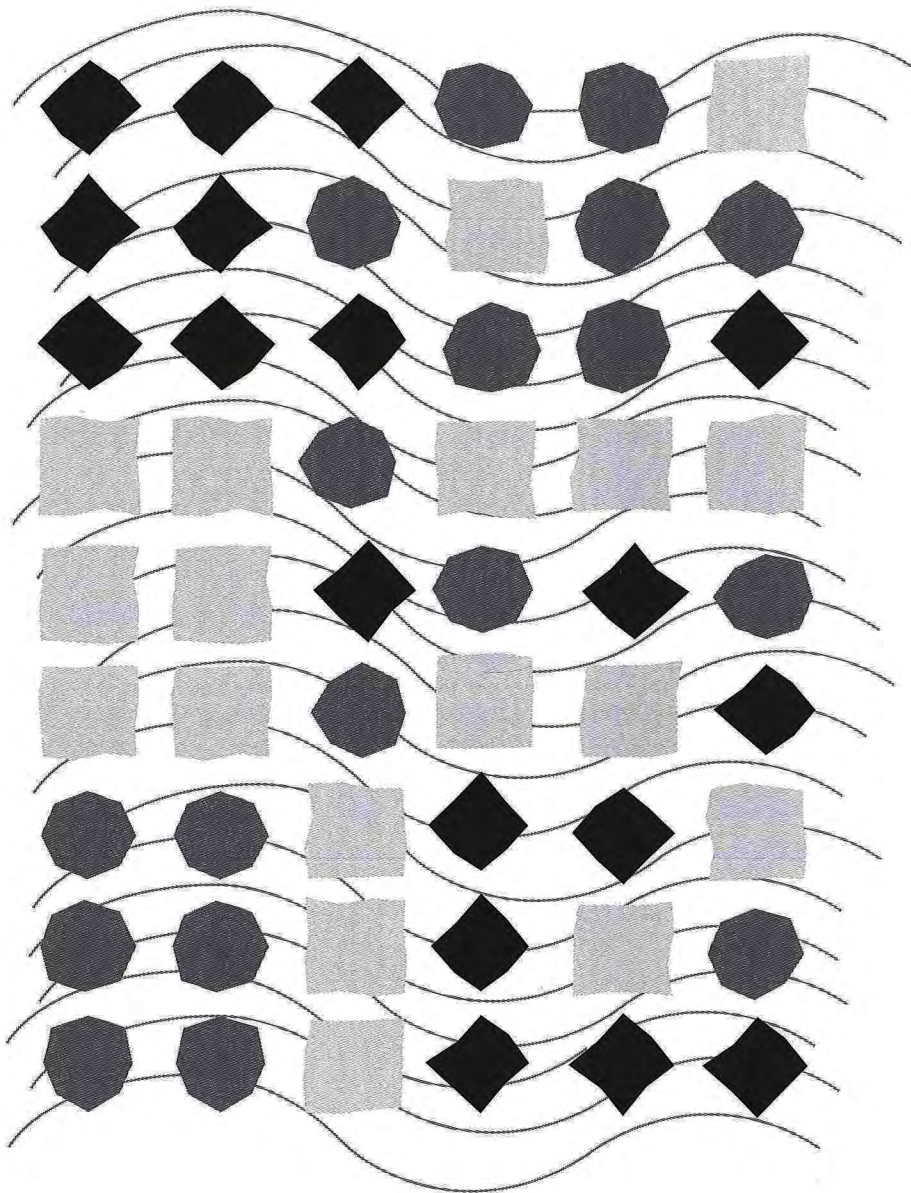


This is an excerpt from:

1995
Rudy Bruner Award
for Excellence in the Urban Environment



BUILDING COALITIONS FOR URBAN EXCELLENCE

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Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 96-80272
ISBN: 1-890286-00-1

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WHAT DID WE LEARN ABOUT URBAN EXCELLENCE?

The Rudy Bruner Award is a search for urban excellence. It seeks to identify and reward excellent urban places, and to serve as a forum for debating urban issues and the nature of urban excellence. So, what did we learn about urban excellence in this round of the Award through reviewing seventy-two submissions, visiting six finalists, and selecting a winner?

Non-Traditional Organizations — Building Coalitions for Urban Excellence

The theme that emerged from this year's award, building coalitions, is demonstrated in a variety of ways by the finalists and winner. Creating urban excellence requires the participation of many entities and many actors. City agencies and elected officials, for-profit and community developers, neighborhood action groups, financial institutions, and many others play a role. In fact, the Rudy Bruner Award has recognized this from its inception by including these actors on the selection committee and asking for their stories in the application. While it has been common for Bruner Award projects to cobble together support from a wide variety of sources, new relationships and new organizational forms appear to be evolving. In this year's finalists, we see changing roles, actors coming together to collaborate in new relationships, and new hybrid entities appearing which can operate in areas where traditional organizations cannot function as effectively. These new vehicles for collective action take a variety of forms.

None of these projects could appropriately be categorized as having been done either by government or by a community developer acting on its own. Rather, in every case, multiple or non-conventional entities came together to create these impressive projects:

- One was initiated by a city (which got foundation support to create a highly non-traditional redevelopment group outside city government — the Lowertown Redevelopment Corporation).
- Another formed a non-profit entity (the Central Park Conservancy) which partnered with the city parks department to achieve what neither could do on its own.
- Another was a combination of for-profit and non-profit developers (Campus Circle) formed by a university to rehabilitate its surrounding community.
- Still others evolved out of struggles with local government — either from an initial opposition to city policies that resulted in an effective collaboration (DSNI, with important foundation funding); or through a struggle to meet city requirements ending in the emergence of a new entity to respond to new challenges (GMDC).
- The winner, Maya Angelou, was created by a non-traditional, highly democratic, feminist group with major support from its city.

