URBAN REVIEW

[the community well-being issue]
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Going Global: How the Department of Urban Affairs and Planning is Strengthening its International Focus

A goal of the Department of Urban Affairs and Planning is to become more centered and proactive towards international events that are rapidly changing urban settings. Responding to student and faculty interests, the Department is currently working to enhance degree paths and study options for students seeking to study urban planning and affairs in international settings.

Social, political and economic characteristics of developing countries are changing at a pace and scale never before seen, with billions transitioning into mobile lives while billions more transition into situations of absolute poverty (Sassen, 2010). Planning methodologies and urban policies used predominantly in the northern hemisphere, and mostly in western states, are being brought to developing regions as interventions, sometimes carrying unintended consequences that contradict existing political and economic forces (Watson, 2009). In response, many academic institutions are directly influencing or guiding urban development as buffer in developing regions amidst the application of outmoded urban planning and policy methods.

How does academia view urban planning and affairs issues taking shape beyond the reaches of known case studies? New York City can be a perfect lens to begin with, and is also a lens worth defining. With New York City consisting of only 0.12 percent of the world’s population and 2.7 percent of the population of the United States, most planning and affairs issues take place outside of our five boroughs and fifty states. With the rush of subways and Select Buses, meandering gerrymandering, dizzying cab TVs, whirling borough bike rides and walking, forever walking streets, New Yorkers live in the world’s capital, but often overlook the real issues taking place in the country their neighbors are from. In many cases, their neighbors’ heritage lies in a developing region that is reacting to unprecedented urban growth. In some cases, this can even be true of multiple neighbors. “In 2008, for the first time in history, over half the world’s population lived urban areas, and by 2050, this will have risen to 70 per cent” (UN Habitat, 2009). Trends in New York City and the US will likely be dwarfed by these changes. “Between 2007 and 2025, the annual rate of change of the urban population in developing regions is expected to be 2.27 per cent and 0.49 percent in developed regions” (UN Habitat, 2009).

Great diversity makes both New York City and Hunter College great venues to live in and learn from. The US offers more foreign-born individuals the opportunity to become permanent citizens than any other country in the world; many of them make New York City home. But with 99.98 per cent of the world planning and governing their cities differently than us, we must find ways to evaluate tools and assumptions we’ve relied on in the past. As students of urban planning and affairs, there is much to learn from our neighbors and the cities they come from. Hunter College’s diversity closely mirrors the diversity of the city; the halls of Hunter are connected to a multitude of countries, making international exchange inherent to the everyday.

Not only is Hunter a remarkable international connector, but it also uniquely focuses on the present needs and interests of its students. Few other schools offer a venue where faculty and students can work so closely together to develop departmental changes. This model of learning and collaboration can be extended beyond the school and understood in the context of international urban planning and affairs itself. Last Spring, student and faculty committees were formed to plan how the Department of Urban Affairs and Planning should enhance its international focus. Both committees have been working to develop goals and objectives that the department can use to offer more internationally focused curriculum and academic resources. Several enhancements to the department have recently been made, including:

Short term goals/objectives:
- Maintaining a comprehensive set of department resources and information for students seeking international studies as part of their degrees
- Continue to pair faculty and department resources to students interests in international urban planning and affairs
- Increasing faculty and student exchanges with partner universities abroad
- Increasing study abroad connections with other universities
- Encouraging Independent Research and Study projects to be led by students and faculty

Long term goals/objectives:
- Developing and growing formal partnerships and exchanges with partner universities and institutions globally
- Developing more curriculum and courses focused on international urban planning and affairs issues
- Developing longer-term planning studios and urban affairs workshops abroad
- Increasing faculty expertise in urban planning and affairs issues taking shape abroad
- Increasing college dedicated funding for student, faculty and department initiatives

If you are interested in working with other students and faculty to build on these goals and objectives, please reach out and get involved, or just share your thoughts. These lists will grow in coming years, and your input is always welcomed.

This article was written by MUP candidates Dan Compitello and Rachel Levin, Co-Chairs of the Student International Committee.
A Letter from the Editor

Cities could not exist without the communities they serve, and the importance of healthy communities within a city cannot be overstated. That is why we are devoting this semester’s issue to communities and the roles they play in the urban environment – and indeed, those roles are many. It could be an initiative that starts with the community, like the Philadelphia neighborhood of North Kensington’s recent sustainability efforts, or an attempt to mobilize community agriculture efforts in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. It could even come in the form of an advisory role, like the communities in Amsterdam whose input has helped shape two major city projects.

