

Creative Communities:

Design as a Community Development Strategy



SUMMIT PROCEEDINGS

Presented by

The Strengthening Communities Initiative
University of Memphis School of Urban Affairs & Public
Policy
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PREFACE

This Proceedings documents the presentations at the “Creative Communities: Design as a Community Development Strategy” Summit, held at the University of Memphis on Friday, October 22, 2010. Funded by the National Endowment for the Arts, the Summit was planned as an opportunity to celebrate the accomplishments of the Strengthening Communities Initiative and to broadly discuss the challenges and lessons learned from building community-higher education partnerships. The Summit highlighted the work of the Strengthening Communities first round grant recipients from Beltline, Uptown, Pigeon Roost and University District neighborhoods, which have now completed their funded projects. In addition, the event promoted university-community partnerships as a capacity building strategy for neighborhoods. More than one hundred community members, University of Memphis faculty and students attended.

The day began with opening comments by Stan Hyland, Head, School of Urban Affairs and Public Policy at the University of Memphis. A panel discussion followed including faculty and community partner organization staff who received funding in the first Strengthening Communities grant round. Anne Whiston Spirn, Professor of Landscape Architecture, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, discussed her community partnership work in Philadelphia. The lunch speaker, Elson Nash, Acting Director of Learn & Serve America, The Corporation for National and Community Service, discussed the strategies available to local communities for partnering with federal government agencies. Five afternoon workshops provided attendees with approaches for putting their learning from the day into action. Workshop topics included: Community Building through Design, Art & Heritage; Energy Conservation and Weatherization; Partnership and Collaboration; Social Media and Communications; and Urban Food Security. And finally, Ann Coulter, Principal, Kennedy Coulter Rushing & Watson, LLC closed the day with remarks that both summarized major themes and challenged participation to advance their work for greater impact in the Memphis.

Documenting and disseminating learning has been a primary goal of the Strengthening Communities Initiative from its inception. The “Creative Communities” Summit and the resulting Proceedings are evidence of that goal. Other strategies for examining the model innovated by the Strengthening Communities Initiative and the lessons learned from implementation have thus far included conference presentations, academic journal articles, newspaper and magazine articles, and community presentations.

This Proceedings provides the written version, in summary form, of the presentations from the “Creative Communities” Summit. Unfortunately, the written document cannot adequately capture the positive energy and upbeat milieu of the day as faculty, students and community leaders talked informally about the opportunities and challenges facing the Memphis metropolitan area. We hope that readers of these Proceedings will gain perspective, information and inspiration for building partnerships that strengthen and revitalize our communities.

Strengthening Communities Initiative Summit

CREATIVE COMMUNITIES: DESIGN AS A COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

OPENING REMARKS

Stan Hyland, Head, School of Urban Affairs and Public Policy, University of Memphis

Now more than ever building meaningful partnerships to address neighborhood revitalization is critical to building sustainable metropolitan regions. At the core of meaningful partnerships is citizen participation and engagement in every aspect of the process. This often means developing a common language, changing traditional behaviors and building trusting relationships based on reciprocity. Towards this goal, The Community Foundation of Greater Memphis, the United Way of the Mid-South and the University of Memphis are working to rethink and create new initiatives that will have a more lasting effect on the neighborhoods and communities in which they are embedded.

The Strengthening Communities Program started four years ago as an effort to meet community needs and further connect the university to our neighborhoods and nonprofit organizations. The program is a collaborative effort of the Community Foundation of Greater Memphis, the United Way of the Mid-South, and the University of Memphis Research Foundation. The program offers two types of grants, Capacity Building Grants and Small Grants. The Capacity Building grants are up to \$18,000 and are to implement neighborhood-based projects. These projects must result in tangible improvements for the neighborhood, as well as a build capacity in the sponsoring organization. Additionally, the projects must support an engaged research agenda from the sponsoring faculty partner. Small Grants are awarded for up to \$2,500 to community partners that would like to take a first step toward a Capacity Building Grant.

Strengthening Communities actually began as three separate small grant-making pools that were funded each year by the Community Foundation of Greater Memphis, the United Way of the Mid-South and the University of Memphis Research Foundation. These grants were given for very traditional neighborhood projects or traditional faculty research start-up projects. Such projects include clean up days, where grant money bought rakes and garbage bags or neighborhood newsletters where grant money bought printer cartridges and paper. At universities faculty projects similarly might involve studying the impact of a housing policy on Memphis neighborhoods. The common question that emerged for all was how could we have a greater impact and more sustainable results that could be disseminated throughout the metropolitan area.

The result of our individual reflections was the creation of a common goal to redefine our individual efforts that sought to engage the grassroots. The result was the launching of the collaborative Strengthening Communities Initiative (SCI). SCI goal

became to connect the dots and build capacity at the neighborhood or grassroots level. Important lessons would be documented and build upon.

The SCI recognized that dialogue over coffee between community stakeholders would lead to subsequent action at the block-level to confront important and relevant major issues. The Community Foundation, United Way and the University recommitted its resources with the goal of producing cutting edge initiatives in the form of neighborhood-based projects that strengthen neighborhoods and increase local organizational capacity through collaboration. Our vision is to make Memphis a city of innovation and creativity, working in one neighborhood at a time. We're looking at our old challenges in new ways. We're solving problems through collaborative relationships. We're building sustainable change with our innovative approaches.

Beyond monetary support for community projects, the Strengthening Communities Initiative has created a vehicle for institutional change, building a local knowledge base through engaged scholarship and service learning, and advancing a theory of praxis on community building. At the heart of this effort are 3 key components:

- A commitment to reciprocal relationships between university-community partners including students;
- Achieving a discernible impact through the development of new approaches to neighborhood revitalizations efforts; and
- Advancing an innovative capacity building effort that is documented, evaluated and disseminated.

By partnering with neighborhood groups from every part of the Mid-South and faculty and students from every college at the University, this effort is an important step for creating innovative approaches that are grounded in the heritage and experiences of this city and this region.

The Strengthening Communities Program has funded sixteen Memphis neighborhoods with \$120,000 in grants over three years. The projects tackle persistent problems of safety, housing, health, transportation, education and economic development. A common theme has been how community participation, urban art, heritage and design have contributed to community enhancement in a variety of ways.

This year the Strengthening Communities Program launched three new initiatives to build more capacity and outreach into the effort. The first of these initiatives is an idea that a graduate student, Ms. Gayla Schaeffer, in the Division of Public and Nonprofit Administration advanced called Community Matching Making. She researched how other universities connect their faculty and students to community partners. Drawing largely upon the experience of the University of Cincinnati, we gathered over 100 community activists, nonprofit leaders and faculty around seven round tables to discuss their issues, resources and plans over coffee. Building meaningful partnerships takes time, commitment and recognition that we may have different understanding of words and working styles.

The second initiative involves connecting other parts of the University's resources to support the Strengthening Communities Program. Dr. Dixie Crase, Director of the University's Internship Program, and Mr. Brian King, an AmeriCorps VISTA assigned to the University through Tennessee Campus Compact, have become actively engaged in

how internships and service learning could be used to support existing and planned community building efforts in Memphis neighborhoods.

Finally, and most important, is this National Conference funded through the National Endowment of Arts that highlights, shares and reflects on the Strengthening Communities' work to date and brings national leaders to share their perspectives on how we can enhance our future efforts.

- Professor Anne Spirn provides us with community design lessons from her work in Philadelphia over a 25 year period. Her university community team broke barriers through landscape architecture, promoting life-sustaining communities, and creating places where people feel a relationship to their surroundings, natural and man-made.
- Elson Nash suggests new ways to promote service-learning and university engagement. Mr. Nash's career spans a number of national agencies that support this type of work, such as Campus Compact, the Ashoka Foundation. He presently is the director of Learn and Serve America.
- Ann Coulter, an experienced community leader from our sister city of Chattanooga, TN and Bruner Fellow, reviews our Strengthening Communities efforts and challenges us to move forward in certain paths.

As the Strengthening Communities Program continues to grow, our plans call for learning from our experiences and expanding the grant pool with new partners and developing fresh approaches to neighborhood revitalization that enable Memphis and its neighborhoods to become a place of innovation and creativity. So why is connecting important? In order to have a creative city, we have to have creative partnerships. Both our neighborhoods and our University have assets to share in this creative process. We both have challenges to overcome as well if we want to become a city of creativity.

In closing, we recognize that this effort involves a village of people and organizations. These include:

- **Funders:** The National Endowment for the Arts, The Community Foundation of Greater Memphis, The United Way of the Mid-South, the University of Memphis, The Tennessee Valley Authority, Memphis Light, Gas and Water
- **Administrative Team:** Susan Schmidt, Katherine Lambert-Pennington, Gayla Schaeffer, Dorothy Norris-Tirrell, Stan Hyland
- **Executive Committee for Strengthening Communities:** Robert Fockler, Bryce Haugsdahl, Deborah Hernandez,
- **University of Memphis Students:** Housing and Community Development Fellows, American Humanics Volunteers, AmeriCorps VISTA (Brian King)

The challenges before the Memphis metropolitan area are well-known and long standing. The Strengthening Communities Initiative is an innovative effort to employ new tools and incentives for authentic collaboration through participatory action research approaches. The Strengthening Communities Initiative is charting a path of innovation and creativity for how future generations will approach the Memphis/Mid-south community's challenges.

STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES FIRST ROUND PROJECTS: A PANEL DISCUSSION

The Panel Discussion, moderated by Stan Hyland, highlighted the opportunities and challenges of the four fully funded grant projects from the First Round of Strengthening Communities funding.

BELTLINE PROJECT

Nonprofit Partner: Bill Marler, Jacob's Ladder Development Corporation

University Partner: Keri Brondo, U of M Department of Anthropology

ROZELLE-ANNESDALE/PIGEON ROOST PROJECT

Nonprofit Partner: Stoy Bailey, Pigeon Roost Neighborhood Association

University Partner: Stephanie Ivey, U of M Department of Civil Engineering

UNIVERSITY DISTRICT ART PROJECT

Nonprofit Partner: Steve Barlow, University Neighborhoods Development Corporation

University Partner: Cedar Norbye, U of M Department of Art

UPTOWN PROJECT

Nonprofit Partner: Molly Merry-Campbell, BRIDGES, Inc.

University Partner: Michael Hagge, U of M Department of Architecture

BELTLINE PROJECT

University Partner: Keri Brondo, U of M Department of Anthropology

In the Beltline neighborhood, Jacob's Ladder Development Corporation's mission is focused on community building and neighborhood revitalization. The SC funded project centered on youth-produced oral history documentaries. The faculty partners and a graduate assistant worked with young residents through various media to produce the films. U of M, Jacob's Ladder, and the Beltline Neighborhood Association held meetings during 2008 to discuss community development efforts and increase citizen participation in Memphis redevelopment projects related to the Mid-South Fairgrounds. The oral history project began with a series of meetings with community members to identify assets, liabilities, and potential solutions to the area's problems. Six children were recruited to work on the project and received training using the equipment. The students gained valuable skills in creating short films that were premiered at a film festival held at a local church.

HOW DID YOU ENVISION YOUR PROJECT MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN MEMPHIS?

A little history of our collaboration is in order for me to move to questions of success, and lessons learned. I met my community partner within 3 weeks of moving to Memphis. We were introduced by Stan Hyland through his many connections in the community after learning that I was particularly interested in the role urban gardens play in revitalizing communities. The Beltline had one of the first urban gardens in Memphis. I met the director of Jacob's Ladder and together we brainstormed service-learning projects for the students in my urban anthropology class to begin that fall. A study of the garden was one, but we had added a few others given the needs Bill had identified. The course used four research teams:

- *Business Partnerships:* The creation of a business directory for the Beltline area, including contact information, products and services and a literature review of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and suggestions for CSR funding opportunities for neighborhood development.
- *Enrichment Center Curriculum:* A best practices review and interviews with education directors of long-standing community centers, leading to programmatic recommendations for the Beltline Youth Enrichment Center.
- *Organic Garden:* A study of community perceptions of participation and use of community gardening;
- *Participatory Action Strategy:* To develop a strategy for community organizing, under a participatory action research paradigm.

Our collaboration continued throughout that year, adding on another set of classes and service-learning projects. Students in my classes helped Jacob's Ladder volunteers with complete home repairs, refurbish what is now the Beltline Youth Enrichment Center (BYEC), conduct a door-to-door survey to inform

curriculum for the center, and served as tutors at the center. Some students delivered formal classes for them; one served as the Asst. Director of the center.

In 2007-2008, Jacob's Ladder was working to organize community residents and other neighborhood stakeholders to produce a shared community-based vision for the redevelopment of the fairgrounds. The hope was that they could have an impact on the developer's plans for the area. One of the groups that Jacob's Ladder had identified as an important community stakeholder was the youth, evidenced by their investment in the BYEC.

The community is also an aging community and a transitional community. There are many families that transition through the neighborhood, but there are also many others who have lived there for multiple generations. Some of these residents live in the Western-most side of the neighborhood, an area that was likely to be razed in redevelopment. My graduate student and research associate at the time was working closely with me in the neighborhood was really interested in video ethnography. Andy and I also developed a positive working relationship with the head of the neighborhood association who was interested in capturing the stories of neighborhood residents on video.

