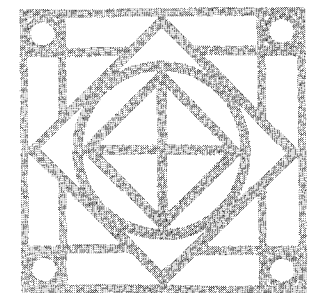
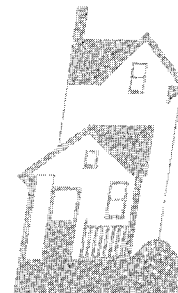
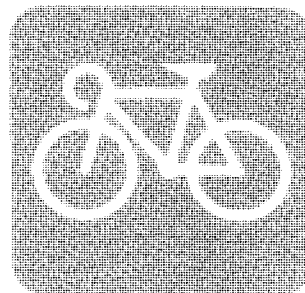
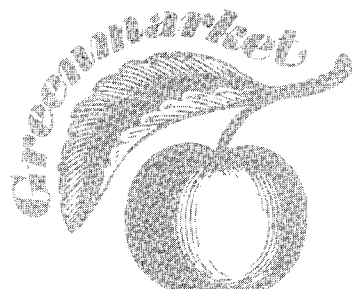
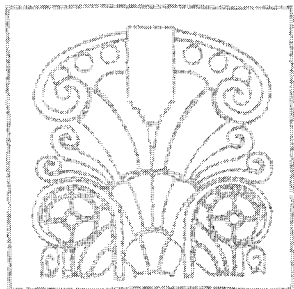


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CONNECTIONS: CREATING URBAN EXCELLENCE

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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, as well as serving as a forum for debating urban issues and the nature of urban excellence. So, what did we learn about urban excellence from the review of seventy submissions, the visits to five finalists, and the selection of a winner?

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE WINNING PROJECTS

Making Connections

The theme which resonated most deeply with the Selection Committee was “making connections” — among people, among neighborhoods, and between the city and its region.

A significant part of the literature on urbanism is devoted to describing (and generally praising) the city as the location where people meet and important interactions take place — in the form of market exchanges and business connections, social interactions, cultural activities, etc.

In spite of (or perhaps because of) new means of electronic communications (telephones, faxes, modems, E-mail) linking communities of interest some have suggested that

the modern city ill serves this connective role. People feel alienated from and afraid of each other. So, one common theme of the finalists is the attempt to reestablish connections and foster new, beneficial contacts.

New York City Greenmarket

New York City Greenmarket won this year’s award because of the many levels on which it contributes to making urban connections — or even healing connections which generally have been ruptured in contemporary urban life.

The Greenmarket provides a tangible economic and personal link between the rural agricultural areas around New York City and many of the city’s inhabitants. Farmers who produce foodstuffs come personally into the urban markets to sell their goods. In the process, they may have meaningful interactions with the shoppers (how different to be able to ask the farmer about the produce — which varieties he or she grows, which seasons they are available, and how to prepare them — compared to picking up a package of shrink wrapped carrots in a supermarket). They may get to know something about each other.

Rural people come into the city and have what are generally reported to be positive interactions with members of ethnic groups and professions whom they usually don't meet. And city dwellers get to experience aspects of nature (or at least aspects of culture which are closely linked to soil and season) which they often miss. In the spring, some farmers bring in baby animals for children — and adults — to see and pet.

Greenmarket also provides a setting and atmosphere where city dwellers are more likely to enjoy meeting each other. Many shoppers told us that they greatly looked forward to meeting neighborhood people at the markets. The stimulating, often festive, yet relaxed atmosphere is conducive to informal interactions. Robert Sommer's research on farmer's markets supports this intuitive notion with data from the study of many markets. (Sommer is an environmental psychologist who heads the University of California at Davis's Center for Consumer Research. See his "Farmers' Markets as Community Events" in Irving Altman and Ervin Zube, editors: *Public Places and Spaces*. New York: Plenum, 1989; pages 57-82.)