Regardless of the form of a community’s involvement, it becomes clear that the health of a community is measured not only by its overall well-being, but also by how active it is; how willing, ready and able it is to do its part in shaping its surroundings. As urban planners, this should be one of our major goals: encouraging and enabling communities to actively and adeptly participate in their own continued health, flexibility and longevity. For if planning is essentially a democratic process, then apathy should be considered among the worst transgressions.

So please consider not only how the articles featured in this issue present examples of community action, but also if we as aspiring urban planners can, or even should, seek to promote similar initiatives in communities throughout the urban landscape.

Collin Hodges, Managing Editor

THE TEAM

MANAGING EDITOR

COLLIN HODGES is a first-year MUP student with an interest in how planning-related technologies can influence the planning process for the better, especially where transportation planning intersects with land use and environmental planning.

CONTENT EDITOR

KRISTIN SHILER is a second-year MUP student with an interest in the relationship between land use and transportation planning. In addition to editing the Urban Review, she is a freelance reporter for the Downtown Express and occasionally blogs for the Tenement Museum.

PEER REVIEW

Israel Cruz
Younis Dar
Collin Hodges
Andrea Katz
Nathan Storey
Seth Ullman

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Dan Ross was always a true role model for me, and not just because we share two names. As an undergraduate in the Urban Studies program at Hunter, I looked up to Dan who towered from the graduate program, making it look fun, approachable, and actually doable. Dan was active in last year’s alumni mentorship program, which he would like to see prosper. This article is a result of the enduring mentoring he is known for.

I spent a Sunday afternoon Skyping with Dan, as my Indian Summer turned to fall in Brooklyn, and his spring turned to a summer Monday Labour Day there. He had woken early, ahead of his three-year-old, and was watching his Buffalo Bills lose to the Baltimore Ravens. Ironic, as he’s from Buffalo and I had just emailed him about Baltimore’s new citywide rezoning process that is merging public health and urban planning in very interesting ways. Dan had visited Christchurch, New Zealand before, a medium-sized city south of his home in Auckland, and I was calling him about a new urban planning movement springing up there – Health Promotion and Sustainability Through Environmental Design, or HPSTED, which is Christchurch’s version of New York City’s Active Design Guidelines. As always, Dan came through with blazingly precise details of what urban planning is like ‘down under.’ To get those details, check out my “Health and Cities” paper. To learn more about Dan, keep reading.

Hi Dan! What year and semester did you graduate?
June 2006.

What is the name of the company you work for in Auckland?
Opus International Consultants.

Can you give us some details on a project you’re working on?
I’ve recently completed preliminary intersection and street treatment designs for a bus priority corridor in transit-starved south Auckland. New Zealand is also hosting the 2011 Rugby World Cup (the third largest sporting event in the world), and I’ve been working with the Auckland City Council to develop alternative mode corridors and fan zones en route to Eden Park Stadium, about three miles from downtown. I’m also assisting analysis of some developments on the Gold Coast of Australia which will require several trips to the beach north of Brisbane this summer. All of it pure torture.

Where did you last work while in New York City?
NYC Department of Transportation – Queens Borough Commissioner’s Office, and later for Traffic Planning.

How long have you been in Auckland?
Two years.

What is it like being a Planner, trained in the US, but practicing outside its borders?
They’re very segmented here, whereas in North America ‘planning’ is a very broad field and professionals need to know a little bit of everything. In Australia and New Zealand (and to a lesser extent in the UK), modelers model, designers design, transportation planners primarily conduct strategic planning, and environmental planners focus on environmental and social impacts only. And it’s normally the responsibility of a non-technical “Project Manager” to assemble and manage their efforts. The fact that I know how to do a bit of everything makes me sort of an anomaly here, but I manage to keep busy.

Aside from that, the biggest hazards are my many English colleagues who half-jokingly wonder aloud if, because I’m an American, I own thousands of guns. I make a point of letting them see me laugh a little at these inane jokes; but only a little - because I don’t want them to be too sure.

