

# URBAN PLACEMAKING BUILDING EQUITY BY DESIGN



The 9½-acre SteelStacks Art & Cultural Campus, Bethlehem, Pa., designed by WRT. The steel plant employed 31,000 at its height.

CHRISTENSON PHOTOGRAPHY FOR WRT

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this article, you should be able to:

- + **DESCRIBE** examples of urban development that contribute to the economic, environmental, and social vitality of cities.
- + **LIST** common characteristics and lessons learned from exemplary urban placemaking projects.
- + **EXPLAIN** the role of visionary leadership and collaboration in creating places that promote inclusiveness and equity.
- + **DISCUSS** how innovative public-private partnerships and investment can facilitate access to resources and empower and regenerate communities.

Anne-Marie Lubenau, FAIA, is Director of the Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence at the Bruner Foundation, Cambridge, Mass., where she oversees a national design award program that recognizes transformative places that contribute to the economic, environmental, and social vitality of American cities. Prior to joining the Bruner Foundation in 2012, Lubenau was CEO of the Community Design Center of Pittsburgh, worked in architecture firms in Pennsylvania and Maryland, and developed and taught classes on the urban environment. She regularly contributes to national and international forums and publications on design.

The U.S. is in the midst of an urban renaissance. People are returning to cities, sparking new investment and growth. This renewed interest in cities coincides with increasing pressure to address current challenges, including climate change and deteriorating infrastructure, and to repurpose former industrial sites and underused land in older urban centers.

Since 1987, the Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence (RBA) has recognized seminal projects that demonstrate the ability of such developments to integrate ambitious social agendas. Collectively, the RBA awardees illustrate the contributions that design makes to the economic, environmental, and social vitality of cities and provide insight into urban evolution and the impact of

## Truly transformative projects require vision, ingenuity, and long-term commitment of time, talent, and resources.

thoughtful planning and design.

The RBA process has revealed five common attributes of transformative development in urban placemaking: the role of visionary leadership; the value of collaborative partnerships; the benefits of engaging and empowering communities; the importance of anchoring projects in their unique culture and place;

and the return on investment of design excellence.

Two recent RBA medalists illustrate how developers and designers are tackling big urban challenges via investment in “urban infrastructure.” Together, these efforts are helping to create and sustain equitable, healthy, and socio-economically vibrant cities.

### CIVIC ASPIRATION AND AMBITION

#### *SteelStacks Arts & Cultural Campus*

Bethlehem, Pa.

Industries that once provided the lifeblood of cities are closing, leaving behind large tracts of vacant land and abandoned buildings. Cities like Buffalo, Detroit, and Pittsburgh have been wrestling with redeveloping and integrating former manufacturing sites back into the economic, social, and physical fabric.

SteelStacks Arts & Cultural Campus provides an inspiring model for other cities struggling to repurpose former industrial sites while honoring the people who helped to build them. Once part of

the international headquarters of Bethlehem Steel, the campus integrates historic structures and new construction with entertainment and interpretive programming that honors the community’s cultural and industrial legacy while stimulating new development in a locale devastated by the mill’s closure.

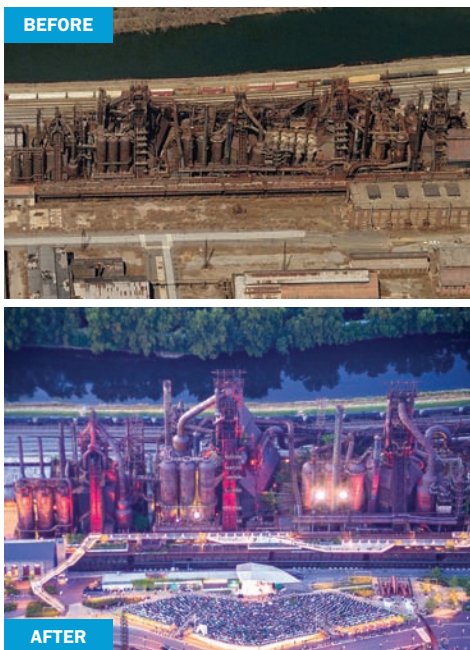
The SteelStacks campus occupies a portion of the former 1,760-acre mill, which employed 31,000 people at its height, supplying steel for the Golden Gate Bridge, the Chrysler Building, and World War II battleships. The company initiated environmental remediation and planning for the site prior to the mill’s 1995 closure, tapping a state program that offered funding and incentives for brownfield remediation.