Another theme in the literature of urbanism is the split between the city and the country, both in its social and physical dimensions. Country folk are seen from the city as



Greenmarket fosters connections between farmers and city people.

bumpkins who are out of the mainstream, though more recent (post-suburban) trends may also see city people moving to the country to escape the city to write or start a business (as in the Diane Keaton movie, *Baby Boom*). Country people may also look down on city people as overly sophisticated, jaded, immoral — seeing the city as a place of dissolution, crime, decay. These images are quite old, dating at least to Victorian times (see Hogarth's "Gin Lane" drawings).

Physically, the countryside is seen as green, open, natural and healthful while the city is viewed as hard, dense, artificial, and polluted. Much urban planning has been devoted to trying to reconcile and control this relationship. Cities (including New York) have been designed to incorporate major green spaces and green belts. Planners have tried to control the sprawling edges of cities (though only occasionally with much success).

But modern (large scale, mechanized) agriculture has also transformed the countryside and farming practices, with small family farms disappearing. The city is growing (some feel like a cancer), absorbing the country at its periphery, and raising the price of land beyond what farming can support. Greenmarket is a step toward overcoming the polarization and split between the city and the country. It contributes to preserving small farms by providing markets for produce and keeping land in production.

West Clinton Action Plan and Roslindale Village Main Street

Elements of the connections theme were also evident in other finalists. Both West Clinton in Portland, Oregon and Roslindale Village in Boston provided opportunities for local people to come together in meaningful ways to help their neighborhoods. Activities included cooperative physical planning, managing community enterprises,

communal work efforts, and community festivals. These projects create the impetus and provide the institutional support for people to come together and achieve their aims.

Many of the people we talked with during our visits spoke of the way that their participation in the project had been especially meaningful to their lives, allowing them to come together for significant and effective action. In this, they achieve something that no individual could do alone, and overcome the otherwise pervasive sense of powerlessness — that the forces outside us are not overwhelming and need not prevent us from reaching our goals of a better place in the city, a better life in the community. They develop a sense of connectedness which is missing from many people's urban experience.

Brooklyn-Queens Greenway

The Brooklyn-Queens Greenway (bikeway) attempts to achieve yet another kind of connectedness — among diverse neighborhoods, open spaces and cultural institutions. The project is based on the revelation that a continuous pathway almost existed (and could, therefore, be created) from the Atlantic Ocean at Coney Island, up the gentle expressways of Brooklyn, across the major parks and open spaces of Queens, to the Long Island Sound.

The Greenway reaffirms the potential of movement corridors to connect the parts of a city, instead of erecting barriers between them. (Often, a new highway or freeway divides a neighborhood or, as the originally proposed Westway in New York would have done, separates the city from one of its riverfronts). Being able to experience a bicycle path that connects many disparate parts of a city — even knowing that such a system exists — helps one develop a more complete image of the wholeness of the city and the connections between its parts.

So “connections” served as the key theme linking most of the finalists and at least four of them showed us important ways that these connections could be created or reaffirmed in our cities.

PARTICIPATION AND EMPOWERMENT

Participation in urban planning and action was discussed above as a form of connectedness: where people come together to have an impact on the city that they otherwise would not have been able to achieve. Through this, they may become empowered to affect processes that most of us, individually, find beyond our control. Participation counters the alienation from power so common for most city dwellers.

Participation has been widely discussed in the planning literature, often being praised as the means of realizing an American democratic ideal through balancing varied interests in the development of the built environment. Participation has sometimes been criticized, however, as an ineffective strategy for marginal groups to use to achieve power. From this point of view it is seen as a bureaucratic ploy to dissipate the energy of those who would protest officially sanctioned planning and, perhaps by co-opting dissenters, prevent them from taking effective counter action.

Thus, examples of effective participation — where people and neighborhood groups succeed in making a difference — are worthy of recognition. And effective participation was a hallmark of several of the finalist projects.

Roslindale Village Main Street

The value of participation is clearest in the two community-based planning projects, West Clinton and Roslindale. Roslindale, at the time of the awards process, was an

entirely volunteer organization, where local business people and residents not only had control, but did all the work. (This may have been a temporary situation, since their paid executive director had left and another had not been appointed. But, they were experimenting to see how the all-volunteer arrangement would work — and, with an expanded board, it seemed to be working reasonably well. See the section below on organizational stability, for a further discussion.)

