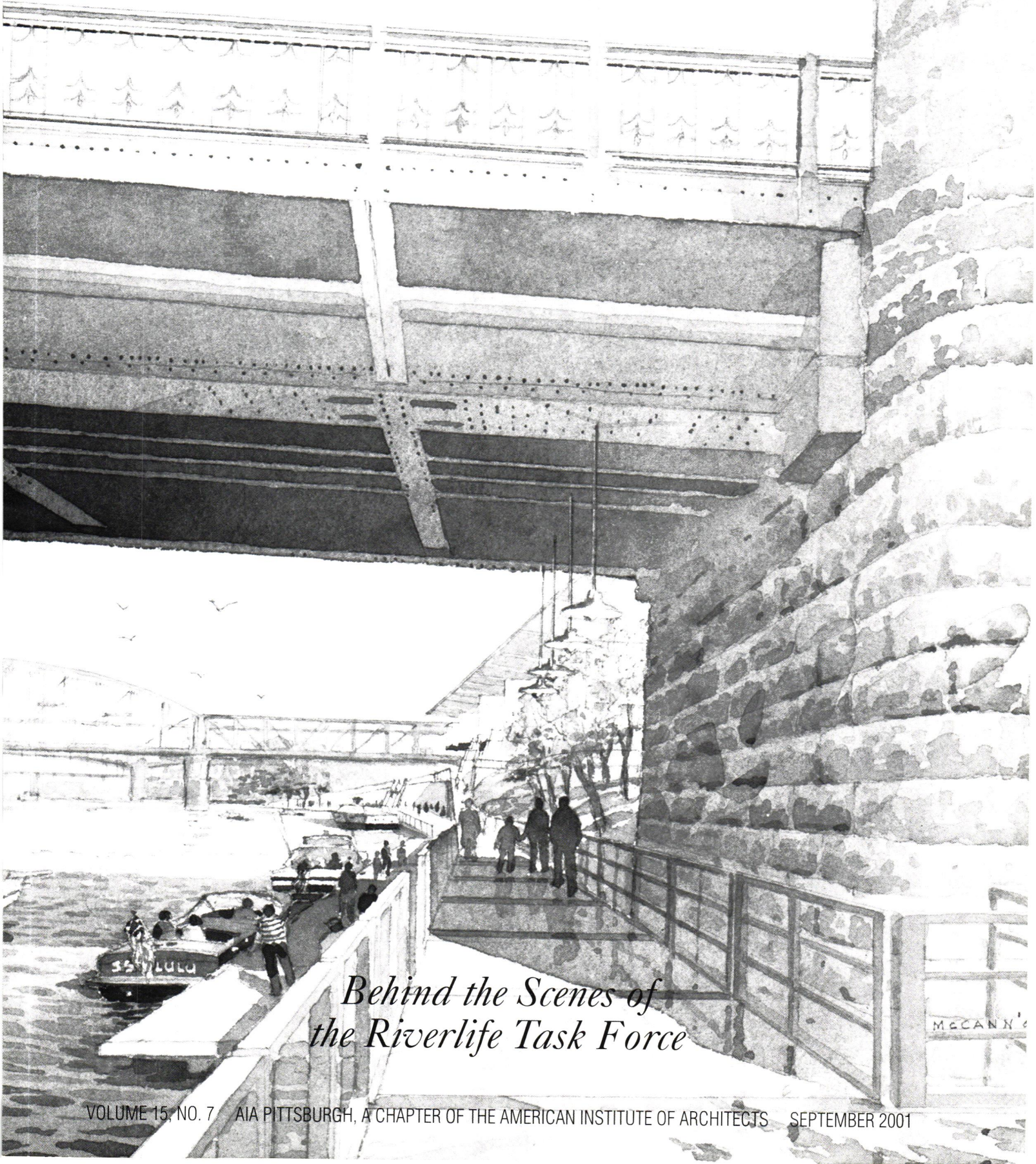


C O L U M N S



*Behind the Scenes of
the Riverlife Task Force*



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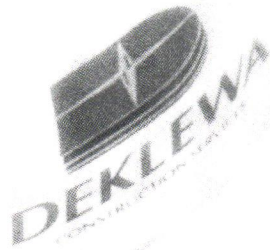
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Lessons From Other Cities by Tracy Certo



Amsterdam is one of the densest cities in Europe which is why it's all the more intriguing how well this city works.

