

Investing in Urban Infrastructure

The 2017 Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence



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Lessons Learned

INVESTING IN URBAN INFRASTRUCTURE: THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT LEADERSHIP

This chapter synthesizes the lessons learned from the 2017 Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence (RBA) cycle. Gleaned from extensive Selection Committee deliberations and countless conversations and observations during our site visits and development of the case studies, this chapter is intended, like those from past award cycles, to provide insight into the complex and difficult process of creating excellent urban places.

Collectively, these reflections reveal the evolution of urban development in America and highlight several recurring themes among RBA winners over the past 30 years: the value of vision and leadership, the impact of collaborative partnerships, the importance of engaging and empowering people and communities, the need to anchor projects in place, and the power of design. The 2017 medalists also underscore the essential role of visionary government leadership and strategic public investment in urban infrastructure, especially as cities navigate dramatic economic, environmental, and social changes in the twenty-first century.

Christenson Photography for WRT



SteelStacks Arts & Cultural Campus transformed a former mill into a twenty-first century civic commons.

Urban Infrastructure in the Twenty-first Century

The 2017 cycle of the RBA took place in an environment of intense political turmoil following the 2016 presidential election. While politics, per se, were not the focus of the Selection Committee's discussions, the members' sensitivity to the potential impacts of the new administration's priorities and policies on urban affairs was unmistakable.

Infrastructure was a "hot" topic in 2017 as the new administration contemplated a massive infrastructure investment program which, at the time of writing, had not been implemented or received much legislative consideration. Such investment, however, is badly needed and long overdue. The Infrastructure Report Card (infrastructure-reportcard.org) produced by the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) assesses US infrastructure conditions and needs every four years. In its 2017 report, ASCE gave America's infrastructure a D+, commenting that "deteriorating infrastructure is impeding our ability to compete in the thriving global economy, and

Kronberg Wall Architects



Iberville Offsite Rehabs I & II contributes to the continued rebuilding of New Orleans.

Anton Grassl



The Bruce C. Bolling Municipal Building offers a new, inclusive model for public buildings in Boston.

improvements are necessary to ensure our country is built for the future.” As the Selection Committee considered the role of infrastructure in our cities, members agreed upon a more comprehensive definition of “urban infrastructure” that goes far beyond bridges, roads, transportation, dams, and utility systems, important as they are, to include arts and cultural facilities, business and manufacturing facilities, educational institutions, housing, municipal buildings and services, and parks and public spaces. Combined, these form the very fabric of our communities and are essential to building and sustaining equitable, healthy, and socioeconomically vibrant cities.

In their choices and remarks about the medalists, the committee members sought to highlight the vital role of government leadership and investment in urban infrastructure as a means of addressing the critical issues facing American cities. In marked contrast to 30 years ago when the RBA was founded and many cities were struggling with population loss and disinvestment, today’s urban renaissance has brought increased attention, opportunities, and investment to cities. However, it also has coincided with and contributed to new challenges, including climate change, rapidly evolving technology, growing economic and social disparity, and aging and deteriorating infrastructure that is inadequate for current—let alone future—needs. Cities are grappling with these and other challenges as federal support for urban programs is diminishing, requiring creative and innovative solutions and financing to tackle big issues. Fortunately, in the midst of increasing bureaucratic dysfunction and paralysis in Washington, DC, leadership from local governments and civic organizations offers inspiration and hope.

The five 2017 RBA medalists provide powerful examples of how local leadership and investment in urban infrastructure build and strengthen communities, catalyze economic development, and inspire civic pride. This is amply demonstrated by their accomplishments: the transformation of a former industrial plant into an arts and entertainment district, a new mixed-use municipal building housing public school headquarters, the reclamation of underutilized riverfront for a new park, the rehabilitation of historic houses into affordable housing, and the creation of cleantech incubator. Through these accomplishments and the steps taken to achieve

them, the medalists highlight the role of aspiration and ambition in tackling big issues and projects, the importance of engaging people and embracing communities in the process of creating inclusive places that bring us together, and the benefit of restoring and renewing the places and communities we value.

Civic Vision

At their best, city governments can function as powerful visionaries and stewards of the urban environment, investing in and maintaining public realm and infrastructure improvements for the public good. Often this happens in partnership with local businesses and civic organizations that engage the community and help to advance and implement the vision. When done well, this attracts additional investment via increased population and business, often yielding a substantial return on investment.