Roslindale Village Main Street is a broadly representative organization, with open meetings, non-exclusive membership criteria, low dues, and elections to their board. While their emphasis is on supportive retail functions of the neighborhood core, they deal with issues of importance to all residents. Their choice of an international festival to catalyze community spirit is highly appropriate to the multi-cultural, multi-ethnic character of the area. Roslindale is seen by city hall as being representative of the neighborhood (and its votes), and therefore has developed the power to speak for the neighborhood — and have city hall listen. In Tom Menino, their city councilman, they have groomed an effective spokesperson. Thus, by being representative of a neighborhood's interests, the group's political effectiveness is enhanced.

West Clinton Action Plan

The West Clinton Action Plan demonstrates an exemplary and thoughtful level of community participation. Portland has a very strong commitment to developing and supporting neighborhood associations, which have been given (or have taken) considerable control over resources and programs (for example, crime prevention). The city makes funds available to neighborhood groups for their programs and projects. The groups achieve real clout, but are required to be broadly representative. While spearheaded by a community development



Photo: Rick Komigosa, The Oregonian

At West Clinton, neighborhood volunteers helped with the rebuilding.

corporation (Reach), West Clinton's key decisions — including the selection of the target area for improvement — were made in conjunction with a network of area neighborhood associations. Once the area was selected,

Reach worked in a power sharing partnership with its neighborhood association (HAND). HAND members formed the planning board and ensured broad community input and control. The community defined issues and problems, set priorities, helped with the planning, and worked on the actual projects (neighborhood cleanups, house paintings, tree plantings).

West Clinton residents speak with conviction about how the effort was transforming not only the physical aspects of the neighborhood, but its social integrity as well. They expressed their enhanced feeling of community identity and their joy at effective joint action. It was clear that the plan was theirs, and not imposed from above or outside.

Ocean Drive

Planning for the Ocean Drive redevelopment also relied heavily on local participation, with protests of the loss of one key hotel galvanizing local involvement. However, as the project has progressed, the Ocean Drive Association (made up mostly of property owners, especially from the hotels and restaurants) has become the key constituency, appearing to have the ear of the city. The project has been criticized, however, for not involving other constituencies. While no group vocally complained about being marginalized, there were problems of lack of sensitivity to the needs and problems of the lower income, Latinos, elderly Jewish, renters and other residents — which might have been avoided if these groups had been more actively involved. At this time, even the historical preservationists and community development corporation appear to feel somewhat left out.

New York City Greenmarket and Brooklyn-Queens Greenway

Greenmarket and the Greenway present different approaches to participation. Both of these projects reflect the driving force of an individual leader, but channeled through collective organizations.

Greenmarket, which was started and is managed by one person, has made a significant effort to involve its participants through a Farmer-Consumer Advisory Committee which helps to ensure that each group's needs are met and problems are addressed — and that there is good communication between them.

The Greenway, once the vision of one individual, is now a collaborative effort of many organizations under an umbrella called NOSC, the Neighborhood Open Space Coalition. One of its strengths has been the ability to galvanize members and leaders from a broad spectrum of community groups, city agencies, and cultural and recreational institutions along the path.

So, while participation can take many forms, the broader and more effective it is, the greater the likelihood that the results will approach urban excellence — especially in the eyes of the participants.

SOCIAL JUSTICE

Closely tied to participation is another theme of the Selection Committee's debate, the concept of social justice. Generally, urban development is controlled by wealthy individuals and powerful economic institutions. What is striking then, are projects which work toward meeting the needs of those who need the most: disadvantaged, low income, and other marginalized groups.

West Clinton Action Plan

The finalists varied considerably in the degree and manner in which they addressed social justice issues. Perhaps the clearest was West Clinton which operated in a lower income area and focussed on providing subsidized rental housing as a part of the overall community development strategy.

