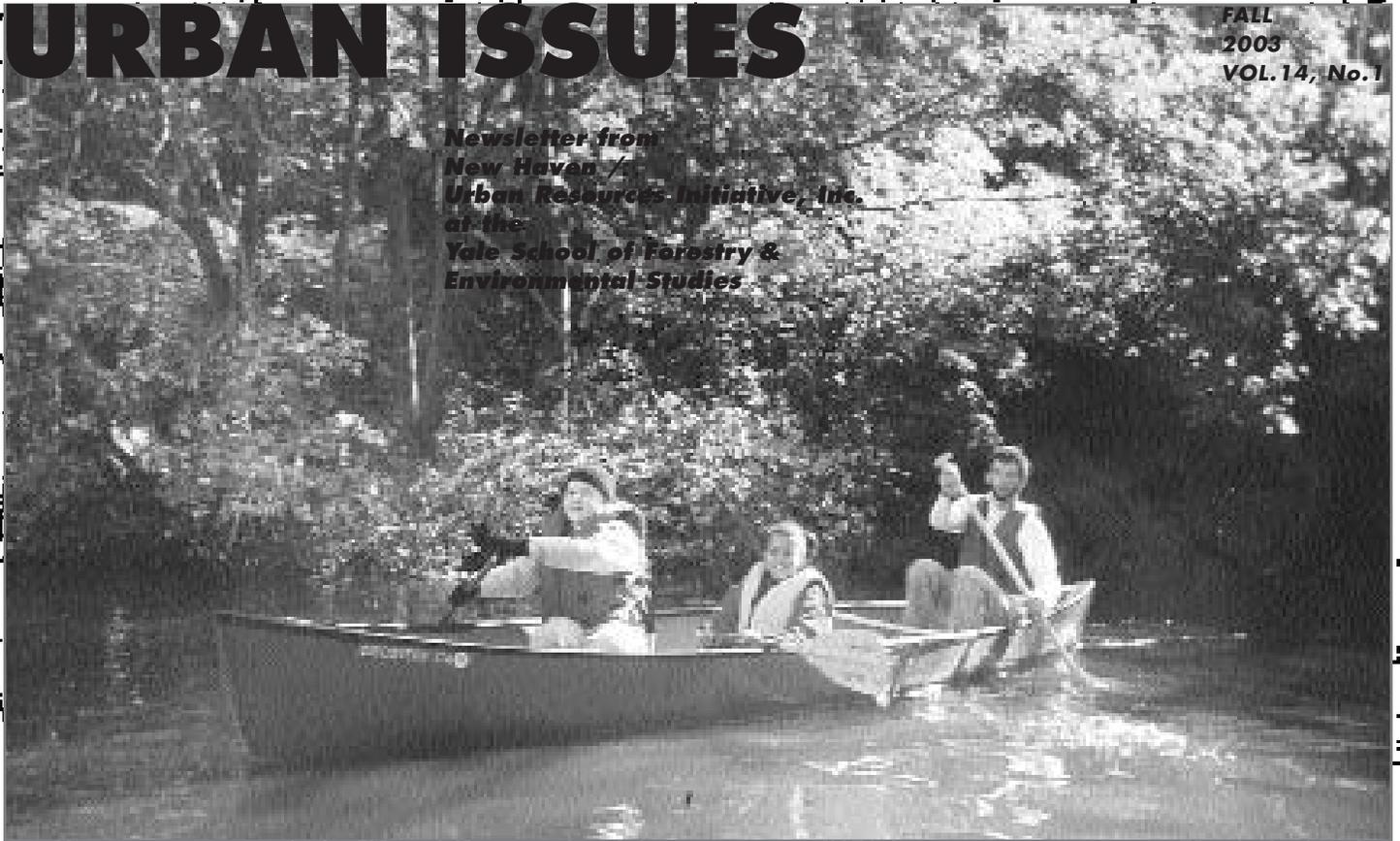


URBAN ISSUES

FALL
2003
VOL. 14, No. 1

*Newsletter from
New Haven /
Urban Resources Initiative, Inc.
at the
Yale School of Forestry &
Environmental Studies*



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*Newsletter of the
Urban Resources Initiative
at the
Yale School of Forestry &
Environmental Studies*



Photo: Steffi Graham

SHARING LESSONS LEARNED

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by
**Austin
Zeiderman**

On the corner of Carey and Mosher Streets sits the remnant of a crumbling brick wall that once served as the foundation of a house now demolished. Colors radiate out from the space, both from the flowers planted in the soil and from the images painted on the side of the building bordering the plot. This is the site of the “Memory Garden.” The memory of relatives, friends, and neighbors now gone is clearly vital to the residents of this neighborhood. But after visiting this area over a three-month period, I saw that even more was being commemorated. Conversations with residents emphasized a remembrance of a time when the streets were safe, everyone knew each other, and people took pride in the neighborhood’s appearance. The “Memory Garden” – as well as eight other oases of green packed within a four-block area of Sandtown-Winchester – also stands

for the memory of a time when there was an active community life.

