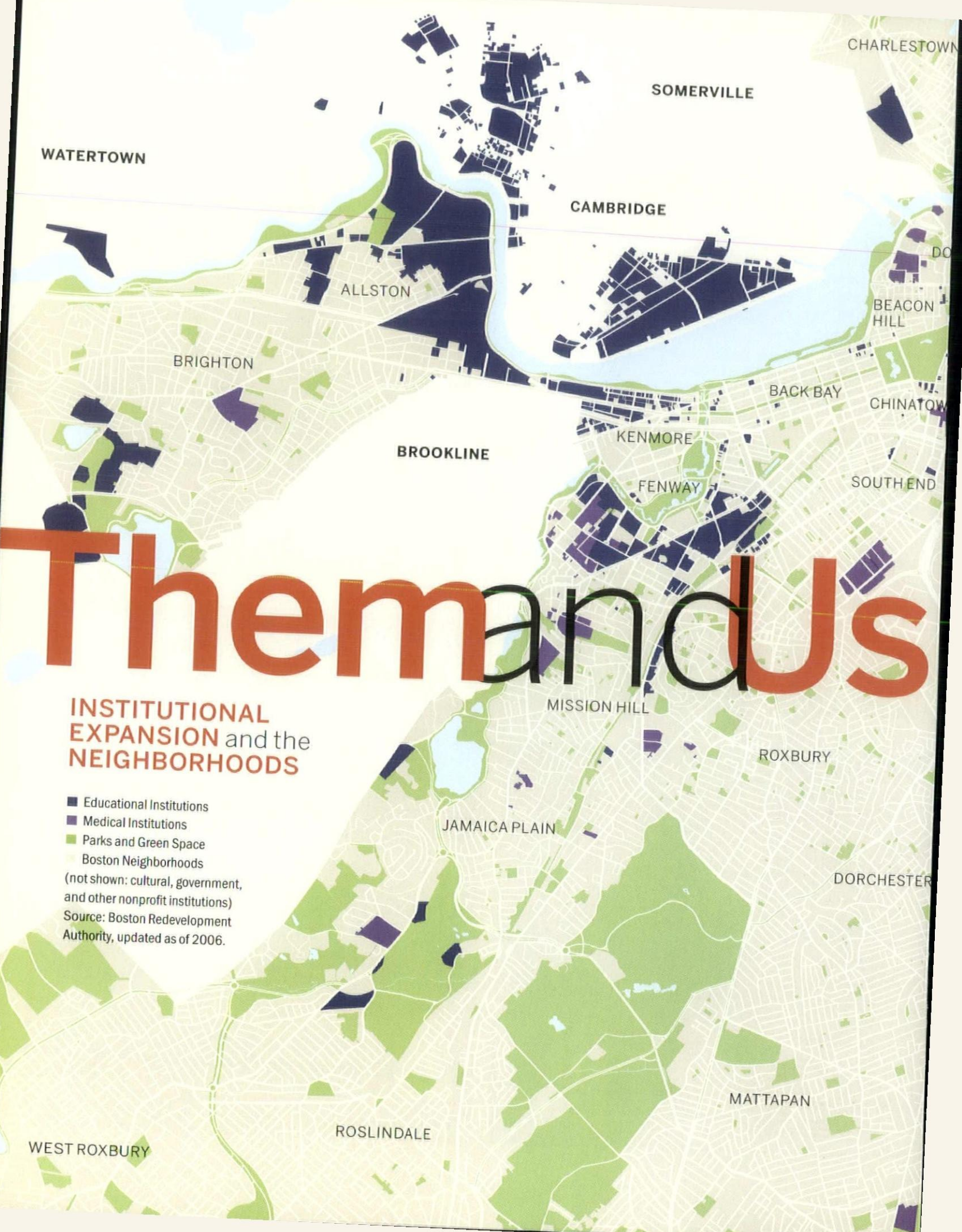
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Them and Us

INSTITUTIONAL EXPANSION and the NEIGHBORHOODS

- Educational Institutions
 - Medical Institutions
 - Parks and Green Space
 - Boston Neighborhoods
- (not shown: cultural, government, and other nonprofit institutions)
- Source: Boston Redevelopment Authority, updated as of 2006.



PARTICIPANTS

Rebecca Barnes FAIA is the director of strategic growth at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island. She was previously the chief planner of the city of Boston and has also served as the director of planning in Seattle.

Omar Blaik is the CEO and founder of U³ Ventures in Philadelphia. He was previously senior vice president of facilities and real estate services at the University of Pennsylvania, where he oversaw more than \$2 billion of construction on the campus and in the surrounding community.

Kevin Carragee PhD is a professor in the department of communication and journalism at Suffolk University. He is co-president of the Hobart Park Neighborhood Association in Brighton, chair of the Presentation School Foundation, and serves on the Boston College Task Force. He also is a member of the advisory board of the Urban Communication Foundation.

Steven Cecil AIA, ASLA is principal of The Cecil Group in Boston.

Elizabeth Padjen FAIA is editor of *ArchitectureBoston*.

Alison Pultinas is a member of the board of the Mission Hill Fenway Neighborhood Trust, a founder of the Friends of Historic Mission Hill, and serves on the steering committee of the Mission Hill Youth Collaborative, representing the Mission Hill School, a pilot K-8 school.

Kairos Shen is the chief planner of the city of Boston, a role that includes oversight of economic development, institutional planning, and research and policy development within the Boston Redevelopment Authority.

David Spillane AICP, RIBA is a principal and the director of planning and urban design at Goody Clancy in Boston.

Elizabeth Padjen: The issue of institutional expansion is a point of contention not only in Boston, but also in many communities across the country. This has come at a time when many institutions have undergone enormous change. Colleges and universities that once were house-like in their physical scale now occupy block-size office buildings and dormitories in their surrounding neighborhoods. Hospitals that were once community-based are now subject to corporate organizational structures and decisions that are made miles away. And although current economic conditions are providing what we might euphemistically call a breather, the enormous wealth in our society in the last decade generated healthy endowments and willing donors that fueled unprecedented physical growth. Even if construction resumes at a slower pace, the decisions that have been made in the last decade will affect institution/neighborhood relations in the years to come.

In the meantime, the neighborhoods themselves have changed, too, in some cases quite dramatically through gentrification and demographic shifts. When people talk about "the neighborhood" in these conversations, what do they mean? What are the qualities and the assets that they're trying to protect, that form the basis of these negotiations?

Kevin Carragee: It's always a political act for anyone to define who the neighborhood is or what its interests are. And although I live there, I can't speak about Allston-Brighton as one neighborhood and one community, because there are multiple voices that have different interests. But when people in Allston-Brighton speak about institutional expansion, they are concerned about a declining sense of community, an increasingly transient neighborhood, and a loss of important community anchors, such as schools. And now with the expansion of Harvard into Allston, they have an increasing awareness of the fragility of their neighborhood. Two of the three major universities in our neighborhood were commuter colleges no more than 40 years ago — Boston University and Boston College have totally transformed their self-definitions. People feel that some of that transformation has had devastating effects on parts of the neighborhood.

Steven Cecil: One of the challenges in neighborhood planning is the idea that there is a static, easily defined neighborhood out there. In fact, there are changing demographics, citizenry, identity, and internal issues that are constantly in play. When an institution gets involved, the focus turns to the entity that is making the most obvious change. We have to make sure that the focus is on the neighborhood and what makes a great neighborhood, as opposed to a series of development or design opportunities. If we can appreciate the dynamics within the neighborhood, then the relationship is going to be on stronger footing.

Elizabeth Padjen: Are neighborhoods aware that they themselves are evolving, apart from the institutions, or does someone need to point that out to them?

Rebecca Barnes: Participants in planning processes often bring to the table a set of assumptions that are based to some extent on current conditions but to a great extent on past conditions and their own world view. And that's where the enormous contention

comes in. When the city and the neighborhoods are engaged with each other and with other powerful stakeholders like universities or hospitals, there is potential for an important mutual education process. And that can alter the dynamics as everyone comes to understand how the neighborhood and the institution have changed, and what their current needs and values are. That in turn gives rise to new thinking about what is possible. And of course institutions change, too, with each new administration. The leadership inside the institution establishes its priorities, including how it communicates and interacts with its neighbors and the city. Leadership matters — the differences can be dramatic.

Elizabeth Padjen: Are there any examples of institutional expansion that are known to be models of disaster? Is there a Pruitt-Igoe of institutional development that proved to be a turning point in how people approach the issue of institutional expansion?

Kairos Shen: In many cases, the real disasters are not built — the disaster occurs in the process itself. But every university I know has a building that was probably a watershed in its relationship with the surrounding community, the kind of project that was the perfect storm of bad process, bad design, and ultimately a bad outcome. The challenge is to learn from those.

Omar Blaik: Some of the most disastrous work was done during the urban-renewal era. Institutions were given the authority through eminent domain to raze block after block of struggling neighborhoods that still had life and richness in them. In their place, they created institutional superblocks that the city then retreated from and created a no-man's-land zone around. And that's at the heart of many urban institutional ills that we see today.

Every university I know has a building that was probably a watershed in its relationship with the surrounding community, the kind of project that was the perfect storm of bad process, bad design, and ultimately a bad outcome.

Kairos Shen

Elizabeth Padjen: Are there examples that are considered to be models of effective partnerships between institutions and their surrounding communities?

Kevin Carragee: Some people in Allston-Brighton have been drawn to the good work that Clark University has done in Worcester, partnering with a troubled neighborhood in a troubled city. Trinity College has undertaken some successful initiatives in Hartford. One of the telling things about both, though, is that sometimes those strategies that seem to work best can happen only when a neighborhood is close to an economic or social tipping point or in fact has already tipped a bit. It would be wonderful if the partnerships could be forged much earlier, when the neighborhood is still robust.

Rebecca Barnes: Arizona State University offers a totally different model. Its president brought in a consultant, who's now on the faculty, to look at everything the university does in terms of its potential for achieving community goals. To me, that is at the far end of the spectrum from most university/neighborhood relationships because, typically, the relationship with the neighborhood is not a university's principal focus — education and research are. Neighborhood relationships become a focus when there's a problem. Universities tend to assume that their presence fosters a mutually beneficial relationship, with a lot of passive if not active contributions to the community. Universities are not typically oriented or structured to attend to neighborhood priorities; they do that when there's a crisis, or when they want or need something, or when it is consistent with their missions. But Arizona State has a leader who says that community engagement is such a big part of what a public university should be that he wants to look at everything it does from this point of view. There is no conclusion yet about whether the outcome will live up to the expectation and the goal, but it's worth learning from this very unusual model.

David Spillane: There's an increasing recognition of the interdependence between institutions and the neighborhoods. Historically, we had more unfettered institutional expansion with less understanding of the neighborhoods. Now, there's a much greater awareness of the potential impacts, both positive and negative.

Ohio State University is another example of an institution helping to stabilize the neighborhoods around the university. It has been working for about a decade to become more involved in affordable housing and a range of economic development initiatives. Emory University in Atlanta has a different set of issues. It's an institution with a beautiful campus, surrounded by beautiful, prosperous neighborhoods. But in-between, there's an appalling sprawl landscape — surface parking lots with thousands of cars. Emory was concerned about this wasteland that was building up around its campus, so it established a university/community partnership called the Clifton Community Partnership as a platform for the university and the neighborhoods to work together to address some of those issues.

Some of the other institutions that have been involved in this for a very long period of time have established not-for-profit partnerships that have as their mission a shared agenda of revitalization and renewal. That's certainly true at Ohio State. It's true now at Emory. The University of Cincinnati in partnership with four other medical and educational institutions formed a similar organization, the Uptown Consortium, with a dedicated staff that is also working on these issues over the long term.

Alison Pultinas: During the presidential campaign, it was reported that Barack Obama's children attend the University of Chicago Lab School — that's an example of a wonderful educational partnership that we don't have in Boston. None of the universities in Boston or Cambridge has anything equivalent. Northeastern had an opportunity to pursue something like that with its development on Parcel 18 in lower Roxbury, but it didn't. Daycare is similar — these campuses all have daycare centers for their own staff, but there's no cross-registration with the community. These are missed opportunities to bridge the racial and class divide in our city.



The hospitals in the Longwood area have a different mission: they are the provider and the community is the client, so it's a different relationship from the schools. There are good examples of partnerships with hospitals. But, like universities, hospitals can engender distrust when they start purchasing buildings without telling people. In Mission Hill, the Lahey Clinic bought residential property in the 1970s — buying up the triple-deckers and tearing them down — and then changed its mind and moved to Burlington. And we were left with acres of vacant land for almost 30 years.

Elizabeth Padjen: And the memories of those things tend to linger on.

Alison Pultinas: Yes, and people are bitter.

Elizabeth Padjen: The memories and suspicions that linger bring us to an interesting part of this whole dynamic, which is the communication piece: what gets told, or what doesn't, and how it gets told. We now have amazing visualization tools for communicating design and development ideas to communities. Some institutions are even using the online virtual world Second Life to help people understand what might be going on in their neighborhood. Blogs have become increasingly significant, not so much as channels of communication from the institutions to the neighborhoods, but as a community discussion medium. A quasi-underground level of discussion goes on among blogs, where people participate in ways they can't through the traditional media. Ideas get launched, fights get started, weird stuff happens. It's sort of a Wild West of communication.

Kairos Shen: Blogs can foster discussions that couldn't happen in a traditional community meeting, but you can never know how representative they really are of the community as a whole. And of course, they are not always civil. One of the difficult aspects of these planning processes is that the number of involved people tends to dwindle over time. And when you look at who's actually blogging, you find it's a very limited number. It's similar to what happens at a real meeting: the people who have the most energy and speak the loudest dominate the conversation.

Kevin Carragee: Despite the uncivil postings, online media give you the ability to reach people who weren't reached before, with master plans and documents and comment letters that are posted on websites. Sometimes you get four pages from someone writing at 12:30 at night, who has actually studied these documents at great length and has some very important things to say. I think online media have mobilized people who previously have not been involved. And they play an even more important role because, sadly, with the diminution of city coverage and resources and readers, traditional newspapers don't keep as careful an eye as they used to.

The community always speaks in multiple voices, since it comprises multiple communities and multiple interests. The universities or the hospitals might speak with multiple voices internally, but a single voice speaks externally. Therefore, it's very easy for big institutions to say, well, there's no community consensus, because communities speak in multiple voices that

We tend to take institutional expansion as a given. We may find that this relationship will shift to one that more overtly focuses on nurturing the institutions and supporting the value they bring to the economy.

David Spillane AICP, RIBA

are sometimes conflicting. But often there's actually no internal university or hospital consensus either, but a decision's been made to speak publicly with a single voice, as though total consensus exists. And that is just a structural inequity in the debate.

Rebecca Barnes: One of the important things that we should talk about is trust. You don't develop trust in your own life if you just deal with somebody when a crisis is at its hottest. You can deal with a crisis in a different way if you've previously established a basic trust relationship. The institution has the same ability as the community to put things online and make them accessible. It's about being part of the community on an ongoing basis. That's the bottom line — are we in this together or not? Trust is probably a major factor in the success stories and a missing ingredient in the catastrophes.

Kairos Shen: And trust requires that the neighborhoods understand why the institution has to undergo change, and that the institution understand the community's expectations about participating in the change. That has to be the foundation of the discussion.

Rebecca Barnes: There is great value in transparency. I think that's a very new idea for most institutions.

Kairos Shen: I agree with you. Right now, one in four jobs in the city of Boston is in either hospitals or higher education. That's a profound number. The economic-development contribution of these institutions is incredible, yet we still don't always fully appreciate it.

Steven Cecil: But a lot of communities that are starving for money instead tend to look at institutionally owned property and see it in terms of tax revenues they're not receiving. They don't think in terms of indirect benefits. A number of institutions and communities are beginning to experiment with new kinds of partnerships that can bring direct economic benefits. The fee-in-lieu-of-taxes system is an early phase of this. But we need to make sure that both the direct and indirect benefits are real, recognized, and understood, because the interdependency is profound, especially in New England.

David Spillane: We tend to take institutional expansion as a given, because we've been living with it for so long. Institutions have continued to expand through almost every economic cycle. But, for example, we're now at a point where college enrollments are actually declining. This is why we continue to need to be proactive, in terms of strengthening area colleges as well as their surrounding neighborhoods. We may well find over time that this relationship

The Institutional City



Of the 50 largest private employers in Boston, 21 are institutional (higher education, medical, nonprofit). Nearly 50 percent of the land in the city of Boston is tax-exempt.

