CELEBRATING 20 YEARS of DESIGN COLLABORATION
DEAR GRID READER,

THE COMMUNITY DESIGN COLLABORATIVE, like you, believes in building communities with strong futures. In 1991, a group of dedicated and self-described “anarchist architects” created the Collaborative to meet a critical need. In the 20 years since then, we have helped community organizations imagine their highest hopes for their neighborhoods.

The Collaborative specializes in transforming the kinds of places that knit people together—schools, stores, parks, community centers, streetscapes, and housing. As our name suggests, the Community Design Collaborative works collaboratively. We collaborate with community development corporations, civic associations, social service agencies and other non-profits who serve neighborhoods. We bring all the stakeholders together, public and private. The designs that have emerged are as diverse as our clients’ visions.

Many of the Collaborative’s clients serve low- and moderate-income communities, and do so with limited resources. Fortunately, the needs of our clients have always been met by the generosity of many of Philadelphia’s finest designers. Since 1991, the Collaborative staff, its board and advisory council have attracted more than a thousand volunteers, who’ve donated more than 100,000 hours of care and creativity on 600 projects.

Collaborating with communities, our volunteer architects, engineers, planners and cost estimators do the design legwork needed to move ahead: conceptual drawings to reach consensus; building assessments to prove that ideas are feasible; and expert estimates to attract funding. Together, we create the foundations on which dreams are built.

In this special section we share a small sample of our projects: to inspire your sustainability efforts in your own neighborhood, and to invite you to consider collaborating with us.

BETH MILLER
Executive Director, Community Design Collaborative

To learn how the Collaborative designs sustainable neighborhoods, please visit cdesignc.org.
In one of his first speeches after reading Paul Hawken’s book, “The Ecology of Commerce,” Mr. Ray Anderson told an audience of business executives: “We are all part of the continuum of humanity and life. We will have lived our brief span and either helped or hurt that continuum and the earth that sustains all life.

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After assessing the condition of the assets and determining the direction of the vision, what will they need to make it happen? That’s the question all dreamers have to answer. Unfortunately, especially for well-intentioned but sometimes poorly-funded nonprofits, answering that question can be very expensive. Investigating the feasibility of even a small project can cost tens of thousands of dollars.

The nonprofit sees a need and an opportunity. The first step for the Collaborative is fully understanding what the client imagines and how they expect it to work.

Some projects begin with assets such as land, a building, an existing program, or an engaged community. The client and the Collaborative visit the site and ask the hard questions. Is the existing building sound? Is it compliant and up to code? What is the real value of what they have?

After assessing the condition of the assets and determining the direction of the vision, what will they need to make it happen?

Can the project graduate from a dream to a reality? Volunteer designers get to work on conceptual design, feasibility studies and renderings.

The Collaborative prepares a preliminary cost estimate for the design. The client can then present to potential funders, consultants and constituent supporters.

FINISH THESE STEPS AND YOU ARE ON YOUR WAY! Sure, the road to completing your project will be long and difficult, but now you have a plan. And when your plan is executed, your community will be a better place.
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**The Community Design Collaborative** at 20

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All Together Now

**WITHOUT VOLUNTEERS**, there would be no Community Design Collaborative. Good thing they have legions – 1,000 individuals total – who offer their time, skills and enthusiasm for design free of charge. Volunteers can be industry veterans and those relatively new to their field, and include architects, planners, landscape architects, engineers and historic preservationists, among others. We asked two basic questions to a handful of these folks: Why does design matter? And why do they choose to volunteer for the Collaborative?

**WHY DOES DESIGN MATTER?**

[Design] starts a dialogue that gives neighbors the ability to identify opportunities and challenges, then seek ways to make the places we call home more livable, enjoyable and vibrant. Design can remind us why we love a place, and can make our neighborhoods more than we had ever imagined.

