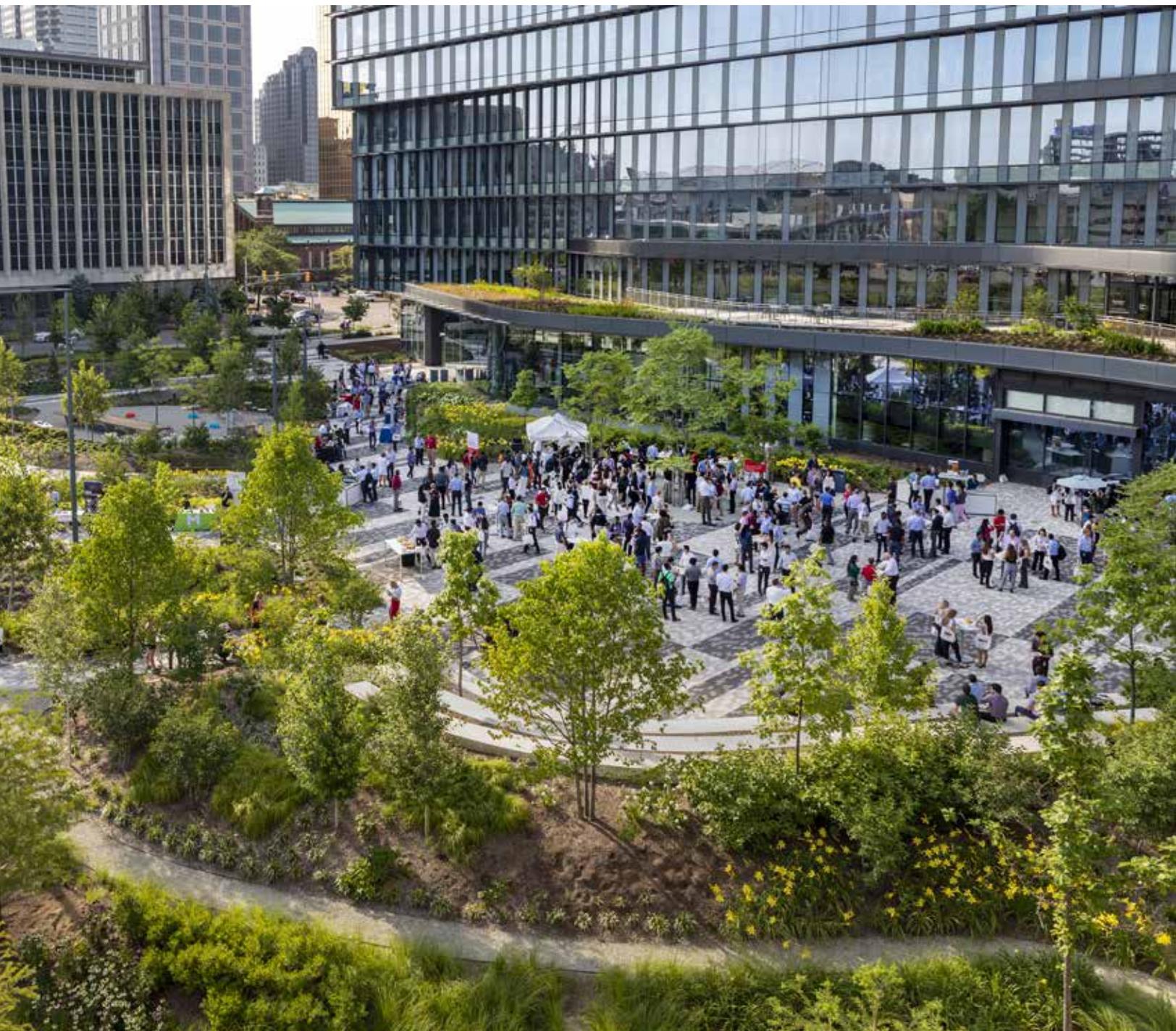
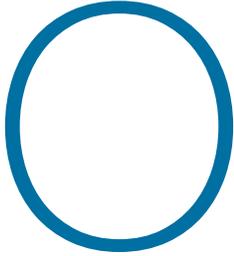


# ROUNDTABLE ON URBAN VITALITY

BY GAIL GREET HANNAH





In August 7-8 2018, Landscape Forms, designer and manufacturer of high-design site furniture and LED lighting, sponsored the latest in its long-running series of roundtables on critical issues in the built and landscape environment. The roundtable on urban vitality brought

together landscape architects, architects, planners, and municipal and corporate leaders to discuss what makes the urban downtown the place where increasing numbers of people want to be, and how designers, developers and municipalities can help create and support equitable, attractive and interesting places to live, work and socialize for newcomers and for current residents and business owners seeking to protect the existing vitality and culture of their neighborhoods. The event at Cummins, Inc. global distribution headquarters in downtown Indianapolis was funded by Landscape Forms, hosted by Kirt Martin, Landscape Forms Vice President of Design and Marketing, and moderated by David Rubin, FASA, FAAR founding principal of DAVID RUBIN Land Collective, a Philadelphia-based landscape architecture and urban design studio committed to practicing with an emphasis on socially-purposeful design strategies.

