LEVERAGE
STRENGTHENING NEIGHBORHOODS THROUGH DESIGN
HOW THE COMMUNITY DESIGN COLLABORATIVE IS CHANGING THE URBAN LANDSCAPE OF PHILADELPHIA
EDITED BY BETH MILLER AND TODD WOODWARD

In 2011 the Community Design Collaborative celebrates two decades of providing pro bono design services to nonprofit organizations in Philadelphia and the region. LEVERAGE showcases the approach and success of this groundbreaking community design center.

Profiles of 20 key projects highlight how the Collaborative transforms its values into three dimensions, on projects large and small. A series of essays considers the role of designers as advocates and policymakers, the future of design activism, and how the Collaborative has contributed to design excellence in Philadelphia and beyond.

LEVERAGE was created for readers interested in the role of cities, as well as for architects, designers, and nonprofit leaders who view thoughtful, innovative design as a strategy to create and sustain vital urban places.

www.cdesignc.org
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Edited by Beth Miller and Todd Woodward
Community Design Collaborative, Philadelphia
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Foreword: The Origins of the Community Design Collaborative

BY DON MATZKIN

WE ALL KNOW HOW DIFFICULT IT IS to start anything up, much less keep it running and growing successfully for twenty years. The creation of the Collaborative was a joy from the beginning. Inspiration was derived from the Philadelphia Architects’ Workshop, an early community design workshop founded in the late 1960s by Hugh Zim- mers via the Philadelphia chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA). In its successful early years, the Workshop was led by Hugh and longtime architectural director, the late (and much beloved) Gray Smith, an activist to the end. The mission of the Workshop was very much what we later adopted for the Collaborative: planning and design support for community groups and other nonprofi  t, community-based organizations in support of their eff  orts to bootstrap their neighborhoods.

Need was demonstrated by the Regional/Urban Design Action Team (R/UDAT) Philadelphia, a planning and design charrette sponsored by AIA National on the cusp of the 1990s that focused on rejuvenating the commercial district surrounding Amtrak’s then-dilapidated North Philadelphia Sta- tion, thereby bringing widespread, much-needed attention to conditions in North Central Philly—and, extension, many other neighborhoods of the city. Vehicle was provided by the Young Architects Forum Philadelphia (YAF), another project of the AIA, designed to attract younger practitioners and interns to the fold, including those who had become disenchantment with what they saw as an indifference to the deteriorated physical and social conditions in our great urban centers. YAF became a vehicle for these folks to become engaged in their communities and, as a result of that engagement, to strengthen both the communities and the AIA. What better locus for the generation of an operation such as the Collaborative?

Fuel was provided by the latent energy within YAF, as well as the pent-up desire within all the design professions to do something.

In the Beginning First, we invited participation from anyone who wanted in: anyone feeling they had something to contribute or just wanted to be intoxicated by the ferment. They were architects, planners, landscape ar- chitects, interior designers, graphic artists, and activists—AIA and anti-AIA. There was no set struc- ture or established leadership. If you were there, you were an essential participant in the process and part of the leadership. Decision making followed the Quaker way of consensus.

Second, we let it take its own sweet time, meeting regularly—weekly, for a while—over the better part of two years. The fi rst project engagement, a master plan for the expansion of a church in Southwest Philly, was conducted in the summer of 1990 by Robin Kohles, Alice Dommer, and myself. It expired, stillborn, as a result of the overreaching of a newly hired pastor, in a failed attempt to simultaneously establish and expand his turf. It taught us a valuable lesson in establishing project selection criteria.

Third, we resisted as long as possible—perhaps longer than necessary—the impulse to establish a formal structure, reveling in the creative high of anarchy in action. Leadership emerged and struc- ture evolved organically, and the right person for a particular task never failed to step up at just the right time.

Fourth, we solicited, and received, the support of AIA Philly in the form of workspace and a modest start-up stipend. But not until we smoothed over a couple rough spots: the chapter needed to be assured that there would be no liability consequences accruing to it, and because the YAF was an AIA proj- ect, the chapter sought control of the Collaborative. Obviously, both issues were resolved satisfactorily, with the Collaborative acquiring its own corporate status and 501(c)(3) tax designation.

Since the Beginning The experience of the Collaborative’s gestation and the aura that enveloped it at the time have carried it forward, and they are reflected today in how it performs its services, relates to clients, conducts business, governs its operation, and envisions its future. Having been only peripherally involved with the organization after its birth, it strikes me now that the Collaborative has made the most of the sense of service, interactivity, and coterie that surrounded its founding. The special initiatives mounted by the Collaborative, for example, have been spawned by and derive their power from the neighborhood service projects that are the mainstay of the Collaborative’s mission. And the relevance and authenticity of these initiatives are reinforced through the direct participation of the Collaborative’s client groups.

It will only get better.
BY BETH MILLER

Introduction:
Unapologetically Urban

ONE THING WE KNOW AT THE COLLABORATIVE is that community development can be a long and tedious process. Since our founding in 1991 by a group of dedicated and self-described “anarchist architects,” our portfolio has grown to include more than five hundred community-initiated projects. Of those, perhaps maybe fifty—about ten percent—have been built. Of those, most have taken five to ten years to realize.

Our services are deliberately narrow. We provide only the first ten percent of design services—an initial step that connects community groups with design professionals. We encourage groups receiving service grants to share their vision with a local task force. We also require volunteer teams to test their design interventions through peer-to-peer project reviews at mid- and final points in their conceptual design.

There is nothing more gratifying than walking by a former vacant site that has been transformed for a productive new use—such as affordable housing for seniors or a restored park—to remind you that the tedium and perseverance necessary to make the transformation was worthwhile.

We’re excited to celebrate the past two decades of the Collaborative’s work with this book, which details twenty projects that represent the wide variety of clients and volunteers with whom we’ve had the privilege of working. This volume is one way we hope to recognize the innumerable hours these dedicated professionals have spent over these past twenty years talking, looking, questioning, and designing with us. And we’re constantly reinvesting the lessons learned from one project into our best efforts for the next.

The essays included here were generously contributed by some leading thinkers (and doers) in design and the evolving role of architecture today. In addition, we have interspersed excerpts from a wide-ranging conversation with Maurice Lox and Alan Gurencberger, who were kind enough to share their perceptions of the Collaborative and the role of community design in our cities. We hope these excerpts inspire even more dialogues among our readers.

As Philadelphia Mayor Michael Nutter has said, design is not a luxury. Good urban design, architecture, and planning are critical to creating thriving, sustainable neighborhoods. Design can promote healthy communities by delivering built-in features that attend to specific communal needs. Public safety, commodity access, and neighborhood identity are a few of the many factors that quality design can influence significantly.

Design works to reknit and revitalize urban neighborhoods.

Cities with good bones and infrastructure are the ultimate canvas for sustainable initiatives. Over the past sixty years, public policy has tended to direct investment outside urban centers. After six decades of shrinking, Philadelphia’s population decline has stabilized and we’re beginning to grow again. The city is taking advantage of this momentum by investing in zoning reform and in Philadelphia 2035—the first comprehensive plan in a generation.

Design is not the only factor at play in our neighborhoods, but it is a critical tool for evaluating ways to turn obstacles into assets. Even more importantly, community design—integrating planning and design services with community development—further engages residents, businesses, government representatives, and nonprofits as advocates for quality places to work, play, learn, worship, and thrive. We’re proud to continue our work toward this end, and feel fortunate to have had the opportunity over the past two decades in the life of this city—and this country—to do our part.
On March 8, 2011, the Community Design Collaborative’s Executive Director Beth Miller and Advisory Council member Todd Woodward sat down for a roundtable discussion with Alan Greenberger and Maurice Cox, to draw upon their local and national expertise in architecture, urban planning, and community design. The conversation focused on the Collaborative and its impact—past, present, and future—and the potential roles for similar organizations within urban environments.

Rather than presenting the ideas that emerged in the form of an essay, we offer here—in three sections, throughout the book—a series of excerpts from that conversation. The excerpts are organized by topic, which include: What the Collaborative Does Well (Connecting the Grassroots with the Grass Tops, Supporting Commercial Corridors, and Translating Lessons Learned); The Power of Design (Building Political Awareness, Tackling Problems as Designers, Approaches to In/fill Housing, and Design versus Implementation); and Where the Collaborative Should Go from Here (The Project-Formation Business, Making Cities the Client, Seizing Philadelphia’s “Planning Moment,” and Institutionalizing Good Design). We hope that within these threads of conversation you will see resonances with the essays and project profiles.
Connecting the Grass Roots with the Grass Tops

Todd Woolcock: How do you see the Collaborative increasing the role of design in the city?

Maurice Cox: I have talked about a grass-roots, incremental approach, using Philadelphia as a laboratory to get things done and to show some capacity. There is so much to be gained by doing hundreds of small experiments—various waiting for the overarching vision that takes a multi-million-dollar, community-wide initiative. All of these small projects build the community’s confidence that change can happen, and it can happen in a place where we can see it. I am a big advocate for the incremental approach. It will press into three. This is something the Collaborative has done in other areas. What are your thoughts about how what the Collaborative has done in Philadelphia might be applied to other cities and areas?

Beth Miller: It’s like a series of steady drips, and then someone who can help connect all of that. We talk about joining the grass roots and the grass tops.

Supporting Commercial Corridors

Todd: How can we support for local businesses impact entire neighborhoods?

Alan Greenberger: In Philadelphia, there are dozens of neighborhood commercial corridors; some have a regional flavor, and they vary in quality. But they all grew to a size that was consistent with the higher population base fifty years ago, and as the population has decreased in most of them, the demand for the commercial activity is low, so first blocks now could be converted into three. This is something the Collaborative could help with. [of the City’s] important initiatives, to help communities understand the value of and work day, or every month. That’s how we create a vibrant, community-wide discussion.

Beth Miller: It’s an overarching vision that takes a multi-million-dollar, city planning departments generally don’t have a lot of time for reflective planning, because they’re charged with managing the regulatory process, which is the nature of those local businesses and not practical planning, because they’re charged with managing the regulatory process, which is problematic to the core but in fact can be used to support the neighborhood. For example, a community acupuncture practice in Mt. Airy has put together street-wise property. It’s about getting projects implemented. So communities understand the value of and work to implement stuff that will be transformative and is going to strike a lot of people’s feathers. It hinges on the locally owned, grass-roots creation of a neighborhood charac-

Lessons Learned

Translating Lessons Learned

Todd: We’re curious about how the model of what the Collaborative has done in Philadelphia might apply to other cities and areas. What are your thoughts about how what the Collaborative has done in Philadelphia might be applied to other cities and areas?

Beth: Those small-scale interventions are critical for organizing and preparing the community for future implementations.

A 360° View, Part I: What the Collaborative Does Well

A 360° View of the Collaborative

There are very few places in any and visionary large-scale transformations, we’ve done. At the end of ten years, let’s see what we’ve done. At the end of five years, let’s see what the city has to be in the habit of having that conversation. It has to be a conversation. It hinges on the locally owned, grass-roots creation of a neighborhood character. It has to be that kind of grass-roots, incremental approach, using Philadelphia as a laboratory to get things done and to show some capacity. There is so much to be gained by doing hundreds of small experiments—various waiting for the overarching vision that takes a multi-million-dollar, community-wide initiative.
experience has been that you have a robust design community, in terms of professionals as well as advocates, you have a high level of design excellence.

Alan Greenberger: As I’ve crossed over from teaching in architecture to teaching in planning, [I think] I love the latter, because students come to planning with a background and expertise in multiple disciplines. They intuitively know how to work together to solve a problem. As Penn when we put together teams to look after a project, we want an economics person, a transportation person, a community development person, a real estate person—all from different worlds. The results have been fabulous. Where they tend to be weak is, actually, in design.

Maurice: I share your sense that solving problems and building the natural environment, you need a cross section of disciplines. (When I managed the Mayors Institute on City Design, the teams we brought in to advise mayors represented at least six different disciplines, that went from urban design, urban planning, landscape architecture, architecture, transportation, transportation engineering, real estate development, even downtown management know-how, because problems are complex and multilayered, and each discipline brings deep knowledge.

When you overlap those, you get highly sophisticated responses. It’s not necessarily how we go about planning our cities—much of planning is about how we go about planning our cities. It’s not necessarily how we go about planning our cities. It’s just how to get these different audiences to communicate around what it is and could be; what’s possible, what’s pragmatic. Our design teams learn as much from clients as clients learn from them. There remains this perception of the developers as the bad guys, so we work with the nonprofit developers first, and next we will reach out to private-sector developers.

Maurice: You can’t do this kind of transformative work without the development community. Every urban site is without a lengthy history. When you have history, you gain an authority, because so many of the places we’re talking about have been changed and transformed over time. If you have history, you gain an authority, but also a way to talk to a broad cross section of stakeholders who have seen changes in the built environment over time, whether it’s preservation or interpretation of the place, because no urban site is without a lengthy history.

Alan: You might go into a block where the problem isn’t solely a vision for the block; it’s also that it’s not managed well, or people haven’t organized themselves to take certain initiatives that are fairly doable: to plant trees, clean up vacant lots. This is a time where, through heightened sensitivity of the design community, or integration of people from somewhat different perspectives, [the Collaborative] can provide a team that says: here are the essential things we need to do to get into this vision—raise money, build capacity, clean up the block, and so on. And there are techniques and linkages to operations that know how to do that and can help you with it.