Do you miss Hunter?
I miss the juggling. I was heavily involved with GUAPA (Graduate Urban Affairs and Planning Association) and Graduate Student Government, and there were always forty things to do at once – a proposal to fund and complete, a cache of money to divert, endless event planning, and the Urban Review to shanghai submissions for. If I recall, I spent relatively little of my time doing actual course work. It was a lot of good stress. All that extracurricular stuff is planning.

You and your family moved to New Zealand together from New York City. How are they doing these days?
My girlfriend and I are both legal residents and have full employment and voting rights. She works for the Faculty of Sciences in the University of Auckland, pitching science to high school students and mentoring foreign students on exchange. She’s a science nerd and very happy with the arrangement. Our daughter attends kindergarten and talks and talks and talks about her upcoming fourth birthday party this February on the beach. She insists it be a ‘Fairy Tinkerbelle party.’ There will be pink cake, sun block, and lots of beer.

By Dan Ross Compitello
Melissa Cerezo

By Collin Hodges

Melissa Cerezo is a 2007 Hunter College MUP alum and a recipient of the American Planning Association’s Robert C. Weinberg Award for excellence in planning scholarship. Prior to that, her undergraduate work in urban studies began at SUNY Albany before she came to Hunter College to finish her degree.

Given her current role as ‘City Planner I’ in the Manhattan Borough Office of New York City’s Department of City Planning, she was sure to have a lot to share with us. I asked her the following questions to get a better idea of her current roles and responsibilities, as well as to learn more about the experiences that have come to inform her work.

Tell me a little more about the Manhattan Borough Office.
The Manhattan Office’s objectives are twofold. First, we cover planning-related efforts in specific neighborhoods and present projects within those areas to the City Planning Commission (CPC), acting as the staff of the CPC. Second, we tend to wear a lot of different hats and give technical assistance to agencies that need it, especially where urban design is concerned. An example is the MTA’s 2nd Avenue Subway project. We helped coordinate where stations should be located, making sure there is a good balance of streetscape amenities. It really took two or three years [for the Manhattan Office] to build trust with the MTA and create our own role in the project. We also aided [the MTA] in community outreach.

What is the most exciting project that you’ve worked on?
I’ve been really lucky to work on a lot of interesting projects. The West Harlem Rezoning is enormous and exciting, because that sort of project is really the agency’s bread and butter, and it involved gathering community input in order to move beyond the limitations set by the 1961 zoning. It has been thrilling to get to know a neighborhood of 90 blocks, and it’s also about engaging the community about what they want to see in their neighborhood. This also means that new issues are always arising, like the provision of community space on West 145th Street. We really have to think about a story that hasn’t happened yet.

What class or project at Hunter best prepared you for your current work?
I’m involved in a whole range of POPS (privately-owned public space) issues, so learning about urban design was very important. How people use spaces was integral in achieving more clarity into how people relate to their surroundings – where they prefer to sit, how they move, etc.

My Land Use Law class and learning about the way that we approach planning issues was also important. We talked about court cases, but also discussed stakeholders, how many different people can be involved and whose values are reflected in policies. In the end, how much change can happen never ceases to amaze me.

What are your long-term career goals?
I’m still trying to figure that out. I feel great about where I am now. I’m going to Philippines in January to learn more about how urban planning is practiced over there. I’ll be in a ‘visiting practitioner’ role, and really look forward to making connection with the Philippines and gaining some new insights.
and the unemployed. Commonly referred to as “the river wards”, these neighborhoods are situated just north of historic Old City (home to the Liberty Bell and Independence Hall) along the Delaware River. Once referred to as “The Workshop of the World” because of its wide breadth of factories, present day Kensington is a collection of deindustrialized neighborhoods experiencing varying degrees of economic challenges. While Kensington struggles with the perils of blight and urban decay, many parts of these neighborhoods have begun to experience certain levels of gentrification. Houses in Fishtown, which only five years ago sold for an average of $100,000, now sell for $400,000. Established residents and transplants live side-by-side, with cultural friction sometimes resulting in amicable-yet-fragmented groups.