Half of the tax-exempt land is owned by city, state, or federal governments. The other half is owned by private nonprofits, including schools, hospitals, churches, and other charities.*

Tax-exempt institutions pay the city of Boston \$32.4 million annually in PILOT (payment-in-lieu-of-taxes) payments. If their properties were taxable, the total would be 10 times that amount — between \$350 and \$400 million.*

HIGHER EDUCATION:

Total number of higher-ed institutions in Boston:

34 universities, colleges, professional and graduate schools, and community colleges

Total student population: 145,274 (fall 2006)

Boston, with only 10 percent of the state's population, has 33 percent of the statewide college-student enrollment.

Largest university: Boston University, with 32,212 graduate and undergraduate students (fall 2006)

Number of students living in on-campus housing: 32,000

New dormitories in Boston (2000–2007): 23 dormitories with 7,321 total beds

Number of dormitories currently under construction: 5 (Wheelock, 115 beds; Emerson – Colonial Building, 364 beds; Emerson – Paramount Center, 262 beds; Northeastern, 1,200 beds; Boston University, 960 beds)

MEDICAL:

Health services represent more than 1 out of every 6 jobs in Boston, with a total of 115,341 health services jobs (2007).

The number of hospital employees in Boston between 2005 and 2007 grew from 73,525 to 79,469.

Number of inpatient hospitals in Boston: 21

Number of hospital beds: 6,224 (2006)


In-patient admittances: 200,150 (2006)

Outpatient visits: over 5.8 million (2006)

National Institutes of Health [NIH] grants to Boston hospitals: \$1.619 billion (2006)

Boston's rank among US cities receiving NIH funding: 1 (for 13 consecutive years)

Boston's share of competitively awarded NIH funding: 7.7 percent



Sources: Boston Redevelopment Authority, except *The Boston Globe* where indicated by *.

will shift to one that more overtly focuses on nurturing the institutions and supporting the value they bring to the economy.

Kevin Carragee: It's a good point. For example, the Archdiocese of Boston has been contracting; what will replace those churches, schools, and community centers? In my neighborhood, the community mounted a campaign to purchase a closed school and maintain it as a community anchor.

Elizabeth Padjen: Tom Keane wrote a piece recently in *The Boston Globe Magazine* encouraging people to think more positively about the presence of institutions as economic generators. But at the same time, he acknowledged that there may be a different future for these institutions, especially the schools, that we can't imagine right now — for example, if distance learning becomes the trend because of financial pressures and generational shifts, the schools may well contract.

David Spillane: It's clear that almost all the problems that people experience with institutions in the city are the problems that go with success. These are much more appealing problems than the problems that go with failure, but that doesn't take away the fact that they're problems. If one in four of the jobs in your community is driven by these institutional economies, it's clear that changes in that sector could have very profound effects on the surrounding communities.

Elizabeth Padjen: We have already seen competition for students, which has driven a lot of construction in universities and private schools recently — schools realized, for example, that many students prefer to live in luxury condo-like residences instead of old-style dorms. At the same time, more educational institutions have realized that their surrounding communities affect their marketing. Part of what drove Yale to pay attention to New Haven, certainly, was the sense that New Haven was falling behind and prospective students were noticing. Omar, was that part of what woke up Penn to its neighborhood in Philadelphia?

Omar Blaik: Definitely. Penn was eventually able to turn around 20 or 30 years of mistrust. And that didn't happen by having a better newsletter or inviting the neighbors to a free barbecue during the Penn-Harvard game. Trust started to take root when the boundaries between the institution and the neighborhood dissolved, when people like me, who were administrators at Penn, moved into the neighborhood. For the first time, administrators would arrive at the campus, not by driving off the highway from the very rich suburbs at the front yard of the campus, but by biking or walking from the neighborhood that was at the time the back side of the campus. With this kind of fluidity between the neighborhood and the institution, a lot of problems got solved without having to create a committee, without having to issue one executive order or another. People used to criticize Penn because Penn was faceless in the neighborhood. But when administrators and deans and vice presidents live in the neighborhood, you can't criticize them as much because their kids go to the same school as your kids, and they have soccer practice together. Suddenly those relationships become more human — they are no longer institution versus neighborhood.

The pattern of absentee landlords who rent to undergraduates destabilizes neighborhoods that might be otherwise strengthened by faculty and staff owning and living in the triple-deckers and the two-family houses.

Kevin Carragee PhD

Elizabeth Padjen: Did the university suddenly change its housing policies? How did it encourage people to live there?

Omar Blaik: It happened by working with the community, and through incentives and targeted real estate acquisitions. It started in 1997, when less than five percent of faculty and staff lived in the neighborhood. Today it's about 25 percent. It's not a huge number, compared to the University of Chicago, where more than 50 percent of faculty and staff live around the university. But it is a significant enough presence in the neighborhood that many issues can be addressed informally, and get resolved purely through the self-interest of those who live and work there.

Allison Pultinas: I agree completely with what you're saying. It was frustrating when Northeastern bought its new president a townhouse on Beacon Hill and not in the Fenway neighborhood. It could have made a real statement of commitment to the neighborhood. Wentworth owns four rowhouses near the Museum of Fine Arts. I was part of a neighborhood coalition trying to negotiate between the city councilor and the university, to say that those rowhouses should be faculty housing, not undergraduate housing. They were adjacent to family-owned housing and, given Wentworth's low number of undergrads, it made no sense to keep them as undergrad housing. Yet they are still using them that way — another real disappointment. The presence of resident faculty and staff can help to restore a neighborhood and to connect people on a one-to-one level.

Omar Blaik: And it's a huge benefit, not only for the city or the neighborhood, but also for the educational experience of the students. We can all remember the one faculty member who invited the class for dinner or was able to meet after hours in a coffee shop next to campus because she or he lived near campus. It enriches the educational experience of the students much more, and it serves as a reality check, as opposed to somebody who comes in from somewhere else, shows up for office hours, then leaves for the safety of the suburbs.

Kevin Carragee: It's also an ill use of residential housing stock to have undergraduates living in large parts of our neighborhoods. The pattern of absentee landlords who rent to undergraduates destabilizes neighborhoods that might be otherwise strengthened by faculty and staff owning and living in the triple-deckers and the two-family houses.

One recent statistic has struck me: Boston ranks 95th out of the 100 largest American cities in percentage of children under 18. We're five from the bottom. This is a very expensive city for working people and families. It strikes me that a winning

strategy to counter this trend would be to move students into dormitories on campuses in order to open up that student rental housing stock to families, including people who work at the universities. And it would be environmentally sustainable, too, because people could walk or bike to work, or take mass transit.

Steven Cecil: One of Jane Jacobs' great observations was that neighborhoods break down at their edges. So she was all about erasing the edges. If you do that well and you do it consistently, great neighborhoods evolve.

Traditionally, from the institutions' point of view, the edges of the neighborhood are barriers — that's where the dangerous things happen, where the strange people who aren't part of the institutional community are. So they build the equivalent of moats, which make things worse. The challenge is to smudge those edges together. Having the vice president living in the community erases an edge.

Elizabeth Padjen: Does that model apply as well to hospitals and medical centers? Or are they different?

Omar Blaik: It still applies in a general sense, although student housing is of course a different issue. Anchor institutions, whether they are hospitals or higher-education institutions, have two assets that create an opportunity that few people really understand: they have a vast resource of real estate, and they have a sustained demand of users. That means that hospitals and universities have

an opportunity that's not available to many other industries, which is to devise development tools that take advantage of their control of both the supply and demand side. We all know of institutions that provide housing subsidies for staff to live 20 miles away. They fail to see the demand side of their enterprise in a way that allows them to bring those institutional resources to work for the good of the neighborhood. But institutions in general do not look at themselves as real estate developers.

One of the things we did at Penn was to embrace our role as a real-estate developer. We owned 13 million square feet and had 50,000 people using the campus. The trick was to balance the supply and the demand to create sustainable community growth that would allow us to bring the students closer to campus. We added about 1,500 beds in about four years on campus, not through building dorms but through partnership with the private sector, building student market-rate housing. And that, with the help of incentives, allowed the housing stock around the campus that had been largely student rental properties owned by absentee landlords to convert to homeownership. We even got involved in buying then selling some of those older homes with a deed restriction to keep them owner-occupied.

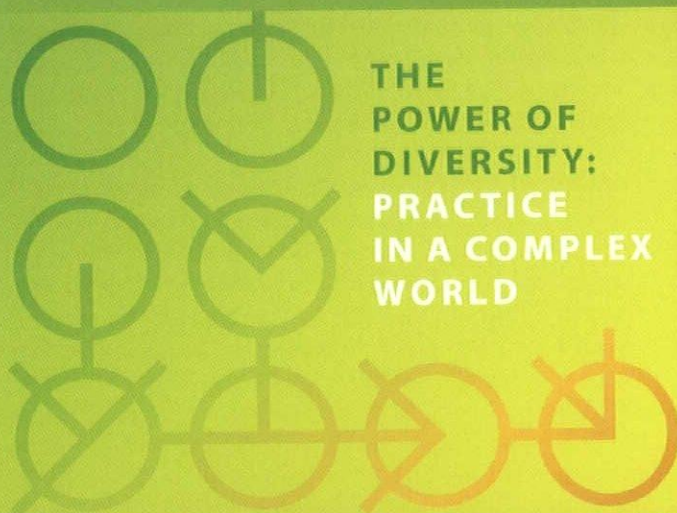
Alison Pultinas: I was part of a group called Coalition to Limit University Expansion that was formed in 2004 mostly to deal with Northeastern's pending master plan. We received a grant to hire a planner to come up with an alternative master plan, and we presented it to neighborhood meetings in the Fenway and Mission



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From the institutions' point of view, the edges of the neighborhood are barriers. So they build the equivalent of moats, which make things worse.

Steven Cecil AIA, ASLA

Hill. I think it had some influence on the process if not the final outcome. One of the premises of the plan was that the edges of the campus had to be transition zones that could be permeated by the public, with uses like libraries, athletic facilities, and cultural facilities that would be shared by the public and the university. Dorms were a high-intensity use that had to be located in the center of the campus; the understanding was that they couldn't be on the edge because they had such a great impact on the adjacent neighborhood. Northeastern didn't follow that recommendation and is now building a 22-story dorm on the edge of its campus. And there tends to be an additional impact if you locate the dorms on the edge, which is that the campus automatically grows in that direction, like an amoeba. So the university is likely to purchase any adjacent parcels that might be available.

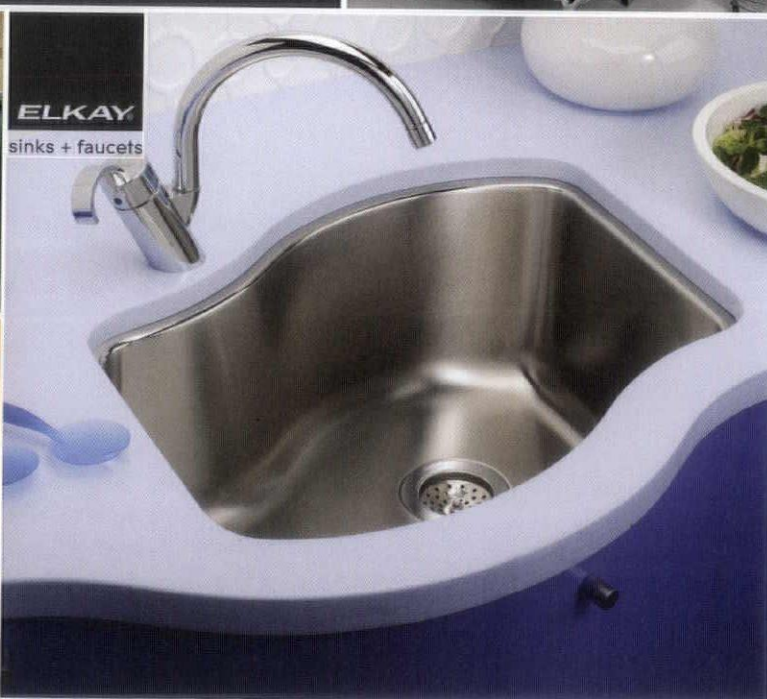
A related problem is the "company town" syndrome if the neighborhood retail district tends to be owned by the institutional entity, which is unhealthy. That was an issue in lower Roxbury, and is also the condition around Berklee and the Symphony on Huntington Avenue. The uses are controlled by the institution and the entire district can become very unstable because it is subject to expansion and conversion to institutional uses.

Kairos Shen: It's true that most institutions are landowners far beyond the boundaries of their actual campus. There's a great deal of land banking going on. When you think about how much land Harvard owns, and that approximately only a third of it is part of its new campus, the biggest question that the community has is, what is Harvard, whose core mission is not real estate development, going to do with it? What kind of leases will it give, and how will it accommodate the existing patterns of land use?

Rebecca Barnes: There's another way of approaching these issues. In Rhode Island, which is a state in extreme economic crisis, over the past year the universities and hospitals, government entities, and business community have joined together for the first time in a strategic effort to try to figure out how to strengthen the economy for the long-term. We had someone come up from the Research Triangle to talk to us about research in the university. He said that essential to the success of the region was the universities' understanding that part of their mission was economic development. This is a whole new concept for many universities and colleges. It may seem like common sense — and it is — but it is a paradigm shift for both institutions and the community, and it's going to be critical for many communities around this country as we try to come to grips with the global economic crisis. Understanding interdependency gives you a very different way of thinking about your organization and your community.

Kevin Carragee: One of the problems that we haven't addressed,

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which I suspect is still a problem however you reframe the dialogue, is the structural inequalities in the process. Neighborhoods are sitting down with institutions that completely outgun them in terms of resources. To see a master plan through the process requires a commitment from volunteers over a lengthy period of time, and attendance at meeting after meeting after meeting, at which the consultants from the institution sometimes outnumber the people representing the community. Moreover, the consultants bring their expertise and experience, and the community members are frequently untrained in the issues at hand. It's a heavy burden to place on a group of people who can be quite dedicated to what they're doing.

Elizabeth Padjen: Is there any way to correct that imbalance of resources? Are there any places that have come up with a solution where the communities have felt really well-supported? Or is it simply an unavoidable, systemic problem?

Kairos Shen: In many cases, the communities don't believe that the city planning agency and development agency, such as the BRA [Boston Redevelopment Authority], are actually helping the neighborhood. But the truth of the matter is, that is our role. We serve as community resources. If the community members knew the kind of back and forth that goes on in many of the conversations when they're not in the room, I think they would perceive us differently. I'm not sure the belief that hiring some outside consultants to help the community, for instance, is the key to

One of the greatest impediments to change is that the administrative structure of most institutions has never been designed to engage with the community.

Omar Blaik

unlocking a better understanding of the issues. In general, I think that the public agencies do their job pretty well, but part of that job is to find solutions. That may mean in some cases that we are not as strong an advocate for certain community perspectives.

Steven Cecil: The way a project is first presented often creates a counter-productive dynamic: the community feels it deserves something, that it's owed something by the institution. The institution looks at that and says, "Hey, I give through my public relations outreach — we did those three barbecues." You're never going to win that conversation. You need to convert that conversation, to say, wait a second, we actually have common interests. If this isn't a great neighborhood, students aren't going to come to this college, or patients will go to another medical center. Similarly, if the institution isn't healthy or if it leaves, the neighborhood loses jobs and a certain level of community support. The trick is to find out where that commonality is and change the nature of the conversation.

Springfield College, for example, saw an amazing reversal. The college president came to neighborhood meetings, sat down, talked to people, and said, "OK, what are we going to do here? Crime's a big issue for you. It's a big issue for me. How are we

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going to solve this together?" The conversation about entitlement just never happened again. And that's the trick: the neighborhood dynamic has to shift a little bit, and so does the institutional. What the public agencies can do is help to bring about that shift.

David Spillane: Boston has one of the most proactive permitting processes for institutions anywhere in the country, where institutions have to come forward with a master plan that describes their known trajectory over a certain number of years, so people have a sense of what's coming. That's a process that neighborhoods in other parts of the country would very much like to have. It's not perfect, but it's a very valuable tool.