Beth: We’ve found that, by providing service grants to nonprofits and responding to their requests, we get automatic buy-in. Sometimes they’re not quite ready for that level of engagement, but the process is a form of community organizing that gets people rallied around a cause together, and the stakeholder and the task force that are a part of our process help reinforce that. Sometimes the design professionals is the external party that everybody throws the darts at; strange bedfellows can come together on that. I see that as valuable community development.

Maurice: I’ve come to value the bottom line know-how about an idea. I like the notion of having various disciplines—especially those who can talk about the history of a place, because so many of the places we’re talking about have been changed and transformed over time. If you have history, you gain an authority, but also a way to talk to a broad cross section of stakeholders who have seen changes in the built environment over time, whether it’s preservation or interpretation of the place, because no urban site is without a lengthy history.

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The people I love the best

•••

who are not parlor generals and field deserters

but move in a common rhythm

jump into work head first

and swim off with sure strokes almost out of sight.

—Marge Piercy, from

peers across the country.

The Collaborative works to transcend not only the typical economic relationship of design services, but also the limitations of the roles that normally circumscribe participants. Through service grants that pair talented professionals with mission-driven nonprofits, the Collaborative helps all participants to examine how to break out of the typical roles of activist, politician, community member, and designer.

Jumping in Head First: Identifying and Tackling Problem Areas

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the collaborative's services. Mission-driven nonprofits are not experts in facility development. Most organizations of the type that the Collaborative serves will only undertake a single facility development or renovation project if they do so at all. Unless the dedicated staff of these organizations are so focused on the urgent tasks at hand—finding shelter for the homeless, protecting victims of domestic violence, providing literacy skills—that they seldom stop even to consider their facility needs. When the staff do consider these needs, they usually acknowledge a gross inadequacy in their existing facility but see any funds applicable for housing tax credits.

The Collaborative’s pre-screening also ensures a more

After experiencing the powerful design work of the Collaborative’s volunteers, the agency included design quality as a criterion in the Excellence in Design Initiative, a special round of funding for projects applying for housing tax credits.

Perhaps the clearest example of the Collaborative’s work in this realm of effectively engaging citizens in broader policy debates is the InfillPhiladelphia initiative. By creating speculative designs for real sites, the Collaborative engaged stakeholders in policy issues that would otherwise have seemed inaccessible to them. The conceptual designs developed for Infill Philadelphia were created through a “design challenge,” an intensive, interactive process in which volunteer design firms worked simultaneously to develop conceptual ideas for real sites selected by community-based organizations. The first phase of the initiative focused on affordable housing, and the winning volunteer-driven, speculative designs during this phase paved the way for several policy debates. A number of InfillPhiladelphia’s clients through a written application, a site visit, a client interview, and review by a selection committee (which includes architects, landscape architects, construction managers, economic development experts, real estate developers, an attorney, and representatives of the public sector). The initiative has focused on the production of InfillPhiladelphia’s pre-screening also ensures a more
Gaining the expert advice of a trained design professional can be extraordinarily valuable ... in allowing [nonprofits] to remain focused on their mission.

meaningful work for volunteers than do projects that individuals would be likely to find on their own. Designers who seek a worthy pro bono client often learn the hard (and time-consuming) way that many worthy nonprofit organizations are not ready to engage a designer. For all of the training, education, and experience that architects get in solving problems, they are not always the most adept at identifying problems—a skill that traditional architectural education has underestimated. For some thirty worthwhile nonprofit facility projects each year, the Collaborative helps fill this gap with pre-development services.

Moving Things Forward: Affecting the Profession of Architecture

Forty-three years ago, when Whitney Young, Jr. spoke before the American Institute of Architects about the rise of civil rights, and I am sure this has not come to you as any shock. You are most distinguished by your leadership role in project management activities such as team coordination, client relations, and presentations.

Moving in a Common Rhythm: Building Knowledge for Collective Impacts

To a casual observer of the Collaborative, it is not readily apparent that we tend to think of ourselves as citizens of a nation-state (because we are encouraged to be more like citizens of a nation-state). But the fact remains that within the larger profession of architecture, public- and community-centered design is still a marginalized mode of service delivery. In 1996, a seminal Carnegie Foundation report on the state of architectural education concluded that “schools of architecture could do more ... to instill in students a commitment to lives of engagement and service.”

Community design, with its focus on delivering a useful service, disproves the popular myth of heroic architects employing abstract design ideas in novel ways. In a profession that is skeptical that architects contribute anything besides elitist abstractions, community design centers present a potent countermovement of committed architects who can listen to the community and effectively communicate—with jargon—with their clients and the public at large. The Collaborative, founded in 1991, was certainly a pioneer in this arena. By providing unique professional opportunities to volunteer designers—and especially professionals early in their careers—the Collaborative normalizes pro bono design practice, making it more palatable and comprehensible to mainstream practitioners. For emerging architects committed to public service, volunteerism with the Collaborative creates an opportunity to demonstrate leadership in ways that traditional architectural practice does not.

“Having the opportunity to stand on your own two feet and see a project through early on in your career is very healthy. Young designers need to have new experiences to grow, which includes opportunities to engage directly with clients, lead projects, and present your project to great design professionals.”

—Alison Holm, Principia, Holleis, Roberts & Todd LLC

“They are forced to be more independent and entrepreneurial, learning simultaneously the professional competencies of an architectural internship—how to manage projects, with the institutional memory and resources to knit them all together. At its simplest, this suggests another role for the architect besides that of a design service provider.

We tend to think of ourselves as citizens of a nation-state (because that’s who issues our passports and processes our duty-free purchases), but we define most practices of citizenship—voting, public education, public officials, as well as providing public officials with the context and the relationships they need to work effectively to satisfy their constituents. Very few in the country would benefit from an organization that serves the role the Collaborative does in Philadelphia. Through its institutional strength, longevity, and capacity, the Collaborative brings what it has learned from a long (and successful) and some unsuccessful) projects to bear on neighborhood-, community- and city-wide discussions of policy and practice. Revealing how architects can effectively facilitate groups, projects, and design services projects, and develop real estate, the Collaborative demonstrates a more complete skill set for the architecture profession—one that should serve as a model at the national level.

A study by the Kettering Foundation shows what we would expect: public officials want better relationships with citizens, but found that citizen engagement creates delays and red tape. The same study shows that citizens feel like they have more power in the political process when they organize into groups. The Collaborative serves as an intermediary at exactly these two points of entry: in providing citizens (clients) with the tools/ language/documentation they need to communicate with and be heard by public officials, as well as providing public officials with the context and the relationships they need to work effectively to satisfy their constituents. Every city in the country would benefit from an organization that serves this role the Collaborative does in Philadelphia. Through its institutional strength, longevity, and capacity, the Collaborative brings what it has learned from a long (and successful) and some unsuccessful) projects to bear on neighborhood-, community- and city-wide discussions of policy and practice. Revealing how architects can effectively facilitate groups, projects, and design services projects, and develop real estate, the Collaborative demonstrates a more complete skill set for the architecture profession—one that should serve as a model at the national level.

1 From Erica Hines and the Network (Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. and Middlemarsh, Inc., 1982).
2 The entire 1968 Whitney Young, Jr. address to the AIA can be found at: http://library.aia.org/aiaweb/aiacontentlibrary/docs/1968_12_AIA_YOUNG_Whitney_Page_1-12.pdf.
3 Volunteer testimonials provided by the Collaborative.
4 Having the opportunity to stand on your own two feet and see a project through early on in your career is very healthy. Young designers need to have new experiences to grow, which includes opportunities to engage directly with clients, lead projects, and present your project to great design professionals.”

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“Their experience and skills are especially important to designers who are just starting out in the field. By volunteering as a part of a Collaborative project, early career professionals gain exposure to key aspects of the preliminary phase of architecture, including programming, site analysis, schematic design, construction research, and material research. They also have an opportunity to take a leadership role in project management activities such as team coordination, client relations, and presentations.

5 Volunteer testimonials provided by the Collaborative.


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Connecting design professionals to community groups and neighborhoods that might not otherwise benefit from design services has always been a key tenet of the Collaborative. This section highlights projects that have had an explicit impact on a neighborhood, brought community groups together, or could serve as prototypes for addressing broader citywide issues.
The Collaborative’s design team helped CLS envision a new building that would better serve its low-income clients in the North Philadelphia neighborhood where the center had long been a critical resource.

**Letting in the Light:**
Community Legal Services of Philadelphia

CLS was particularly vocal about its desire for offices with natural light, and in response the team created a U-shaped building footprint, which shaped the ultimate design of this project, which is under construction in 2011.

The staff needed meeting spaces where clients would have privacy to discuss confidential matters, which was also lacking in their current space. They also wanted meeting spaces that could serve the law center and the community. All of these features support CLS’s goal of expanding its client base. The plans allowed CLS to mobilize quickly to raise funds and hire a project team.

**Responding to Specific Needs**

**Location**: 1422-12 West Erie Ave. (at Broad St.), North Philadelphia

**Services completed** 2009

**Client**: Community Legal Services of Philadelphia (CLS)

**Volunteers**: Jibe Design; JxN Studio, LLC; Bittenbender Construction

**Hours donated (value)** 375 ($30,710)

**Products**

Programming study, preliminary code review, conceptual design, preliminary cost estimate

**Sustainable design features**

Daylighting, energy-efficient heating systems (photovoltaic panels, geothermal heat pumps, radiant floor heating)

**Consultant for final design**: Alan-Gibbs Schade Architects

**Built**

Construction scheduled to begin in 2011
Over the years, several churches have approached the Collaborative about doing master plans. But Mt. Airy Presbyterian Church had a unique request. It had already brought the larger community inside the church by offering space to local organizations. Now the congregation wanted to rethink its outdoor space—a large lawn facing the commercial corridor of Germantown Avenue—to engage the community even more.
The church sought to support the ambitious and successful revitalization and community reinvestment efforts already underway for this corridor by Mt. Airy USA, a nearby community development corporation. Mt. Airy USA was seeking to develop and restore storefronts and streetscapes along Germantown Avenue to reverse the blight visited upon the area in previous decades.

The resulting plan sought to carve out a piece of the lawn, used primarily as a daycare play yard, and repurpose it for a gathering space that the entire community could use. This would create a pause along the reviving corridor.

“[Since] 1997, commercial corridor activities in Mt. Airy have attracted more than $40 million in private investment, some 40 new storefront businesses, 175 new jobs, and stabilized property values.... [these] accomplishments are considered a national standard bearer for CDC-led commercial corridor revitalization.” —Mt. Airy USA website
These projects build on the premise that “good design is good business.” What started out as an individual service grant to a community development corporation grew into a series of “design days” to help neighborhood merchants improve their storefronts. Ultimately these relationships led to the Collaborative delivering a broad base of design services through an ongoing relationship with the City’s Commerce Department.

A strong strategy: Mt. Airy USA, the CDC that originated the “design day” concept, brought the Collaborative to the Germantown Avenue Commercial Corridor to consult with merchants. This coffeehouse was one example.
Talking facades: Design consultations like this one, with a Frankford Avenue Commercial Corridor merchant in 2009, support storeowners in taking the time, energy, and—sometimes—the leap of faith required to reinvest in their facades.

**REMOVE OLD WALL MOUNTED SIGN AND LIGHT FIXTURE**

**REMOVE WINDOW SECURITY GRILLES**

**NEW CONCRETE PLANTER**

**(2) NEW LIGHT FIXTURES**

**PAINT EXISTING WINDOW, FRAME, TRIM, AND INFILL PANEL**

**PERFORATED METAL, PROJECTING WALL MOUNTED SIGN**

**SIGN LETTERS MOUNTED TO METAL**

Over the past decade, the Commerce Department began working more strategically to target investment with its Storefront Improvement Program (SIP), which offers funding to business owners to invest in their buildings. At the same time, The Merchants Fund had reinvented itself as a source for grants to small businesses, including business owners looking for matching grants for storefront renovations.

**Design Days**

The collaboration had begun in 2005, with Mt. Airy USA, a Northwest Philadelphia-based community development corporation charged with improving the Germantown Avenue Commercial Corridor. The CDC recruited storeowners and paired them with architects for a one-on-one design consult. In 2006, other CDCs began referring storeowners to the Collaborative for conceptual drawings for facade improvements that addressed improvement priorities, cost, building and zoning regulations, and sidewalk appeal.

**An Evolving Role**

The Collaborative’s contract with the Lity has continued to evolve. In addition to troubleshooting with SIP grant recipients during implementation, the Collaborative now sits on the City’s SIP Design Review Team, along with members with retail and economic development expertise. The Collaborative helps to recognize successful store investment projects citywide, organizing Philadelphia’s first Citywide Storefront Challenge and a design workshop for corridor managers.

**A New Focus on Facelifts**

Over the past decade, the Commerce Department began working more strategically to target investment with its Storefront Improvement Program (SIP), which offers funding to business owners to invest in their buildings. At the same time, The Merchants Fund had reinvented itself as a source for grants to small businesses, including business owners looking for matching grants for storefront renovations.

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For cars more than kids:

Before, much of the playground was paved with asphalt and used as a parking lot.

“Greening Greenfield” transformed a “hot, noisy, and hard-surfaced” Center City schoolyard into a model green facility and outdoor classroom. The design represented the first instance of retrofitting an existing public school campus in Philadelphia. The outcome also planted seeds of change for parent- and teacher-led campus greening efforts at other public and charter schools.

Location
22nd and Chestnut Sts., Center City Philadelphia

Services completed
2009

Client
Greenfield Home and School Association (HSA)

Volunteers
Maggie Raddens

Products
Existing conditions report, conceptual design, proposed phasing, and opinion of probable cost

Consultant for final design
SMP Architects; Viridian Landscape Studio; Meliora Environmental Design, LLC

Built
2009

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Fun and practical: Four phases were devised to support the school association’s fund-raising, each one complementing Greenfield’s new environmental curriculum. Phase two involved forming mounds covered in porous rubber that absorb stormwater runoff.