Indianapolis was selected as the site for the event because this mid-sized, mid-west city is in the nascent stages of reverse migration and is fortunate in having enlightened public and private leadership working together to foster a vibrant urban realm. The city has been recognized for the Indianapolis Cultural Trail designed by Rundell Ernstberger Associates, a 9-mile landscaped bike path and pedestrian walkway system in the heart of downtown that links cultural attractions, parks and restaurants, hotels and shops; the HOK-designed Sidney & Lois Eskenazi Hospital, the flagship medical center for the oldest public healthcare system in Indiana, with a plaza and gardens – The Commonground, designed by DAVID RUBIN Land Collective – that are open and welcoming to the community; the new Cummins building designed by Deborah Berke Partners, with a large green-space plaza also designed by DAVID RUBIN Land Collective that is fully accessible to the public and intersects with the Cultural Trail; and a municipal economic development agency that land banks underused properties and oversees the reconstruction of abandoned buildings and

new construction that respect the architectural context and character of established neighborhoods.

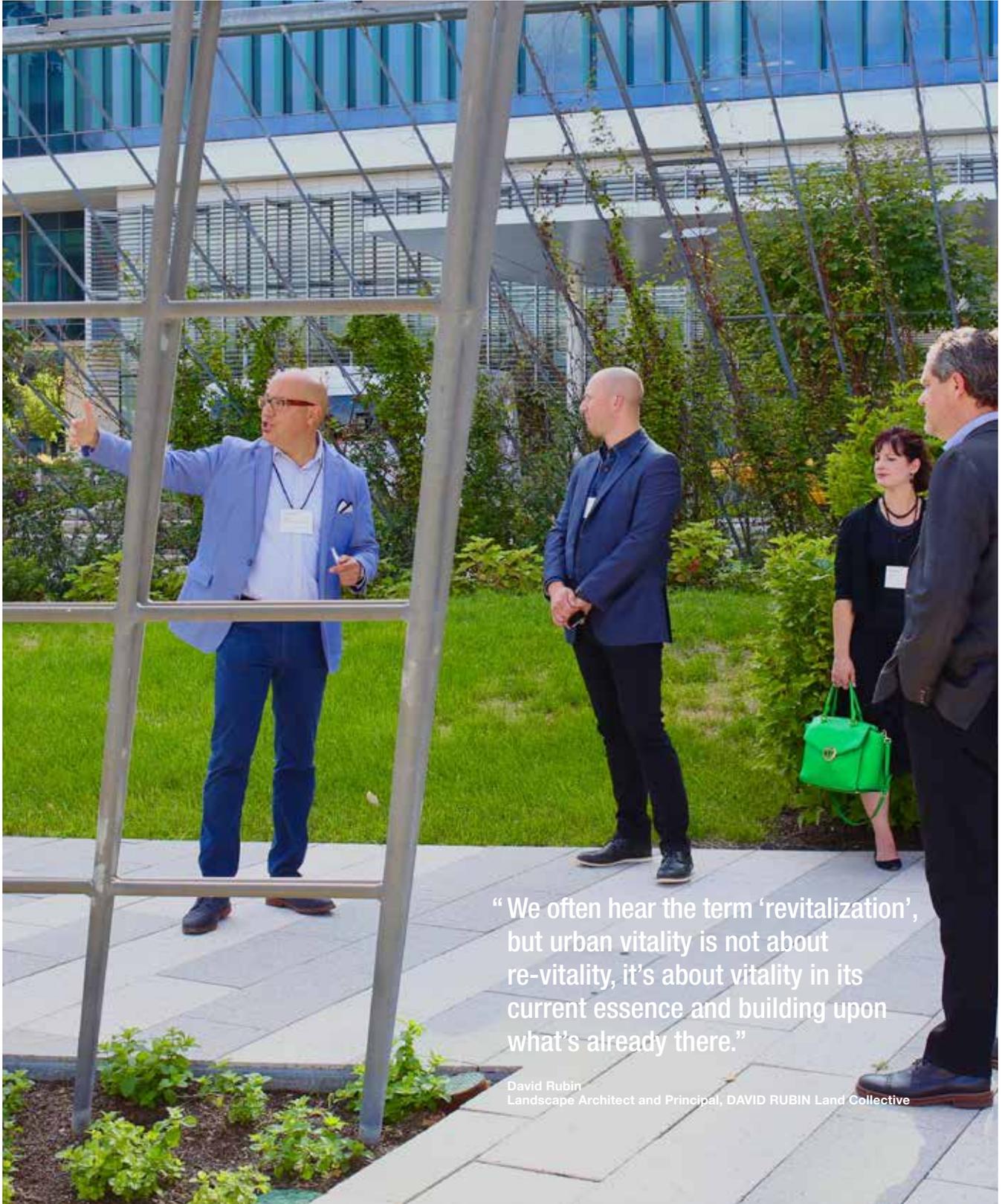
Preceding the roundtable, participants were led on a guided tour of key sites in downtown Indianapolis and moderator David Rubin gave a brief overview of DAVID RUBIN Land Collective's work and ethos. In turns quirky and profound, he revealed his sources of inspiration: Gravity, the force by which bodies in the universe are drawn to other bodies; Empathy, the human capacity of identity with the feelings, thoughts and attitudes of another; and the archaic word Landscap, a bounded view representative of the larger environment which we all share. This heady and deeply sincere statement of commitment set the tone for a humanistic exploration of the complexities of building and nurturing a vital urban realm.