Given ongoing environmental and economic concerns, substantial increases in energy costs, and the need for improved quality of life, the New Kensington Community Development Corporation (NKCDC) has been working with neighbors in this area over the past year on a community-led initiative to go green. NKCDC aims to strengthen the physical, social, and economic fabric of the community by being a catalyst for sustainable development and community building. In existence for over twenty years, the organization was founded in 1985 by the leadership of the local civic association to meet the housing needs of the community. During its first ten years, NKCDC focused primarily on rehabilitating vacant homes and providing housing counseling services to low- and moderate-
Faced with the same economic and environmental problems as the rest of the country, community members in the 19125 zip code in Philadelphia have begun leveraging strong partnerships and using civic pride to get their neighbors involved in the global green movement. The populations of these neighborhoods, which include Fishtown, East Kensington, and Olde Richmond, are quite diverse: African-Americans, Hispanics, Caucasians, and Asians, with a mixture of working-class, lower middle class,
The key to making Green Blocks a success is pitching sustainability in terms that are attractive to different demographics. Workshops led by Green Guides have demonstrated to hundreds of neighbors how to create and install their own rain barrels, succeed at composting, and be a responsible urban cyclist. It is the economic benefits of these practices, not environmental concern that motivates many lower-middle class neighbors to get involved; thus, much of the outreach is framed economically. Community leaders and government partners have led workshops on utility assistance, housing counseling, and foreclosure prevention. The idea is to expand sustainability beyond just the environment, incorporating a sense of equity in making a sustainable neighborhood accessible to people from all walks of life.

Under the Green Blocks program resident leaders have engaged over 50 blocks, with over 10,000 neighbors receiving outreach. Long-term established residents and recent transplants have come together to participate in this program. While there has been some apprehension (not everyone responds positively to door-knocking), a majority of Green Guides have claimed success in getting neighbors onboard. With local sustainability addressed in a holistic approach (environmentally, economically, and socially), neighbors have united around “going green” regardless of what their personal incentives might be. Green Guides have so far achieved the following goals:

- Over 1,500 homes signed the Sustainable 19125 Green Pledge, committing to taking green steps in their everyday lives
- Over 50 rain barrels have been installed, each of which will slow run-off and help alleviate pressure on overburdened storm water systems
- Over 200 conservation kits have been distributed, including weatherization materials for sealing leaks around the home
- Over 4,000 CFL bulbs have been distributed
- Over 1,600 recycling bins distributed
- Over 200 trees have been planted

While similar programs are underway in other parts of the country, including a fascinating initiative currently being implemented by the University of Kansas, Sustainable 19125 is distinct in its vast scale and the diversity of residents in which it targets. Neighbors are comprised of all ages, races, and socioeconomic classes. Through the expansive partnership and comprehensive approach to organizing which Sustainable 19125 brings to the community, NKCDC seeks to create a program that can easily be replicated on a larger scale – changing the world one block at a time.
Urban Review
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Through this initiative neighbors have expanded the phrase “sustainable” to include not only concepts that pertain to greening, but also a broader approach that deals with the future health and vitality of the community.

At the heart of this initiative is an outreach program called ‘Green Blocks,’ where volunteer ‘Green Guides’ go door-to-door explaining the benefits of everyday green practices. The Green Blocks program, launched in September 2009, has allowed residential blocks to compete with each other to improve their community. The initiative utilizes six sustainability themes (Greening, Recycling, Energy, Water Conservation, Transportation, and Buy Local, Grow Local) as well as a network of Green Guides who engage their neighbors to participate in achieving green goals for each theme. These volunteers, who receive tool kits containing items such as recycling bins, tree planting applications and CFL light bulbs, are tasked with getting as many people on their block as possible to participate in rebuilding the urban infrastructure while improving quality-of-life factors.

income families. Today, NKCDC has developed into a community development corporation with a multi-faceted approach to community development that includes economic development, real estate development, housing counseling, and vacant land management.

'Sustainable 19125' is a broad, innovative partnership among community residents, businesses, and numerous government, nonprofit, and business partners with the goal of making 19125 the most sustainable zip code in the city of Philadelphia. With the influx of new residents and private investment in recent years, numerous progressive green businesses and organizations have emerged. Sustainable 19125 follows the examples of these local residents, businesses, and organizations that are at the cutting edge of sustainable action. By participating in this community-led initiative, neighbors have embarked on a multi-tier approach to lowering their energy costs, improving the health of their families, and reducing their carbon footprints.
‘tower in the park’ design conveyed symmetry, uniformity, and a clear separation of functions. The large, honeycomb-shaped structures included communal facilities and large, shared plots of open space that promoted a modernist understanding of social equity. Over 13,000 dwellings were built between 1968 and 1975; each building was between 10 and 11 stories and contained 300-500 individual units. The moderately priced units were considered superior in quality and spaciousness. City planning felt Amsterdam’s historic centre had enough dwellings for low-income groups; Bijlmermeer would be for middle-income families open to new, alternative living models outside the city core.