Unpaving a Playground: Greenfield Home and School Association
Everyone’s involved: Greenfield students participated in the 2009 ribbon-cutting for phase one, which improved the western half of the play area.

Outside the Lines: The conceptual plan called for curving planting beds and play surfaces to bring an organic feel to this urban schoolyard.

Building Consensus

The project was entirely collaborative, including input from parents, teachers, administrators, students, and partner organizations during both predesign and design development phases. The first step for volunteer architecture and engineering firm Kling Stubbins was to convene a community task force that included students, teachers, and parents from Greenfield as well as the Center City District, the Center City Residents’ Association, the Philadelphia Water Department, and the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society.

Phasing into Green

Preliminary design was instrumental in getting the first major grant to hire a sustainable design team to develop the project. In 2009 and 2010, they added planting beds, shade trees, and rubberized play surfaces to the school yard. In spring 2011, the Greenfield HSA dedicated a “secret garden” that reclaimed what had been a dark, inaccessible, and underused corner of the grounds. Plans for the final phase are to install a green roof.

Leverage: Strengthening Neighborhoods through Design
Creating Gateways to the “The Ridge”: Roxborough Development Corporation

Ridge Avenue is an artery that covers five miles through the heart of Philadelphia’s Roxborough section, and the design challenge here was to create gateways at either end. The Roxborough Development Corporation wanted to celebrate the avenue’s central role, and to explore ideas for a public gathering space at its midpoint. The Collaborative’s team designed a whimsical yet functional solution inspired by the local landscape and public art installations.

A Leafy Solution for Two Extremes

The east end of Ridge Avenue, at Osborne Street, is narrow in scale as it rises sharply uphill, crowded by row houses and corner stores. The west end, at Domino Lane, has a diffuse series of parking lots, significant setbacks, and large utility poles. The design team adopted an ivy leaf motif and then adapted it to respond to the specific scale of the two gateway locations.

At the east end the team sought to convey a threshold, but at the west end, that same gateway structure would have been lost amid the other tall elements, so they transformed the leaf motif into a canopy overhanging bus shelters. Designs for Osborne Street were geared toward reinforcing the close-knit feel of this neighborhood, with street trees, sidewalk bump-outs, crosswalks, and urban pleasures like benches and a newsstand.
The Philadelphia City Paper described how this project transformed what had been a "killing field" and a "cage" into a place to garden at twilight—"something that, just two years ago in Cedar Park, would have been unthinkable."

Residents were eager to transform this triangular, half-acre public park near the University of Pennsylvania campus into a more attractive, safe, and engaging space that was integrated into the fabric of the neighborhood.

The site lies at the junction of a quiet residential street and the lively, pedestrian-friendly Baltimore Avenue Commercial Corridor, but the park had fallen into disrepair, and a chain link fence enclosing overgrown, hidden spaces made it a magnet for loitering, public drinking, and drug activity.

The preliminary design featured new pathways that opened up all the areas within the park and connected neighbors with Baltimore Avenue. The neighbors spearheaded other improvements, including new playground equipment, tree plantings, a mosaic, and restoring the World War I memorial at the park’s east end.
Skip Biddle, director of North Philadelphia Community Help, became one of the Collaborative’s first clients in 1991. He had acquired twenty abandoned row houses on North 11th Street, and his organization wanted to rehab them to rent to local residents. But he was faced with a dilemma: he couldn’t get funding for the renovations without first documenting the project’s scope and feasibility.

Building Trust and Building Blocks: North Philadelphia Community Help

Set in motion by design: A simple set of drawings was the first step in rehabbing an entire block of housing in North Philadelphia. The same block in the ’90s (see bottom right) was almost entirely vacant.

Skippable section

"Without funding," wrote Dan Garofalo in an early Collaborative newsletter, "[Skip] could not hire design professionals to begin any work at all." However, Skip was one of the community leaders in North Central Philadelphia to have forged relationships through AIA’s Regional/Urban Design Action Team (R/UDAT) starting in 1990—a precursor to the Collaborative. So he reached out to Emanuel Kelly, AIA, to help him overcome that initial hurdle. Dan Garofalo and Mark Keener, two intern architects involved in the newly formed Collaborative, stepped up to help.

A Process at Work

Skip presented the Collaborative with photographs of the row houses, rough dimensions, and possible interiors, and Collaborative founders Dan and Mark created pen and ink drawings of initial layouts of all the houses. These went into a proposal that Skip presented to various funding agencies—with successful results.

He was able to secure funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development, and Philadelphia’s Office of Housing and Community Development, as well as several private and foundation donors. The ribbon-cutting for the finished “Rose Garden Apartments” took place in 2000.

A Client’s Chicken-Egg Dilemma

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Location
2700 block of North 11th St. (at West Somerset St.), Hartranft neighborhood, Philadelphia

Services completed
1991

Client
North Philadelphia Community Help, Inc.

Volunteers
Dan Garofalo, AIA; Mark Keener, AIA

Hours donated (value)
15 ($1,200)

Products
Conceptual floor plans
Consulted for final design
Dan Garofalo, AIA

Architects & Planners
Built
2000
Building Political Awareness

Todd Woodward: The idea you’ve presented that “Everyone deserves good design” is a simple but important one. It seems to imply that “Everyone appreciates good design”—that it doesn’t take a design education to appreciate a good public space. From your position now, what barriers do you see to achieving that? What prevents everyone from having the design they deserve?

Alan Greenberger: Community Development Corporations (CDCs) and neighborhood groups should not shortchange their own right to decent design. It’s not just the “haves” that do the shortchanging; sometimes the “have-nots” shortchange themselves, because they just don’t believe it’s theirs to have.

Beth Miller: When we’re working primarily with nonprofit CDCs, design isn’t high on their priority list, but in the context of finding solutions for other issues, when they see it as a tool that can add value, then they are willing to invest. And that’s what we’re trying to do: build political awareness (with a small “p”), and how we build design advocacy in general. I see how organizations like the Mayors’ Institute on City Design are trying to create this bigger political awareness, and trying to understand what role community design centers play in that constellation of activities. It takes all of them, but I’d like to hear your experience, Maurice, at the National Endowment for the Arts, and Alan, your experience in Philadelphia.

Alan: This idea that design creates value is an important premise. People often forget—or are willing to discount—the power of design in their physical environment to create value. With products, this power is evident all the time. For a lot of companies, design has saved their necks. Two noteworthy examples are the VW Beetle, or the iMac. Apple is thought of as the leading design company in the world of computers. Everyone who works in computers recognizes that it is high-quality design.

Todd: Working with nonprofits as our clients—either as a Collaborative volunteer, or as an architect in the private industry—I see that they don’t want to put money into their facility; they want all of it to go to their mission. They don’t realize that how they inhabit their own facility says a lot about their mission and could even enhance their mission.

Alan: At the same time, designers have to know when to step back.

Beth: No “Mighty Mouse” architecture. We’re not here to save the day.

Maurice Cox: There is a challenge when you talk about good design of environments, versus design of products. People interface with gadgets every day and they know what amenities make them superior products. When it comes to environments, people sensitively know what a comfortable or acceptable environment looks and feels like: a pedestrian scale, things visually attract them, they walk down the street, sidewalks that are not obstacle courses, places that seem to be dominated by pedestrians over cars. All of that sounds like a downtown more than their neighborhoods. People place a lot of value in the quality of neighborhoods. As goes the downtown, so goes the city, and (rightfully) a lot of cities focus on their downtowns. But if you can talk about quality of life in people’s neighborhoods, you can grab them where they live.

Beth: On their front stoop.
I remember trying to create small when it's about a neighborhood. It's a wonderful thing to have people talking about what their neighborhoods are synonymous with quality of life. It's a downtown, you're dealing with a scale of development, because this is not a conversation that is exclusive to downtown, it might be a process of maturing, that's when you realize that—come to a community anchors, and you realize—came to me recently and showed me a stack of what he's done: ones, twos, and fours. I cringed at the design of some of them, but it's tree-covered, decades old or centuries old, versus what you see in an impoverished neighborhood. It's a pleasant and more agreeable experience for people to walk and feel more responsive to the street, he ups the critical mass to make work a business that operates on incredibly tight margins—let alone to get it built.

Tackling Problems as Designers

Task: How have your experiences as educators and in practice—influenced your other roles, in government and elsewhere?

Maurice: Part of the power of learning is that you run smack into the regulatory process; an idea might be a pedestrian-oriented anchoring corridor. So we came to a community

Maurice: I like to use my discipline base to challenge lawyers. To the extent that the developers and as architects—both as

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Design versus Implementation

Task: What’s the biggest challenge in bringing projects to fruition?

Alan: The biggest barrier to achieving good design—especially projects that are ambitious in terms of trying to weigh all of the issues in front of planning, it’s rare that it’s economic, political will, and the organizational ability of the sponsor of the project. And no matter how well it starts to align to make something happen.

In my new role

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In my new role

I’m interested in asking about the neighborhood. When you talk about that, you see them giving greater value to design quality. And it might be a process of maturing, because this is not a conversation that is exclusive to downtown, you’re dealing with a scale of development, with enormous economic interests, and very complex dynamics. With residential areas, it’s a matter of blocks, residents, community facilities, walkability—all those things are economic, political and finacial, it’s a wonderful thing to have people talking about the places that they care about. I’ve found it’s easier to be around neighborhood residents—about quality of life, about design—when it’s about a neighborhood.

Approaches to Infill Housing

Task: How has being an architect or designer influenced how you tackle housing problems?

Maurice: I remember trying to create small opportunities for local contractors to do infill housing in the city of Charlottesville, VA. One of my favorite examples, which has been a lot more of [Philadelphia] than you might realize—came to me recently and showed me a stack of what he’s done: ones, twos, and fours. I cringed at the design of some of them, but others were getting better. This happens in neighborhoods that have bottomed out, but one reason or another, the market has proven worthy: Kensington, Fishtown, Point Breeze. These are “vital neighborhoods.”

Alan: Some neighborhoods grudgingly go along, and some fight it tooth and nail because it looks as if, or because there is some turbulence that is confusing the way that work is being done. In my new role I’m interested in asking about the neighborhood. When you talk about that, you see them giving greater value to design quality. And it might be a process of maturing, because this is not a conversation that is exclusive to downtown, you’re dealing with a scale of development, with enormous economic interests, and very complex dynamics. With residential areas, it’s a matter of blocks, residents, community facilities, walkability—all those things are economic, political and financial, it’s a wonderful thing to have people talking about the places that they care about. I’ve found it’s easier to be around neighborhood residents—about quality of life, about design—when it’s about a neighborhood.

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for it. This is extremely hard—particularly in a difficult economic environment. And it is not solely a question of where the money is, although that's a big part of it. It's also a question of who is the sponsor, where is the willpower, who has organized a community’s general support and participation, who is assuming the ongoing maintenance costs, and who is assuming the liabilities in an ongoing way. These are huge issues, and typically they don't have natural answers.

One of the criticisms leveled at design is that good design is relatively easy to envision, and almost impossible to implement—the implementation is where the real heroics are. There’s a fair amount of truth to that. However, it’s not fair to separate quality design, as if it exists solely as a series of ideas on paper. Ultimately, quality design manifests itself through the implementation process, and ideally it survives the implementation process, so that what you get in the end is actually a good thing, with a method to care for it. That takes a lot of hard work, because it requires people to step back from an idealized design future and make compromises.

Actually I see it as a more dynamic, integrated process, in which good design emerges in the context of an implementation strategy. And that’s a reality, by itself. Architects, planners, and designers tend to see it as compromise of a vision, and there are times when it is. But the weakness of that statement is the premise going in—that idealized design absent implementation … has an essential truth to it, and if it can’t [be implemented], then it doesn’t have that essential truth. Idealized design is just that. It’s aspirational; it’s a wish list. People shouldn’t think [of it as] compromising; they should see it as refining and perfecting [the product]—getting to the point where they can live with it and experience the benefit that comes from it. It’s about what the Collaborative and AIA and the Design Advocacy Group have been saying forever: Design needs to be on the table. It’s not on the table, it will get cut, because money generally will win out.

If it’s on the table, it gets perfected and refined and made into what it can and should be—possibly not to everyone’s liking. You win some and lose some, [but] winning some and losing some in the big city is okay. It’s like the baseball season: 162 games, and no one wins more than 105. You don’t go out and win every time.

Beth: I like what you said about how good design emerges as part of an implementation strategy. That’s a part of what the Collaborative pushes for: that design is part of a process to improve neighborhoods and strengthen them. Good design without implementation, is it really good design? How do you make it work in reality?

Alan: It may be good theoretical design.

Beth: But we want to be pragmatic.

Alan: There’s nothing wrong with theory, with being aspirational. There’s nothing wrong with showing people the best you have to offer. But people should take it for what it’s worth: it’s idealized, a vision without the means to realize it. Yet. Obviously this varies with the sponsors and what financial position they are in to [realize a project].

At the level of planning—and (I know the) Collaborative engages in a great deal of planning, both at the architectural level and mini urban scale—one of the objectives is to put a set of ideas in people’s heads. This is part of the process of building a collective will, (to help them realize): “This is important; I can kind of taste it. Some folks have shown us how it might pan out, and this is what we want.” In a world that’s like going to a supermarket—a tidal wave of possibility, too many choices, possibilities, things to get done—and you can’t get them all done, so you have to pick. The way you pick is by picking winners, [a project] where there is some collective will to do something. Those are the ones that get done. Anyone interested in getting things done wants to gravitate to that. Planning is a way to organize will—and ultimately money—to implement projects, based on a premise of how people might live better.

