Imagining Art & A New Landscape

December 13, 2008
Community Room
Minneapolis Police Department 4th Precinct
1925 Plymouth Avenue, Minneapolis 55411

Workshop Proceedings & Results
September 2009
Imagining Art & A New Landscape

A workshop exploring the landscape and art opportunities of the urban landscape surrounding the new Urban Research and Outreach/Engagement Center.

Led by the art and landscape team of Seitu Jones and Close Landscape Architecture and supported by Urban Design Perspectives (Alicia Belton) with Charles Levin Architects.

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Table of Contents

1 Introduction
2-3 The Workshop
4-7 Workshop Results
7 Evaluation Results
8 Outcomes
   UROC Building Renovation Predesign Concepts
   Preliminary Art Recommendations

Appendices (Workshop Materials)
   A: Invitation
   B: Powerpoint Presentation
   C: Attendees & Community Vendors

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How do you bring a building to life? How do you reduce an historic divide of “them” and “us” that has grown larger and deeper over time? How do you design space that speaks/reflects collaboration and community? How do you build collective ownership through art and landscape? These were some of the questions that guided the planning and implementation of a community-based workshop, “Imagining Art and a New Landscape,” held on an early Saturday morning (8:30-noon) on December 13, 2008. The primary goal was for a group of community residents and university, city, and county representatives, led by the art and landscape team of Seitu Jones and Bob Close, supported by Urban Design Perspectives (Alicia Belton) with Charles Levin Architects, to explore the landscape and art opportunities of the interior and urban environment surrounding the soon-to-be renovated home of the first Urban Research and Outreach/Engagement Center (UROC), located at 2001 Plymouth Avenue, Minneapolis 55411.

The idea of UROC emerged in response to community questions, critiques, and recommendations. Its presence in North Minneapolis reflects the University of Minnesota’s commitment to establishing a sustainable partnership based on mutual respect and driven by community-identified needs. UROC will serve to anchor the university’s presence in North Minneapolis and become a mechanism through which university research and resources related to solving the complex issues facing urban communities will be delivered. UROC will coordinate university research programs, working in partnership with urban community organizations, to deliver ideas, solutions, and innovation to the Northside in ways that make a difference in people’s everyday lives.

Despite the dire statistics of impoverishment, crime, and economic underdevelopment that are often used to describe North Minneapolis, and most urban environments, we know that urban communities are a diverse set of neighborhoods that are rich in expertise, cultural diversity, and vision. These facts are proven by the ideas and recommendations that flowed from the workshop, and are presented herein.
The concept of hosting a workshop focusing on art and the landscape at the new University of Minnesota Urban Research and Outreach/Engagement Center facility quickly gained traction after Dr. Irma McClaurin, UROC Executive Director, initially proposed it. Her goal of using the site and building to literally and symbolically extend the mission of the program beyond the walls of the facility and into the surrounding community had immediate appeal. A flyer was prepared to invite representatives of the neighborhood as well as allied professionals to the event (see appendix A). The energy and enthusiasm present at the workshop is a testament to the interest in working collaboratively to make this project more than a simple renovation.

The workshop began with an introduction by Dr. McClaurin to UROC’s mission and the goals of the workshop. This was followed by a powerpoint presentation (see appendix B) that introduced “themes” to be explored during the workshop and stimulate creative thinking about the integration of art into the building and site design. Following the powerpoint, the group subdivided into four working groups, each with an assigned theme to explore. The four themes were:

- Stewardship and Ecology
- Culture and Symbolism
- Gardening and Sustainability
- Art and Architecture

The groups were asked to brainstorm, following standard ground rules that no idea is a bad idea. A facilitator was present at each table to record comments and help keep the discussions flowing. The sub-groups spent about an hour brainstorming a wide range of ideas, sometimes listing them, and sometimes drawing on or attaching colored post-it notes to the scale models that were present at each table. Ideas led to other ideas and there was a lot of energy in the room. Following a short break, the entire group reconvened to “hear back” from each group. The enthusiasm and innovative thinking were readily apparent as team spokespeople presented the panoply of ideas that were generated.
The brainstorming ideas were then categorized by the four thematic groupings (see pages 4-7). The design team reviewed all the ideas and discussed approaches for integrating the most appropriate concepts into the site and architectural design. Some of the ideas will be incorporated within the existing commitment to integrate art into functional aspects of the renovation, other ideas will require additional funding. We anticipate that community artists will be engaged for some of this work, as the building renovation budget permits.