Rebecca Barnes: The three cities I've worked in — Seattle, Boston, and Providence — have all had institutional master plan [IMP] requirements. An IMP means that you have a mechanism for starting a managed dialogue.

Alison Pultinas: I don't think institutional master plans are a great success. It's a process for responding to a crisis, not for building good relationships.

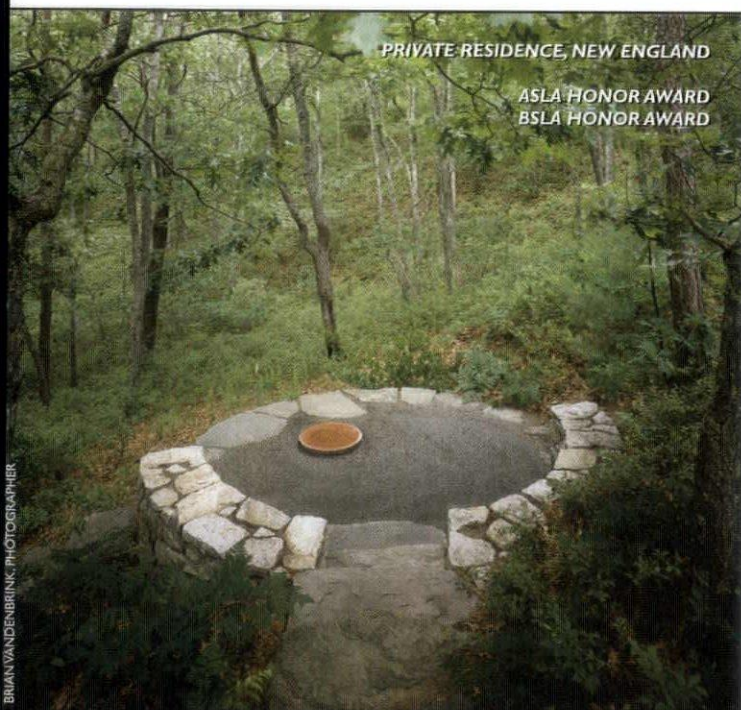
Elizabeth Padjen: How have they failed? What doesn't work?

Alison Pultinas: They oversimplify the relationships — the communities are the friction, but the BRA is the grease. And you only have a certain number of people in a community who are into

going to that kind of zoning and planning meeting. And then, things change with amendments, and no one is the wiser. But more importantly, the IMP process is completely separate from the process of improving relationships between neighborhoods and institutions.

Steven Cecil: One problem of course is that even elected or appointed neighborhood representatives can't represent "the" community. That's the nature of a public process. The whole mechanism of the IMP isn't perfect, but having that public document interface where all of the issues get resolved is really a good beginning. And I think the IMP process will improve over time, because it allows all of the stakeholders to come together.

Omar Blaik: One of the greatest impediments to change is that the administrative structure of most institutions has never been designed to engage with the community in any sort of process. They need to restructure. It's one thing for many institutions to be aware of their role as an economic driver and want to engage with their communities. But even those that are trying to establish a dialogue frequently struggle. And I trace that back to the way they are structured; even their own internal departments don't talk to each other. It causes huge distrust. Institutions need to reorganize and establish departments of external affairs — their own State Departments — where all things that touch the neighborhood and touch the city come to one senior vice president. Until then, we will continue to have this distance between what institutions profess they want to do and what they actually do. ■




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The housing boom that followed the Second World

War took many forms, but 15 years of depression followed by war created a widespread desire for new forms of community. In this country, the impulse to build in harmony with the progressive social, technical, and aesthetic promise of Modernism was coupled with the urge to find uniquely American expressions of the new spirit. The Modern Movement in America was never about the kind of collective housing estates that proliferated throughout Europe in the interwar and immediate postwar years. In the agrarian tradition that runs from Jefferson to Frank Lloyd Wright, Americans remained in many ways distrustful of cities and sought the ideal of a single-family house on one's own tract of land (however small). The notion of the Modern community first began to take shape in the Progressive era and is best illustrated in the English-style garden suburb developments of the 1920s and '30s (America's soft answer to the housing estates of Central Europe). By the postwar era, it had evolved to include a new model of the single-family house and its attendant community as an alternative to the ubiquitous suburban tract development that simultaneously arose to meet the tremendous demand for housing.

Modern neighborhoods are found throughout the United States, though they are concentrated on the east and west coasts. Although California has the largest of these with the vast developments undertaken by builder Joseph Eichler with architects such as A. Quincy Jones and Anshen and Allen, Massachusetts in fact has the richest and most diverse variety of Modern neighborhoods, some of which are the most architecturally influential and significant to be found anywhere in the world. These neighborhoods stood out in several ways. First, they were conceived as developments of *modern* houses:

of the most stable communities in America.

Massachusetts is home to the first (and only prewar) Modern house neighborhoods in this country, of which the earliest and one of the most significant is Snake Hill in Belmont, developed by architect Carl Koch. *Progressive Architecture* noted in a 1945 article on the expansion of Snake Hill that the five original 1940 Snake Hill houses were "one of the best known and most significant groups of contemporary houses in the world," by virtue of their planning and architecture, and their success in creating a strong sense of community on what had previously been considered an unbuildable rocky hillside. Snake Hill was as innovative technically as it was in social terms; Koch experimented with new materials and construction techniques that enabled the houses to be built cheaply and quickly, without sacrificing aesthetics or the quality of the interior space. The steep road accessing Snake Hill was even fitted with radiant hot-water pipes to melt snow and ice. The enduring coherence of Snake Hill's identity is underscored by the relative obscurity of a contemporary development, undertaken by architect Gunnar Peterson in 1941 in Falmouth. This was unfortunately not conceived as a protected community, and has therefore had a considerable number of its houses replaced with mammoth contemporary structures that have severely compromised the character of the neighborhood.

The western suburbs — arcing out from an intellectual heart in Cambridge through Belmont, Lexington, Concord, Lincoln, and Weston — formed the locus of the Modern neighborhood. Each was a place that attracted progressive intellectuals, most of limited means, in search of space and good schools for growing families. A culture receptive to Modernism had already established itself in this area before the war: the first Modern

Hipsters in the Woods

The Midcentury-Modern Suburban Development

A half century ago,

by David Fixler FAIA

as anything besides what they were — appropriate mid-20th-century responses to the challenge and exhilaration of living in the modern world. Second, they were consciously formed with community in mind, usually by members of the academic and research communities who were particularly enthusiastic about the possibilities that Modernism held for leveraging minimal means (these were small and very economically built houses) to enable a gracious, satisfying lifestyle. Most of the neighborhoods constructed communal facilities (some more elaborate than others) and established boards that set guidelines for the future development and maintenance of the neighborhood. These commitments fostered an identity and a sense of common purpose in the neighborhoods that have over time reinforced their unique character and contributed to their becoming some

they look forward to the future without nostalgia or the desire to be seen

houses in New England were the 1932 Eleanor Raymond House in Belmont, the 1933 Field House in Weston, and several houses including architect Henry Hoover's own house, in Lincoln — all prior to the arrival of Walter Gropius in 1938.

The explosion of Modern neighborhoods began after the war in 1948 with the construction of Six Moon Hill in Lexington by seven of the original partners in The Architects Collaborative (TAC). Intended to house their families and a group of friends in 28 houses on half-acre lots, the development arguably constitutes the gold standard for the Modern suburban neighborhood in terms of planning and architectural quality. The siting of these houses, integrated into a wooded landscape that is left as natural and undisturbed as possible, imparts a far more rural quality to the neighborhood than can found in other developments of comparable density.

By the time the wave of Modern development finally subsided in the 1960s, Lexington could count nine new Modern

Identity and a sense of common purpose in these neighborhoods has contributed to their becoming some of the most stable communities in America.



young members of the creative class left the city in search of, yes, neighborhood.

Midcentury-Modern Neighborhoods in Greater Boston: Snake Hill, Belmont :: Conantum, Concord :: Nut Meadow Crossing, Concord ::

neighborhoods. The first of these was Five Fields, developed by the TAC partners as a speculative neighborhood almost simultaneously with their own houses at Moon Hill. As TAC and its work were largely seen as a product of Harvard under Gropius, the MIT response soon followed. The Peacock Farms community was developed and designed by MIT-trained Danforth Compton and Walter Pierce FAIA in 1952. White & Green were brought in as builders in 1955, and the development eventually grew into a community of 68 households with an elected board of directors, common land, and deeded design controls.

Carl Koch was also behind the development of Kendal Common in Weston, also founded in 1948 by a group of Cambridge-based young married academics and scientists who, in the words of Weston historian Pamela Fox, “shared a common

vision...were ready to experiment with new architectural concepts...were environmentally conscious...[and] above all wanted to create a sense of community.” Advertising brochures created to promote the development to a wider audience promised “Land and an Idea, Community and Modern Architecture,” with notions of “an adventure in living...building towards a better life...modern homes with all their freedom and color and sun...among neighborly people who appreciate the advantages of doing things together.” Prospective owners at Kendal Common were given a list of architects who were pre-qualified to design houses in the neighborhood, and were subsequently encouraged to find ways to participate in the activities of the community — they even helped each other on the construction of their houses in the time-honored barn-raising

These neighborhoods remind us that Modernism still has much to teach us.

tradition. The houses at Kendal Common were thus designed by a consortium of the best young architects in the area at the time including Koch, Robert Woods Kennedy, Walter Bogner, Hugh Stubbins, Carleton Richmond, and TAC.

Koch was also the architect for a second development in Weston at Spruce Hill, which features a number of his Techbuilt experimental houses. However Spruce Hill, like Peterson's development in Falmouth, was not a chartered community and

eclectic mix of 22 houses (this seems to be a charmed number for these neighborhoods, as it is the same as Kendal Common), including a very early version of a passive solar trombe-wall house. In reinforcing the quality of life that this community has developed, Ruth Wales, a founding member and the historical conscience of the neighborhood, notes that in her first 45 years at Brown's Wood, all of her neighbors, once settled, stayed put.

The largest local Modern house development — and the one that perhaps more closely resembles its counterparts such as Arapaho Acres in Denver and the Eichler developments in

:: Five Fields, Lexington :: Peacock Farms, Lexington :: Six Moon Hill, Lexington :: Turning Mill, Lexington :: Brown's Wood, Lincoln

it has also been prey to rapacious overdevelopment that has just within the last five years effectively compromised the simple, bucolic character of the neighborhood.

Lincoln has become much more famous for its individual Modern houses, but even the Gropius House is part of what might loosely be termed the first Modern neighborhood (though not an intentional development) with the houses that Marcel Breuer and Walter Bogner constructed for themselves between 1939 and 1941 on Wood's End Road. Brown's Wood in Lincoln, however, was founded as another response to the early Harvard-centric TAC-based developments by a group of MIT professors who created a highly successful and architecturally

California — is Conantum in Concord. The brainchild of MIT professor W. Rupert McLaurin and the ever-present Carl Koch, Conantum has 100 houses on 190 acres, 60 acres of which are held in trust as common land. Designed specifically with the preservation of a sizable wetland in mind, Conantum takes the name given to the Kalmia Woods area by Henry David Thoreau in honor of Ebenezer Conant. This nod to the enlightened thinkers who fostered appreciation of this land was reinforced with the establishment of an anti-discrimination statute in its 1951 by-laws, one of the first of its kind in the country. Conantum also provided Koch with the opportunity to further develop his building technology systems — which went on to

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become Techbuilt, which later merged with similar early efforts, becoming the Deck House system that was developed for use on a large scale.

These communities and their houses have renewed relevance in our present circumstances. They embody the American dream of a commodious single-family home in a supportive community without material excess and in maximum harmony with its environment — a minimal touch on the land. It is rare to find a house in these early developments that originally exceeded 2,000 square feet in size (many are closer to 1,000



∴ Wood's End, Lincoln ∴ Valley Spring, Newton ∴ Kendal Common, Weston ∴ Spruce Hill, Weston

square feet), and yet most if not all of these houses — even those that have not been expanded — feel airy and commodious, not small or constrained. They also serve to remind us that Modernism still has much to teach us. Ironically, the failures of Modernism are sometimes attributed to a loss of sensitivity to scale in later large-scale urban development, but it is precisely the mastery of human scale — a sensitivity that has been completely absent from the outsized, neo-traditional homes that have taken over our suburbs — that is the key to the magic and success of these developments. Driven by disgust and exhaustion in contemplating the excess of the last two decades, as well as economic need, more people are discovering the full

panoply of values that are inherent in these neighborhoods. And to my sons, and many of their generation, they're just cool. ■

David Fixler FAIA is a principal of Einhorn Yaffee Prescott in Boston, president of the New England chapter of DOCOMOMO (an international organization promoting the documentation and conservation of Modern Movement buildings and sites), and co-chair of the Association of Preservation Technology (APT) Technical Committee on Modern Heritage.

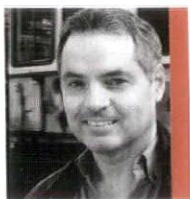
▲ Peacock Farms, Lexington, Massachusetts. Photo by Walter S. Pierce FAIA.

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Robert J. Sampson is the Henry Ford II Professor of the Social Sciences and chair of the department of sociology at Harvard University, where his research focuses on the social organization of cities. Previously a longtime member of the sociology faculty at the University of Chicago, he serves as the science director of the groundbreaking Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods (www.icpsr.umich.edu/PHDCN).



Jeff Stein AIA is head of the School of Architecture and dean of the Boston Architectural College and is the architecture critic for *Banker & Tradesman*.

Jeff Stein: People often refer to the Chicago school of economics, the school of thought that was launched at the University of Chicago in the 1950s

and, similarly, there was a Chicago school of architecture at the turn of the 20th century, which included designers such as Sullivan, Adler, Burnham, and Root. It turns out there's a Chicago school of sociology, too, and you are considered to be one of its leading exponents. Is Chicago the birthplace of the idea of looking at the social ecology of cities, looking at entire communities rather than just individuals?

Robert Sampson: Yes. The Chicago school was first formed by thinkers who were interested in the study of the city — how a city develops and changes, the social dynamics of the neighborhoods — a field of study that is now known as urban sociology. It flourished in the early part of the 20th century, during an era of increased immigration to the United States, when cities like Chicago were rapidly exploding in population. The Chicago sociologists were interested in human ecology and social ecology, as well as the notion of the neighborhood as part of a larger system, much like an ecosystem. They borrowed from biology to try to understand processes in the city. So, for example, they probed the notion of invasion and succession: the idea that certain immigrant groups would “invade” a neighborhood, take over, succeed, then pass on.

Jeff Stein: Beyond just borrowing the language from biology, did they really consider the city to be a kind of organism?

Robert Sampson: They did, actually — a social organism. They extended the metaphor to notions of competition and survival. More significant, though, was their focus on the social structure of the city and the ways in which various neighborhoods grow, change, and evolve.