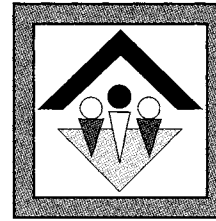
These inventive arrangements raise interesting qualitative and organizational questions:

- What is the most effective agent for urban change and improvement?
- How should it operate?
- How should it incorporate or relate to the many interests which come into play?
- Is the appropriate entity a city agency, a not-for-profit developer, a for-profit developer, or a new hybrid such as Lowertown Redevelopment Corporation, the Central Park Conservancy, Campus Circle, or the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative?

Interestingly, in several of these projects, it took us a rather long time to ferret out what these entities and relationships are about, since they are new hybrids and hard to classify.

There are also more quantitative issues, such as the question of how much government will contribute to projects that are in the public interest, and how much will come from business, local residents, foundations, and others. In some cases, the local governments got a tremendous “bang for their bucks”, but would the projects have been more successful or succeeded earlier with more public investment? This can be stated more strongly: it may seem that the city is abdicating its duty in some cases (e.g., Central Park) and letting or requiring the private, charitable, and not-for-profit sectors meet what had been the obligations of the commonweal (government) to provide for parks, safety, and other features of urban life that used to be taken for granted as public responsibilities.

There is a clear trend toward a new and more minimalist role for government in the community development process (see “The New Role For Government” below). The key question is, then, how will the reduced resources from governments be allocated and used to greatest effect? These projects may hold answers in their non-conventional modes of obtaining resources and often highly efficient ways of utilizing them. They are pushing boundaries, inventing new forms of organization, entering into new relationships and inventing new processes to bring about needed urban transformations.



This year’s winner, the **Maya Angelou Neighborhood Initiative**, was developed by Housing Our Families (HOF), technically a community development corporation, but in fact a highly non-traditional organization. HOF started as a feminist consciousness-raising and advocacy group but chose to become a developer because it determined that the only way to realize its vision was to help provide housing and services for low income single parent (usually female) families.

Racially, ethnically, and economically diverse, HOF modeled its approach to egalitarian, consensus-based decision making after the National Congress of Neighborhood Women. This emphasis on group process and non-hierarchical structure is central to HOF’s organizational personality. HOF will not move forward without everyone buying into the direction. What HOF lacked in experience, it made up in the quality of its process, gaining great strength from the power of consensus.

HOF succeeded with the Maya Angelou project because it formed a working coalition with city. It gained the confidence of the city, which, while not its partner, initially put up all the money for HOF to buy the project. Before committing to take on the project, HOF insisted on reaching out to the rest of the neighborhood and honored its commitment to listen and respond to their needs. Thus, HOF made the city and the neighborhood collaborators in the project planning, and in continued improvement of the area.



The **Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI)** is rather difficult to categorize. It is a grassroots organization, not a community development corporation, but it orga-

nized the people, stopped illegal dumping, got the neighborhood cleaned up, prepared a plan (which the city adopted), created a land trust, and eventually built some housing. Yet the events that precipitated the formation of DSNI were initiated by a charitable foundation. Traditionally, a neighborhood plan would have been prepared by the city (hopefully with input from the neighbors) but

here DSNI created the plan as a means of envisioning and realizing its desired future. The city had the wisdom to recognize that this plan had legitimacy and the foresight to adopt it as the official plan. The city also collaborated with DSNI to create the land trust, delegating powers of eminent domain to a related entity, Dudley Neighbors, Inc.

When DSNI started, it had to exert intense pressure to get the city to respond to local problems of trash dumping and arson. By demonstrating its legitimacy as a voice for community needs, it gradually became recognized by the city as the key actor in the area. While fiercely maintaining its independence from the city, DSNI joins with it when it needs to in order to achieve a desired end. For its part, the city uses DSNI to furnish input and garner support for city initiatives. The city provided major funding and considerable technical support for the one construction project DSNI undertook. Thus, there is an ad hoc, evolving coalition between DSNI and the city to achieve mutually beneficial ends.



In St. Paul, the **Lowertown Redevelopment Corporation (LRC)** is a much heralded example of reinventing government. In the late 1970s, mayor George Latimer asked the McKnight Foundation to support a new concept: a non-profit agency to help reclaim the nearly defunct district below downtown. Although the type of entity created for Lowertown may not seem so unusual in the mid-1990s, when the model was proposed the notion of public-private partnerships was far from common.

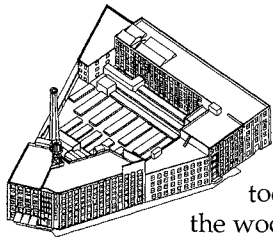
LRC has three areas of emphasis: gap financing on projects that would not otherwise be financially feasible, design review, and marketing. Unusually for a redevelopment agency, LRC does not have condemnation powers, does not own land, can't assemble parcels, and can't offer standard development incentives by itself (such as tax abatement) — but it can facilitate these and other contributions to a project. With a modest budget and a very small staff, LRC is a model of doing more with less. LRC spends much of its effort maintaining liaisons and building coalitions; working with or through other agencies or boards to encourage development that

will contribute to Lowertown's quality. It advocates for good design, but cannot enforce particular standards. It helps projects that need its help, but requires them to be mostly self sufficient. LRC is difficult to classify as an organization; set up at the impetus of the city, funded privately, yet acting in the public behalf. A considerable part of its success is undoubtedly attributable to its president, Weiming Lu (see the discussion about leadership below).