## URBAN VITALITY DEFINED

“Urban vitality is about creating diverse, inclusive and complete communities for living, working, playing, access to education, healthcare, food, transportation, history, culture and recreation. That’s what we work on every day.”

**Emily Mack, Deputy Mayor of Economic Development for the City of Indianapolis**

Mack’s definition of urban vitality in practice was followed by other participants’ takes on the subject:… True urban vitality recognizes the many different cities that exist within the city and invites a broad spectrum of people in conscious ways, not just those who can afford new development… Urban vitality invites interaction and engagement and has a sense of authenticity and diversity… Urban vitality is seeing everybody coming to a great public space for people from all walks of life… Urban vitality is a public realm that elevates collective experience with access to art and nature and distinct and memorable places that provide social, personal and environmental health… Urban vitality



“We often hear the term ‘revitalization’, but urban vitality is not about re-vitality, it’s about vitality in its current essence and building upon what’s already there.”

David Rubin  
Landscape Architect and Principal, DAVID RUBIN Land Collective



David Rubin leads participants on a bus tour of key downtown sites. Standing in The Commonground, a garden and plaza designed by DAVID RUBIN Land Collective at Sidney & Lois Eskenazi Hospital, Rubin describes a shallow pool of gently rising and receding water that welcomes the community to wade in or wheel in (it is wheelchair accessible).



provides playful or peaceful spaces that make people smile and allows you to be what you want to be and to express yourself... Urban vitality means a holistic view of time and space that embraces past culture, present activation and future optimism and playfulness... The word vitality has two meanings: the original, which is “life force,” and the recent, which is “essential.” Urban vitality is a kind of life force that is essential, with basic public health, equity, culture, enjoyment of nature, places for unstructured encounters, and beauty... Urban vitality is about making people healthier, happier and more connected to their space and community. And from Mary Titsworth Chandler, CEO of The Cummins Foundation and Vice President of Corporate Responsibility and Community Relations for Cummins, Inc.: “I see urban vitality from the perspective of helping to make communities healthier and more prosperous, for the benefit of our communities and our highly skilled employees who live and work there.”

## GENTRIFICATION

“Urban vitality is about the fight against homogeneity and monotony and how you disrupt them on the ground. People move to downtowns because they find them fascinating, but as more people move in, it stifles the flame of what’s already there. How do you maintain the flight to the city and still maintain the flame?”