There were a number of recurring themes that emerged from more than one team during the workshop; the UROC facility should:

- be open and accessible for all users, including children
- give added importance to the pedestrian and bicycle user
- reflect community values and cultural diversity
- demonstrate stewardship throughout the site
- become a “green” building and site
- create beautiful places for people
- integrate interpretation into the architecture and landscape
- connect cultures and generations
- invite the community to participate in the artistic expression
- provide gardens for food and plants
- celebrate natural systems and make them visible
- create an educational place

The design team has begun to make preliminary recommendations to the university on how to integrate art into the redevelopment project (see page 8); the site plan has already been modified in direct response to workshop input (see page 8), reconfiguring parking to include a much more gracious area for landscaping, stormwater management, and public art at the front of the site, between the sidewalk, and parking lot. In addition, the facade of the building and the central atrium have also been identified as prime locations to integrate art.
I. ART AND ARCHITECTURE

• General Principles
  o Integrate art early in the design process – not as an afterthought
  o Create an icon or destination at UROC

• Concepts and Building Themes
  o Reflect Community/Be accessible to Community
    • Images of Northside faces (of residents, etc.)
    • Integrating signifiers or symbols of the neighborhoods in the Northside
    • Patio should be accessible to community
    • Child-friendly
    • Fully accessible (ADA)
    • Interpret connections between the Mississippi River and Theo-Wirth Park
  o Movement/Circulation
    • Stacked parking
    • Parking lighting
    • Fewer lights, more art/sculpture with lighting integrated
    • Contextual art from the perspective of:
      • Pedestrian
      • Vehicles
      • Transit – bus stop
    • Bike racks – advocate more bike commuting
  o The Tower
    • In Tower
      • Screens for video, images
      • Enclosed in glass
    • Create a sculptural clock tower in analog form as a teaching tool like the Fair School
  o Pavings
    • River walkway (concrete) from street to building
    • Benches, river stones along the path
  o On the Building/Architectural Expression/
    Building Details
    • Windows and Doors
      • Use tinted coloring on glass
      • Use cultural symbolism integrated into elements
    • Contrast with the horizontal scale of the building (verticallity)
    • Light walls that reflect and guide the sun
    • For the banding around the building, use lots of color and texture, dimension, and whimsy
    • 8 ft. signage space around top of building – interpretive potential
    • Use art work infused with cultural symbolism, well-lighted to be viewed at night
    • Lighting on roof
    • Solar energy
    • Create an exoskeleton (external structure system) on the building to facilitate incremental growth and support vines on building face
    • Light wells to bring light into the structure
  o Interior
    • In kitchen, use tile infused with cultural symbolism
    • Bathroom doors – artistic handles
    • Curved icons or sculpted surfaces
    • Entryway/reception
      • Mosaic tile on floor and/or walls
      • Culture & symbolism
      • Artwork and sculptures on walls and in hallways and office spaces
    • Large tropical plants
    • Well-designed brochure rack to avoid junky flyer look
    • Observation Tower
    • Screens for video, images
    • Enclosed in glass
    • Create a sculptural clock tower in analog form as a teaching tool like the Fair School
    • In kitchen, use tile infused with cultural symbolism
    • Bathroom doors – artistic handles
    • Curved icons or sculpted surfaces
    • Entryway/reception
      • Mosaic tile on floor and/or walls
      • Culture & symbolism
      • Artwork and sculptures on walls and in hallways and office spaces
    • Large tropical plants
    • Well-designed brochure rack to avoid junky flyer look
  o Rear of Building
    • Peaceful sitting area
    • Patio block pathway infused with cultural symbolism – messages
    • Shrub (colorful/shading)
    • Rock garden/sculpture
    • Waterfall from top of roof
  o Light/Lighting
    • Use lighting to keep art visible at night
  o Water/Stormwater
    • Chutes and ladders water filtration system
    • Roof to water well to supply the fountain
  o Educational Art/Energy
    • Bicycle-generated electricity (energy room – educational opportunity)
    • Alternative energy sources
    • Solar panel
    • Forestry – trees
    • Sundial or celestial structure