_Brian Szymanik_  
Principal, Brian Szymanik Architects  
**COLLABORATIVE PROJECTS:** Cyber Village Senior Housing, Reconfiguring Blocks to Reduce Density and Enhance Safety in St. Elizabeth’s, Devon Movie Theater Renovations, Spiral Q Puppet Theater and Site Feasibility Study

_Benjamin Cromie_  
Urban Planner, currently Research Fellow at Bicycle Coalition of Greater Philadelphia  
**COLLABORATIVE PROJECTS:** Overbrook Environmental Education Center, Libertae Learning Center, Conceptual Design for Millbourne Redevelopment, Pretzel Park in Manayunk

_Landscape Architecture is not just about understanding ecological processes, but enhancing the spaces in which we live. Design is important because it can restore ecological function and reveal the beauty of a place. People need working ecology and beauty. Beauty matters._  
_Tavis Dockwiller_  
Landscape Architect,  
Viridian Landscape Studio  
**COLLABORATIVE PROJECTS:** Cook-Wissahickon School, Cranallieth Spiritual Center, Greenfield Elementary School, InFill Philadelphia Charrette, Lindley Mural Arts Garden for the Mural Arts Advocates, Meadowood Nature Reserve, Overbrook Environmental Education Center, SHARE Charrette and Master Plan

_In our cities, and particularly in underserved areas of our cities, we have settled for poor design or no design at all. Design matters because it creates the settings for all that is meaningful in our lives._  
_Todd Woodward_  
Architect, SMP Architects  
**COLLABORATIVE PROJECTS:** Mount Airy Presbyterian Church, Overbrook Environmental Education Center, Frankford Friends School, Infill Philadelphia Industrial Sites

_Quality design can impact the people in a neighborhood in countless ways, with the end result typically being a better quality of life and increased pride of place. The Collaborative helps prove time and time again that design does have an impact on your life through your surroundings._  
_Joe Matje_  
Project Engineer, Bruce E. Brooks and Associates Consulting Engineers  
**COLLABORATIVE PROJECTS:** Has worked on 12 projects, including Mt. Airy Learning Tree, Libertae Learning Center, Cyber Village Senior Housing, Narberth Community Library

_The built environment affects each and every one of us every day, in countless ways big and small. Better places to live, work, play, and pray enhance our lives and help make us better people._  
_Michael Paul_  
Structural Engineer,  
Duffield Associates, Inc.  
**COLLABORATIVE PROJECTS:** Began volunteering in 1991 and has worked on more than 20 projects since. These include the Masterman High School Design Charrette, Spiral Q Puppet Theater, Overbrook Environmental Education Center

_Benjamin Cromie_  
Urban Planner, currently Research Fellow at Bicycle Coalition of Greater Philadelphia  
**COLLABORATIVE PROJECTS:** Overbrook Environmental Education Center, Libertae Learning Center, Conceptual Design for Millbourne Redevelopment, Pretzel Park in Manayunk

_Beastification of a neighborhood is no longer seen as an extravagance; it is now recognized as integral to improving the function of a neighborhood._
As a designer, the Collaborative gives you an opportunity to expose yourself to new situations and stretch yourself a little. Many of the clients have limited resources, but very ambitious goals—which can pose some interesting challenges.

**Jesse Forrester**  
Landscape Architect, Jonathan Alderson Landscape Architects, Inc.  
**COLLABORATIVE PROJECTS:** Libertae Learning Center, Pretzel Park in Manayunk

As a young engineer, the Collaborative gives me the opportunity to not only give back to my community, but also to develop my watershed management design skills. It is easy to become engaged in these projects because the client—the community itself—is so engaged and passionate.

**Molly Julian**  
Water Resources Designer, Meliora Environmental Design, LLC  
**COLLABORATIVE PROJECT:** Meadowood Nature Preserve

I started volunteering with the Collaborative because I wanted to contrast my more focused professional experience with the often raw, yet perhaps more gratifying experience of dealing with design in the public realm.

**Jeffrey Brummer**  
Architect, Charles Matsinger Associates  
**COLLABORATIVE PROJECTS:** Aldersgate Youth Service Bureau, Overbrook Farms Club Commercial Corridor Improvement, Impact Services Corporation Master Plan

Working directly with the clients to create and present our designs is [a] strong draw for me because you can have a direct involvement that you don’t always achieve in standard corporate projects.