**Lourenzo Giple, Architect and Urban Designer, Rottmann Collier Architects, Indianapolis, IN**

Giple was describing the dilemma of gentrification: how to welcome people and development that can bring increased vitality and economic benefit, while ensuring that existing vitality and culture are not destroyed in the process. Residents in some urban communities have told designers and planners that they don’t want improvements because they fear the community will become unaffordable and they will have to leave or that their communities will become

unrecognizable and inhospitable to them. Roundtable participants advocated for slower approaches to development that would be healthier and more sustainable, including working with communities on strategies that would enable individual wealth and development to grow in pace. Lori Singleton, a landscape architect with Smith-Group in Ann Arbor, MI, proposed making individual wealth growth a part of policy, creating partnerships with urban planners that focus on funding as well as physical place, and using university research as a potential tool. David Rubin noted the key role of designers in helping clients understand the implications of development, and encouraged advance dialog with developers about the value of land banking before the onset of speculation that can bring developers a “win/win in getting the trust of communities about how they will benefit.” While land banking is effective in some cases, Lourenzo Giple observed, once development begins and a neighborhood is branded as a “hot new place,” affordability is often still an issue. “Affordable for whom?” he asked, and explained that in his Indianapolis neighborhood, developers who not long ago were building \$60,000 affordable houses are now building affordable houses for \$130,000. “I would like to change the conversation from affordable housing to equitable housing,” he said. “Look at the whole range of houses from \$60,000 to \$300,000 because we need all of these pieces so a neighborhood can grow and thrive.” Gina Ford, landscape architect and founding principal of Agency Landscape + Planning, in Cambridge, MA, cited the critical importance of inviting more people to actively participate in value creation. “Lack of information is a disservice to these changing communities and those who live here,” said Ford. “It’s about community engagement, but it’s also about representation. We need more diverse leaders to be able to raise these issues and participate in addressing them.”

Building leadership capacity is always top of mind for her, Emily Mack stated, and lauded Indianapolis’s Neighborhood Resource Center and Community Building Institute that support the effort. Like many other municipalities, she said, Indianapolis leverages mixed use and mixed income by trading developer economic incentives for mandated affordable housing or donation of a percentage of the cost of a project to a housing trust fund for investment, and a requirement that developers who take city incentives invest

1% of the total cost of a project in approved public art. “Chicago has some of those incentives, but people are still pushed out of existing neighborhoods,” stated landscape architect Hana Ishikawa, a principal at site design group ltd. in Chicago. She argued that education is the surest solution for making communities better over time, saying, “I’m always surprised at how one person who is vocal and active and excelled in whatever schooling they had can come back to a community and make change.” She pointed to a program implemented in Chicago for identifying successful existing community businesses and providing incentives to build off them. “It is one small effort that expands.”

“One issue of gentrification is that people are priced out of neighborhoods. Another is that there are cultural tensions that happen when new people move into a neighborhood – whether it’s about economics or not,” explained Wes Michaels, a landscape architect and founding principal of Spackman Mossop Michaels in New Orleans. He related the story of a man in New Orleans who inherited multiple houses, each worth a small amount, from neighbors in return for helping them take care of their properties. When gentrification began and values went up, he owned about 3 million dollars in property. But there were cultural tensions with his new neighbors, mostly about his dogs, and it was more than he could handle so he moved out of the place where he had spent most of his life. Michaels concluded, “When someone lives in a neighborhood for 70 years and then the entire neighborhood changes in five, issues around behavior and noise arise and you need to have negotiations to ease the tensions so people can come together.”

Lourenzo Giple asserted that when we talk about gentrification, we know two things: change is going to happen and it will be ongoing. Designers working on urban projects should tell people in the affected neighborhoods that change is going to happen and that they’re there to help, he said. “As designers we’re are not always privy to what’s at play, so I use the approach of saying, ‘What do you want?’ And I advise my developer friends that if they are going into neighborhoods building houses, they need to tell the new people they’re bringing to get to know their neighbors, because if they don’t, it is not going to go well. We need a human approach.”

George Roberts, Director of the Public Spaces program at the Quicken Loans Family of Companies, believes there is an underleveraged role for consumers in all of this. “People are drawn to urban spaces because they are fascinated with them.” he explained. “Are we really working to find ways to prove out the value of mixed income and mixed entry point communities? I think we’re missing that. Our goal should be to build on the interest that people have in this mix. It’s as true in public space as it is in housing.”

## COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT

“Communication through an engagement process is something we try very hard to do on our projects....to do it early and then show how everyone who was engaged influenced the ultimate outcome. [As others have said] ... there’s a solution out there and we are gathering the input, trying to figure out what the best solution is.”

**Kevin Osburn, Landscape Architect,  
Rundell Ernstberger Assoc.**

“Not everyone is a designer but design can come from anywhere,” added Andrew Knight, a landscape architect with MKSK in Louisville, KY. “That’s the important part of engaging with communities. You get ideas that are very well rooted and it’s all for free.” Wes Michaels cautioned on the importance of setting up the conversations in the very early stages of a project, so they don’t immediately become about mutually exclusive dichotomies. “You have to craft the conversation so people don’t quickly form groups and show up with signs.” Kevin Storm, an urban designer at Beyer Blinder Belle Architects in Washington D.C. explained that, in his experience, “...being frank and open at the very beginning of the process and asking questions about who’s getting the short end of the stick elevates the notion that cultural systems are as important as natural systems for building infrastructure.”