I came to North Carrollton Avenue during the summer of 2003 to interview residents who have taken it upon themselves to reclaim their environment. As an obvious outsider, I visited many inner-city Baltimore neighborhoods throughout the summer expecting to find that, as I had read, community gardens were a form of community development – a physical remedy for a degraded environment. In fact, I found that a common perception amongst community development professionals is that green spaces are temporary measures on the path towards attracting investment in the neighborhood. What I saw and heard in Sandtown, however, led me to realize that commu-

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FROM THE DIRECTOR

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As populations around the globe swell, and as this growth becomes increasingly concentrated in cities, we all will need to better our understanding of urban ecosystems. Doing environmental work in urban settings particularly requires an ability to link a landscape's physical features to the social realm. In this edition of *Urban Issues*, we explore "Sharing Lessons Learned," as we look at the ways in which we are working to develop a deeper awareness of these relationships and a better idea of how to improve them.

Our organization is now participating in the recently established Urban Ecology Collaborative, which Jocelyn Hittle describes in this issue. The Collaborative was founded to aid in the creation of healthy urban ecosystems in service to urban communities. Partners in the Collaborative have organized to exchange information and to help each other work towards a better future for our cities. More simply put, the partners are committed to learning from one another in order to meet better the challenges of working in urban ecosystems.

In his article, intern Austin Zeiderman investigates the difficult situation faced by poor communities in Baltimore and beautifully describes different citizens' attempts to recapture a sense of community by planting neighborhood gardens. Summer internship opportunities like Austin's provide students critical clinical learning experiences that help them grow professionally. In addition, by articulating what he learned about the motivation of these communities to recover derelict sites, Austin reminds us to consider human behavior and decisions, and how they affect the landscape in profound ways, both positive and negative.

Back in our hometown of New Haven, Christian McMillen and Amy Shatzkin discuss in their related articles how we are using novel tools to help neighbors continue to reclaim Lenzi Memorial Park. At the park, we are making our first foray into integrating the hard-scape feature of abutting buildings into the landscape. As with all our work in the Greenspace program, neighbors have collectively developed a vision of how they wish the landscape to function. Christian describes this interesting process, relating how the community decided on the design for the mural they are currently painting on the back of the building. Amy also explores the balance between the social and the physical, though she focuses on a different theme. In her article, she writes on our progress in addressing the presence of invasive plant species at Greenspace sites, beginning with our survey of Lenzi Memorial Park. Of course, this is only one of the ways in which we are seeking to enhance our understanding of nature in the city in order to improve citizen driven management.

As we have endeavored to integrate physical features and social functions, we have also worked to incorporate our Community Greenspace program into our environmental education program, *Open Spaces as Learning Places*. Nao Teshima, who writes in this issue about this integration, has made the rare decision to intern with both the Greenspace program in the summer Open Spaces program during the academic year. She is therefore well able to make the connections between the two programs, as well as delve into the benefits of bringing children into Community Greenspace sites in order to teach them science while they explore small, urban open spaces.

Working on environmental challenges in the city requires innovative tools and ideas. We often face the difficult task of balancing needs, trying to determine how to make our cities more livable for humans while simultaneously working to improve ecosystem functioning. We must continue striving to learn how best to accomplish this goal, and subsequently to share our experiences with others doing the same. In this way, urban forestry will not only entail the restoration of the physical environment, but the social environment as well.

Colleen Murphy-Dunning

The Memory of Community Life: Can the Environment Prevent Its Extinction?

(continued from page 1)

nity gardens are filling a vital cultural need that public and private development plans can rarely, if ever, address: the need to preserve community life. As community development looks to create a brighter future, community gardens are preserving a brighter past. The past represents a way of life that has mostly disappeared from the public sphere of the neighborhood. To the residents who have been around long enough, however, the memory of vibrant community life remains very much alive.

On a steamy afternoon in late July, Justine Bonner takes me on a tour of the southeast corner of Sandtown. As we descend the white-marble steps of her three-story rowhouse, Justine explains that this is the house she was raised in after her family migrated from the agricultural fields and tobacco plantations of southern Maryland. An immediate right down a narrow alley leads to an unexpected sight – behind her house, the interior of an entire city block is now a garden. Half of the garden is filled with rows of head-high corn, string beans, and too many other vegetables to count. The other half shows off a dizzyingly colorful array of flowers. Justine remembers what an important role this spot once played in the social life of the neighborhood – it was a grassy field where neighborhood kids used to play. In 1999, having just retired from teaching, Justine came back to her childhood home and found the park she remembered from her youth overtaken by weeds. She decided to return the space to how she remembered it.