**Michael Funk**  
President and Senior Estimator, International Consultants, Inc.  
**COLLABORATIVE PROJECTS:** Long time volunteer who has worked on more than 25 projects. Most recent include: Bache Martin School Site Planning Study, PROOF Rooftop Farm Study, Southwest Community Development Center Improvements

The types of organizations [the] Collaborative helps need the input of design professionals to realize what is possible and how to achieve their goals. Many of these [organizations] could never afford these services or know where to start looking to get them on their own.

**Amy Yaskowski**  
Landscape Architectural Designer, Viridian Landscape Studio  
**COLLABORATIVE PROJECTS:** Marconi Plaza, Meadowood Nature Preserve, Meredith Green (in progress)

...the excitement and sense of accomplishment at the end of a Collaborative project is priceless.

**Marguerite Anglin**  
Architect, Wallace Roberts & Todd, LLC  
**COLLABORATIVE PROJECTS:** Cramer Hill Community Lounge, CW Henry Elementary School Gymnasium and Cafeteria Renovations

To volunteer with the Collaborative, visit cdesignnc.org.
Senior Class

MT. TABOR CYBER VILLAGE PROVIDES A GREEN HAVEN FOR NORTH PHILADELPHIA'S OVER-55 CROWD

by LIZ PACHECO

THE YELLOW-PAINTED HALLS of Mt. Tabor Cyber Village looks more like a college dorm than a senior living center. Apartments are decorated with welcome mats and doorhangers, and residents have personalized the individual shelves outside their doors. There’s a computer lab, fitness center and community room on the first floor. And each of the four floors boast a shared laundry area and common room where residents can read, play cards, watch TV or just hang out. Being 55 or older never looked more fun.
Top Left: The Cyber Village was the special project of Mt. Tabor’s Reverends Mary Moore and Martha Lang. Credit: Haley Loram.

Top Right: A look inside the spacious entrance area at the Cyber Village.

Bottom: The Cyber Village is neighbors with the Mt. Tabor AME Church, which was founded in 1803. Credit: BWA Architects + Planners/ Don Pearson Photographers.
“[We have] a close-knit type of atmosphere here in this building,” says Mary Reese, who moved to Cyber Village in June 2009, six months after it opened. “I know everyone in the building and they know me.” Reese loves living here—it’s safe and well cared for, she says. “You couldn’t ask for a better place.”

The Cyber Village is a project of the Mt. Tabor African Methodist Episcopal Church, a fixture in the Philadelphia religious community. Founded in 1803, the church is still at its original location on North 7th Street, between Girard and Poplar Streets. In addition to regular religious services, Mt. Tabor provides outreach services, such as educational and after-school programs, activity days and prison inmate rehabilitation. While Mt. Tabor has many leaders, Rev. Martha Lang and Rev. Mary Moore spearheaded the Cyber Village project. Rev. Lang joined Mt. Tabor as pastor in 1983 and Rev. Moore arrived almost 10 years later, in 1992. They make a lively pair, full of joy and pride in their church community.

The initial idea for the Cyber Village came from what Rev. Lang describes as her vision. “I believe God gave me a vision to do something for the community to help bring it alive because this area was dying,” she says. Her vision was specifically directed at youth and seniors. A study by the Mt. Tabor Community Education and Economic Development Corporation (CEED) showed both groups as those most in need in their community.

“The neighborhood has been changing for the past several years,” says Richard Winston, the Cyber Village architect from BWA Architecture + Planning. “[It] had a pattern of empty lots... run-down housing. A fair percentage of the seniors were underserved.”

So Reverends Moore, Lang and Lang’s late husband, Rev. Larry Lang, worked with the Mt. Tabor CEED team to find a solution.

“Their vision was to have an apartment building that would be loosely affiliated with Mt. Tabor Church, but stand on its own,” says Winston. With an empty lot on both sides of the church, adding an affordable housing center seemed viable. However, developing a plan was
Lager Raabe Skafte Landscape Architects, Inc.

Congratulations to the Community Design Collaborative on 20 years of creative energy and great work!
complicated and expensive. That's when Rev. Moore reached out to the Collaborative. With the Collaborative's help, a site plan and conceptual design were created in 2005. Five years later, the affordable housing for seniors center opened. Reverends Lang and Moore refer to it as “the miracle on Seventh Street.”