At **Harlem Meer**, the Central Park Conservancy, a private non-profit corporation, administers Central Park in cooperation with the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation. This highly unusual arrangement grew out of a number of special circumstances. The park itself had deteriorated greatly due to New York City's fiscal crisis of the 1970s. A visionary leader, Elizabeth Barlow Rogers, not only recognized the needs of the park, but was instrumental in founding the Conservancy, which she headed until 1996. In what is essentially a joint venture arrangement with the City, the Conservancy provides the administrator and top executives who manage the park, a portion of park staff, operational budgets, and capital financing. Many other staff, working under Conservancy administrators, are city Parks and Recreation Department employees. This unique arrangement works so well that in practice the question of which organization is paying someone's salary seems insignificant.

The evolution of the Conservancy and its sharing of responsibility for the park grew out of circumstances unique to New York City. New York faced a traumatic municipal fiscal crisis, and its Central Park, a significant symbol of the city and a national treasure, suffered from lack of attention. With significant corporate, private and foundation resources in New York (possibly more than in any other American city), the decline of Central Park would seem to be a clear example of public poverty in the midst of private wealth, where the commonweal could not shoulder what should have been its responsibilities. This unique organizational model is working very effectively and apparently has been emulated in one or two other cities. It is not clear, however, that this scale of resources (and perhaps talent) can often be marshaled to duplicate its success.



Greenpoint's organizational structure evolved in response to changing conditions and needs. It started life as the Woodworkers Center Equity Corporation which was formed when the risk of eviction on short notice loomed as the city took over the building in 1988. In response, the woodworker tenants began to organize to protect their interests and formed a corporation, the

WCEC, creating a legal entity that could sign a lease with the city and eventually buy the building. They conceived of the WCEC as a European crafts-cooperative, much like a trade association. It intended to provide a way for tenant-manufacturers to control their own destiny by working together and managing the building cooperatively.

It became clear, however, that the WCEC was not going to be able to consummate a purchase. Their for-profit status made city concessions difficult. More importantly, they lacked the financial, managerial and political expertise required to inspire confidence that they could succeed. The alternative that became increasingly attractive was to create a "local development corporation" (LDC). This became the Greenpoint Manufacturing and Design Center with a board that included outside technical experts, business people, and bankers as well as representatives of the woodworkers and artists. As an LDC, and making use of the expertise on its new board, GMDC could negotiate more effectively with the city. Thus, GMDC formed a hybrid organization in order to effectively pursue its ends. Greenpoint has had many collaborations with local institutions and foundations and with members of the New York City Council, in part to help it overcome the resistance of city agencies.



Campus Circle is another very unusual organization. Set up by Marquette University, but largely independent of its governance structure, Campus Circle was able to function as a "wheels on fire" developer when lightning fast acquisition of deteriorated properties was the only way to gain control of a sufficient number

of them without causing their prices to skyrocket. Campus Circle developed partnerships with other institutions in its neighborhood,

such as hospitals and service organizations, with other parts of Marquette University (students, service learning programs), and with the city police department.

Six Parts of A Whole City

While these six projects were chosen as finalists because of their individual achievements, the choices were not made in isolation. Rather, as the Selection Committee debated, sifted and winnowed at their first meeting, they worked toward a set of selections that included what they perceived as the cities' most pressing problems together with the most promising approaches to solving them. The Selection Committee came to view these six projects as a unit, as complementary tiles in a mosaic, addressing a broad set of needs, strategies and possibilities for urban excellence. Individually they are important yet isolated pieces of excellence. Together they say something about what makes a city function as an effective whole — a balanced place to live, work, play, and learn.

The whole consists of elements addressed by these projects that are common to most or all big cities. These include healing devastated inner core areas, providing affordable housing, addressing the abandonment of the city by industry and manufacturing, developing and maintaining parks, and coming to terms with the important relationship between universities and their often troubled surrounding communities.

Reclaiming the most devastated neighborhoods — places marked by the out-migration of the working and middle class, ravaged by crime, and housing the city's poorest and least powerful — is addressed head on by **DSNI** and **Maya Angelou** and, to a significant degree, by **Campus Circle**. While these three projects share this problem focus, they differ in context, process, leadership style, financing and development strategies. DSNI and Maya, for example, are very much about community building — bringing together and building on the human resources that can be tapped in even the most devastated communities. DSNI has community development at its core, with a construction project emerging as an outcome of the process. Maya Angelou did the reverse, using their housing project as a wedge to rally the community and provide an impetus for its overall improvement.

Campus Circle also addressed the problem of reviving a poor inner city neighborhood, and was able to have a broad impact in a short period, in part because it focused more on physical development, with its rapid and massive acquisition and development phases, placing less emphasis on neighborhood participation and organizing, which were parallel and somewhat mutually supportive efforts.

The Selection Committee recognized that, for all the appropriate attention to housing and jobs, cities exist and succeed because these are balanced with other resources. Campus Circle addresses the often uneasy marriage between urban neighborhoods and great universities, with the potential for mutually destructive or mutually supportive relationships. Universities have a wealth of resources (intellectual and otherwise) that can hold great benefits for neighboring communities. And, as Marquette was wise enough to learn, the viability of these communities can be crucial to the success of the university. Campus Circle was unique in addressing these issues directly and its apparent success will have implications for the university, the community, and the city. As a model it is already attracting the attention of other urban universities.

Cities are also experiencing an exodus of industry from the central core. The industrial base that helped create great cities is evaporating from many of them, leaving behind a legacy of abandoned buildings and neighborhoods, unemployed workers, and an eroded tax base. Because they so effectively address these issues, the Selection Committee included **Lowertown** and **Greenpoint** as finalists. Lowertown provides a careful, sensitive and cost effective approach to the adaptive reuse of an abandoned industrial area into a mixed-use commercial and residential community. It not only resulted in the successful reuse of existing resources but also created a neighborhood and community of artists and families where none had existed before.