Our project thus grew out of a combined set of needs, interests and expertise:

- Jacob's Ladder - concern with the area's redevelopment
- Neighborhood Association – preservation of neighborhood voices
- Graduate Student – skills in videography
- Faculty – interest in engaged scholarship and moving in the direction dictated by the community.

By this time, the study of the urban garden had moved to the sideline, replaced by the immediacy faced by residents with regard to the fairgrounds redevelopment. Our project was to develop a collective oral history of the Beltline neighborhood through capturing the oral histories of the long-time residents through interviews and engage youth in the neighborhood by training them to conduct interviews and produce their own videos

We collectively envisioned that this project would have a variety of impacts, including:

- Connect youth to neighborhood elders, thus fostering a sense of community through sharing stories.
- Stimulate the youth to think about the future of the community and how they might play a role in its development.
- Awaken a broader residential voice in the redevelopment process by bringing new faces out to the film screening.
- Develop a curriculum that could become a standing program at the BYEC and could be used at other community centers / by other community groups. (Note: We developed this and have a manual. BYEC has the equipment to continue, but has not done so. We have sent the manual to others based on request.)
- Edit the individual youth videos to create a more targeted video for the development team. [This wasn't part of our original proposal but a suggestion by the SCI team; we were unable to pull it off.]

One of the most significant lessons learned from this project is that the success or impact is influenced by the degree of buy-in from the variety of partners, as well as restricted by available resources -- not just time and money, but also individual skill sets and expertise.

HOW DID THE PROJECT SUCCEED?

Use of students: The project was run over the summer rather than in conjunction with the U of M academic year classes. A graduate student led the video portion of the curriculum for his practicum and editing the videos. The graduate student, the neighborhood association president and I shared responsibility for working with the kids on the front end in community history lectures, hosting guest speakers, developing questionnaires and interviewing residents. University of Memphis students were also involved in general project assistance (3 student volunteers who wanted research experience) and door-to-door surveys and volunteering at the center (75 or so students). In addition, students assisted as note takers during focus groups at the community meetings to get feedback on the neighborhood's redevelopment.

Scholarship: This project resulted in a constellation of research products, including a peer-reviewed journal article, two technical reports, and six short films. The project also received significant positive local press, and was featured in *The Commercial Appeal* and *The University of Memphis Magazine*.

The areas of scholarship to which this project contributes:

- Distinctions between engaged scholarship and service-learning.
- Partnerships and strategies for collaboration in community-based research
- Collaboration with faith-based institutions in the Mid-South.
- Working with youth in community-building.

The Video project curriculum has been sent to others who requested. The videos remain shared property of the community, Jacob's Ladder, and U of M. Jacob's Ladder wanted them all housed at their center. However, given that some residents were not involved with the organization, we decided to make them available in other locations to community residents, such as the library.

WHAT LESSONS DID YOU LEARN?

Matching faculty expertise w/ community needs: Our original partnership began with research on urban gardening fitting squarely into one of my research focus areas: environment, natural resource management, and community development. Under a participatory action research framework (a central methodology in engaged scholarship), this project evolved to focus primarily on resident voice in urban redevelopment and community heritage, also important

areas of focus in our department's urban anthropology track. During the course of the project, I found that I lacked the expertise in community organizing and experience / networks with the city that might have been helpful to push the youth videos into a direction that might influence city council and the developers. Pulling in faculty and/or expanding partnerships to include those with specific skill sets in areas of needs is essential for success.

Reliance on Students: Many of the projects I helped foster in the community are driven by student skills and areas they wish to build. I think this is really important for us as faculty to offer the opportunities to sharpen the skills of students and build towards a meaningful career in community development. However, it is very difficult to sustain research projects that are built upon student skills. Once Andy left, all of my knowledge of film-making disappeared. I even have trouble locating the files on my own and have to contact him for help.

Time commitment: Community collaborations are very time-consuming, and most faculty who do this kind of work do so as "add-ons" to regular course loads and research agendas. Something has to give in this situation, as there are only so many hours in the day: Is it going to be less time dedicated to teaching? To writing? To your personal life? (In my case, I spent far less time over those first 2 years with my husband and kids.) Increased institutional support to facilitate the logistics of engaged scholarship and service-learning work would be helpful. In an ideal world, faculty would have a graduate assistant appointed to facilitate their engaged scholarship research agendas.

Partnerships and Communication: We neglected to define our various roles, responsibilities, and individual agendas from the start. This caused tensions to rise in our project. The U of M and the Neighborhood Association President essentially ran the entire project, without much input from our official community partner. However, because Jacob Ladder's put up the space, their leadership felt they had the authority to let go some of the youth we had collectively hired to participate in the project, and/ or to withhold pay. Yet, Jacob's Ladder never discussed this with me and asked that graduate research assistant be the messenger, which put him in a very uncomfortable place.

Funding issues put a major wedge into our partnership, creating tensions that have remained unresolved. The funds were not immediately available from the SC grant even though our work with students had begun and we had agreed on certain pay dates. Since the youth went unpaid, the lead graduate research assistant and I were in a difficult position. In addition, the Neighborhood Association President was also not paid in a timely manner, and Jacob's Ladder told her it was my fault and to talk to me about it. This was not true; the community partner portion of the money was controlled by Jacob's Ladder. I only held funds for Andy and equipment.

Other tensions emerged in partnership with regard to running focus groups related to the area's redevelopment, and my critical interpretation of the events through engagement with the scholarship on southern progressivism and Participatory Action Research.

The following lessons are for others considering this type of community-based work:

- **SC funding and summer projects.** Do not begin the project in the first year of funding. Wait a full year so that funds will be in place for distribution and you will have had plenty of time to detail individual roles and responsibilities.
- **Buy-in.** Be clear on the degree of buy-in of particular projects. Your partner may not be truly interested in the project, and thus will take a backseat as it develops.
- **Identify roles and responsibilities, and revisit throughout the process --** for the faculty partner, the students, and the community partner.
- **Set boundaries.** The benefit of conducting research in your home community is that you don't have to travel far to do your work. The downfall of conducting research in your home community is that you can never get away.
- **Keep your perspective.** It becomes more difficult to step back and critically analyze what is occurring in a community project.

ROZELLE-ANNESDALE/PIGEON ROOST PROJECT

University Partner: Stephanie Ivey, Department of Civil Engineering

The Rozelle-Annesdale neighborhood lies in the heart of Memphis' Midtown area, acting as a major thoroughfare in the city for traffic flow. The SCI funded project worked with the Pigeon Roost Neighborhood Association to improve accessibility for residents by completing a walkability study and developing a placemaking strategy. The project utilized pre-project, transportation, and sidewalk surveys from people in the neighborhood to generate policy changes affecting pedestrian traffic in the area and to promote urban design strategies to improve access for neighborhood residents.

HOW DID YOU ENVISION YOUR PROJECT MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN MEMPHIS?

The purpose of this study was to help Rozelle-Annesdale (RA) neighborhood residents develop a sustainable effort for community improvement through a plan for transportation network modifications. The suitability of a neighborhood for walking and bicycling is critical for promoting community ties and sustainability, reducing crime, and improving lifestyles for residents. Key factors determining how conducive a neighborhood is to these modes of active transportation include the variety of attractions within the neighborhood, connectivity of the transportation facilities for pedestrians and bicyclists, and perceived safety (both traffic safety and personal safety). Thus, the primary focus of this project was to develop a plan to improve facilities for pedestrians and bicyclists within the community. As such, it was essential to obtain input and feedback from neighborhood residents, who have the most in-depth knowledge of the issues with and barriers to walking and bicycling within the community. An additional goal was to successfully involve neighborhood residents in project components in an effort to improve participation in neighborhood improvement activities. Finally, it is anticipated that as a result of this study the RA neighborhood will serve as model, demonstrating how modest changes in infrastructure can encourage more energy efficient and healthy lifestyles. The neighborhood can share these experiences with other organizations in the city.

Project Description

A comprehensive inventory of traffic patterns along with a series of neighborhood surveys were conducted to identify problems related to safety and efficiency of existing transportation systems. Ensuring that RA residents were familiar with the project goals and activities was an essential element for project success. Prior to any data collection or request for resident involvement, multiple means of communication were used to introduce the project goals and to encourage community participation, including: a project flyer, neighborhood website, neighborhood newsletter, and neighborhood meetings. The neighborhood website was developed and an initial project flyer was distributed to 500

households in September 2008. Following the distribution of the flyer, the project was discussed and the website (www.thepigeonroost.com) availability announced at regular monthly neighborhood meetings and in the monthly RA newsletter. All of these means of communication were used throughout the project to keep residents informed and engaged in project activities.

Three surveys were developed and distributed to neighborhood residents over the course of the project. Survey instruments were available online through a link on the neighborhood website, however, the primary means of survey data collection was through door-to-door survey administration by RA resident and U of M student volunteers. The survey events were designed to reach approximately 20% of households in the neighborhood, with a goal of 100 responses to each survey.

The first survey developed was a brief pre-project survey consisting of five questions. This instrument was designed to collect data regarding how residents preferred to receive project information, to determine how important residents felt community involvement was to project success, and to identify concerns residents had with walking/bicycling in the neighborhood. The primary means of input from neighborhood residents for this project was through a transportation survey. This survey, consisting of 10 questions, was designed to determine most frequent modes of travel and to identify perceptions of residents regarding importance and ease of walking/bicycling in the neighborhood, greatest barriers to walking/bicycling, and overall quality and safety of the transportation network components in the neighborhood. The final survey developed for this project was designed to evaluate project success in meeting the expectations and needs of neighborhood residents. The evaluation surveys consisted of ten questions, with the first five questions focusing on overall project impact and the last five questions focusing on the target area of the neighborhood.

In addition to input from neighborhood residents, traffic data collection and infrastructure conditions assessment were critical to this project. The primary data needed for the project were sidewalk conditions, traffic volumes at key intersections, and speed and volume data along McLean Boulevard (identified through neighborhood surveys as a key corridor in need of traffic calming). Neighborhood volunteers and U of M students conducted sidewalk surveys. The surveys consisted of inventorying neighborhood sidewalks and rating the condition as good, fair, poor, or not existing. Intersection volume counts were conducted at all intersections along McLean Boulevard within the RA neighborhood, and around Rozelle Elementary (area of higher pedestrian volume). Counts were conducted manually by U of M civil engineering student volunteers, and included volume of each turning movement during peak hours. Speed and volume data was also collected along McLean Boulevard using an automatic counter.

Findings

Our project was successful in reaching a significant number of residents. Approximately 100 responses were received to each project survey. The key

survey for identifying problem areas within the neighborhood was the transportation survey. The findings of the transportation survey included:

- 33% of residents said safety was their biggest concern in walking or bicycling in the neighborhood.
- More than 90% of residents think traffic safety and neighborhood security are the most important factors for standard of living in the neighborhood.
- Residents rated neighborhood streets, particularly McLean as poor for walking and biking.

In addition, traffic data indicated high volumes and relatively high speeds along McLean Boulevard and a need for additional efforts to improve pedestrian visibility in the vicinity of Rozelle Elementary. McLean is a key facility in the RA neighborhood because it serves as the boundary between the RA and the Cooper-Young neighborhood. With improved conditions along this facility, connection between the neighborhoods will be facilitated. The final product of this project is a report that defines existing conditions, identifies areas of need, and recommends changes to the existing transportation network. This report includes a summary of recommended best practices for both traffic calming and neighborhood involvement, a summary of collected data, plans for re-design of McLean Boulevard to make it more suitable for pedestrian/bicycle traffic, and a plan for additional traffic calming around Rozelle Elementary. With the adoption of the transportation improvement plan resulting from this project, the Rozelle-Annesdale neighborhood will serve as a model for sustainable transportation practices for the greater Memphis community.

HOW DID THE PROJECT SUCCEED?

Community Engagement: We are pleased with the level of neighborhood involvement throughout this project. Nearly one hundred residents participated in each of our survey events. Ninety RA residents participated in the project evaluation process. A significant number (62%) of respondents reported they provided input for this project through at least one of the project activities. It is exciting to note that 87% of respondents reported that they feel this project will increase future neighborhood involvement, and 69% reported that they personally are more likely to be involved in future neighborhood activities because of this project. When asked what else could be changed to increase participation in neighborhood activities, common responses included reducing violence and increasing neighborhood communication.

Student Involvement: Various research assistant project activities were incorporated into two transportation engineering courses and one engineering statistics course within the civil engineering curriculum at the U of M. In addition, three undergraduate research students participated in project activities via MemphiSTEM Undergraduate Research Fellowships, and one graduate student participated through an individual project course. Students were very excited about the RA project because it allowed them to better understand the direct way in which civil engineers can make a positive impact on society. It is essential to demonstrate connections between courses (i.e. engineering statistics and

transportation engineering) and to actively engage students in real-world applications of course content for the greatest learning gains to occur. This project allowed both goals to be effectively addressed. Students unanimously reported on course exit surveys that the project experience was valuable for enhancing learning of course material and for connecting engineering solutions to real-world problems.