II. CULTURE AND SYMBOLISM

• Cristo Rey Jesuit High School example is good precedent
• Community, collaboration, welcoming – sets a tone
• Carpeting and tile are good for interpretation
• Big Brothers and Sisters on University Avenue is an important precedent because of the concern that the university will not represent the folks in the community
• Culture and symbolism can be represented in the building, parking lot, sidewalk to the building and to the back of the building
• Symbols such as the (African) ANKH – use set of symbols that represent all cultures – also that can grow like a sapling into a tree
• Reflect community demographics – 50 percent of community is African American, 30 percent other minorities, 20 percent white
• Lots of young people and older people in the community – opportunity to connect through interpretation
• How can the community be co-creators, making things like tiles that can be replaced
• Invite school children, local artists to contribute
• Lighting is an opportunity
• Tile says this is what is now and this is temporary
• Use natural substances – tile, carpeting, recycled materials
• Gateway Project – 38th and Chicago on Bloomington
  o Artist went into the community and worked with folks
  o Pattern throughout the site – seating cubes inside and outside – Stone Arch Bridge
• Replaceable medallions
• Park and Rec example – history on the walls – pictures, documents – Preserve the changing history of the Northside on a wall or series of banners like the light rail
• History of Plymouth Ave
  o Jewish, now largely African American
  o Completely transformed by race riots in late 1960s
  o “We knew who we were” video – get a copy
  o Brochin’s in St Louis Park is an excellent source of Jewish history in the community
  o Historical society, libraries, photographs
  o Everyone worked together – the story should be told
  o Use Plymouth as the focus
  o Use the history department at the university and schools that have a public history program
  o Extend to River Parkway – show where jobs were
• Band at top of building can capture words, symbols, history (images), that reflect waves like wider example
• Integrative point – inclusive
• Where there is green, think about seating stone – have them “sit in the environment”
• Use the bus stop for interpretation and think about the area around the shelter (for example, the trash cans can be artistically designed)
• Need encroachment permit from the city to move bus shelter
• Create a complementary shelter plaza area – inviting, stress human comfort
• Artistic lighting on building, in parking lot, and natural light – Fencing – Posts with lights – Franklin – fencing/lighting in a neat plaza area
• Is there a possibility for a farmer’s market at the site?
  o No, for profit business cannot be in UROC, and maintenance is an issue
• The city is designing public plaza on Broadway at Hawthorne Crossings
• Use brick patterns to incorporate symbols to show connection to MUL, Dunwoody (perhaps the tower – community context – could the tower be a light, reflect)
• There should be an archway over the door
• Incorporate sound and music
• Engage Juxtaposition Arts, schools, youth to help design
• Create gathering spaces
• It would be nice to have fountain – make the building come alive
• Patio in back, on the south side of the building
• Seating medallions
• Master community garden spaces in the rear – plant winter (evergreen plants), aromatic (lavender), sage, herb garden – artistically designed to reflect different cultures and their use of herbs, and a place where you can grab healing recipes
• Artistic drains
• Hmong New Year is today and so some important people are not present
• Ask communities, if there is one herb that is important in your culture what would it be?
• Use sculpture
• Respect our Feng Shui
• People should be invited to the landscape on all sides of the building
• If there is an opportunity to regain more green space on the boulevard – North – bring cultural symbols to the front
• Symbols at driveways
• How do we incorporate water – without increasing electricity and waste?

III. GARDENING AND SUSTAINABILITY

• Food production at rear of building
• Food processing facility
• Rear of building – active, educational growing area
  o Teach people how to do this in your own backyard
  o Learn about foods of other cultures
  o Link this to local schools – programs for kids
  o Year-round as well – learn how to winter garden
  o Link to Arboretum
  o Outdoor deli in summer – maybe one or two days a week
Also opportunity to have food gardens in the former street alignments (Newton or Oliver) to connect to the neighborhood

Work together to create recipes from different cultures – cookbook – maybe each year a different culture would be highlighted

Demographics – lots of seniors here and lots of young – can connect generations with gardening

Important to test/renovate/restore soils – another learning experience

Can part of site be other plants/nursery?
  Bittersweet, redtwig dogwood – the nurseries would buy them

Also growing things on the walls of the building
  • Create a downspout that celebrates the water falling from the roof
  • Permeable pavement – perhaps a somewhat lower drainage area in the parking lot and one crosses it on a symbolic (or literal) bridge to enter the site?
  • Harvesting water for the gardens – from the roof or parking lot
  • Master Gardeners – create a partnership of gardening programs with churches, schools
    • Learning gardening skills can lead to job creation
  • In the front – demonstration/rain gardens
    • Devote front to public art and maintainable growing sites – artwork can “tell the story”
    • Front garden should be a showplace
    • Plants could be for sale for residents to use
    • Gardening is infectious - Create a gardening “virus” that spreads through the community
  • Need places to sit along this linear garden
  • Encourage seniors and children to pick a flower – appeal to all the senses
  • Seating in the active garden – symbolic links back to neighborhood
  • Responsive to Feng Shui
  • Fish ponds?
  • Don’t forget about trees
  • Winter interest (and edible crabapples for jams, etc.)
    • “Harvesting from home”
  • Hose bibs all sides of the building
  • Harvest rainwater on all four sides
  • Bus shelter
    • Etched glass
    • Kids’ art between panes of glass – changeable
  • Can the parking lot be split into two with pedestrian walkway between (there are two entry drives)?

