

PARK DESIGN FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

A Symposium Sponsored by the Design Trust for Public Space and
The New York City Department of Parks & Recreation
Earth Day, April 22, 2008
Center for Architecture, 536 LaGuardia Place, NYC

SYMPOSIUM SUMMARY: INTRODUCTION

On April 22, 2008, over 150 designers, researchers, landscape architects, activists, and city officials came together to envision a new era of sustainable parks and landscapes at “Park Design for the 21st Century,” an Earth Day symposium hosted by the Design Trust for Public Space and the NYC Dept. of Parks and Recreation.

The symposium took place at the Center for Architecture from 12:30 to 5:00 pm and was free and open to the public. Opening remarks were followed by two panel presentations in which panelists discussed design innovations, technical considerations, policy trends, and implementation barriers to creating sustainable parks and landscapes in urban settings. Each presentation was followed by open discussion and a question and answer period.

This document, created by Steve Caputo, Design Trust Fellow, offers highlights and notes from the day’s presentations and dialogue. Please visit the project’s blog, www.sustainableparks.blogspot.com, to add your voice to our discussion of the issues raised at the symposium and to view PDFs of the presentations.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

OPENING REMARKS

Deborah Marton, Executive Director, Design Trust for Public Space	p.2
Hillary Brown, Principal, New Civic Works	p.2
Laurie Kerr, Senior Policy Advisor, Mayor’s Office of Long-term Planning and Sustainability	p.3
Charles McKinney, Chief of Design, NYC Dept. of Parks and Recreation	p.3

PANEL 1: The Big Idea: Sites in Context

- Denise Hoffman-Brandt - Professor of Landscape Arch., CUNY School of Architecture “Engaging Cities as Carbon Reservoirs”	p.4
- Alex Felson, EDAW "Bridging Ecological Research and Urban Design"	p.4
- Joan Krevlin, BKSK Architects "Queens Botanical Garden: Integrating Building and Landscape"	p.5
- Tim White, eDesign Dynamics "Sustainable Stormwater Management"	p.5

Panel 2: Examples from the Field

- Susannah Drake, dLandstudio "Sponge Parks: Neighborhood-Scale Planning"	p.6
- Signe Nielsen, Mathews Nielsen "DDC's Sustainable Site Publication; Regulatory Barriers/Incentives"	p.6
- Margie Ruddick, WRT Design “Queens Plaza: Interagency Collaboration and Sustainable Site Design”	p.7
- Marcha Johnson, NYC Dept. of Parks & Recreation "Case Studies for Implementation"	p.7

DISCUSSION

- <i>New York’s need for an overarching water management framework</i>	p.8-9
- <i>The importance of pilot projects</i>	
- <i>The hazards of Guidelines</i>	
- <i>The need for skilled maintenance</i>	
- <i>A new model of interacting with nature</i>	
- <i>Regulation</i>	
- <i>Sustainability in international settings:</i>	
- <i>Outreach</i>	
- <i>Designers as Advocates</i>	

OPENING REMARKS

Deborah Marton

Executive Director, Design Trust for Public Space

At the Earth Day Symposium, representatives from NYC Parks, other city agencies, and the private sector came to share and learn about the state-of-the-art in sustainable design. The day's interdisciplinary, cross sector assembly was typical of the Design Trust model -- bringing private sector design expertise to inform and elevate city practices. The upcoming High Performance Landscape Guidelines will be the third in a trilogy of Design Trust sustainable design manuals, produced in collaboration with the City of New York. These publications are a model of civic collaboration and design innovation.

Reflecting on the impact of the first Earth Day in 1970, Marton commented:

“Environmental concerns no longer occupy a margin of political activity or design thinking. It's the way that we think now and the way that we have to live now... The values that drove those students to become activists are...central to every aspect of civic life, and are seen nowhere more profoundly than in guiding the design and management of the public realm. If proof of this fact where necessary just look around this room.”