1 An architecture/development firm in Philadelphia. www.onionflats.com
2 Philadelphia Housing Finance Agency.
3 See http://postgreen.com and http://hybridconstruct.com
4 Mr. Greenberger is Deputy Mayor for Communities and Economic Development and Executive Director of the Philadelphia City Planning Commission.
A FEW YEARS AGO, I was struck that a famous architect began a lecture of Carpenters Hall in Philadelphia with the claim: “I don’t build, because I am an artist.” The key to keeping that mantra from slipping into off-flode, while remaining in to couple it, is when possible, with an authen-
tic readiness to build. That creative tension—between
demanding design and satisfactory structure—has been
the sweet space the Community Design Collaborative
has occupied for twenty years. At its best, ready-to-build collaboration creates so much value that construction
can be either the icing on the cake; it rarely doesn’t matter. I am grateful for the chance to celebrate the twentieth
anniversary by raising three issues provoked by the past
and future of the Collaborative. First, software companies
speak of “fragmentation” as one consequence of rapid
innovation. For example, there are four or five versions of Google’s relatively new and rapidly evolving Android
operating system. To make it difficult for other actors (e.g., consumers, app developers) to find a stable platform
on which to learn, invest, and operate. I adopt this concept
of Google’s relatively new and rapidly evolving Android
system, making it difficult for other actors (e.g., consumers, app developers) to find a stable platform
on which to learn, invest, and operate. I adopt this concept
of fragmentation to consider the many productive organi-
izations that work on community design in Philadelphia.
That is, in this case, fragmentation is not a bad thing; rather, it is a consequence of a good thing: rapid innova-
tion within this issue network. The challenge for funders
and policymakers is how to balance innovation and stability.
And the challenge for innovators like the Collaborative
is to keep that manifesto from slipping into effete, elite
denial and close up shop? A challenge for any organization
facing a twentieth anniversary is determining whether to
transform the status quo in a way that makes it obsolete or
redefine its substance as technically quite different from
the typical Collaborative project. The common ground
lies in the attempt to make responsible choices in the present to improve outcomes in the future.
I suggested that fragmentation may be so fundamental to design thinking that designers
may underappreciate its impact on the general public. But it is hard to imagine a more confusing community expectations from the transactional
mode of the 1990s and early 2000s to the visionary mode of Greenworks,
the Civic Vision for the Central Delaware, and Philadelphia2035 without
the cultivation of design thinking by the Collaborative, DAG, and others.
In some of those vibrators, the Collaborative is learning to
draw on the available alternative futures in neighborhoods and among communi-
ties that might otherwise have been thought too stressed, too poor, too elite—too whatever—-to move beyond transactions to transactions
Stress can indeed drain the resources needed to make an intentional choice
from among alternative futures that have been empowered by expertise. For twenty years, the Collaborative has helped
funders or decision makers, but for the innovators themselves, fragmenta-
tion is about the need to stand out in a crowd, and neither consolidation
nor confederation necessarily makes that easier. The Collaborative’s twenty years of practice immunize it from the risks
(i.e., innovations) of either consolidation or confederation. Who else combines the advantages of being disciplined by the realities of single projects with the advantages of being about different projects every year? Who else speaks to the most powerful elements of Philadelphia design and policy community while always making a place in that conversation for those
otherwise absent? Who else brings the most politically scalable element—
community while always making a place in that conversation for those
otherwise absent? Who else brings the most politically scalable element—
ordinary people and their advocates—-into the process of designing better
buildings under real conditions? The best way to respond to fragmentation
is to make yourself indispensible.

I suggested that fragmentation is a complicating consequence of lively
innovation, as Philadelphia has witnessed in design in the past five years.
Foundations and others have observed that, as choices proliferate, funders
and decision makers face so many options that the sheer number of potential
grantries, advisors, and worthy causes no longer seems to bring
under the world. One solution to fragmentation is consolidation, in which
the strongest features of previous versions are all gathered in a
single (presumably, but not always, the latest) version. Another solution is
collaboration, in which the collaborators network their strengths. These
are solutions for those who need to balance innovation with stability, like
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nor confederation necessarily makes that easier.
Mayor Nutter’s repeated promise and continuing efforts to restore the authority of planning and design in the City have probably encouraged and certainly cultivated this innovation.

Brilliant ideas are often conceived as second-best solutions. In fact, it is usually easier to dream up the kind of textbook or first-best solutions that require a “magic wand” of assumptions and “if-only” than it is to develop solutions that ensue certain realities and work around them. Good design, especially as it creates outcomes with increased site or neighborhood benefits or more efficient use of resources, is a competing public interest that warrants resources and regulation. And this is especially true when the ability to pay means that access to good design is unevenly distributed in Philadelphia—and everywhere else. But, every project requires a magic wand, and certainly did affect what the Collaborative does? These questions and work around them. Good design, especially as for the foreseeable future, that first-best solution of the Collaborative has changed the game. My answer is yes, but maybe the Collaborative hasn't changed it is to devise solutions that accept certain realities of buildings, but these technologies face a number of obstacles that prevent them from being widely adopted in the regional marketplace. So GPIC is designed to demonstrate and deploy energy efficiency in buildings using partnerships, information, training, and regulations that support technology in the market. This is true of, with enough demonstration and deployment, the market will accept and widely adopt increased energy efficiency in this region and beyond. This is a model that plans for GUP, to go out of business because of the transformation it effects. We could think of the Collaborative as playing a similar role: teaching the city and region about the value of good design. For large parts of Philadelphia, it is hard to imagine sustaining that interest in order to produce more well-designed projects. The Collaborative is also about the considerably more ambitious work of collective action. No amount of deployment will ever ensure that private developers will create enough design value in the commons shared by all who benefit from good design. And no amount of demonstration will ever ensure that every community can afford to pay for good design, even when every community wants it.

In other words, the Collaborative isn’t just trying to create clients for good design, because even if everyone in Philadelphia had part of a Collaborative project, it still wouldn’t be enough to transform the status quo. The real game the Collaborative is changing is in trying to create constituencies for good design. And it is not a game where the outside can get elected to reform the inside and then go home. As Lincoln Steffens noted a little over a hundred years ago, Philadelphians have a fondness for reform because they have such a difficulty for governing. They want to fix things and go home. But the real challenge is continuous good governance. And on our issues, that takes a permanent constituency for good design. And no amount of demonstration will ever ensure that.

managed by the Philadelphia City Planning Commission starting in 2010, this is the city’s first comprehensive strategic plan in 50 years. http://www.phila2035.org

In 2009 Mayor Nutter’s Office of Sustainability created Greenworks Philadelphia, an ambitious plan that targets sustainability across energy, environment, economy, equity and engagement, as part of an effort to make Philadelphia a 2035 greenest city in America. http://www.phila.gov/green/greenworks

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Only the Community Design Collaborative has the leverage—the position to act effectively—to create and sustain these constituencies among much of the City. The Collaborative’s legacy shows that collaboration can be as good as construction, when that collaboration is designed by an authentic readiness to build, if possible. This story is one worth talking about at Carpenter’s Hall.
The Collaborative’s volunteers are all designers, of one kind or another, and all want to use their skills to improve our city. The Collaborative strives to provide design expertise to underserved neighborhoods at a level of quality that was previously unprecedented for community design projects. Many of the projects over the last twenty years exemplify design excellence and represent thoughtful and beautiful expressions of civic design.
The challenge here was to reuse a site that was essentially a crowded old factory complex in a neighborhood of row houses that were interspersed with factories and workshops. A “fine-tuned demolition” opened up all sorts of possibilities, including a mixed-use community that combines 34 units of affordable housing and 45 studios of artisan workspace, as well as a landscaped ramp leading from an “industrial garden” at ground level to the rooftop garden for residents.
Filling in: Oxford Street was one of several old industrial sites the Collaborative targeted for an initiative called Infill Philadelphia, created to help urban communities rethink the use of older spaces and re-envision their neighborhoods.

A Philly/New York Partnership

This development project with WCRP was one of the first in Philadelphia for New York-based GMDC, which has rehabilitated several Brooklyn manufacturing buildings for occupancy by small manufacturers, artisans, and artists. The two community development organizations share a mission of creating affordable housing and jobs within a community.

Carving Out a Courtyard

Through what they termed “selective subtraction,” the architects shaved away eight percent of the factory structures. While the current site’s six disparate buildings (see below) are clustered close together, the design carved out space for a courtyard to bring natural light into building interiors and create a landscaped ramp that spirals up through the courtyard, connecting floors, studios, and housing. The design uses the character of the existing buildings and sites to create a progression of views and spatial experiences.

Leverage: Strengthening Neighborhoods through Design
A family-owned business that was ripe for reinvention was paired with a fluid but respectful design. The results reflected renewed prospects for neighborhood commercial corridors like this one in West Philadelphia’s Saunders Park.

The New Angle Lounge—a neighborhood pub—was one of several commercial corridor sites designers reconceived through the Collaborative’s Infill Philadelphia initiative, created to help urban communities proactively rethink the use of older spaces, in order to re-envision their neighborhoods. People’s Emergency Center (PEC), a community development and social services agency based nearby, thought the New Angle Lounge and its owner, LaTonya Furman, would be a good match for Infill Philadelphia. The new design presents the building as a lively, engaging gateway to the Lancaster Avenue commercial corridor.

Designing a New Angle

The predesign approach combined the first floors of three adjacent buildings to create a larger, more flexible floor plate that was large enough to accommodate a full-service restaurant—an amenity that is rare but extremely desirable on developing commercial corridors like this one. The triangular site was the inspiration for “Trilogy,” a combined jazz club and restaurant that would populate the space during the day and into the evening.

The design team sought to take advantage of the flexibility afforded by the first-floor space, which—unlike the other floors—had already been modernized but was almost completely sealed up. Predesign devised a strategy to reanimate this space with large windows opening onto the sidewalk. The challenge was to make these elements work together with preservation efforts on the upper floors, given the need to respect the historic urban fabric of Lancaster Avenue. The solution was a sculptural canopy that would wrap around the building, providing cover for outside seating, while contrasting the finely detailed bays and cornices that would be restored on the building’s upper stories.

A Commercial Infill

The New Angle Lounge—like its original namesake—had much to offer. Like the 1890s tavern that was in this location, the 2007 New Angle Lounge—designed by CICADA Architecture/Planning, Inc., for the People’s Emergency Center (PEC) and volunteers from LISC Philadelphia—has been a landmark for neighborhood residents.

Commissioned to create the new design for the New Angle Lounge, CICADA Architecture/Planning, Inc., worked to recreate the original space of the restaurant with a fluid but respectful design. The results reflected renewed prospects for neighborhood commercial corridors like this one in West Philadelphia’s Saunders Park.

Creating a Landmark:
The “New Angle Lounge” as “Trilogy”
School as Beacon: Byron Story Foundation

Juanita Story-Jones is a shining example of a Collaborative client who is passionately absorbed by a mission of service, but also attuned to the power of symbols—and of architecture—for a community. Moving the foundation she’d started in her son’s honor into a newly designed space struck her as a chance to transform her vision for this alternative school into (literally) a “beacon of light” for the neighborhood. The Collaborative was more than happy to help.

“The building’s architectural expression was inspired by a simple question: ‘If this building were a store, what would it be selling?’ The answer came back almost immediately: ‘Hope.’” —Bill Becker, AIA, leader of volunteer design team
In the wake of losing her son Byron to handgun violence in 2002, Ms. Story-Jones decided to honor his memory in an exceptional way: by reaching out to help the young people who were most at risk for falling victim to (and perpetrating) this same violence. Soon after, she created the Byron Story Foundation (BSF), an alternative education center that provides “wraparound” services to at-risk youth, through a contract with the School District of Philadelphia.

Four years later, BSF staff struggled to do justice to its ambitious list of activities—teaching, tutoring, counseling, and special events—within the 1,700-foot space on the first floor of an aging Francisville row house. When a larger vacant space became available on the same block, the foundation saw an opportunity to expand in order to offer more services to more young people.

**Manifesting a Mother’s Vision**

Juanita Story-Jones is not only an exceptional person—given her determination and commitment to helping kids who had been truant or dropped out of the public school system. She also had a unique ability to interpret her vision through collaboration with the design team. The dramatic and contemporary result was a design that successfully interpreted Ms. Story-Jones’s goal for the building, including a fascinating yet approachable facade.

**Honoring a Legacy**

This project has a story that the one红色的一家餐馆, and story from Juanita Story-Jones

—Jessica Brams-Miller, a design team member

A personal investment: “Every project has a story but this one really hit home. Juanita Story-Jones stood up, took charge, and said ‘This isn’t going to happen anymore on my watch’.”

—Jessica Brams-Miller, a design team member

Leverage: Strengthening Neighborhoods through Design
Pushing the Envelope: APM’s Affordable Infill Housing at Sheridan Street

Over the past decade, the community design corporation Asociación Puertorriqueños en Marcha (APM) has created hundreds of affordable housing units in its neighborhood, on the fringes of Temple University to the west, and Northern Liberties to the south. In 2005 they sought to diversify how they developed housing in this transforming area and brought the Collaborative on board.

Mix and match: Individual units can be customized by swapping living and sleeping spaces, creating two-story loft spaces, or converting an upper bedroom into a terrace, but none of these would affect the building footprint.