Scholarship: In terms of scholarship goals, a paper is currently being prepared focusing on the role of the unique academic/community partnership of this project in facilitating student learning. In addition, the implications for recruitment and retention of engineering students will also be addressed. Failure to understand the ways engineering benefits society is one key factor cited in current engineering education literature as leading to attrition from engineering programs and to lack of interest in the major for K-12 students. Thus, the publication prepared from the RA project will highlight the usefulness of projects such as this in demonstrating examples of engineers positively impacting society to students at both the K-12 and college level.

Leveraging Resources: This project has promoted organizational change in that the neighborhood association has developed and will maintain an ongoing transportation committee in cooperation with the Pigeon Roost Development Corporation to monitor neighborhood activities, based on the information obtained during this project and the products resulting from it. With the help of a formal, professionally developed plan these coordinated activities and the commitment of the neighborhood residents will encourage the City of Memphis to support the neighborhood transportation planning efforts for the sustainability of pedestrian facilities and traffic calming approaches. This project resulted in a redevelopment plan for sustainable transportation practices in the RA neighborhood with routes extending into the surrounding neighborhoods. It was also instrumental in building capacity and developing funding efforts, as nearly \$200,000 in grant funding and private donations were obtained in large part due to efforts on this project.

WHAT LESSONS DID YOU LEARN?

The project has been beneficial to both the faculty/students involved as well as the Rozelle-Annesdale neighborhood. The Rozelle-Annesdale neighborhood has been able to use data and products developed through the project to further efforts for community improvement. Multiple grant applications are underway that will leverage the results from this project. Additionally, 83% of residents responding to the post-project survey (N=90) believe the project adequately addressed neighborhood needs, 80% are more likely to walk and bicycle in the neighborhood if design plans are implemented, and 87% indicate they will be more involved in neighborhood activities due to this project.

The following represent the lessons learned over the course of our project:

Communication is the most critical component to the success of any project or partnership. It is essential to identify avenues for communication and

dissemination of information at the beginning of a project, and that multiple methods (flyers, email, website, neighborhood meetings, etc.) are used throughout the project. Had we not been successful in reaching the residents from the outset, we would not have been able to achieve our project goals. Our academic/community partnership was successful because we developed clearly defined goals and roles of the team members from the beginning, and communicated frequently about progress and stumbling blocks.

We dramatically ***underestimated the scope/effort of this project initially*** because of the way our (faculty and community partner) ideas changed and expanded as we began our work. Originally it was anticipated that one graduate and two undergraduate students would be involved in data collection, analysis, and design development. However, by the end of the project we involved more than 50 undergraduate students and two graduate students, and were able to collect far more data than we ever expected. We would never have been able to afford this type of effort through our project budget. Thus, academic and community partnerships can greatly increase the capacity of a project by involving students in service-learning experiences. This type of partnership is not restricted to the University level. K-12 classrooms can also help with data collection efforts, and will benefit from the learning experience if links between course content and the community project are clearly demonstrated.

The most significant outcome of this project from an academic standpoint was the opportunity to ***incorporate service-learning experiences*** in civil engineering courses. Students responded very well to the project, and indicated on course exit surveys that the experience was instrumental in deepening their understanding of both the course material and the impact civil engineers have on society. This type of learning environment may also improve student retention and even recruitment into engineering majors.

UNIVERSITY DISTRICT ART PROJECT

Nonprofit Partner: Steve Barlow, University Neighborhoods Development Corporation (UNDC)*

The University Neighborhoods Development Corporation (UNDC) focuses on economic and business development in the geographic area surrounding the University of Memphis. The SC grant was awarded to implement a public art project in the neighborhood's main corridor, the Highland strip. Community residents and young people took part in the design and production of the public murals with the goal of establishing a neighborhood identity. The project's faculty partner helped the neighborhood choose and create art that reflected the community's heritage through community input and review meetings. A second part of the project was a weekly art education course taught at the Davis Community Center by art education students. Finally, beautification projects were completed to visually enhance the Highland Avenue strip.

HOW DID YOU ENVISION YOUR PROJECT MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN MEMPHIS?

Working with 7 neighborhood associations in the University of Memphis area, neighborhood residents and business owners were interested in doing something visual to show that change and revitalization were coming. Many years of planning had resulted in documents and maps, but nothing tangible that a passerby would notice. In the interest of promoting further revitalizations, the alliance decided public art would be the way to accomplish this goal. The alliance had a history of working with architecture and planning schools and on the advice of University of Memphis administrators, approached a muralist in the art department.

The original goal was to do a series of high profile murals in the neighborhood. The alliance partnered with Cedar Norbye in the Art Department and the Memphis Urban Art Commission to install public art and create a Community Art Center to attempt to create a sense of place and to give residents, students and businesses an opportunity to be involved in thinking about community revitalization while creating art. Working with the Art Department the actual project included a 6 week art class in a local community center for neighborhood middle school students, a competition for public art projects in the art school, numerous public art murals and even billboards generated based on community input, and a street planting of trees and shrubs in the most busy portion of the commercial hub.

HOW DID THE PROJECT SUCCEED?

Students were integrally involved at all levels of this project. Students taught middle school neighborhood kids at a Saturday art academy. Students

* Steve Barlow was Executive Director of the UNDC during the project time period. He is now an attorney with Brewer & Barlow.

participated in community planning meetings where art projects were discussed and created. In one case, students coordinated a mural at a public facility which was in collaboration with another local nonprofit group which involved a Nobel peace prize winner as a community muralist. Art professors in the art education and the fine arts programs had the opportunity to access local neighborhood people to develop and refine their approach to teaching. Numerous local community organizations were involved in implementing art projects. For example, the Memphis Botanic Gardens donated labor and professional expertise to install trees and shrubs purchased with grant funds.

WHAT LESSONS DID YOU LEARN?

- Community building is about personal relationships.
- While the university operates on a semester basis, real organizations don't. It is hard to continue a working relationship when your faculty partner is off on a sabbatical in India.
- Everyone doesn't like every piece of art...but if everyone has a chance to be involved, it is worth the effort and gets conversations going. And art can be a lot of things – even things you never thought of. For example, one art project done as a part of this project involved going around the neighborhood, taking photos of people at their house, and asking them one question “What do you like most about your neighborhood.” This yielded a design for a mural which incorporated all of the photographs and quotes into one display. Another part of the art project was designing and printing t-shirts for a neighborhood festival.
- The project expanded as it went along – organically. The mural grew to an art project competition.
- A little money can go a long way, with partnership (Memphis Botanic Garden designed plantings, UNDC bought the plants, and students planted.)
- The intern responsible for the art project learned a lot and was very important to the making the project work. As a student, she had more frequent access to other students and when she was empowered to plan and dream other students were inspired to participate in creative ways as well.

UPTOWN PROJECT

Nonprofit Partner: Molly Merry-Campbell, BRIDGES, Inc.

Bridges, Inc. is a youth-serving nonprofit providing experiential, hands-on learning to fight racism, poverty, and educational challenges. The SC funded project was to create a middle-school level sustainable design curriculum. The curriculum included a series of field trips that taught environmentally sound building design. The aim was to encourage cost savings and energy efficiency within schools and homes throughout the Uptown and downtown neighborhoods. The project also provided youth “green” jobs as docents; six GED interns from other Bridges programs were selected to serve in paid positions as educators. Many of these students have had little or no prior work experiences.

HOW DID YOU ENVISION YOUR PROJECT MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN MEMPHIS?

Conversations about this new initiative came out of an already-existing university-community relationships between the U of M architecture faculty and students, BRIDGES staff, and an advisory board consisting of Uptown/Downtown middle school principals, teachers and students who worked together to design interpretive panels to teach about the green building ideals and design of the BRIDGES Center. The Ordinary to Extraordinary: Learning and Leading Green (hereafter referred to as O2E) initiative is a natural fit with our prior work together, and it builds on the foundation we have already established. Conversations with students, faculty, staff, parents, Uptown residents, BRIDGES GED/Life Skills Program Director have also helped to shape this project.

Building upon the creative collaboration described above, O2E was developed as a mutually beneficial project aimed at:

- Improving academic achievement in math and science.
- Inspiring leadership for environmental sustainability.
- Providing economic development through energy efficiency and “green” employment within the Downtown/Uptown geographic area.

The previous collaboration had been very successful because it built upon the strengths of the missions of both the university and the community organization. In collaboration with BRIDGES and the other stakeholders, the University of Memphis faculty and students were able to serve the Memphis community through engaged scholarship, research and creative expression that contributed to sustainable, stable communities. BRIDGES, in collaboration with the University of Memphis, was able to better fulfill its mission of helping others to overcome poverty and educational challenges through experiential education. The Strengthening Communities Initiative grant helped us to strengthen and expand this community collaboration by developing a new initiative (O2E) that involved all community-university stakeholders in a meaningful, impactful way. Also joining the collaborative for this new initiative were the students and faculty from the architecture honors courses (fall 2008 and spring 2009).

The O2E initiative included the development, implementation and evaluation of a classroom curriculum and educational fieldtrip experience based on green building ideals and design that aimed to improve academic achievement in math and science among Downtown/Uptown middle school students. It also provided students with opportunities to supply leadership for environmental sustainability and economic development through energy efficiency/cost-saving initiatives within their homes and schools (including a new school policy implementation). Lastly, the project trained and employed young adult interns from the Uptown/Downtown area (enrolled in BRIDGES GED/Life Skills program) to be docents/educators for the O2E fieldtrip experience, giving them meaningful work and educational experience while introducing them to the expanding job/career opportunities within an emerging U.S. and global “green” economy.

Phases of the O2E initiative:

Phase I—(May 19, 2008-September 2008): The first phase of this project involved the collaborative development of “Ordinary to Extraordinary: Learning and Leading Green! (O2E)” –a hands-on, experiential curriculum and fieldtrip that uses green building ideals and design of the BRIDGES Center to inspire learning in math and science and leadership for sustainability. We aligned this curriculum with state math and science educational standards for middle school students (grade 7) and used a service-learning pedagogy to combine academic achievement with leadership for social change. An exciting component of the curriculum that was developed was the “Green Jobs/Careers” exploration where students learned about the growing green economic opportunities in a variety of fields as well as the skills and credentials required for these jobs/careers. The leadership component of the curriculum was two-fold. The first component involved a student-led school-wide environmental sustainability audit process that would ultimately result in the implementation of a new policy for advancing environmental sustainability and increasing cost savings for the school. The second component involved a student-parent collaborative home environmental sustainability audit process that would result in individualized sustainability practices and cost-savings. Phase I involved significant collaboration. A team of teachers, principals, local environmental consultants, students, and parents in the Uptown/Downtown area worked with the BRIDGES staff, University of Memphis architecture faculty and a paid student assistant to develop the classroom, standards-based curriculum.

Phase 2—(September 2008-December 2008): Phase two of O2E included the training and employment of GED students as docents/educators for the O2E fieldtrip experience. The goal was to train young adults to serve in this meaningful, paid internship experience (receiving non-taxable stipends). This experience was invaluable to these students, many of whom have had little to no work experience and who desperately need to earn income during their participation in BRIDGES GED/Life Skills Program. Also during phase two, teachers within the partnering middle schools were trained on how to implement the O2E curriculum in their classrooms. Then, the first round of implementation of the curriculum/fieldtrip with pilot classes within Uptown/Downtown middle schools took place. As a part of the curriculum, students completed a home environmental sustainability audit with their parent(s). The students worked

together to do an environmental sustainability audit of their school and then create a leadership action project that would implement sustainability practices and increase cost savings for their school. This leadership project culminated with the development of a new school policy to advance environmental sustainability in their school and surrounding neighborhood. Evaluation tools for this phase included math and science mastery assessment tools and teacher and student surveys that were collected and analyzed by BRIDGES staff. Based on the results of the evaluations, improvements were made in the curriculum, trainings and fieldtrip experience before the next round of implementation began in the spring.

Phase 3—(January 2009-July 2009): In Phase 3 of O2E, additional classes within the partnering middle schools implemented the curriculum and fieldtrip experience. Also, during Phase 3, all of the participating classes (from the fall and spring) in each school combined ideas from their school-based leadership action projects to draft their school policies for advancing environmental sustainability and increasing cost savings. Evaluations (same as Phase 2) from this round of implementation were completed and analyzed. Based on the results of these evaluations, additional improvements were made in the project (June and July).

Phase 4—(August-December 2009): In Phase 4, the focus was on the implementation and evaluation of the newly developed school policies advancing environmental sustainability and increasing cost savings. Students worked with adult leaders in their school to educate the school community about the new policies, encouraging compliance. These policies would ensure that the work of O2E would be sustained in the future. The school policy developed through the first cycle of implementation would hopefully be strengthened by future student groups within the school who also participate in O2E. BRIDGES built upon the successes and lessons learned during this grant cycle to expand the work of O2E within these partnering middle schools and eventually within schools throughout the greater Memphis community.

COMMUNITY NEEDS ADDRESSED BY THIS PROJECT

The community was involved with this project in several critical ways. The project advisory board composed of principals, teachers, environmental consultants, students and parents of Uptown/Downtown middle schools collaborated with the BRIDGES staff and University of Memphis faculty and staff to develop the O2E curriculum. Six community youth from BRIDGES GED program served in the significant role of educator/docent for the O2E fieldtrip component of the curriculum. Parents of the middle school students were involved by working with their child to complete the environmental sustainability audit of their home and implement recommended steps to advance environmental sustainability and increase cost savings for their home.