In a culture where baggy jeans, Nike basketball shoes, and oversized white t-shirts are the dominant style, Justine's faded overalls and wide-brimmed straw hat themselves make a statement. She explains that many in her generation who came to Sandtown from rural parts of the South have roots in the farming traditions of the agricultural lands on which they were born. "But the young generation," Justine fears, "has none of this information . . . they are into fast foods and television . . . and the old ways are being lost." She sees a ripe opportunity to use the garden to help preserve this disappearing cultural heritage. But it's not only the memory of an agricultural past that Justine sees being lost –



Photo: Austin Zeiderman

Justine Bonner teaches children about the food growing in her garden.

she also believes that people no longer have a vision of what "good things can look like in the neighborhood." She is trying to pass on her cultural history by connecting young people to growing vegetables and working with nature. And by transforming the physical environment of Sandtown, Justine is creating memories for the future.

Sitting on a railroad tie and talking, we hear little voices and footsteps and turn to see a group of ten small children and four adults coming up the path into the garden. Justine immediately welcomes the group and offers them a guided tour. One of the adults whispers that the children are homeless and staying at a nearby church. At once, Justine draws upon her knowledge and skills, both as a teacher and as a Maryland Master Gardener. She leads them around from plant to plant showing them the origin of the foods that often end up on their dinner plates. After a half-hour lesson, the group leaves smiling with fresh tomatoes in their stomachs and memories in their heads.

Leaving the enclosure of "Our Garden," Justine and I set out onto the streets. We walk north a block, and stop in front of

the "New Beginnings" garden that was spearheaded by the church next-door and supported by the Parks & People Foundation – a local non-profit organization that assists gardeners and tree planters all over the city. Justine introduces me to Rob who has just finished preparing a new section of the garden. We strike up a conversation when Ms. Emma spots us from her kitchen window and comes out to see what's going on. A three-way conversation begins with details of the garden, but quickly shifts to a debriefing about people in the neighborhood who have recently taken ill, been locked up, or moved out.

We say goodbye to Emma and Rob, continuing our trip up North Carrollton Avenue. Our walk ends at a former vacant lot, now a green space, which will receive some finishing touches this afternoon. As we work, three young kids arrive to join in the activity. Justine immediately engages them in tasks suited to their size and skill, folding them into the work. As I sweat profusely, fumbling with wheelbarrows and pitchforks, the kids casually combine their watering with a healthy amount of play.

(continued on 5)

Neighborhood Classrooms: Using Greenspaces for Environmental Ed

by
Nao
Teshima

It's a sunny afternoon in late September and all 27 members of Mr. Wolkovitz's fifth grade class from East Rock School are running around Blake Field Arboretum (formerly known as the Mechanic Street Park) searching high and low for laminated pictures of birds that have been hidden in the trees and bushes. The students are fully occupied by the hunt so it is unlikely that any of them are thinking about the history of the Arboretum or the people who worked to make it what it is today. However, it is clear from their smiles and laughs and constant chatter that they are excited to be outside. Without knowing it, these students are an integral part of this Greenspace site and play a special role in seeing that this space is maintained and protected.

Just a couple of months ago, I was in this same Greenspace site with another group important to its success: the Community Greenspace participants from Mechanic and Nash Streets. Marie Sherban and Ron Oster, the mainstays of the group, have worked for the past four summers transforming this once vacant lot into a native species arboretum for the community. By working as a URI intern for both the Community Greenspace and the Open Spaces as Learning Places (OSLP) programs, I have had the unique opportunity to see how these two programs complement and benefit one another.

URI started the OSLP environmental education program almost four years ago under the direction of Susan Swensen, an experienced environmental educator and alumna of Yale's School of Forestry and Environmental Studies. The OSLP curriculum emphasizes environmental education on a local scale. Students study the environment using places that they can access easily, such as their schoolyard, a local park or even a tree right outside their home, and they learn concepts that they can apply anywhere in the city. This is important because many of these students come from historically neglected neighborhoods and are not encouraged to see the important environmental components in

their immediate surroundings. The program works to increase students' awareness and understanding of the urban environment and to teach them about the importance of environmental stewardship.

After many years of environmental education efforts that utilized local parks as places to learn, URI started the OSLP program and linked it explicitly to its Community Greenspace program, which focuses on community-led revitalization and restoration. The OSLP curriculum now dedicates one of its six units to studying Community Greenspace sites and thus requires that participating schools be located nearby at least one Greenspace site.