Yet by the time the massive structures were complete, the housing market had stabilized, resulting in too many units and not enough people to fill them. This left entire floors unoccupied, creating isolated pockets of residents. Rather than promote communal participation, public green spaces were neglected, becoming sites of crime and insecurity.

As early as 1983 the city recognized the need to intervene. In an attempt to address escalating social discontent and spatial exclusion, the Oostlijn (East) metro line was connected to the area and public amenities such as a mosque, community center, pools, and educational facilities were increased. None of these efforts seemed to work.
Amsterdam’s population is growing. The city expects to add 70,000 residents to its current population of 768,000 within the next 20 years. To offset the anticipated demands that population growth will bring, the city has instigated a series of infrastructure projects that address Amsterdam’s future socio-economic needs. An overview of two projects—the renewal of the Bijlmermeer (a planned community) and the construction of the Noord|Zuidlijn (North|South) metro line—illustrate the challenges that come with balancing present wants and future needs of residents in order to assure the long-term well-being of Amsterdam as a whole.

**Bijlmermeer Housing**

Located in Amsterdam Zuidoost (Amsterdam Southwest), the Bijlmermeer plan was developed in the late 1960s as a planned community that would address the nation’s escalating housing shortage. Inspired by CIAM¹, Bijlmermeer’s
efiting city residents, the metro has been unpopular throughout most of its development. Much of the concern regarding the Noord|Zuidlijn originates from the 1970s, when the city built the Oostlijn (East Line) metro. Construction of Oostlijn resulted in the demolition of buildings and historic neighborhoods, which caused widespread public protest. The city completed the Oostlijn but decided not to pursue underground projects again. New technologies in tunnel-boring and advanced measuring systems to monitor and preserve existing buildings caused the city to reconsider underground transportation as a way to relieve mounting congestion.

The possibility of a North-South Metro line was first studied in 1989 and was presented to the City council three years later. A referendum for the metro was held in 1997. Although 65 percent of those who voted were against the construction, the total number of voters did not constitute a large enough proportion of the population, rendering the vote inconsequential. Construction began in 2003. Some find the metro irrelevant and costly. However, for those who live outside the center—about nine out of ten residents—the Noord|Zuidlijn is an increasingly welcome undertaking. This is because for those who live and work in different parts of the city, Amsterdam’s current transportation options are insufficient. Amsterdam’s Department of Physical Planning sees the completion of the Noord|Zuidlijn as crucial to the well being of Amsterdam as a whole. Population projections indicate that more and more residents will need to live outside the city center, the Noord|Zuidlijn metro will help offset the negative trade-offs—such as longer commute times—that come with living further from the center. To encourage public involvement and feedback throughout construction, the city initiated multiple projects that fund artists and other residents who wish to increase public awareness of the project. From musical compositions inspired by the metro route to an exhibition of 150 works of art depicting the future vision of Noord|Zuidlijn, the city has used alternative methods to increase public dialogue. Whether or not the effects of Bijlmermeer renovations and the North-South Metro are positive will not be known for years to come. However, Amsterdam’s commitment to listening to residents indicates a healthy relationship between planning and communities—a relationship that will ensure long-term well-being of the city as a whole. Community well-being from a planning perspective requires balancing present wants with future needs while making sure there is public understanding and support for large-scale city projects. Providing outlets for expression and tools that encourage participatory processes are two ways city planning can engage communities to better ensure a cohesive planning process.