The Greenpoint Manufacturing and Design Center deals with an aspect of the same problem of industrial flight from the city, but its approach and solutions were different in every way. GMDC is the outcome of a kind of "guerrilla adaptive reuse" process. The woodworkers and crafts people were initially legal renters, then essentially squatters, who developed a communal solution to their own

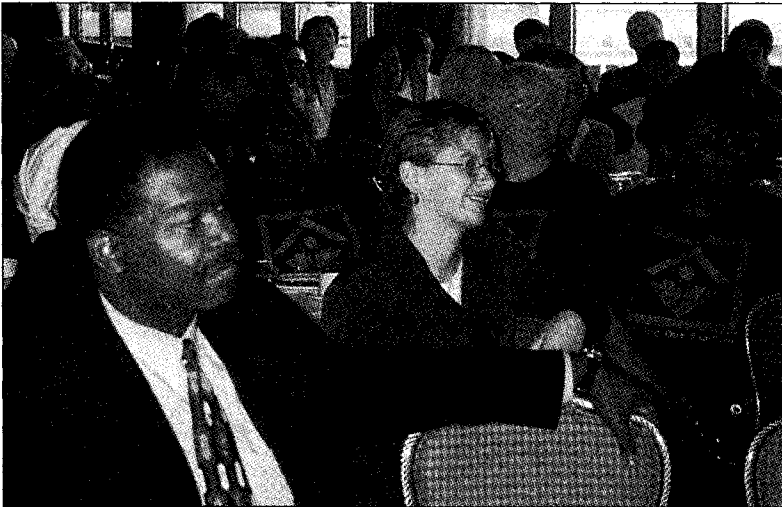
problem, trying to avoid being forced out of the city and out of business. In the process they created a model akin to a European-style crafts-cooperative, a "virtual large corporation" made up of many small, independent shops sharing services, equipment, expertise and marketing. It has saved the original shops and jobs and incubated many new ones.

The Selection Committee included **Harlem Meer** as a finalist because it saw parks not as frills, but as essential elements that define the quality of urban life. In restoring Harlem Meer, the Central Park Conservancy created amenities that made an important and under-served part of New York City more livable. The Meer restoration also reconnects the northern end of the park, and its related communities, with the rest of the park and of Manhattan.

A New Role For Government

At one time the role of government in creating urban excellence was obvious: as the initial planner, the prime mover, and the provider of major funding for the urban infrastructure. In fact, many of the Bruner Award winners and finalists over the past decade have been projects initiated and heavily supported by city and federal programs (New York's Tenant Interim Leasing program, Portland's Downtown Plan, and Boston's Southwest Corridor, to name just a few, as discussed in previous books about Bruner Award finalists, referenced in the Introduction). Even though governments never acted alone for these projects, they were often a, or the, major player. However, the resources available for heavy government intervention, and with them the will to foster large scale change, are on the wane as both political parties have declared "the era of big government" to have come to an end. Fewer and fewer public resources are likely to be available and greater reliance is likely to be placed on non-federal and even non-governmental entities.

What, then, is the proper role for government in solving urban problems and helping to create excellent places given these new realities? Some community developers have urged it to "lead, follow, or get out of the way". Certainly the 1995 Bruner Award finalists demonstrated these diminished and divergent government roles. In none of these cases was a government agency the primer



The Award Ceremony

player, and nowhere were federal agencies heavily involved (though block grants and other federal funding or subsidies were used). Only in Lowertown and Maya Angelou did local governments play a significant role in the inception of a project, and even there the primary efforts in planning and making it happen were conducted outside of government offices. For Lowertown, a mayor had the foresight to initiate an effort that brought in a private foundation and created a redevelopment agency to manage the process of gap financing, design review and marketing. At Maya Angelou, the Portland Development Commission had the courage to risk the 100% financing that allowed the renovation and community organizing to go forward, but the creative and physical effort, and ongoing fiscal responsibility for the project, were managed by Housing Our Families.

For DSNI and Harlem Meer, the local city governments played important but diminished roles. While New York City effectively teamed with the Central Park Conservancy for Harlem Meer, the Conservancy often appears to be the senior partner. In Boston, the government helped by supporting plans created through DSNI's efforts. In both cases the governmental partner helped by providing regular city services where requested (and where they were

conspicuous by their prior absence), and by avoiding bureaucratic roadblocks to the implementation of plans. At Campus Circle, the City of Milwaukee was barely visible. It had little or no role in planning and implementation, save for the agreement to move a precinct of police into a Campus Circle building for a pilot test of community policing. It provided little funding, except for loans based on tax increment financing. Marquette University and Campus Circle filled a gap in planning and community service left by the absence of city efforts in its neighborhood.

For GMDC the City of New York was the major obstacle that needed to be overcome. The long period of negotiations, demonstrations, and much of the risk of failure, were due to the intransigence of a city agency blocking the transfer of building ownership to the local development corporation. The eventual success of GMDC in gaining title was the result of a battle between the city Division of Real Property and GMDC, which was supported by other city agencies and city council members.

For city planners and officials there are several lessons about the role of government to be learned from these stories. Perhaps most the important lesson is the cost of neglect and abdication of responsibility. Several of these projects required heroic effort to accomplish what the cities should have been doing all along, for instance to provide for safety, housing, and infrastructure. The lack of attention to, and in some ways abandonment of, the maintenance of Central Park, of the huge factory building in Greenpoint, and of poor neighborhoods in inner city Boston and Milwaukee, created voids that were filled by the unusual, hybrid organizations described above. On the other hand, in Portland, and especially St. Paul, we found stories where the city was a positive force for change, seeding projects, facilitating and collaborating with many different players, and clearing a path through bureaucratic thickets.