Including the Community Greenspace sites into the OSLP curriculum undoubtedly benefits both programs. The students have a space to explore their urban environment while finding out about the steps involved in its ecological revitalization. They learn about

community based action and how to make positive environmental changes in their own neighborhood. The hope is that students will be able to experience environmental stewardship first-hand and become more aware of their natural surroundings.

Some students have actually participated in the Community Greenspace program in their neighborhoods or have links to Greenspace sites through family or neighbors. One of the students whom I currently teach helped community members plant street trees along Nash Street and another student pointed out that his cousin had planted one of the shrubs in the Arboretum. The OSLP instructors also provide links to the site. For example, I try to remind students of my role as a Greenspace intern in the Arboretum, pointing out that I helped plant some of the trees and shrubs in the site. These personal connections integrate the students into the site and deepen their appreciation of the space.



Susan Swenson teaches children at Nash Street

Of course the relationship between the Community Greenspace program and OSLP also benefits the community members. Those who have worked on the Greenspace site gain a sense of pride and accomplishment because they not only improved the physical appearance of their neighborhood, but also created a space that can be used as a tool for learning. Indeed, many communities design their Greenspace sites with children in mind, though often not with an explicit educational goal.

However, at the Blake Field Arboretum, the community members on Mechanic and Nash Streets explicitly wanted to create an educational space on the lot. Its proximity to East Rock School and to Blake Field made its location ideal. Oster, who leads the Community Greenspace work on Nash Street, says, "We wanted to create a space where the kids could be involved. The original hope was to have the neighbors work on the site during the summer as part of the Community Greenspace program

and then have some of the science teachers take over the space during the school year and use it as a learning tool in their classes." Consequently, such design issues as the use of native species and the configuration of the benches were decided upon with an educational purpose in mind.

Although the site has not yet elicited as much interest from the teachers as the neighbors had hoped, the community members are encouraged by the activities of OSLP. "I'm delighted!" was Sherban's response when I told her that I was teaching at the school and using the Greenspace site. "I wish [the school] would use the space more. Not only for classes, but I wish the teachers would come out there to relax and have their lunch on a nice day." All the same, the Community Greenspace participants have been inspired and motivated by seeing the space used.

Indeed, the community members who work on the Blake Field Arboretum continue to make improvements to the lot. This past summer the group began plans to place identification tags on the plants in the Arboretum to increase the educational value of the space. These tags, along with a vegetation map of the

Greenspace site, will be available to the community and the school next summer. With these additions, the educational use of the site may be expanded to include older students from nearby high schools like Wilbur Cross who are interested in studying ecology or plant identification.

On site at the Arboretum, I continue to observe the action in the Greenspace as one student proudly points out a well-hidden hummingbird to Susan and another calls out to the class that he has found ten different birds. Watching their enthusiasm, I know that when these students return to their classrooms, their experiences outside during the program will stay with them. Though they may not remember all the terms or the concepts taught to them in the field, they will remember how "cool" nature can be and how much fun they had learning about it. And hopefully they have begun to realize that nature is all around them, in the city, in their own neighborhood and even in a formerly vacant lot.

Nao Teshima is a Master of Environmental Management candidate (2004) at the Yale F&ES.

The Memory of Community Life . . .

Meanwhile, I notice two suspicious figures ducking behind a wall that separates them from our view. Trying not to make eye contact, I catch a glimpse of one of them pulling a rubber tube from his pocket and tying it around the bicep of his partner. As they lurk in the shadow of a burned-out building, Justine keeps one eye on them and one eye on the kids, who continue splashing water at each other.

This is the kind of community life that is hanging by a thread in the southeastern corner of Sandtown-Winchester. Sandtown has seen people and promises come and go over the years, and neighbors have concluded that they themselves hold the key to the most critical aspect of community development. Community development programs can work to increase housing,

small businesses, and sanitation – efforts that will be critical for the neighborhood's future. But ordinary people are the ones who can preserve the community life. As an outsider, it took me months to see the extent to which community gardens are an act of cultural preservation. And it took me time to understand how they do not simply represent a cost-efficient, intermediary use for vacant land that will eventually be developed. But towards the end of the summer, I sat and talked with Sandra Smith on her marble front steps in the shade of the old sycamores lining her block. We were surrounded by hip-hop beats, dancing children, and people gardening – the suspicion and fear so tangible just a block away gave way to a relaxed sense of well-being here. I felt lucky to be catching a glimpse of what this community stands to lose.

The urgent need to preserve community life is not peculiar to this four-block area.

Such small patches can be found amidst the blight spread across swaths of Baltimore. But as these areas succumb to the pressures of urban decay, people are searching for ways to rescue neighborhoods caught in a downward spiral. Baltimore is not alone – the future of city life is increasingly at risk in twenty-first century America. But people in Sandtown are setting an example for the world to see if anyone bothers to look. Strong, dedicated women like Justine Bonner and Sandra Smith are seeing their environment – and the process of transforming derelict spaces into gardens and parks – as key to preserving this foundation of social life upon which community development can be built. And it is their memory that keeps them going.