Hillary Brown

Principal, New Civic Works; author, *High Performance Infrastructure Guidelines*

Brown is a past Design Trust fellow and the founder of DDC's Office of Sustainable Design. In her remarks, Brown reflected on the “emerging capacity to solve major environmental problems outside of the regulatory framework.” She cited the Design Trust as an exemplar of this process of this “civic environmentalism.” Guidelines not only provide a meta-narrative and overarching intention for environmental health and quality of life under a growth circumstance, but they also provide “stretch goals” analogous to putting a man on the moon. These goals—such as achieving 35% carbon dioxide reduction by 2030—are motivational, engender competition, and stimulate fast-paced professional development. Meeting these goals requires up-front incorporation into the capital planning process, as well as extensive interagency coordination. Pilot projects are the best opportunities to make incremental progress and provide models for widespread innovation. Offering a final challenge, **Brown suggested that a “vision for the next generation of buildings, infrastructure and parks...must be one that is not only for replenishing health of natural systems, but placing them deliberately in our midst.” As a primary site for intervention, parks and landscapes can help to reconnect people to nature, while offering “richer living environments in an urbanized and urbanizing world.”**

Laurie Kerr

Senior Policy Advisor, Mayor's Office of Long-term Planning and Sustainability

Pointing out the one-year anniversary of PlaNYC, Kerr unveiled the city's first progress report, which can be downloaded at: <http://www.nyc.gov/html/planyc2030/html/downloads/the-progress.shtml>. Kerr went on to describe the forthcoming landscape guidelines as **“the latest in a type of targeted intervention into city process that the Design Trust may well have pioneered, but certainly has excelled in...that enables agencies to take a comprehensive look at progressive ideas in their fields.”** Admitting that agencies have a difficult time doing this on their own because of the intensity of day to day problem solving, Kerr described that the “genius of the Design Trust is [that] a...small grant by a comparatively tiny institution, could provide these enormous agencies the necessary protected space to indulge in high level thinking.” Although there are only 619 days left in the Bloomberg administration, there are 22 years until 2030. “It will be the role of institutions like the Design Trust to continue to create a thirst for what is possible and to hold the city's feet to the fire over the long haul.

Charles McKinney

Chief of Design, NYC Dept. of Parks and Recreation

McKinney proudly affirmed that “New York City has a history of doing the unexpected before there was consensus,” citing aqueduct, subways, Central Park, and WPA era parkways and playgrounds as models of innovation. Fresh Kills Park in Staten Island is the 21st Century's Central Park, and the Parks Department has a lot of other projects on the books that will help achieve the Mayor's PlaNYC goals. Mayor Bloomberg's administration has brought about the largest increase in parks investment since the 1930's, with an additional \$100 million spent in FY 2007 alone. McKinney then described several initiatives that the DPR is undertaking, including the conversion of 290 school yards into parks, the reopening of the Highbridge and the McCarren Park Pool, land reclamation and park creation at the Verrazano Narrow's Bridge, and innovative park programs at Barrett's Park and along River Avenue in the Bronx.

McKinney closed by suggesting a collective goal of “creating livable urban communities to steer sharply away from the environmental tipping point” and to “work with urgency to create a healthy environment for our citizens.”

PANEL 1: THE BIG IDEA: SITES IN CONTEXT

Denise Hoffman-Brandt - Professor of Landscape Arch., CUNY School of Architecture
“Engaging Cities as Carbon Reservoirs”

New York City has the opportunity to create a meta-park or network of “City Sinks” to sequester carbon in underutilized sites and other landscapes.

City Sinks vs. traditional parks:

- Urban parks were traditionally conceived with a “dialectics of wilderness in contrast to urbanity.” New York’s great parks are filled with “legible juxtapositions of wild, dense, often unreachable terrain versus clean, ready for recreation, tree-dappled lawns.” Vast tracks of lawn for recreational activities, framed by picturesque woodlands, reveal nostalgia for an idealized agrarian landscape.
- A new landscape type is needed to face the threat of anthropogenic climate change
- “City Sinks” are already prevalent in the varied physiographic regions and plant communities that exist at the margins of parks and habited areas. These layered assemblages of plants maximize biomass and soil-building potential by competing, acting symbiotically, and undertaking temporal succession.
- These “working landscapes” should be incorporated front and center to amplify ecosystem services and communicate ecological functionality to the public.