The project addressed specific community needs:

Deficiency in math and science achievement: According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) 2005 report on 8th Grade Mathematics Achievement for 52 states and other jurisdictions, Tennessee ranked in the

bottom fifteen. Two of the three middle schools (Vance and Humes) we partnered with for this project were on Memphis City Schools' "High Priority List" for failing to meet "Adequate Yearly Progress" (AYP) benchmarks.

Dearth of meaningful opportunities for youth to be leaders/resources in their communities: According to the Search Institute's Survey of Student Assets and Resources among Shelby County and Memphis City Schools (7th and 9th grades), only 27% of students perceive that adults in the community value youth, and only 27% report being given useful roles in the community.

Lack of meaningful and skill-building jobs for low-income youth: Based on many years of experience working with low-income youth and young adults, BRIDGES has observed that our participants have great difficulty in finding employment. BRIDGES has previously partnered with the City of Memphis and the Chamber of Commerce to offer summer employment opportunities for youth. Over 400 students applied for the twenty-five positions, showing the substantial need for meaningful youth jobs.

Need to reduce utility costs among low-income households and schools: With all three Uptown/Downtown schools being TITLE 1 schools, the majority of their students represent low-income households. At the time when energy costs were on the rise, low-income households and schools would certainly benefit from learning how to conserve natural resources and improve their energy efficiency, thus reducing their utility costs.

HOW DID THE TEAM EVALUATE THE OUTCOMES OF THE PROJECT?

Tangible Products Aligned with Project Objectives

Objective: To increase mastery in math and science among middle school students in Downtown/Uptown.

Products:

- Innovative, collaboratively developed curriculum to teach math, science and leadership for sustainability for middle school students. Curriculum includes assessment tools for teachers to evaluate changes in academic mastery.
- Trainings to prepare teachers for implementing the O2E curriculum. Trainings are evaluated through teacher satisfaction surveys.

Objective: To provide middle school students opportunities to supply leadership for environmental sustainability and economic development.

Product:

- This is measured by the number of environmental sustainability audits completed by students and parents and the level of participation by students in the development of policies that advance environmental sustainability and increase cost savings.

Objective: To provide meaningful, economic development opportunities for young adults through "green" employment (docent/educator for O2E fieldtrip/curriculum)

Product:

- Monetary stipends and meaningful work experience provided for 6 low-income GED students

Objective: To encourage cost savings and energy efficiency within Uptown/Downtown schools and homes

Products:

- Number of environmental sustainability audits completed by students and parents.
- Implementation of new policies that advance environmental sustainability and increase cost savings in schools, homes and surrounding neighborhoods

Policy Change and/or Organizational Change Outcomes:

- The development of a school policy for advancing environmental sustainability and increasing cost savings will create a way for the learning and leadership accomplishments of O2E participants to be sustained within their schools.
- Through the collaborative process of developing and implementing O2E during this funding cycle, BRIDGES gained a foundation of knowledge and experience upon which BRIDGES has built a sustained educational and leadership program using green building design within Uptown/Downtown and beyond.

HOW DID THE PROJECT SUCCEED?

Use of Students. *From the perspective of our U of M faculty partner, Michael Hagge (Architecture):* The Ordinary to Extraordinary: Learning and Leading Green (O2E) project significantly advanced both my teaching and scholarly goals as well as created special opportunities for other faculty and for students within the Department of Architecture. One of the major aspects of the design profession is that of community engagement. This project gave me the opportunity to share my knowledge of architecture and sustainability with university students as well as the middle school students towards whom O2E is focused. I believe professionals have an obligation to “give back” to the community and O2E accomplished this.

Students from the Department of Architecture were vital to the success of O2E. From the beginning, architecture student Kate Bidwell worked closely with me as a special assistant and guided the project in respect to LEED standards. She became a LEED Accredited Professional in July of 2008 and having a person with the detailed level of knowledge on this subject was critical. Further into the project, the Parameters in Architecture Studio I taught participated as a class on several different occasions. This course was composed of undergraduate architecture honors students as well as graduate students in both architecture and city planning. The group created the impact statements as well as formed the way that the model sustainable schools were created and facilitated. It was great

bringing students to the BRIDGES Center to experience what they helped to create.

In regards to the curricular and academic products, the lessons learned by the architecture students involved in O2E were useful as they designed a prototype affordable and sustainable residence for the South Memphis Renaissance Initiative neighborhood during the spring 2009 semester and beyond. Building on our work with O2E and our TERRA (Technologically + Environmentally Responsive Residential Architecture) demonstration house, students in the Department of Architecture became uniquely qualified to undertake this and other similar community projects.

Over the project period, the Department of Architecture also expanded the presence of sustainability in its curriculum both formally and informally. The knowledge gained will be built upon as curricular revisions are made in the coming years.

Engaged Scholarship. *From the perspective of our U of M faculty partner, Michael Hagge (Architecture):* Overall, this project played a significant role in the enhancement of the culture of engaged scholarship within the Department of Architecture. While the Department has had a significant community component, the O2E project offered students the opportunity to explore architecture and design in a non-traditional, experiential way. While the norm for architects and designers is to design places, either building or public spaces, this project presented a unique and engaging challenge. Architecture students focused on using education to teach youth and adults about the benefits of sustainable living and sustainable architecture. Architecture faculty and students also worked with BRIDGES to develop curriculum pieces and hands-on fieldtrip learning stations. Because the O2E development process was done in collaboration with community partners, it gave the faculty and students significant opportunities to engage with people outside of the academy, to learn from their real-life experiences and ideas.

The Department of Architecture values the partnership with BRIDGES and has discussed other ways in which to work together in the future. One way in which we plan to continue our partnership is to continue to work together on the Discovering Architecture Summer Camp. During this camp experience, architecture faculty and student leaders engage camp participants with the O2E experience at BRIDGES. Another possible partnership is to work together on designing additional green buildings to help further the BRIDGES mission in different parts of the Memphis community. The partnership with BRIDGES has been a completely positive experience.

Leveraging resources and outcomes

Organizational capacity built as a result of or related to this project: As a result of our O2E development and implementation experience, BRIDGES employees have developed knowledge around sustainability principles, movements, etc. and aligning curriculum with Tennessee state standards and state performance indicators. Our partners at the University of Memphis gained knowledge about

program development and delivery. And together, we built a strong foundation on which to continue working together to sustain this educational and leadership program using green building design.

How this project has helped leverage additional grant dollars and community support: Because of the program's initial support through this grant, we have been able to focus on the careful and strategic development of O2E. In doing so, several other teachers, organizations, companies, etc. have become interested in the O2E education/training experience. After reviewing the program in detail, the Tennessee Valley Authority agreed to sponsor the development of the fieldtrip learning stations, as well as the fees and transportation costs of the fieldtrip experiences for O2E pilot students. In the beginning of 2009, TVA supported O2E with a \$14,500 gift and then renewed their support in 2010 with a \$25,000 gift. O2E has also gained attention and support from the Junior League of Memphis which donated \$8,000 for student O2E scholarships. In recent proposals, O2E has received formal endorsements from Mayor AC Wharton, Mayor Joe Ford, MCS Superintendent Dr. Kriner Cash, MLG&W President/CEO Jerry Collins, Jr., Memphis and Shelby County Division of Planning and Development Deputy Director Maura Black Sullivan, and many other community leaders.

WHAT LESSONS DID YOU LEARN?

When reflecting on the project, there are some recommendations that our project team would make to improve the process, and these recommendations come from a variety of project staff.

Recommendations from the university student research associate:

- Develop stronger communication patterns and practices between the grant committee and grantees
- Simplify the communication practices between the grant recipients and the university
- Simplify the project documentation processes

Recommendations from the University of Memphis faculty:

- Increase time and frequency of grantee meetings for more detailed project sharing and reflecting
- Recommendations from BRIDGES/the community partner:
- Clarify the roles and expectations of student roles, community partners, etc. so collaborations can be more effective, efficient and impact-oriented

PLENARY PRESENTATION

Anne Whiston Spirn, Professor of Landscape Architecture, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Dr. Spirn's presented her work in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Dr. Spirn gave permission for the article that follows from the journal, *Landscape Research*, is reprinted in this Proceedings. The article provides the details of the Dr. Spirn's ongoing project in Philadelphia.

Restoring Mill Creek: Landscape Literacy, Environmental Justice and City Planning and Design

ANNE WHISTON SPIRN

ABSTRACT Injustices occur when human law and social practice ignore natural processes and when those who plan, design and build the city focus on a neighbourhood's problems and fail to recognize its resources. The story of the Mill Creek neighbourhood in Philadelphia illustrates these themes. Mill Creek is shaped by all the processes at work in inner-city America. It was laid waste by the flow of water and capital, and by the violence of redevelopment and neglect. Known locally as 'The Bottom', Mill Creek is one of many such 'Black Bottoms' in the US. They are at the bottom, economically, socially and topographically. Here, harsh socio-economic conditions and racial discrimination are exacerbated by health and safety hazards posed by a high water table and unstable ground. Landscape literacy is a means for recognizing and redressing those injustices through urban planning and design and community development, just as verbal literacy was a cornerstone of the American Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s.

KEY WORDS: Landscape history, environmental education, community development, watershed management, urban design and planning

Mill Creek

The Mill Creek neighbourhood of West Philadelphia is a place of many puzzles. Within its street grid of three-storey brick rowhouses with small porches, are other types of dwellings: a Georgian mansion, single-family homes on large lots, tiny rowhouses with no yard and tall towers of concrete. The amount of open land in Mill Creek is striking, especially in contrast to the dense fabric of small rowhouses. Much open land is covered by rubble and grasses; in some places trees have grown 20 feet high. On some blocks, only one house or one small lot is vacant; in other areas, houses have sagging porches and crumbling foundations, and there are almost as many vacant lots as buildings. Blocks of vacant land and wasted structures border blocks of well-tended houses and gardens. Boarded-up storefronts speak of failed ventures, but other institutions, such as the numerous community gardens, flourish. Mill Creek is among the poorest neighbourhoods in

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Philadelphia, yet it is home to many well-educated, middle-class residents; almost all are African-American.

To those who can read this landscape, it poses many questions. Why is there so much vacant land? Are there patterns to how and where abandonment occurs? Why are some parts of the neighbourhood so devastated, while others prosper? These are not trivial riddles. The answers reveal the nature of Mill Creek and are key to its future. When those who plan and build the city disregard the significance of these mysteries or fail to see them at all, they waste resources, produce dangerous, expensive mistakes and inflict grave injustice on all who live there.

The landscape of Mill Creek is a catalogue of the failures of 20th-century urban policy, planning and design. Some policies and projects were deliberate and insidious in their effects; most were well-intentioned but misguided. The Federal Housing Administration's guidelines for underwriters spelled out in the 1930s contributed to redlining, the practice of refusing to grant loans for the purchase of properties on the basis of location.¹ Redevelopment projects of the 1950s, such as the public housing towers inserted into this neighbourhood of small-scale rowhouses, had devastating effects on the place they sought to improve and contributed to the racial segregation of a neighbourhood where Blacks and Whites had lived next door to one another, in identical rowhouses, for at least a century. New playgrounds and streetscapes built in the 1960s cracked and sank within a few years of construction, and a public housing project was recently demolished.

The critics of modernist urban planning and redevelopment are now legion. However, much recent development in Mill Creek is likely to produce similar results. Like their predecessors, those responsible for planning Mill Creek often treat symptoms and fail to address the underlying processes that produce them. Planners too often concentrate on narrowly defined problems and fail to see the connections among seemingly unrelated phenomena. Designers tend to focus on physical form and fail to account for the processes that will continue to shape their project over time. Planners and designers alike see the devastation in Mill Creek, but are blind to the blocks of well-kept homes and miss the fact that one house type is never vacant. They do not see the 18th-century mansion; it is on no map or tour of Philadelphia's historic houses. Such prejudice is not limited to top-down planners and designers. Non-profit organizations dedicated to community reinvestment stress the neighbourhood's liabilities and neglect its resources and the opportunities these afford. Even grass-roots activists often concentrate on a specific local problem or a particular site and overlook how these fit into the larger neighbourhood, city and region.

To plan a neighbourhood is both a spatial and a temporal undertaking that entails the management of complex relationships, but planners' and designers' maps are usually static snapshots of current conditions, narrowly framed. Some problems, though manifest locally, are phenomena set in motion outside the neighbourhood and must be resolved in that context. Some features of the built landscape are clues to forces that continue to exert a decisive influence, while others are artefacts of processes now defunct. Some are amenable to change, others are not. Some are themselves dynamic agents that enable and constrain possibilities for subsequent development.

To restore the Mill Creek neighbourhood requires an understanding of how it came to be, how the built landscape evolved, through what processes

and actions, when, and which of its features have had a sustained impact on their surroundings over time. I use the word landscape in its original sense in English and Nordic languages—the mutual shaping of people and place—to encompass both the population of a place and its physical features: its topography, water flow and plant life; its infrastructure of streets and sewers; its land uses, buildings and open spaces.² The urban landscape is shaped by rain, plants and animals, human hands and minds. Rain falls, carving valleys and soaking soil. People mould landscape with hands, tools and machines, through law, public policy, the investing and withholding of capital, and other actions undertaken hundreds or thousands of miles away. The processes that shape landscape operate at different scales of space and time: from the local to the national, from the ephemeral to the enduring.