Austin Zeiderman is a Hixon Fellow and Masters candidate (2004) at the Yale F&ES.

Exchanging Experiences: An Intercity Collaborative Effort

by
**Jocelyn
Hittle**

Across the country, organizations are striving to improve cities through environmental education, community driven restoration, and stewardship. Each city faces different challenges and each has programs with different approaches. Nevertheless, there is much information regarding community forestry, restoration, and education that cities can share and shape to fit their own needs. There is no need to “reinvent the wheel” when modifying a few of its spokes will do.

The Urban Ecology Collaborative (UEC) is pioneering this intercity sharing of information and tools. It is an alliance of organizations and agencies from six cities – Baltimore, Boston, New Haven, New York City, Pittsburgh and Washington, DC – that brings together knowledge, experience, and problem solving techniques to the mutual benefit of the member organizations.

Birth of the UEC

When Colleen Murphy-Dunning, Director of the Hixon Center and URI, was starting URI’s Greenspace Program, she naturally turned to other organizations for insight and examples of functional programs. This sort of information and model sharing is commonplace in all sectors, both environmental and otherwise. It was when Charlie Lord, Co-director of the Urban Ecology Institute in Boston, met with Colleen last summer to get some ideas from URI’s Greenspace program that they formulated the goal of formalizing the existing network to share ecological and educational tools and ideas. Lord noted, “an NGO sector has evolved over the last 5-10 years and we have realized that we have much to learn from each other. [When the UEC met] we realized right from the start that we had developed methodologies that could be shared.”

Innovative and Effective

The creation of the UEC did something remarkably simple: it gave structure to the network of ideas and tool sharing that already existed informally. At the same time, it also gave

the network substance, influence, and goals of its own. This formalization of the network allows cities across the northeast to pool resources and expertise to address specific topics. Colleen Murphy-Dunning characterizes the UEC as a way to “improve by understanding different approaches and pieces of someone else’s work that can strengthen your own.”

Jim Lyons, Director of Casey Trees in Washington, DC, a UEC member organization, feels that the Collaborative is a way of learning from each other in a field where there is not yet a lot of information. He added that “the extent to which cities can share experience and expertise [within the collaborative] is a real advantage . . . It is important to have a mechanism for addressing ideas and problems.”

In addition to the city agencies and not-for-profit organizations in the six cities, the U.S. Forest Service is a critical partner of the UEC. Through synthesis and analysis of the large body of data collected by each of the member cities, the Forest Service will be able to conduct research across the region in the relatively new field of urban ecology. It is often difficult to determine if trends in urban ecology within a given city are site-specific. As a federal body that can act at a level that cuts across city boundaries, the Forest Service will be able to give insight into which trends are unique to certain cities and which trends exist on a larger scale.

UEC’s First Year

The UEC provides a forum for model sharing at all stages of the lives of both organizations and their projects. UEC’s membership includes large organizations and agencies, such as the New York Department of Parks and Recreation, and smaller, newly formed organizations, such as the Nine Mile Run Watershed Association in Pittsburgh. This broad cross-section of the urban ecology and education community means that a variety of issues are brought to the table. How to best organize the UEC to address all of the relevant issues at varying scales was the UEC’s initial challenge.

The first meeting of the UEC was held in New Haven in November 2002. At this meeting, the member cities and organizations set up the basic structure and goals of the UEC. In order to address the myriad topics related to urban ecology and education, the Collaborative created a Steering Committee, with one representative from each city, and five working groups: leadership development for adults; leadership development and education for youth; model sharing; restoration tools; and creation of a multi-city research agenda and database. During this meeting, the group also decided to create a website, managed by the model sharing working group, to disseminate information among the members.

The working groups have been actively exchanging resources, materials, and models since the November meeting. For example, the Restoration Tools working group met twice this past summer, once in May and once in August. The subjects of these meetings were chosen based on immediate needs of member organizations. The topic of the May meeting was street tree inventories. The purpose of this meeting was for the participating cities to learn from the experience of those cities that had conducted inventories, and to identify regional standards for urban forest data and collection variables. Similarly, the August meeting focused on community outreach methods, as participating cities were interested in improving the diversity of participants in their respective programs.

In addition to the Restoration Tools meetings, the Environmental Education working group organized a weeklong training at the Common Ground Charter School led by the Urban Ecology Institute Field Studies Program. Oliver Barton, Director of the New Haven Ecology Project, which founded the Common Ground School, commented that the Institute’s training provided an “interesting conceptual framework for looking at cities as ecosystems and ecosystems within cities.”