At a time when cities will have much less money to throw at problems, they will find their intellectual, moral and organizational leadership roles coming to the fore. If they conceive of their role in this way, they will be able to create the conditions where they and other players can get important things done. If cities limit themselves to their regulating functions, some potentially excellent projects may never get off the ground.

Leadership and Decision Making Styles

Leaders who have the vision to see beyond obstacles, and are able to commit their energy and creativity to overcoming those obstacles, have contributed greatly to all of the projects. Some have incorporated extraordinary levels of participation through exemplary democratic processes. In our book on the 1993 awards, *Rebuilding Communities*, we commented on the need to balance appropriately strong and dynamic leadership with broad participation — both to ensure an effective base of support throughout the community and to sustain the project if the leader moves on. This theme of balancing leadership and participation reappears with this group of projects, which shed further light on the wide range of variations in how they can be handled.

Lowertown Redevelopment Corporation has long been led by dedicated planner and urban designer, Weiming Lu. To fulfill his organization's mandate, Lu has also had to learn finances and marketing. Though he covers a broad range of issues, as explained above LRC actually has very limited powers compared to other redevelopment agencies. Therefore, Lu has had to achieve a significant portion of what he does not by direction, but by persuasion and persistence, coalition building, and leading by example. He has had a very small staff but a strong board that participates in decisions about funding and other key issues. LRC networks and builds coalitions with other commissions and agencies, as well as the private sector. It seems to have learned to be inclusive on projects that require it, like planning for the redevelopment of the community park and tot lot, as well as recent plans for the river front.

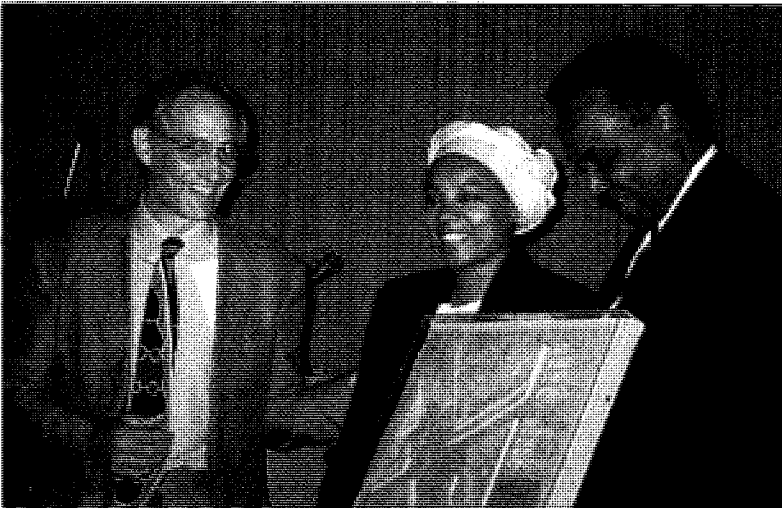
The **Central Park** Conservancy has been led, until recently, by a charismatic, even "aristocratic" pioneer who had vision, put together the park master plan, raised money, created the innovative organizational relationship with the city, and then actually administered the park. This is a remarkable range of roles for one person to be able to play and Elizabeth Barlow Rogers seems to have played them very well indeed. The Conservancy appears to have been rather insulated and elitist during its early years but to have learned from mistakes and failures and now seems to have incorporated effective mechanisms for participation from park users and neighboring residents.



Housing Our Families (Maya Angelou Apartments)

Campus Circle was created because Marquette's President, Father DiUlio, had the insight to recognize the connection of Marquette's fate to that of the neighboring communities, and because its Board of Trustees was willing to risk significant capital on his vision. Campus Circle flourished because of a strong entrepreneurial executive director, Pat LeSage, who led a fast paced program of acquisition, rehabilitation and new construction. His skills were necessary to conduct a program at the speed with which Campus Circle proceeded. While he reported only to the president of the university, he also encouraged an effort to reach out to students and community members.

All the groups involved in **Greenpoint** Manufacturing and Design Center agree on one thing — it would not have happened without David Sweeney. Sweeney was called a "luminous personality" by one board member, and a "visionary" by a staffer. Sweeney joined with the woodworkers out of excitement at the concept they were trying to carry forward. He stayed on to develop the proposal, see negotiations through to their final conclusions, create the board structure and management team, and guide it through its initial financial difficulties. Observers suggest that his genius is for organization and, above all, persistence. This project could never fail, a participant told us, "David would never let it."



Che Madyun of DSNI (center) with Simeon Bruner and Mayor Rice

Sweeney's contributions were crucial to getting GMDC through its birthing process. His development of a politically and financially savvy board may have been the stroke that made the difference. Tenants, however, may be underestimating their own capabilities for managing the operation, should Sweeney leave at some point. They have a board and a structure in place, and a large group of tenants who were part of GMDC's creation story, and have taken an active role in the management of GMDC affairs.

The **Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative** is a premier example of strikingly participatory, consensus-based decision making on complex community issues. While Dudley was born of a meeting called by a charitable foundation that had taken an interest in the area, it was transformed during that initial meeting into something more. It restructured itself to mirror and give power to the entire range of community interests. Interestingly, it also has attracted a succession of strong executive directors, including among others Peter Medoff and Gus Newport (former mayor of Berkeley, California). These leaders had powerful commitments to community participation and worked in that mode. At the time of our visit, the status of the organization was less clear in terms of leadership, with an interim executive director and a rather large staff. Having expe-

rienced considerable success and very significant growth, it appeared to be a time of reconsidering how Dudley should be structured.