City Sinks vs. Street trees:

- Street trees are increasingly promoted as “urban cleaners”, but unless they are robust and healthy, they process relatively small amounts of pollution, and are also susceptible to the same pollutants that humans are.
- The average life of a street tree in New York is two to ten years, partly because trees are managed like potted plants rather than living things. A tree with such a short life is likely to release more carbon than it stores.
- Trees are seen as totemic objects and as marketing devices—more functional landscapes are possible.
- Trees gather carbon in their tissues and roots, and then ultimately pass it into deeper and more beneficial soil sequestration. However, soil sequestration opportunities are limited by the prevalence of impervious surfaces.
- Rather than single isolated trees, City Sink envisions pervasive dispersal of low impact, layered and porous landscape strips throughout the cityscape to radically ramp up carbon storage.
- Building on existing Greenstreets methods, City Sink would insinuate high-carbon sequestering plant system typologies—based on microclimate conditions—into interstitial and uninhabited spaces throughout the city.
- Initial efforts would be minimal. The challenge lies in sustained management of plant and soil systems.

Creating a City Sink Network:

- This “reframing of urban landscape” would be more productive than paying for off-site carbon mitigation.
- Performative plant designs should demonstrate the synchronization/evolution of ecological processes, and also promote public recognition of global warming and carbon sequestration.

Alex Felson - Director of Ecological Design, EDAW
“Bridging Ecological Research and Urban Design”

Urban ecosystem management is a new collaborative discipline that brings together ecologists, social scientists, designers, and administrators. What is a city from an ecological standpoint? What are the flows and mechanisms and processes? How can human systems such as transportation, water engineering, zoning, building codes, and infrastructure management be understood in ecological terms? These questions point to opportunities for ecologists to “couple” with practitioners of the city.

Towards Urban Ecology:

- Ecologists have traditionally avoided inhabited environments. The level of disturbance caused by humans makes it challenging to set up controlled experiments and rigorous statistical frameworks.
- Even though ecologists now understand that disturbance is a fundamental component of ecosystems, they are only beginning to deal with urbanization as an overarching form of disturbance to global ecosystems.
- Urban landscapes offer sites for data-gathering, analysis, real-time experimentation, and monitoring, that can become a collaboration between designers and ecologists. New designs can generate quantitative data to evaluate best management practices. Sites as small as one square meter can be utilized.

Obstacles to collaboration:

- Ecologists and designers have very different disciplinary perspectives. In the ecological sciences, there is a tremendous amount of uncertainty and contingency—like a game of pick-up sticks. These complex formulations are often inaccessible to designers. On the other hand, designers employ a greater degree of subjectivity, and an emphasis on language, representation, and aesthetics, which ecologists shy away from.
- Applied ecologists and designers tend to wait for key concepts to emerge before applying them in the field, which entails an efficiency loss of up to ten years. Technology is narrowing that gap, but more can be done.
- Urban ecologists need more data, and are just beginning the data gathering stage.
- Technologies like GIS should be utilized as a bridge between disciplines.

Objectives for ecological experimentation in urban designs:

- Define / Design ecology research sites: Idlewood Park near Jamaica Bay is a pilot project for making replicable sites for eco-zone research that can be maintained by grad students and have a larger educational function.
- Engaging diverse stakeholders: Designers should work to show how landscape layouts and sections can achieve conventional criteria, while allowing for zones for bio-integrity and mediating levels of human access.
- Getting around uncertainty: EDAW has modified residential housing developments in Tuxedo, NY to accommodate seasonal migration of salamanders between vernal pools. Based on scientific observation, they made the best case informed decisions. Climate change is a prime case where designers need to plan for change and the unexpected, as well as to pass the idea of uncertainty onto the public.