A view along the Indianapolis Cultural Trail, a 9-mile landscaped bike path and pedestrian walkway system in the heart of downtown designed by Rundell Ernstberger Associates. The Trail, which links cultural attractions, parks, restaurants, hotels and shops, has played an important role in the city's resurgent vitality.



A redesigned downtown streetscape offers options in a historically car-dependent city. Pedestrian walkways and bike lanes are integrated with attractive access to public transportation to encourage alternative ways of moving through the urban core.

Roundtable guests offered examples of how inclusive community conversations contributed to successful outcomes in their own work. Kevin Storm talked about the 11th Street Bridge project in the District of Columbia, where a group called Building Bridges Across the River held over 200 meetings with faith leaders, community organizations and a host of others before design began. They asked the question: does the community want this? They then designed the competition program through community charrettes and continued to engage as the work was being done. “When you address people that early in the process, there’s a different level of response and it becomes a real partnership, not just engagement,” stated Storm. On this project, a radically proactive approach also led to the development of new tools for supporting ongoing success that included: a trust to buy up property for affordable housing; a home buying club to help people purchase their homes; renter’s rights workshops for tenants; and communication in the community to let people know that gentrification was coming, so this might not be the best time to move. “I think it’s a very interesting model. All the things they did have helped them raise more than the project cost to put this project forward,” he concluded.

David Rubin discussed three of his firm’s projects. For a downtown development plan for Columbus, IN, that could have elicited a homogeneous, even antiseptic, response from a community that describes the downtown as “safe and clean,” they pursued an inclusive approach based on focus groups in which people were “deputized” to bring others into the process. That helped establish early alignment in which everyone could see themselves in the process and led to a more interesting and inclusive result. At the University of Pennsylvania, a pattern of continually expanding west into a community without a lot of resources was reversed after engagement with the community. Instead, the university made the strategic decision to provide amenities, including K-8 schooling, that the university and neighborhood could share, and to move east towards the railway where they would create less disturbance for the vitality of an existing community, however economically challenged it was. In downtown Allentown, PA, plans for a parking garage on street level were altered after community feedback revealed that what people wanted was a place to get fresh healthy food downtown. The top items in the plan became a street level market and a green grocer, the garage was moved to an



upper floor, and the metrics showed that the new scheme would work for the developer as well as the community. “It’s going beyond [the particular property] ...to create an environment in and of itself,” Rubin explained. “The grocery store is an act of moving along the way and meeting the neighborhood as well as an act of commerce. Clients don’t understand the constructive power they could wield in public space by creating community value.”

Derek Don, an urban planner with HOK in St. Louis, described a major project at the St. Louis Zoo in an area adjacent to an established neighborhood that had the potential to bring new jobs, offices, hotels and public amenities. The initial community response was: “We don’t want this.” But once residents learned about the benefits that the zoo project would provide, including a grocery store and mixed-use development, and the economic value it would generate, it became a win-win for everyone. “The Zoo was nervous about even having those meetings because they didn’t want the backlash, but getting the commonalities on the table in the beginning helped it work for everybody,” Don said. David Rubin observed, “Our role in design leadership is incredibly important for these efforts

because people who don’t even assume that they have a place at the table are invited to sit there.” And whether they see their particular issue resolved in the final product, they have alignment with the process and recognize it as a success.

What about communities that don’t have the know-how or financial ability to request public/private meetings? Lori Singleton suggested that it is important for designers in their role at the nexus of these conversations to become aware of the resources available in the communities within which they work, noting that there has been an evolution of development organizations that fill these gaps. And what about the people who do not have a voice? “We need to consider children, teenagers, and people with mental health issues who don’t come to these events,” Hana Ishikawa stated. “We do have to be cautious that these are people who won’t be able to voice their opinions.”

“It’s about recognizing that as designers we ask the right questions to find the right answers to the problem,” said David Rubin. “We are conductors and curators who bring it all together and allow the excellence of others to inform the space. People often don’t realize that they’re coming to us with a problem. They have aspirations, but they don’t

always realize that to get there, there are issues they need to resolve. Understanding them and empowering them to re-think what their aspirations are achieving is part of the challenge of exploration.”