The **Maya Angelou Neighborhood Initiative** was developed by Housing Our Families, a feminist, completely democratic, consensus based organization. While HOF has an effective executive director, its commitment to consensus decision making means that decisions are well understood and widely supported once reached. There is no one person whose loss would be fatal to the organization since power is broadly dispersed.

The Microwave versus the Crockpot — Differing Recipes for Community Development

In 1995 the RBA team flew from the Campus Circle site visit directly to Lowertown. The contrast between these two projects, however, made the distance traveled seem far greater than the few hundred miles between Milwaukee and St. Paul. While both projects had as their mission mixed-use redevelopment of an area near downtown, their approaches and styles were diametric opposites. One observer characterized these different approaches as the "microwave" rapid boil versus "crock-pot" slow cook models of community development. Campus Circle was striking for the speed and scale of its effort — a top-down approach characterized by rapid planning on multiple fronts, engaging in a massive property buying effort in its first year, and using direct intervention and management to evoke significant change in a short time.

Lowertown, by contrast, was equally striking for its patient and long term perspective, choosing to view change as a process to be measured in decades, using leverage, coalition building and considerable subtlety to gently nudge, rather than directly push, the course of development.

The vast differences in their approaches is the result of many factors, including the organizations that created them, the nature of the neighborhoods involved and the urban contexts in which they exist. But there are also elements of perspective, values and leadership style (see earlier section) involved in selecting the proper pace for a project.

Campus Circle was created by a university that saw an immediate need to create change to ensure its own survival by addressing

crime, housing, and livability in its surrounding community.

Marquette had a history of unilateral action in the area.

Marquette's president and Campus Circle's leader were disposed to a top-down model adapted from for-profit real estate development — a quick study to generate an action plan followed by immediate implementation.

By contrast, **Lowertown** Redevelopment Corporation, the product of a unique organization formed by the city and a local charitable foundation, was looking to support creation of a community where none existed. The decisions about projects and investments were made mainly by the private developers who Lowertown courted and sought to influence. Lacking many powerful tools often available to redevelopment commissions, Lowertown was able to gently direct and encourage projects by finding and helping development teams it thought appropriate for projects it wanted done, providing very small amounts of gap financing to help projects forward, reviewing designs and making suggestions (but not enforcing standards), and marketing the success of the entire area. Lowertown's leader was clearly effective at working this gradual, long term perspective.

A key decision for any project, one which depends on context, management style and values, is the degree to which decisions are subject to a broad, participatory process or are made by a smaller group of leaders. Opting for a less centralized and more participatory approach increases the time it takes to make design and development decisions. The potential payoff for the extra investment of time comes from the broader base of input, decisions which are better for the community, and increased "buy-in" and long term success. The renovation of Maya Angelou apartments, for example, proceeded relatively quickly (about one year), but even so Housing Our Family's internal consensus approach and involvement of the community extended decision-making in ways that would have been maddening to a typical developer.

Insistence on a participatory process at the expense of speed is also inherent to the history and structure of the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative. Born of an effort to organize the community, DSNI functions as a grassroots organization.

Part of the significance of the Harlem Meer project was its demonstration of Central Park Conservancy's willingness to extend the



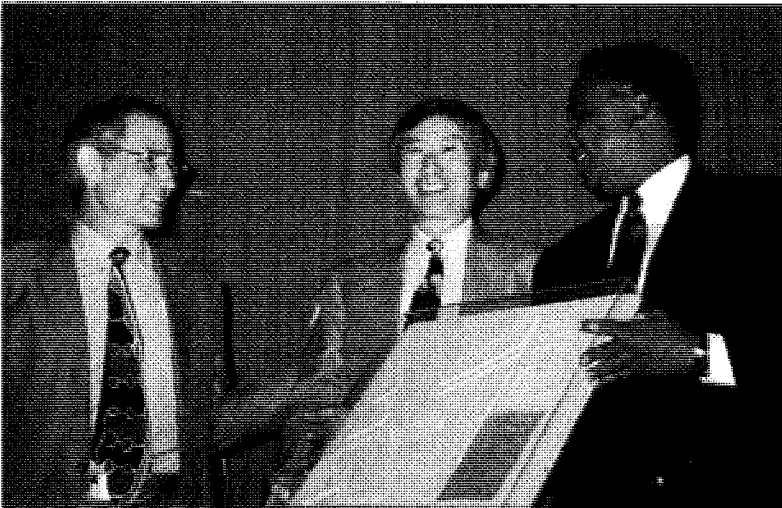
David Sweeney of GMDC (center)

restoration process to include the input of several committees made up of representatives of the neighborhood, again at the expense of simplified, centralized decision making. The Conservancy learned the hard way about the necessity of participation — by having projects challenged or stopped — and has since integrated it into its normal way of planning projects and programs.

Campus Circle's model of rapid, top-down change was effective and may have been necessary, given the goals and demands of the situation. Indeed, some elements of quick change and success may be critical to any successful project that needs to infuse confidence and hope to sustain the community over the long haul. The Selection Committee pointed out, however, that this model does not allow for the kind of community building and human resource development necessary to create a body politic that can eventually take over responsibility for their own community.

The Importance of Design

To qualify for consideration for the Bruner Award, a project must be a tangible place. That is, it must have a physical, spatial dimension. To become a finalist or winner, the qualities of the place need to be in harmony and balance with the values, processes, and social



Weiming Lu of Lowertown (center)

outcomes which are supported by that physical environment. While the RBA is not an award for urban design, urban excellence cannot avoid incorporating design. This section discusses general aspects of design, while the following section focusses on using design features to reduce crime.