New York City Greenmarket

The Greenmarket serves all income levels, but has made a special effort to ensure that farmers markets are located in lower income areas. Sometimes it must subsidize these markets by charging farmers fees that are less than management costs or entice farmers to locate in them as an incentive for eventually getting space in the more profitable downtown markets. Greenmarket has also encouraged farmers to accept food stamps, and arranged for Cornell's Cooperative Extension service to provide information about preparation and nutritional value of fresh foods.

The Harlem Greenmarket is of great importance to that neighborhood. We visited the site (the plaza at the Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. state office building in the commercial center of Harlem) in the off-season and even then spoke with users who greatly value the market for bringing fresher, cheaper foods to people who really need them.

Brooklyn-Queens Greenway

The Greenway connects a wide variety of neighborhoods, with considerable ethnic, racial and economic diversity — including Brooklyn's Bedford-Stuyvesant, an economically depressed African American neighborhood. The Greenway sponsors were at least partially responsible for renovations to the Eastern Expressway (with its separated bikeways in

each direction), which contributes to this neighborhood and helps link it to Prospect Park and the green spaces of Queens.

Roslindeale Village Main Street

The Roslindeale Village area is mainly lower-middle and middle class, but it contributes to the local economy through employment and shopping opportunities that would otherwise be lost to major suburban malls and shopping centers. Small merchants are helped to survive who might otherwise have been replaced in favor of national chains.

Ocean Drive

The Ocean Drive project raised some difficult questions about social justice. The problem here is not that lower income residents were not the focus of the project. Indeed, cities must serve and attract all segments, including the affluent, to survive. The question is: given the focus on preservation, adaptive reuse, and the attraction of higher income users, were the planners sensitive to the concerns and potential problems of those with less money and power who were affected by the plans? The Selection Committee concluded that, although there were no massive dislocations, there was inadequate attention to the project's negative impacts on these groups.

In the Ocean Drive area, the original populations were very heterogeneous: the area was originally built as a modest seasonal resort catering to lower middle class European immigrant Jewish people from the East Coast. The hotels had small rooms — for economy and because much time was spent outside. On retirement, many of the patrons settled in the area, living in the hotels or apartments. By the 1970s the area had fallen on hard times and was physically

deteriorated. Cheap rents were attractive to Cuban (and other) immigrants, including the well known 1980 Marielitos who arrived en masse and often settled in the South Beach area. Conditions also attracted drug dealers, users and related crime.

How were these elements affected by preservation and redevelopment? The surroundings of Ocean Drive are still a highly diverse area, although the Drive itself is now dominated by tourists, fashion models and photographers, and young Miami residents enjoying a good time at the bars and restaurants. Very few of the ocean front hotels still cater to the elderly (soon none will), who have moved inland a block or two. Yet, talking to residents in the area, including those who were there before, one hears almost uniformly positive reports. The elderly who are still there appreciate the renovated park, though they do not know what to make of all the tourists and fashion models. Workers at the community center a few blocks away appreciate the safety that displacement of the drug dealers and higher levels of street activity have brought. Still other social welfare agencies raise doubts about whether the needs of the elderly were taken adequately into account — or whether they were forced to move without adequate assistance in the face of a “higher and better use” (for which read greater profits for developers and an increased tax base for the city).

While the evidence did not condemn the project, it raised doubts to the Selection Committee which felt that the beneficiaries of the project were mainly people whose interests are already well taken care of.

PRESERVATION AND RENEWAL

Urban planning has often been characterized by the conflict between forces favoring preservation and those favoring development and renewal — perhaps creating a false

dichotomy. All too often, the city’s past is either ignored in favor of redevelopment or elevated to a pedestal of historical preservation where it serves to block renewal and which removes it from playing a meaningful part in everyday life. One important theme linking the finalists is the way in which preservation was used — often as a center point — of the development and renewal process.

Ocean Drive

What was most interesting to the Selection Committee about Ocean Drive was its lively approach to revitalization of an entire zone with great historical and architectural significance — rather than as a collection of individual monuments. In fact, few of the individual buildings on Ocean Drive are notable. It is the district as a whole which is significant due to its very large number of intact art deco structures, retaining a large measure of its visual coherence.

