Resilient Public Spaces and Communities
DYCD, 2 Lafayette, 14th Floor Auditorium
November 18, 2019, 8:30 a.m. to Noon

AGENDA

8:30 a.m. – 8:45 a.m.  Sign In

8:45 a.m. – 9:00 a.m.  Introduction and Welcome
Terri Matthews, Town+Gown: NYC
David Green, Perkins+Will, Event Moderator

9:00 a.m. – 9:45 a.m.  Red Hook Case Study Project: BlueCityLab
Zehra Kuz, Pratt/OasisDesignLab
Tim Gilman-Sevcik, RETI (Resilience Education Training Innovation) Center

9:45 a.m.—10:15 a.m.  The Community in Planning
Lily Pollans, CUNY/Hunter

10:15 a.m.—11:15 a.m.  The Community in Design
Ali Sutherland-Brown and Isabel Saffron, Karp Strategies
Michele Moore and Onel Hilgalgo, NYCHA

11:15 a.m.—12:00 p.m.  The Working Groups Reconvene
Background. The first event in this series, *Resilient Public Spaces and Communities*,¹ one year ago, used a continuing series of design-related events in Town+Gown² as a jumping-off point to aim at accelerating the action research cycle by using a format that began with a brief academic framing presentation and followed with working group break-out sessions focusing on issues identified in the framing session to tease out what we know, what we don’t know and what we need to know in a way to engage the academic community to help provide specific research addressing research gaps.

After Superstorm Sandy, the academic focus on environmental sustainability quickly pivoted to a focus on resiliency, and few other neighborhoods in the city received more intensive academic attention than Red Hook in Brooklyn. The 2018 event used Red Hook as the case study area to pull together all that has been done in Town+Gown to establish the knowledge base and move it forward by exploring and contextualizing resilience in the built environment generally and public space and communities specifically and then identifying issues for future research within the Town+Gown community.

Working groups formed for the following areas:

- What Allows Public Space to Function as Community Resiliency Asset in Both Disaster and Every Day Life?
- Moving from Qualitative Data to Quantitative Data: Where is It and What Can It Tell Us?

Designing resilient public spaces within communities and with communities requires understanding how to make them good for the community (e.g., supporting community resilience) and effective as resilient designed objects. Public space, in its various forms, is the foundation for creating resilient cities, with New York as a good example. The city’s outdoor public spaces—its streets and plazas and its parks—have, for two centuries, allowed it to grow and respond to acute critical events and weather longer-term chronic stressors. Now, however, projected environmentally-related climate change forces demand a deeper analysis of the trends and events that have the potential to significantly impact the functioning of the city and its neighborhoods. This challenge requires us to locate and identify critical data, understand how to use it to evaluate options moving forward, and understand how the public realm provides, to a greater or lesser degree, the lasting framework within which these efforts can progress.

A follow-up working group meeting, on April 5, 2019, decided to identify a public capital project in Red Hook to explore the issues of community engagement and, using Hana Kassem’s
methodology of leveraging capital projects to engage the community within the constraints of the city’s capital program/process, to apply AREA Research’s life cycle cost benefit analysis model to the explorations. Efforts to identify a capital project for this research project did not reveal an appropriate project due to timing issues. Capital projects for Red Hook in the latest capital budget documents were either underway or too far in the future, which made them unsuitable for the research project idea, as originally conceived. This experience reflects the temporal problem raised by a focus on the “community”. The capital project process—from planning to construction completion and use—is long and complex.

**Capital Project Processes: Rosetta Stone**

**Planning**
- **Program Planning:** Owners and stakeholders develop an advocacy platform to influence the public’s vision for the community, including capital project needs and timelines. The advocacy platform is used to support the development of a master plan. (Owner: City)

**Capital Budget Adoption**
- **Four-Year Capital Plan:** The City’s capital budget is adopted, along with the Annual Corporate Plan. (City)
- **Capital Budget:** The budget is adopted, and the specific projects are identified and their timing is determined. (City)

**Design**
- **Program Planning:** Owners and stakeholders develop a design platform to influence the public’s vision for the community, including capital project needs and timelines. The design platform is used to support the development of a design charrette. (Owner: City)

**Bid**
- **Activity Planning:** The owner identifies the project scope and develops the project budget. (Owner: City)

**Build**
- **Construction:** The construction project is developed and managed by the owner and the owner’s representative. (Owner: City)

Capital Project Processes: Design

**Planning**
- Preparation of Project Scope
  - Evaluation of capital project's initial budget becomes direction and order to agency to proceed with preparation of a scope of a preliminary design project (Chapter 5.219(b))

**Preliminary Design**
- Certificate of Preliminary Scope Approval (Chapter 5.219(a)) is OMB's approval of scope of project which becomes direction and order to agency to design project (design site approval if required) and/or preliminary design and serve as authorization to Comptroller to expend appropriated design funds and includes:
  - Program of requirements (or scope)
  - Estimated construction cost
  - Interfund agreement requirements for in-house design cycle or consultant's contract and fee if agency contracts for design work

