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SUMMER 2017 – IN THIS ISSUE

Philadelphia is a leader in creating transformative civic spaces, but what goes into making those spaces one with the community? This issue looks at the civic spaces making an impact on Philadelphians and some of the people responsible for their creation.

FEATURES

12 Giving Arts a Seat at the Community Development Table
A panel of creative placemakers discuss the process of creating place out of space.

16 Communal Landscapes
A Snøhetta design charrette becomes a learning experience for students and an engagement tool for citizens.

20 Designing Civic Spaces
Jeff Goldstein, of DIGSAU, sits down with Bryan Hanes, of Studio|Bryan Hanes, to discuss the process of designing public spaces.

ON THE COVER
Sister Cities Park near the Benjamin Franklin Parkway, Philadelphia
Photo: Barrett Doherty
Designers: Studio|Bryan Hanes and DIGSAU
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Philadelphia –
A Model for Creating Civic Spaces

BY SUSAN MILLER DAVIS, AIA
CONTEXT Editor and Editorial Committee Member
AND
ELIZABETH MILLER, CONTEXT Editor
and Executive Director, Community Design Collaborative

When you have visitors to Philadelphia, where do you take them? What do you want them not to miss during their stay, whether for the first or 100th visit? Even if someone has been here many times, or even lives here, chances are that new, exciting places to visit have recently been (or are being) created, and are waiting to be visited. And even more likely is that whether familiar or newly created, “not-to-miss” includes many of Philadelphia’s imaginative, creative, photogenic, citizen-enhancing public spaces.

From Thomas Holme’s and William Penn’s plan for the new city of Philadelphia, with its roots in Penn’s Quaker belief in the value of all citizens and the inherent right of each to shared public space, to the Benjamin Franklin Parkway (1917), intended to connect Philadelphia’s urban center to the natural world of Fairmount Park. Today Sister Cities Park, and Dilworth Plaza, welcome children with water jets on hot days.

The design of Philadelphia’s growing collection of notable civic spaces is part of our urban DNA and is an inherent element of the lives of Philadelphia’s citizens. Our waterfronts are showcasing the public amenities with Schuylkill River Trail, Bartram’s Mile, Race Street Pier and Spruce Street Harbor. Even Philadelphia’s industrial heritage gets into the civic commons game at the Navy Yard’s Central Green and with the Rail Park, transforming underutilized places into civic spaces for all to enjoy. Thanks to the efforts of civic groups on the ground, innovative practitioners, progressive city agencies, and the prescient investment of regional and national foundations in the civic commons, these efforts reach our neighborhoods too - from parks and libraries such as Mt. Airy’s Lovett Library, Norris Square, Centennial Commons, Vernon Park, Mifflin Square, and Columbus Square to schoolyards and streets through parklets and pedestrian plazas.

As Samantha Maldonado of PlanPhilly describes in her article in this issue, Philadelphia has become a model for creative placemaking and the role of design in these spaces. Architects, landscape architects, artists are embedding community-engaged design into their practice. As shapers of space (among many roles) they are the leading figures in creating civic spaces that are welcoming and transformative, in a range of scales, budgets and locations. In addition, the new civic spaces express the aspirations and values of our lives as citizens of Philadelphia. Providing spaces for people to gather, reflect, observe, play, engage in spontaneous conversation, even protest is a basic tenet of democracy, increasingly needed in our time.

Successful civic spaces provide opportunities for humanity’s favorite pastime: observing other people in the act of being themselves. Even the scale of a well-designed street, such as Philadelphia is fortunate to have in plenitude, offers the setting for neighbors to interact, for children to play, for sharing a cup of coffee or a glass of wine. Our civic spaces, in a range of sizes and locations, are the basis for our commonality as citizens and human beings, our “common wealth.”

Susan Miller Davis, AIA, is an architect and public art curator and consultant in Philadelphia. (susanm.davis@verizon.net)

Beth Miller is the executive director of the Community Design Collaborative and serves on the board of the Center for Architecture and Design and the Plan Philly advisory committee.
Dear Friends and Colleagues:
I hope you were able to attend the Louis I. Kahn Memorial Award + Talk this past May honoring Jeanne Gang, FAIA of Studio Gang. If you weren’t able to attend, come by the Center for Architecture and Design this summer and check out their exhibit on the Writer’s Theater in Chicago.

During the lecture, Jeanne spoke of how population growth will demand that architects build more compact and dense cities around the globe – so it is more important than ever that architects design cities for people and help create community within these dense urban environments. Public space and civic commons are vital components of the new urban agenda – and the articles in this issue of CONTEXT highlight projects and ideas about engaging community design to create welcoming civic spaces.

Future of the Profession and How AIA Philadelphia Can Support You
As some of you may know, AIA Philadelphia is in the midst of a strategic planning process. We had a kick-off Town Hall meeting in April that covered a lot of topics generally, but not specifically. This summer, fall, and winter our committees will be hosting Town Hall meetings in order to accomplish one thing: listen to our members about what they think about their association and what they want out of it.

The leadership of AIA nationally and locally have published statements of our values…we want to spend some time this year listening to all of you about what that specifically means for the AIA Philadelphia Chapter. You can share your thoughts in a myriad of ways:

1. Tell us what you think via the anonymous form on the Town Hall Series section of our website.
2. Respond to our 2017 Membership Survey, which also lives on the Town Hall Series section of the website.
3. Stop by the Center and add your thoughts, sketches, and comments on the Strategic Graffiti Wall.
4. Request a listening session at your firm, where AIA Philadelphia staff and/or Board leadership will come to you.

I hope that you will take a moment to read through AIA National’s statement of values and consider how those values impact you and your business. Your input is essential to move our organization forward and guide us toward providing more meaningful service to our members.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Johnson
Executive Director
AIA Philadelphia | Center / Architecture + Design

It’s been said that DAG “owns Thursday mornings.” And we are indeed proud of our first-Thursday-of-the-month, public meetings at the Center for Architecture and Design. Our monthly meetings, which have been running for almost 15 years, feature presentations on topics critical to the city’s planning and design, along with frank discussion, information sharing and penetrating questions.

We recently had our largest-ever morning attendance. About 120 turned out on May 4 to hear Nicole Westerman and Kira Strong preview plans for Rebuild, Mayor Kenney’s seven-year, $500 million program to revitalize neighborhood parks, recreation centers, playgrounds and libraries.

To stay informed what's upcoming at DAG, visit us on Facebook @designadvocacy or sign up for our email list at http://www.designadvocacy.org/join.
Visit the Center for Architecture and Design to view Crafting Performance: A Studio Gang Exhibition on display through August 31. Crafting Performance offers an in-depth look at Studio Gang’s architectural research and design process for Writers Theatre in Glencoe, Illinois. Tracing the parallel trajectories of the history of theater, innovations in timber construction, and the role of theater as a community anchor, Crafting Performance exhibits a combination of physical models, documentary photographs, and research materials to tell the story of the design. Named ‘the finest piece of theatrical construction to be built in this country in the past decade’ by the Wall Street Journal, the award-winning building ushered in a new era for Writers Theatre when it was completed in 2016.