IV. STEWARDSHIP AND ECOLOGY

People commented about having covered bike racks

A green roof is probably not possible given budget and weight restrictions, but it will be explored

Parking requirements depend on the number of people that will gather in the multi-use space

Winter interest should be thought about when picking plant species

Food in the building, and garden space outside

There will be nutrition and master gardener Extension programs in residence at the new UROC building

Stormwater must be handled and expressed somehow

Stormwater as a demonstration

Pedestrians should be the priority, not the automobile

Could the parking be divided into to two lots with a pedestrian promenade/spine down the center?

The public sidewalk could bend into the site to get pedestrians closer to the front door and to experience the site

The site should celebrate large rainfalls, especially water from the roof

Cisterns could be used for water storage which could then be used as irrigation water

Rainwater from the roof could be stored and used to make sounds/music

Could the street on the south side be donated by the city and become part of the UROC site for gardening?

The university should explore “livable communities” grants

Trees on-site should be tagged with species information and become part of an educational piece of the site

Paver grates and turf should be used for overflow parking areas

Garden areas should be raised for easy access

The parking lot should function as a plaza when not filled with cars

The boulevard could be widened and used as a bioswale or small pond to treat stormwater
Evaluation Results

Four months after the conclusion of the workshop Imagining Art and a New Landscape, participants were asked to respond to a survey. Almost 50 percent of the 30 participants gave their assessment of the community engagement event. Those who responded offered an overwhelmingly positive description of the experience.

“Spontaneous and invigorating.”
“Very enjoyable and concrete.”
“The right length of time . . .”
“It was very helpful to see what people thought.”

Those attending included community residents, of whom some represented non-profit organizations. Three people identified themselves as community activists, three as local artists, and two as gardeners. Almost all of those responding learned somewhat or a great deal through their participation.

Motivations for attending the workshop included a concern and commitment to their community, a desire to be involved in the process of design for the UROC building and grounds, curiosity, and wanting to learn more.

Answers to a set of questions about participants’ perceptions of UROC and the University showed that while the majority of respondents’ opinions didn’t change, the responses of those who did change their perceptions indicated a positive shift.

The survey also asked about the best way to inform the community of future UROC events; it would seem that e-mail was one of the most effective means for letting people know about the event, although two people found out from a flyer, and one from a newspaper ad.

Respondents indicated UROC needs to work even harder to get the word out to the community about its events. They suggested more radio promotion, ads in more newspapers, and one person wrote at length:

“Flyers need to be accessible. Perhaps putting them up on telephone poles, in Cub where many of the residents shop, contacting the different block leaders to get the word out. Make sure there are fliers up in the local barbershops and beauty shops.”

Finally, two respondents mentioned sending notices to religious organizations (church bulletins, mosques, temples) and targeting community organizations and their information networks.

UROC will be using this information in future event planning and in the development of its strategic communications plan.

Survey responders also suggested that a broader range of voices needs to be at the table for future events. The additional voices they suggested included youth and teens; seniors; other cultural groups such as American Indian, Asian, Latino, and East African; immigrants; faith-based and other organizations; and businesses.

More than half of those responding said that attending the workshop introduced them to new people or organizations. They were evenly divided as to whether the event helped them to strengthen existing relationships. One person, who found the relational aspect of the event important and whose words sum up the overall response to the workshop, wrote:

“Working together in a non-competitive workshop to impact the community we all care about allows for us to respect each other’s differing values a little more.”

To see the survey questions and analysis of results, please visit:
http://www.uroc.umn.edu/imaginingworkshop/
UROC Building Renovation Predesign Concepts

The ideas that flowed from the workshop have already influenced some of the predesign concepts for the site. Below are two images that reflect the original predesign concept and a current predesign rendering that builds on many ideas from the workshop. In the current predesign rendering, the shape of the parking lot has been altered to invite the community into the space, and more green space has been reclaimed in the front. Note that these images do not reflect the final design and details.

Predesign Concept as of November 2008 — pre-workshop

Predesign Rendering as of April 2009 — post-workshop

Urban Design Perspectives with Charles Levin Architects

Preliminary Art Recommendations

The renderings below build upon the visions of the workshop participants. Please note that these are recommendations only, and must be vetted through filters of cost, budgets, timing, maintenance issues, and feasibility.