## CHANGE AND CONFLICT

“True conversation and true vitality include conflict, and will continue to include conflict if they are living and vital and are about a real condition, whether it’s natural or social.”

**Lori Singleton, Landscape Architect and Principal/Corporate Design Director, SmithGroup**

Singleton went on to report, “So many of our clients and communities are trying to avoid conflict and it’s just not possible if you are going to do this well. Whether it’s the process of getting there or what happens in the stages after. There’s a reality to that.” She recalled a project involving a neighborhood that was primarily white and well-to-do in proximity to districts that were primarily African-American and economically struggling. “When people from the white community complained about people driving by in cars with loud speakers that disturb people eating at cafes, we had the discussion about whether that is racist and I think it was a healthy debate. We didn’t conclude anything, but that we had the conversation was great. There may not always be a conflict-free solution but the conversation is important.”

Wes Michaels described a familiar dilemma: the neighborhood group that doesn’t want people from the outside to come into the neighborhood for access to a riverfront park. With developers, there’s sometimes a practical mid-way, he said. “But there are certain larger and more entrenched issues about how you see your neighborhood, how you want it to be changed, and what are the trade-offs between the quality of life for the people in it and the public amenity that is the riverfront. That’s where we come in as

designers. We know how to think through problems and try to get to a, ‘Yes, and...,’ type of answer.” Other participants offered suggestions for how design might address perennial third-rail urban issues like tagging and skateboarding. “It depends on the situation,” Hana Ishikawa said. If a person is using a skateboard for transportation, or if it’s graffiti on a wall that’s meant to be tagged, it’s probably not as aggravating. The key Kevin Storm said, is to provide places where people can do these things. In the case of skateboarding, Lori Singleton proposed middle-ground space: a place that is not designated as a skateboard park but can be durable and tolerant enough that with some guidelines it can be used for that purpose at certain times. “That’s the real kind of listening and programming we’re talking about,” she said. “Saying, we’re not going to do beautifully executed granite benches here and instead go for a balance.” Lourenzo Giple observed, “It comes down to the fact that people want an audience. So how can you create a space where an audience can sit on a plinth and watch it happen? It’s almost design without design. Allow people to discover a space, but say, ‘You go over here,’ and let people on the benches look at you.”

Kevin Osburn noted that engagement is not just about designers, developers and institutions listening to the community, it’s the community listening to what their neighbor or someone from the other side of town says. “Often inherent conflict is allayed when someone puts a face to someone with an opposing point of view and begins to see that they may have a good point to make.” George Roberts argued for an awareness of change and conflict as part of “the cocktail of urban vitality.” Rather than thinking about how we can manage change and avoid conflict, he suggested that we, “... recognize those things that are going to happen, and then celebrate them as they are happening – in the context of people being drawn to the city because we are excited by change and want to be a part of things that are changing.” Acknowledging up front that not everyone is going to get what they want in the process is itself valuable, David Rubin concluded. “The vitality in the end is in the engagement of so many voices as you actively listen to try to find the elements that can be resolved.”



The Sidney & Lois Eskenazi Hospital, designed by HOK, is the flagship medical center for the oldest public healthcare system in Indiana. The top-down view of The Commonground, designed by DAVID RUBIN Land Collective, shows the healing garden of grape vines, fruit trees and flowers, and the plaza with its densely planted rough limestone waterfall at one end and shallow contemplative pool at the other.

## EQUITY AND IDENTITY

“We often make the assumption that there is some sort of universal design. But our public landscapes are Anglo-European inspired spaces, which is just one way of thinking. There is not a universal type and then customized environments. There are a lot of people living in customized environments that are not their own. And that needs to change.”

**Gina Ford, Landscape Architect and Principal,  
Agency Landscape + Planning**

If public space provides equity and is open to all, where does the neighborhood – the place where people seek to find individual identity as part of their cultural identity - come into play? How do people make a neighborhood their own? And how can designers create public spaces that are accepting of everyone but, in David Rubin’s words, “proponents of the current possessors?”

Gina Ford sees the answer in a wider representation of voices in the community conversation and increased diversity of designers. It’s not about empowering people, she declared, it’s about identifying why they aren’t in the conversation and removing the barriers to their advancement. And the way design is practiced has to change. “The 21st century city should be open and embrace different forms of expression and space making,” she said. “This is a really exciting moment for us because it not only necessitates new forms of design excellence, but new ways of design practice away from the model that assumes there is a universally understood vision of beauty to something that embraces more dynamic partnerships and more inclusion of different kinds of designers.”