In Amsterdam, water rules.

Numerous dams and dikes attest to the fascinating history of this lowland city in trying to control and at the same time, celebrate water. The city, bordered by the North Sea, has hundreds of canals ringing the central core. Lining these beautiful waterways are historic houses, narrow and tall and sometimes leaning as if whispering to its neighbor inches away. On just about every street in this charmer of a city is a bike trail which is well-groomed and, in June when my family and I visited, extensively used.

Amsterdam is one of the densest cities in Europe which is why it's all the more intriguing how well this city works. You can get anywhere easily and in most cases you have a choice of transportation. Water taxis are common and tour boats operate throughout the city—buy an all-day pass and jump off and on anywhere you please. The #20 trolley loops around the city in a wide arc, perfect for tourists who can get on and off anywhere they like. We walked to the train station to take direct trains to Rotterdam and Brussels and Antwerp—it couldn't have been any easier.

Once, we rented a canal pedal boat to get from the Anne Frank House to the Rijkmuseum. It was great fun on the water although as navigator I confess I was too enthralled looking at the historic canal houses and we missed a turn, ending up on the Amstel River—oops—right by the locks. Lesson learned: although it's easy to get around, it's also easy to get lost in this city where there are so many delightful distractions.

On a bike tour we crossed dozens of canals and bridges to get to the Amstel River (our destination this time) where others flocked. Serious cyclists whizzed by, crew teams plied the rivers, runners and walkers and kids in strollers crossed paths. It was an idyllic scene, windmills and all, and yet, part of the everyday life. In this very active city, bikes outnumber people.

At night, the streets are well-lit so the cycling continues. Most of the stone canal bridges are lit, too, with strings of white lights along the arches, reflecting in the water. Nice touch. You can sit at any number of outdoor cafes and bars and, Heineken in hand (it's much better there), just watch the active street life. It's a wonderful scene, colorful and very alive.

As I write this, members of the Riverlife Task Force are in Vancouver to see how another first-rate city uses its waterways to advantage. They'll be mightily impressed. Vancouver is seductive in its beauty, with a perfect melding of citylife and nature. The idea—which was the Post-Gazette's John Craig's—is to bring back great ideas for our own city's waterfronts. Should be interesting. If they're up for it, they might consider traveling to Amsterdam, too.

As we walked through the city, we talked about ideas for Pittsburgh. (My kids liked the idea of not wearing helmets while cycling but forget that.) Nick thought we could flood a downtown street and make a crosstown canal joining the Mon and Allegheny rivers—some of us need practice navigating those pedal boats. And we all cheered the idea of bike paths—everywhere—as a practical, everyday means of transportation. How about some trails in Point State Park? And why isn't it possible to ride your bike from the South Hills to downtown (without traversing Mt. Washington, that is)? Couldn't we open up the Armstrong tunnel and include a bike path? It's awesome that we can get to Washington, D.C. on a bike trail that starts here (p. 12) but rather ironic that we have to drive to that trail.

As the Riverlife Task Force unveils its plans and invites more public discourse, all ideas will be considered. The more the merrier and yours would be very welcome. Meanwhile, read about the public forum (p. 6) this group is providing and the wonderful work they are doing. I doubt that even in a remarkable city like Amsterdam, such a passionate and determined group exists.

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On the cover: Allegheny River Park design by Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates, Landscape Architects, New York.

Looking East toward the convention center, a cantilever around the base of the Ninth Street Bridge continues the lower park walkway, providing ADA-compliant ramped access to the convention center.