The training involved teachers, non-profit workers and utility company educators in a project geared toward repli-

cating the Urban Ecology Institute's Field Studies program in New Haven. This replication is an instance where the model for an entire program could be shared between partner organizations. Barton credits the UEC with the concept of the training week, adding, "the idea of model sharing encouraged us to look at what they were doing in Boston and begin to replicate it here."

Goals of the UEC

While the UEC has had a productive first year, its work is still very much in an early stage. There remains a great deal to do, from finding the most efficient ways to transfer technology between partners to integrating the working groups to a greater degree in order to reflect the interdisciplinary aspect of work in urban ecology and education.

Although environmental work at the local level has been going on for years, many in the environmental sector believe that it is of increasing importance. The Urban Ecology Collaborative is a unique way to bring together organizations working locally to improve the effectiveness of their work by sharing information and tools while simultaneously creating a database of urban ecology data for regional research. The UEC's synthesis of this data also may have national significance and applicability. Therefore the UEC serves not only as a model for linking local organizations to each other, but also as a connection between local work and work at the regional and national level.

Jocelyn Hittle is a Masters of Environmental Management candidate (2005) at the School of Forestry and Environmental Studies. She is interested in restoration ecology and land use issues.

UEC Partners

Baltimore Partners

The Parks and People Foundation has worked to restore the urban environment and educate Baltimore's children since 1984. Through two different programs, Parks and People helps to improve the quality of neighborhoods through greening projects and community stewardship and works with communities to provide activities that enrich and nurture Baltimore's children. More information is available at www.parksand-people.org.

Boston Partners

Urban Ecology Institute's Natural Cities Program provides ecological community planning, legal services and tools to assist non-profit organizations and community groups with researching, restoring, and protecting urban natural resources. More information can be found at www.urbaneco.org. The other primary partners in Boston are the Neighborhood of Affordable Housing and the Chelsea Green Space and Recreation Committee.

New Haven Partners

In addition to the Urban Resources Initiative, the other primary partners in New Haven are the New Haven Ecology Project and the City of New Haven Parks Department. The URI website is www.yale.edu/uri.

New York Partners

The New York Tree Trust is a program of the City of New York Parks & Recreation and the City Parks Foundation. It works to protect, preserve, and enhance New York's trees. More information is available at www.nycgovparks.gov. Several other non-profits citywide are involved.

Pittsburgh Partners

Nine Mile Run Watershed Association works to improve the watershed by supporting residents' efforts to increase green spaces, addressing stormwater problems, training citizens for urban ecological stewardship, and providing information about key watershed issues. More information can be found at www.ninemilerun.org. Other primary partners include the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy, 3 Rivers 2nd Nature, and the Pennsylvania Environmental Council, Western Region.

Washington, DC Partners

The Casey Trees Endowment Fund, based in Washington, D.C., is the newest member of the Urban Ecology Collaborative. The program's mission statement is "to restore, enhance and protect the tree canopy of the District of Columbia in cooperation with local and federal government agencies, community groups and individual citizens." More information can be found at www.caseytrees.org.

Adding Some Color to Lenzi Memorial Park

by
**Christian
McMillen**

The wall is huge: 2000 square feet of cinder block. It is a boundary marker of sorts. While attached to Project Apoyo, whose roots and mission are firmly planted in Fair Haven, it faces Lenzi Memorial Park, a place very much a part of the Wooster Square neighborhood. Though it currently splits the two, the wall could become a bridge between the areas. To this end, a determined group of neighbors who live near Lenzi Park, with the help and support of Project Apoyo, have decided to paint it. Funded in part by a grant from the U.S. Forest Service, and with both financial and technical help from URI, the mural at Lenzi Park will be a collective reflection on the meaning of nature in the city.

This mural is only the latest in a series of transformations at Lenzi Park underway since the summer of 2001.

Dedicated to the memory of Joseph Lenzi, a World War II veteran who died at Iwo Jima, the site was originally the home of the Eaton School. In the early 1970s, Dan Kiley, a renowned landscape architect, converted the space to a playground. As the surrounding neighborhood hit difficult economic times and negative elements, particularly drug users and dealers, entered the park, the play equipment gradually deteriorated and the park became little more than an eyesore. However, beginning two years ago, URI and the community around the park began collaborating on plans to revitalize Lenzi. Much of the old playground was demolished and the asphalt that once covered the ground was replaced with grass. The community has planted sev-

eral small islands of trees, perennials, and shrubs and a graceful path, lined with cherry trees, now snakes its way through the park.