Joan Krevlin - Partner, BSKS Architects
“Integrating Building and Landscape: The Queens Botanical Garden”

Begun in 2000, the Queens Botanical Garden was the first pilot project to grow out of the Design Trust & City of New York, Department of Design and Construction’s *High Performance Building Guidelines* publication.

- The first lesson was Hillary Brown’s mantra, “right-size your building,” which is applicable to all projects.
- The masterplan aimed to showcase the garden as an environmental steward while bringing plants and people together. The design explores how people engage with seasonality, surroundings, and natural elements.
- A submerged auditorium under a green roof provides energy, acoustic, visual and educational benefits.
- Water as a primary theme and functional entity: water collected on the roof falls onto bioswales, is treated by planted landforms, and then gets piped to a fountain. People are always crossing over water in the building.
- Parking garden uses bioswales interspersed with parking. Water is managed fully on the site.
- Photovoltaic roof creates portion of the building’s energy consumption.

Tim White - Project Manager, eDesign Dynamics
“Sustainable Stormwater Management”

Polluted stormwater runoff is not an inevitable by-product of development. By giving special attention to the path and fate of water as it moves through and across developed areas, the adverse impact of those areas on watersheds can be lowered.

Changing paradigms in hydrological engineering:

- The old paradigm in hydrological engineering is a linear accounting of Human needs → generating engineering approaches → leading to impact on hydrologic cycle → ecosystem alteration and degradation.
- A newer, more sustainable paradigm sees human needs in flux, and in dialogue with, environmental needs and infrastructural design.
- This new idea of “Ecohydrology” considers stormwater as a resource rather than a waste project.
- Ecohydrologic projects are collaborations between ecologists (i.e. focused on nature), designers (focused on inhabitation, development and program) and engineers (concerned with watershed as infrastructure).

Case Study: Rye Golf Course (Rye, NY)

- Achieves zero runoff and extended detention.
- Handles offsite runoff and uses the landscape for treatment of adjacent sewersheds.
- Reduces potable water and reuses water for irrigation.
- Restores habitat and ecosystems through creating fresh water wetlands to complement salt water marshes.

PANEL 2: EXAMPLES FROM THE FIELD

Susannah Drake - Principal, dLandscapestudio
“Gowanus Canal Sponge Park: Neighborhood-Scale Planning”

The Gowanus Canal has intense degradation along its path, but great potential for beauty. When rain occurs, highly polluted runoff floods the streets, leaving slicks of garbage and sediment. Combined sewer overflow outfalls are prevalent. The goal of the Sponge Park is to create a series of landscapes that will hold back water during storms, reduce water pollution and provide treatment, and provide lushly vegetated open space.

- Though told to only focus on the canal area, designers expanded their research to the entire watershed.
- Where a continuous esplanade was not possible, the designers proposed greenways that extend into the community to create secondary connectivity. The esplanade would extend in and out of the community, with a high level of ecological functionality along the paths.
- Kevin Robert Perry’s work in Oregon provided great case studies for treating and storing water along streets.
- During light rain water is trapped on street edges in bioswales.
- During medium rain: water runs parallel to street to the canal edge and may enter entering linear wetland.
- During heavy rain, water is stored in wetland reservoir along canal edge. Overflows enter combined system.
- The designers also looked at different plant communities to find species that could handle various levels of inundation, process heavy metals, and in some cases handle constant wet feet.

Signe Nielsen - Principal, Mathews Nielsen
“City-Scale Implementation: Barriers and Opportunities”

Mathews Nielsen is currently working with the New York City Department of Design and Construction on a new publication, *Sustainable Urban Site Design*. This manual will be used by DDC and consultants, particularly on projects where a landscape architect was not hired. The manual includes sustainability strategies, along with checklists that direct designers to specific materials and processes that could be used.