Save the date for the 2017 DesignPhiladelphia Festival – October 5 through October 14. We are in our lucky 13th year with more than 100 events programmed and a kickoff party on October 4 right in the heart of center city Philadelphia. More details to come, stay informed by visiting www.designphiladelphia.org and join our mailing list.
**Civic spaces evolve.** Our ideas about their role in cities and communities change over time. Initiatives like NYC Parks’ Parks Without Borders, the Knight Foundation’s Civic Commons, and the City of Philadelphia’s Rebuild reflect a new focus on civic spaces as places of inclusion, community engagement, and responsiveness to unique local needs.

Columbus Square Park in South Philadelphia is a good example. In 2014, the Columbus Square Park Advisory Council and Passyunk Square Civic Association reached out to the Community Design Collaborative to help them rethink their park. Three-quarters of Columbus Square Park was devoted to playing fields for baseball and soccer associations throughout the city and the surrounding neighborhood wanted more options for day-to-day recreation. “Not every kid wants to play sports,” said one parent.

The Collaborative engaged the community in a series of task force meetings to reconsider the programming and design of the park. Task force members were selected to represent all the park’s constituents—longtime residents, newcomers, sports clubs, dog walkers, gardeners, and public agencies and funders with key roles to play.

Ilene Wilder, president of the Columbus Square Park Advisory, brought years of experience as an environmental lobbyist to the project. At the outset, she told everyone, “We’re not all going to agree. But, hopefully, we can get a good project where everyone gets a win… Let’s start with what we can all agree on: a nice place, a park that responds to people’s interests.”

Leah Rominger, a landscape architect who served on the Collaborative’s volunteer team, says that resident needs became apparent quickly, “They wanted access to more grassy lawn. They wanted to be able to have a picnic, read a book, or simply sit down. A significant portion of the park consists of sports fields surrounded by high fencing, and residents saw these fences and locked entrances as barriers to pedestrian flow.” Or, as one resident put it: “I want to walk through, not around the park.”

The preliminary plan envisioned an open lawn along the south side of the park, inviting entrances on all four corners of the park, and pathways that allow people to walk through the entire park. A 25% reduction of the playing fields—not a popular compromise with every stakeholder—was the trade-off.

The park is being redeveloped through a combination of public and private funding. The nonprofits proved their mettle and the widespread support for park improvements in 2013 with a grassroots fundraiser that drew 200 residents and raised $10,000. “Everyone was stunned by the interest,” says Ilene.

Gilmore & Associates is preparing the design and construction documents for Columbus Square Park. The fundamental concepts from the Collaborative’s community-engaged preliminary design process are shaping the final design. The park is slated for completion in spring 2018.

Ilene Wilder says, “A great community space enables us to meet, work together. It serves and nourishes the neighborhood’s subcultures. In the case of Columbus Square Park, that includes the gardeners who tend roses and other planting beds in the park, the dog people, and families with children of different ages. The kids have play dates in the park. Even the dogs have play dates! One father told me, ‘Now that I have kids, I can’t imagine living anywhere else.’”
(They are leaving) The Room.

Two years together, today is the day. Each senior majoring in Architecture will present his or her capstone project. The work is a semester, a year, and what seems a life in the making.

This will be another first at The Charter High School for Architecture + Design: a genuine architecture final review. Yes, high school seniors, the CHAD class of 2017, will experience ‘a review’.

A final review is an event familiar to anyone who has ever studied architecture. It’s something every architecture student lives through, for better or worse, multiple times. Reviews are unrehearsed critiques and conversations, prompted by a student’s designs, amongst invited jurists. Sometimes brilliant, often thought provoking, sometimes silly, and occasionally brutal, a review is a rite of passage unique to architectural education.

Final reviews at CHAD are the next step in our continuing evolution of the design curriculum. Over the past eight years the faculty has built the design curriculum into a methodical progression of courses spanning freshmen through senior years.

It begins with a series of short, nine-week courses introducing elements, principles, concepts and skills. Four years later, it culminates with each senior pursuing a year long major in a single design discipline. There are currently seven design majors at CHAD: Architecture, Environment, Fashion, Fine Art, Industrial and Product Design, Interpretive Design, and Graphic Design.

The curriculum is designed to prepare students for college. It loads them with knowledge, gained through their own hands. Usually, the students have little comparative context: they don’t know what they know, they don’t know otherwise. Then students visit college studios, only to discover and observe work on the tables and walls that looks a lot like what they already understand.

“I can make that!” It’s a moment that never fails to catch the breath. A seventeen or eighteen year old passes through a college architecture studio brimming with work, spots a model on a desk and recognizes kinship. A realization happens: he or she could be sitting on that stool. Now he or she wants to.

The design curriculum is a rebuttal. Sometimes fatigued and irritated, it’s a response to the chronic skeptics of our students’ potential. There is no better rebuttal to false defeat than undeniable work. To the “no, they can’t”, we offer an audacious “yes, they can”.

A casual comment questioned the merits and veracity of a high school final review. So, we go big…and public. Time to do some schooling.

The morning of the first final review is here. Work hung, neat and ready, fills the exhibit walls. Models stand arranged before the walls. Time is short. Directions are blunt. Then the students are summoned to the room for one last discussion. They retreat to the room before go time. In a brief huddle, they hunker one last time where they’ve spent so many days together.

The nerves are visible.

Ok, ladies and gentlemen, the first thing you need to know is your work is excellent.
Kathryn Ott Lovell
REIMAGINING PHILADELPHIA’S PARKS AND REC
BY JOANN GRECO

Wister Playground ribbon cutting.
PHOTO: CITY OF PHILADELPHIA PARKS AND RECREATION
It’s 9 am and Kathryn Ott Lovell, Philadelphia’s Commissioner of Parks & Recreation, is already sipping from the day’s first bottle of Coke. “I drink soda to build parks,” she says, laughing.

She means that literally. After all, $300 million of the Kenney administration’s $500 million Rebuild investment in parks, recreation centers, and libraries, will be borrowed via city-issued bonds, with a portion of the city’s controversial soda tax going toward servicing the debt on those bonds.

And despite her laughter, she’s dead serious. “Only about 20 percent of our rec centers are air conditioned,” she says, “and yet we’re running so many summer programs. Overall,” she continues, “about 85 percent of the city’s parks, rec centers and libraries could use improving. This initiative presents the opportunity for us to figure out how facilities built 50 years ago for a different city and different neighborhoods can better serve today’s communities.”

Things may have changed over the years, but like any kid growing up in Philadelphia — in whatever era — Ott Lovell was a loyal denizen of her neighborhood rec center. Mainly, she spent her time there playing for Mayfair’s Little League team, the Holy Terrors. “Parks and rec were a part of my everyday life, but I knew next to nothing about the system as a whole,” she admits. Even by 2011, when she became executive director of the Fairmount Park Conservancy (FPC) — a nonprofit that focuses on capital improvements, historic preservation, and park stewardship through citywide events like Love Your Park — she was no expert.