Indeed, this path, an integral part of Diana Balmoni's design for Lenzi, is a perfect example of the learning-focused approach that URI has emphasized during the park's rehabilitation. The project was part of the same U.S. Forest Service grant, whose goal is to help URI increase its understanding of how best to address the ecological needs of a greenspace while at the same time helping the neighborhood work towards its own concerns. For example, taking into consideration the hydrological problems posed by an impermeable surface, such as the asphalt court, Balmoni designed the path using permeable pavers in order to improve the hydrological functioning of the park. She successfully developed a design that balanced the community's desire for a welcoming transverse across the park while improving the ecological processes within the park. The community members have been engaged throughout the learning process as they have turned the design ideas into reality, from laying the pavers to pulling invasive plant species (see related article by Amy Shatzkin, page 6) to planting trees.

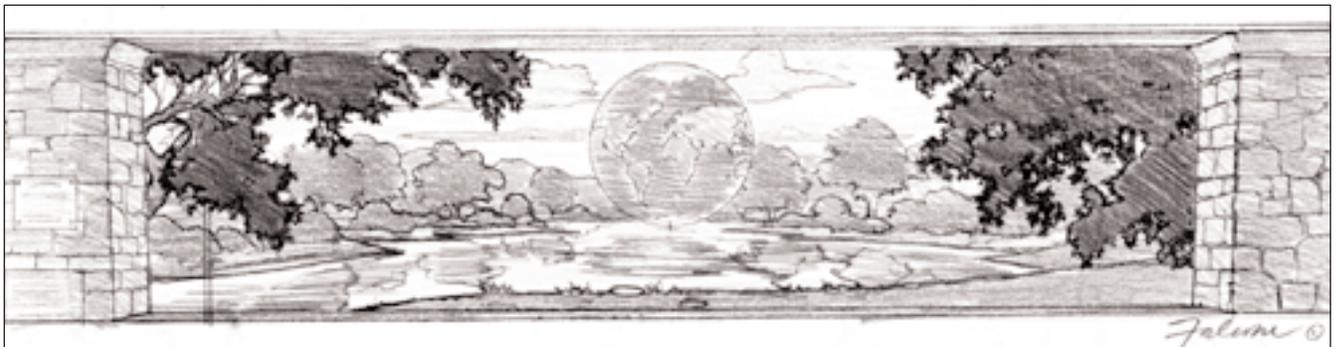
Despite these significant improvements, the wall, visible from blocks away, still looms over the park. The challenge in this case is how best to assimilate the built environment in an urban landscape with its natural surroundings. The wall is a physical hardscape feature whose presence must be taken into account

when planning for Lenzi Park as an integrated whole. The addition of a mural will add a natural backdrop to the park and help incorporate the wall into the site.

Tapping into momentum gained over the summer, a group of about a dozen neighbors has been meeting weekly since early September at Project Apoyo to discuss their ideas for a mural. Guided by master muralist, Tony Falcone, the group has had a series of vigorous discussions about what they want to see on the wall. With "nature" being the only thematic constraint, the ideas flowed forth, running from the ambitious – an exact reflection of the park – to the more modest – a simple sunrise. Several ideas were constant: trees and water should be present; the mural should convey an earth-friendly message; and, the final design should set a contemplative, reflective mood at the park. As group members shared their thoughts, Tony sketched. He tried to reign in the more complex, difficult to paint schemes, and to encourage simpler, though still expressive, designs.

In early October, after a month of meetings, the group had come up with approximately half a dozen designs. The community then voted the number down to two: a landscape featuring a river and forest; and, a depiction of a formal garden featuring cypress trees, columns, several pathways and a globe. With sketches in hand, Tony retreated to the studio, where he added color and further fleshed out the group's ideas. He ulti-

Sketch: Tony Falcone



Muralist Tony Falcone's design for the mural at Lenzi Memorial Park

mately created a final version that unifies the two designs in an attempt to include the desires of the majority of the community. (See sketch on previous page.)

Most recently the community has been painting the wall. To transfer a small sketch to a 2000 square foot space, Tony turned his design into a series of grids that can be worked on individually, a sort of giant paint by numbers. After the community washed and primed the wall, Tony worked with the neighbors to apply the grid system and under his guidance the group is now filling it in. This approach has allowed people with little artistic experience to contribute. Initially, many community members worried that they could not paint well enough – just as they feared that they could not lay the pavers or properly plant a tree – but the mural has become another community-driven success. As these neighbors have become aware of their previously unrealized capabilities, URI continues its own learning process as an organization, discovering with each new project how to best approach greenspace rehabilitation.

Christian McMillen is PhD candidate (2004) in history. He was a Greenspace intern last summer.



Photo: Sara Ohly

Neighbors work on the Lenzi Memorial Park mural

Support Needed

Due to the hard work and enthusiasm of community members, Lenzi Memorial Park has been transformed. Over the past two years, neighbors have spent countless hours pulling weeds, planting trees, laying pavers for a path, and otherwise greening and improving the space. This concentrated and tireless effort has united the surrounding community, as neighbors have worked side by side to reclaim the park.