Modern options: Pradera I and II are twin homes, and APM wanted to offer residents a sustainable option for affordable housing, while also creating a more contemporary vibe and building that fit the modest site.

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The project—one of three focused on affordable infill housing for older urban neighborhoods—was part of a larger initiative by NeighborhoodsNow on how to address obsolete housing and block configurations. The goal was to come up with new home and street design prototypes that fit in, but offered something new.

To encourage innovative solutions and spur a conversation between design experts and leaders in community development, the Collaborative sponsored the Design Challenge, in which three design teams developed and presented to a jury options for affordable infill housing that reflected each neighborhood’s unique context, site, and market.

The three design “problems” posed through a Design Challenge led to three innovative approaches to affordable housing, to serve as models for neighborhoods facing similar scenarios. Most important, the results were exciting designs that organizations like APM could achieve within the parameters of affordable housing, and offered a number of sustainable elements.

Breakthroughs at Berks and Sheridan

The project encompassed one strip of vacant land on Sheridan Street and another small parcel around the corner on Berks Street. Sheridan Street presented a particular design challenge because it was only 40 feet deep—too narrow for conventional housing redevelopment—and wedged behind Pradera, new twin homes with yards that APM developed recently.

The design team created a relatively simple prototype that was based loosely on the dimensions of the typical Philadelphia row house (roughly 16’ x 40’), but emphasized daylight and flexibility—and offered the possibility of prefabricated construction. A palette of environmentally friendly materials was used on each facade relative to its solar exposure and interior layout.

Creative Challenge

“"This design challenge shows that infill housing design in Philadelphia needs to be approached in a more serious way, and it can be.” —Lisa Armstrong, juror

What Philadelphia does well:
The concept of the Sheridan Street design prototype garnered national attention and a partnership with Postgreen that led to inexpensive houses suited to row house neighborhoods.
Back in 2004, when Mt. Tabor Community Education and Economic Development Corporation (CEED) approached the Collaborative for conceptual design services, an urban Cyber Village for seniors was a cutting-edge concept. Reverends Mary Lou Moore and Martha Lang had worked for five years to acquire the vacant lot adjacent to Mt. Tabor African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, and they then fought to gain control of the lot from drug dealers and prostitutes. The ministers had a vision for a colorful, tech-savvy, and engaged senior community, but they needed the Collaborative to make a giant leap forward.
A gracious welcome:
Mt. Tabor Cyber Village has a first-floor community room large enough for the entire population to gather, an outdoor patio, a community garden, and a 14,000-square-foot green roof—all of which inspire this diverse, thriving community to come together in new ways.

"Mt. Tabor asked us from the beginning of the project to really work on developing community—in the neighborhood, with the church, and for the residents."
—Brian Szymanki, AIA

Envisioning Possibilities

Inspired by the ministers’ passion and tenacity, the Collaborative did preliminary design work to prove that Mt. Tabor CEED could build enough units on the lot to make the project feasible. The design team also showed how the senior housing complex could feel welcoming, blend into the neighborhood, and serve a new generation of actively engaged seniors.

The conceptual design for the multi-story building consisted of two residential wings, joined by common rooms and a lobby at the main entrance. Much of the first floor—the café, computer center, fitness center, and community room—is also available for neighborhood use. Open-air lounges on each floor draw residents together, and outdoor gathering spaces and a greenway link the Cyber Village to Mt. Tabor AME Church and adjacent streets.

Creating Success

The strong preliminary design enabled Mt. Tabor CEED to maintain the integrity of its vision, despite a tight project timeline and budget. Mt. Tabor CEED hired bwa architecture + planning to join the development team, develop the project further, and apply for funding. They ultimately obtained affordable housing tax credits, and residents moved into the new space in 2009.

The Community Design Collaborative’s products are intended to provide visual concepts and to assist in project design and planning. All drawings are limited to conceptual design and are neither intended nor may be used for construction. Neither the Community Design Collaborative nor the project volunteers assume responsibility or liability for the technical accuracy of drawings or for any unauthorized use.

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Project number
Date
Scale

Cyber Village Senior Housing for Mt. Tabor CEED
973-1003 N. 7TH ST.
Philadelphia, PA 19123

2004-31
5/27/05
1/32”=1’-0’

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When Habitat for Humanity approached the Collaborative about developing green affordable housing for a vacant lot in this East Parkside neighborhood, design aesthetics were the issue, and skilled community engagement was the solution.
This East Parkside neighborhood had been disappointed with the results of two affordable housing units Habitat had constructed there in 2002, given that they did not suit the historic character of the neighborhood. So the humanitarian organization reached out to the Collaborative for help in building consensus for their next set of houses there. The Collaborative facilitated dialogue with the East Parkside Residents Association (EPRA) to get their feedback on—and buy-in for—the design options this time around.

Finding an Attractive Compromise
Habitat generally relies on simple designs that its volunteer construction crews can build easily. With this new housing, the organization needed to go beyond their standard unit—two-story frame twin homes with aluminum siding and sloped roofs—and devise a solution that integrated feedback from the community as well as practical building considerations.

Assembling a Green Team
The firm of Wallace Roberts & Todd (WRT) recruited volunteers from its staff and teamed up with the Philadelphia nonprofit Energy Coordinating Agency (ECA) to incorporate sustainable design elements into the project, so that the homes would be energy-efficient and have low maintenance costs for their residents. The Collaborative provided a service grant to help Habitat develop its first affordable green housing project, and WRT continued its relationship with Habitat as a consultant, providing the final design and construction documentation and management.

Bridging Gaps, Facilitating Relationships
Building the future: During a volunteer work day, architect Maarten Pesch explains the green features of the Stiles Street housing to a future owner/resident.

Design continuity: The new housing carries on the rhythm of the porches of the older homes on the block.
Creating a Neighborhood Anchor: Simons Recreation Center

This is a story of a recreation center at the heart of a neighborhood that was in turnaround mode: West Oak Lane. “Simons Rec” was bursting at the seams with use by residents, for programs that were helping to rebuild the community. But, with an ice rink dating from 1948 and a main building from the 1970s, they needed a design plan that was also forward thinking.
By the early 1990s, a decade of effort to revitalize this working-class, predominantly African-American community was bearing fruit. As a result, the Simons Rec advisory board needed a project proposal showing how they sought to grow to make a strong case for funding. And they did, raising $2.1 million in state funding, with the help of State Rep. Dwight Evans. They hired the firm of Studio Agoos Lovera for the final design, which was completed in 2000.

The Collaborative’s proposal focused on massing more than design: how much space was needed for specific activities and where to expand. The predesign process helped the advisory board to collaborate with residents to create a vision for an infrastructure that aligned with the future needs of the community. The people of West Oak Lane came together as well—in active resistance to the breakdown of community that all-too-often depletes city neighborhoods like this one.

Making it work: Amid a climate of budget cutbacks, an essential aspect of the project’s success was the involvement of the City’s Department of Parks and Recreation. Then-commissioner Mike DiBerardinis was particularly focused on improving neighborhood rec centers like this one, and helped to issue the request for proposals (RFP) for Simons. Findings from the Collaborative’s study were included in the RFP to convey the project scope and the advisory council’s input.

“West Oak Lane is a key neighborhood to preserve and develop. There are good, strong, workingclass people moving into the neighborhood and living there. These are people we want to keep in the city. We compete with the suburbs for them. Neighborhoods like Ogontz are a barometer of how the city is doing.”

—Jeremy Novak, Delaware Valley Community Reinvestment Fund

(quoted in the Philadelphia Inquirer, September 15, 1996)
The Project-Formation Business

Todd Woodward: How can the Collaborative ensure that the work we do means something? With some of the projects, we wonder whether they will go anywhere. Education matters to us, but as volunteers, we also want to make a difference. Are there ways the organization can do more of this?

Alan Greenberger: The Collaborative can... perfect what it does pretty well already. Be selective about the projects you take on. It can afford to up its scale. The Collaborative should always do architectural projects on behalf of people who have buildings and an idea, but there's opportunity to pursue some of the different areas you have started to veer into, such as filling in gaps one block at a time, handling larger sites. The Collaborative has a role to play in being smart about which projects you do, with the specific intent of forming the collective will that enables good things to happen.

Alan Greenberger: The Collaborative... can do more of this?

Maurice Cox: There are very few places where those who are interested in advancing an idea for a project can go—other than the regulatory public process—to come to some kind of a shared vision with community stakeholders. It's an enormous burden on the City—on City staff or a department—to go out and create public will, or be the broker between the development interest and the community interest.

Making Cities the Client

Todd: Alan said earlier that the Collaborative might broaden the scale of what it takes on, and we've also talked about taking on smaller projects. If you both had a crystal ball, what advice would you offer? What will be the key issues the Collaborative might tackle?

Alan: There's an opportunity for the Collaborative to think of the City as a client from time to time. You've always relied on projects coming from grass roots, and that will always be the core of what you do. But think of it the other way around. What if I said you could organize a highly motivated group of volunteers to look at a problem that we have and that we in City government don't have the staff to do? I could unload a list of...
Beth Miller: Maurice: Of course there was. crossed all neighborhoods. Rather than a cates in facilitating discussions around a wide community design center that process of “What happens when one neighborhood of, “What happens when one neighborhood then [looked] to see whether there was any to be on that team? One of the better City Council members was overheard criticizing me—not to me, of course—saying, “Well, Alan’s a nice guy, but he’s an architect, he’s not a deal guy.” Meanwhile, I’m thinking, “Yeah, but deals are getting done. How do you think they are happening?” It’s not necessarily by me being a big hero, but I have a team of people who are all part of a network of how these things happen; it’s not the classic quarterback method, but they are getting done. Maurice: How do you think Mayor Nutter’s year as a Rose Fellow has changed how he understands the power of what your office is able to do? Alan: I have nothing but good things to say about his year with the Rose Fellows. Not only did they actually do, but they allowed us to do the planning that you were talking about. It was a moment of opportunity for the next administration[ you will have another mayor who will be just as interested in design issues, or that Alan will remain in his position for the next 20 years. You can’t count on any of that, so if [brought to it] the sense of urgency there is now that allows us to start saying, “North Broad Street,” which was our Rose topic. He asks the investor, “What are you doing for the next two hours? Let’s drive up and down the street.” Maurice: Alan: And you could probably talk about it with incredible insight and in a very persuasive way, and that’s really what it’s all about—the extraordinary capacity of our political leaders to do. One of the things that I hope that the Collaborative does build on is the fact that you have a design advocate in City Hall who understands the value of what you do—and potentially would entertain a proposal from you that, two years ago, maybe he would not. Beth: I think Maurice is making the ask for me, Alan! Maurice: You know that these [opportunities] are being missed, that there are things that align—and it’s really hard to remember that [those opportunities] are not going to take place. You feel an obligation to the people to exploit it to get something done. I’m speaking metaphorically of what we did here in Charleston, [when I] realized there was a moment in time—and a series of people—when things got done quickly. In fact, in prior moments could truly be over, to the extent that we can institutionalize certain good practices, that’s a big gift to the future. And to the extent we can, we can better [accomplish] something in those years.

Institutionalizing Good Design

Todd: How do you see the Collaborative’s role evolving? Maurice: One of the things that you all are able to do is [in Philadelphia]—because of your size and [the fact that] you have enough public commissions that you can do good—is begin to understand the phenomenon of how you proffer good design.
you can create requests for qualifications and you can legally create a pool of people prequalified to do the commission, so the public can set the bar. But the real challenge is how to get the private sector to push design as a value to [factor into] their equation in those projects. Just like we have affordable housing profilers, and all kinds of open space profilers, one wonders whether you could have a “good design” profiler, where people who are developing contribute to a pot that could be used in innovative ways to raise the bar in design excellence in the private sector.

Beth: You’d have to define “design excellence.”

Alan: I think how to institutionalize that is what I’m really not clear about. On a day-to-day basis [in Philadelphia], it happens to a large degree because there’s a small cadre of people who just keep talking about it. It’s interesting—it does embed itself in places where you would not otherwise expect it. My colleagues and some of the other deputy mayors keep hammering at it.

The other nice thing that’s happening—at least in the private sector—is that the demand side is going up. So, where it shows up most noticeably is in buildings designed to high-quality standards, where one developer in town says, “I’m never building another building otherwise.” It’s even showing up now in industrial buildings that they do, because other developers see that and think about it.

Beth: Raising the bar.

Maurice: Alan, at some point I’d love to see how to get the private sector that the mayor may have on his agenda—I think those are always the best—or things that are coming up in the private sector. Alan knows the community will need to have a really robust conversation about design, so he reaches out to the Collaborative and says, “Can you set the stage for this conversation?” Whether it’s this particular area or a particular building, it’s part of creating a culture.

As much as I try to institutionalize good design, in the end I’ve found that the best institution you can create is a constant stream of high-quality designers who are in positions of confidence with people who make decisions. I’m not sure what planning boards or design review boards help the planning office, but make sure that you have the high-quality design professionals volunteering to serve on those boards and commissions. Or ensuring that there is an easy pipeline between the schools of architecture and their leadership, and the kind of council that works with the planning office and City Hall to break down the silos that tend to exist between those different organizations. In Philadelphia the leadership of some of the universities have had really good participation. But again—it’s about getting designers who have really strong and thoughtful reflections on the city in the company of political leaders and decision makers, so that this conversation about design can flow from that.

Alan: Beth is our most recent planning commissioner. She’s one of nine. Six are appointments by the mayor, and three are appointments from finance, the managing director, and the commerce department, who all have reserved seats.