Over the next 20 years, the city, private developers, civic leaders, nonprofit arts and preservation organizations, private developers, and the community forged and implemented a strategy to redevelop the site into an industrial park and 126-acre mixed-use district with an arts and cultural campus at its center.

The strategy used the city’s rich Moravian arts and cultural heritage and the site’s industrial past as a platform for the future. Inspired by visits to Emscher Landscape Park and Landschaftspark in Germany’s Ruhr Valley, arts leaders envisioned a contemporary town square anchored by the steel mill’s five 20-story iconic blast furnaces. Today, the square is enlivened with festivals and performances that draw upon Bethlehem’s history and musical traditions while appealing to the city’s increasingly diverse multicultural community.

The 9½-acre campus, designed by WRT, is organized around a “21st-century civic commons” that includes an outdoor plaza and performance pavilion, visitor center, and arts facilities, and an elevated walkway offers a view of the historic blast furnaces. The simple design aesthetic of the new structures defers to the grandeur of the furnaces and the grittiness of the surrounding industrial artifacts.

The campus’s central plaza and gathering space is framed by two contemporary concrete, steel, and glass structures housing ArtsQuest Center (designed by local firm Spillman Farmer Architects) and PPL Public Media Center at PBS39 (designed by URS, now AECOM), the headquarters of the local PBS TV station. Both buildings have expansive glass façades overlooking the plaza and blast furnaces and a variety of indoor



BETHLEHEM REDEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

HALKIN WASON PHOTOGRAPHY



SASAKI (LEFT), ANTON GRASSI | ESTO (CENTER, RIGHT)

spaces and venues that host public events and programming.

The Bethlehem Visitor Center in the historic Stock House opens up to the plaza, offering historical and visitor information about the mill and surrounding Lehigh Valley. USA Architects rehabilitated the 1863 structure in accordance with National Park Service preservation guidelines, restoring its rubble stone masonry, key features, and details while inserting new ground-floor restrooms and a second floor to house administrative offices.

Outside the Visitor Center, a steel-enclosed elevator and angular staircase lead visitors up to the 1,650-foot long Hoover Mason Trestle. The elevated pedestrian walkway, designed by WRT, provides close-up views of the blast furnaces. Interpretive signage, tours by former steelworkers, and an award-winning digital application describe the process of steelmaking and the cultural and industrial history of the mill and its workers.

The elevated walkway respects the historic railbed and adjacent surroundings. WRT opted to use bare metal so it would weather over time and gradually blend in with the industrial context and rusting blast furnaces. “The major challenge for the trestle was having to adapt the design concept to a site with degraded conditions, requiring inventive detailing that would only lightly touch upon the existing industrial infrastructure,” said former WRT Principal Ignacio F. Bunster-Ossa, FASLA, LEED AP. The landscaping incorporates concrete planters with a mix of species culled from plants that took hold on the crumbling infrastructure after the mill closed.

In front of the walkway and furnaces, the Levitt Pavilion outdoor amphitheater, also designed by WRT, offers lawn seating for 2,500 and hosts 50 free concerts a year. Inspired by the German Ruhr

Valley parks, the walkway and furnaces are illuminated with programmable LED lighting at night that provides a dramatic backdrop for performances and a striking silhouette reminder of the mill’s presence on the city skyline.

Developed by Bethlehem Redevelopment Authority in collaboration with local nonprofits ArtsQuest and PBS39, the \$93.5 million project employed local, state, and federal grants and financing, historic tax credits, New Market Tax Credits, and tax increment financing.

SteelStacks has become a destination for the neighborhood, city, and region, hosting nearly 5,000 arts events and performances annually, attracting 1.5 million visitors. It is a source of significant community pride and a catalyst for economic development, celebrating the history of steelmaking while attracting new businesses, housing, a national museum, a community college, and a charter high school for the arts.

## ENGAGING AND EMBRACING THE PUBLIC

### *Bruce C. Bolling Municipal Building*

Boston, Mass.