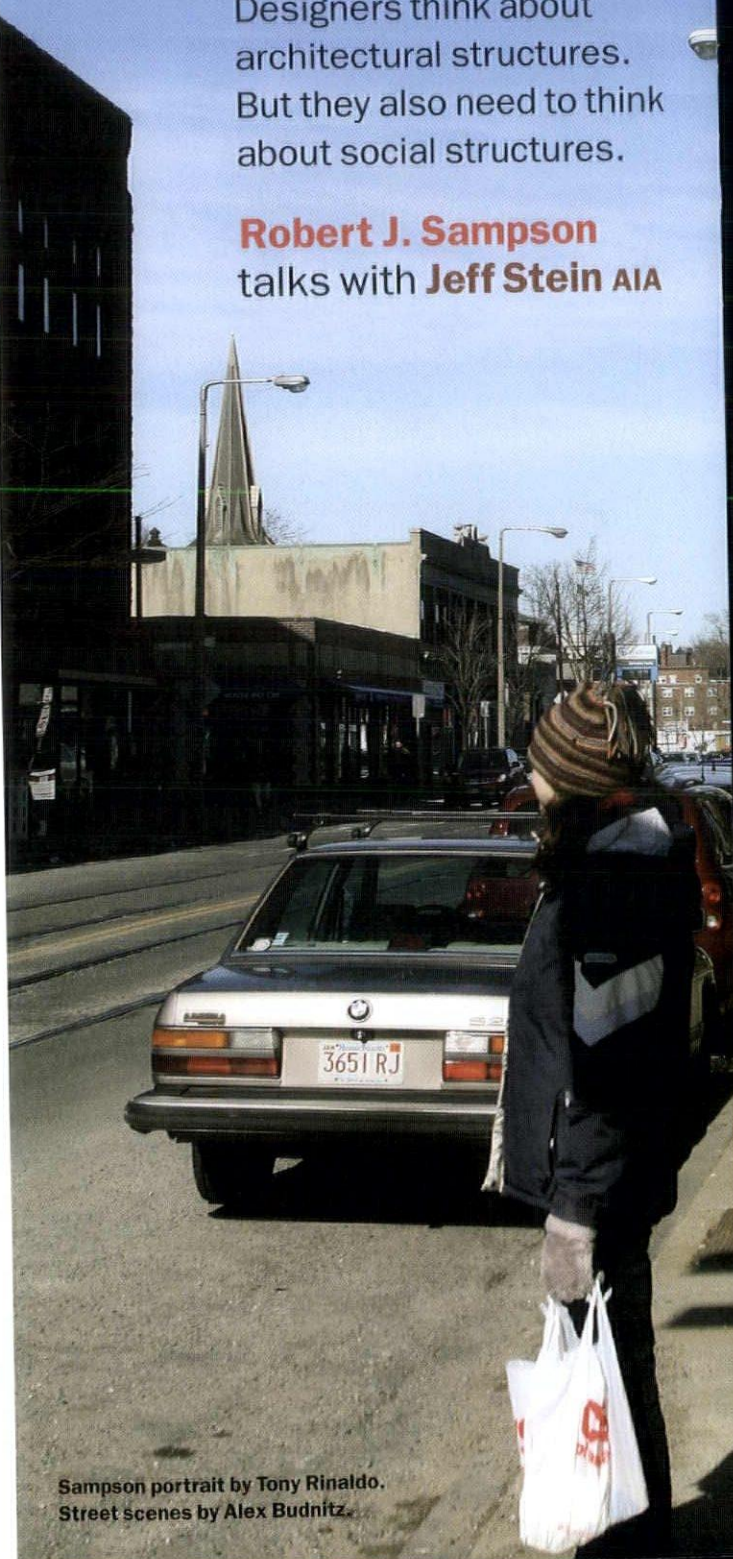
Jeff Stein: When you say “social structure of the city,” what do you mean?

Robert Sampson: It's a bit of jargon, I suppose, but it refers to the nature of the relationships among individuals and also across the various neighborhoods of the city. There's something about city life, about the nature of interactions among human beings, that creates a social property that is different from the property of the individual. That would include the social cohesion of a community

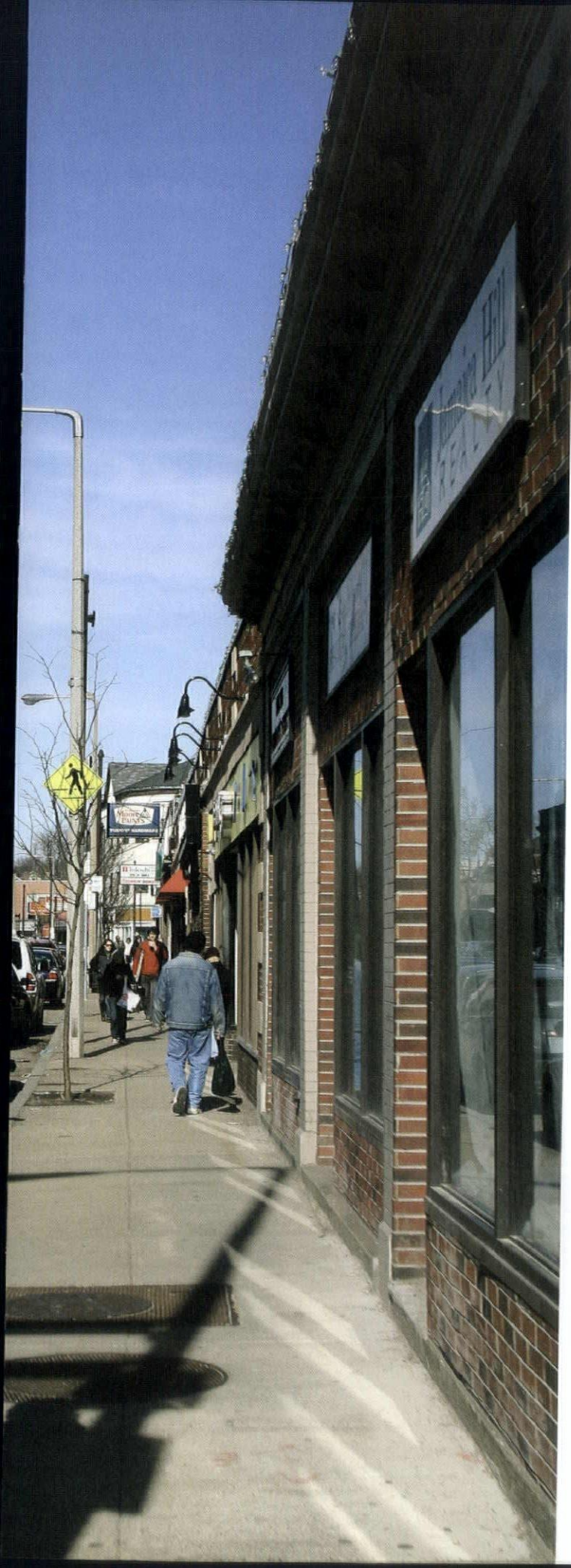
Street Smarts

Designers think about architectural structures. But they also need to think about social structures.

Robert J. Sampson talks with **Jeff Stein AIA**



Sampson portrait by Tony Rinaldo.
Street scenes by Alex Budnitz.



or a society or any entity that is larger than the individual. We can also think about it in terms of the nature of ties, the ways in which people know one another or are able to go to someone to get something done. In general, sociologists view the nature of ties between people as a fundamental feature of the discipline.

Jeff Stein: Frank Lloyd Wright talked about architecture as the mother of all the arts, by which he meant, without architecture to create the space for ties to happen, the relationships don't happen. Is there a relationship between what architects do and their ability to create neighborhood space or social space? We claim that there is, but we don't have science to back us up.

Robert Sampson: Architecture plays a role in the history of thinking about cities, but I would view it as one that's more indirect if you think of cities as social structures. I'm not an architectural determinist by any means, but I do think that architecture matters in a number of ways. The primary way is how the design of cities and the architecture of physical spaces bring people together — or not.

One way of getting into this is to examine Oscar Newman's idea of "defensible space" that was dominant for a while in the 1970s. He believed that our patterns of interaction are dependent on how buildings are set, and whether or not the resulting sightlines allow us to observe in a natural way. For example, he talked about housing projects where mothers who were unable to directly observe their kids playing in the street would be less likely to control them.

Jeff Stein: Which we later imagined was the trouble with high-rise housing.

Robert Sampson: Exactly. I think Newman took it too far. He's been criticized for being an architectural determinist, perhaps because he focused too much on the notion of surveillance and the assumption that if you couldn't see specific behavior, then you would be less likely to be involved. He made other assumptions about high-rises — that you wouldn't know your neighbors, for example. That way of thinking fell out of favor. Clearly we have many dense, high-rise, urban environments around the world that are quite safe.

Jeff Stein: And there are plenty of sparsely populated suburban environments that are unsafe.

Robert Sampson: Absolutely. In fact, in Chicago, density is inversely related to violence. But that doesn't mean that the design of space is unimportant. Behavioral studies have shown that the design of some environments can bring together the various actors that, let's say, facilitate crime. There are, for example, predatory relationships that may be facilitated by the design and siting of public transportation. That's a somewhat more complex variant on Newman.

Jeff Stein: Can a sense of ownership of a space contribute to its social success, whatever its design might be?

Robert Sampson: Yes. In fact, one of the more influential articles in urban sociology was based on a study here in Boston that made the

connection of cultural identity with a community's use value. And I've been studying the related notion of cultural aspects of space and identity and how they affect the ways people relate to certain spaces.

Urban sociologists try to understand how places take on reputations. Why, for example, do people perceive some places to be more disorderly than others? Why do some places attract graffiti, defacement of public property, groups of kids hanging out? I think that understanding the physical aspects of disorder is a key to understanding cities. The "broken-windows theory," for example, is about physical disorder and what that means to people.

Jeff Stein: What it means for some people, apparently, is that those who live in that neighborhood don't really care that much. That one broken window leads to another, that one outbreak of graffiti leads to more graffiti. And if you're predatory, it means that you can commit acts of violence there and nothing will happen.

Robert Sampson: Right — that's the theory. I think it happens to be wrong for the most part. It's not that the theory is off base in pointing out the importance of these cues, because after all, we do see them. The interesting thing about crime is that we don't usually see it. It's hidden. We hear about it, but often indirectly, maybe through newspaper reports. But the physical signs of disorder are something people can see. The trick from the perspective of a social scientist is to try to understand the meanings that people attach to that disorder. It turns out that they're highly variable. How people interpret disorder is dependent on other characteristics of the environment.

Jeff Stein: And in fact you've conducted a significant study of neighborhoods and human development in Chicago that addresses these issues.

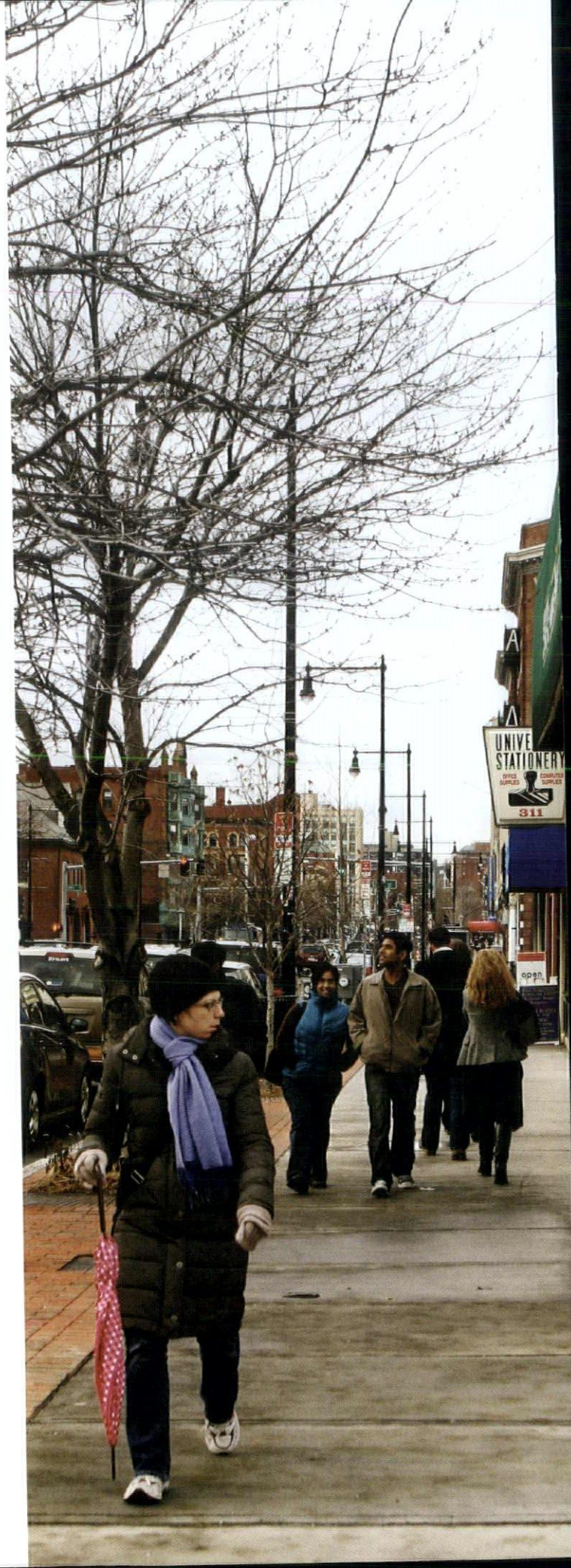
Robert Sampson: It was an enormous effort including colleagues at other universities, full-time research directors, IT people, interviewers — we employed about 150 people and interviewed thousands of people over seven years from the mid-'90s until 2002. We started just as the juvenile violence rate in American cities was hitting its peak, and there was a lot of concern about crime.

Jeff Stein: And then crime in America went down by a quarter over the decade.

Robert Sampson: Right. And the debate about that still rages. One hypothesis is that policing helped — the Giuliani initiative in New York City in response to the broken-windows theory is probably the most famous example. I think that's correct, that policing was part of it.

Jeff Stein: A lot of people think it had to do with the birth rate — the number of juveniles, who presumably are more likely to commit crimes, peaked in the early '90s.

Robert Sampson: Age composition is the basis of a longstanding hypothesis about the crime rate. But it turns out that the two recent periods of high crime — the mid-1960s to the '70s, and the late '80s to the '90s — can't really be explained by age. I think the major contenders for an explanation of the drop in the '90s are the



There's nothing so useful as a good idea and good facts. The job of the social scientist is not to make policy, and perhaps not even to recommend policy, but to provide the knowledge base that policymakers can draw upon.

Robert Sampson

increasing incarceration rate, policing, the growth of community intervention through community organizations, the revitalization of many cities, and immigration.

Jeff Stein: One of your papers points out that neighborhoods that attract immigrants tend to be safer neighborhoods.

Robert Sampson: It's a bit counterintuitive, especially given people's biases and the way that the media have often reported things. People are more likely to perceive disorder in neighborhoods with a large immigrant or minority population. In our Chicago study, we were able to determine perceived versus actual disorder through direct observation — video cameras and observer logs coding everything from condoms in the street to evidence of drug use, types of graffiti, and broken windows. We coded land uses as well — for example, single-family and multi-unit housing, stores, and bars.

Then we looked at how those factors correlated with crime and people's perceptions. That's where we came to two significant conclusions: first, that the observed level of disorder as traditionally defined by the broken-windows theory was not really the major predictor of crime. And second, that people's perceptions of disorder depended less on the actual amount of disorder in the neighborhood and more on the population composition, in terms of immigration and minority status.

That makes the puzzle even deeper, because people are perceiving more crime and disorder where there's more concentration of immigrant groups. But the data show that, over time, crime was declining as immigration was increasing. The research suggests, in general, that first-generation immigrants, those born outside the US, have lower rates of violence. We demonstrated that in Chicago. We've also shown that neighborhoods with high concentrations of first-generation immigrants are also related to lower rates of violence. So as we see increasing diversity and immigration in many US cities, we are, for the most part, seeing decreasing crime rates. By the way, it was also true that first-generation immigrants in the earlier waves of immigration had lower rates of violence. But those periods coincided with vast social change in terms of urbanization and industrialization, so the social equilibrium of the community was disrupted.

Jeff Stein: When you find this kind of information, real data based on observations and interviews, then what? You approach this as a social scientist, presumably without an agenda; you're simply uncovering facts. But the information that you develop could lend itself to underwriting government policies. How does your work get translated into policy?

Robert Sampson: The translation of research into policy is a very complex issue, especially for controversial issues like crime or immigration. It often seems that people think they know the answers already. And policy is interpreted in ways that serve interests. I'm motivated by the notion that there's nothing so useful as a good idea and good facts. So while I don't start with any particular agenda, I always try to rewrite our findings in a way that is interpretable by a more general audience. The job of the social scientist is not to make policy, and perhaps not even to recommend policy, but to provide the knowledge base that policymakers can draw upon.

Jeff Stein: Housing would seem to be one area where more science could produce better policy, or a better understanding of policies that we already have. Mixed-income housing is one example. Tent City, in Boston's South End, was among the first projects in Boston that intentionally sought residents with mixed backgrounds. A quarter of the units are at market-rate rents, half at middle-income subsidized rates, and a quarter at low-income subsidized rates. It seems to work pretty well, too; before it opened, there was a waiting list of 2,000 families for 370 units.

Robert Sampson: Boston has a number of examples of successful mixed-income projects. But Boston, like New York, never had the level of extreme segregation by class — or race — that, say, Chicago had. In many places, the mixed-income policy seems to be working, although it's still controversial in some communities. Clearly there's a demand for it: you're seeing that in the waiting lists and in the market-rate units that are being snapped up.