Practices include:

- Maximize vegetation: Focuses on how plant material can solve certain problems – heat gain, wind, runoff treatment, microclimate. What plants are good for climate change adaptability and low maintenance.
- Minimize site disturbance: Reduce disturbance of existing soil and water. Aid utility coordination.
- Water management: Promote pretreatment, structural, and bioengineered strategies to treat and detain water. Reduce water consumption. Create green and blue roofs.

Policy & Design:

- Each practice contains a checklist of relevant laws, rules, policies, and agencies, so that the designer can understand how to navigate the complicated regulatory framework as a precursor to innovation.
- Designers need to examine the interrelationship between zoning laws, land use patterns, building codes, infrastructure, and building design, to figure out how to get out of the policy mess towards overriding goals.
- Pilot projects as a way to collect data and ease regulatory barriers.

Water Policy:

- For water management the entanglement of agencies and policies is incredibly confusing and daunting.
- City agencies are required to comply with NY State stormwater Pollution Prevention Plans for any large building project, but they do not have the expertise to perform these reviews adequately.
- One major water policy obstacle is that DEP does not reduce runoff coefficients for green roofs, no matter how deep the soil profile is. This disregards the potential benefit of slowing stormwater or mitigating combined sewer overflows, and creates no incentive for innovation.
- DEP does not accept onsite plant filtration as a means to slow down or reduce water traveling to the sewer. This means there is no reduction in coefficient and no reduction in size of outflow pipe.
- The Mayor’s office has convened interagency task force for dealing with stormwater—look at pilot projects as a way to begin collecting data.

Integrated Maintenance Planning at Brooklyn Bridge Park:

- Working with Michael Van Valkenburg Associates, Mathews Nielsen developed an interactive design process based around managing long-term maintenance costs.
- The park had the unusual requirement that it needed to be financially sustainable.
- When the project was first designed, it was like Central Park with large lawns, open vistas, and perennial beds which would require costly maintenance over time.

- To reduce costs, they altered the landscape design by minimizing maintenance intensive landscapes, reducing turf to the minimum required for recreation, planted trees in hedge rows to reduce tree pruning, etc.
- The project will recycle inexpensive fill from the Yankee stadium construction to create land berms that reduce noise, create microclimate, and only need to be mowed once a year.
- A value engineering matrix was used, and community residents were asked what levels of maintenance they expected for clean bathrooms, weed removal, snow plowing. This helped to reduce some standard maintenance requirements by parks, while prioritizing others based on community desires.

South Bronx Greenway:

- Evaluated marine structures along park edge; removed structures requiring expensive longtime maintenance.
- Worked with adjacent property owners / industrial tenants, who agreed to provide security cameras, pay for lighting, and open and close Greenway gates. These stakeholders now view the Greenway as an asset.
- Park planners, designers and administrators need to engage in a dialogue about maintenance from the outset.
- Maintenance needs to be retooled as a positive design factor from the outset, rather a burden later on.
- The pedestrian bridge between the South Bronx and Randal's island will be built.

Marcha Johnson - Landscape Architect, Department of Parks and Recreation
"Case Studies for Implementation"

Ms. Johnson drew upon her over 20 years of experience working as a landscape architect for the NYC Dept. of Parks and Recreation, and discussed strategies for achieving design innovation in NYC Parks:

- **Come up with good ideas that build on ideas from other places**
- **Develop a good fit between the ideas and the project site.**
- **Encourage the support and understanding of decision makers and stakeholders.**
- **Develop good partners in construction and maintenance.**

Brooklyn Bridge Park Beach:

- DPR worked with geomorphologists and marine biologists to determine how to create a relatively stable "soft" beach environment that flourishes with species, amid hardened urban infrastructure.
- The designers searched for an "ecological analog" to how the beach was evolving in relation to the adjacent urbanized area. The answer was to give back some land to the water and create a cobble beach with natural stones, mimicking the rubble deposits that had already accumulated. Shells were put down to attract fish.
- The beach has moved slightly and seasonally, but it is largely stable after seven years. Oysters are abundant.