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1 Congres Internationaux d’Architectuur Moderne.
3 When the renewal process began, residents were given presented with various options such as temporary and permanent relocation.
4 As of 2008, roughly two-thirds of residents intend to stay.
5 154,935 people would have had to vote no in order for the project to be stopped. This number was based off the total number of voters from the city’s most recent city council elections.
6 The project is estimated at 1.8 billion Euros.
In 1992 the city concluded that the buildings were simply too large to promote a sense of community and neighborhood scale. A steering committee was created to research possible solutions. The Multiculturalisation and Participation Bureau was established to ensure the involvement of Bijlmermeer residents in the reconstruction and renewal of their community. The goal was to find solutions that would inspire residents to stay, even when presented with the opportunity to leave.\(^3\)

After a series of surveys and visioning workshops, the consensus was to demolish and rebuild at a smaller scale while better integrating place of work and residence. The majority of residents chose to stay throughout the renewal process.\(^4\)

Today, most of the renewal has been completed. Roughly half of the total housing in Bijlmermeer is subsidized and affordable to low-income residents, and the other half percent is at market rate. About 45 percent of the housing remains high-rise. Some of this has been converted into student housing, while others combine residence and retail. Semi-detached houses and flats constitute 34 percent of the housing renovation with the remainder being low-rise apartments. New office and mixed-use commercial buildings have been integrated throughout the neighborhood. In the original design, roughly 80 percent of Bijlmermeer’s open space was public, but the ambiguity of the space left it largely unutilized. Today, these spaces have been reconfigured—park areas are clearly demarcated for sports and play facilities. Meanwhile, small shops, as well as bicycle and car parking, border these spaces, which reinforces human scale and encourages greater use.

Taken together, the initial construction of Bijlmermeer and the subsequent renewal project is possibly the most expensive housing project in the Netherlands. Nevertheless, it has yielded tangible results. Unemployment has dropped significantly since the renewal process began; data collected by the city in 2007 revealed Amsterdam Zuiderost to be one of the cleanest and safest city districts.

**Noord|Zuidlijn**

Despite the problems associated with the original Bijlmermeer design, there was wide-spread support from city residents to find keep searching for new solutions. On the other side of the spectrum however is Amsterdam’s Noord|Zuidlijn (North|South) metroline project. Despite its long-term intention of ben-
GROWING POWER

Community Agriculture in Milwaukee, Wisconsin

By Jesse Alter

McDonald’s near Ebbets housing project
(adjoined to a Play Place)
Several weeks ago I attended a Food Policy Forum, hosted by the Brooklyn Food Coalition, at which a number of local officials gathered to discuss food system issues in New York City. During the panel discussion, City Councilman Stephen Levin (District 33) stated that there is a severe shortage of city-owned land that could be used for community edible gardens. New York City is similar to a number of other U.S. cities in that land prices are relatively high and there is limited vacant land available for cultivation purposes. For some community planners, the next
and vegetables, farm-raise thousands of fish and care for livestock. The participation of local communities in food production is important in order to educate a new generation on how to feed themselves. Allen describes healthy soil as the focal point for healthy food, healthy people and a healthy community. To enrich their soil, Growing Power composites over 100,000 pounds per week, saving up to six million pounds of “waste” from going into landfills each year. Some of this enriched soil is used for the two-and-a-half acre urban farm where Growing Power uses a number of intensive food production techniques, including vermicompost (worm compost), bees, aquaponics and livestock. Allen estimates that Growing Power’s urban farm brings in $500,000 annually from the sale of produce and meat. Logistically, the Milwaukee farm is run by fifty employees and dozens of volunteers from the community: “I don’t build gardens with fences. You have to engage the community,” says Allen. “We go into communities and we organize around the work that we do which is food. So it’s a very powerful organizing tool.”

In addition to support from the community, Growing Power is funded by a number of prestigious foundations, including a $100,000 grant by the Ford Foundation in 2005 and a $500,000 grant by the MacArthur Foundation in 2008. Most recently, the Clinton Global Initiative asked its 300 sponsors to raise funds for Allen to replicate Growing Power’s food production model in South Africa and Zimbabwe. Not surprisingly, Growing Power’s annual budget has grown from $200,000 to up to $4 million in the past five years. Growing Power now farms on more than 100 acres spanning from Milwaukee to Chicago with plans to raise an additional $10 million to build a five-story, glass-enclosed facility in Milwaukee that Allen calls “the first vertical garden in the country.”

When asked whether Growing Power is financially self-sufficient Allen responds, “No, Growing Power isn’t self-sufficient, but neither is industrial agriculture, which relies on price supports and government subsidies. Moreover, industrial farming incurs costs that are paid by society as a whole.”