Wes Michaels noted that designers have to grapple not only with how the needs and desires of the existing community fit into a particular project but how that plays out against the needs of an adjacent neighborhood, the larger city or the

region. And the long and short-term vision of municipal and regional governments add another level of complexity. These issues are becoming increasingly intertwined, he said, and while everyone agrees on the need for engagement, there are conflicts around them that require very careful balancing. Kevin Storm observed that we want public spaces to be as equitable to as many people as possible but if you take the same approach to every plaza, there is the danger that everyplace would begin to look the same. “So do you ask the question about equity on the scale of neighborhood or on the scale of the city? Maybe the neighborhood has a different kind of public realm.” Gina Ford answered, “That’s back to design practice. More diverse designers will mean that we get to see more diverse variety in the ways we think about open space.”

Lori Singleton pointed to two ways in which neighborhood identity gets entered into the plan. One is what can happen there – how can the community own it and express themselves in the space. The second is how it is articulated in space, details and materials. “How happy or surprising or unusual it is makes cities exciting. Some things that you don’t expect to find that the design community brings is what starts to make people think, what’s possible here? Community engagement is important but we shouldn’t dismiss what we bring. It’s the marriage of those two things – how we create a plan that lets things happen, that draws on and reflects the community and the culture that’s here, but also talks about what’s possible, what’s not in the place yet.” Kevin Storm noted that tactical urbanism can be useful in such situations as a way to test things and pivot if they’re not going in the right direction. “You can test something that’s inexpensive and can have impact, but if it doesn’t stick, you can be more experimental and bold.”

Sometimes helping urban communities express their identity means learning what they don’t want. Gina Ford related an encounter while working on a project in a Los Angeles community near a shipping container depot. “People in the community said, ‘Here’s a tip. Everybody who comes here wants to use containers because they think they’re amazing, so huge and so cool. We don’t want to look at another container. We just want trees and a beautiful park.’” She cautioned designers to be careful about fetishizing grit and mindful in employing tactical urbanism, which in some cases

is a great strategy and in others can get people arrested. Lourenzo Giple warned against making simplistic assumptions about identity, in individuals and communities. “We’re more than a single identity,” he said. “I’m black, I’m a science nerd and I love comic books. These identities are what help us connect with people....You need to have culture within a space, but make sure that culture ties to a lot of what’s around it and that everybody can feel comfortable.”

## THE THINGS THAT CONNECT US

“People have this mythical view of urban vibrancy – that it’s a festival or a market, but ultimately it’s the streets and sidewalks. The first rule is getting the streets right.”

**Kevin Storm, Urban Designer, Beyer Blinder Belle Architects**

Designing for urban vitality requires understanding how people actually experience and move through the city. It’s not for the most part spending the whole day in a public space, it’s usually about moving through it from one place to another, Lori Singleton observed. “Some of the public spaces we create can be small and intimate – like the vertical face of a building that creates an experience for me as I move through the space. Every project we take and every action we make has the ability to impact that total experience. We need to be aware of the incremental impact of the work that we do.” David Rubin noted that a great street has been described as a place where something happens every walking minute. It can be a monumental sculpture or simply a well-placed bench. Where streets interface with waterways, it’s about all the ways people can enjoy the experience at different rates of speed: walking, jogging, cycling and boating. The bottom line is that all are invited to the space. The intersection of the streetscape with publicly accessible private spaces also offers meaningful opportunities for expressing vitality and equity. The Cummins Plaza in Indianapolis is an example of how interaction at multiple levels, from movable tables and individual chairs, to a harvest table that beckons groups, to an amphitheater-like setting, offers a rich variety

of experiences within the urban throng. Kevin Storm called that, “... a kind of planned complexity,” and recalled Jane Jacobs’ celebration of the intimate, sidewalk ballet, “... that never repeats itself from place to place.”

Streets provide rich experiences and they also provide essential connectivity. Derek Don talked about his work on a complete streets project in St. Louis involving a 3-mile corridor of public realm in a neighborhood where there is very little car ownership. “We asked, ‘What kind of public meeting space do you want?’ And people in the community said, ‘We don’t need that. We meet at the grocery store and church.’” Ultimately the project was about creating safe connectivity. In this case, the public realm came first and the development came afterward. The conversation about the importance of streetscapes led Kevin Osburn to warn fellow designers, “We need to make sure we don’t cede that territory over to the transportation planner and the civil engineers, who design our streets for a single purpose, which is driving from one point to another as fast as possible and not for multiple purposes, which is what we all care about. Streets as part of public space are very important to connectivity, equity and access to jobs and other opportunities.”