Before the Cyber Village, the empty lots were regularly abused by the neighborhood. “They were trashing it. We had to keep it clean. We had to remove the snow,” says Rev. Lang. “The city didn’t take care of it. We took care of it.”

Though they performed owner-like duties, the lots didn’t belong to Mt. Tabor, and no one was really sure who owned the land. Mt. Tabor began applying for ownership in 1999. Ten years and multiple disputes between the city and the Redevelopment Authority later, Mt. Tabor finally owned the space.

Acquiring the lot wasn’t the only major obstacle. To receive tax credits for an affordable housing building, the design had to pass specific requirements of the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency. Consequently, many elements of the Collaborative’s original conceptual design had to be altered.

“When we first came to the table, we wanted the first floor to be commercial,” says Rev. Moore. “We had wanted a little café and a doctor’s office, all to be convenient to the seniors.” But receiving tax credits for a commercial

“...The people that were displaced and... have come from other areas of the city, they love it here. They found a home.”

—Reverend Martha Lang
space wasn’t viable. The number of units was also reduced and other changes were made to the design.

Most sustainable features were kept. The Cyber Village has a green roof, which is critical for stormwater management and provides insulation. The building is energy-efficient with Energy Star appliances, lighting and HVAC equipment, low-flow plumbing, and green materials used wherever possible.

Another crucial design element was the “cyber village” theme. “[The Mt. Tabor CEED] expressed from the outset the vision of a community of older adults who are connected to the larger community through the use of technology,” says Winston. Residents are provided with their own laptops, and technology skills are taught in the first floor computer lab. Winston and the other architects even went so far as to include the theme in the building’s façade.

“This was one of those funny leaps that designers sometimes take,” says Winston. “We thought about digital technologies and then we thought about pixilation on your computer screens. We had this idea that if we used modestly priced materials and just a little bit of articulation, we could alternately push the façade in and out.”

The concept is modern, unusual and aesthetically pleasing, but looks nothing like the regal, stone-covered church next door. Despite the architect’s fears that the design might be too daring, the Reverends embraced the concept, which Winston attributes to the project’s overall goal: providing a modern place for older adults who are independent and still an active part of the community.

Even with those early obstacles, the Reverends describe the design and construction process as very smooth. “Usually, when you’re building anything, there’s always different conflict,” says Rev. Lang. “We had none of that.”

Rev. Moore chimes in, revealing the secret to their success. “Pastor Lang brought this faith… always praising God and saying Hallelujah. They went from cursing to Christ!”

With the Cyber Village complete, the Reverends are looking ahead. Winston is helping them put a sitting garden behind the housing center, where residents and the local youth organization Teens 4 Good will have a vegetable garden. And there are more construction plans. Eventually, the other empty lot will become the Mt. Tabor Intergenerational Community Recreation and Education Center—a place specifically for youth.

“The people that were displaced and… have come from other areas of the city, they love it here. They found a home,” says Rev. Lang. “All the things we had dreamed and hoped for and worked hard for, they were realized with the people that are here.”
The seven LEED-certified rowhomes (to be joined later by a pair across the street) incorporate insulated concrete form foundations and walls, bamboo flooring, solar-light pipes, cement board siding, ultra-high efficiency heating systems, and other sustainable design elements.

The project was undertaken by Habitat for Humanity Philadelphia, whose interest in sustainable design was prompted by “the long-term durability and affordability to operate and maintain [that] it provides for homeowners,” says Jon Musselman, Habitat’s director of project planning. “We also hoped that going into the LEED program would attract partners who would want to invest in a project that pushed the envelope a little bit.”

Through the Collaborative, Habitat Philadelphia was connected with a team of architects from the firm of Wallace Roberts & Todd (WRT), who designed the homes in response to the concerns of both Habitat and the East Parkside Residents’ Association. The local community, explains Maarten Pesch, the lead WRT volunteer architect on the project, had three main concerns they wanted this project to address: Restoring an uninterrupted streetwall to remedy the number of vacant lots on the street; rebuilding facades in brick to maintain the character of the neighborhood; and improving the sustainability of the area.