Reading the Landscape of Mill Creek

The landscape of Mill Creek is a textbook of American city planning and city building from the colonial period to the present. Market Street, the neighbourhood's southern boundary, is Philadelphia's main east - west axis and one of its oldest routes, laid as a western extension of William Penn's grid plan of 1683 for the centre of the city. The prevailing grid of streets in Mill Creek is an artefact of the 19th-century streetcar suburb. The principal thoroughfares, Lancaster and Haverford Avenues, cut diagonally across the grid and predate it. Like Market Street, they once linked the city with its agricultural hinterlands; each points to a former ferry crossing of the Schuylkill River, one to Market, the other to Spring Garden. Lancaster Avenue was the nation's first turnpike, and before that an Indian trail that followed a ridgeline.

Mills powered by water operated along Mill Creek by 1711, and by the middle of the 19th century steam-powered textile mills were prominent. Wealthy Philadelphians established country estates on the outskirts of the city in the 18th century, such as Woodlands at the mouth of Mill Creek and Paul Busti's Blockley Retreat of 240 acres, established in 1794, which overlooked the creek upstream. Busti's estate was purchased in 1836 to establish a hospital in the country for psychiatric patients. That same year, a group of Quakers founded the Coloured Orphan Asylum on Haverford Avenue across the street from the Busti mansion. It was the first institution in the nation dedicated to the care of African-American children.

The Hopkins Atlas of 1872 shows the creek, hospital, home for orphans and mills within a grid of streets, houses and platted (but undeveloped) properties. This is a landscape undergoing rapid change from countryside to streetcar suburb. Although the neighbourhood's residents were predominantly White, enumeration tables of the 1880 US Census record that 'Blacks' and 'Mulattos' lived side by side with 'White' families. The Bromley Atlas of 1895 no longer shows the creek, and rowhouses have replaced the mill buildings at 46th and Haverford. In the Bromley Atlas of 1927, almost all the land north of Haverford has been developed, and the sinuous line of the sewer beneath blocks of rowhouses is the only visible trace of Mill Creek.

At first glance, the 17th-century forest and the 18th- and 19th-century agricultural and industrial landscapes seem obliterated, but abundant traces remain. From the corner of 46th and Haverford, one can read several hundred years of history. A large vacant block slopes upward toward the northeast.

Once covered by homes, now it is a grassy meadow with a grove of ash and ailanthus trees. A fire hydrant amidst the trees is a clue to the houses that once stood here and to the pavement and pipes that lie beneath the soil. The processes of plant succession that shaped the original forest drive the growth of the grove.³ A high stone wall runs along the south side of Haverford Avenue, east to 42nd Street and west to 49th; it was built in the mid 19th century to enclose Pennsylvania Hospital's buildings, gardens and inmates. Uphill to the east, behind the stone wall of the old hospital, the roof of the Busti mansion is visible. It is now the Lee Cultural Center, which sponsors African-American cultural activities. Basketball courts and a playground occupy the former gardens.

There are painful stories in Mill Creek, stories just as important to remember as stories of mills and mansions. By the late 19th century, the creek was polluted by wastes from slaughterhouses, tanneries and households. In the 1880s, it was buried in a sewer, its floodplain filled in and built upon, but it still drains the stormwater and carries all the wastes from half of West Philadelphia and from suburbs far upstream. Each new suburb built in the watershed has poured more sewage and stormwater into the sewer. The size of the pipe—about 20 feet in diameter—is now far too small for the huge quantity of wastewater it must convey. So the water cracks the pipe, then undermines it, and, once or twice a year, sometimes more often, the sewer overflows, and brown water spouts from inlets and manhole covers.

For more than 60 years, the ground has fallen in, here and there, along the line of the sewer. The creek has undermined buildings and streets and slashed meandering diagonals of shifting foundations, and vacant land across the urban landscape. Local newspapers have chronicled the long series of broken pipes and cave-ins.⁴ In the 1940s, 47 homes were demolished because they were "plagued with rats and filled with sewer vapor". In 1945, a neighbourhood of small row homes built above the sewer was destroyed when the sewer collapsed. In 1952, a 35-foot-deep cave-in on Sansom Street swallowed two cars, and the porches of three homes crumbled into the crater. On 17 July 1961, the sewer caved in beneath Funston Street near 50th. Initially, four houses were destroyed and three people killed; ultimately 111 homes were condemned and demolished, leaving hundreds homeless and many others fearful of further collapse. "We haven't been ordered to leave. We're just too frightened to stay here", one person told a reporter. Months later, Philadelphia's Evening Bulletin described residents' complaints of sewer odours and their frustration at the city's slow response in repairing the 30-foot chasm. Entire city blocks are now open within the buried floodplain. Young woodlands of ailanthus, sumac and ash have grown up on older lots, urban meadows on lots vacated more recently. Many community gardens in this part of West Philadelphia lie within the old floodplain of Mill Creek; older gardeners remember when buildings sank, their foundations eroded by high groundwater, undermined by subsiding fill.

On higher ground are other types of vacant land, the product of the outward flow of capital and population. Vacant corner lots are common, remnants of the many corner stores that once served the neighbourhood. They are artefacts of changing scales and modes of merchandizing and the failure of new businesses to fill the gap. There are also individual, scattered vacant lots in otherwise intact blocks of homes, the consequences of events such as death and fire. Some lots were once 'heir houses', homes left vacant after the death of an owner when there was no clear title to the property; without active ownership, these homes fall into disrepair.⁵ Others were sites

of fires, where homeowners with no insurance may have lacked the resources to rebuild. For many years, businessmen and homeowners in Mill Creek found it difficult or impossible to obtain fire insurance and mortgages. The Philadelphia Real Property Survey of 1934, a contributing factor to such insurance and lending practices, documented building age and condition, and the race, income and education of residents. Mill Creek's older houses, some in poor condition, some with flooded basements, and its population of different races and ethnic origins (some with relatively low incomes), led to the lowest rating, 'D' or 'red', for the entire neighbourhood.

In 1945 Pennsylvania enacted enabling legislation for federally funded redevelopment under the Urban Redevelopment Law. In 1948, the city designated the Mill Creek neighbourhood as a redevelopment area, and hired architect Louis Kahn to produce a plan. In 1950, following a sewer collapse near 47th and Fairmount Streets, Kahn was also commissioned to design the Mill Creek Housing Project on several square blocks near the cave-in. Newspaper articles from the 1950s to the 1960s record protests by residents who opposed public housing, particularly the high-rise apartment blocks. The public housing was built, as were playing fields and ball courts on other blocks that had fallen in. Land immediately over the sewer pipe was maintained as open lawn or parking lots, but much of the new public housing was built on the buried floodplain. There have been no major cave-ins in recent years, but sinking streets, playgrounds and parking lots and shifting building foundations continue to plague the area. The basement of the elementary school built on the corner of 46th and Haverford in the 1960s is frequently flooded, and the building has sustained serious structural damage.

Between 1950 and 1970, the overall population of the Mill Creek neighbourhood declined by 27%. In 1950, the US Census described the population as about 27% Caucasian and 73% African American. By 1960, the White population had dropped to about 13%; it had dropped to 4% in 1970, and to less than 2% in 1990.⁶ There are local reasons for these demographic changes, but they are also part of a much larger story. The city of Philadelphia, as a whole, also lost population during this period, and the trend continues. While six suburban counties around Philadelphia grew by as much as 12% in the 1990s, Philadelphia lost 9% of its population during the same period (Diaz, 1999). This is a local manifestation of a national phenomenon, a massive migration from central cities to suburbs and ex-urban areas, which has reshaped American rural and urban landscapes, consuming farmland and forests and destroying urban communities in the process.

Given the outward flow of population and capital and the inward flow of sewage and groundwater, the abundance of vacant land and deteriorating or abandoned properties in Mill Creek is not surprising. The single feature of the Mill Creek landscape that has had the most significant, persistent and devastating effect is the least recognized: the floodplain of the creek itself and the hydrological processes that continue to shape it. And yet the strong pattern it creates—the band of open land and deteriorating buildings—is striking once recognized. Outside the buried floodplain, there is another locus of widespread abandonment and deterioration. The area between 48th Street and Lancaster Avenue is riddled with boarded-up houses and abandoned blocks of land; it contains some of the oldest and smallest houses, as well as the most recent, the Mill Creek Public Housing.

Just as significant as the devastated areas are locales where little or no abandonment occurs. Perhaps these intact blocks are even more significant for their survival, given the strong destructive forces operating on Mill Creek's landscape. In the neighbourhood west of 48th Street, there are many signs of private investment: well-maintained homes with front porches furnished with chairs and potted plants. Among the predominant small rowhouses of brick are blocks of slightly more substantial rowhouses, some with fine architectural details: bands of elaborate brickwork on facades, ceramic tiles and parquet floors in the interior. One type of block seems never to have vacancies: the stone-faced, two-storey rowhouses with front gardens, each with a garage under the house, the only house type that was built with of-street parking. There are few vacancies outside the buried floodplain; small open lots have been transformed into private gardens or of-street parking, larger ones into community gardens, like Aspen Farms at 49th and Aspen Streets, which often wins the prize for 'best community garden' in an annual city-wide contest.

Why did the area west of 48th Street remain relatively intact, outside the floodplain, while other parts of the neighbourhood declined more radically? Blocks in this part of Mill Creek received the same rating of highest risk as the rest, and they were likewise subject to redlining. One major factor is that they were buffered from such land uses as slaughterhouses and stables that clustered near Lancaster Avenue. Another factor may be the scale, quality and style of the homes that were built. They are sufficiently large to accommodate the needs of modern families, but even the more substantial homes are small enough to maintain on a modest income. As the population has declined, the most desirable housing has remained attractive to homeowners and has been sustained, while the least desirable seems to have been abandoned more readily.

The landscape of Mill Creek is full of dialogues and stories, from epics to folklore to cautionary tales. To read this landscape is to understand that nothing stays the same, that catastrophic shifts and cumulative changes shape the present. It permits the reader to see what is not immediate: a former store in a vacant corner lot; a future forest in today's meadow; water underground in the cracks of a building's foundation; the slumps in pavement. To read landscape is also to anticipate the possible, to envision, choose and shape the future: to see, for example, the connections between buried, sewered stream, vacant land and polluted river, and to imagine rebuilding a community while purifying its water.

The West Philadelphia Landscape Project

For the past 18 years, I have worked in and studied Mill Creek: first, from 1987 - 1991, as part of a larger landscape plan and 'greening' project for West Philadelphia; then, since 1994, as the primary focus of my research on urban landscape planning and community development. The first stage was an extension of my work on the role of urban nature in city design and planning (Spirn, 1984, 1985, 1986, 2000). I focused initially on vacant land as a resource to restore the urban natural environment and rebuild inner-city neighbourhoods, then broadened my investigation to explore how to combine a comprehensive, top-down approach with a grass-roots, bottom-up approach to urban planning and design (Spirn, 1991).

Vacant urban land is a social, environmental and aesthetic problem, a symbol of neglect and decay, but it is also a resource for reshaping the Mill Creek neighbourhood to serve the needs of its residents and to address regional problems. Vacant lots relieve the former density and provide space for new uses and the opportunity to correct past mistakes. There is an impulse, particularly among residents of Mill Creek, to rebuild houses, but there is no housing shortage in the city of Philadelphia, whose shrinking population and large proportion of ageing homeowners mean there will continue to be a surplus of houses for the foreseeable future (Ferrick, 1997). In any case, houses should not be rebuilt on much of the vacant land in Mill Creek. Although the former creek bed is buried, the valley bottom still functions as a floodplain, where the soil is sometimes saturated. A key proposal of the West Philadelphia Landscape Project is to manage the buried floodplain as part of a broad approach to planning the city's watersheds and as a strategy to secure funds to rebuild the neighbourhood.

Normally, as rain falls, it flows quickly across the paved urban floodplain to the sewer, then on to a treatment plant for cleansing before discharge into the Schuylkill River. After a heavy rain, there is too much stormwater, and some flows directly into the river—a combined sewer overflow. Such overflows are a significant source of water pollution, and the US Environmental Protection Agency has pressured the City of Philadelphia to eliminate them. This will require millions of dollars, and there are funds available to support innovative approaches. Why not use low-lying vacant blocks in Mill Creek to detain stormwater in order to eliminate combined sewer overflows from the watershed? It is not feasible to bring the creek back above ground; it is now a sewer that carries waste as well as stormwater, but its presence as a green ribbon of parks and play fields would recall the creek, protect houses from flooding and provide local open space for a variety of public and private uses. This is not a radical proposal, but an application of well-accepted watershed planning practice to an urban watershed. In 1985, I made a similar proposal in Boston (Spirn, 2000). In Philadelphia, the timing was opportune, with ample time to lay the groundwork before the City Planning Commission produced its plan for West Philadelphia in 1994.

By the end of the first phase of the project in 1991, my students, colleagues and I had created a digital database with maps of the neighbourhood's demographics and physical features, made proposals for the strategic reuse of vacant urban land in the Mill Creek watershed, and designed dozens of gardens (including new common space for Aspen Farms). The *West Philadelphia Landscape Plan: A Framework for Action* (Spirn, 1991) provides an overview of the project during that initial period and describes the core recommendations.⁷ The project is fundamentally academic, and there is no client in the conventional sense. Although the work is not bound by political expedience, it has no official standing. We built demonstration projects, but had no authority to implement plans.