As appealing as the district is visually and historically, it is the linkage between the renovated historical structures and their new uses which is intriguing. When the area was still in decline and suffering widespread deterioration (and real estate was cheap), some developers saw the potential of the area to be attractive to artists, fashion photographers, and the tourists and night life. New York’s SoHo was their



model, but the mechanisms for preservation and planning control were different. Among many other features, the city instituted an innovative incentive for renovation, allowing ground floor use for a bar or restaurant only if the entire building were renovated. This resulted in a massive influx of private capital and visually striking renovations.

Many thoughtful design features were also incorporated in the reconstruction of the street and sidewalk. Crucial was widening the sidewalk from about three feet to about 12, allowing and encouraging the daily (and nightly) promenade up and down the drive. Sidewalks at intersections are even wider to allow strollers to stop and gather. Lighting is sensitive to the quality of the buildings and their marvelous illuminated signs. Street lights are located on the ocean side of the street and only up-lights are used along the sidewalk near the buildings. Landscaping is carefully chosen and placed so that it will complement the buildings and will not block views from or of them even when it is fully grown.

Roslindale Village Main Street

Preservation and renewal were in better balance in Roslindale, which comprises a traditional shopping area on the edge of a large city. Shopping was being lost to suburban shopping centers and mega-malls, depriving the neighborhood of amenities and convenience. It had also lost its rail transit stop. The main value of its physical fabric was represented by its centrally located park (in Boston parlance, its "square"). The physical revitalization of the area focused on renovation (not preservation) of its store fronts and their signage, planting, lighting, and paving of the streetscapes, and the park. The latter was done with considerable sensitivity, both to historical values and current needs (e.g., for community events such as concerts and an international day). These changes were made in support of the needs of existing community members who have remained to enjoy their benefits.

Other Finalists

West Clinton used physical preservation (or more precisely, renovation) to support the social renewal which is its primary intent. Older housing was generally rehabilitated with sensitivity.

For the Brooklyn-Queens Greenway, historical significance stems from the joining of two open space systems of considerable vision which were developed in the relatively recent past. The expressways and Prospect Park in Brooklyn were the vision of Frederick Law Olmstead in the 1860s. The extensive, mostly linked open space system of Queens was created by Robert Moses in the 1930s and 1940s. The vision of the Greenway authors was to see the potential linkage of these two systems and the scope of the bikeway system that could be created. Clearly, this notion continues and builds on the tradition of sweeping open space concepts.

Greenmarket makes a different kind of contribution to preservation. It can be argued that it is preserving and revitalizing a traditional marketing method and shopping experience, as well as keeping farm land in production and preserving the small farm way of life. It has also contributed to the preservation and rehabilitation of some of the open spaces it occupies, especially Union Square.

Thus, in each of the finalists, preservation was a means of progressing toward the goal of renewal. It was not an isolated — even self-serving — notion standing in opposition to change and development, as it is sometimes viewed and practiced. Rather, it served as a driving force (or a supplementary strategy), supporting the ability to create change — to improve the present by maintaining and reinvigorating important feature from the past.

LOCAL INITIATIVE AND GOVERNMENTAL SUPPORT

Where does urban excellence come from? Is it generated by individuals, private organizations, or governmental agencies or programs? In this set of projects, it appears that excellence derives from an effective blending of individual initiative, action by private organizations, and government programs working together.

All of the finalist projects benefited from a balance of these factors. Generally, the recognition of need for the project and the main ideas and energy behind it came from individuals (like Barry Benepe for Greenmarkets) or non-governmental organizations (like Reach and HAND for West Clinton). But these individuals and groups were adept at using existing governmental channels and programs to their projects' advantage. Finding that support was crucial to allowing the projects to go forward.

There often appears to be a dynamic tension between the entities involved in a project. Each may have his/her/its own agenda — and the agendas may barely overlap enough to justify their cooperation. At times, conflicts arise and need to be resolved for things to go forward. For the Greenway, the state wanted to reconstruct a highway without a bike path and NOSC had to threaten court action to get the state to agree to even study the bikeway. At Ocean Drive, a large protest over the demolition of an art deco hotel helped catalyze the city's action. So the ability to cooperate is not always easy to achieve — but does appear to be essential to creating excellent places.