“On one of my first days, I was at a meeting with Parks and Rec, actually, and everyone was talking about the Wissahickon,” she recalls. “Here I was, a fourth generation Philadelphian who grew up 15 minutes away from this amazing asset, and I hadn’t a clue about what they were discussing.”

It was a telling illustration of the way in which many of us experience what’s been called America’s largest park system — on a very, very local basis. “I think we can all be guilty of taking the parks for granted,” she muses. So now, a resident of West Philly whose go-to is Cedar Park, she and her husband make sure to take their two young daughters to parks “all over the city.”

Ott Lovell spent six years leading the Conservancy before newly-elected Mayor Jim Kenney asked her to assume the helm of Parks and Recreation last January. Her work at the Conservancy serves as a good indication of where her priorities lie in steering the department’s 700-plus full-time employees, 10,000 acres of land, 500 buildings, 250 playgrounds, and 225 miles of trails. (In contrast to the former occupant of Ott Lovell’s office, Deputy Mayor Michael Diberardinis, her domain does not include libraries. Now the city’s managing director, Diberardinis is the impetus behind Rebuild.)

On Ott Lovell’s watch, for instance, the Conservancy launched Reimagining the Civic Commons, a $5 million dollar initiative aimed at tackling under-used public spaces, including the much-publicized Reading Viaduct and Bartram’s Mile. (The other projects were an expansion of Mt. Airy’s Lovett Library and Park that converted it into a more fully-programmed community center, Discovery Center in East Fairmount Park (an environmental education center that reactivates an abandoned, century-old reservoir) and Centennial Commons in West Fairmount Park (a softening of the rough edges facing Parkside, with streetscape and lighting improvements, porch-like seating areas, and a children’s playground.)

Another accomplishment: the complete turnaround of North Philly’s 87-acre Hunting Park. Phase 1 of this effort resulted in $4.5 million worth of improved lighting, a community garden, a new baseball field, nearly 400 new trees, six state-of-the-art tennis courts and, not insignificantly, the establishment of a Friends group. Now, the park is so successful that neighbors are complaining about overcrowding and noisy conditions. “I’m heading there to talk with the community about this later, in fact,” Ott Lovell says. “But these are issues we can deal with and address — we’ll take them.”

At the Conservancy, Ott Lovell also worked with partners (including Parks and Rec) on tactical urbanism efforts — such as The Oval — to engage new users. She’s already brought such efforts to her new office, most notably with Parks on Tap, a series of pop-up beer gardens (in partnership with, wait for it, FPC) in various parks around town that debuted last summer and returns this year.

“Those kinds of efforts are about social and economic integration. We’ve all become so incredibly insular and we want everything customized and you’re compelled to interact with people you might not otherwise interact with.

“That’s the power of parks today — they can be a pretty powerful tool in a city or a country that stands pretty divided,” she continues. “Who knows, if people get more involved in their park, maybe they will vote more often or start participating in neighborhood cleanups. Maybe they’ll become more personally invested and then more civilly engaged.”

JoAnn Greco is a freelance writer and frequent contributor for PlanPhilly, the Philadelphia Inquirer, and Philadelphia Daily News.
GIVING ARTS A SEAT AT THE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT TABLE

BY SAMANTHA MALDONADO

In December, the National Endowment for the Arts released a collection of essays titled *How to Do Creative Peacemaking: An Action-Oriented Guide to Arts in Community Development*. Jason Schupbach, the Director of Design and Creative Placemaking for the National Endowment of the Arts, came to Philly this past February to discuss the new book, which he said he thinks of as “a primer on giving arts a seat at the community development table.”

Creative placemaking represents a wide array of work that ranges from public art projects confronting complex social questions to building artist live/work spaces in changing neighborhoods. It can mean development of new cultural institutions or simply using creative expression to foster community engagement.

Schupbach joined a panel*, hosted by Fairmount Park Conservancy, Mural Arts Philadelphia’s muraLAB, and Community Design Collaborative at the Center for Architecture and Design, to discuss themes of the book, as well as strategies for creative placemaking in American cities and towns. Lyz Crane, Deputy Director of ArtPlace
America, which funds creative placemaking work, and Anne Gadwa Nicodemus, Principal of Metris Consulting, who studies the field and co-authored of the original whitepaper about creative placemaking joined Schupbach to bring a national perspective. Representing Philadelphia’s rich community of creative placemakers were attorney and artist Rasheedah Phillips, founder of the AfroFuturist Affair; Kira Strong, deputy director of design and construction for the city’s Rebuild Initiative; and Aviva Kapust, executive director of the Village of Arts and Humanities in North Philadelphia. (Kapust and Strong both have essays in the new book.) PlanPhilly’s Ashley Hahn moderated the discussion.

ART’S ROLE IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The process of creative placemaking aims to evolve space into place through artistic techniques and deep community engagement. “How do we know when we’re in a place?” asked the City of Philadelphia’s Director of Planning and Development, Anne Fadullon, in her opening remarks. “We know it when we feel it.” Sense of place has to do with the attachment felt by a community.

But such an intuitive, simple answer belies the difficulties inherent in the work of creative placemaking. Creative placemaking came about as a response to the 2008 housing crisis, when nonprofits, government agencies, and individuals came together to figure out how the arts could improve communities and help people where they already lived, since most people could not afford to move. Whereas developers typically assume that schools, transportation, and businesses were some of the top reasons people want to live somewhere, Schupbach listed social offerings, openness, and aesthetics as the real reasons people give. He emphasized that adding art to community development work can foster those attributes, and can innovatively address economic development issues too.

Art can be an easier entry point into public discussions about challenges and issues for a wider swath of people. “Art can be fun! It’s a creative approach to conversations that can be hard, that are tired. Art provides a creative gateway and level of engagement from standard civic dialogue,” Strong said. When people partake in these conversations, they have a greater level of control and power and help shape the narrative. “People are creative every single day to survive,” Kapust said. “When we’re talking about art, we’re talking about creative problem solving too.”

Moreover, art contributes to quality of life and has the ability to help people thrive rather than just survive.

“Art helps people imagine other futures, alternative futures different from the ones they already have,” said Phillips. “That’s a big thing for people who are routinely told that they don’t have possibilities for the future.” She noted that people in unstable situations often deal with worries that prevent them from thinking beyond immediate needs, but art has the ability to take them outside of that.

COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

Panelists emphasized that creative placemaking only works when the community is deeply involved. After all, creative placemaking is about strengthening community and addressing a challenge or issue within that community. Effective creative placemaking, as Hahn pointed out, is not a DIY effort, but DIT (do it together) — in part because the lives of those in the community make up a medium of a project.

“A collaborative practice is critical between the artist, community partner and community itself,” Crane said. “What is the conversation that’s happening? What is the expertise that’s being relied on? There needs to be a sense of reciprocity.”