During the first phase of the project (1987 - 1991), and for years following, I hoped to convince the City Planning Commission and the Philadelphia Water Department that the buried creek was both a force to be reckoned with and a resource to be exploited. My research assistants and I presented our work to the Director of the Philadelphia City Planning Commission in 1991. An article in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* the following

year summarized the proposals and urged the city to adopt them (Hine, 1992). In 1993, *Living on Earth*, a programme on National Public Radio, broadcast a story on the West Philadelphia Landscape Project. I was confident that the work would influence the city's plan for West Philadelphia. It did not.

When the City's Plan for West Philadelphia was published in 1994, it failed to mention the buried floodplain and the hazards it posed. In 1994, part of the Mill Creek neighbourhood was designated a federal Empowerment Zone, under whose auspices new housing and businesses were proposed for locations on the buried floodplain. That year, the city donated a large parcel of vacant land for the construction of subsidized housing for first-time, low-income homeowners. This latter project, which was jointly sponsored by the city and by the Nehemiah Corporation, was especially troubling. The site was on the buried floodplain, and the project was designed as an enclave. Not surprisingly, the buyers of those homes report that they have little or no contact with the larger Mill Creek community (Cummings et al., 2002). Had the developers chosen a site on vacant land next to blocks of well-maintained homes, the new residents could have been integrated into the neighbourhood and into an existing network of homeowners. This also would have bolstered the investments of time, energy and money already made by residents.

When the West Philadelphia Landscape Project began in 1987, I did not intend a long-term involvement. However, the City Planning Commission's disregard for the health, safety and welfare of Mill Creek residents made me renew my commitment. It also prompted new realizations that both sharpened and enlarged the questions my research sought to answer. Confronted with scepticism about the existence and dangers of the buried floodplain, I began to understand this resistance as a form of prejudice and a kind of illiteracy—an inability on the part of public officials, developers and even Mill Creek residents themselves to read the landscape.

I organized my teaching and research to explore these issues. From 1994 - 2001, students in my classes at the University of Pennsylvania and at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology analysed the urban watershed, demonstrated how storm-water could be collected in landscape projects that are also stormwater detention facilities, and created dozens of designs for wetlands, water gardens and environmental study areas on vacant land in the Mill Creek neighbourhood.⁸ In 1995, research assistants expanded and redesigned the digital database so that it could run on personal computers. We hoped to make the database accessible to local organizations and residents.⁹ When the West Philadelphia Landscape Project website was launched in early 1996, it featured the database, reports and built projects of 1987 - 1991. Since then, it has been a showcase for ongoing work.¹⁰

In 1994 my students and I launched a programme with a public school in the Mill Creek neighbourhood in order to reach a broad spectrum of the Mill Creek population and also to bring together children and the elder gardeners with whom I had worked since 1987. What began as a community-based, environmental education programme organized around the urban watershed grew into a programme on landscape literacy and community development. In the process, I learned that the consequences of illiteracy are far greater than I had imagined.

Teaching and Learning Landscape Literacy: The Mill Creek Project

From 1996 to 2001, hundreds of children at Sulzberger Middle School, together with dozens of my students at the University of Pennsylvania (Penn), learned to read the neighbourhood's landscape; they traced its past, deciphered its stories and told their stories about its future, some of which were built. The tools they used were their own eyes and imagination, the place itself, and historical documents such as maps, photographs, newspaper articles, census tables and redevelopment plans. The programme had four parts: reading landscape, proposing landscape change, building landscape improvements and documenting these proposals and accomplishments. The first two parts were incorporated into university and middle-school curriculum during the academic year; all four were integrated in a four-week summer programme.

I chose Sulzberger Middle School for several reasons. Children in sixth through eight grades (11 - 13 year olds) are old enough to grasp relatively sophisticated ideas and to work on landscape construction projects and young enough for an educational experience to have an important influence.¹¹ The school's location was ideal. Aspen Farms Community Garden is just a block away, and the gardeners were keen to participate. Front and back doors of the school open on different worlds. The front doors look out on the high ground of the old floodplain terrace and faces the neighbourhood of homes around Aspen Farms. The cafeteria and gym, several metres lower, are in the bottomland; so is the playground and the Mill Creek Housing Project across the street. I was warned that Sulzberger was shunned by many teachers in the Philadelphia School District; its reputation seemed to stem from students' weak performance on standardized tests (among the worst of all schools in the city) and the fact that Mill Creek is among the city's poorest neighbourhoods. Like the residents of Mill Creek, all the students (and most teachers) are African-American. The principal initially was reluctant to work with me, but was persuaded by the sponsorship of Penn's Center for Community Partnerships and the Aspen Farm gardeners. It took two years of small collaborations to lay the groundwork for a more ambitious programme.

At the start of the first year of the expanded programme in fall 1996, a Sulzberger teacher told me that her students called their neighbourhood "The Bottom". So they already know it is in a floodplain? "No, they mean it's at the bottom." Both meanings of the word can be read into the area around Sulzberger School: standing water after rain; slumping streets and sidewalks; vacant house lots, rubble-strewn; whole square blocks of abandoned land; men standing around street corners on a workday afternoon, jobless.

The school's environmental curriculum treated at length such topics as tropical rain forests and exotic wildlife, while issues of local importance like watersheds and plant succession received scant attention or none at all. One popular science teacher took students once a year to an environmental centre in the suburbs to see and study Nature. To change the teachers' and students' perceptions that the Mill Creek landscape was divorced from the natural world was quite a challenge. It was equally hard to persuade students that their neighbourhood had ever been different or that it might be changed.

In fall 1996 my students taught weekly workshops on Mill Creek and its urban watershed. They led a field trip outside the school to look for signs of the buried creek (slumping sidewalks, cracks in walls, manhole covers). One eighth-grade teacher followed up with further assignments, including an essay on the buried creek, the problems it posed and ideas for solutions. The students did what was asked of them, but the creek was not yet real to them. When my students spoke of designs for change, the children told them all the reasons the proposals would fail. "It won't happen." "Someone will wreck it." Studying the history of the neighbourhood proved to be the key that unlocked the students' imagination.

"You mean, there really was a creek!?" a 13 year old exclaimed in April 1997 as she examined a photograph from 1880 showing stream, mill, workmen dwarfed by the huge sewer they were building, and new rowhouses in the distance. This breakthrough in her understanding came six months into the Mill Creek Project. The catalyst was a series of weekly classes taught by students in my seminar. Each of my students led a group of six or seven eighth graders in 90-minute workshops. The sessions focused on particular time periods. There were no lectures and no secondary sources. At the end of every class, two students from each group 'reported out' by telling the rest of the class what they had discovered. The groups looked at different primary documents and/or emphasized a different theme in order to provide a variety of topics for the reporting out.

My students brought in texts, tables of statistics, maps and photographs, and then asked the eighth graders to describe and compare them. To help the children draw out meanings from the documents, they posed successive questions. By breaking up big questions into smaller questions to which the Sulzberger students could find answers, my students led them to develop a hypothesis and then to find further evidence to support it. Only after the children had identified potential explanations for what they had observed, did my students tell them about background information that they had gleaned from their own reading and from our seminar discussions. The idea was to encourage the children to form the habit of looking for significant detail, framing questions and reasoning out possible answers. The goal was that, after reading these documents describing the history of their neighbourhood, the students would transfer this process to the reading of the landscape itself.¹²

During the first class at Sulzberger, the Penn students introduced the concept of a primary document. "Where do the authors of your history textbook get the information they write about?" "From books." "And where do the authors of those books get their information?" "From other books?" "What about the sources for those books?" One by one, the Penn students presented a time line composed of events in Mill Creek's history, each represented by a document of the period: a 17th- century map of the Delaware Valley showing a river in the midst of forest, an 18th- century engraving of a Leni Lenape Indian village, a map of 1872 showing several mills along Mill Creek, a photograph of the Mill Creek sewer under construction in the 1880s, Louis Kahn's plan for the redevelopment of the neighbourhood in 1954, a newspaper report of the sewer's collapse in 1961, the Empowerment Zone proposal of 1994. When we arrived at the school the following week, the eighth graders had mounted the documents on red construction paper, laminated them in a protective coating of plastic, and posted them, 20 in all,

on the wall of the hallway outside their classroom, where they remained until the end of the school year, prompting much comment by teachers, parents and other students.

The Sulzberger students' interest intensified as the time period under discussion got closer to the present. The class on the period from 1930 to 1970 was a turning point. My students were apprehensive, for they anticipated that the Sulzberger students would be angry about the effects of redlining and urban renewal on the neighbourhood. They asked the children to play the role of a neighbourhood council in 1961; each group was a sub-committee charged with investigating an important issue. The groups presented their findings to the entire class and recommended actions to be taken, which then were discussed and voted on. One group investigated the origins of the 1961 cave-in and how to prevent future catastrophes. They read newspaper articles, studied maps and photographs, and learned that the cave-in was one of many that had occurred along the Mill Creek sewer since the 1930s. A second group reviewed Louis Kahn's redevelopment plan and his design for Mill Creek Public Housing. They were particularly impressed to learn that Kahn was a famous architect. The students marked up a copy of Kahn's plan and coded it with different colours to illustrate their recommendations that the neighbourhood council should support some features and oppose others.

A third group looked into how homeowners and small businesses might obtain loans for mortgages and improvements. They read the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC) criteria for rating neighbourhoods and studied the maps in the Philadelphia Real Property Survey of 1934, which showed every block in Mill Creek, except for the cemeteries, as highest risk, and learned the meaning of redlining. Their response to the HOLC report, maps and lending practices surprised me. They showed no anger. Their faces registered surprise, then relief, then determination to come up with an effective response: a city-wide march on city hall and the establishment of a community bank.

The students' energy carried over into the next class, which focused on planning for the future. Staff members from the West Philadelphia Empowerment Zone and the City Planning Commission visited the class. Sulzberger students asked the planners: "Why did you let those new houses be built on the buried floodplain? Did you warn the people who bought them?" "What are you doing about the Mill Creek sewer?" "What have you done about redlining?" "Why haven't you started a community bank?"

Between our weekly visits, the Sulzberger teacher took the material we brought in and used it across the curriculum in social studies, maths, science, English and art. He reported, for example, that the class spent an entire day analysing census statistics from 1860 to 1990. They were particularly fascinated to learn that African Americans had lived in the neighbourhood since at least 1860, and that many White people also had lived there for most of the 19th and 20th centuries. And they turned to their American history textbook with greater interest than they had shown previously.

Landscape literacy entails more than reading, it means shaping landscape also. Each student made a proposal for how the creek might be transformed from a liability into a neighbourhood asset. These were published at the end of the school year in a booklet with one-sentence reviews by the Mayor of Philadelphia, among others.¹³

At the end of April, the Sulzberger students and their Penn mentors gave a public presentation on the history of Mill Creek at a symposium held at the University of Pennsylvania. After the presentation, someone asked what was the most important thing they had learned. One 13 year old answered for the whole class: "We learned to be proud of our neighborhood. I want to stay there and help make it a better place".

At the beginning of the semester, Sulzberger students described their neighbourhood in negative terms and said they would not live in Mill Creek if they had a choice. Only one student planned to attend college. Two months later, all but one student said they planned to attend college. The teacher reported that his students' performance in all subjects had improved dramatically. He attributed this to the way that primary materials challenged and made history real for them and to their growing perception of how their own lives and landscape were related to the larger city, region and nation.

Teaching and studying the landscape of Mill Creek also caused learning to become real for my students.¹⁴ Most were unprepared for what they observed: the sheer extent of devastation in the Mill Creek landscape, for example, and the high level of intelligence among the children. My students' weekly journals revealed their evolving understanding of race and place. After several visits to Sulzberger, many acknowledged their surprise that some of the Sulzberger students were smarter than they, and this led them to reflect on their own prejudice and privilege. They also reported that their experiences in Mill Creek challenged the assumptions and theories asserted by texts that they were reading for other courses.

The culmination of the year was a four-week summer programme for Sulzberger students and teachers, organized and led by four of my research assistants.¹⁵ In the mornings, the group met either at Aspen Farms, where they built a water garden and outdoor classroom, or at Sulzberger, where they constructed a topographic model of the Mill Creek watershed and learned how to create a website. Two students from the eighth-grade class worked as junior counsellors in the mornings and, in the afternoons, as research assistants at the university, where they wrote, illustrated, designed and produced 'SMS News', a series of web pages that were posted on the West Philadelphia Landscape Project website.¹⁶ The four Sulzberger teachers also spent afternoons at the university; one research assistant taught them web authoring and how to use GIS (geographic information systems) software to map the neighbourhood. At the end of the summer, one of these teachers was appointed to head the school's new computer programme.