The jury is still out in terms of why it works. One possible mechanism has to do with middle-class residents bringing certain kinds of resources — financial and attitudinal — to either the housing project or the neighborhood: when something is wrong with the school or neighborhood, they have more experience in being able to get social action to fix it. Another possible mechanism is the interactions between lower-income and middle-income residents: through these interactions, the poorer folks will learn, get job information, skills, and improve their lives.

My read of the data is that it's not so much the social interaction between residents that makes things work, but the improvement in the overall resource base of the neighborhood. And undoubtedly some of the success of these projects relates to another broader factor, which is that many of the healthier cities in the US are dominated by what some have called the "creative class" — people who value cultural amenities and a certain kind of dynamic mixing, who favor heterogeneity over homogeneity.

Jeff Stein: You have written that you don't necessarily think that a neighborhood is a primary group that needs to have face-to-face, intimate relationships.

Robert Sampson: That's right. It has to do with the very definition of a neighborhood. Many people think that neighborhoods are less important than they used to be. If you define a neighborhood in terms of primary group relationships — that probably mythic notion of a place where people knew their neighbors intimately and had dinner with them regularly — then indeed they have declined over time. The data seem to bear that out. People are less

likely to know their neighbors. On the other hand, if you define a neighborhood in terms of the sense of identity and the meanings that people attach to places, which lead to all kinds of self-sorting, then you find that people think of neighborhoods much as they always have.

Jeff Stein: But they can live comfortably with a sort of psychological distance.

Robert Sampson: Exactly. People want to live in environments that they perceive as safe, as cohesive, as having certain kinds of amenities. That is not the same as having a deep, intimate, personal tie with your neighbors. One of the things we've tried to do is to study how contemporary urbanites create certain kinds of social spaces and neighborhoods. Our argument, in part, is that the collective identity of the neighborhood and what we call the "collective efficacy," which refers to social control and the ability to get things done, are important and vary across neighborhoods. But that's not the same as having close social ties.

I can give you a concrete example — Boston's North End in the early 1900s, an Italian immigrant neighborhood with lots of family and inter-generational ties. That kind of density of friend and kinship ties is not the same thing as public social control in the sense of bringing outside resources to the community and promoting the well-being of its youth (especially the second generation), one of the central ideas behind collective efficacy. Neighborhoods have changed in what they provide people. They don't provide personal ties as perhaps they once did, but they do provide an important social environment in which people are raising their kids. And certain core features of neighborhoods that have always been important, like safety and trustworthiness, are highly valued by residents. The trick is to achieve those in the modern world.

There are lots of paradoxes involved in this. For example, you might think that people who use the Internet would be least likely to identify with the neighborhood or be involved in local organizations. And that's not necessarily true. It turns out those who are more likely to be involved in the neighborhood are also involved in a range of ways, including using the Internet for local community purposes. So we're seeing what are called e-neighbors — e-mail groups and listservs that revolve around public aspects of the neighborhood, such as a park or a new development or a crime problem, where people connect through technology to achieve a certain outcome.

Jeff Stein: How does that relate to what we term community? There's a nostalgic lament for the loss of community over the last generation or so. Architects respond by trying to create community space that will foster a sense of community. Yet it's not clear that we know what we're talking about when we say that.

Robert Sampson: There are all kinds of communities. Community typically means shared values. What do I mean by shared values? Well, in the modern world, a neighborhood can have lots of heterogeneity in its values. On the other hand, the data suggest that there is a strong demand for shared values on certain aspects: safety, for example, and certain qualities of the environment. The

There are all kinds of communities; in the modern world, a neighborhood can have lots of heterogeneity in its values.
Robert Sampson

notion of shared community has to do less with a personal aspect and more with organizations providing the kinds of social and public goods that people can agree upon.

Architects would be wise to focus on designing spaces that provide these kinds of opportunities. Simple things, like the design of parks where people can interact in a way that's safe. It seems like a trivial example, but the town of Brookline has dog parks where in the evening I see lots of people with their dogs, standing around talking for quite a long period of time. These are public spaces. People get to know one another. Then they go back into their world. In a way, that's a community, but it's intersecting with public space. If you layer that through a number of different dimensions of social life, you have a very livable, very desirable, urban environment.

Jeff Stein: Is that the sort of casual meeting that turns into civic engagement? I'm thinking of the economist Albert Hirschman who wrote in 1970 about the options people have in their institutions: exit, loyalty, or voice. I suspect those options apply to community, too.

Robert Sampson: Voice means getting involved and having a stake in the community, trying to change it if things go wrong. Let's go back to the notion of the broken windows. Several years ago, I went out one morning and noticed graffiti that had been spray-painted along the side of an apartment building visible from my house. I have to admit I was at first angry, because the space had been defaced. Now, if the broken-windows theory is right, I could have viewed that in a number of different ways — I could have, for example, seen it as a sign of decline and moved away. In that particular case, I told the authorities about it, as did others. It was cleaned up. A month later, it appeared again. This happened three or four times. But each time, residents either cleaned it up or engaged in some sort of collective action to make sure it went away, and it hasn't reappeared. That's an example of "voice," in the sense of taking action.

Over time, if people give up on a place, they exercise the "exit" option and they leave. Sometimes people are stuck in communities. My colleague Bill Wilson has written about "defended neighborhoods," which are an example of Hirschman's third option — the sense of loyalty that develops when people feel their neighborhood is under siege. That sometimes has a negative side which is seen in some mixed-income neighborhoods or in areas that are undergoing racial transition, where the residents band together against newcomers. We often forget that neighborhoods are always changing. Our data in Chicago showed that something like 40 to 50 percent of the people are moving.

Jeff Stein: I have seen a map that shows an astonishing amount of movement among black households in Chicago versus very little among white households.

Robert Sampson: What's happening in Chicago, but also in many other places, is that there is a lot of movement, but there's a lot of reproduction of inequality. A recent government initiative called Moving to Opportunity gave people vouchers to move out of bad neighborhoods.

Jeff Stein: Sort of a more humane version of urban renewal.

Robert Sampson: Yes. Let's move the individual instead of changing the environment. What happened, though, was that most people moved to areas that were slightly better off. It was a difference of degree, not a difference of kind. Moreover, after a while, many people moved to neighborhoods just like the ones they had come from. At the end of our study, we found that people were still living in fairly poor neighborhoods, and there was still a high degree of segregation — blacks were moving to either predominantly black or mixed neighborhoods. Whites behave similarly. So people end up in the same place, even though they're moving. It's the paradox of the stability of change. That has important implications for policy. If instead of trying to improve neighborhood environments through mixed-income housing and other community-level interventions, we took this kind of policy of moving individuals to a larger scale, then we'd have massive change, which would then lead other people to change their behavior in ways that are possibly negative. We're actually seeing that now. In Chicago, where Robert Taylor Homes was torn down, 26,000 poor and vulnerable residents have been dispersed throughout the city. The residents in some of the neighborhoods that are receiving those people then start to think, well, this is where the poor are moving to, and the future of the neighborhood doesn't look bright, so I'll leave.

Jeff Stein: Have you done any cross-disciplinary work with architecture schools, to help architects understand the social context in which they're working?

Robert Sampson: I have had some interactions, but not as many as I would like. My sense is that there is an increasing recognition that the traditional structure of the academy is highly arbitrary. We've been set up as departments, but knowledge is progressing in an interdisciplinary way.

So, don't start with a discipline, start with a problem. If we're talking about something like the future of cities, then you've got the environment. You've got buildings. You've got social interaction. The broadest way to think about it is the study of urban change.

Jeff Stein: In the midst of the current financial crisis, does a discipline like sociology become marginalized as policymakers focus on the economy?

Robert Sampson: In a way, our position may even be enhanced. The importance of social relationships never goes away and they become even more critical in a time of economic downturn. Collective action, addressing social problems, and the cohesiveness of social environments have never been more important. ■



The Once and Future Neighborhood

Clues to the neighborhoods of the future lie in our past.

OF ALL THE PARTS OF THE CONTEMPORARY CITYSCAPE, the neighborhood is perhaps the most sacrosanct as well as the most challenging feature for the designer. Though neighborhoods are almost everywhere, they are notoriously difficult to define, never mind design from scratch. Nor are they the same for all people: one person's neighborhood may or may not be another's, depending on lifestyle, abilities, age, income level, or interests. Yet certain physical features such as boundaries, centers, and districts still retain their definitional power. Everyone recognizes a small, friendly park surrounded by houses as a neighborhood space, and a corner store is a neighborhood place whether it is isolated in a neotraditional subdivision or nestled in the urban grid.

Where neighborhoods do not exist, we inevitably create them, for they are a fundamental part of our

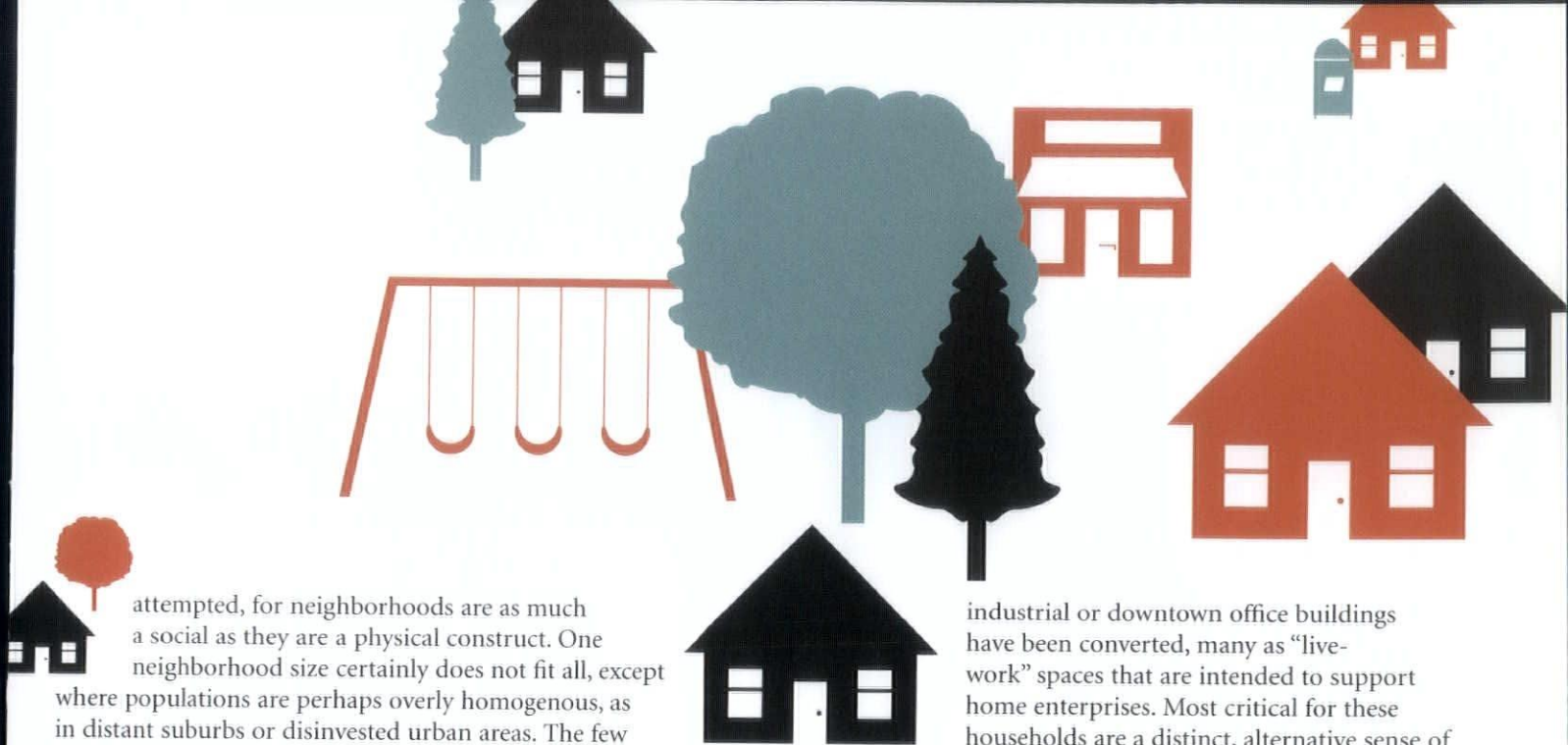
BY **BRENT D. RYAN**

psyche. Just as we feel the need to belong to a social unit of some sort, we also feel the need to belong to a part of the built landscape, no matter what the form of the community we live in. Neighborhoods do not require distinctive topography, nor architectural definition: sociologists pioneered the concept of the community area in 1920s Chicago, a "city of neighborhoods" that is largely an unvarying grid of small houses where residents feel a fierce attachment to their local piece of the urban fabric. Though we may view neighborhoods today in a nostalgic light, they did not vanish with the coming of the suburb: former urban residents promptly formed attachments to their local subdivision after they had relocated from the city, as sociologist William Whyte documented in the 1950s. Suburban commercial strips, garish and traffic-filled, were harder to love, so place attachment instead centered on the home, which had grown correspondingly more spacious and comfortable in suburbia.

Designers' efforts to fix the form of the neighborhood in place have proved problematic. Planners' efforts to rationalize and diagram neighborhood form were never successful: architect Clarence Perry's "neighborhood units," designed in 1929, projected that people could happily spend their non-working hours in a community of 160 acres and approximately 5,000 people, centered around a local school and church and separated from other neighborhood units by wide automobile arterials. This vision, derived in no small part from a romantic view of the medieval village, assumed that most activities and tastes could be satisfied at the village scale. This fiction of command, control, and limited choice has never been satisfied in reality except in what sociologist Irving Hoffman called "total institutions": asylums, prisons, college campuses, and the like.

Not surprisingly, suburban developers and towns never adopted the neighborhood unit except in the most reductive sense. This neat concept of the self-contained neighborhood, surrounded by open space and presumably filled with civic institutions and mutually supportive citizens, proved expensive to construct and perhaps never should have been





attempted, for neighborhoods are as much a social as they are a physical construct. One neighborhood size certainly does not fit all, except where populations are perhaps overly homogenous, as in distant suburbs or disinvested urban areas. The few completed 1960s “new-towns in town,” with their pizza parlors, laundromats, and schools constructed according to planning algorithms, represented a sad Modernist mockery of the processes that had shaped actual urban neighborhoods.

The future of the neighborhood lies not in rigid planning or design measures but in our shifting conceptions of ourselves, the technological changes that permit ever greater mobility, and lifestyle and environmental changes that are difficult to predict. Each of these is gradually encouraging different settlement patterns, and many of these shifts will act in concert to produce neighborhoods that will be denser, more physically and socially heterogenous, and greater in scale than ever before. Within this shifting settlement pattern will arise a variety of new building types to accommodate the demands of the emerging American population. Each of these new community models will generate new social proximities and groupings that in turn will form the future neighborhoods of cities and suburbs.

Many of the new 21st-century neighborhoods will be those districts in which the distinction between living area and shopping area, first seen in the early 20th century, breaks down. The homogeneity of suburbia has made the shop seem increasingly attractive as an activity generator, and “mixed-use” has consequently become a marketing distinction. As a result, new shopping districts across the country are being built with apartments above, either in outdoor mall-type developments (“lifestyle centers”), or in small, formerly entirely commercial downtowns. Such condominiums are proving increasingly attractive to wealthy older households seeking more manageable living quarters, proximity to commuter rail stations, or simply someplace to walk for a cup of coffee. The design of these new mixed-use neighborhoods is generally conservative, fitting the tastes of their residents.

Other new mixed-use neighborhoods will coalesce in the underused areas in and near downtown. Larger cities have also proven remarkably successful at attracting the “creative class.” Many of these individuals reject the concept of the single-family detached home. To accommodate them, obsolete

industrial or downtown office buildings have been converted, many as “live-work” spaces that are intended to support home enterprises. Most critical for these households are a distinct, alternative sense of place and design; a mix of activities nearby,

not all of which have to be salubrious; and a feeling of shared community, even if residents are busy professionals who spend little time “neighboring” with their fellow members of the creative class. Where old buildings are not available, new ones are constructed, often as “lofts” with higher-than-usual ceilings if not bare concrete walls. Such “creative communities” have enlivened fringe-of-downtown neighborhoods in Los Angeles, Chicago, Houston, and almost every mid-size city in between. Examples in Boston include the Fort Point Channel district, and buildings such as Channel Center and the South End’s Laconia Lofts.