Anne Gadwa Nicodemus explained that reciprocity and inclusion is necessary to ensure that no one is used and that nothing is done to a community—a project can’t be an imposition. Creative placemaking is about figuring out what’s at stake and who has skin in the game—the artist, developer, and residents of a neighborhood. Reflecting and addressing the needs and wellbeing of those most affected by creative placemaking efforts is a way to avoid projects that contribute to “art washing” or could signal inequitable neighborhood development. Instead, the success of a creative placemaking project is defined for and by the specific community. The best creative placemaking initiatives, according to Schupbach, “deeply engage with the culture of a place and honor people through the work.”

Phillips concurred, noting that those who want to engage in creative placemaking projects in an area must make sure they do their homework: “Go to community meetings, get to know people, get uncomfortable,” she said. “People aren’t going to automatically trust you.”

“When you’re an artist [from outside a community] working in a community, you must become part of the community,” Kapust said, explaining that building equity and empathy should be the goals as much as any resulting physical product. “Establishing shared values early on is really important, and you can’t assume it’s going to be easy.”

CREATIVE PLACEMAKING IN OUR POLITICAL CLIMATE

Without directly addressing the changes at the federal level, Schupbach squashed the notion that the National Endowment for the Arts was in any immediate financial trouble, reminding the audience that, like all federal agencies, the NEA is funded as part of a continuing resolution until April 28th. (Fiscal Year 2018 will be Trump’s first budget, and anyway, “Congress controls the purse strings,” he said.)

Creative placemaking efforts can bloom even without a robust budget—scrappy Philly, which Schupbach called “one of the best creative placemaking sites in the country,” is no stranger to that.

“In Philly[,] there’s a culture where not everything is at your finger tips,” Strong said. The drive to figure out how to solve a problem or how to make an idea into a reality leads to partnerships and sharing resources—key ingredients when it comes to forging alliances and building solidarity among neighbors.
Creative placemaking, like political work, “is incredibly complex, and because it’s complex, it’s messy, it’s chaotic, it’s human scale,” Kapust said.

These days, stronger communities and more collaborative processes are more important than ever—but panelists maintained that the aims of creative placemaking haven’t shifted.

“What’s going on in the places that need this the most has been going on for a long time,” Kapust said. Crane, too, said creative placemaking’s focus on community and self-determination to be just as important as ever.

Gadwa Nicodemus, however, argued that, “some issues we’re coping with have a greater sense of urgency than techniques of creative placemaking may be suited for.” While creative placemaking can be iterative, incremental work, she asked, “How can creative placemaking transition and be repurposed to meet the pressing needs of a civil society?”

*Disclosure: PlanPhilly was a media partner for this event and the discussion was moderated by editor Ashley Hahn.

Samantha Maldonado is a writer based in Philadelphia interested in the arts, culture, and cities. This article originally appeared on WHYY’s PlanPhilly website on February 16, 2017. Visit www.planphilly.com to learn more about design, planning and development in Philadelphia.
COMMUNAL LANDSCAPES
TEACHING STUDENTS COMMUNITY-ENGAGED DESIGN

BY HANNAH RECHTSCHAFFEN

Drexel University is known for its ethos of experiential learning, a culture and philosophy that continue to set the school apart, drawing students who are interested in learning as much outside the classroom as in it.

This approach leads to student opportunities such as a recent four-day design charrette led by global trans-disciplinary architecture firm Snøhetta. The charrette, Communal Landscapes, offered participating students from a range of design disciplines the opportunity to look at one of four community spaces adjacent to Drexel’s campus in the Mantua and Powelton neighborhoods, and to design creative interventions for these spaces that would bring to light new ways of seeing and utilizing them, involving both community opinions and students’ design-thinking.

The sites under scrutiny were all along 34th street, moving north away from Drexel’s campus. With the tagline “Think local. Design local,” Snøhetta seized an opportunity to expand students’ understanding of the broader community surrounding Drexel. The students quickly grasped the scope of their role in the neighborhood with a deepened awareness of a crucial point of civic engagement – seeing oneself as a critical part of the work taking place.

With the complex relationship between an anchor institution and the neighborhoods that surround it, building awareness in students is a crucial part of evolving what those interactions look like. Through participation in a project like Communal Landscapes, students are immediately confronted with the realities of gentrification, displacement and disinvestment, and come to understand first-hand how their roles as future professionals – architects, interior architects, policy-makers – will be interlaced with the scope of their role in the neighborhood with a deepened awareness of a crucial point of civic engagement – seeing oneself as a critical part of the work taking place.

“Ultimately [the presence of] colleges and universities affects prices in the area, so that people who go to college can afford them, but the rest of the community can’t,” acknowledges Agnes Gummere, a freshman in Drexel’s Interiors program who grew up in Philadelphia. “It makes you consider...everything you do in the area, and ensure that whatever you do is beneficial for everyone...”

Agnes worked with a group that designed interventions around Kimey’s Place, a popular corner store at the corner of 34th and Hamilton. Leading into their design process, students spent time with local residents, including artist Rebecca Rose and Drexel architecture professor Uk Jung, digesting the problems that continue to challenge them and their neighbors. They learned that residents in Mantua and Powelton want what all communities want – better health, beautification, access to jobs, quality education, and improved safety. While this may be obvious to many working in the various fields that intersect with community building and urban design, it can be an important lesson for students who are learning to view the world through eyes other than their own.

With these common desires in mind, Agnes and her group designed interventions that were cross-cutting, addressing spatial challenges that currently counter the development of these benefits. They added more light to the corner, adding warmth and visibility, and a rooftop garden was designed for health – an outdoor space above the street where people could relax, eat, and view their neighborhood from a new vantage point. The group also designed outdoor seating on the corner, to encourage community members to gather and talk, rather than moving quickly to and from the store.

In addition to bringing these communities together, Communal Landscapes also afforded an opportunity for students to work with designers outside their own disciplines. With an open call for participation, students from multiple design backgrounds found themselves in a rare moment of cross-pollination.

Juliet Bibla, a third-year architecture student, noted that it was “…interesting to see how different design disciplines relate and work to fix a problem from the beginning to the end.” Juliet and her group worked on a re-design of Brandywine Park, an underutilized pocket park at the corner of 34th and Brandywine. Agnes agrees with the value of connecting disciplines through the charrette experience: “…it was wonderful to see how different designers work together, and what their values are. Some people were considering the community more, some people were considering sustainability...”

For students who will soon move out into the world, participating in and putting together their own project teams, understanding the importance of interdisciplinary thinking is a vital part of evolving the design field and encouraging young designers to seek out voices that are informed by different backgrounds. Whether engaging community opinion early on or making space for a graphic designer in the process, these broader avenues of communication elevate conversations about public space, including the ways that designers can have a range of impacts.

The disciplines involved with the Snøhetta charrette were not limited to design. Flavio Borquez Gomez, a freshman from Costa Rica, is studying Art History and Political Science, and attended Communal Landscapes without knowing what he was getting into. His interest piqued by the initial invitation email, Flavio attended the presentation about Snøhetta on Thursday night and was hooked. He felt he brought questions of
policy to the conversation about design, and provided context for the ideas being presented.