New York City Greenmarket

Starting a farmer's market in New York City was discussed by a number of people before it happened. Barry Benepe thought it would be a good idea to do a feasibility study,

but others (including urban and social critic John Hess) suggested that he simply go ahead and start the market instead of studying it. Benepe enlisted the support of the New York Council on the Environment (a quasi-governmental organization which reports to the mayor), which made the Greenmarket one of its projects. The Council hired Benepe to manage the markets. There is no doubt that being part of the Council has helped the market in negotiating with city agencies to get the use of parks and plazas and to have streets closed on market days. Of course, having tremendous public support helps it get city agencies to cooperate.

Roslindale Village Main Street

The Roslindale Village Main Street organization started in response to a National Trust for Historic Preservation program for small town downtowns and city neighborhood commercial areas. The group came together to make its application to the program and, when it was selected, got some support from the National Trust — mainly in training and organizational development. Initially, it followed the Trust's Main Street formula, which contributed to its early success. The organization realized that the support from Washington was going to be limited, so it worked hard to build active local involvement and to get the city of Boston to work with it. Its local alderman, Tom Menino, worked with it from the beginning and helped at city hall. But the energy and persistence of its executive director was also a factor in getting the city to help with park and sidewalk improvement programs. In the end, the alderman would not have been able to accomplish as much if the voters of the neighborhood were not well organized and solidly behind the project. At the time of the site visit, city involvement in neighborhood development was being modeled to some extent on Roslindale. The city appeared to have learned that it has more success when it can find programs which support local initiatives, rather than trying to impose ideas from city hall.

West Clinton Action Plan

The same is true of the city of Portland's view of West Clinton. But, as stated above, Portland has an elaborate system of neighborhood associations which it supports for community planning. In West Clinton, an experienced community development corporation, Reach, decided it could have more impact through concentrating its efforts in a community rather than on scattered sites. Reach worked with the community associations and the people they represent. But the organization's knowledge of politics and financing helped tap resources available from governmental programs and private banks (under the Community Reinvestment Act) which the community groups did not have the expertise to tap on their own.

Brooklyn-Queens Greenway

The idea for the Greenway came in a flash to an individual, Tom Fox. It was an instant recognition of a way to extend and connect a system of open spaces which had their own history of visionary inspiration (from Olmstead and Moses). Fox then used NOSC (Neighborhood Open Space Coalition) as the main driver of the project. Fox and NOSC enlisted the support of key city agencies (the same ones that the Greenmarkets worked with), Parks and Transportation. These are the effective owners of the land over which the Greenway travels. Because of NOSC's efforts, implementation of the Greenway has become part of departmental policy for both Parks and Transportation. NOSC succeeded in having the city include grade separated bikeways when they reconstructed Eastern Parkway. Also with the support of the city, pressure was put on the state highway department to at least study the inclusion of a bikeway to parts of an expressway that were being upgraded.

Ocean Drive

In the case of Ocean Drive, the balance between individuals and city agencies is somewhat different. It was a shared and iterative process, initiated by preservationists, supported by government, and carried forward by developers. Crucial contributions were made by individuals such as Barbara Capitman (the preservationist who pointed out the historical and visual value of the building stock) and early developers who invested before civic improvements were made. The city took a more activist role than in the other four projects discussed here, preparing the area's plan, supporting its implementation, and sponsoring its financing.

Conclusion

For all these projects, the inspiration to get the project going and the perseverance to keep it going came from individuals and local groups. For the successful urban activist, a key skill is the ability to "play the system" for the support it can offer and, at times to keep pressure on elected officials and bureaucrats. However, none of the projects would have gotten very far without active government support in the form of program assistance, grants, loans, or administrative support. Successful efforts were marked by government officials who recognized creative and worthwhile projects and were prepared to support them. The most sensitive city officials saw community development as nurturance, even using parental metaphors to describe their role. Like a good parent, government provided sustenance and support while granting sufficient leeway so that the projects could thrive or fail on their own merits. This involved laying the framework for strong and effective community organizations and developers, then providing regulatory and monetary support. Where successful organizations developed, city agencies used them as models for other neighborhoods.