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THE CALL TO CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN DESIGN, once revolutionary, has developed in myriad interesting ways since it was first articulated in the 1960s. This foundation of the community design movement has expanded as the agency of the design professions. Designers have realized thousands of projects such as the Community Design Collaborative, undertaken by engaging the members of a community in an empowering discursive method of design. These new community design actions are emerging in reactive, proactive, and transactive ways, each of which has a role to play in the evolving political, cultural, and physical landscapes.

This Moment in Design Activism

A new wave of political and spatial issues is cresting, and new practices in social design are taking shape in response. Globalization of capital is accelerating disinvestment in local economies, undermining communal structures, and leaving less and less available to newly populated neighborhoods. Environmental degradation generates epidemics of health problems and threatens food security, especially at the margins of our society, making food security a pressing political issue. Environmental degradation generates epidemic health problems and underscores the need to act on urgent social issues. The local AIA committee worked for months on the ground with the community in Caracas, and now Alan Greenberger in Philadelphia has developed one of the first of these centers, the Architect’s Workshop, in 1968. Advocates formed centers in Baltimore, New York, Cincinnati, and other cities in the U.S. as well as in Europe and the U.K., providing design and planning services to newly emerging community development corporations. Recalibrating power relations, these nongovernmental intermediaries formed the core base for much of the early community design work. The Philadelphia chapter of the Institute of Architects (I.A.I) established one of the first of these centers, the Architect’s Workshop, in 1968. In operation for more than 40 years, the Workshop offered the pro bono services of AIA members to neighborhood organizations in Philadelphia, and as such it was very much the forerunner of the Collaborative.

In the late 1960’s advocacy for downstate communities took political center stage in public design discourse. It was a tumultuous time steeped in adversarial rhetoric. With clearly demarcated lines of resistance and incantations of “power to the people,” the early advocacy planners were militantly active, using their agency to combat the well-funded threat of political apathy and corporate actions as the decades of with much acuity, the community design movement kept a relatively low profile. As the political landscape of the design professions took a turn in the 1980’s, funding to cities was drastically reduced. Community advocacy had lost its bully pulpit, and a socially progressive agenda was relegated to the margins of our design culture. A period of speculation in both theory and practice opened an ethos of sociopolitical action through design, and widespread apathy toward those living in poverty took hold.

In 1984 look The Scope of Social Architecture, Richard Hatch cites Alex Tzonis and Liane Lefaivre’s blistering critique of the then-current professions: "The profession has become a mirror of the nation's neglect of the urban poor, its willingness to accept and ignore the reality of the urban poverty, violent crime, race-based geographic disparity, and lack of access to affordable housing. Once a mirror of the nation's neglect of the urban poor, its willingness to accept and ignore the reality of the urban poverty, violent crime, race-based geographic disparity, and lack of access to affordable housing.

The foundational of the Collaborative in 1991 anticipated a resurgence of social activism in the design professions. Many of the issues that were prominent in previous years were still present or worsening: poverty, crime, race-based geographic disparity, and lack of access to affordable housing. Social activism for housing in the late 1980’s was generated, for the most part, by the rising costs and the squeeze of the Architect’s Workshop, the Philadelphia chapter of the Collaborative housed a Regional/Urban Design Action Team (R/UDAT), at first to focus on the development of older industrial neighborhoods in central North Philadelphia. The local AIA committee worked for months on the ground with the community centers, the City, and local political leaders to set the stage for a highly public urban forum to put forth North Philadelphia’s critical issues and a framework for envisioning its future.

The R/UDAT was an intensely proactive process. Over the course a four-day charrette, the nationwide pool of community activists, environmental and political activists worked with the local AIA and its community-based participants. The process disappeared widely held myths about North Philadelphia, proposed new urban strategies, and unearthed scores of innovative ideas to address crises that we can reasonably anticipate designers can employ a proactive approach to raise questions, initiate action, and engage the political public in the planning process.

Leveraging Reactive Practice

Pro bono community design centers like the Collaborative—which was formed in response to the very tangible needs for design services that emerged from the R/UDAT—commonly adhere to what I am calling a reactive model. This suggests that they follow the traditional role of the design professions in responding to a situation or program that others have defined extrinsically. I work, though certainly not apolitical, does not directly engage designers in a political process. Projects usually have a limited scope in terms of the inquiry and the potential for deep engagement with the end users of the projects. Yet in several decades of work, community design centers have established a visible and viable alternative practice that is intentionally expressive for those whose design professions have historically underserved. This practice has brought numerous architects, planners, engineers, and landscape architects into a larger cultural ethos of design for the public good.

Reactive practice may also coalesce in response to an external threat, as during the formative years of the community design movement. On the world stage—responding to the ravages of human and nonhuman forces—disaster relief is perhaps the purest form of current reactive design. Moti-

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At the Margins: Politics and Design Now

for the rights of the local community in face of the juggernaut of top-down city planning evolved to form one of the earliest prototypes for the community design center, opening new roles for designers and planners. Recalibrating power relations, these nongovernmental intermediaries formed the core base for much of the early community design work. The Philadelphia chapter of the Institute of Architects (I.A.I) established one of the first of these centers, the Architect’s Workshop, in 1968. In operation for more than 40 years, the Workshop offered the pro bono services of AIA members to neighborhood organizations in Philadelphia, and as such it was very much the forerunner of the Collaborative.

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By Sally Harrison
At the Margins

their words: “Activist practice means making the costs of housing inmates, the project compares the center to the marginalized urban communities, where the private realm has consumed public space.

Visual representation of place is an emerging and powerful form of proactive discourse that is disseminating books and public exhibitions. These representations address the dynamic systems —social, environmental, economic, political— that underlie the social occupation of space. Anuradha Mathur and Dilip da Cunha, principals of a design firm based in Philadelphia and Bangalore, concentrate on case-studied public investigations around questions of inclusion and exclusion.

The community design movement appears to have arrived once again at center stage. Organizations like the Collaborative have become established, respected institutions that engage the broad participation of private practitioners and nonprofit clients alike. In some cities, community, creative and enlightened policymakers are building an ethos of democracy around the planning and design of urban space. And in the vanguard of design culture, the publication of a spate of new books and high-profile exhibitions are exploring and documenting the resurgence of a collective social awareness. But even as we count these successes, it is important also to push outward from the center and continue to engage the margins, where the weave of social fabric has unravelled and where the present is pressing the old structures into new patterns of interaction.

The Urban Workshop at Temple University, as a number of other university-based centers, has committed to multiply partnerships with neighborhoods at the university’s margins. We have worked with our community partners and unpacked the processes of urban design, research, and public policy. The lab has mapped criminal justice data in major cities, demonstrating a chilling concentration of incarcerated people from specific urban neighborhoods: The Million Dollar Blocks. Referring to the costs of housing inmates, the project compares the spending on education, healthcare, housing, and social programs that, if equally well funded, might preclude the devastating effects of an institutionally supported criminal culture on these neighborhoods.

Their compelling GIS-generated images have been exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the National Constitution Center in Philadelphia.

The Next Frontier: Transactive Practice

Transactive social design uncovers embedded cultural value, allowing an often-modest reality to inform and guide development. In his plan-

to address the issues that underlie building more diverse disciplines and agents. We are simultaneously designing and the products of design form an unfolding interaction takes place, and set in motion small, deft interventions: trees and shrubbery, and an improvised standpipe, to help develop a vibrant center of community. Harriet Davis declares that, in the interior of change, practice disturbs the order of things, yet “intelligent practice builds on the collective wisdom of people and organizations on the ground—who truly speak and act—rather than in a rationalized manner in which, in the official, top-down world... It starts with something small and one starts where it counts.”

Design Activism at the Center and the Margins

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All of the Collaborative’s projects embody the spirit and ethic of collaboration, yet some of our projects have opened new doors for individuals and organizations to learn from each other. This section highlights unique partnerships among groups that might not otherwise have worked together toward a shared vision.
The Collaborative typically works only with clients who already have control over a particular site. But in the case of this historic theater, the Collaborative teamed up with a community development corporation that did not own the property, to explore options that would once again make this ailing landmark the heart of the neighborhood.

Re-envisioning a Neighborhood Landmark: Wynne Theater

Local heritage: The site of generations of movie-going, bingo, weddings, bar and bat mitzvahs, and concerts, the building is important to the collective community memory—from Jewish immigrants to the current African-American residents.

Location
54th and Arlington Sts., Wynnewfield neighborhood, Philadelphia

Services completed
2010

Client
Wynnewfield Overbrook Revitalization Corporation (WORC)

Volunteers
Friday Architects/Planners, Inc; Thornton-Tomasetti; Domus, Inc; Alisa McCann

Hours donated (value)
379 ($43,870)

Products
Feasibility study

Built
No

A new direction: One option would include a 9-unit apartment building on a raised platform over parking, as well as a community center, retail, and two green spaces.
Reclaiming a Source of Community Pride

WORC described the empty, neglected building—which had been developed as a movie theater in 1928 and was used as a ballroom and a banquet hall in later iterations—as the “only impediment in an otherwise stable neighborhood, once a source of community pride.” The Collaborative study sought to explore potential reuse given the despair and the fact that many original architectural details had been destroyed.

The team found that the theater headhouse—a foyer with a Renaissance Revival facade flanked by retail space—could be rescued with relatively modest improvements. They also determined that the main theater space, covering about two-thirds of the site, should be demolished to make way for new development that brought new purpose to the main entrance.

Two Feasible Design Options

The Collaborative led three interactive workshops to identify four redevelopment scenarios, exploring two in more depth: a community center with meeting, classroom, and gathering space, and a mixed-use project featuring nine new apartment units.

Both scenarios would retain and refurbish the theater headhouse—with its handsome foyer, old-school storefronts, and distinctive sign. The rental housing option was deemed to be more feasible, given that the building will need to be almost entirely revenue producing.

Determining Suitability for Government Resources

The Collaborative prides itself on helping clients navigate the world of funders and resources. This feasibility study sought to explore whether the site was applicable to a recently passed state conservation act, which could appoint a conservator to assume responsibility for stabilizing and adapting the site for productive use. It became clear through the predesign process that, although the building satisfied the physical requirements, its complicated structure, ownership, and the extent of deterioration meant that pursuing this source of support was not the best use of WORC’s time.
This project sought to reinvent a typical storefront as a community resource for fresh, locally grown food and a healthy lifestyle. The West Oak Lane neighborhood—much admired for striving to maintain the quality of its housing, schools, and playground—offered little in the way of fresh produce. The nearest outlet was an eleven-minute walk away from Ogontz Avenue, the neighborhood’s main shopping street, out of the back of a truck. The design team re-envisioned the building and an adjacent lot as a living organism—one that can grow and evolve as the community becomes increasingly engaged in the food co-op.
Weavers Way Cigóñez was one of several projects of the Collaborative’s Infill Philadelphia, a multi-phased design initiative that helps urban communities reinvigorate their neighborhoods and rethink the use of older spaces. This aspect of a phase of Infill focused on food access for urban neighborhoods.

Creating Flexible, Functional Security

The conceptual plan is multidisciplinary for the co-op to expand in phases—adding more retail space, a demonstration kitchen, a green roof, and even a café over time; the third phase considers full expansion onto the adjacent vacant lot, to optimize the co-op’s potential.

The early design featured an innovative security grille that could enliven any urban commercial corridor. Inspired by the metal security grilles that shutter many city storefronts after hours, the design team fabricated perforated metal panels that fold out during the day to create an open-air produce stand and overhead canopy. At night the panels fold back to secure the facade, while also allowing light from inside the store to illuminate the sidewalk, creating a more open and safer atmosphere for pedestrians.

“Infilling” with Strong Design

Expanding the reach of fresh food: The new store is a satellite of Weavers Way, a Philadelphia food co-op that sought to establish a branch within reach of moderate-income families.

“We want to help residents in the community feel like they own a piece of the co-op.” —Alex Chan, Agoos Lovera Studio

Design team (left to right): Ted Agoos, Eriberto Luis Cruz (of Weavers Way), Eddie Layton, Wandy Chang, Adam Jeckel, Brian Tiede, and Alex Chan
The Show Must Go Elsewhere: Spiral Q Puppet Theater

A performing arts group forced to relocate from its industrial space—with a tremendous amount of bulky and delicate equipment in tow—equaled a fun challenge for the Collaborative. Many nonprofits face this daunting task alone, but the Collaborative has assisted Spiral Q Puppet Theater since 2005 to evaluate potential sites for their suitability. It’s an inspiring process as Spiral Q plans for continued growth.

A first step: When a vacant trolley barn in West Philadelphia became available, the Collaborative did a quick evaluation to see whether the space could accommodate Spiral Q’s needs. It would but the required renovations would have been too costly. The search for the perfect site pressed on.

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Spiral Q is an organization with a primary focus on promoting social justice, but it’s also a hotbed of creativity; the staff and a crew of volunteers construct the puppets, hand-sew the costumes, screen-print its signage, and build its sets. The workshop space needs a wide variety of areas for each of these tasks. The group also hosts education and public outreach events on-site, and has its own library and museum.

A “test-fit” examined the group’s current space needs and evaluated what kind of building could effectively be adapted for their use—an exercise that architects do routinely for clients in the private market, but nonprofit clients (let alone arts troupes) rarely have resources to invest in this kind of exploratory planning work.

As of June 2011, the Collaborative continues to evolve its work with Spiral Q to assist them in understanding and documenting their space needs as they plan for growth in a new location. This process helped the organization to identify and build awareness among its staff about what type of building can be adapted for their unique use—a design service that the Collaborative has found to be particularly well suited for a high-capacity organization like Spiral Q.
After four decades of helping people with developmental disabilities, the social services agency Programs Employing People (PEP) wanted to enhance its program of enriching people’s lives through vocational and social activities. But the space it occupies had created a sense of isolation from the community. The Collaborative worked with leadership to identify a series of simple facility improvements that would help build community not only among consumers of PEP services, but with the surrounding neighborhood as well.