Flavio was in one of two groups that worked on a small parcel situated between Mantua, Fairmount and 34th street. The area is largely underutilized, and the group envisioned a space with places to sit, shade to relax in, and even a pitched stage to provide both a view of the city and a potential performance space. Flavio enjoyed the exercise of the design process, and while the designs were intended to remain hypothetical, the experience resonated on a real level. "[The process] "gives a chance to show our work and gives us experience in how to approach problems, and how to see design as a means of using a space in a way that is gives the biggest benefit to whomever is using it," he says.

Overall, it is experiential learning like this that yields young design and urban-minded professionals who shape new approaches to the challenges of community-building and creative placemaking processes. Working with a renowned firm like Snøhetta was a boon for these burgeoning designers. "Suddenly I realized all these places that I've seen in pictures or have been to, like the 911 Memorial Museum, the Library of Alexandria [Egypt], San Francisco MOMA, it's amazing to see the influence Snøhetta has around the world," Agnes comments. With a Snøhetta project underway at Temple University (a new library with an automated book-retrieval system), hopefully it will not be the last time that Drexel students interface with Snøhetta's team.

Communal Landscapes left a lasting impression on the students, encouraging them to continue thinking about their own practice, and how their time at Drexel might impact their larger community. Juliet notes: "...There isn't a driving force of students who can execute projects like this," referring to her team's designs. "We should promote the contributions of the school, and particularly the growth of the community that's already there, and help them thrive. The charrette helped to start that conversation, and to begin the changes that we hope will happen in the neighborhood." An excellent point, and hopefully a leadership opportunity is born out of the culture of experiential learning that encourages students to see the world beyond their classroom in new and approachable ways, and to become involved, as designers and citizens.

Hannah Rechtschaffen is a project planner at the Lindy Institute for Urban Innovation at Drexel University.
Designing Civic Spaces

BY JEFF GOLDFEIN, AIA
Jeff Goldstein (JG), is a principal at DIGSAU, an award-winning firm practicing contemporary architecture, urbanism, and environmental design. Based in Philadelphia, the firm is recognized for their expertise in providing unique, high-quality design to a diverse client group.

Bryan Hanes (BH), is the founding principal of Studio|Bryan Hanes, a landscape architecture and urban design studio that creates socially and ecologically sustainable spaces through timeless yet innovative design. DIGSAU and Studio|Bryan Hanes have collaborated on several civic-minded projects including the project on this issue’s cover, Sister Cities Park. The two principals sat down to discuss the thinking and process behind designing civic spaces.

JG: You’ve built your practice around the design of spaces within the public realm. Is there a philosophy from which you approach the design of public spaces?

BH: We always start with trying to find inspiration in the place. What is the place’s history? What are its environmental features? Is there an ecological or cultural significance? We want to find something that can be leveraged to tell a story, a way to connect people to that place. At Penn Treaty Park, for example, we wanted to connect to a site where William Penn and the Lenni Lenape agreed to live in peace and equality. We engaged with the community to develop a master plan, responded to their input, and integrated the historic tale of the treaty and democracy. Conversely, at Pier 68, the construction of the pier itself served as the onramp to celebrate the natural history of the place and a means to reveal the cyclical, natural movement of the tide.

JG: There’s also something very local about each of those projects — both on the same river, in the same city, but each primarily serving two unique and distinct neighborhoods. Which leads to me to wonder how you go about designing civic spaces within the public realm. For spaces that are less about a local neighborhood, but more about a larger population?

BH: Well that’s just the thing. All public spaces must cater to and support specific demographics. Civic spaces, however, must support the most diverse audience and therefore be the most inclusive. Successful civic spaces are designed for everyone. There needs to be a sense of scale, and ability to bring people together for a larger purpose. That purpose could be celebratory — like a Phillies championship parade — or a protest — Black Lives Matter, or Resist for example.

JG: You remind me of the recent Broad Street Run, when Broad Street itself was transformed into a civic space.

BH: Broad Street is one of Philadelphia’s great civic spaces. Generally, all of our streets are civic spaces that we take for granted. When you think about the flexibility, capacity, and diversity of programming, streets are really hard to beat. They offer an unmatched ability to congregate, AND circulate.
JG: I know you’ve been working with the Fairmount Park Conservancy to reimagine the space around Memorial Hall in Fairmount Park. Can you talk about Centennial Commons? I saw some earth being moved around last weekend.

BH: The design process began with the acknowledgment that Fairmount Park is a great civic asset. At the same time, we all recognize that some pieces function better than others. While the site for Centennial Commons can and will serve a regional audience, we also need to recognize the adjacency to the immediate Parkside neighborhood. So on one hand, the space needs to serve a civic function and leverage the nearby assets – the Philadelphia Zoo, Please Touch Museum, Mann Music Center. On the other hand, there is a local community and we need to make a place that can serve that community day-in and day-out. So the idea was to amplify and intensify the civic nature of the site, and to engage the community to create a space that could support and reflect the neighborhood and their unique needs.

JG: So is this a question of programmatic opportunities?

BH: Well the program is very complex. The space needs to serve as a recreational hub – a meeting place for competitive races, charity walks, and other events that attract people from across and beyond the city. Kelly pool is an underappreciated asset that holds the potential to draw from across the city. Conversely, we found through an engagement process with the local community that there was a lack of gathering spaces. So yes, the program is important, but we found the key question for the design was one of scale.

The solution was to develop an edge that is very responsive to the scale and needs of the Parkside community. This edge consists of a string gardens that are a third of a mile long and manage the stormwater from Parkside Avenue. There are “porches” imbedded in the gardens...
at the terminus of each cross street and echo the grand porches on the houses across the street. The scale of these spaces invites neighbors to gather, to talk, and to share ideas and stories.

This Parkside Edge is the first phase of the project, and is critical to both creating the proper interface with the neighborhood and to setting up the large-scale civic components of the following phases. The next phase includes a youth area near the Kelly Pool, and hopefully subsequent phases will focus on the restoration of the Welsh Fountain and a “B’Tween” zone that is envisioned as a recreational and social space for teenagers.

JG: If I might return to where we started – where did your team find inspiration for the project?

BH: We didn’t have to look far. The site’s current configuration was constructed for the 1876 World’s Fair and Centennial Exhibition. In fact, Memorial Hall is the last main structure completed for the Centennial to still be standing. The scale of the place was massive – Memorial Hall was actually one of the smallest of the buildings on the site!

The history of this site is well-documented and we really enjoyed pouring through historic maps and drawings. Almost ten million visitors came to Philadelphia’s newly formed Fairmount Park. But what really got us excited was finding a way to tap into the spirit of the Centennial. The Exposition celebrated the 100-year anniversary of US independence. The experience was designed to showcase the United States’ industrial, creative, and innovative prowess.

We’ve been working to incorporate a sense of discovery and invention into the design and have taken inspiration from the collection of steampunk devices that were on display, such as the Aerial Chair – now reimagined as a recreational swing – and the CorlissEngine interpreted as a kinetic play structure. We hope the new experience unlocks the same sense of discovery amongst visitors, both from the Parkside Neighborhood and well beyond.