Ft Washington to Riverside Park Link:

- Water from the elevated roadway splashed down onto the ground below, causing erosion, and also polluting the river with hydrocarbons, metals, and other pollutants.
- DPR installed a filtration system underneath the pipe outfalls using sand, compost, and activated charcoal.
- After being detained and treated, water is then discharged into the river.

Other Designs:

- Pugsley Creek Park was a chance to create spaces for unstructured play areas and access to nature. Design inspirations included treehouses, living willow structures, natural bridges, decks with plants growing through.
- To encourage kinetic activity, DPR is working with manufacturers to develop outdoor bikes and equipment that can generate electricity.
- Harlem River Park involved the reconstruction of a collapsing seawall. The reconstruction sought to fulfill structural needs while creating a "living edge." Design ideas included the use of tide pools and terraced gabions with embedded shells to simulate a living crust that plants and animals could attach to. Models were tested in a wave tank and the project is being constructed.

Margie Ruddick - Principal, WRT Design
"Queens Plaza: Interagency Collaboration and Sustainable Design"

Queens Plaza is a collaboration with many consultants and agencies (DCP, EDC, DOT, MTA, DEP). The objective was to transform a toxic and dangerous entanglement of infrastructure into a great civic space with improved way finding and legibility, reduced air and water pollution, improved bike and pedestrian access to the river, and world class public spaces / landscapes. The project will create a more layered, acceptable site that integrates many environmental practices. Despite challenges, Queens Plaza is a model of interagency coordination.

Water:

- Because of the amount of pavement and elevated infrastructure, there was a huge amount of water coming onto the site, which overflowed into the river, created CSOs and left standing water.
- The project envisioned a “blue thread,” that was both invisible and visible where water is slowed down and treated before entering the river.
- Rain gardens were developed at sloped areas incorporating wetland species.
- JFK Park has subsurface wetland that handles all the water from the site. Dense landscape makes it a refuge.
- Initial attempts to filter street runoff in the subsurface wetland, were resisted but are now back in consideration. The idea is to use a Terraclean, hydrodynamic separator and detention tank. Everyone involved in the project wants to construct it, but DEP hasn’t committed to maintain it.

Right-sizing pavement:

- Constructing the absolute minimum amount of pavement is critical.
- Medians were heavily planted—and berms created—with densely layered plantings that enabled stormwater absorption, as well as buffering and noise reduction.
- Pavers on permeable bed were attempted but not approved because the agencies didn’t want to commit to correcting settlement over time, so the pavers were put on a concrete slab. Instead, standardized pavers with moss between the joints were designed to be somewhat absorptive, even without percolation.
- Pavement and furniture design were coordinated.
- Elevated infrastructure was partially covered with backlit scrims to reduce noise and enhance aesthetics.

DISCUSSION & COMMENTS

New York’s need for an overarching water management framework:

- In environmental assessments, DEP frequently discusses the need for landscapes that attenuate water flow, but they don’t give incentives or credit for new designs that do so.
- DEP does not accept onsite detention or filtration as a means to slow stormwater, mitigate combined sewer overflows, reduce runoff coefficients or reduce the size of outflow pipes. DEP is especially critical of dry wells, even though they work in nearby urban areas that experience freezing.
- All DPR parks are currently required to connect to the nearest sewer pipe.
- The Philadelphia Office of Watersheds has an overarching CSO mitigation strategy that it implements through localized stormwater BMPs, median landscapes, parks, community gardens, green roofs, etc.
- The Mayor’s office in Chicago is accelerating building permitting to incentivize water management.
- Baltimore requires buildings within 1,000 feet of the waterfront to undertake water management practices.
- The LEED rating system should also reflect and incentivize the contributions of landscapes for reducing stormwater and providing other ecosystem services.