The growth of lifestyle centers and creative communities has not stopped the relentless development of agricultural land at the fringe, or prevented the continuing decline of older, poorer, out-of-fashion urban neighborhoods farther from downtown. These older trends will continue, but each offers the opportunity for larger-scale planned new communities that question the conventional suburb and the older, often monotonous urban grid with new open spaces, activities, and housing forms. New Urbanists have been the most aggressive in colonizing these spaces with neotraditional “villages” based in large part on the neighborhood unit, but other opportunities await creative planners, municipal officials, and developers willing to take formal and programmatic risks with redevelopment. Urban fringes and inner cities, given up for dead but in reality bubbling with activity, represent a true frontier for innovative neighborhood design.

Another frontier for innovation is the most basic neighborhood component of all, the single-family home or apartment unit. Historian Dolores Hayden has carefully documented how industrialization and new conceptions of women’s rights in the early 20th century promoted a flurry of centralized housing complexes intended to ease women’s household burdens and to promote a new communal ethic based on shared cooking and laundry duties. Such efforts were discouraged by the emerging real estate and appliance industry,

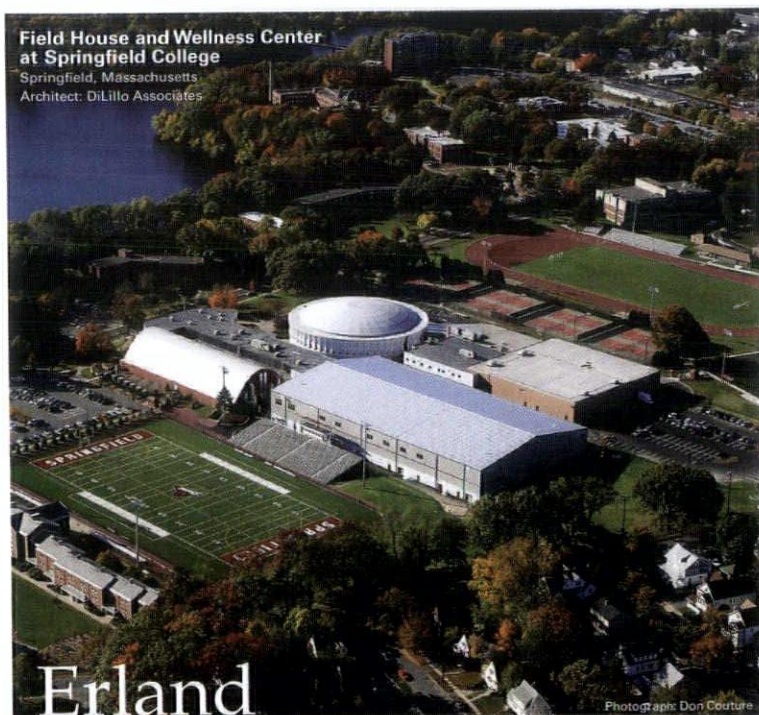
Just as we feel the need to belong to a social unit of some sort, we also feel the need to belong to a part of the built landscape.

which promoted individual consumption instead of collective ownership, consigning mass construction of alternative housing formats to the dustheap of history. Yet the ideal of a collective settlement pattern has persisted, reinforced not only by disillusionment with the suburb, but also by the very real logistical difficulties of childcare, transport, and social activity in two-career households.

Communities with collective social and kitchen space, called cohousing, today represent a tiny minority of residential construction, yet they also offer perhaps the clearest sign that renewing the concept of the neighborhood has less to do with its stylistic or locational characteristics than a reimagined understanding of the interaction between society and space. If the 20th century was the era of mass production, perhaps the 21st can offer the reemergence of truly differentiated development, with a range of neighborhoods providing a variety of sociospatial amenities in a correspondingly wide range of design and planning forms. In order for this true reimagination of the neighborhood to occur, developers, municipalities, planners, and designers will all have to join hands to permit or even encourage experimentation. Much of

this innovation will occur, as in the past, in usable, somewhat marginal communities offering cheap space and underused amenities — the very neighborhoods celebrated by Jane Jacobs 50 years ago.

Mixed uses, collective facilities, and convenient urban locations may be increasingly preferred lifestyle options for the upper-middle class, but they are essential components of economic wellbeing for those populations lower down on the economic ladder. It is easy to forget that the bucolic, detached single-family home was largely a “bourgeois utopia,” as historian Robert Fishman termed it. The design of such dwellings presumed that their inhabitants had the leisure and capital to live elsewhere, and planning regulations reinforced this dictate by forbidding economic activity in the home. The sylvan vision of the suburb obscured the reality and desirability of homes that provided more than a retreat for a prosperous nuclear family, and suppressed the equally compelling histories of alternative housing models that had provided accessory units, flexible commercial space, and outdoor workspace. Such alternative models, designed to provide



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increased economic stability for working-class households, many of them minority, have begun to reappear, particularly on the west coast where programmatically innovative architects such as Michael Pyatok, Daniel Solomon, and Teddy Cruz have designed what Pyatok calls "entrepreneurial housing" in cities like Oakland and San Diego.

Ideally, the 21st century will offer not only the increased range of new neighborhood concepts, but also an increase in the range of mobility options to reach them and in the economic ability to afford them. Many of the new metropolitan and architectural structures of the 20th century excluded the range of populations that had inhabited the much more pluralistic 19th-century city. All of us should strive to ensure that the future city is not only more formally diverse but also more socially equitable, environmentally sustainable, and visually compelling than the places that preceded it. ■

Brent D. Ryan PhD is an assistant professor of urban planning at the Harvard Graduate School of Design.



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**BEST OF
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The Neighborhood Murals of Boston and Cambridge

Outsize and outside, city murals offer a glimpse of life inside the neighborhoods.

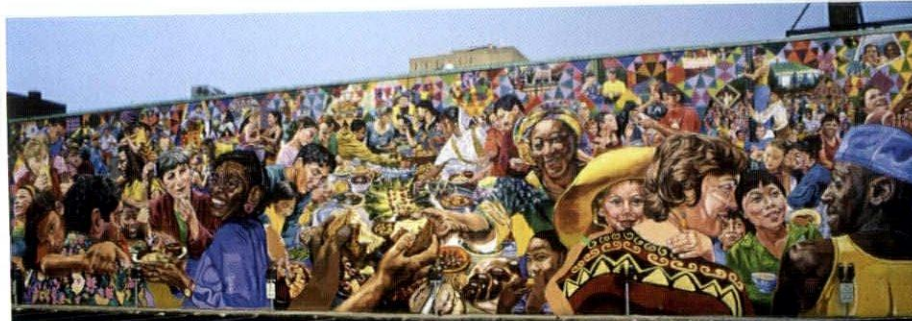
Robert Frost had it wrong: Something there is that does love a wall. From cave paintings to pharaonic tombs and Renaissance frescoes, the history of art amply documents the human urge to ornament large vertical surfaces.

Most murals, however, are not mere decoration. They transcend genres as a unique narrative form, telling stories through images with a freedom not available to later media such as photography and film. The muralist can juxtapose images and ideas without the spatial limitations of photography or the chronological constraints of film. This fluidity makes the mural much more akin to today's new-media art forms than its often representational language would suggest.

With the international influence of the Mexican muralist movement of the early 20th century, led by painters such as Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros, murals became more overtly populist and political. Closely associated with Social Realism and promoted through the Works Progress Administration, muralism reached its zenith in this country in the 1930s and '40s, declining in the postwar era until the last quarter of the 20th century, when the genre re-emerged in two very different forms: the trompe-l'oeil, most notably by artist Richard Haas, and the vibrant neighborhood murals that recall the populism of the Social Realists without their explicit politics.

Many visitors to Boston are familiar with Richard Haas's 1977 Boston Architectural College mural or with Joshua Winer's 1991 Café DuBarry mural on Newbury Street. But these are only two pieces in a remarkably large collection. Boston and Cambridge have been home to a lively mural scene that has paralleled the growth of public-art programs and neighborhood political empowerment. Although sometimes commissioned by businesses or individuals, murals in these cities have found their strongest champions in the Cambridge Arts Council and in the Boston Mayor's Mural Crew, which recruits teen workers to assist in painting and installation. The combination of local participation and images incorporating neighborhood histories and portraits of residents creates art that is a powerful statement of neighborhood identity and pride.

— Elizabeth S. Padjen FAIA





by David Fichter **title** The Potluck: Area 4 Community Mural

location Harvest Food Co-op, intersection of Bishop Allen Drive and Norfolk Street, Cambridge

This 22-by-100-foot mural, completed in 1994 and sponsored by the Area 4 Neighborhood Coalition, is a portrait of a multi-ethnic neighborhood. It was painted with the assistance of paid students and community volunteers. Photos courtesy the artist.

by Wen-Ti Tsen and David Fichter

title Unity/Community: The Chinatown Mural Project

location Parcel C, 38 Oak Street, Boston (demolished)

This 40-by-30-foot mural was designed and painted with the assistance of community volunteers. Following its demolition in 2002 due to new construction, a replica was installed in the lobby of the Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center at 38 Ash Street. Photo courtesy David Fichter. (For a history of the mural, including its symbolism: <http://bostonchinatowngateway.com/archives/380>).

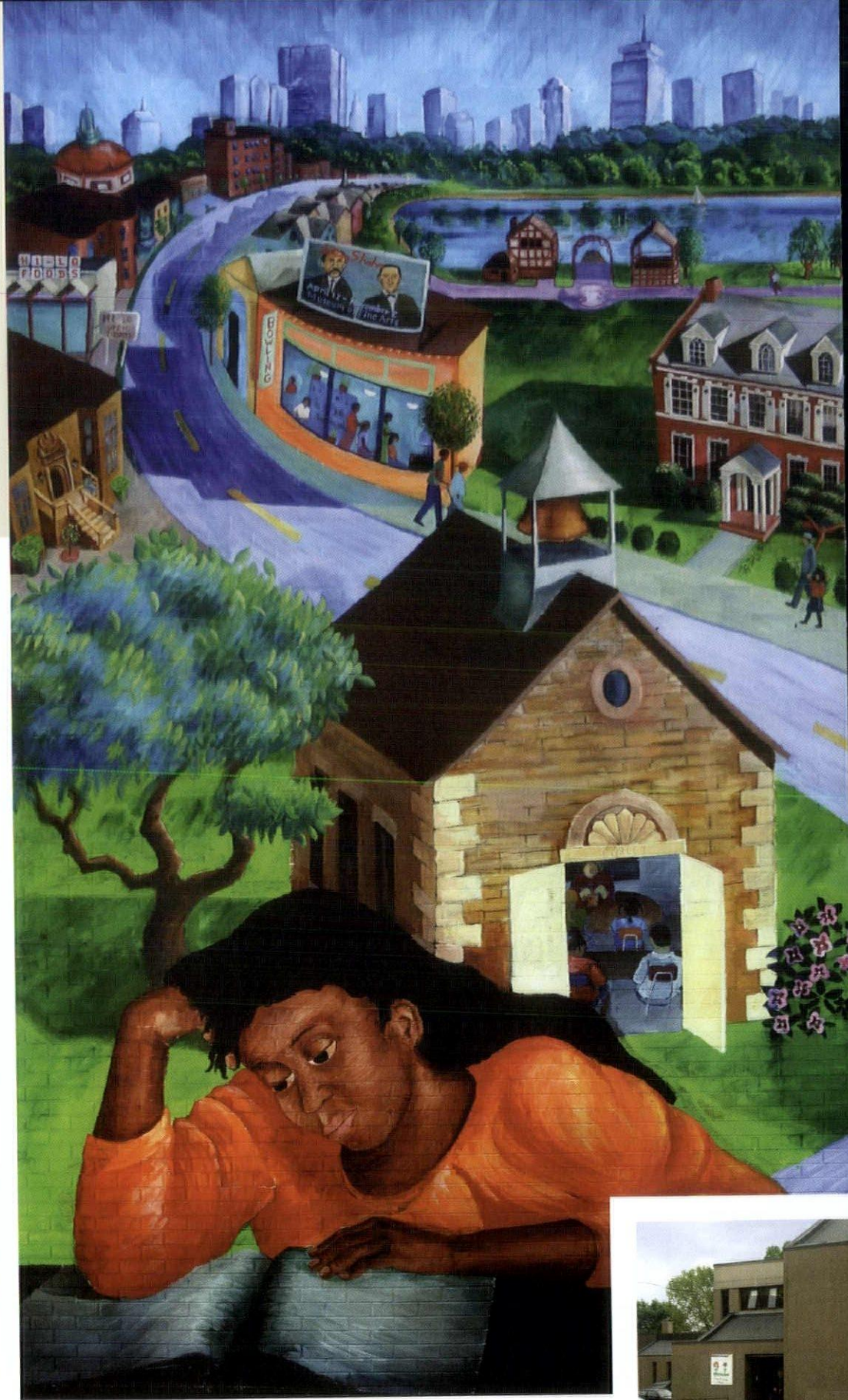


by Daniel Galvez **title** Crosswinds

location Middle East Restaurant, 472 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge

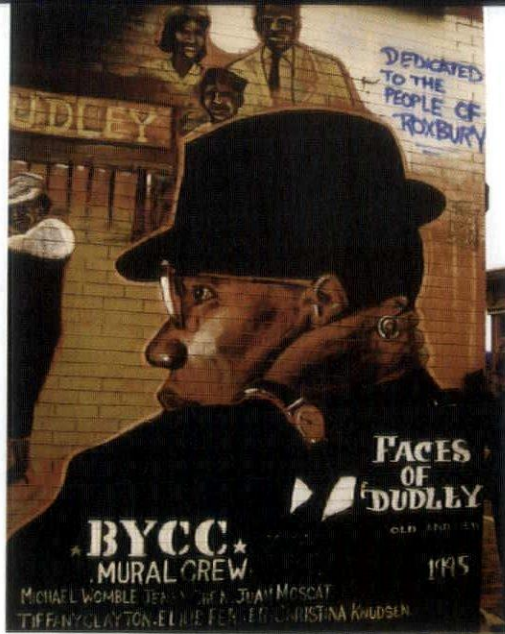
Combining portraits of local residents with patterns and objects from the world's cultures, *Crosswinds*, painted in 1992, is the companion piece to *Crossroads* (1986), located a few blocks away on Pearl Street. For both murals, Galvez relied on the community for ideas, including images from local photographer Jeff Dunn. Photo courtesy the Cambridge Arts Council.





by John Ewing **title** untitled
location James Michael
 Curley Elementary School,
 Jamaica Plain

Commissioned by the Parents
 Committee for a wall near the
 school's entrance (see inset,
 before mural), the mural was
 completed in 2002. Photos
 courtesy the artist.



by The City of Boston
Mayor's Mural Crew
title Faces of Dudley
location 2387 Washington
Street at Malcolm X Boulevard,
Roxbury

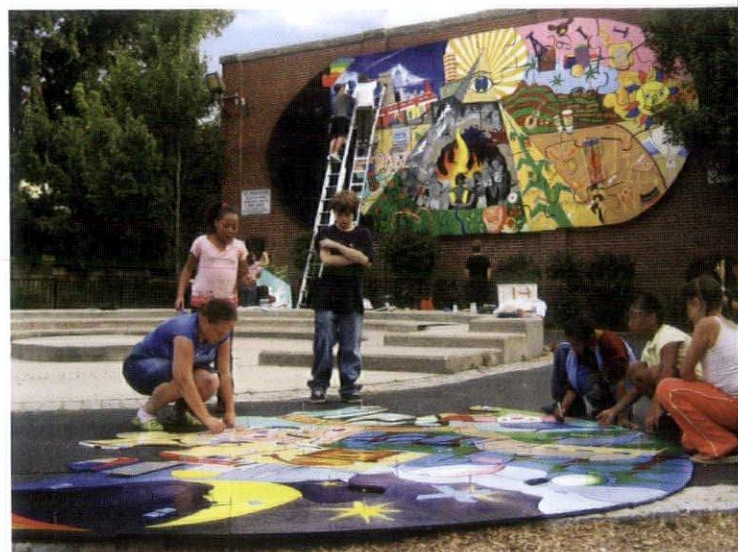
Completed in 1995, this mural features portraits of residents of the Dudley Square neighborhood, including Malcolm X. Photos: (detail) by Liz Kelleher/lizkdc; (left) courtesy the City of Boston Mayor's Mural Crew. (For more information on Mural Crew: <http://bostonyouthzone.com/teenzone/employment/muralcrew>).

by The City of Boston
Mayor's Mural Crew
title Lantern Parade
location Municipal parking lot
off of Burroughs Street behind
Bukhara, 701 Centre Street,
Jamaica Plain

This mural celebrates the neighborhood's Lantern Parade, an annual procession around Jamaica Pond with homemade lanterns, held on the last Sunday in October.