Jeff Goldstein is a principal at DIGSAU. With a background in ecology, Jeff brings an interest in the relationship between people and buildings to their physical surroundings. He is a Registered Architect in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, the State of New Jersey, Washington, D.C., and the State of Delaware. Jeff has taught sustainability, technology, and design studios at Temple University, and has served as a guest critic and lecturer at numerous design schools. He serves on the Board of Directors of the Community Design Collaborative.

Bryan Hanes is the founding principal of Studio|Bryan Hanes. He is a Registered Landscape Architect in Pennsylvania, Delaware and Indiana and LEED Accredited Professional. Bryan has been involved in a diverse range of work, from significant urban and open space planning and design projects, to small-scale designs for institutional and private clients.

Bryan’s extensive work in creating ecologically and socially sustainable spaces strives to acknowledge an understanding of the natural and cultural systems of a site. His contributions to the regeneration of Philadelphia’s public spaces include recent and current work such as Sister Cities Garden at Logan Square and Pier 68 on the Delaware River waterfront.

Bryan served as the Stuckeman Practitioner-Instructor for Design at Penn State University, and has led studio courses at Auburn University, Philadelphia University, and Temple University, and has served as a computer and technology advisor to the National Park Service Cultural Landscapes Division. He has participated on design juries and lectured at many universities across the country.
In late 2014, the Fairmount Park Conservancy was selected by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation and the William Penn Foundation as convener for Reimagining the Civic Commons, a collaborative initiative that began in Philadelphia as a way to connect the city’s leading public space operators and five planned new civic spaces. Philadelphia’s Viaduct Rail Park, Lovett Library & Park, Bartram’s Mile, Discovery and Centennial Commons are the five public space projects in the city’s Reimagining the Civic Commons Collective -- the pilot cohort in a national initiative exploring how improving, repurposing, and connecting civic assets can lead to greater social and economic integration and opportunities. Philadelphia’s collective is serving as a three-year “learning laboratory” to explore new ideas and test new strategies related to “reimagining the civic commons.”

For more information about the Civic Commons Collective, visit civiccommonsphl.org.

**DISCOVERY CENTER**
**DIGSAU and Ground Reconsidered**

The Philadelphia Outward Bound School and The National Audubon Society are joining forces to reactivate a century-old abandoned water reservoir in East Fairmount Park. The project will provide environmental education and adventure programs that inspire self-discovery, foster personal achievement, and build community across Philadelphia.

**BARTRAM’S MILE**
**Andropogon Associates**

Philadelphia Parks & Recreation and the Schuylkill River Development Corporation will transform this former industrial waterfront, adjacent to Bartram’s Garden, into a greenway that will reconnect the oldest botanical garden in the U.S. to Center City, while reconnecting an isolated neighborhood back to its historic waterfront.
Fairmount Park Conservancy will create three recreational zones and bring much-needed amenities to a 12-acre edge of West Fairmount Park to transform this space into an inviting and vibrant park for residents of the adjoining neighborhood.

Center City District and Friends of the Rail Park will repurpose a portion of an abandoned rail line as an elevated linear park in a changing, multi-ethnic community.

The Free Library of Philadelphia and Mt Airy U.S.A will convert this library and adjoining unused, open space into a new community center.

Center City District and Friends of the Rail Park will repurpose a portion of an abandoned rail line as an elevated linear park in a changing, multi-ethnic community.
Moving Historic Preservation Forward
IN 21ST CENTURY PHILADELPHIA
BY PAUL STEINKE

When I first signed on as a board member of the newly established Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia, local preservationists had their hands quite full. It was 1996, and the city’s collection of architectural gems was under constant threat of vandalism, decay, and demolition. Despite the tireless work of our small, but dedicated group, many interventions ended in heartbreak. It was during this era that the Victory Building, a lovely example of Second Empire architecture at 10th and Chestnut Streets, had become a poster child for urban blight. The windows were boarded up, trees were sprouting from its cornice, and fire damage was wreaking havoc to the building’s interior. This iconic Center City office building, built in 1875, was quickly falling into ruin.

Across town, the former Philadelphia Naval Asylum was sitting vacant and abandoned for nearly two decades. Considered one of the finest examples of Greek Revival architecture in the country, it was modeled after the Temple of Ilissus in Athens by architect William Strickland. The beleaguered complex had become a haven for arsonists, vandals, and graffiti.

Philadelphia’s commercial and residential real estate markets were stagnating at the time, generating little demand to spur the reuse of the city’s countless neglected structures.

But as things turned out, a wave of revitalization was not too far in the offing. In 1999, the Victory Building was fully restored and reopened as a luxury apartment building. The Naval Asylum, after several fits and starts (and a close call with the wrecking ball), was renovated and adapted into a campus of condominiums in 2004. Like good omens, these pivotal preservation projects foretold the return of reinvestment on a scale that the city has not seen for generations.

Today, we are in the middle of a citywide building boom, something that should be embraced by urbanists and preservationists alike. But this growth, as crucial as it is to a healthy economy, cannot be allowed to spread unregulated at the expense of Philadelphia’s historical character and architectural identity. The current challenge for historic preservationists is identifying and legally protecting historic buildings before they become victims of inappropriate zoning and targets of unchecked redevelopment.

Philadelphia is one of the oldest cities in the United States. Our diverse structural inventory covers three centuries of stunning American architecture and is unparalleled anywhere in the country. History is the heart and soul of Philadelphia and our generation has been handed this incredible legacy. It is our duty to identify, protect, and revitalize our historic resources, while encouraging new construction in a controlled and methodical fashion.

Right now, roughly 2.2% of the city’s structures are legally protected by historic designation. That leaves almost 98% of our existing building inventory vulnerable to demolition without effective protocols in place to evaluate their historical or architectural merits.

In the last three years we have witnessed the destruction of the church in South Philadelphia where renowned contralto Marian Anderson learned to sing, Center City’s last grand movie palace, the Boyd Theater, on Chestnut Street, a block of 300-year-old wooden houses near the Delaware waterfront in Fishtown, and myriad of Victorian-era buildings from Spruce Hill to Roxborough. It is an endless list of irreparable loss with little attention paid to accountability.

In April, Mayor Kenney announced the formation of a Historic Preservation Task Force comprised of a 29-member panel of experts on preservation, architecture, development and urban planning. The group will meet over an 18-month period, researching best practices in historic preservation around the country and making recommendations to strengthen the city’s commitment to preserving built history. The City has also budgeted for two additional preservation planners to join the Philadelphia Historical Commission staff in the new fiscal
year. This will be the first increase in staff at the Historical Commission in nearly 30 years.

The Preservation Alliance welcomes these steps, which are small, but significant. We are prepared to support the City’s work with our own research and community outreach efforts in conjunction with our partners at the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Historic preservation should be a priority, not an afterthought, when construction projects and city planning issues are under review. The Preservation Alliance believes that infill, adaptive reuse, and redeveloping empty lots must be the first choice for developers, with the demolition of historic resources as a heavily vetted, final resort. The following six-point plan was developed by the Preservation Alliance for improving the city’s preservation codes and protocols. We believe this to be a vital component of a new roadmap for improving the state of historic preservation in Philadelphia and have been sharing it developers, community leaders, and public officials since last fall.

