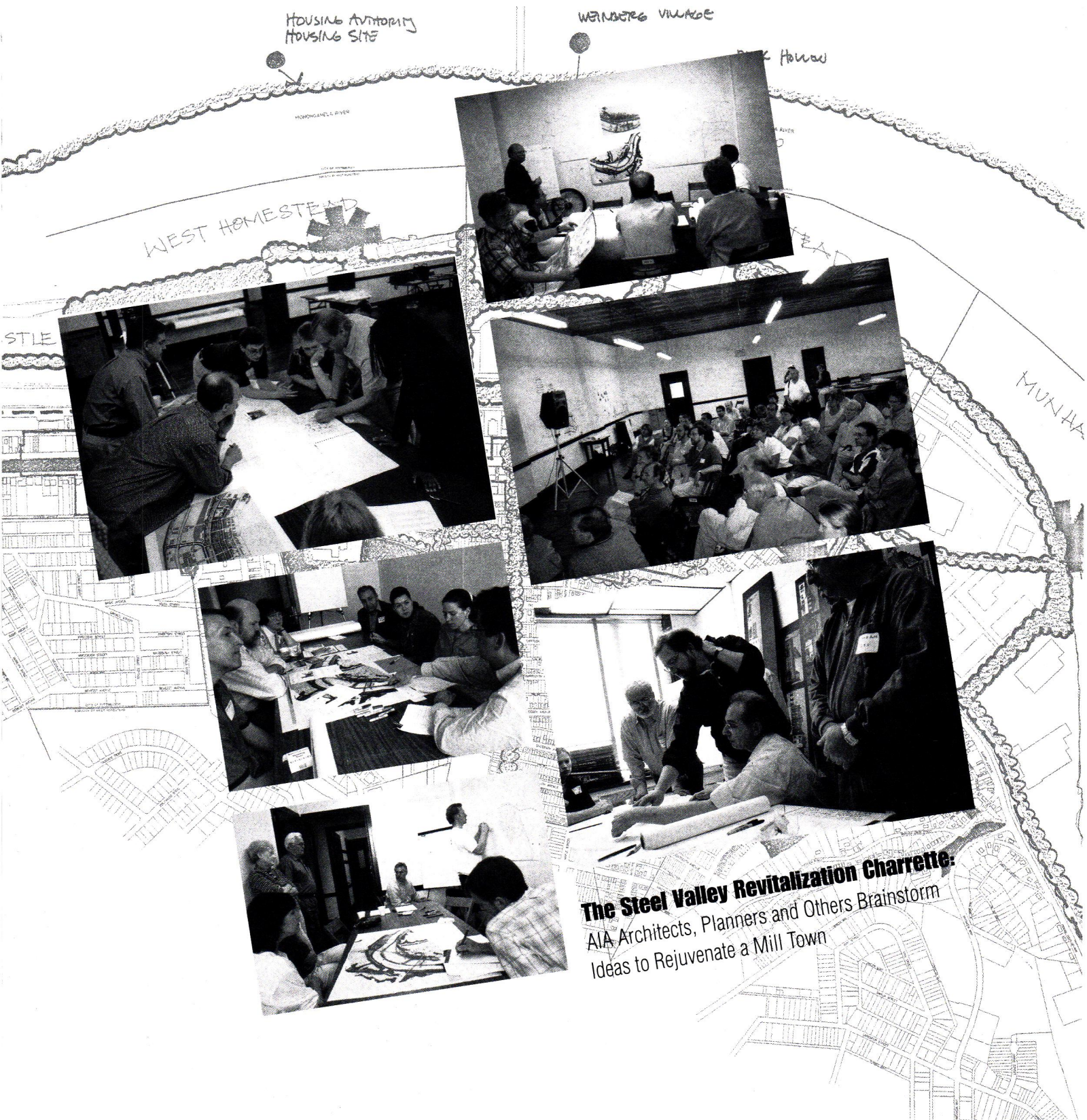
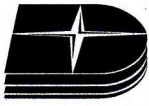