The importance of pilot projects:

- Pilot projects are critical for breaking down assumptions and demonstrating innovation, particularly for water.
- DEP’s Bluebelt is a model for stormwater innovation. Some designs failed at first but over time they were improved and made beautiful.
- Queens Plaza has benefited from two mayoral staff who aid in interagency coordination.
- The Gowanus Canal Sponge Park designers took DEP’s data and calculated that 3.3 acres of permeable land were needed to handle all outflows into the canal from the park area, and 19 acres were needed to handle the entire watershed. That is easily achievable when distributed through the entire watershed.
- The Jamaica Bay Watershed plan, particularly chapter five, is an amazing of what’s possible at a policy level.
- The SWIM coalition (Storm Water Infrastructure Matters) is overseeing the creation of a citywide sustainable water management plan. The goal is to create mandates, incentives, integrated policies, and pilot projects.

The hazards of Guidelines:

- Guidelines need to be a provocation, not just a step-by-step roadmap that is blindly implemented.
- Guidelines should bring about cultural transformation in agencies.
- Highlighting and foregrounding maintenance is one of the most critical issues.
- Designers should not just work to achieve a certain amount of points in rating systems. They should use their knowledge to push towards higher design realizations.
- Guidelines and pilot projects should provoke professionals to overcome steep learning curves and build skills.

The need for skilled maintenance:

- A fundamental cultural transformation is needed when it comes to maintenance. Society does not understand the value and importance of maintenance.
- Maintenance can no longer be the lowest common denominator. Maintenance specialists need to be skilled and have a systematic view. They can't just follow a roster of steps.
- Many formerly incarcerated individuals return to NYC neighborhoods each year. Educating them to become skilled maintenance practitioners would be a cost-effective and socially beneficial alternative to recidivism.

A new model of interacting with nature:

- The conventional notion of environmental “stewardship” carries an underlying ideology of “control.”
- Today, humans understand the environment as incredibly complex, interrelated with inhabitation and urbanization, but not controllable.
- Urban design should positively illustrate the interaction of environmental and social ecologies.
- A citizen scientist approach would bring make capital investments and social investments a seamless process in which everyone is involved in some form of upkeep.

Regulation:

- Regulators continue to expand protective measures, which can significantly undermine progress and innovation.
- Designers are used to working in a context. They should have the flexibility of working back and forth between regulations and policies and real design considerations to achieve the best outcome.
- The permitting process is an overwhelming barrier to innovation that needs to be overhauled.
- The Mayor’s office encourages innovation and wants policy improvements that enhance coordination.
- Pilot projects are the key, especially during this time of optimism and Mayoral support.

Sustainability in international settings:

- Audience participants and panelists debated the merits of attempting sustainable best practices—or other design trials—in international settings that are often less regulated than the United States.
- Panelists acknowledged that a lot of innovative practices will happen in third world countries. If successful, these practices could then be brought to more regulated areas.
- On the other hand, working in unregulated countries can also harm and exploit people and places.
- Working in international settings also requires navigating diverse cultural, economic and social mores.

Outreach:

- Outreach to public organizations and community groups can encourage innovation.
- Getting community groups to maintain parks can make a huge difference. A number of DPR projects have neighborhood groups that help replant or raise money for maintenance.
- Children are excellent advocates. They are very knowledgeable about the environment, and attuned to the importance of open space.
- Park design should help create narratives about environmental processes and encourage public support.
- The more avenues of communication a design process can open, the better.

Designers as Advocates:

- Designers are called on to be advocates on many levels, from policy advocacy, to promoting organizational change, to working with neighborhoods to envision urban revitalization, to advocating for social and environmental justice, to making sure that urban landscapes are well cared for.
- Since projects in the public realm can take a long time to complete, designers must even advocate to younger staff in their offices to stick with the projects. Innovation does not always happen quickly.
- There is no panacea or global intervention for sustainability. Any project involving soil, water and vegetation is an opportunity to enhance living systems in a city. Projects should be taken one step at a time.
- Ten years ago designers were trying to get their arms around the science of sustainability; today they are in the process of figuring out how to make those projects beautiful as well.