Of course, city officials can also have good ideas or play more active roles in planning, regulating, stimulating, and finding financing. Their efforts must be matched to community needs and organizations.

Thus, it is the partnership of individuals, neighborhood groups and government entities that makes urban excellence — even if one or more of the parties must be dragged into the partnership or if compromises have to be made to keep it together.

LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

Each of the finalists had one or more strong individuals who provided some combination of creative inspiration and long term direction. While inspiration is needed to get the project started, the continuity of the organization is also crucial to its success. Greenmarket, for example, had the benefit of a leader who could both come up with the idea for the market then build and direct an organization to sustain it. Farmers were understandably concerned at first about planting crops to market in the city based on the good efforts of Barry Benepe alone. The involvement of the Council on the Environment and the development of the Farmer-Consumer Advisory Committee lent credibility and long term viability to the effort.

Other projects proved their mettle by surviving changes at the top of their organizations. Reach lost its charismatic founding director, but proceeded apace with a new director. Roslindale had lost its paid director, but decided to make its board of directors more active and expand its size and scope. At the time of our site visit in 1991, this appeared to be working (and was reported to still viable in the Spring of 1992).

Thus, the resilience of the organization and its ability to adapt to changes in personnel are of great importance to its ability to succeed.

EARLY AND VISIBLE SIGNS OF SUCCESS: Hitting the Ground Running

A valuable strategy employed (consciously or not) by several of the finalists was to have a very early, highly visible success. This won them positive recognition and helped to gather support from the community.

At West Clinton, Reach conducted a few rather quick and easy community activities, with considerable impact. A neighborhood cleanup day was followed by a “paint-a-thon” at the first houses it acquired. These activities got the neighbors involved and showed an immediate improvement to the surroundings and showed the organizations to be effective and worthy of support. Roslindale Village ran an international day festival as one of its first visible activities, getting all segments of the neighborhood to do something together.



Photo: Roslindale Village Main Street

Roslindale Village International Festival.

These early actions share the characteristic of being inexpensive and relatively easy to do. In each case, the public became more aware of the organization and developed a sense that positive change was possible. Perhaps the Brooklyn-Queens Greenway has had difficulty translating a brilliant idea into public awareness, in part because it lacked this kind of early high visibility program.

THE NATURE OF URBAN EXCELLENCE

In debating the selection of the award winner, the Selection Committee raised many other issues that help define urban excellence.

What Makes an Excellent Place?

Committee members agreed that this would not be an award for urban design (emphasizing the physical planning aspects of a place), but rather an award for achieving the rather precarious balance of the physical, social, financial, political, and aesthetic qualities of a place. They looked for places where the whole was a complete synthesis of (or even greater than) the sum of its parts.

Several submissions that had strong aesthetic character did not make the finals because they were seen to be deficient in social or economic features. In the end, several of the Committee members were disappointed that real design quality and innovation are so rarely part of otherwise excellent places.

Which Urban Issues and Problems Are Addressed

The Committee looked for projects that address the significant issues and problems of contemporary urban settings and urban life. They saw some of these problems as disassociation, alienation, crime, physical degradation of the fabric of the city, the separation of economic/social and ethnic groups. Most of the finalists do indeed address one or more of these issues, often with surprising effectiveness.

- The Greenmarket seeks to heal the split between the city and the country, farmer and urban dweller, while providing better, more joyful shopping for consumers and markets for small farmers that can help preserve agricultural land.
- The Greenway strives to connect urban open space systems and cultural institutions for people who had seen them as separate.
- Ocean Drive tries to preserve a valuable and unique visual heritage while inserting contemporary urban activities.
- West Clinton seeks to improve the overall quality of a working class neighborhood, while providing affordable housing, parks, and dealing with the encroachment of industry.
- Roslindale Village Main Street reinvigorates a neighborhood center with shopping, community and cultural activities.



Cyclists on the Greenway at Prospect Park, Brooklyn.

Simply addressing these issues does not in itself make a project excellent, but places or projects that do not address them are felt to be less worthy.