The Bruce C. Bolling Municipal Building, in Boston’s Dudley Square, offers a

**Boston’s Bruce C. Bolling Municipal Building weaves together several historic building façades, including the Ferdinand Building (left), with new construction (center and right).**

## The 2019 Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence

RBA is a national design award that recognizes transformative places distinguished by their economic, environmental, and social contributions to the vitality of American cities. Each biennial, the RBA bestows one Gold Medal (\$50,000 cash prize) and four Silver Medals (\$10,000 cash prize each) to projects selected by a multidisciplinary committee. Winners are documented with detailed case studies that are published digitally and in paperback book format. To be eligible, projects must be urban, built, and located in the contiguous United States.

**Submissions for the 2019 RBA are due December 12, 2018:**  
[rudybruneraward.org](http://rudybruneraward.org)

## Good design responds to unique environmental, social, and physical needs and requirements, as well as the aspirations and expectations of place.

model for 21st-century municipal development. Located adjacent to a regional transit hub in one of the city's oldest and most diverse neighborhoods, the \$124 million mixed-use facility was developed by the city to stimulate neighborhood development and investment.

The largest municipal office project developed by the city in 50 years, the building integrates the Boston Public Schools headquarters (primary tenant), community meeting space, and retail and restaurants in the spacious ground-floor lobby. The project was initiated in 2008 by the late Mayor Thomas Menino with the goal of revitalizing Dudley Square by creating a collaborative, inclusive, 21st-century facility that embodied "the values of its citizens and

their aspirations for city government."

Long considered the heart of Boston's African-American community, this once-thriving commercial district had suffered from decades of population loss triggered by redlining, the removal of an elevated rail line that connected it with downtown, and demolition and displacement associated with urban renewal and a proposed highway that was never built.

An international competition was held to select the architect for a facility with state-of-the-art technology and a healthy work environment. The winning proposal, by Sasaki and Dutch firm Mecanoo, envisioned a multi-use "village" integrated into the surrounding neighborhood rather than an isolated, single-purpose building. The scheme was inspired by the area's vibrant cultural history and reinforced by discussions with neighborhood residents. "The building needed to feel welcoming to its visitors and its neighbors," said Sasaki Principal Fiske Crowell, FAIA, LEED AP. "The design team looked to the history of Dudley Square for inspiration on how to fit into the existing fabric while

### FIVE COMMON ATTRIBUTES OF SUCCESSFUL PLACEMAKING

■ **RBA's in-depth evaluation of transformative urban American projects has revealed five common characteristics of successful placemaking:**

**1 Visionary leadership.** Aspirational leadership and ambition is essential to catalyzing projects, generating enthusiasm, and engaging the support necessary to move ahead. While projects are often inspired by the vision of a single individual or organization, leadership often becomes increasingly collaborative. Some projects are initiated by a visionary mayor or charismatic civic leader or developer. Others emerge organically over time from the community through creation of a collective vision.

**2 Collaborative partnerships.** Truly transformative projects are rarely the product

of one person or entity but rather the outcome of long-term relationships among people, organizations, and communities that work together over time and leverage necessary experience, skills, and funding. Today, most significant urban development projects involve complex public-private partnerships that facilitate access to local, state, and federal funding and programs and also leverage private capital and financing.

**3 Engaging and empowering communities.** Places that enhance interaction and increase access to opportunities and services improve quality of life for everyone. Likewise, involvement in the creation of place—through advocacy, participatory planning, and community workshops, and the development of ongoing programming—

contributes to a collective sense of ownership, stewardship, and community empowerment and pride. This is especially critical in places that have experienced or are going through significant change, such as loss caused by catastrophic weather events, economic and demographic shifts, or the collapse of a major local industry.

**4 Anchoring projects in their unique cultures and places.** Context is critical. Development that is informed by an understanding of the distinctive historical, cultural, and physical characteristics and that also reflects local aspirations and values of place is more likely to be embraced by the community and to be successful in the long run. Quality of place matters in attracting and retaining residents and businesses.

Those that are unique and reflect and embody local characteristics are more likely to stand out and endure.