Achieving urban excellence requires at least that the physical environment not inhibit, constrain or detract from the social environment. At best, the projects are wonderful places, with spatial and physical qualities that express, symbolize and support the social processes they contain. While design — the conscious, deliberate shaping of the physical environment, generally at a single point in time and by professional experts — played a key role in some of these projects, others have evolved over time, the result of incremental decisions and actions of the residents or neighbors themselves. Some projects were designed by capable or even noted architects, landscape architects and planners. Others have benefited from the thoughtful, caring actions of citizens, such as planting flowers, building a fence or trellis, maintaining a front yard, and the like.

The **Maya Angelou** apartment project benefited from starting with buildings that were attractive, nicely scaled, and well constructed

of sturdy, attractive materials. Key design goals for the complex centered on making it livable, useful, pleasant, homey, and safe (as described in another section, principles of crime prevention through environmental design played a major role in the design). Not surprisingly for a project like this, cost control was a key factor in the rehabilitation and materials were reused wherever possible. The only major design change came in the remodeling to create four larger apartments and the new construction of space for community meetings and child care. This new structure was, to good effect, made to match the original buildings. Thus, while “design” was not the major factor at Maya, the result is entirely appropriate to intentions and needs.

At **Lowertown**, design was an important focus from the beginning. Led by an urban designer, Lowertown is an exceptionally attractive area. This results from a base of attractive historical structures which have been restored and preserved and new designs which are generally respectful of the historical character. This has been achieved by an agency which performs design review to encourage good design, even though it lacks the “teeth” to enforce standards. It also helps developers find capable, sensitive architects. Of course projects that are done or funded by the city provide opportunities for more control. This was true for street improvements, which are very attractive (the light fixture serves as the logo for Lowertown) and the Meer’s Park renovation, which is also very well done. The park is so much a part of the community that it attracts significant citizen involvement in its maintenance program.

In **Central Park**, because of the history and prominence of the place, design is a crucial factor. The Conservancy has top landscape architects on staff who are highly sensitive to the importance of balancing historical character with modern needs and materials. Olmsted and Vaux’s original design is always taken into account, and at the Meer, much was done to restore the lake to conditions it would have displayed in earlier times, such as naturalizing a large portion of its shore. Lighting, benches and signage are, throughout the park, consistent with the original character, while not slavishly copying historical models. Design, construction and maintenance are well coordinated, so that each rock and tree is placed where it looks best, materials are used which are known to weather and wear well, and plantings are kept up so that areas look as they were intended to.

The main new structure at the Meer, the Dana Center, was treated with considerable thought by the architects. Carefully sited at the water's edge it is strategically placed to present itself attractively from several directions. The style is reminiscent of the Victorian period in which the park was built yet it is still recognizable as a contemporary building made of quality materials.

The **Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative** was the somewhat reluctant developer of Winthrop Estates, 36 units of owner-occupied housing. With much input into the design, the result is a quality product. While there were some missed opportunities from an urban design perspective (such as more closely reflecting the pre-existing housing stock and maintaining and urban street front), the homes probably exceed residents' expectations.

Campus Circle's main new development, Campus Town, made many efforts to use design features to visually relate the project to the neighborhood through massing, choice of materials, and details. The buildings are brick with bay window elements at some locations, gables, and metal roofs with dormers. One phase of Campus Town is successful in maintaining the street facade by placing the parking in the rear while the other interrupts the continuity of the street facade by leaving a large parking court at the street. Campus Circle also completed handsome preservations of several historic buildings.

In looking at these project as a group, there are some overall lessons that can be learned with regard to design and the qualities of place.

- Design must play its appropriate role, depending on the nature of the project. While not always the most important factor, design can be critical to the success of a place.
- The design process must be treated with attention equal to other decisions (such as funding or political approvals).
- Participation is the hallmark of design decision making which takes into account the needs of occupants. Excellent, professional designers and planners can support these participatory processes by helping to find creative, responsive design solutions.



Housing Our Families

- Sufficient construction funds must be provided to allow the setting to support the people and activities, and to last for a long time. While costs must be controlled, cutting the wrong corners can be deleterious to achieving key project objectives.
- While materials and systems must be of a high enough quality to last, sufficient provisions must be made for ongoing maintenance. If deterioration or graffiti are allowed to persist, a downward cycle is reinforced that can kill a project.

Fighting Crime through Urban Design

An unfortunate but enduring fact of modern urban life is the overriding concern about crime and safety. Crime is a dominating issue in local and national politics, and it also is a major factor driving many development decisions. The level of personal safety felt by community residents is one good index of community health or distress, and effectively addressing these fears is a major component of urban excellence. Thus, it is not surprising that, for many of the finalists, crime and safety issues were important, even central.

Housing Our Family's (HOF) entry as developer and organizer into the Albina neighborhood was primed by its rising crime rate. The apartment complex itself had become a key site for drug use and sales. Street crime and prostitution were facts of life in the area and some people, especially elderly residents, were afraid to venture outside their homes.

When HOF began the Maya Angelou renovation they took advantage of Portland's strong commitment to community policing by involving local officers in their neighborhood improvement plans. Neighborhood watch patrols — created with the help and support of local police — have been credited by neighbors with improving community safety.

Maya Angelou also made extensive use of "crime prevention through environmental design" (CPTED) principles in the redesign of the apartment complex. These included planning for increased natural surveillance (such as seeing from the laundry room to the playground), reducing vehicle passageways through the complex, creating real and symbolic markers of territory (through liberal use of picket fences), and reducing hiding places among trees and shrubs. Lighting was improved within the complex and on the surrounding streets. Tenant selection became more rigorous and the tenants themselves are involved in watching what goes on and reporting untoward activities. As a result of these changes, together with the broader efforts to improve housing and address needs of neighborhood youth, crime is down significantly and residents report feeling much safer.