Process versus Place

In reviewing the 70 submissions and five finalists, the Selection Committee often discussed the relative strengths of a project's process in comparison to its results, the kind of place that had been created. In theory, could a project win the RBA solely on the basis of an outstanding process? The Committee decided that while process was of great importance, the resulting physical place also had to display elements of excellence.

Even among the finalists, some projects seemed to be strong in process but weak in quality of place. In discussing West Clinton, for example, the Committee recognized an excellent process, in terms of the overall structuring of decisions, the broad and effective participation, the inclusiveness of issues dealt with, and the excellent cooperation among entities. They were left wondering, however, about the impact that the project had had on the place to date, with only three houses renovated (and these with a somewhat doubtful lack of attention to maintaining their historical integrity), and many other projects yet to be done. This may have been the result of the project not being far enough along. (At the time of this writing, 16 houses had been completed and the community park designed. It is impossible to predict how the Selection Committee would have responded to the project if it had been that far along at the time of the selection.)

Similarly in Roslindale, the process was recognized for its excellence. Physical changes, however, varied widely in their quality. The renovation of the park was felt by Selection Committee members to have been done very well, while the storefront renovations varied from the very good

to the garish (some were thought to have looked better before renovation).

For Ocean Drive, the concerns were rather different. There, the place was outstanding in the main (with concerns voiced about the quality of the park renovation). However, there appeared to be a lack of sensitivity in the process for certain groups of original residents, especially the Hispanics and the elderly Jews.

Thus, to be recognized as an unequivocally excellent place, the project had to effectively balance process and place, with each of them appropriate to the context. The award winning Greenmarket did not have an especially impressive process, but it evolved in a wholly appropriate way to result in a number of exceptional places.

Concept versus Realization

A closely related topic concerns the quality of a project's concept compared to the quality of its realization. Realization here is meant to include the degree of completion as well as the quality of execution (design and construction, attention to detail, etc.). Is the project simply a great idea or has it been realized and been functioning as intended? The best illustration of this dilemma is the Brooklyn-Queens Greenway, a breathtaking concept. However, despite years of effort by its organizers, the Committee found that there was not really very much of it on the ground. One has little sense of being on a greenway system (as opposed to being in an existing park or on an existing bikeway) when one is there. Even signage to assist with this conceptualization had not yet been installed.

Innovation

In looking for urban excellence, the Selection Committee at

first hoped to see stunningly innovative places or ideas about how to make them. As it found rather few of these innovations (the Greenway being one that was a powerfully innovative idea), it began to ask if perhaps it might not be enough to simply apply existing ideas very well — and decided that, based upon the submissions, it was. Thus, the Greenmarket might be part of an already existing national farmers market movement, but they were doing it so well and having such an important impact on New York that they had created real urban excellence.

The Committee was also interested in considering the kinds of problems that the projects addressed. Were new problems and issues being defined or was the project addressing problems inherent to post-war planning, such as suburban sprawl, shopping malls, or strip commercial streets? By and large, projects seemed to be addressing the problems of the past. For example, Roslindale was effectively addressing how neighborhood shopping can be revitalized in the face of shifts to huge malls and shopping centers. The Committee would have liked to have had the opportunity to assess more of what they would have considered really innovative and creative concepts — especially ones that addressed emerging urban problems (such as AIDS, homelessness, restructured families, the isolation of the home office worker).

Uniqueness versus Replicability

The Selection Committee valued replicability in a place or process over uniqueness. They looked for places or projects that could serve as a model for others. If it could not be a model, the Committee asked what could be learned from it. Here it felt that each of the finalists had something to offer. The best models of places and concepts were the Greenmarket and Greenway, respectively; while West Clinton and Roslindale offered model processes.

CONCLUSION

The 1991 Rudy Bruner Award sought and found projects that foster connectedness and empowerment of urban dwellers. They achieved this through providing conducive settings, inventing institutions, or implementing processes that allowed people to come together to have meaningful experiences in the urban environment.

Each in their own way, these unique projects serve as models. However, they are models that cannot be copied, only emulated with great care and commitment — such as was demonstrated by the projects' authors. Each project has its unique circumstances of time, place, issue, and personality. These must be effectively integrated to achieve urban excellence.