Photo courtesy the City of Boston Mayor's Mural Crew. (For more information on the murals of Jamaica Plain: <http://communityartsadvocates.org/JamaicaPlainArtsMurals.html>).





by **Roberto Chao and local community** title **Our World**

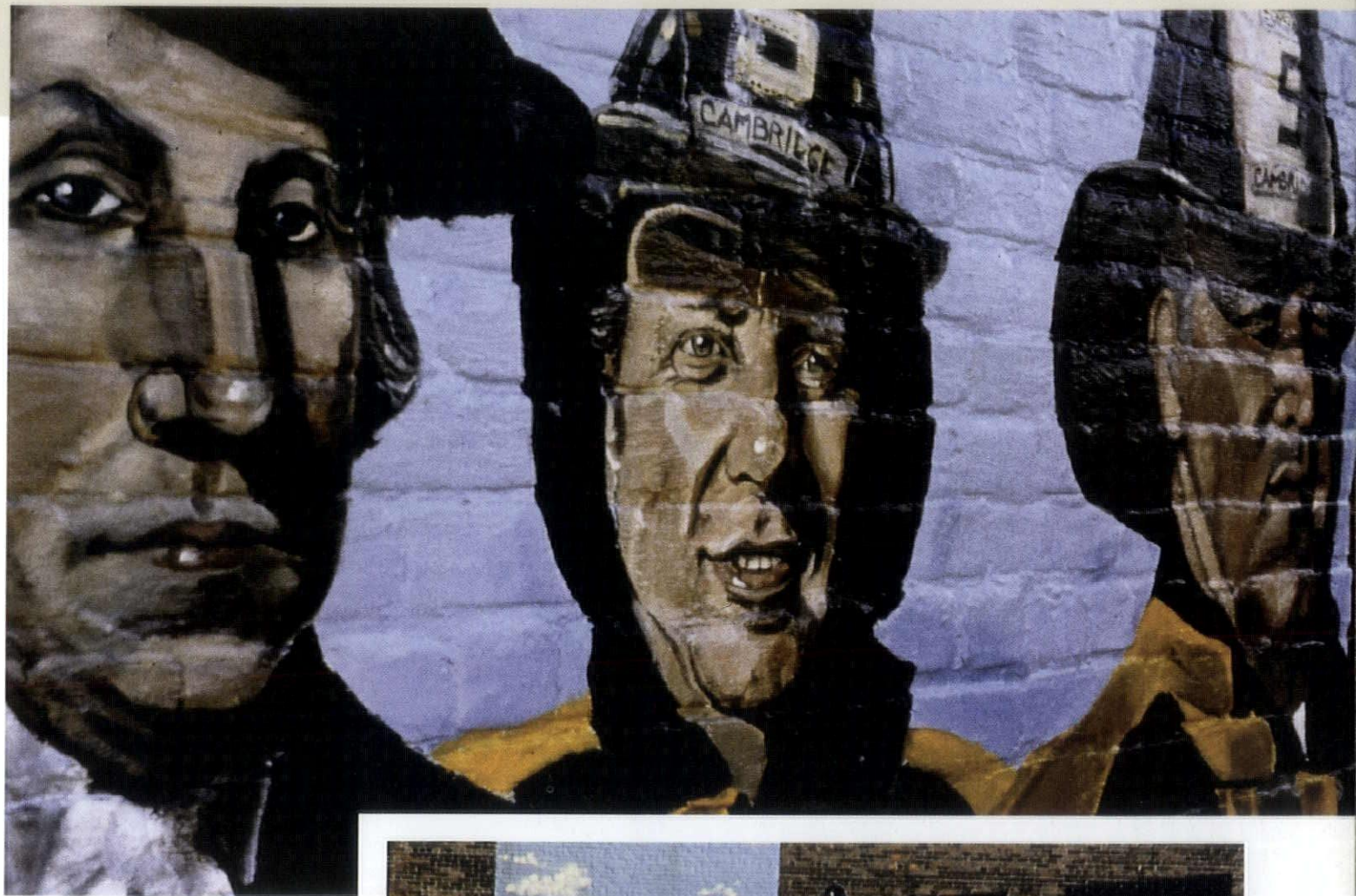
location **Rafael Hernández School, Roxbury**

Conceived as a jigsaw puzzle painted on plywood, this 38-by-16-foot mural was originally installed in 1989 and was redone in 2007 with the assistance of students and community volunteers. Photos courtesy the artist.

by Ellery Eddy **title** Engine Company No. 5

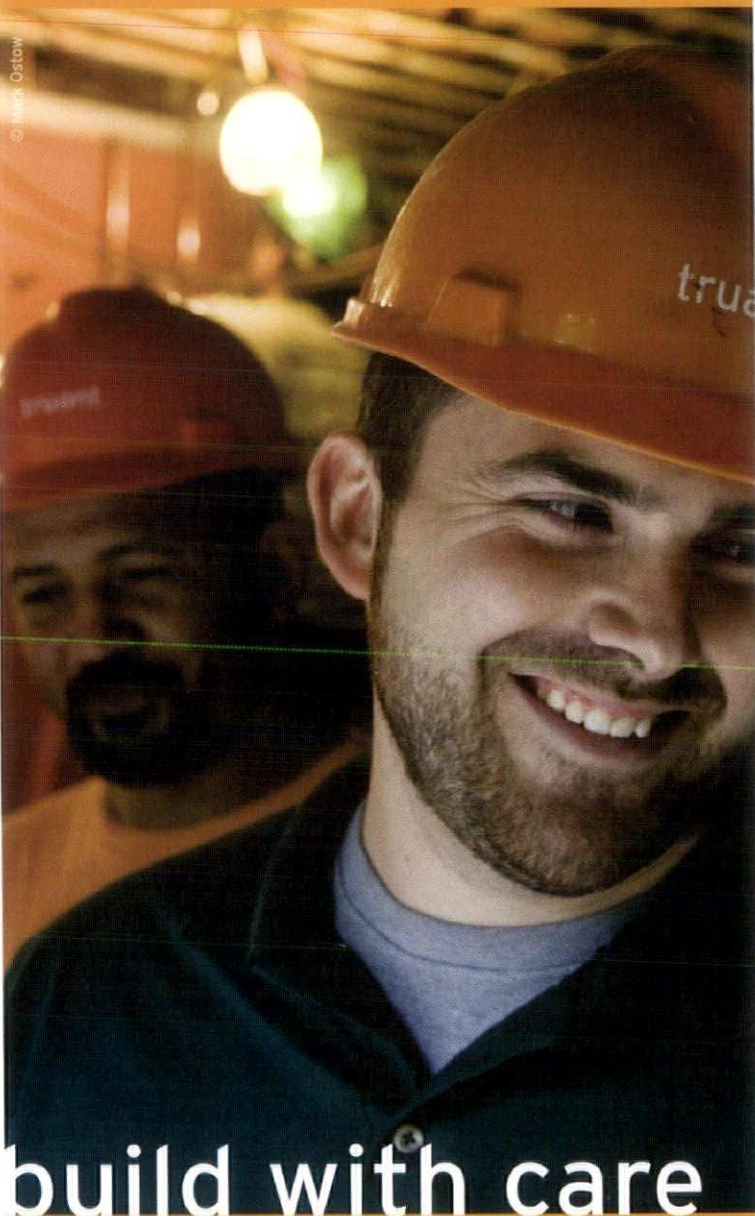
location 1384 Cambridge Street, Cambridge

This 15-by-25-foot mural, completed in 1976, was commissioned by the Cambridge Arts Council with funding from the US Comprehensive Employment and Training Act. It features portraits of all the members of Engine Company No. 5 (including the company dalmatian) as well as Benjamin Franklin, who founded the first volunteer fire department, and George Washington, who lived in Cambridge during the Siege of Boston. Photos courtesy the Cambridge Arts Council. (For more information on Cambridge murals: http://cambridgema.gov/CAC/public_art_tour/murals.html).



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Covering the Issues

The green giant... An inspiring speaker, talented architect, and Pied Piper-like visionary, green guru William McDonough has played an instrumental role in promoting and popularizing ideas about more environmentally positive design. Yet in "The Mortal Messiah" (*Fast Company*, November 2008), Danielle Sacks pulls back the curtain to reveal an extensive litany of tales of outsized ego, supersized fees, disillusioned associates, and projects that fall far short of their promise. The truly tragic part seems to be that much of the promise of McDonough's work has been "stalled by a logjam of his own making." It's a cautionary tale about the possible influence—and limitations—of a single person, the complexities of vision meeting reality, the importance of relationships, and the power of the media.

Two-fer... The newly redesigned *Atlantic Monthly* (November 2008) offers two short pieces that warrant a second glance. In "A Question of Balance," Pentagon partner Michael Bierut describes the millions of decisions involved in a design process, the challenge of finding the equilibrium between conceptual ideas, budgets, and schedules, and the desire to honor history while shaping a fresh, forward-looking direction. Bierut is describing the magazine's redesign, but his approach applies to other projects, too. In a very different vein, writer Scott Borgerson and cartographer Bryan Christie offer a provocative graphic essay in "Sea Change." Based on scientists' prediction that the planet will have a direct, ice-free Atlantic-Pacific connection within the next five years, Borgerson and Christie speculate on the effects of this new waterway on seaports, transportation, and geopolitical alliances. To architects, this could dramatically alter the transport of materials as well as the urban forms of

waterfront cities, affecting where we work and how.

Energetic writing... *Forbes* magazine's special issue on "Energy + Genius" (November 24, 2008) includes a truckload of articles on the theme, both high-minded and highly practical. Asleas Ebeling's "The Green Tax Gusher" gives readers a handy guide to tax credits for incorporating geothermal, solar, and wind systems, as well as for simple energy-efficient improvements, arguing why this work makes economic sense even for the individual homeowner. In "Boost your Albedo," Matthew Craft interviews Arthur Rosenfeld, the founder of the Center for Building Science at Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, who predicts that increasing the whiteness and surface reflectivity of roofs would reduce US cooling costs by \$1 billion annually. Craft then goes to the UAE in "Utopia in the Desert," describing young Arab investors putting revenues from the oil sector into new types of energy as they aim to create the world's first carbon-neutral city.

Twin set... The "Art Issue" of *The Believer* (November/December 2008) includes a few selections of architectural curiosity. In "The Lost Twin," Jonathan Taylor takes readers to the Bank of Oklahoma Tower, a project by Minoru Yamasaki completed three years after its more famous New York siblings. This tower seems "sized down and ordered up as if from a catalog of urban design, in international units to be manipulated and stacked," writes Taylor as he muses on its significance, and its oddity. Closer to home, artist Chris Cobb ponders the meaning of a line in "A Perfunctory Affair," as he reports on his experience installing the humongous drawings of the Sol LeWitt retrospective now on view at MassMoCA: "The line

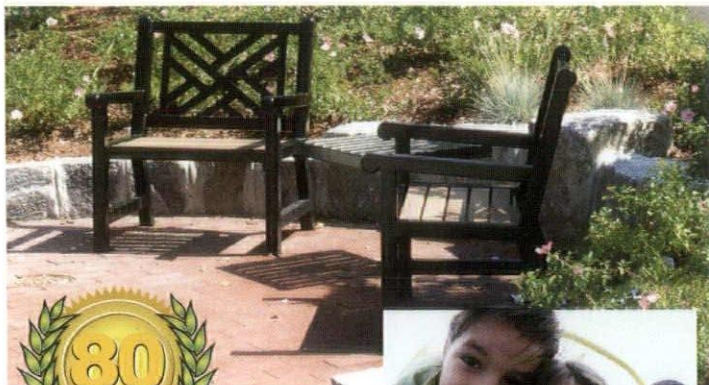


itself is not sacrosanct; it's the idea of the line." In an abstract, highly conceptual, fine-art sort of way, Sol LeWitt's work is like the work that architects do: they make instructions that others execute. Bringing the instructions to life requires judgment, interpretation, and translation of stated intent, with many people involved in the making.

Bucky, come back... *Artforum* turns architectural with Buckminster Fuller on its cover (November 2008). Now 25 years after his death, the editors argue that our contemporary world needs Fuller's category-defying, science-meets-design-meets-society thinking more than ever. Here, an artist, an architect, a historian, and a handful of architectural critics go beyond the geodesic dome as they take turns explaining and imagining what Fuller's life and work has meant, and what we might still learn.

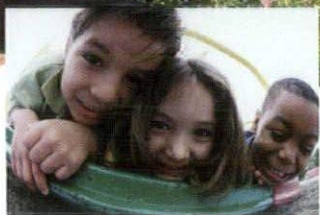
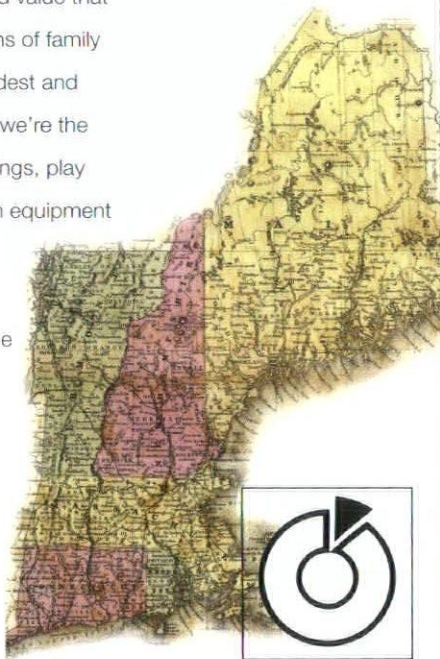
Gretchen Schneider, Assoc. AIA, is the principal of Schneider Studio in Boston.

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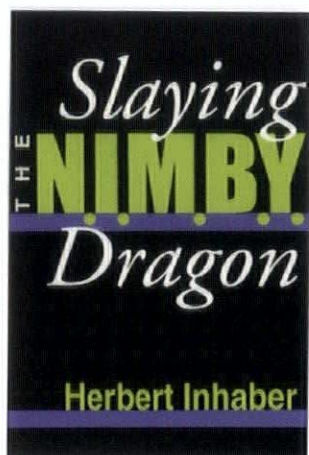
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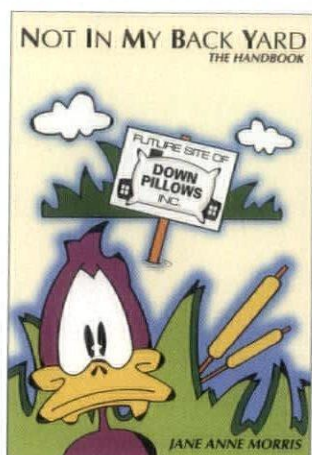
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SLAYING THE NIMBY DRAGON

By Herbert Inhaber
Transaction Publishers, 1998



NOT IN MY BACK YARD: THE HANDBOOK

By Jane Anne Morris
Silvercat Publications, 1994

To corrupt Mark Twain, everybody complains about NIMBYism but nobody does much about it. Does anything else in the planning realm occasion more *agita* and less analysis? A Google search triggers an avalanche of hits from the popular press, but there is scant serious writing on the protectionist sentiment best summed up by the phrase “not in my back yard.” Two books, one by an earnest utility scientist, the other by an unapologetic neighborhood activist, reflect the two sides of the debate, and never the twain shall meet.

Herbert Inhaber’s experience doing risk analysis for power plants prompts him to propose a “reverse Dutch auction” to resolve siting controversies for LULUs — Locally Undesirable Land Uses. The siting authority would announce objective siting criteria. Like passengers being paid to give up their seats on overbooked flights, the amount a community with an eligible site would be paid for hosting a facility would be raised in increments until somebody says “aye.”