The number one obstacle in building these homes, as with any sustainable building project, was upfront costs. But despite the expense and difficulties in the planning and construction period, which spanned roughly five years, Pesch says that ultimately the green approach will pay off for residents. “For people living in these homes, their utility bills will be significantly reduced,” he says. “Also, when you build with sustainable materials and put sustainable mechanical systems in, the air quality will automatically be better, which is especially important in urban environments.”

Working with Habitat also provided its own unique challenges. “Habitat typically selects construction methods and materials that are volunteer friendly,” Pesch says. While swinging hammers and putting up siding is easily teachable, some aspects of sustainable building require specialized skills. “So, there was an interesting dance between what works for Habitat, what works for the residents, what works for the volunteers, and what would be the right method and systems to approach the project in a sustainable way.”
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**Little Green Giants**

**THE SHERIDAN STREET HOUSES ARE CHANGING THE FACE OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING** by SAMANTHA WITTCHEN

**THE 1800 BLOCK OF SHERIDAN STREET** in North Philadelphia defies the expectations of what affordable housing looks like. The homes aren’t suburban style, semi-detached houses, or the 1950s high-rises they replaced. Instead, you’ll find a block of sleekly designed, eco-friendly homes.

Designed by Interface Studio Architects (ISA), the 13 homes on Sheridan Street were built for the Asociación Puertorriqueños en Marcha (APM) in response to the Community Design Collaborative’s 2005 Affordable Infill Housing Design Challenge. Infill Philadelphia is a design initiative by the Collaborative to revitalize neighborhoods by re-envisioning vacant buildings and spaces.

APM, which is well-known for developing extensive affordable housing in the blocks just east of Temple University, found through focus groups that APM’s community wanted green housing options, according to Rose Gray, APM’s Vice President of Community and Economic Development. The Sheridan homes, slated for LEED Gold certification, have solar hot water, pervious pavement that allows rainwater to seep through, and green roofs, among other sustainable features. However, it’s the design that truly makes these homes unique.

“The defining characteristic of the project was its ridiculous dimensional constraint,” says Brian Phillips, ISA Principal and Collaborative board member. The block is 450 feet long and 39 feet deep—extremely long and skinny—which made it tricky to design houses that would conform to the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency’s (PHFA) 1,300 square-feet, three bedroom, 1.5 bathroom standard requirements. So ISA decided to re-conceive the process of developing affordable housing.

Instead of starting with preconceived notions about how the houses should look, or accepting the idea that, because the budget was limited, the houses would inevitably be low-quality, ISA first looked at the performance requirements of the houses. Then, they designed them to meet those requirements within the budget. The result is six L-shaped couplets of homes (there is one unit that is not a twin) that all feel like they open to the street, even though some don’t. It’s very different from the “filing cabinet” layout of homes so prevalent in Philadelphia, Phillips says.

In fact, it works so well that it attracted the attention of Postgreen’s Chad Ludeman, who approached Phillips after a presentation on the project. A series of coffee shop meetings between Phillips and Ludeman led to the 100K House project, Postgreen’s flagship affordable, market-priced, LEED-certified homes. Since then, ISA has designed all of Postgreen’s projects.

Phillips says that there’s a strong synergy between the 100K House and the Sheridan Street Homes. While one’s been featured in the upscale architecture magazine *Dwell*, the other has appeared in the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency newsletter. They’re so similar in aesthetic and design strategy that they’re beginning to bridge the gap between affordable and market-rate housing, making green available to everyone.
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Expanding Market

MARIPOSA FOOD CO-OP RELOCATES TO A LARGER, GREENER RENOVATED STOREFRONT by LIZ PACHECO

MARIPOSA FOOD CO-OP HAS LONG BEEN a Philadelphia favorite. Since opening in the early ’80s, membership has reached nearly 1,000, but popularity has taxed their tiny 500-square-foot storefront on Baltimore Avenue. Now, thanks to conceptual design done by the Collaborative in 2008, Mariposa is renovating a new, 5,500-square-foot space. With help from the conceptual designer, Re:Vision Architecture, the future storefront will have plenty of space for retail, storage and kitchen space, as well as sustainable features, including a vertical garden, LED lighting and rain cisterns. An official groundbreaking was held in June 2011, and Mariposa is completing $1 million of the estimated $2.25 million renovations.