**5 The ROI of design excellence.** Successful placemaking is a process that requires assembling, integrating, and responding to a variety of information. Good design responds to unique environmental, social, and physical needs and requirements, as well as the aspirations and expectations of place. It can be achieved with the help of design competitions that seek fresh talent and innovative ideas, the engagement of firms with deep expertise and knowledge, the careful preservation and adaptation of architectural heritage, and the introduction of new techniques and technologies that contribute to resilience and long-term sustainability.

looking to more modern examples for how to create transparency throughout.”

In keeping with the mayor’s mandate, the development and programming of the Bolling Building was informed by community input led by the Dudley Vision Advisory Task Force, a committee of local business owners and residents. Advocacy groups worked with the project team to ensure that local and minority populations benefited from the job opportunities.

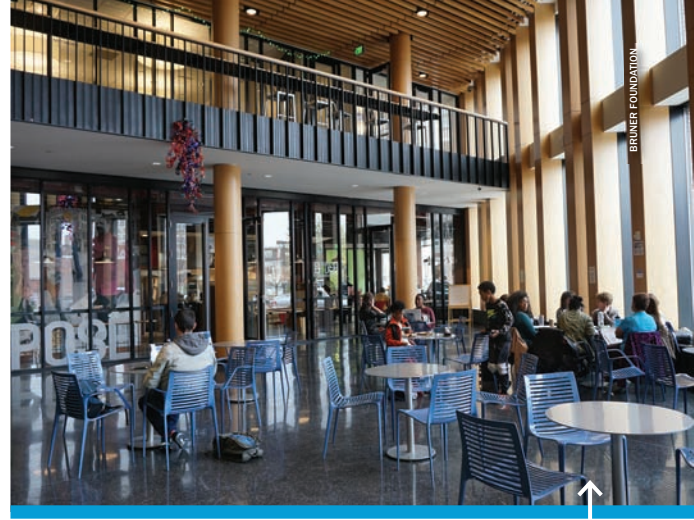
The resulting six-story, 215,000-sf, LEED Gold-certified complex weaves together contemporary construction and materials with the restored façades of three historic structures including the Ferdinand Furniture Building, a local landmark. Local masons incorporated intricate modern detailing using three types of brick that recall the city’s historic architecture, a process captured in “Boston Bricks with a Dutch Touch,” a video produced by Mecanoo.

The two-story lobby connects the building with an adjacent bus station and the surrounding community. The ground floor offers flexible seating for informal

gatherings and meetings as well as large events. Six storefront retail spaces house vendors and cafés. Priority is given to locally owned tenants; financial support is provided to small businesses.

A grand staircase leads up to a second-floor mezzanine with public meeting rooms, a Boston Public Schools Welcome Center, and the Roxbury Innovation Center. The Innovation Center, which reflects the policies of current Mayor Martin Walsh, provides local residents a fabrication lab with 3D printers and programs that promote local entrepreneurship and economic development.

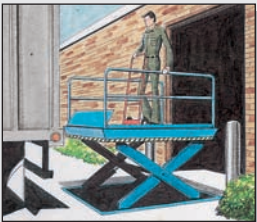
Floors 3-5 house workspace for 500 BPS employees, with large windows that maximize access to natural light, and open, flexible workstations. A mockup of



The lobby at the 215,000-sf LEED Gold Bruce C. Bolling Municipal Building features restaurants and retail space. Sasaki and Dutch firm Mecanoo were the designers.



## DISAPPEARING DOCK LIFT



NOW YOU SEE IT



NOW YOU DON'T

**AN ADVANCE DOCK LIFT IS THE ONLY EQUIPMENT THAT CAN SERVICE ALL TRUCKS.**

- **WHITE PAPER (SELECTION GUIDE)**
- **LIFT SPECIFICATIONS SHEETS**
- **ARCHITECTURAL SPECIFICATIONS**
- **PIT & PAD DRAWINGS**

AVAILABLE AT **advancelifts.com**



ISO 9001:2015  
Certified



**1-800-THE-DOCK**

CIRCLE 786

## REACHING ECONOMICAL HEIGHTS!

PFlow’s team of engineers work with your exact specifications to produce a custom designed vertical lift, suitable for any application.