Planning for the **Harlem Meer** restoration happened to coincide with a widely publicized assault and rape in the park. Given the problems and reputation of both the north end of the park and its neighboring communities, making the area around the Meer safe was considered a necessary step in increasing park use. It was so important that a blue ribbon committee of local citizens and organizations was established to make recommendations for increasing safety. Here, as in many urban areas, there was a circular aspect to the safety problem. A critical mass of people using a space creates a feeling of security, but those people won't come until they first feel safe there. In the northeastern end of Central Park, extra lighting

and call boxes were installed and police patrols increased to help overcome initial resistance to entering the area, and design features as well as activity programming provided positive attractions.

For **Campus Circle**, crime was also a driving issue. Marquette blamed the perception of dangerous conditions around the university for reduced enrollment figures, which fueled their willingness to fund Campus Circle. The approach to crime prevention in Campus Circle took several forms. A Campus Circle-owned building was donated to Milwaukee for use as the city's first community police station. Campus Circle also set up its own security operation with a primary focus on closed circuit television observation within and around its buildings. Improved crime statistics in the neighborhood are considered important indices of success by Campus Circle.

Dudley Street began life organizing to stop arson fires and illegal dumping. Curtailing the dumps was an early and major success for the organization. The reduction of arson and other criminal activity may be less the result of specific anti-crime efforts than a sign that its broader organizing and development efforts have reversed the social disorganization that had characterized the neighborhood.

There is also a security component to the success of **Greenpoint**, although security was not its reason for being. The cooperative community that developed there became a source of comfort and safety. In this space tenants felt they could work late into the night without being exposed or threatened by possible intrusions.

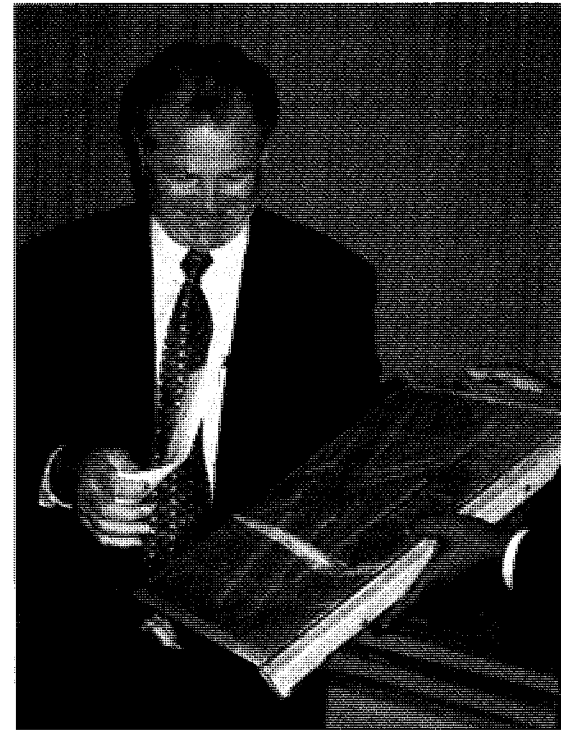
Conclusion

The six projects that make up the 1995 Rudy Bruner Award speak to inventive problem solving in an era of changing political and economic realities. These realities led to the creation of the hybrid — and occasionally very unusual — organizations needed to produce excellent urban places. They have in common a perspective that focuses on the community as a unit, working from the ground up to create excellence by building on strengths and resources (both physical and human) rather than focusing only on problems. They also have leaders who are creative and, in some cases, visionary.

The Selection Committee made use of the opportunity to choose and then discuss in depth these six projects in order to make several points they considered vital to urban excellence. First, the variety and balance of these projects illustrates many of the elements critical to the success of any city — housing, community development, keeping and creating space for quality jobs, and providing recreational and cultural opportunities. There are so many crises in our cities, it is often difficult not to take a single minded focus (on affordable housing, for example). But cities, as the mayors who serve on the selection committee inevitably point out, cannot survive by adopting only projects like Maya Angelou, Dudley Street and Campus Circle — as important as they are. They must also find ways to produce jobs and be an attractive place to live for all income levels, as illustrated by Greenpoint, Lowertown, and Harlem Meer.

With the choice of the winner — Housing Our Families for Maya Angelou — the Selection Committee also hoped to send a message to mayors and other decision makers: that government at all levels cannot afford to take a hands-off approach and still expect urban excellence to develop. In many ways and places, governments are seeking to privatize and otherwise reduce their role in urban development. But there are times when enlightened governments have to step up and take a major role in funding, even where private or non-profit organizations take the lead in planning and management. Maya Angelou would not have happened if all or even most of the initial funding had to come from private sources. The Portland Development Commission bent its own rules to provide 100% financing, yet the project was not a burden on the public. On the contrary, the low cost renovation and eventual private refinancing made the public expense very low, particularly considering that it paid not just for forty-two units of low cost housing but for very successful organizing efforts which turned around a distressed community.

While there are times when government has to step up and take initiative, these projects are most notable for their unusual and creative collaborations among public, non-profit, and for-profit entities. Not one project in the group is the product of a traditional development organization or a single sector of the economy. This



Pat LeSage of Campus Circle

trend may be critical for survival in a time when resources are scarce and rules are changing. In evolution, biologists point out that rigidity of function — being very good at one mode of operating — can be very efficient, but also can make extinction likely when conditions change. In biological evolution, it is diversity — a variety of options and ways of operating — that allows adaptation to change and assures survival. This kind of creativity in developing organizational responses to community needs may now be critical to helping cities survive and flourish.