The Mill Creek Project continued in subsequent years with a similar format of weekly workshops led by Penn students during the academic year and a four-week summer programme in July based at the school and at Aspen Farms.¹⁷ In 1998, the Sulzberger principal and teachers decided to expand the programme, wrote grant proposals, and obtained funds to do so. They established four small learning communities, each with 10 teachers and about 250 students; one focused on the themes of regional watershed and local community. Each class was required to design and carry out a community service project every year: to identify problems in the community and to bring these problems and potential solutions to public attention. The computer teacher created an after-school computer club and worked with the staff of Penn's Center for Community Partnerships to secure grants for

the purchase of equipment and software. Within two years, members of the computer club were taking apart and building computers and writing computer code to adapt commercial software.

Putting Mill Creek on the Map

From 1998, Sulzberger Middle School and the Mill Creek Project received increasing local, national and international recognition.¹⁸ Philadelphia School District staff, politicians and officers from national foundations visited the school and observed Sulzberger and Penn students in the classroom. The Sulzberger portion of the West Philadelphia Landscape Project website led Pennsylvania's governor to invite students from Sulzberger to make a five-minute presentation to the State Legislature; their presentation was televised, as was the legislature's response—a long, standing ovation. Later that year, the Philadelphia School District named Sulzberger 'School of the Month' and produced a television documentary on the Mill Creek Project and the school's innovations. In 1999 Sulzberger was the subject of a report on NBC Evening News, a national television programme. In 2000, President Bill Clinton visited the school.

Recognition for the Mill Creek Project and for Sulzberger opened doors to other collaborations. In 1999, the Mill Creek Coalition, a group of neighbourhood organizations, invited me to work with them on the creek and its impact on the community, including research on flooded basements and a course for residents on the history of Mill Creek's landscape.¹⁹

From 1996 to 1999, there were over a million visits to the West Philadelphia Landscape Project website from more than 90 countries on six continents. Among those who visited were public officials. In fall 1996, staff of the US Environmental Protection Agency invited engineers at the Philadelphia Water Department to meet with me to discuss the potential of stormwater detention to reduce combined sewer overflows.²⁰ At that time, the Mill Creek watershed did not even appear on the maps the Water Department was using, but was subsumed under the much larger watershed of the Schuylkill River. They agreed to put Mill Creek on the map as a special study area. In 1999, staff from the Water Department asked me to take a group of engineers on a field trip to Mill Creek. With 19th-century maps in hand, we walked and drove along the buried floodplain and looked at potential sites for stormwater detention projects. An immediate outcome of this trip was the decision to build a demonstration project on a vacant block next to Sulzberger, which would detain stormwater and also function as an environmental study area and outdoor classroom for the school. The Water Department obtained a grant to fund the project in 2000 and pledged to work with teachers and students at Sulzberger. They hired one of my research assistants to direct the project and, in 2001, co-sponsored the summer programme on the urban watershed with Sulzberger Middle School.²¹ Later that year, the Philadelphia Water Department, Philadelphia Housing Authority and the Philadelphia City Planning Commission submitted a proposal for \$34.8 million to the US Department of Housing and Urban Development's Hope VI Program in order to redevelop Mill Creek Public Housing as a demonstration project that would provide an environmental study area for the school and integrate stormwater management measures to reduce combined sewer

overflows. The city cleared the site in November 2002 and broke ground in August 2003 on a \$110 million project.

A few years ago, I was confident that things were going well for Mill Creek. I had moved from the University of Pennsylvania to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in fall 2000, but continued to work with teachers at Sulzberger. Students in an MIT class travelled to Philadelphia, collected stories about the project from various participants, and redesigned the West Philadelphia Landscape Project website. In 2002, the computer teacher at Sulzberger visited MIT in order to discuss plans for further collaboration. Then, a few months later, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania took control of the Philadelphia School District and granted responsibility for the management of Sulzberger, among other schools, to a corporation headquartered in New York. After trying to work with corporation staff that summer, the computer teacher and the other key teacher in the Mill Creek programme resigned in protest of certain new policies.²²

In November 2004, I learned that the Philadelphia Streets Department had refused to grant a permit for the city's demonstration project in Mill Creek. New houses would be built, but the programme to integrate stormwater management to improve water quality had been abandoned. The professional consultants whom the city hired to prepare the plan chose not to fight the decision, nor did they alert those who might have intervened in the political process more effectively.

Putting Mill Creek on the map and keeping it there is not easy, whether the creek itself, the neighbourhood, or the people who live there. Confronting these recent failures, I sometimes think of the children's initial scepticism about prospects for change: "It won't happen. . . . Someone will wreck it". And this makes me determined to find a way to continue.

Environmental Justice, Landscape Literacy and City Planning and Design

Mill Creek is shaped by all the processes at work in inner-city America. The neighbourhood was laid waste by the flow of water and capital and the violence of redevelopment and neglect. The correlation of a buried creek with deteriorated buildings and vacant lands in inner-city neighbourhoods is not unique to Philadelphia; similar situations are found in many other American cities (Spirn, 1986, 2000). Mill Creek is typical of many American inner-city neighbourhoods where the residents are predominantly low-income people of colour. Known locally as 'The Bottom', it is one of many such 'Black Bottoms' in the US. They are at the bottom, economically, socially and topographically. Here, harsh socio-economic conditions and racial discrimination are exacerbated by health and safety hazards posed by a high water table and unstable ground.

Despite such conditions, the landscape and population of these communities embody resources as well as problems. In Mill Creek, the resources are many and varied. Flourishing community gardens demonstrate the energy and determination of the gardeners who reclaimed them from abandoned lots; flowers planted along the sidewalk and bags of vegetables offered there express the gardeners' generosity. Inside Sulzberger Middle School, the drawings, models and essays that decorate the halls speak of young people's intellect and vision. Lancaster Avenue, the stone wall that runs for blocks along Haverford Avenue, and the many different types of

houses, from the Georgian mansion to the tiny rowhouse, are landmarks that make the past visible and change tangible. Even vacant blocks and the buried floodplain are potential resources. To recognize resources is not to deny the problems, but to see each in the context of the other.

These resources are readily apparent once the observer is prepared to see them. Someone who knows neither local history nor the broader canvas of US urban history is unable to read many of the stories the landscape holds. One who assumes that the city has supplanted 'nature' is not likely to see the effects of the natural processes that still shape its landscape; another who believes that the city has degraded 'nature' is apt to see only pollution. Those who think the ravaged state of a neighbourhood is the natural outcome of its occupation by an isolated 'underclass' who have lived in poverty for generations, may see only devastation. Prejudice is reinforced by the tools professionals use. If those responsible for planning and designing a neighbourhood rely only on maps of those features they judge to be important and do not spend time there, their assumptions are not likely to be contradicted. Mistakes that follow from misreading or failing to read significant features of the urban landscape can have terrible consequences.

Ten years ago, I thought that the worst effect of landscape illiteracy was to produce environmental injustice in the form of physical hazards to health and safety. The Sulzberger students showed me that there is an even greater injustice than inequitable exposure to harsh conditions: the internalization of shame in one's neighbourhood. This is a particularly destructive form of injustice. To feel both at home in a place and ashamed of it is harmful. It saps self-esteem and can engender a sense of guilt and resignation. Before the students at Sulzberger Middle School learned to read their landscape more fully, they read it partially. Without an understanding of how the neighbourhood came to be, many believed that the poor conditions were the fault of those who lived there, a product of either incompetence or lack of care. Learning that there were other reasons sparked a sense of relief. Once they had the skill to read the landscape's history, they began to see their home in a more positive light, came to appreciate the effort and vision that places like Aspen Farms represent, and to regard some adults, like the gardeners, as heroes. They came to consider the possibility of alternative futures and brimmed with ideas. Secure in their knowledge and ability to reason, they challenged public officials with confidence and impressed them with articulate proposals. To read and shape landscape is to learn and teach: to know the world, to express ideas and to influence others.

Verbal literacy—the ability to read and write—is commonly acknowledged as an essential skill for the citizen to participate fully and effectively in a democratic society. Teaching literacy became a cornerstone of the American Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. The 'Citizenship School', which began as a means to increase voter registration through the promotion of literacy, evolved into a forum for discussion and a catalyst for political action (Horton & Freire, 1990). When, I first read about Horton's work with civil rights activists and Freire's with adult literacy programmes in Brazil, I was struck by the many parallels to my experience with landscape literacy in Mill Creek.

Freire designed literacy programmes that were tailored to what he calls the 'word universe' of the learners. To extract the words specific to the

universe of particular people and place, and as a preparation for reading the word, he employed images of their surroundings. He found that "decodifying or reading the situations pictured leads [people] to a critical perception of the meaning of culture by leading them to understand how human practice or work transforms the world" (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 36). He believes that people should learn to read in the context of the "fundamental moments of their common history" and proposes that texts of local history be created for that purpose from transcripts of taped interviews with older inhabitants (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 45). In *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World*, Freire and Donaldo Macedo describe literacy as a form of cultural politics that either "serves to reproduce existing social formations" or "promotes democratic and emancipatory change" (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 141) They assert that knowledge of the world is a precondition for literacy and that understanding and transformation of the world should be its goal. Reading, they say, "always involves critical perception, interpretation, and the rewriting of what is read" (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 36). Macedo suggests that "emancipatory literacy" has two dimensions:

On the one hand, students have to become literate about their histories, experiences, and the culture of their immediate environments. On the other hand, they must also appropriate those codes and cultures of the dominant spheres so they can transcend their own environments. (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 47)

Studying their neighbourhood's natural and built features brought the place alive for the Sulzberger students. The understanding of their own landscape also opened wider vistas. It introduced them to broader social, political and environmental issues and promoted other learning. In Freire's terms, it enabled the "students to develop a positive self-image before grappling with the type of knowledge that is outside their immediate world. . . . It is only after they have a grasp on their world that they can begin to acquire other knowledge" (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 128).

Like verbal literacy, landscape literacy is a cultural practice that entails both understanding the world and transforming it. One difference between verbal literacy and landscape literacy, however, is that many professionals responsible for planning, designing and building the city are not landscape literate. After six weeks' investigation of the history of their neighbourhood, the children were more literate than many professionals, and some of their proposals for the neighbourhood were more astute. To be literate is to recognize both the problems in a place and its resources, to understand how they came about, by what means they are sustained, and how they are related. Such literacy should be a cornerstone of community development and of urban planning and design. To plan prudently is to transform problems into opportunities and liabilities into resources, and to intervene at an appropriate scale. To design wisely is to read ongoing dialogues in a place, to distinguish enduring stories from ephemeral ones, and to imagine how to join the conversation. The stakes are high for those who must live in the places professionals help create. Like literacy, urban planning and design are cultural practices that can serve either to perpetuate the inequities of existing social structures or to enable and promote democratic change.

Acknowledgements

Many debts are incurred during a project of such a long duration. A list of sponsors and participants appears on the West Philadelphia Landscape Project website (<http://web.mit.edu/wplp>). The initial support of the J.N. Pew Charitable Trust from 1987 to 1991 made possible the foundation from which all later activities grew. Without the support of the Center for Community Partnerships at the University of Pennsylvania, the work with Sulzberger Middle School would not have been possible; support ranged from the provision of vans to ferry my students back and forth to seed grants for curriculum development to support for research assistants. To learn more about the Center, whose leadership in promoting academically-based community service has received international recognition, see <http://www.upenn.edu/ccp>. I am grateful to Kenneth Olwig for editorial suggestions and would also like to acknowledge Cynthia Ott, who assembled a rich archive of historical material, first as a student, then as a research assistant.

Notes

1 The racial composition of a neighbourhood was one of several criteria used for assessment. For an excellent discussion of research on redlining, both historical and current, see Hillier (2003).

2 English dictionaries define landscape as static and "natural": "a picture representing a view of natural scenery (as fields, hills, forests, water) . . . a portion of land that the eye can comprehend in a single view" (Merriam-Webster, 2003). But landscape is not a mere visible surface, static composition, or passive backdrop to human theatre. Landscape associates a place with all who dwell there, past and present. Danish *landskab*, German *landschaft* and Old English landscape combine two roots. 'Land' means both a place and the people living there (earth, country, nation). *Skabe* and *schafen* mean "to shape"; suffixes *-skab* and *-schaft*, as in the English '-ship', also mean association, partnership. Still strong in Scandinavian and German languages, these original meanings have all but disappeared from English. See Spirn (1998) for a longer discussion.

3 A ballfield was recently built here, so the meadow and grove are no more.

4 These articles were collected and compiled by Heather Hillman (Hillman, 1997).

5 This is a vernacular term explained to me by Frances Walker, a resident of Mill Creek. 6 Population of Hispanic origin was less than 1% in 1990.

7 In addition to built projects, there are five reports. *Models of Success: Landscape Improvements and Community Development* describes examples of successful projects that have already been built and draws lessons for similar projects that could be undertaken in West Philadelphia (Spirn & Marcucci, 1991). *This Garden is a Town* explores community gardens as models for neighbourhood-based planning (Spirn & Pollio, 1990). *Shaping the Block* focuses on the block as a significant unit of neighbourhood and explores how residents can reshape the block they live on to better support their needs (Spirn & Cameron, 1991). *Vacant Urban Land: A Resource for Reshaping Urban Neighborhoods* describes the diverse types of vacant urban land that occur in West Philadelphia and how they can be reclaimed for a variety of uses (Spirn & Pollio, 1991). *The West Philadelphia Digital Database: An Atlas and Guide* is an introduction to the digital database (Spirn & Cheetham, 1996).