AIA Pittsburgh serves 12 Western Pennsylvania counties as the local component of the American Institute of Architects and AIA Pennsylvania. The objective of AIA Pittsburgh is to improve, for society, the quality of the built environment by further raising the standards of architectural education, training and practice; fostering design excellence; and promoting the value of architectural services to the public. AIA membership is open to all registered architects, architectural interns, and a limited number of professionals in supporting fields.

AIA Pittsburgh
211 Ninth Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15222
Telephone: 412/471-9548
FAX: 412/471-9501

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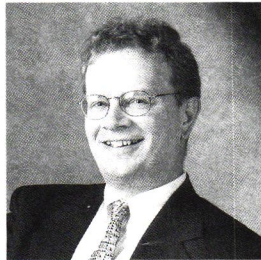
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A Message from the President

By Paul Ostergaard, AIA

In my last message, I described the

positive influence the AIA is having on the design community and the focus we have brought to strengthening downtown Pittsburgh as the center of the region. Since that message, the baseball park has opened, the Renaissance Hotel has brought life back to an architecturally significant building and our largest cab company sees enough market to begin a New York style cab operation in the downtown. This evolving downtown and the many development initiatives we as a profession have participated in are truly exciting.



As a profession, we should continue to defend the integrity of our natural landscape and our existing town centers against those who would spoil our landscape for profit.

However, those high standards we have focused on in our regional core are not apparent in the surrounding road corridors feeding into Pittsburgh. With our continued prosperity, we are beginning to suffer from a disease of the physical environment in areas surrounding the downtown that has afflicted other cities. Because our growth has been slow compared to many peer cities, we have thus far avoided the advanced state of environmental degradation that is making many cities intolerable to live and work in.

For many years, highway-oriented strip commercial development in the Pittsburgh region was contained within our valleys where our arterial roadways followed historic paths and stream beds. For decades, highways like Rt. 51 and Rt. 88 have been plagued by slum lords, increasing traffic congestion and flooding. Recently, the adjacent communities in these corridors have begun to address those issues in significant ways with new coalitions and plans.

I had an opportunity recently to travel the Saw Mill Run Parkway in Westchester County, NY and marveled at the beauty of this older limited access road as it wound through the forests and rock outcroppings of the Hudson River Valley. For me, this was a trip down memory lane. Several years ago, Allegheny County proposed a series of performance zoning guidelines to relate land development intensity to land forms along the Parkway West. In their proposals, development would be limited on steeply sloped

sites and wooded vistas along the parkway would be preserved for future generations. This planning required cooperation among several jurisdictions which did not materialize. The county's sensitive concern for the quality of our airport parkway corridor was sacrificed for increased tax revenues from big box retail developments. The result has been the most devastating destruction of our landscape since the slag dumps of Rt. 51. The beautiful wooded topography of our airport corridor was simply removed and replaced with a series of asphalt covered mesas and shabby concrete block buildings. The new barren slopes that line the parkway have no hope of ever having any tree coverage. Perhaps it is no coincidence that these recent parkway developments resemble the flat topped slag dumps in the south hills used by the same big box retailers.

This evolving trend of land consumption, now so despised in many regions, will have a far more devastating impact on our landscape. Should those with singular interests be permitted to strip away our beautiful forests and hills to create flat areas for shabby commercial structures? Can we learn from the mistakes of others?

With the promise of the Mon Valley Expressway, let us guard against indiscriminate destruction of our valleys and hillsides and protect the beauty of our region. Consider reinforcing the future of existing towns and main streets along the Mon Valley by focusing development to benefit our existing communities and retail districts.

The AIA sponsored a visioning charrette for the parkway corridor a few years ago that proposed a far more sensitive management of land resources, traffic flow and balanced land uses. The recent Homestead Charrette sponsored by the chapter looked at ways to better relate big box retail along the riverfront to benefit the historic town center. The state has adopted new powers for municipalities to jointly plan for the future and share ideas for managing the physical environment. We should continue to explore new techniques for allowing development while protecting the quality of our environment. As a profession, we should continue to defend the integrity of our natural landscape and our existing town centers against those who would spoil our landscape for profit.