PFlow’s sole focus is on lifting products. Our expertise and know-how ensures that cost-effective solutions are used for any challenge, without sacrificing safety. That’s peace of mind your clients will appreciate!

**M Series: 10,000 LBS Lifting Capacity, 2 or More Levels of Travel, 200 Feet of Vertical Travel**

**414.352.9000**

**www.pflow.com**

Made in the USA, Milwaukee, WI



**MATERIAL HANDLING SOLUTIONS**



CIRCLE 785

the proposed workstations was installed at City Hall so that BPS employees could try them out and provide feedback. These workspaces have become the new standard for City of Boston municipal offices.

The sixth floor has multipurpose meeting space and a large roof deck with views of downtown. The space is available for public rental.

Financing for the \$125 million project came from the city and New Market Tax Credits. The Bolling Building complements other municipal investments in Dudley Square—a new police station, a redesigned library, and street and sidewalk improvements. Together, these improvements have leveraged more than \$800 million in private investment in the community.

Completed in 2015, the Bolling Building has become a popular community hub that illustrates the power of public investment to foster neighborhood renewal and civic pride.

**SUCCESSFUL URBAN PLACEMAKING**

Both of these projects were driven by ambitious leaders with aspirational visions, working in collaboration with allied partners over years and sometimes

decades. Each engages and embraces its own unique place and culture, bringing people together and strengthening the physical and social fabric of their communities.

In the process, they restore and renew hope and civic pride. They offer powerful examples of how investment in placemaking can promote equity, resilience, and the regeneration of our urban infrastructure and communities.

Tackling big urban issues is complex and difficult. Truly transformative projects require vision, ingenuity, and long-term commitment of time, talent, and resources. Most urban development today involves collaborative, public-private partnerships involving multidisciplinary teams with the knowledge and experience necessary to navigate the increasingly complicated process of design, development, and financing in these settings.

As AEC leaders, leveraging our unique ability to interpret and integrate information related to economic, environmental, and social concerns and needs into physical spaces that directly impact lives and communities is essential in this process.

**NATURAL DOG PARK PRODUCTS**

**NATIONWIDE DOG PARK PRODUCTS & DESIGN**

**GYMS FOR DOGS**  
Natural Dog Park Products

GymsForDogs.com  
sales@GymsForDogs.com  
800-931-1562

CIRCLE 787

**REPRINTS.**  
**YOUR MOST EFFICIENT SALES TOOL.**

**Event Handouts | Direct Mail | Employee Training**

Objective, respected third-party coverage of your company is a powerful endorsement.

For reprint pricing and custom options, contact Tina Kanter at **tkanter@sgcmail.com**

**BUILDING DESIGN + CONSTRUCTION**

COURTESY ROSALES + PARTNERS



# ‘Urban Oasis’ in the Heart of Downtown

## FALLS PARK ON THE REEDY GREENVILLE, S.C.

Consistently rated as one of the best places to live and visit (including The New York Times, “52 Places to Go in the World in 2017,” at <https://nyti.ms/2k1CmSh>), Greenville, S.C., offers an enviable combination of low-cost of living and high quality of life.

Chief among its draws is Falls Park on the Reedy (the 2015 Rudy Bruner Award Silver Medalist), the reclamation of a forgotten waterfall and overgrown river valley into a 26-acre urban oasis running through the heart of downtown.

First proposed in 1907 as part of a broader civic vision, the park was finally realized in 2004 by the city of Greenville in collaboration with local garden club and civic leaders. A four-lane vehicular bridge built directly over the waterfall was replaced with an elegant pedestrian suspension bridge that provides a dramatic overlook of the river and the falls.

The park is a popular destination for residents and visitors and has become the centerpiece for the city and the growing network of trails and greenspaces linking downtown with adjoining neighborhoods and amenities.

The \$13.5 million park has influenced over \$600 million in development near the river, including more than \$65 million in new waterfront development.+

— Anne-Marie Lubenau, FAIA

### + EDITOR’S NOTE

Some additional reading is required for this course. To earn 1.0 AIA CES learning units, study the article and take the exam posted at [BDCnetwork.com/UrbanPlacemaking2018](http://BDCnetwork.com/UrbanPlacemaking2018).