# C O L U M N S



**The Steel Valley Revitalization Charrette:**  
AIA Architects, Planners and Others Brainstorm  
Ideas to Rejuvenate a Mill Town



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## From The Chair Of The Steel Valley Revitalization Charette

by Stephen Quick, AIA, Perkins Eastman Architects PC

### The Steel Valley Revitalization Charrette

was truly a pleasure. Not only was the process exciting and invigorating but it was also fascinating to learn more about this feisty community. After Friday night's tour of the community, a keynote speech by economist and historian Bob Gleeson, and a delicious Hungarian dinner at St. John's, my appreciation of Homestead deepened even further. For me, personally, it was a rekindling of old friendships and revisiting the vigor and excitement of the 1988 Remaking Cities design charrette — it isn't often that you have a chance to build on past efforts.

What potential! Homestead has all the ingredients one could ask for in a livable community. There's a varied housing stock of sound homes, tree-lined residential streets, a thriving commercial area, recreational activities that include biking and walking trails, one of the best Carnegie Institute library and community centers in Pittsburgh, more churches than you can believe, and a rich heritage with one of the largest historic districts in the region. These three individual communities of West Homestead, Homestead, and Munhall that collectively are "Homestead" make for a walkable, mixed-income town with a full mixture of commercial, housing, religious, institutional, industrial and recreational uses — all in a spectacular setting that celebrates the river and its hills.

At its peak, the Homestead area was a bustling community with a workforce of over 20,000 in the mills and an output of steel that was, bar none, the greatest in the world. The Homestead Steel Works lined the Monongahela for over six miles and immigrants flocked to the area, moving to hillside houses within walking distance of the mills. Today, only thirty years later, Homestead, so rich in history, is without steel and searching for its identity and its future. Except for the Waterfront development, a new regional-based retail and entertainment center that replaced the mills, there is little apparent reinvestment. Stores are closed along its traditional main street and the ethnic churches are struggling to survive. The Waterfront caters to a different clientele than the typical Homesteader and the two commercial centers speak little to one another. To the outsider, the sense of isolation and abandonment hangs over the traditional core of the community. For all practical purposes, Homestead is certainly at a critical crossroads.

Is Homestead still a company town, dependent now on the Waterfront development instead of the steel mill? Or can this community seize the opportunity to reinvent itself? These and other questions captivated and charged the design charrette organized by the AIA and co-sponsored by the Homestead Economic Revitalization Committee and the Steel Valley Revitalization Committee. It was the job of the 60-plus architects, landscape architects, historians, community residents, and others to see how linkages could be made and new visions achieved.

Each of the five groups: Waterfront Development, Residential, Churches and Ethnic Groups, National Park and Waterfront and the Core Commercial district looked at the overall picture with emphasis on targeting their specific area and its relationship to the core business district.

The results? As you'll see in this special edition of *Columns Magazine*, they were quite impressive. It was an exercise that proved fruitful for all involved. Many architects commented on how much they enjoyed participating in the charrette. Residents chimed in with how much they appreciated the collective efforts.

The real benefactors, however, could be the AIA and the Pittsburgh design community in providing this opportunity to collaborate on issues broader than those we typically work on day to day. As we all discovered, it was a case of giving and ultimately receiving much more in return.

Thanks to the many people who were instrumental in making this charrette such a success: Jim Thomas and Chuck Starrett of the Steel Valley Enterprise Zone Corporation, Michael Solomon of HERC, Walt Haglund, AIA of Mullin & Lonergan, and the team leaders: John Martine, AIA, Chip Desmone, AIA, Edward Shriver, AIA, and Rich DeYoung, AIA. Thanks, too, to the other members of the planning team: Jennifer Beck, Assoc. AIA, and Fred Winkler, AIA who put in a lot of work behind the scenes.

The staff of the AIA, Joan Kubancek and Amanda Roland, were instrumental in making the event so special. Last and most importantly, thanks to the AIA's Executive Director, Anne Swager, Hon. AIA who said yes to the idea of the charrette when she was approached, then spent countless hours putting it all together. Without her energy and heart and drive, it never would have happened.



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**On the cover:** Charrette photos by Tracy Certo.