Inhaber assumes such facilities serve a public purpose and that a rational siting process will overcome resistance. But this “better living through chemistry” approach

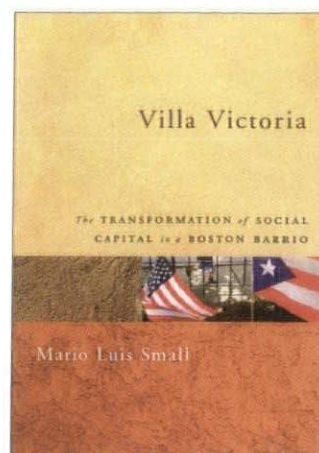
is only useful for government or utility facilities subject to a formal site selection process and able to fund the bid amount, and it must fight the perception that poorer communities are being bribed. Maybe that’s why nobody has taken him up on the idea yet.

Jane Anne Morris makes an exactly incompatible set of assumptions: that LULUs are unacceptable and are likely being advanced in bad faith by incompetent public officials, and that passion and guile are more important than rationality in opposing them. The book offers a host of stratagems in a tone that mixes outrage and upbeat self-help.

Unsaid in either book is that some of the reasons why neighbors oppose development are supportable and some are not, and it is important to distinguish them. The benefits of development are diffuse and general, while the impacts are specific and local. NIMBYism distributes development impacts and allows the neighbors to protect their biggest assets, their houses. It’s not so much a dragon to be slain as a distorted form of civic expression to be managed — a type of market determinism, like Wikipedia, where the users determine the content.

But NIMBYism is also the bitter fruit of a pluralistic democracy in which self-interest is venerated as an essential motive force of both government and the economy; to follow it to its logical conclusion invites paralysis. Who will tell the cranky neighbors that the social contract entails a share of the burdens of civil society? In this dawning era when government is being called on to solve big problems, this just might get easier.

Matthew J. Kiefer is a land use attorney at Goulston & Storrs in Boston. He teaches in the urban planning program at the Harvard Graduate School of Design.



VILLA VICTORIA

THE TRANSFORMATION OF SOCIAL CAPITAL IN A BOSTON BARRIO

By Mario Luis Small
University of Chicago Press, 2004

This book tells the story of Villa Victoria, a mostly Puerto Rican neighborhood in Boston’s South End. The subject is one close to my heart. In 1975, after graduating from the Harvard Graduate School of Design, I went to work at IBA (Inquilinos Boricuas en Acción), the parent agency of this residential development, as the planner of some of its housing projects.

Villa Victoria was an outgrowth of the experiment we call “social housing.” The federal housing programs of the late 1960s and early 1970s carried a new promise — that of safe, clean, family-oriented, even beautiful, new housing under the aegis of the private sector and with subsidies for renters.

Villa Victoria went one step further. Through tenant advocacy and community participation, the “community” — the ultimate user — would control its own destiny and shape its own environment. Therefore, Villa Victoria’s physical characteristics — its urban pattern and architectural language — were as much the conception of the whole community as of the architects.

Its social aspirations also went one step further. The development was to be a model of self-sustaining advancement of a poor

community, encompassing a gamut of bootstrap strategies to ensure its evolution into a thriving middle-class community. And so there were schools to teach English as a second language, vocational training, a local TV station, cultural programs, and a daycare center for working mothers — one that would preserve Latino culture. Economic development opportunities were included through the creation of community-based enterprises. There was even the hope that, upon expiration of the subsidies, the housing could be bought by the residents in the form of a cooperative.

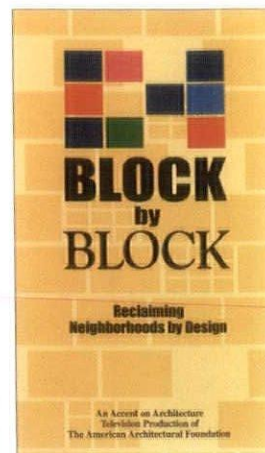
So, what happened to all of that? The author lets us know many parts of the story. First the neighborhood organized and transformed itself into a model community. Then slowly, as the buildings deteriorated, the community lost interest in participating in upkeep, the level of crime increased, and the neighborhood came to be seen as a slum within a prosperous community. The level of poverty has not changed in the intervening 40 years, and the level of community

participation has waned over time.

The reasons are many: physical isolation; lack of commitment by the newer generations; lack of linguistic and cultural integration. Even so, we are left with a glimmer of hope for this community. The percentage of high-school graduates has increased. Crime is currently down. And the whole neighborhood has been recently upgraded through much-needed physical rehabilitation.

I wish the author had spent more time analyzing the urban design of Villa Victoria, since I believe this contributed immensely to the sense of isolation he accurately identifies. Architects don't promulgate urban policies, but they do give them physical form. I am thus left wondering if the affordable housing that we embark on today with such idealistic hopes requires a more critical evaluation.

Fernando Domenech AIA is a principal of Domenech Hicks & Krockmalnic, an architecture and planning firm in Boston, New York, and San Juan.



BLOCK BY BLOCK: RECLAIMING NEIGHBORHOODS BY DESIGN

Video, 56 minutes

Hosted by Charles Royer

The American Architectural Foundation, 2001
(forthcoming on DVD from AAF;
for VHS: 1-800-365-2724, ID# 904)

Three neighborhoods, three strategies.

Block by Block highlights the successful revitalization strategies for three declining



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and forgotten urban neighborhoods in Atlanta, Hartford, and Denver. Although each come-back story is unique, they all shared a dogged determination to reinvent themselves. The question is whether these strategies would still prove successful today.

Atlanta's once-thriving Sweet Auburn neighborhood, the birthplace of Martin Luther King, Jr., was the historic center of Atlanta's black community. By the 1960s, Sweet Auburn had fallen into decay as successful blacks moved to surrounding suburbs. Then, in the 1980s, several residents, determined to bring back their community based on pride in its historic importance, began to acquire old houses and renovate them. They devised a "block-by-block" strategy of renovating an entire block at one time to create a critical mass of improvement. Once a stable residential population had returned, they turned their attention to restoring the neighborhood's commercial vitality. By 2001, their strategy had proved successful.

Hartford's Frog Hollow neighborhood adjoins Trinity College. Once a thriving

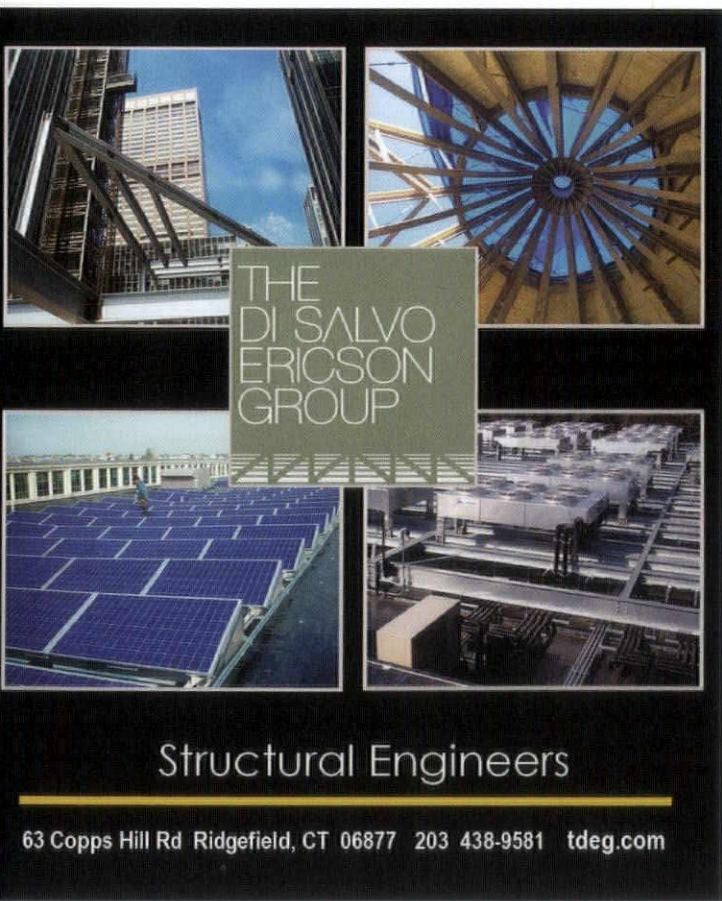
working class neighborhood, Frog Hollow had fallen into decline as factory jobs left the city. Soon, crime, drugs, and decay plagued the community. Nearby, Trinity College felt the impact: visiting parents felt unsafe, and admissions noticeably declined. Recognizing that something needed to be done, the president of the college partnered with his neighbors, the city, and other institutions to revive the district. He demolished notorious crack houses, revived neighborhood housing with low-cost loans, and finally built a complex of public schools for the community. By 2001, the town-gown partnership was an admired success story.

Denver's Lower Downtown (LoDo) neighborhood was that city's historic brick warehouse district. After the railroad industry declined, the warehouse district saw extensive abandonment and, by the 1960s, many buildings were scheduled for the chopping block. Alarmed by the potential loss of this part of the city's history, a local developer saved and renovated Larimer Square as a commercial magnet.

But for a long time, through repeated cycles of boom and bust, it remained an island of successful historic preservation in a sea of decay. After the election of Mayor Federico Peña, the city worked with citizens groups to create a vision for LoDo to revive the district based on its historic importance and architectural integrity. Today, the area thrives as a successful neighborhood of loft housing, entertainment venues, shops, and the home of Coors Field.

If there are common ingredients linking these success stories, they are local leadership initiative, pride in a neighborhood's history, a game plan, and forged partnerships. These ingredients are as necessary today as they were in the past. The critical piece that may be missing today is readily available credit, mortgage financing, and generous institutional and corporate support. Tough times may be ahead for some of our urban neighborhoods.

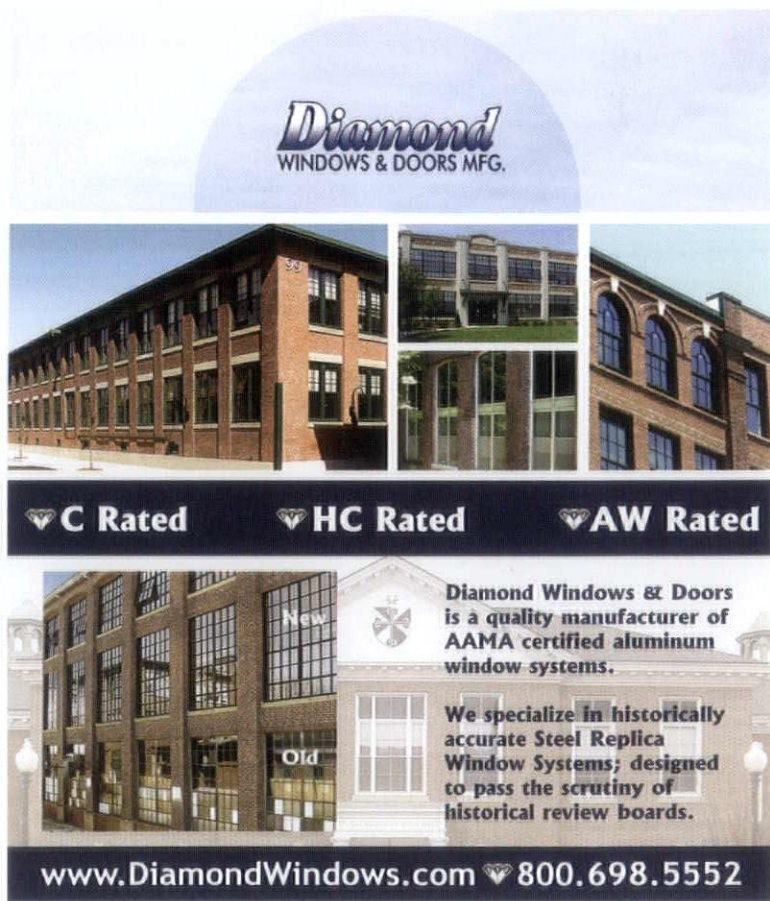
Lawrence Bluestone AIA is the principal of Bluestone Planning Group in Cambridge, Massachusetts.



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The US Green Building Council has proposed a rating system that will integrate "the principles of smart growth, urbanism and green building into the first national system for neighborhood design." A pilot version has been tested, with a revised version launching in the summer of 2009.

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www.fortpointarts.org

BRICKBOTTOM ARTISTS ASSOCIATION

www.brickbottomartists.com

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HARVARD'S ALLSTON INITIATIVE

www.allston.harvard.edu

One-stop shopping for the official word on Harvard's planned expansion into the Allston neighborhood, including meeting notes, reports, plans, drawings, and photographs.

NIMBY BOSTON

www.nimbyboston.blogspot.com

One thing about living in Boston — you never get bored.

STOP THE BIOLAB

www.stopthebiolab.org

The biolab proposed by Boston University for a site near the Roxbury and South End neighborhoods for the study of some of the most dangerous known pathogens is itself worthy of study: neighborhood activism, politics, money, and environmental justice — it's all here. Check out the impressive student presentation under "Voices."

MR. ROGERS' NEIGHBORHOOD

<http://pbskids.org/rogers>

"For neighbors of all ages." Maybe not. But if you really want to know where you can see the sweater, this site will tell you.

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Somerville's Union Square

I don't live in a neighborhood. Which is to say, I live in a place with wide sidewalks, where everyone's front doors are in close proximity and people nod at each other when they're jogging or walking, but where no one really connects. It's nice enough, but lately I've found myself wondering what is missing.

The answer occurred to me during a visit to Somerville's Union Square.

As you approach the intersection where Somerville Avenue, Washington Street, and Prospect Street meet, Union Square hardly appears neighborly. Driving up Washington Street, the snare of traffic seems destined to dump into a large parking lot.

On foot, however, Union Square reveals itself to be infinitely more appetizing.

My first taste of this was when my friend and I ventured into the neighborhood for an ethnic-market tour. Unremarkable-looking from the outside, normally these cramped, fluorescent-lit corner shops wouldn't draw a second look, never mind a visit. But inside each lay a culinary passport to cultures around the world: halal meats, Korean pastries, beef butchered just right for churascaria, frozen fish from Bangladesh. As part of the tour, the shopkeepers volunteered recipes and eagerly shared how they use such foreign ingredients at home.

Later, as I unloaded my shopping bags, I realized what my traditional New England Main Street block is missing: We have food in my town, but it's safely put away in pantries, cupboards, and refrigerators. In Union Square, it's everywhere you look.

Not long after the market tour, my husband and I planned a date in the square, starting with a Peruvian dinner at Machu Picchu, followed by a stroll through the "What the Fluff" festival, which for three years now has celebrated the sticky marshmallow sandwich filling invented here by Archibald Query in 1917. More



Photo by Mimi Graney; courtesy Union Square Main Streets.

than 1,000 people also showed up, and the once-ominous parking lot was transformed into a true block party that spilled onto an adjacent plaza. Sugar-fueled kids bowled plastic balls at empty Fluff containers, while their parents indulged in Fluffer Nutters, in brazen defiance of the FDA food pyramid. My husband and I commiserated with strangers at the booth where the Fluff ice cream had already sold out.

The same plaza also lets you meet the faces behind your food at a farmer's market every Saturday from June through October. You only need to squeeze a fuzzy peach while bantering with one of the members of the third generation of Nicewicz farmers to understand why the "locavore" movement continues to gain momentum.

Although Somerville is one of the densest communities in the country, the city teems with green. Personal gardens and grapevine arbors hide in the small spaces between triple-deckers, hinting at the culinary lives within. And at the Somerville Community Growing Center near Union Square, both local students and the public can connect over producing food — from juice pressed from grapes and apples harvested in its garden to maple syrup made from trees tapped throughout Somerville.

On a recent Saturday in Union Square, my husband and I passed Bloc 11 café, where people hunched over laptops and books in the company of similarly quiet souls. Outside The Neighborhood Restaurant, locals made small talk as they sat on the sidewalk and stood in line, patiently waiting to sate their hunger with a huge Portuguese lunch. At Casa de Carnes, my husband and I kidded around with the butcher before taking away two beef sausage links for our Sunday breakfast. And at International Foods, the cashier patiently answered our questions about tortillas and Mexican farmer's cheese while helping another shopper choose from the several sacks of rice on display.

When I returned home to my street full of nail salons, tanning parlors, and vague acquaintances, I wished my town had remembered to leave room for food. We need something to share. A true neighborhood provides more than the simple fulfillment of our shallowest impulses — it offers nourishment. ■

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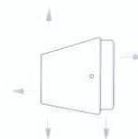
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