We offer these suggestions to the mayor’s new task force with the hope they contribute to the discussion over how best to protect our aging city, while still making room for bold, adaptive reuse, and dynamic redevelopment. The versatility of Philadelphia’s unique built environment represents our best competitive advantage for livability and growth in the 21st century.

1. Adequately Fund the Philadelphia Historical Commission

Mayor Kenney’s allocation of additional funding to add two more preservation planners to the staff of the Historical Commission is indeed welcome news. Yet, it will still fall far short of what is needed to oversee and protect Philadelphia’s extensive historic building inventory. The Commission currently lacks the ability to both review and produce new nominations for individual buildings and historic districts in a timely fashion. Right now there are five proposed districts awaiting action.

The Commission should also have staff devoted to promoting preservation as a key component of smart urban development with resources available for public education and outreach. These fundamental tasks are clearly outlined in the City’s current Preservation Ordinance.

2. Adopt a Demolition Review Ordinance

Demolition review, or demolition delay, is the process in which relevant municipal agencies are granted an opportunity to evaluate a building’s historical significance prior to the issuing of a demolition permit. The typical threshold for such a review requires that a building be either 50-years-old (or older) and/or currently registered on the National Register of Historic Places. The length of the delay varies, but typically exceeds 60 days. A number of cities across the country practice demolition review of their historic resources, including Boston, Chicago, Denver, Dallas, and Portland, among many others.

3. Zoning Remapping

The City’s new zoning code barely acknowledges historic resources. Historic buildings are now eligible, by right, for additional height, massing, and density under the code, and are vulnerable to irreversible alterations unless they are listed and protected on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. The process of zoning remapping must pay closer attention to the preservation of historic fabric on the ground.

4. Partial Control Districts

Historic designation of individual properties and/or inclusion in an historic district is often perceived as a financial burden to property owners who are often reluctant to accept what they typically view as onerous guidelines on maintenance and alterations. A Partial (or “Soft”) Control District seeks to address those concerns, alleviating some of the less significant guidelines of historic property maintenance, while still regulating the alteration or removal of historic fabric.

5. A Lack of Preservation Incentives

There are few economic or procedural incentives for the preservation and rehabilitation of historic properties in Philadelphia aside from the Federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit. The City of Baltimore administers a version of that program at the municipal level, offering a ten-year tax credit to both homeowners and commercial property owners within the city’s 70+ historic districts. It is true that all properties in Philadelphia, designated historic or otherwise, are currently eligible for the city’s ten-year tax abatement. But our abatement is limited to the cost of “improvements,” a benefit that usually pales in comparison to the much greater abatement afforded to new construction projects.

6. Conduct a Citywide Survey of Historic Resources

The need to perform a citywide survey has been a clarion call of the preservation community for the last three decades. This crucial resource is needed to both establish a solid baseline of what merits protection and help guide future development and urban planning initiatives. By providing a clear and thorough assessment of the city’s most valuable (and most flexible) properties, the City can help shape the direction of our rapidly changing urban landscape.

Paul Steinke was named executive director of the Preservation Alliance of Greater Philadelphia in 2016. Previously, Paul was general manager of Reading Terminal Market and finance director for the Center City District. He holds a degree in Business and Economics from Penn State.
Inspired by the Wildwood beach region’s iconic, colorful, and geometric modern and Doo-Wop style architecture, the new Wildwood Crest Branch of the Cape May County Library System serves a community of 4,000 year-round residents that swells to 250,000 during the summer. The design brings two distinct community populations – locals and vacationers – together through architecture that feels both intimate and spacious, and that offers programmatic flexibility. The multitude of offerings provided by today’s modern library – from technology to teaching – puts it at the heart of civic engagement and pride.

BKP collaborated with the Cape May County Library facilities director and the Wildwood Crest Branch Library director to ensure the design met county objectives for budget, quality, and design, and library objectives for functionality, maintenance, and programming.

Having outgrown its current building, the county acquired a former Masonic Temple that was renovated and expanded. The program includes adult, teen, and children’s collections, café, lounge, teaching kitchen, distance learning and small-group meeting spaces, and a 220-seat multi-purpose community room.

Originally conceived by the county as a single-story renovation, the project was expanded during schematic design at the request of the community, library, and county. Both opportunity and need existed in Wildwood Crest for enhanced educational programming, library services, and community space. All agreed a larger facility would serve those purposes. The expansion incorporates additional storage, reading, and collection areas; inclusion of the large community room, which is available for public gatherings or special events; and a second...
story roof deck overlooking a green roof and the Atlantic Ocean a block away.

The design took cues from Jersey Shore architecture to create a welcoming, relaxed environment with flexibility to accommodate residents plus an influx of vacationers. Although neon, kitsch, and flamboyance are part of the colloquial aesthetic, the team was careful not to design a library that looks like a beachside motel. Subtly and refinement combine with geometry and color imbue the library with midcentury modern references while keeping it firmly in the 21st century.

Bright pastel colors and a beach theme run throughout the playful interiors, where the children's area includes a carpet pool and umbrella-topped tables and chairs. Angled rooflines are echoed in terrazzo floor and railing details. Laser-cut and etched resin panels that mimic waves clad the circulation desk. A reclaimed wood trellis marks the new entrance.

Flexible spaces suit different-size groups for meetings or educational programming, such as a conference room separated from the kitchen by a collapsible dry-erase partition; when closed, the partition can be used as a white board for meetings. When open, the room doubles as a teaching kitchen, meeting the library's demand for healthy cooking classes.

Sustainable design ensures the library's long-term efficiency and security. High-performance, impact-resistant glass offers protection for the hurricane-prone locale while providing transparency into the interiors. The front wall of the addition features a solar chimney: a dual-wall system flanked by a colored glass exterior and a terra cotta interior designed to draw warm air up. In winter, the air is re-circulated to heat the building; in summer, the air is exhausted to keep the library cooler. At night, the solar chimney's terra cotta glows a warm orange that is complemented by interior paint in the renovated part of the building.

The grand, sweeping spaces of 20th century civic architecture are replaced at Wildwood Crest Library with the technology and teaching tools of 21st century life. Compact, efficient, and comfortable, the library shapes – and is shaped by – those who use it. By serving both the social and educational needs of the community, the library has become a hub of year-round activity.
SOUTH PHILADELPHIA COMMUNITY HEALTH AND LITERACY CENTER

VSBA Architects & Planners
The Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP) joined with the City of Philadelphia in a public-private partnership to create the new South Philadelphia Community Health and Literacy Center. This innovative, LEED Silver-certified facility combines a CHOP primary care practice, a City Health Center, a branch of the Free Library, and a City recreation center with playground.

The Center is located at the heart of a rapidly evolving neighborhood of long-time residents, first-time homeowners, recent immigrants, renters, and many living in poverty. The site extends from Broad Street to 15th Street and from Morris Street to Castle Avenue. Three surrounding streets feature residences in 19th century townhouses, while Broad Street is home to a vibrant mix of institutions and businesses.