8 Many of these can be seen on the web pages for my studio class *Transforming the Urban Landscape* in 1996, 1997 and 1998 (<http://web.mit.edu/wplp/course>).

9 Examples of maps and other information from the digital database are online at <http://web.mit.edu/wplp/wpdd/wpddhome.htm>.

10 <http://web.mit.edu/wplp>. To see the original website, click on the link to Old Penn WPLP. The website was redesigned by my MIT students in 2002; to see their version, go to New MIT WPLP.

11 One goal was to inspire students to enter high school with their sights set on a college education and with the confidence that this ambition was achievable.

12 The students in spring 1997 spent the first six weeks of the 14-week semester preparing for their visits to the Sulzberger classroom. Each student researched one period in the neighbourhood's history from pre-colonial times to the present, found primary sources, and used secondary texts to put the history of the neighbourhood into the context of region and nation.

13 The texts and drawings of this report, *Power of Place: Essays about Our Mill Creek Neighborhood*, are on the WPLP website, as are the reflections of Sulzberger teacher Glenn Campbell.

14 Those enrolled were typically undergraduates and graduate students. Initially, the students in the class were Caucasian or Thai; in later years, the ethnic and racial diversity broadened to include Hispanic, African-American and Asian-American students.

15 Martin Knox, one of the research assistants who led the summer programme in 1997, spoke in 2002 with my MIT students. His reflections are online at

<http://web.mit.edu/4.243j/www/wplp/s-knox.html> 16 SMS News is online in the Sulzberger (SMS) part of the WPLP website at <http://web.mit.edu/wplp/sms/smsnews/smsnew.htm>

17 More information about and illustrations of the Mill Creek Project are available online at <http://web.mit.edu/wplp/sms/millc.htm>

18 Some of these are described online at <http://web.mit.edu/wplp/sms/award.htm>

19 A description of these activities appears on the WPLP website at <http://web.mit.edu/wplp/project/mccoal.htm> and <http://web.mit.edu/4.243j/www/wplp/s-cornitcher.html>

20 Joe Piotrowski, Associate Director of the Environmental Protection Agency's Water Division, Region 3, describes the Environmental Protection Agency's role in the project at <http://web.mit.edu/4.243j/www/wplp/s-piotrowski.html>

21 My former research assistant, Sarah Williams, and Joanne Dahme, Watersheds Programs Manager at the Philadelphia Water Department, describe their experiences with this programme at <http://web.mit.edu/4.243j/www/wplp/stories.html>

22 Reportedly, the final straw was when the corporation placed in charge of Sulzberger decided to partly dismantle Sulzberger's computer lab in order to distribute equipment to other schools that did not have as many computers.

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APPLIED WORKSHOPS

Five workshops were offered during the afternoon session providing participants with hands on approaches for the topic listed below. A separate document, *The SCI Grassroots Guide*, documents the information provided during the workshops.

COMMUNITY BUILDING THROUGH DESIGN, ART AND HERITAGE

Presenters:

- Robert Connolly, Ph.D., Associate Professor, University of Memphis Department of Anthropology, and Director, Chucalissa Museum
- Samantha Gibbs, Graduate Assistant, University of Memphis Department of Anthropology
- Scott Blake, Executive Director, Victorian Villages

ENERGY CONSERVATION AND WEATHERIZATION PROJECTS

Presenters:

- Tom Chamberlain, Strategic Marketing Coordinator, MLGW
- Michael Hagge, Associate Professor and Chair, University of Memphis Department of Architecture
- Michael Chisamore, Assistant Professor and Director, University of Memphis Center for Sustainable Design

FARMERS MARKETS

Presenters:

- Ken Reardon, Ph.D., Professor and Director, University of Memphis Division of City and Regional Planning
- Katherine Lambert-Pennington, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, University of Memphis Department of Anthropology

PARTNERSHIPS FOR SERVICE LEARNING AND ENGAGED SCHOLARSHIP

Presenters:

- Dorothy Norris Tirrell, Associate Professor and Director, University of Memphis Division of Public and Nonprofit Administration
- Joy Clay, Ph.D., Professor and Associate Dean for Interdisciplinary Studies, College of Arts and Sciences, University of Memphis

SOCIAL MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION

Presenters:

- Ashley Akin, Graduate Assistant, University of Memphis Department of Communications
- Gayla Schaefer, Graduate Assistant, Strengthening Communities Initiative and University of Memphis Division of Public and Nonprofit Administration

CLOSING REMARKS

Ann Coulter, Principal, Kennedy, Coulter, Rushing & Watson, LLC

My role today is to try to make some pertinent and intelligent summary remarks based on this incredible day of learning, debating and sharing. As this closing session was scheduled late on a Friday afternoon, I thought if my remarks did not rise to the excellence of the first part of the day, at least there would probably be few you still around as witnesses. But you are still here! So I will do the best I can in order to honor the work of the School of Urban Affairs and Public Policy's Strengthening Communities Initiative.

It has been an extraordinary day for me to be back in Memphis, at the University of Memphis, one of this city's greatest assets. I was the Turley Fellow here from 2006 to 2009 and much of the work we heard about today was just getting started when I left – and this incredible building was still under construction. I'd like to thank Stan Hyland and Susan Schmidt for inviting me back for this conference and for the chance to connect with my colleagues David Cox, Michael Hagge, Steve Barlow and other faculty and staff. And, as always, it is wonderful to be among students. Having the chance to learn more about the work of Anne Whiston Spirn and Elson Nash has also been particularly rewarding.

As I listened today I thought often about discussions with University of Memphis colleagues during the Turley Fellowship about the connection between community and placemaking, particularly in a university setting -- and about the role of academia in the creation of place. It occurred to me that placemaking is something like a double set of fingerprints. Let me try to explain this somewhat awkward metaphor. As soon as we're born, the place we are in begins to imprint on all of our senses, touch, sight, sound, taste and smell. That continues our whole life; obviously some things are more powerful and compelling or memorable. That is one of the sets of fingerprints - fingerprints the landscape leaves on us as humans. The other set of fingerprints are the ones we leave on the landscape. And as I was sort of teasing around with this notion, Anne began her talk and defining landscape as she did, it made this notion of the double set of fingerprints make more sense to me. Maybe it does to you.

Anne and I were looking at the same thing, but we came at it from different directions. She said that landscape was a mutual shaping of people and place, and I was thinking of placemaking as the mutual imprinting of people and landscape. Thinking about these projects to strengthen communities reminded me that academia is also place. The origin of the word academy was a place. It was the grove of sacred olive trees in Athens where Plato set about his teaching. This grove, dedicated to the goddess Athena, was owned by the hero Academus in about 400 BC and he made it available for Plato's teaching. So academy comes originally from a sacred place of teaching. It was a particular place.

The focus of this gathering today was on lessons learned from the community based projects, so the rest of my remarks will be about the commonalities in these projects that may form larger lesson for us. I think it comes down to four values or principles. It is important to always look at the values and the principles that underlie your work so that you have a base on which to build

The four main values I heard today were the value of collaborations, the value of relevance, the value of flexibility and creativity, and the value of passing on the knowledge. In some form or fashion all these values were addressed in the course of the work of these projects.

Collaboration

Certainly the value of collaboration was recognized before these projects even began. It was a hallmark of how the University of Memphis wanted to go about this work, but during the course of each project this value was reinforced and reinterpreted through action. I liked the way Steve Barlow put it, that collaboration was all about personal relationships. It is an aspect of collaboration that cannot be overlooked.

Molly Campbell described the project at Bridges as a co-creation of the educators, program directors, faculty, and students of School of Architecture. Co-creation is another way of emphasizing collaboration. So the value of collaborations, partnerships, and personal relationships form a set of standards for this kind of work.

Relevance

There was the intent from the very beginning of the initiative that relevant outcomes be identified, understood, and documented for each project. In the course of the projects, however, that value became more richly interpreted. Specifically, relevance is something that has to emerge from the participation of everyone in the project. You may think you know what will be relevant before a project begins but only in the coming together in participation with the community and with the other stakeholders can you truly define what relevance means. It is important to let relevance come full circle.

Flexibility and Creativity

We heard over and over today that flexibility and creativity go hand in hand. Unlike collaboration and relevance, the importance of this value was not anticipated in advance or built into the design of the initiative. But it was quickly learned by those involved in the projects. All of the speakers today pointed out when they had to be nimble and how this flexibility improved the projects.

Keri Brondo talked about the idea of community gardens that got turned flipped around into an oral history film project. What a stretch! It is this kind of openness to flexibility that allows creativity and innovation to flourish.

Everyone realized another aspect of this value of flexibility during their projects. This has to do with a clash of cultures, or at least recognition that there are very different cultures involved in each project. The culture of the institution - the academy, is different than community culture and both are different than the non-profit culture. All of the cultures had to come together, be flexible and let the real creativity happen. Anne Spirn recommended against designing everything and this hit home to me in terms of lessons on flexibility. Leave room for the framework you set up to have people help make things happen on their own and take ownership for the work.

Passing on the knowledge

As a university initiative, the interest in documenting, recording, publishing and building on the knowledge was a part of each project design. Yet we heard over and over today how important it is to not have the knowledge go away when a student

graduates, or a professor goes somewhere else or, in the nature of the neighborhoods themselves – change and knowledge is not institutionalized. When you are working with eleven and twelve year olds for example....think about how to capture their knowledge for the future! So there is a real concern about non-academic ways of documentation so that lessons can be passed on, revisited, and built on - especially in non-academic settings.

Those are the four values I identified as a way of tying up the loose ends today, and I hope this way of thinking about what we learned today will be helpful to you as well. I have another thought in closing and that is to recognize the very special and unusual nature of what's happening with this work of the Strengthening Communities Initiative. Everyone felt this today. However, this kind of university-community work should not be a special or unusual thing. There should be a lot more of this going on, in all communities. I know it's not easy. It's not exactly the mission of any one entity or institution in a community. And the University of Memphis is a big institution with many masters, and it has budget challenges as do all universities.

But there is something more important than mission about this. It is about our mutual responsibility for city-building and placemaking. We must make a commitment to speak about the importance of this kind of work as part of what a university believes is valuable, as valuable as research on vaccines, on earthquakes, or on nano-fibers. And everything that we heard about today tells me that can happen. And I hope that the University of Memphis and its community partners find a way to continue and even increase their support for this kind of work.

AFTERWORD

Dorothy Norris-Tirrell, Ph.D., Former Director, Division of Public and Nonprofit Administration, University of Memphis

The presentations, workshops and discussions included as a part of the Summit, “Creative Communities: Design as a Community Development Strategy,” highlighted the work of the First Round of the Strengthening Communities Initiative funded projects funded Memphis, Tennessee in 2008. Since that time, seven additional projects have been funded and the next round of proposals is under review.

Much has been learned from these projects about the Memphis metropolitan area and about community-higher education partnerships. The results of an evaluation of the First Round of Strengthening Communities projects were generally positive finding that neighborhood groups not only reached their project goals but leveraged new partnerships and ideas to gain additional resources. Faculty members learned from their community partnerships and have begun to look at their own research agendas in new ways, valuing engaged teaching and scholarship as an important strategy for their own careers and for improving their local community. Students report vital learning and greater understanding from the applied experiences linked to both academic content and reflective exercises that extended curricular goals beyond the walls of the university. The learning will continue as the subsequent projects are documented and assessed.

Cities are shaped by historic events, politics, and economics. The history of Memphis is often painful; however, the “city on the bluff” has many attributes that make it a place of hope and resilience. Memphis has much to celebrate in its music, its cultivation of business entrepreneurs, and the beauty of its geographic setting. In the face of statistics that place Memphis at the top of national lists related to crime, infant mortality, bankruptcy, and housing stock decay, various public, nonprofit and private sector collaborative efforts seek to make a difference.

The Strengthening Communities Initiative projects and the accompanying university-community partnerships offer an important strategy for moving Memphis to a more positive future. Many of the lessons from the Strengthening Communities projects are focused on developing strong and reciprocal partnerships. One of the primary lessons for effective partnerships is the need to align goals. Partners bring different expectations related to responsibilities, decision making and communication processes, and results. University-community partnerships, like all effective relationships, require the investment of time to build trust and create shared understanding while setting goals, clarifying desired outcomes, and planning projects. Sometimes partnerships are highly successful while other times, the results are not so positive. However, even when goals are not achieved, the collaborative effort provides the opportunity to learn in preparation for the next partnership.

Economic, social and political conditions create an abundance of topics for new and ongoing collaboration. For greatest impact, university-community partnerships must target their effort on pressing issues and needs that have a reasonable probability of resolution. Developing goals and projects that support a larger change agenda can bring legitimacy to the work of the partnerships. Assuring that partnerships have sufficient and appropriate representativeness increases the group’s standing and lays the groundwork for achieving desired outcomes. The group members should also

bring competence for the problem to be addressed, including leadership skills. Nurturing these partnerships to productivity is hard work, requiring a commitment to the goals and outcomes of the project.

University-community partnerships can be a key to cultivate the innovation necessary for meaningful change. Collaboration provides the impetus to rethink and transform status quo systems while sharing the workload and the risk. The projects nurtured by the Strengthening Communities Initiative position Memphis for the future as a thriving metropolitan center.