Inviting the Neighbors In: Programs Employing People

Location
1200 South Broad St. (at Federal St.), Point Breeze neighborhood, Philadelphia

Services completed
2005

Client
Programs Employing People (PEP)

Volunteers
Joseph Salerno, AIA; Veronica Viggiano, AIA; Emma Johnson; Brian Wenrich

Hours donated (value)
2003: 45 ($5,100);
2005: 181 ($12,890)

Products
Feasibility study, conceptual design

Awards
First prize, Pennsylvania Horticultural Society’s City Garden Contest, 2010

Built
2009

From foreboding to inviting: PEP was eager to change the courtyard’s eight-foot travertine wall and two-foot iron rail, topped with razor wire—a less-than-welcoming exterior for an organization that wanted to draw people in, not keep people out. Security was an issue, but bringing the garden out to the street was of greater importance to bringing goodwill to the neighborhood.
The Collaborative assisted with two projects to improve PEP’s mid-century modern building at the corner of Broad (a major thoroughfare through South Philadelphia) and Federal Streets. The first was a modest warehouse project in 2003, which solidified the partnership. Then in 2005, a more extensive renovation focused on the generous courtyard and entryway formed by the C-shaped building, including aesthetic and functional improvements.

PEP needed dedicated storage to free up space within its on-site workshop, so the Collaborative’s design team proposed creating a warehouse to occupy the side yard between PEP and the adjacent building. This was an efficient use of space, and the design team provided evaluations and proposals for the additional building as well as related zoning issues.

Spaces That Help People Flourish

One of the unique features of the existing space was a six-lane bowling alley—a holdover from the previous owners, the Sons of Italy social club—which PEP wanted to renovate for use with client activities. Affordable to maintain, the alley also had the potential to generate revenue if PEP opened it up to residents in the neighboring communities of Point Breeze and South Philadelphia.

The 2010 courtyard renovation enhanced outdoor seating and gardening opportunities, and created goodwill with the neighbors by extending activity out to the sidewalk. Now maintained with the help of PEP clients, the courtyard garden won first prize in the prestigious Pennsylvania Horticultural Society’s City Garden Contest in 2010. PEP gains a third of its funding through contributions and fundraising, so a lovely, functional courtyard was a boon to a busy event season.

Starting Small

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Located in a middle-class suburban town on Philadelphia’s Main Line, the Narberth Library was part of a thriving community center, but the eighty-year-old building was in desperate need of restoration and improvements. The Collaborative became involved to help the library create a focused vision for the project, including drawings, to present to a group of prospective funders.

An Update after Eighty Years:
Narberth Community Library

Glimpse inside: The well-kept Colonial Revival facade belied dim, outmoded spaces and drop ceilings inside.

Handsome expansion: The project replaced a less-than-attractive trailer near the rear entrance (left) with a new addition (above) that accommodates the children’s reading room with a large bay window.

Location:
80 Windsor Ave., Narberth, Pennsylvania

Services completed:
2004

Client:
Narberth Community Library

Volunteers:
Brawer & Hauptman Architects, CCM, ArMa, ZOA, Senko, Sensation

Hours donated (total):
236 (326,730)

Sustainable design features:
Energy-efficient heating, ventilation, and air conditioning system

Consultant for final design:
Brawer & Hauptman Architects

Built:
2007
The conceptual plan outlined a strategy for the
site also includes a playground and meeting spaces for
the Girl Scout headquarters and the American Legion Hall.
But the library's space needs had exceeded the building
footprint, which meant spilling over into a less-than-attract-
tive trailer attached near the library's rear entrance.
The Collaborative helped because the library lacked the
funding to do even the basic design work needed to get the
project underway. The Collaborative's building assessments
and drawings enabled Narberth to secure the funding that
ultimately paid for design development and construction.
The final project upgraded the facility to include energy-
efficient heating and air conditioning, as well as ADA
compliant restrooms, and upgraded lighting, smoke detec-
tion, and alarm systems. These bread-and-butter improve-
ments gave the community the opportunity make the library
more appealing and functional.

Step One: Create a Vision

New heights: The dramatic double-height ceilings that had been hidden for thirty years by dropped ceiling tiles were revealed and complemented by state-of-the-art lighting.

Leverage: Strengthening Neighborhoods through Design
AWF had a long track record of revitalizing this neighborhood, which lies in the shadow of the Hunting Park West industrial district. Since 2002, the area has been poised for new economic development, after suffering suburban flight, deindustrialization, and disinvestment. But some residents in one corner of Allegheny West felt overlooked. AWF saw promise in the “Forgotten Blocks,” which were within walking distance of a growing mixed-use industrial district where new neighborhood-based jobs were anticipated.

Prototypes and Options

At the same time, AWF’s strategy of targeting redevelopment to specific blocks was a new idea. Combining two vacant lots or a vacant house and lot to develop one larger house made them strong contenders for Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority funding. These two approaches distinguished AWF in the city’s development landscape.

Rediscovering the “Forgotten Blocks”

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BY BRIAN PHILLIPS AND TODD WOODWARD

2011 MARKS TWENTY YEARS OF THE COMMUNITY DESIGN COLLABORATIVE—twenty years of service to nonprofit organizations, of connecting designers with volunteer opportunities, and of projects that, together, have raised the bar consider-ably for design in Philadelphia. This is certainly a cause for celebration, but it is also an opportunity to consider the future of the organization over the next twenty years. As architects and Collaborative volunteers, we are confident that the Collaborative will continue to promote change, foster innovative partnerships, create projects, and lead design professionals into new territory. The Collaborative could employ the skills of its volunteer design professionals and the expertise it has developed over time to address issues at a wide variety of scales and questions not traditionally considered design problems. This essay argues that, at this time in our history, the design field is charged with great transformative potential and that both the Collaborative and the design professions should support such transformation.

Design and design professionals have a significant role to play in the future of our cities and regions. Government officials and the business community would not have taken this statement seriously twenty years ago, when the Collaborative began provid- ing pro bono design services to underserved organizations and neighborhoods. Throughout its history, and especially at the beginning, the Collaborative filled an important gap—one that opened conventionally funded projects with high levels of support and projects that never materialized. This role came to be known as “community design,” and later, more broadly as “public interest design.” Typical project types included low- or mixed-income housing, public parks, school yards, and urban streetscapes: the kinds of buildings and spaces with which we interact on a daily basis in our communities. With this work, the Collaborative has championed the importance of participatory design efforts and the idea that every citizen deserves the benefits of a well-designed environment.

These types of projects will continue to be important to the Collaborative’s mission as well as to the city at large. However, as we look toward the future of the organization, we must seek new gaps to fill and emerging issues that could significantly benefit from design resources. In its first twenty years, the Collaborative emphasized community design by connecting design professionals to local mission-oriented groups, to explore proj- ects that otherwise would not have happened. The organization encourages, actively, and fosters collaboration throughout the development of each project—collaboration among all types of design professions, as well as partnerships between neighbors, neighborhoods, and potential stakeholders. In a world characterized by intense new challenges and an increasing awareness of creativity as a productive tool for problem solving, the Collaborative should seek in the next phase of its work to push the limits of design.

Defining Design—The design challenges emerging in the twenty-first century are significantly different from those of the twentieth. With shifting and often unstable economic conditions, a worldwide explosion of urbanism, and widespread environmental issues, design is more important than ever. Historically, design has been viewed as merely an aesthetic exercise in which designers bring visual and experiential appeal to new and reused environments. We advocate instead for design as a problem-solving tool—a creative generator of high-impact, value-added solutions. Precedents for this thinking span from game theory and online user-generated content to Apple’s comprehensive emphasis on design. Design should not be simply a reactive process, but rather an exercise in leadership, one that unlocks new potential on multiple scales for a better future.

What might this mean for the Collaborative? While the twenty-first century should be an exciting time for designers, given the potential to have broad and deep influence, our profes- sion has not yet prepared ourselves to capitalize on this opportunity. Design professionals are taught and become skilled at how to imagine future possibilities that others may be unable to envis- ion. These possibilities are not limited to renovated buildings, new landscapes, or transformed commercial corridors, but include broader concerns such as public policy questions and social issues that are typically considered outside the realm of design thinking.

We see this emerging role of design—which allows thoughtful practitioners to solve problems and add value to pragmatic, high performance, and innovative ways—as integral to reflective design practice, and also as a critical component to the improvement of our communities. Though it can be difficult to quantify certain benefits of design, the current climate requires that we chart new political, economic, and design energy into achieving measurable gains and replicable strategies. The Collaborative and other organizations like it should lead this effort, preparing and encouraging design professionals and community groups alike along the way.

As a Seat at the Table

The Collaborative has been successful at increasing the profile of design and the design community relative to civic and urban policy issues that impact the built environment in Philadelphia. Though the organization initially worked along the margins of development activity in the city, the Collaborative has gradually become an established voice that represents the importance of quality design. This expertise would be useful to other cities, regions, and even countries that are in need of creative thinking regarding issues of the built environment.

Although politicians, economists, and business owners are part- icipating from the beginning of a major planning effort, the reality is that architects and designers often do not. Brian recently led a studio at the University of Pennsylvania’s School of Design (PennDesign) that focused on rebuilding in the wake of the 2010 earthquake in Haiti. His charge was to explore the role of the designer in the context of disaster relief and to consider how the students’ design work could benefit the rebuilding effort. Though the group had done considerable research in advance into the character of a trip to Haiti, they came to see that the challenges were not limited to destruction from the earthquake, as tragic and intense as it was. Many of the most serious problems grew out of leverage: strengthening neighborhoods through design.
Design is no longer an afterthought, but rather a foundation for making good decisions that add value and improve the quality of life. The Collaborative should help the design community move away from the assumption that design is just a product of the design process, but rather as a means to an end. Designers should be viewed as problem-solvers who can help create a better future for the communities in which they work. The Collaborative should be a leader in this movement, using its resources and expertise to advocate for design and its value in the public sphere.

The Collaborative should continue to be a vehicle for design thinking and creative problem-solving. It should work to create a culture where design is seen as a valuable tool for addressing complex challenges, and where designers are seen as important contributors to the future of the city. The Collaborative should continue to focus on the future of design in the city, and how it can be used to make a positive impact on the community. This includes advocating for design education and training, as well as supporting the development of new design practices and tools. The Collaborative should also continue to work with other organizations and stakeholders to ensure that design is integrated into all aspects of the city's development.

The Collaborative should use its network of designers and experts to create a platform for design thinking and collaboration. It should work to foster a culture of innovation and creativity, and to encourage designers to think beyond their traditional roles. The Collaborative should also continue to work with local governments and other organizations to ensure that design is integrated into all aspects of the city's development.

The Collaborative should also continue to be a leader in the field of design education. It should work to ensure that design is part of the curriculum in schools and universities, and that designers are viewed as important contributors to the future of the city. The Collaborative should also continue to work with other organizations and stakeholders to ensure that design is integrated into all aspects of the city's development.

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An Overview of the Collaborative

Leveraging Neighborhoods through Design

The Community Design Collaborative works to strengthen neighborhoods in Philadelphia and beyond by coordinating pro bono design for nonprofits through a dedicated network of volunteer design professionals. Community design is an important part of the revitalization process and a critical element of livable, sustainable neighborhoods.

The Collaborative harnesses the urban energy, talents, and commitment of design professionals (architects, engineers, planners, landscape architects, estimators, and others), who work with energetic nonprofit, civic, and community leaders to envision a better future for citizens. The organization provides early feasibility stud-
ies and design services to nonprofits on site-specific projects, and develops model projects that promote dialogue and problem solving around critical issues in the city and region. The Collaborative focuses on core issues affecting the quality of life in Philadelphia and surrounding counties such as housing, open space, commercial corridors, food access, and social services. Targeting direct services such as housing, open space, commercial corridors, food access, and social services, the Collaborative coordinates pro bono design for nonpro-
fits through a dedicated network of volunteer design professionals. Community design is an important part of the revitalization process and a critical element of livable, sustainable neighborhoods.

Service Grants

Through responsive service grants, the Collaborative coordinates teams of volunteers from a range of design professionals to bring a variety of skills to the table. Perhaps the most important skill we promote through our volunteer design professionals is problem solving. Our nonprofit clients face an all-too-common dilemma: while they have stellar track records in identifying needs and delivering programs and services, they seldom design designate lines in their budgets to hire design professionals to help develop conceptual plans for capital improvements. We believe this preliminary aspect of planning is essential for effective, community-attentive design. Combining teams with nonprofits early in the process (what we call the first 10 percent or “pre-predevelopment”) engages the power of design by unlocking possibilities, sparking reinvestment, and pushing the envelope for a brighter, more sustainable future. Moving people where they are—offering design solutions that address issues of concern on their front stoop, on their block, or in their neighborhood—creates an undeniable connection between the design of the built and natural environments and the quality of life in their neighborhood.