A 1960s health center, library, and recreation center that occupied the site were well beyond their useful life and were considered by many to be detrimental to the community. The playground harbored drug and gang activity and the site was plagued by trash and graffiti. Moreover, due to hazardous materials in buildings and soils, the site was designated a brownfield.

**A COMMUNITY HUB**

The new Center replaces the aged facilities and adds a pediatric care clinic, all housed in a single building. But it does much more: by combining community services and recreational activities, the Center creates a hub for community engagement and a source for civic pride. From entry plaza to ground floor library to neighborhood park, it welcomes the public and brings people together.

The mix of uses is key. Families and area residents visiting for particular services can easily utilize many other services and amenities. A family with an appointment at CHOP can also check out kids books from the library then picnic in the park. Librarians are trained by healthcare providers to assist visitors researching health questions.

The design of the Center embraces the Urban Land Institute’s “Ten Principals for Building Healthy Places,” with family-oriented programs encompassing all dimensions of health and wellness, from clinical care to education and physical fitness. These, in turn, are helping to build a healthier community.

**AN URBAN PLAZA**

The Center’s entrance is at the corner of Broad and Morris, a transportation hub offering subway and bus access. Here, the Center angles back to form an entry plaza with a sitting wall and planting bed extending from the subway entrance. At the south end of the bed is “See the Moon,” a sculpture of mother and child by Philadelphia artist Evelyn Keyser. Large ground floor windows along the plaza allow views into and from the library.

The entry plaza welcomes people to the Center and creates an urban gathering space. Its gracious extension of the sidewalk offers space to sit, meet, wait for transit, rest, and enjoy the plantings and art.

**A NEIGHBORHOOD PARK**

At the site’s west end, a new recreation center, playground, and civic park offer recreation and exercise to neighborhood residents young and old. It’s a place for the entire community to meet, relax, and play.

The DiSilvestro Recreation Center houses a multipurpose space and computer room used by students in afterschool programs and by other community groups. The playground includes equipment for children of various ages, basketball courts, game tables, picnic lawns, a spray feature, natural grass areas, and a rain garden. New sidewalks with new street trees encircle the site and bike racks are provided near entrances.

**A MODEL FOR THE FUTURE**

The Center has already helped to transform its community and, more broadly, is seen as a model to others looking to reproduce its success. CHOP’s Steve Wilmot says “this is an absolutely new model of public and private partnership...We have been visited by many guests from other cities around the country looking to recreate this work.”

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**PROJECT:** South Philadelphia Community Health and Literacy Center  
**LOCATION:** Philadelphia, PA  
**CLIENT:** Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia and City of Philadelphia  
**SIZE:** building - 96,000 SF | site - 69,700 SF  
**PROJECT TEAM:**  
VSBA Architects & Planners (Architecture)  
Bruce E. Brooks and Associates (MEP Engineering)  
Keast & Hood (Structural Engineering)  
Pennoni Associates (Civil Engineering)  
Ground Reconsidered (Landscape Architecture)  
MedEquip Intl. (Medical Equipment Consulting)  
Metropolitan Acoustics (Acoustics/Audio Visual)  
CSS (Security Consulting)  
Re:Vision Architecture (Sustainability Consulting)  
Jensen Hughes (Code Consulting)  
International Consultants, Inc. (Cost Consulting)  
TBS Services (Envelope Consulting)  
Genesis (Commissioning Agent)  
Jeremy Tenenbaum (Photography)
NAVY YARD CENTRAL GREEN
James Corner Field Operations
Field Operations has designed the 5-acre Central Green at the heart of the Philadelphia Navy Yard Corporate Center. The site was historically marked by wetlands, meadows, and bird habitat and is growing into Philadelphia's most innovative and progressive corporate neighborhood. The design unites the cutting edge urban potential of the site with its native habitat, resulting in a new type of environment that is sustainable, green, and natural as well as social, active, and urban. A 20-ft wide Social Track organizes the site's circulation and frames a unique, immersive interior park featuring flowering meadows, a hammock grove, an outdoor amphitheater, bocce courts, and fitness stations.
The Fairmount Park Conservancy and Philadelphia Parks and Recreation initiated the first-ever comprehensive plan for historic Hunting Park. The plan provided a framework for improvements, a strategy to implement them over time, and the creation of a park advocacy organization. The project recognized the importance of creating a safe and well-maintained park, which will provide a place for healthy recreation for children and families, bring neighbors together, and serve as a catalyst for neighborhood renewal.

The plan for the 87-acre park envisioned the restoration of the historic landscape and structures, improvements to pedestrian and vehicular circulation, the renovation and expansion of existing athletic, picnic and playground facilities, and the introduction of community gardens and a farmers’ market.

With the Master Plan as a road map, the Fairmount Park Conservancy and Philadelphia Parks & Recreation completed a number of projects in a robust $4.5 million Phase 1 including establishment of a friends group, improved roadway lighting, new baseball field and tennis courts, a community garden and orchard, new playgrounds, and the capstone project – the new Team Vick Field. Phase 2 is currently underway with the creation of a new hand-ball court, community-based food vending program, walking program, and the redesign of the rec center.
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Bartram’s Mile is a one mile stretch of formerly vacant river frontage along the western banks of the Tidal Schuylkill between Grays Ferry Avenue and 56th Street. This section of frontage has been repurposed as a public trail that will eventually be part of a larger 130-mile long Schuylkill River Trail network. Once realized, the trail network will take users from Pottsville, Pennsylvania, down to the confluence of the Schuylkill and Delaware Rivers while linking to several other trail networks, including connections to the Appalachian Trail. The trail will also connect to the planned redevelopment of industrial portions of the Lower Schuylkill, currently in the master planning phase.

The Bartram’s Mile trail project stretches along a storied stretch of the Schuylkill River, with remnants of history from over two centuries of development. Much of the trail runs across land that was almost entirely controlled by the Bartram family until the mid-nineteenth century, with the exception of the southern end that was owned by the Gibson family and is known as Gibson’s Point. Starting in the mid-nineteenth century, this same stretch of land was transformed, as farm land and marshes were developed into heavy industrial sites for oil refining and building materials manufacture. The sole exception was Bartram’s Garden, which was preserved as a city park.

The concept design and visioning phase, completed in December 2012, was the first step in an accelerated process to reimagine the Mile. This rapid civic engagement and public planning process brought together community representatives from the immediate neighborhoods, as well as key stakeholders from across the city and region to determine preferred design alternatives for Bartram’s Mile.

Produced as a culmination of the public engagement process, the concept design included trail alignment, community connections, integration with the Bartram’s Garden trail, site programming, and park space improvements. Design features are focused on reconnecting people to the outdoors and the Schuylkill River, while celebrating and enhancing the history and horticulture of Bartram’s Garden and connecting up to the Schuylkill Banks Trail, which currently terminates at the Grays Ferry Crescent. Construction was completed in 2017.

The development of Bartram’s Mile provides a great opportunity to convert publicly-owned vacant brownfields to public green space. The project will provide riverfront access and recreational opportunities to an underserved neighborhood, and inform future waterfront development opportunities.
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