Questions regarding the potential to replicate Growing Power in other parts of the U.S. are difficult to answer. If residents wish to build a community food system they will need available land, startup costs, good training and, most importantly, a number of dedicated workers. In addition to relying upon thousands of volunteers, Growing Power has up to fifty paid employees. However, this dependence on private funding may prove problematic if Growing Power needs to expand its operations in order to increase revenue. This new focus on ‘growing power’ may divert valuable resources away from programs already in existence and start to diminish their relationship with communities they have committed to serve. Although Growing Power’s rapid expansion is receiving international acclaim for its intensive food production techniques, the organization’s origins depict how a powerful leader with help from local residents can jumpstart a successful urban agriculture project.
step is not to create more land use policies in favor of edible gardens, but rather to initiate a new community food development system that works within a city’s current limitations.

In 1994, Will Allen aimed to address this question in Milwaukee, Wisconsin by founding ‘Growing Power’ on the last plot of city-owned land zoned for farming. Allen describes Milwaukee as a food desert in which liquor stores, fast food restaurants, convenience stores and bodegas predominate.

Similarly, in the Brooklyn neighborhood of Flatbush there is a pattern reminiscent of redlining in which nutritious food, such as locally grown produce, is not available for low-income residents. There are seven fast food restaurants that fall within a two-block radius of the Ebbets housing project: Pizza Hut, Kentucky Fried Chicken, and Burger King on Bedford Avenue followed by McDonalds, Popeye’s, Dunkin Donuts, and Wendy’s on Empire Boulevard next to Prospect Park and the Brooklyn Botanic Garden. If recent trends continue, the majority of America’s children born today will be obese and/or have Type 2 diabetes. Other well-known health problems associated with fast food are hypertension, kidney disease, heart disease, and cancer. Moreover, each condition disproportionately affects people of color living in ‘food deserts’ throughout the U.S. The aforementioned concentration of fast food restaurants wreaks havoc upon low-income communities by pushing out healthy food options.

ConAgra profits in the billions of dollars society suffers the costs: sick farmers due to pesticide use, excessive dependence on fossil fuels for the production and transportation of cotton, runoff of poisonous Monsanto chemicals into streams, industrial monocultures of corn destroying fertile land in Iowa, deaths from an E coli outbreak transmitted through eggs, and millions of cattle emitting huge amounts of methane gas.

Simply stated, our current food system and poor diet is the root cause of some major health epidemics, as well as a main contributor to climate change. In order to combat these social and environmental issues, we will need to develop an alternative food system and educate ourselves in order to change dangerous consumption habits. This new system will address questions of food security, or control over one’s food supply, as well as food sovereignty, or the ability to produce one’s own food.

Will Allen and his organization Growing Power have developed an innovative community food center located five blocks from Westlawn, Milwaukee’s largest public housing project. Allen encourages members of the community, especially young people of color, to help grow local organic produce as an affordable alternative to eating highly processed “cheap calorie” foods. Milwaukee residents have access to two types of ‘market baskets’ containing produce, as well as an on-farm retail store. In addition, Growing Power sells its produce to local schools, restaurants and farmers markets contributing to what Will Allen calls the ‘Good Food Revolution.’ Also, the farm is used as a training and educational facility that employs dozens of local residents to grow 20,000 plants.
The Joseph P. Addabbo Family Health Care Center Inc., or Addabbo, a 501(c)(3) Federally Qualified Health Center, in cooperation with the Queens Economic Development Corporation, has partnered with the Hunter College Neighborhood Development Studio to develop a Wellness Center in the Rockaway community of Queens, New York.

Since 1987, Addabbo has been providing affordable health care to underserved communities throughout Queens. In 2006, Addabbo opened its third facility, a 22,000 square-foot health center in the Rockaway neighborhood of Arverne. This enabled Addabbo to expand its reach and increase patient visits by 40 percent. In 2009, the Health Center had over 69,000 patient visits, helping to establish Addabbo as the largest Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) in Queens.

These health issues are compounded by the fact that many Rockaway residents are also poor. In 2009, within the primary study area zip codes served by the health center – 11691, 11692 and 11693 – one-third of all household had incomes of less than $20,000 a year and one-fifth had incomes of less than $10,000 a year.