Mariposa is moving from 4726 Baltimore Ave. to 4824 Baltimore Ave. To learn more about the move and fundraising events, visit mariposa.coop.
Mariposa Co-op: Conceptual Design for Relocation and Expansion

LOCATION: 4824 Baltimore Ave.  VALUE OF SERVICES: $79,020

OUTCOME: Funded, under construction, 2011


Below: Existing rear-facade on Baltimore Ave.  Bottom: proposed alterations

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Farmer’s Delight

NIC ESPOSITO, CO-FOUNDER OF PHILLY ROOTED AND DEVELOPER OF THE WALNUT HILL COMMUNITY FARM, EXPLAINS HOW THE COLLABORATIVE HELPED MAKE HIS FARM A MASTERPIECE

IN MY EXPERIENCE CREATING URBAN FARMS, the conflict I have most often faced is between the desire for high-end craftsmanship and the need to just get the project going. I’ll be the first to admit that the community organizer in me usually errs on the side of the latter. But with the Walnut Hill Community Farm, the Collaborative’s consulting helped Philly Rooted attain this elusive equilibrium.

I’ll also admit that we weren’t the easiest to work with. By the time Greg Heller of the Enterprise Center Community Development Corporation (the lease holders of the farm site and main structural support for the farm) informed us that he had secured the Collaborative’s support, Philly Rooted had already built eight raised beds, six farm rows and an herb spiral. I vividly remember Collaborative volunteer landscape architect and witty pragmatist Michael Nairn asking, “So, I’m not sure what you need us for?”

The truth is that we needed them a great deal. It was their advising that helped us fit an urban farm, pocket park and community garden in our third-of-an-acre space. It was their foresight that made us address the drastic slope between the farm and the park by leveling off the land, installing porous pavers and planting an orchard to manage storm water runoff. And it was their diplomacy and innovation that helped us solve the ideological debate over having a fence by suggesting we plant a living fence of blackberries and raspberries.

The brilliance of the Collaborative structure is that it provides professionals with manageable volunteer commitments and community groups with the high quality consulting their budgets could never afford. Thanks to the Collaborative, Walnut Hill boasts a safe, space-efficient and creative design that takes into account the needs of the land and the community. The result is a utilitarian aesthetic I feel every day I step onto the farm.
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For more information on all of the Greenhouse Projects www.apsmuseum.org

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Community Effort

INNOVATIVE, NEIGHBORHOOD-BASED DESIGN LEADS PARK RENOVATIONS by JULIE LORCH

WISSAHICKON NEIGHBORS PARK has a history of redevelopment. Situated on the corner of Terrace and Hermit Streets in Manayunk, the park is built on the site of a church that burned down in 1971. Following the fire, the city bought the land and built the park in 1976. As one of the first small neighborhood playgrounds in the city, Wissahickon Neighbors Park was originally considered to be a highly innovative use of space. But since its construction and major renovations in 1994, the park has been largely untouched.

The Wissahickon Neighbors Civic Association (WNCA), which was already taking small actions to restore the park, enlisted the help of the Collaborative to create a unified vision for the park’s master plan for revitalization. The redesign, done by Danielle Denk, the Collaborative’s volunteer architect from Dendritic Design, drew on the same innovative use-of-space idea utilized by the original park.

The park design is based on the flow of water and an integrated catchment, or collection, system. The proposal includes a large rain garden with native plants and, eventually, green roofs on the existing buildings. The catchment system is one of the features Denk is most excited about. “This design is really all about water. By keeping the water on site in the rain garden, we feed the native plants,” says Denk. “Most importantly, we are keeping the water on site during storm events, thereby helping to slow the flow of water in the Philadelphia sewer system. Fast-moving water leads to erosion and flooding, and we don’t want to see any more of that.”