**Advertising Bids and Awarding Contracts**
- Certificate of Final Design Approval (Chapter 5.219(d)) is OMB's approval of the final design of project which becomes direction and order to agency to prepare and advertise bid and, later, award contract and includes:
  - Final plans, specifications and cost limitation (with modified construction cost limitation, if required)
  - Determination of conformance with approved project scope
  - Interfund agreement requirements for in-house construction supervision or consultant's contract and fee for construction supervision if agency contracts for construction supervision

**Final Design**
- Certificate of Final Scope Approval (Chapter 5.219(b)), after completion of preliminary design, is OMB's approval of final scope of project, which becomes direction and order to agency to begin final design of the project and serves as authorization to Comptroller to expend appropriated construction funds and includes:
  - Preliminary plans and specifications
  - Construction cost limitations, including contingencies

**Build**
- Pre-Construction
  - Initial Plan
  - Initial Design Meeting
- Substantial Completion
- Final Completion
- Post-Construction
  - O&M
  - Maintenance

**Use**
- Post-Construction
  - O&M
  - Maintenance

Increase in Construction Cost Limitation if necessary if amount responsible lid exceeds approved approved cost limitation, beyond stated primary agency and OMB will work to amend cost limitation in Certificate of Final Design Approval.
The “community” involved during the planning stage of a particular project may be
demographically different than the “community” for that project during the design and build
phases after it is approved in the adopted capital budget. This realization, which initially
seemed to complicate the planned research project, pointed the way forward for this event.

**Introducing the Planning Discipline to this Series.** The panelists at last year’s event were all
architects, and one of the event partners was the AIA New York Public Architects Committee.
While planners can be architects by training, planning is part of the Geography discipline and is
not entirely about architecture. This event brings the planning discipline’s focus on community
explicitly to bear on these complex issues. With both architecture and planning disciplines
involved going further, research projects developed through the working group process should
focus on the best ways to involve the community during the planning process and during the
design process for those projects emerging from the city’s capital budget, with additional focus
on temporal issues (what “community” when) and connections between the two processes.

Urban planners can simultaneously act as agents of authority and of communities. Public
spaces and communities share reciprocal, symbiotic relationships. Communities become
resilient due to their use of public spaces, which continue to exist due to the communities’ use
of them. These spaces’ levels of accessibility, openness, visibility, revelation, and support for
community practices define their resiliency. An open, accessible space builds community,
which builds support for community practices, which in turn allows for community members to
become visible within the space. Visibility breeds revelation and a sharing of ideas, which leads
to diversity, accommodation, and tolerance.³

With climate change affecting urban municipalities, resilient public spaces become an even
more important area of planning for stakeholders in the built environment. Sustainability and
resiliency share a close, often reciprocal relationship, which is reflected in the Envision
framework that is a holistic framework for evaluating and rating the community,
environmental, and economic benefits of all types and sizes of infrastructure projects and
permits owners to evaluate, grade and give recognition to infrastructure projects that use
transformational, collaborative approaches to assess the sustainability indicators over the
course of the project’s life cycle.⁴ The Envision Rating System provides measurements for
quality of life, leadership, resource allocation, the natural world, and climate and resilience,
several of which address the importance of creating and maintaining a culture of resilience
within communities. In addition to the inanimate components of infrastructure, this
framework also prioritizes including communities and leveraging different data collection
methods within these projects.
Throughout discussions on sustainability and resiliency, the “community” remains a key component in maintaining public spaces. Viewing sustainability as a multi-disciplinary issue reorients policy and administration goals to create the proper social context. Engagement with the community begets involvement, which can then beget partnership, finally concluding with a successful and desired project. Urban planners can offer a great insight into engaging the community in these processes, as an important part of this profession involves not only communicating with this conceptual entity, but also designating who constitutes this nebulous entity. The often called-upon “community” is an object and linchpin in the precisely delineated public planning process. Urban planning can provide metrics to delineate a community and identify the best methods to engage with the identified community during planning body.

The question of how to create resilient and sustainable neighborhoods raises the a priori question of “Who can create?” While land use planning is one of many local governmental functions that must at some point, of necessity, be performed at the city-wide executive and legislative branches of local government, New York City is physically large, consisting of perhaps as many as 336 distinct neighborhoods that are smaller geographical areas corresponding to lived reality. In New York, the functions and relationships of neighborhood activities are defined by the City Charter, which creates 59 community districts and invests their boards with power to act in land use and in the budget. "[T]he average community district, however, has a population of over 100,000, which makes it comparable in size to Elizabeth, New Jersey, and Albany, New York." The City’s core processes—land use and budgeting—are technically complex, involving a high degree of politics, many stakeholders and reams of equally complex public data that are, at time, difficult to understand and use.