The combination of disproportionate health problems and concentrated poverty constitutes what the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services calls a health disparity: “Differences in health status among distinct segments of the population including differences that occur by gender, race or ethnicity, education or income, disability, or living in various geographic localities.”

While Addabbo has a history of providing accessible health care services to the residents of the Rockaways, the organization seeks to establish a new facility that will specifically develop and deploy “interventions which are scalable and translatable” to address health disparities. In the United States, health care providers have traditionally utilized the medical model, which stresses clinical diagnosis and intervention to remedy diseases. Although there are obvious merits to the medical model, the Hunter Team opted to explore the concept of wellness, which “emphasizes efforts and programs geared toward the prevention of disease and maintenance of an optimum state of well-being.”
During the 2009-2010 Academic Year, the Hunter College Community Development Studio developed a plan for a Wellness Center in the Rockaways, Queens. This two-semester project began with the studio team researching over two hundred non-profit organizations throughout the New York City Metropolitan area in an effort to identify a non-profit organization in need of planning assistance. The team’s selection process was based on a set of criteria that evaluated the needs of the community, mission and services that the non-profit provided, and the potential for positive impact on the community if the project is (or was) implemented. After conducting interviews and visiting over a dozen sites, the team selected the Joseph P. Addabbo Family Health Care Center Inc. During the second semester, the team broke into groups that focused on site planning, finance and feasibility, design and programming, market research and analysis, community outreach, and graphics and presentation. The studio team developed a final presentation and report that was delivered to Addabbo and its board that has since been used as support for federal and state grants to build the Wellness Center. The Executive Summary of the final report, “Planning for Prevention” is presented as follows:
After researching various wellness paradigms, the Hunter team adapted the National Wellness Institute’s model as the foundation for its design and programming plan for the new Wellness Center. This six-dimensional framework focuses on physical, spiritual, intellectual, social, emotional and occupational health. The Hunter team believes that successful mitigation of health disparities in the Rockaways necessitates a comprehensive and preventive approach.

The three-story, 28,926 square-foot Wellness Center will include areas dedicated to chronic disease management, nutrition education, research, physical and art therapy, mental health consultation, a teaching kitchen, business incubator space, fitness areas for adults and children and the Borrow-a-Bicycle program. The Wellness Center will be located adjacent to the existing Health Center, at 6200 Beach Channel Drive, on an open lot currently owned by the New York City Economic Development Corporation (NYCEDC).

To finance the Wellness Center, Addabbo will utilize its partnerships with non-profit organizations and local universities to expand programming and conduct medical research. Ground floor retail space and a biogenetic repository will be the primary revenue sources for the Wellness Center. It will also qualify for federal funding, state grants and financial support from the Queens Borough President and New York City Council.

With recent passage of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, integrating wellness into conventional health care services is gaining attention. But the concept of wellness is still not familiar to many Americans. It is often discussed in the context of luxury for individuals who can afford it. However, wellness is equally critical for impoverished communities. In this respect, the Wellness Center will not only proactively address the health needs and disparities of the Rockaways, but will ultimately serve as a replicable model for low-income communities as need.

The studio team consisted of ten students: Nicole Altmix, Laura Azze, Paul Costa, Paula Di Stefano, Heidi Exline, Jesse Goldman, Jordan Katon, Paulo Lellis, Terri Mills and Rich Zanoni. Alice Blank and Professor William Milczarski, Ph.D served as faculty advisors. To view the entire report please visit: http://maxweber.hunter.cuny.edu/urban/studios.php

1 Primary Care Development Corporation (PCDC), 2010
2 PCDC 2010; Addabbo 2008
3 New York City Department of Mental Health and Hygiene (NYCDOHMH), 2006
4 Black & Mackindo, 2010
5 Addabbo, 2009
6 SRC/Alteryx, 2009
7 As cited in Centers for Disease Control for Prevention (CDC), 2005; as cited in Healthy Carolinians, 2010.
8 Addabbo, 2008
9 Shi & Singh, 2004
10 Shi & Singh, 2004
CONTACT URBAN REVIEW:
urbanreview.hunter@gmail.com
695 Park Avenue West Building 1611
New York, NY 10065
PH: 212-772-5518
F: 212-772-5593

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