Another critical feature of the redesign includes taking down the stone wall around the park to create a more inviting entrance to a “neighborhood porch” for public gathering. Other elements of the proposal will foster intergenerational use of the park, including chess tables, a climbing wall, sprinkler area and sand bed. The basketball court will stay, but will get lines for a four-square court and hopscotch. WNCA hopes these renovations will help entice more family-oriented renters and first-time homeowners into making the Wissahickon neighborhood their permanent community.

The master plan inched closer to reality in 2010, when Craig Ablin, leader of the WNCA’s park revitalization committee, shared the Collaborative’s proposal and renderings with Councilman Curtis Jones’ office. That May, Jones’ office announced the park would receive $200,000 to begin implementing Phase 1 of the master plan, which includes the new entryway, the “neighborhood porch,” and the rain garden. With this funding, WNCA hopes to begin the renovation project shortly.
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**SCHUYLKILL RIVER PARK IS BEING REDESIGNED, STARTING WITH THE ENTRANCE**

*THE FORMER SITE* of ‘70s-era warehouses and an impound lot for towed cars, the Schuylkill River Park is now one of Southwest Center City’s largest green spaces. While the park boasts multiple fields, courts, a community garden and recreation center, time and frequent use have qualified this space for a makeover. After commissioning a master plan in 2006, the Friends of the Schuylkill River Park (FSRP) brought in the Collaborative to focus on one portion of the park: the entrance at the corner of Taney and Pine Streets. Mostly paved surfaces, this gateway is plagued by crumbling concrete tables and chairs, cracked and buckled pavement, and a fountain sculpture with water circulation problems. The gateway also includes a poorly designed portico for the recreation center.

Published in February 2011, the conceptual design addresses functionality, aesthetics and stormwater management, touting features like rain gardens, porous surfaces, solar-powered lights and native plants. Now, FSRP is looking for funding and Sean O’Rourke, the group’s vice president, says they’re looking to those stakeholders who were involved in the conceptual design. “You know about this [project], you gave us all these great ideas,” reminds O’Rourke, “[now] how can you give us support?” —**LIZ PACHECO**

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**Green Edge**

**COMMUNITY LEADER MAUREEN TATE EXPLAINS HOW CEDAR PARK RESIDENTS RECLAIMED THEIR NEIGHBORHOOD** by **SHAUN BRADY**

**SINCE 2003, THE ALL-VOLUNTEER** Cedar Park Neighbors have worked with the Collaborative to devise a long-term vision for regaining control of blighted segments of their diverse community. Maureen Tate, longtime resident and former vice president of Cedar Park Neighbors, has been active in those efforts from the beginning, and sees them as both a success story and a work in progress.

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**GRID: Your first partnership with the Collaborative focused on Cedar Park itself?**

**TATE:** From the perspective of the community, it was a very underutilized and a very abused park. There was a lot of criminal activity, drug dealing, violence; we needed to do something about this park as part of a larger neighborhood improvement project. So we submitted an application to the Community Design Collaborative to help us with a vision for that park. Now it’s turned totally around and is a really pleasant, vibrant green space at the heart of the community.

**GRID: You then parlayed that success into a grander plan for Baltimore Avenue?**

**TATE:** For a long time, Cedar Park Neighbors has been concerned about the 5000-5100 blocks of Baltimore, because as soon as you pass 50th Street, things change dramatically. This is a much more complex situation than a park, but we thought maybe the same process could happen again, where we’d have the benefit of the Collaborative’s professional expertise to guide a conversation and shape the vision. Even with great ideas, groups like ours would never have the capacity to take the kinds of steps that we’ve taken without that.

**GRID: One thing you’ve insisted on is maintaining the unique personality of Cedar Park. How would you define that?**

**TATE:** Cedar Park is one of the most diverse neighborhoods that I’ve seen in the city. Some people describe the neighborhood as a little edgy—if you have three people in a room, there’ll be five opinions. And that’s a good thing in terms of keeping us open to new ideas.