## LETTING VITALITY HAPPEN

“We need to think about the things that attract people to urban places. Consider New Orleans. The rules aren’t so formalized, so people can take ownership of public space. I think we can loosen things up a little bit in our work, be more spontaneous, and let the urban systems express themselves.”

**Wes Michaels, Landscape Architect and Principal, Spackman Mossop Michaels**

Programming can be a useful tool for promoting equity by enabling different textures in outdoor space. In some public places like Bryant Park in New York, programming targeting



a diverse constituency is orchestrated all day, every day, and in private/public spaces, such as the Eskenazi Health campus, programming is specifically designed to educate and support healthful public practices. But, as George Roberts pointed out, it's not binary – having either active programmed or passive public space. There is room for spaces engineered to be used in a particular way and those where the design intent can be hidden. He advocated moving towards, "... a focus on amenities over programming, and getting back to Holly Whyte's ideas about connecting people through triangulation in public space." Lourenzo Giple called attention to how people assert their identity in public spaces. "We all want to influence a little bit where we inhabit. You see this when a guy goes up to a chair, moves it less than an inch, and sits in it. It's that ownership piece. I think that's how we need to program spaces – program but leave it open." He described an area in Indianapolis that his firm is working on that will provide civic space designed as a "blank canvas" where the programming is loosely controlled to allow a variety of different activities on the

public streetscape, the private/public Cummins campus, and a new transit center. "It is going to be fantastic to see how all these play with each other," he said. Andrew Knight expressed frustration at the limited opportunities for creating new public space because, as he put it, open space is almost always a derivative of architecture and, "... designers are lucky to get a space downtown that's not parking or driven by the economy. How smart can we be with the little things that are left over?" he asked. "We need to have a recalibration about the role that architecture plays in our cities to help with mobility and interaction." David Rubin pointed to a bright spot on the landscape: tertiary spaces, including former railway yards and demolished highway superstructures now entering the field of play. "These are things that never made the map in the first place," he says. "Now there is value there above what was originally intended and opportunities for new building and new public space... with an incredible range of possibility because tectonics and technology and social science are rife for experimentation."



**The gestures say it all. Roundtable guests were engaged, enthused and expressive.**

## PEOPLE-CENTERED PLACES

“Cultural systems and natural systems are all part of the urban plan. When you add in big data and data systems, we’re entering uncharted waters,” Kevin Storm observed. In city systems, urban design is ideally suited to take on these issues and technology like digital master plans have real import, as does visually monitoring of every aspect of public spaces. “How do we incorporate the technology but not allow the technology to take over the human experience and the pleasure of the urban public realm?” Storm asked. “We have to elbow in as designers to bring the humanist view to the table.” David Rubin had the last word on the role of landscape architects in championing human values in creating vital urban communities. “Speaking to the human dimension is inherent to our discipline and part and parcel of the success of our practices. This is our opportunity to embrace the ideas we talked about today and to lead efforts to support them,” he declared. “Self-identification

in the context of city is, ‘Here I am, even in the cacophony of everything that is happening. I am a player in it.’ Urban vitality means that you can be both same and different, that you can seek camaraderie and individuality, that there is dialog that can take place where I am no longer just the recipient of language but part of the vocalization of what it means to live together. Urban vitality is about a renaissance in cities and inviting people to participate in it. Regardless of how sustainable or beautiful a place is, if it is not loved with the heart and the mind it will not endure.”

# ROUNDTABLE ON URBAN VITALITY

## Professional Participation

### **Derek Don**

*HOK*  
St. Louis, MO

### **Gina Ford**

*Agency Landscape + Planning*  
Cambridge, MA

### **Lourenzo Giple**

*Rottmann Collier Architects*  
Indianapolis, IN

### **Hana Ishikawa**

*site design group ltd.*  
Chicago, IL

### **Andrew Knight**

*MKSK*  
Louisville, KY

### **Emily Mack**

*City of Indianapolis*  
Indianapolis, IN

### **Wes Michaels**

*Spackman Mossop Michaels*  
New Orleans, LA

### **Kevin Osburn**

*Rundell Ernstberger Assoc.*  
Indianapolis, IN

### **George Roberts**

*Quicken Loans*  
Detroit, MI

### **David Rubin**

*DAVID RUBIN Land Collective*  
Philadelphia, PA

### **Lori Singleton**

*SmithGroup*  
Ann Arbor, MI

### **Kevin Storm**

*DC Office of Planning*  
Washington, D.C.

### **Mary Titsworth Chandler**

*Cummins*  
Indianapolis, IN