Recently, with the help of a U.S. Forest Service Grant and URI, professional muralist, Tony Falcone, has assisted the community in creating a large-scale mural for the back of a building bordering Lenzi Memorial Park, a project described in more detail by Christian McMillen in this newsletter. Despite this major accomplishment, Lenzi Memorial Park continues to need your support for future improvements, which will include finishing the path through the park and installing a better lighting system, as well as other neighbor-led projects. Please join us in supporting the continuing efforts of the community to revitalize their local park.

Invasive Plants in the City

by
**Amy
Shatzkin**

The Community Greenspace program launched a new initiative this summer to improve the ability of URI staff to work with New Haven residents to recover neglected open spaces. “There is a preponderance of invasive species in Greenspace sites, which need to be addressed as a function of recovering derelict vacant lots and other urban open spaces,” said Chris Ozyck, URI Greenspace Manager. He added that the invasive plant species tend to “out-compete other vegetation, choking out what residents carefully planted.”

Developing a management protocol for invasive species is the next step in an ongoing research project funded by the United States Forest Service (USFS) to investigate ecological characteristics of small-scale urban sites. As part of the USFS study, in 2001 Dr. Steven Handel, Professor of Ecology and Evolution at Rutgers University, assessed Lenzi Memorial Park in part to determine the status of invasive species at that Greenspace site. Upon completion of his review, Handel nicknamed the park New Haven’s “Asian Botanical Garden” due to the prevalence of far-eastern plant species at Lenzi, including *Ailanthus* (tree of heaven), multiflora rose and oriental bittersweet. According to Handel’s survey, nearly all of the vegetation at the park was non-native.

With Handel’s recommendations in hand, URI hired Yvette Williams (FES ’03) to spearhead a summer long research program and plant inventory. All eight of the Community Greenspace interns were trained to identify non-native plants and catalogue them for Williams. In total, she reported 83 species of invasive plants on Greenspace sites, the most dominant being *Alianthus*, Norway maple, climbing nightshade, multiflora rose and Japanese knotweed.

Community members often have mixed reactions to the clearing of invasive plant species. At Lenzi



Photo: Sara Ohly

Community member, Laura Mark, removes invasive vines from a fence at Lenzi Memorial Park.

Memorial Park, for example, oriental bittersweet appealed to many neighbors aesthetically. However, after clearing it from the site and replanting areas with native species, the neighbors generally appreciated the newfound space for a more diverse selection of plants. With the elimination of oriental bittersweet and other non-native plants at the park, the community had the chance to see their other plantings flourish. Maura Leahy, a URI Greenspace intern this past summer, describes “hacking through a jungle of invasive plants in a corner of the Park.” She remembers a community member, David Eliscu, breaking at least one tool while trying to get rid of these plants, and another, Jack Ohly, resorting to using a machete in

order to get through the thick growth. This strenuous process of physically removing invasive species, rather than applying herbicide, was another team effort that pulled the community further together.

Building on this summer of research, URI continues to investigate how to address non-native, invasive species in the Greenspace program. Williams has just finished gathering her data and found many of her initial suspicions confirmed. For example, the parks, front yards and streetscapes with higher levels of maintenance and gardening had many fewer invasive species than sites that were more disturbed sites that were poorly maintained or entirely neglected.

However, well-maintained sites adjacent to unmanaged areas, or highly disturbed areas like roads or even fences, were more vulnerable to invasive species.

Though Williams' initial research serves as a useful base upon which to design educational programs for neighborhood groups, Williams is the first to admit there remains more work to be done. She points out that "the research and work needs to be done hand in hand with community residents. The level of awareness about invasive plants is at its inception. What is a scientist's concern is not necessarily a community concern. We can start to change that."

Amy Shatzkin is a first year Masters student at the School of Forestry and Environmental Studies. She is studying Urban Ecology after working for a number of environmental non-profit organizations in New York City

Invasive Species

The official U.S. definitions regarding invasive species were provided by an Executive Order signed by President William Clinton in 1999 that mandated all federal agencies to adopt efforts to control invasive animal and plant species.

Invasive species means an alien species whose introduction does or is likely to cause economic or environmental harm or harm to human health.

Alien species means, with respect to a particular ecosystem, any species, including its seeds, eggs, spores, or other biological material capable of propagating that species, which is not native to that ecosystem.

Species means a group of organisms all of which have a high degree of physical and genetic similarity, generally interbreed only among themselves, and show persistent differences from members of allied groups of organisms.

Ecosystem means the complex of a community of organisms and its environment.

All information is from www.invasivespecies.org. Please visit the web site for more information.

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