The process of working with community groups and nonprofits on site-specific projects that excite them is what makes the Collaborative service grant model so unique. A community organizer motivates design teams to offer expertise and technical assistance that help put to paper an vision for a renewed facility or reactivated space. The final product, a bound report, helps the organization document and illustrate how these ideas can generate new anchors for a thriving neighborhood—places to offer access services, and celebratory community events. This grassroots perspective makes the Collaborative unique among built-environment intermediaries in Philadelphia. The Collaborative serves as a matchmaker—connecting engaged community leaders with engaged design professionals who share passions for improving quality of life for all residents. Our volunteers have social justice in their blood. With leadership from a dedicated board and a motivated Advisory Council, Collaborative staff coalesce the desires and skills of professionals who seek to deliver solutions to the communities they serve. The results are brick-and-mortar foundations for community, civic, and neighborhood pride.

We often say the process is as important—if not more important—as the products we provide. Working together helps groups weigh options, secure sustainable buy-in, and secure the social fabric of neighborhoods while improving the quality of their built and natural environments. Community input, participation, and instigation are core values. Assisting civic and community organizations in testing the feasibility of community enhancement projects helps to strengthen the social fabric, which often underpins a thriving neighborhood in less-than-tangible ways.

Infill Philadelphia

In 2005, Infill Philadelphia—a five-year, three-phase projective initiative launched by the Collaborative—developed partnerships with thought leaders to address design challenges related to advocacy. In the pilot phase, we teamed up with NeighborhoodsNow to address scattered and small-scale sites with potential for reuse as affordable housing. The results exceeded our expectations. Our service grant model was the foundation, but we added three service grants with promotion and packaging that took us to another level. The clear-eyed stewardship, expertise, and knowledge of our partners propelled us to consider the sum of the parts—to use design as a tool to advocate for policy and funding support.

With the support of the William Penn Foundation, the Collaborative used this model to establish Infill Philadelphia. We partnered with the Philadelphia office of the Local Initiatives Support Corporation to craft a design challenge to address commercial corridors in phase one. For phase two, we addressed design challenges related to food access in partnership with the Reinvestment Fund and with support from Pennsylvania’s Fresh Food Financing Initiative. We recently completed work with the Philadelphia Industrial Development Corporation to explore industrial reuse, with support from the Urban Land Institute Philadelphia District Council. Each phase of Infill has expanded the conversation using design as a tool to address intractable urban problems. Through this series of design challenges, the Collaborative has tapped into local expertise, partnering with thought leaders to help reposition critical issues and unleash the possibilities for reinvestment, civic engagement, and neighborhood-based community revitalization in an unapologetically urban way.

Looking Ahead

The Collaborative has a strong platform on which to build our future. We will continue to use design as a catalyst to ask provocative questions, encourage innovative thinking, and provide pragmatic, practical solutions for urban design challenges. We will create more partnerships and inspire new spirited public discussions among residents, policy makers, investors, designers, business owners, and developers. We will continue to rely upon the urban energy of our interdisciplinary volunteers and nonprofit leaders to leverage resources, attention, and action to strengthen neighborhoods through design, one project at a time.

BY BETH MILLER
Maurice Cox
Associate Professor, University of Virginia
School of Architecture

Maurice is an urban design, architect, and educator at the University of Virginia’s School of Architecture, and former mayor of Charlottesville, Virginia. He most recently served as Director of Design for the National Endowment for the Arts, where he presided over the largest expansion of design to the federal government since the Governor’s Institute on Community Design, Your Town! The Citizens’ Institute on Rural Design, and the Mayor’s Institute on City Design. Maurice served as a Charlottesville City Councilor for six years before becoming the mayor of that city, from 2002 to 2004. A recipient of the 2019 Edmond F. Bacon Prize, the Harvard University Graduate School of Design for Design of 2004–05 Loeb Fellowship, and the 2006 John O. Nef Prize for Architecture, he received his architectural education from the Cooper Union School of Architecture.

Alan Greenberger, FAIA
Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development and Director of Community Design, City of Philadelphia

Alan was appointed Philadelphia’s Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development and Director of Community Design by Mayor Michael Nutter in June 2010. Previously he served as Executive Director for the Philadelphia City Planning Commission, and was an architect and planner with NGA Partners and its predecessor, Mitchell Giurgola Architects. During his thirty-four years in private practice, he was the principal designer on numerous architectural, urban, land-use, and design projects, including the Salvation Army Erica Corps Community Center, Philadelphia, the West Chester University School of Music and Performing Arts Center, and the renovation of Leigh University’s historic Linderman Library.

Mark Alan Hughes
Distinguished Senior Fellow, PennDesign, PennDesign and the Center for Architecture, University of Pennsylvania

Mark leads GPC’s research program aimed at understanding obstacles to adoption of energy-efficient building system technologies and the financial, policy, and regulatory instruments that speed technology adoption through increased ROI. Mark is also a Distinguished Senior Fellow of the University of Pennsylvania School of Design. As a cabinet member in the administration of Mayor Michael Nutter, he established the City’s first Office of Sustainability, created a distinguished 20-member Sustainability Management Board, and designed and produced the City’s 2010 policy framework—Governments of Philadelphia, with fifteen ambitious targets for 2015. He also designed and taught the City’s strategy for maximizing the value and impact of heavy-use University Copyright Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Mark graduated from Swarthmore College and received a PhD in Regional Science from Penn.

Don Matzkin, AIA
Principal, SMP Architects/Planners, Inc.

Don was born and raised in Philadelphia and attended Philadelphia public schools. He received his undergraduate degree from Cornell in 1963, he spent two years on active duty with the US Navy. Don left active duty in 1965 and returned to Philadelphia, taking jobs with Murphy, Lewis, Warman, Montgomery, Bell and Arnold, and finally Vincent G. Kling and Associates, before founding Friday Architects/Planners in 1970 with Peter Arfaa, David Stoves, and Arlene Matzkin. Don cofounded a professional life around community service and design, and helped found the Community Design Collaborative and the Charter High School for Architecture and Design. He retired from active practice in 2010.

Elizabeth K. Miller
Executive Director, Community Design Collaborative

Beth has served as Executive Director of the Community Design Collaborative since 2001, helping the organization evolve from a part-time, largely volunteer operated AIA Board initiative into a full-service, nonprofit affecting design policy in the City of Philadelphia. With more than 20 years of experience in the fields of strategic planning, community development, and nonprofit management, she has held various positions with Farmington Ventures, The National Trust for Historic Preservation, and Susan Manzan Architect. Beth was recently appointed by Mayor Michael Nutter as a member of the Philadelphia City Planning Commission. She has a master’s degree in government administration from the Fels Institute of Government at the University of Pennsylvania and a bachelor’s degree in the growth and structure of cities from Bryn Mawr College.

Brian Philips, AIA, LEED AP
Principal, ISA

Brian is a founding principal of ISA, an award-winning architectural design and research office in Philadelphia. He has extensive design experience with a range of building scales, urban design, master-planning, and speculative work. He has committed considerable energy toward bringing innovative design solutions to urban neighborhoods with strong environmental agendas. Brian holds a bachelor’s degree from the University of Oklahoma and a Master’s from the University of Pennsylvania. He has lectured widely on technology and urbanism, and his writing and design work have been featured in publications such as 2009’s Zdd, and Metropolis, and 2011’s Dwell.

Todd Woodward, AIA, LEED AP
Principal, SMP Architects

Todd is a principal of Philadelphia-based SMP Architects and a nationally recognized leader in sustainable design, as well as an adjunct professor of architecture at Temple University. He served for several years on the Board of Directors of the Community Design Collaborative and currently serves on its Advisory Council. Todd serves on the editorial board of Context: The Journal of AIA Philadelphia, and on the Board of Directors of the University of Pennsylvania Alumni Association. Todd holds a BFA from Penn State and an MArch from the University of Pennsylvania. He is a lifelong Philadelphia fan.

Sally Harrision, AIA
Associate Professor, Temple University

Sally is a registered architect and Associate Professor of Architecture at the Tyler School of Art at Temple University. She is a former chair of the Department of Architecture and the director of the Urban Workshop, a university-based practice that seeks to address community design issues through a process of participatory, site-based research and design collaboration with other place-making disciplines including landscape architecture, public art, planning, and geography. Sally has served on the boards of the Philadelphia and Pennsylvania Chapters of the AIA, and was a founding member of the Community Design Collaborative.

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Acknowledgments

For the Community Design Collaborative to influence Philadelphia’s neighborhoods, we have needed leverage to gain advantage from numerous generous investments of time and resources. For more than 20 years the Collaborative has “leveraged” the pro bono services of design professionals, the commitment of community based-organizations, and the desire for collaboration among private, nonprofit, and public stakeholders. We have many to thank for helping us make this investment in the city’s urban landscape.

We dedicate this book to the Collaborative’s volunteers, whose combined efforts since 2001 have generated nearly $5 million dollars in pro bono preliminary design in service to the region’s nonprofits; to the nonprofits that have the perseverance to work with the Collaborative to put their credible ideas to paper; to the public, private, and nonprofit developers who help projects take shape; and to the firms that continue this work into the built environment.

We are grateful to our partners at the Office of Housing and Community Development, in particular Belinda Mayo and Deborah McColloch, who saw the value of the Collaborative’s technical assistance for neighborhood advisory councils, community development corporations, and other nonprofits serving low- and moderate-income neighborhoods. We thank AIA Philadelphia and Chapter Presidents for the foresight to connect its members to community service through the Collaborative and other nonprofit entities such as the Charter High School for Architecture and Design (CHAD) and the Center for Architecture.

In an era of scarce resources, the Collaborative has been fortunate to harness the urban energy of dedicated design professionals and community leaders. Many thanks to our partners at the William Penn Foundation, especially Shawn McCaney and Gerry Wang, for pushing us to move beyond responsive site-specific service grants to proactive initiatives that attract attention, action, and resources. Support from numerous family and corporate foundations has helped us sustain service over the past ten years, including: PNC Foundation, Bank of America, Carpenter’s Company, Citizens Charitable Foundation, Cianelli Foundation, Connelly Foundation, Counselors of Real Estate Foundation, Dolﬁnger-McMahon Foundation, Drumcliff Foundation, Samuel S. Fels Fund, the Walter J. Miller Trust, National Endowment for the Arts, The Philadelphia Foundation, Urban Land Institute Foundation, Union Benevolent Association, Henrietta Tower Wyrs Memorial, and the Wells Fargo Foundation.

We are indebted to our Infill Philadelphia partners—NeighborhoodsNow, LISC Philadelphia, The Reinvestment Fund, and PIDC—who embraced the design challenge as a proactive, problem-solving process. Special thanks also goes to the Collaborative’s “godfather,” Don Matzkin, and our founders—too numerous to mention—for taking action toward social justice through design. We are grateful to our board, advisory council members, and co-chairs past and present: Mami Hara, Paul Marcus, Cece Denegre, Michael Paul, Lisa Armstrong, Susan Smith, Dan Garofalo, Howard Lebold, Stephen Gibson, Patrice Carroll, and Alice Berman, who have challenged their peers to raise the bar for civic engagement and action.

Heartfelt thanks to our able and dedicated staff: Heidi Segall Levy, Linda Dottor, Caryn Golden, Robin Kohles Hasa, and Camille Cazon, for their deft ability to mobilize volunteers and nonprofits, and to recent Collaborative fellows and staff: Emily Stromberg, Haley Loram, and Erik Kojola. We are indebted to Susan Frankel, our founding director, and early staff member Jan Strouse, who developed a project management system for the first decade that we still use today. We also thank our consultants Don Kligerman of Fairmount Ventures and Sharon Gallagher of Sage Communications for their counsel.

Acting as an advocate, connector, and provider requires passion but also ﬂexibility, due deference, and humor, and we were fortunate to assemble an editorial team for this project with these same qualities. The intrepid project manager Alison Rooney and Advisory Council champion Todd Woodward kept us focused on the task with humor and grace. Our staff and board took on the feat of winnowing our archives of more than 600 service grants down to a final list of 20, as curated by Linda Dottor. Our graphic designer Anthony Smyrski made us look good with his clarity and inventiveness. In addition, we showcase here the talents of many photographers, including Mark Garvin, Peter Kubilis, Sam Oberter, Don Pearse, Wynne Levy, Jacob Helman, Haley Loram, Matt Wargo, Barry Halkin, Caryn Golden, and Raymond W. Holman, Jr.

Our colleagues near and far contributed thoughtful, provocative essays. Jess Zimbabwe and Maurice Cox put the Philadelphia story into a national context, and Mark Alan Hughes and Alan Greenberger talk about design advocacy at a new level. Don Matzkin and Sally Harrison renew the unwavering belief of the Collaborative founders that architects and afﬁliated professionals have a moral obligation to deliver pathways for social justice through design of the environment. Todd Woodward and Brian Phillips pose provocative questions and challenge our notions of public interest architecture, pro bono service, and advocacy.

And ﬁnally, we extend a special thanks to the Co-Chairs of our Board of Directors, Paul Marcus and Mami Hara, to our 20th Anniversary Steering Committee, led by Michael Paul, and to our Urban Energy Honorary Committee, which includes Phil Eastman, Beverly Coleman, John Grady, Alan Greenberger, John Claypool, and Andy Frishkoff. Each of them provided invaluable guidance as we created a year-long celebration of the Collaborative’s past, present, and prospective future.
In 2011 the Community Design Collaborative celebrates two decades of providing pro bono design services to nonprofit organizations in Philadelphia and the region. LEVERAGE showcases the approach and success of this groundbreaking community design center.

Profiles of 20 key projects highlight how the Collaborative transforms its values into three dimensions, on projects large and small. A series of essays considers the role of designers as advocates and policymakers, the future of design activism, and how the Collaborative has contributed to design excellence in Philadelphia and beyond.

LEVERAGE was created for readers interested in the role of cities, as well as for architects, designers, and nonprofit leaders who view thoughtful, innovative design as a strategy to create and sustain vital urban places.