The 1989 Charter Revision Commission included, as one goal, increasing “... the participation of ... the people in the things that affect their lives”, seeking to enhance the ability of community boards to participate in the land use planning process; this goal, however, is impacted by the tension between two approaches to planning—the professional and centralized approach and the community-based planning approach that is still evolving. The goal embedded into the City’s governance structure, in part, reflects the urban planning field’s adoption of Jane Jacobs’s belief that land use planners, versed in techniques, theories and services, need to know “the terms of the precise and unique places in a city with which they are dealing” by turning to “the people of the place” who “understand thoroughly” the specific place. The term “locality coordination” describes a vertical communications mechanism that captures place-based expertise for “locality knowledge in planning, whether the planning is creative, coordinating or predictive.” While Jacobs may have elevated the neighborhood to the subject and object of urban planning and the City Charter vests the community boards with locality coordinating powers in land use and in budgeting, the history of the City’s community boards reflects
impediments that have made it challenging for community boards to function and for individuals living in neighborhoods to feel they can play an effective role in planning and designing at the neighborhood level.

The community boards are the official means by which City agencies engage with communities in various public processes, especially the City’s planning process. Community boards also play Charter-mandated roles in the City’s expense and capital budgets and consult with agencies for service provision on the cost of their needs of their respective districts’ programs and they review agency departmental estimates. While the Charter delineates the processes requiring the "community"—or community board—involve and participation before final decisions on neighborhood land-use decisions, structural issues remain for community board effectiveness, such as their general lack of coterminality with other local jurisdictional sub-boundaries, which can negatively impact all governmental community outreach efforts. In addition, demographic changes over time—which time frame can include the entire capital process—continue to affect the alignment of actual communities and neighborhoods with their designated community boards.

Since 1989, “horizontal networks of public, private, and non-profit organizations as a phenomenon of governance, as opposed to hierarchical organizational decision making,” may be evolving into “a new type of local governance regime [and] a form of “muddling through” at major American cities and may already have produced an “evolution of a new type of local governance regime.” Among the three patterns some cities have successfully used to adopt environmental sustainability policies and programs, one of them, “neighborhood associations[,] demonstrate[s] surprising levels of interaction with policymakers. Despite scant resources, neighborhood associations are clearly part of the policymaking process in urban systems.”

The environmental sustainability agenda and the related resiliency imperative, explicitly expanded to include economic and social measures, may have helped to generate a robust community of neighborhood-based planners and other neighborhood-based nonprofits focused on economic and equity issues to succeed in the “politics of place.” The recent interest in U.S. cities, including New York City, in participatory budgeting, would tend to provide some additional evidence. Yet in New York, those seeking change at the neighborhood level also have a ready-made, but poorly understood, lever—the community boards—which are publicly-funded City agencies representing the smallest unit of government involved in the City’s formal planning and budgeting processes. Earlier completed Town+Gown projects, such as Making the Invisible Visible, Red Hook HUB: A Creative Placemaking Project, and Data Driven Influence: Putting Dollars to Work at the Community Board Level suggest that planning, design and policy
can help identify ways to strengthen community board functioning in the sustainability and resiliency domains as research from this event develops.

*The primary author of this precis is Brenna Hemming, Research and Communications Fellow at Town+Gown.*

2 See https://www1.nyc.gov/site/ddc/about/town-gown-archives.page#symposia.
3 Anthony Maniscalco "Occupy Mall Street? How the Court Conditioned Public Space Where People Go" (2014). CUNY Academic Works. https://academicworks.cuny.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1069&context=gc_etds accessed on 11/08/19 @ 4:31 p.m. The “simultaneous presence of innumerable perspectives and aspects in which the common world presents itself” in modern public life (Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: 1989, p. 57) requires “stable worldly ‘furniture’” that helps give us the sense that we are rooted in something permanent or that at least *feels* permanent.” (Ronald Beiner, “Our Relationship to Architecture as a Mode of Shared Citizenship: Some Arendtian Thoughts”, Techné: Research in Philosophy and Technology, Volume 11, No. 1 (Fall 2007), p. 3. http://scholar.lib.vn.edu/ejournals/SPT/v9n1/beiner.html, accessed 11/08/19 @ 4:41 p.m.). Architecture can significantly contribute to this “conception of a *grounded* citizenship-civic experience grounded in shared attachment to a built place that provides an enduring home for members of a political community extended over many generations” by creating “an ensemble of buildings as the site of civic space” or “a community as a whole as a locus of civic-architectural experience.” (Beiner, p. 4) Daniel Libeskind has similarly articulated this concept of the role of architecture in the public realm as one that draws “members of the society into a stronger, more emphatic identification of what’s public.” (Beiner, pp. 4-5).
5 Ibid.
11 Ibid., pp. 543-545.
13 Ibid., pp. 150-160.
14 Ibid., pp. 161-169.
16 Ibid., abstract page.
17 Ibid., pp. 6-8.