Seitu Jones

Seitu Jones
imagining art & a new landscape
A workshop exploring the landscape and art opportunities of the urban landscape surrounding the new Urban Research and Outreach/Engagement Center

Saturday, December 13, 2008    8:30 AM-12:00 PM
Minneapolis Police Department 4th Precinct Community Room
1925 Plymouth Avenue North
Minneapolis, MN 55411

North Minneapolis residents, businesses, and friends are invited to a workshop to share ideas and visions for the use of art in the Urban Research and Outreach/Engagement Center building and the surrounding landscape. The University of Minnesota has hired Alicia Belton of Urban Design Perspectives with Charles Levin Architects, and a team that includes Close Landscape Architecture and visual artist Seitu Jones, to help plan and design the building and site at 2001 Plymouth Avenue North.

This workshop will be an opportunity for community members, Northside artists, and gardeners to share their ideas with the design team, UROC staff, and engaged University faculty. The design team has identified specific opportunities where community members can be engaged in the creation of artistic elements and landscape features. Using maps, plans, and 3-D models, the team will lead participants in an exercise to visualize design elements to be considered for the Urban Research and Outreach/Engagement Center building and the surrounding landscape, and to imagine ideas could be used at home or in their own neighborhood. No experience or expertise in design is required. Breakfast foods, healthy snacks and beverages will be provided. Please bring your inspiration to this workshop.

Limited Space Available; Registration Requested by December 8, 2008: uroc@umn.edu or (612) 626-UROC/626-8762

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imagining art & a new landscape

close landscape architecture+ I urban design perspectives I charles levin architects I seitu jones, artist

Photos by Seitu Jones and Bob Close

culture & symbolism
not silenced
by pain or time
a Dakota woman sings
listen to the voice
a mighty river
sings her song
faith
create
gardening & sustainability

bringing community together | using available space
urban learning environment
art & architecture
stewardship & ecology

managing stormwater | art & flowing water
creating habitat | natural, easily maintained landscapes
Workshop Attendees

Participant

Brett Bauer
Connie Beckers
Alicia Belton
Barbara Bergeron
Bob Close
Beverly Cottman
Raymond Dehn
Ben Erickson
Archie Givens
Christopher Harrison
Ni Ora Hokes
Seitu Jones
Tom Leighton
Charles Levin
Irma McClaurin
Michael Newmann
Marylynn Pulscher
Andrew Roberts
Beverly Roberts
George Roberts
James Robin
Douglas Snyder
Hawona Sullivan Janzen
Craig Taylor
Tobechi Tobechukwu
Deborah A. Torraine
Stephanie Wilkes
Makeda Zulu-Gillespie
Nothando Zulu
Karen Zumach

Organization

Hennepin County Property Services
Northside Arts Collective
Urban Design Perspectives
Willard Homewood Organization
Close Landscape Architecture, Workshop Co-organizer
Northside Arts Collective, Willard Homewood Organization
Northside Residents Redevelopment Council
Close Landscape Architecture
Owner’s Representative
Harrison Art Studio
Plymouth Avenue Green Team
Public Art Consultant, Workshop Co-organizer
City Planner, City of Minneapolis
Charles Levin Architects
Executive Director, Urban Research and Outreach/Engagement Center
Environmental Justice Advocates of Minnesota
Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board, JD Rivers Children’s Garden
Community Resident
Homewood Studios
Owner’s Representative
Close Landscape Architecture
Mississippi Watershed Management Organization
Urban Research and Outreach/Engagement Center
University of Minnesota, Center for Innovation and Economic Development, Office of Business and Community Economic Development
Studiotobechi
Environmental Justice Advocates of Minnesota
Urban Research and Outreach/Engagement Center
Urban Research and Outreach/Engagement Center
Plymouth Avenue Green Team, Northside Arts Collective
Tree Trust

Community Partners & Vendors

The Bean Scene
Linda Baker
1101 W. Broadway
Minneapolis, MN 55411
612-76-ROAST

StudioTobechi
Tobechi Tobechukwu
2500 Washington Ave N
Minneapolis, MN 55411
612-216-4967
info@studiotobechi.com

Minneapolis Police 4th Precinct Community Room
1945 Plymouth Ave N
Minneapolis, MN 55411
(612) 673-5704
karen.bjornstad@ci.minneapolis.mn.us

Asian Media Access
Ange Hwange
3028 Oregon Ave. S
Minneapolis, MN 55426
612-376-7715
angewhang@amamedia.org