For more information visit: [www.cedarparkneighbors.org](http://www.cedarparkneighbors.org)
A Room with a View

DICKINSON SQUARE PARK IS GETTING MORE SCENIC WITH A LONG-AWAITED MAKEOVER

THIRTY YEARS AGO, South Philadelphia’s Dickinson Square Park was a mess. “Cans were throughout the whole park. Dog poop was absolutely everywhere. It was a dump,” says Ron Cohen, former president of Friends of Dickinson Square. Cohen has had a third-floor view of the park since his family moved into their apartment in the 1980s. Over the years, his view has improved. The Friends of Dickinson Square keep up the general maintenance, and now the well-used community space is getting a facelift with help from the Collaborative.

“The Collaborative took our ideas in conjunction with their concepts and put [them] into a format that was easily readable for the city and state,” says Cohen. The Philadelphia Parks and Recreation Department, which is responsible for the space, has since adapted the Collaborative’s 2007 design. New lighting and playground equipment is being installed. More trees will be planted, surfaces repaved, fencing fixed and a mostly unused, large, circular building will be taken down. Construction started this fall and should be completed by Spring 2012. —LIZ PACHECO
Art Yard

A CHILDREN’S GARDEN WELCOMES VISITORS TO THE FLEISHER ART MEMORIAL  by LIZ PACHECO

BEHIND A ROWHOME ON CATHARINE STREET, in South Philadelphia’s Bella Vista neighborhood, is a haven for young artists. What was formerly a backyard used for trash storage and HVAC equipment is now a pocket garden for children. The garden opened in 2007 as part of the Fleisher Art Memorial, the country’s oldest free art school for children and adults. The space, designed with help from the Collaborative, serves as a gathering place for children’s workshops and end-of-term celebrations. The wall separating the backyard from the neighboring Palumbo Park was replaced with a custom-crafted, wrought iron gate. “It was really important to us to match the finished project with our organization’s mission and values, so to be able to provide access to that space for everyone,” says Matt Braun, Fleisher’s executive director, “whether inside of Fleisher or coming from the park side, was really important.”
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Design Forward

FOUR NEW PROJECTS IN THE COMMUNITY DESIGN COLLABORATIVE’S QUEUE

Each year the Collaborative provides more than 30 service grants to nonprofits. The grants provide organizations with the predevelopment design services necessary to getting their projects off the ground. Below are four of the latest projects from the Collaborative, all offering a unique vision for improving a community.

**ST. MARY'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH, HAMILTON VILLAGE**

**PROJECT** Conceptual Master Plan for Expansion

**THE IDEA** Creating more visibility for great community programs.

St. Mary’s, located near Locust Walk on University of Pennsylvania’s campus, houses a group of community programs including Neighborhood Bike Works, a soup kitchen run by students and a daycare facility. The conceptual plan proposes a new building nearby Locust Walk with a storefront workshop for Neighborhood Bike Works and a shared community space.

**PHILADELPHIA ROOFTOP FARM (PROOF)**

**PROJECT** 2010 Pilot Project: Conceptual Design for Residential Rooftop Planter System

**THE IDEA** Transforming Philadelphia’s thousands of flat roofs into organic farmland.

PROOF’s mission is to create and sustain a citywide rooftop farm to grow and distribute vegetables to urban communities. The design study offers workable design prototypes for the standard, flat-roofed rowhome.

**NEW KENSINGTON COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION**

**PROJECT** Conceptual Neighborhood Master Plan

**THE IDEA** Utilizing an old industrial landscape to revitalize a neighborhood.

This master plan proposes many ways to reframe Kensington’s gritty landmarks: a greenway along Lehigh Avenue, a community kitchen and servery near Somerset Station, and a mixed-use neighborhood hub at the now-vacant Orinoko Mills.

**SHARE FOOD PROGRAM, GREEN VILLAGE PHILADELPHIA, COMMON MARKET**

**PROJECT** Design Charrette for an Urban Eco-Village

**THE IDEA** Developing an urban green business marketplace.

Can a former ball bearing factory in North Philly become the nexus for a mixed-use green business marketplace? Over 40 design and sustainability professionals convened in April to sketch out ideas for making that happen—sustainably—on a five-acre site in Hunting Park.
Congratulations to the Collaborative on 20 great years!

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