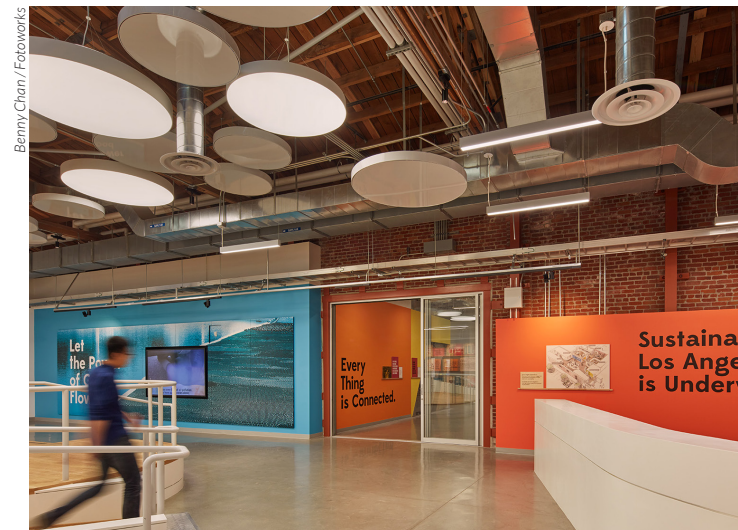
American cities have a long history of sponsoring and implementing ambitious and bold visions for the future. The City Beautiful movement of the late 1800s and early 1900s powerfully influenced the development of cities like Buffalo, Chicago, and Washington, DC, through plans developed by the likes of Daniel Burnham and Frederick Law Olmstead. Burnham's 1909 *Plan of Chicago* was pivotal in defining the city's pattern of growth and identity as an architectural destination and continues to inform and influence new development, including the Chicago Riverwalk. Falls Park on the Reedy (2015 RBA Silver Medalist) in Greenville, South Carolina is the realization of a vital new civic amenity anchored by the river in a manner first envisioned in a plan commissioned by the city in 1907.

Forward-looking visions were the basis for each of this cycle's winning projects. Such initiatives are often born during periods of significant social and economic change, such as at the dawn of the twentieth century and our present time. Two of the 2017 winners, SteelStacks Arts & Cultural Campus and the Bruce C. Bolling Municipal Building—a new civic commons and municipal facility, respectively—were expressly envisioned as “twenty-first century” places. The developers of Chicago Riverwalk Phase 2 & 3, Iberville Offsite Rehabs I & II, and La Kretz Innovation Campus + Arts District Park incorporated contemporary architecture practices and



©Christian Phillips Photography

Chicago Riverwalk Phases 2 & 3 is part of the city's continued investment in the public realm.



Benny Chan / Fotoworks

La Kretz Innovation Campus + Arts District Park showcases Los Angeles' cleantech leadership.

technologies that support ecological health, environmental sustainability, and the innovation economy to reimagine and transform empty riverfront arcades, abandoned and dilapidated housing, and vacant warehouses into modern places for recreation, living, and business development.

Each of the five 2017 medalists also helps to advance a broader civic agenda. SteelStacks is one of the first steps in an extensive, ongoing collaborative effort by the Bethlehem community to redevelop the site of the former steel mill that long dominated the city's economy and skyline. The Bolling Building is part of the City of Boston's concerted effort to reinvest in its neighborhoods and create a new, inclusive model for municipal development. Chicago Riverwalk not only fulfilled an element of Burnham's 1909 plan but supports the City of Chicago's *Building on Burnham* and the Metropolitan Planning Council's *Our Great Rivers* initiatives to use the rivers to connect and enhance the communities along their banks. La Kretz Innovation Campus + Arts District Park is the City of Los Angeles' investment in infrastructure that showcases and positions the city as a cleantech leader and promotes innovation in that industry. Iberville contributes to the continued rebuilding of New Orleans in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina while helping to maintain the city's architectural, cultural, and economic diversity.

Each medalist also demonstrates extraordinary aspiration to create a new kind of place that had never existed before. In Bethlehem, local leaders, inspired by a visit to the Ruhr Valley in Germany, set out to redevelop a historic steel plant into a cultural campus and catalyst for community revitalization. The City of Boston took a property with substantial historic and community significance that had languished for years and created a contemporary municipal facility that integrates historic building facades with new community space while taking advantage of adjacency to a regional transportation hub. The City of Chicago expanded on Burnham's vision to reclaim its riverfront for public access, ecological restoration, and economic benefit. In New Orleans, Redmellon Restoration & Development saw the potential to preserve historic housing while integrating sustainable design features and renting the units to low-income residents, an all-too-rare combination supporting a population that does not usually benefit from

these resources. The City of Los Angeles, under two mayors, envisioned La Kretz as the anchor for a proposed "Cleantech Corridor" that would transform a four-mile swath of underutilized warehouses immediately east of downtown into a hub for cleantech companies supporting the city's emerging green economy.

Local Government Leadership

Each of the 2017 medalists could only have been realized by a commitment of substantial government leadership and financial support, often spanning multiple mayoral administrations and incorporating multiple agendas. In addition to the support of elected leaders, each project had the full support of key city staff and agencies, which helped to provide continuity across administrations.

- SteelStacks was spearheaded by the Redevelopment Authority of the City of Bethlehem and realized over two successive mayoral administrations.
- In many ways, Boston's Bolling Building is Mayor Thomas Menino's legacy project, reflecting his commitment to turning around a neighborhood he had represented on the city council, although he passed away before it could be completed. The building also bears the stamp of his successor, Mayor Martin Walsh, who not only recognized the importance of the project and saw it through its completion, but also expanded the vision to include the Roxbury Innovation Center, a commitment to leasing retail space to locally owned businesses, and continued engagement with the community to address concerns about displacement resulting from new development.
- Riverwalk was developed by City of Chicago and also spanned two mayoral administrations. Planning was initiated under Mayor Richard M. Daley while the project was implemented under Mayor Rahm Emanuel, who used his federal government connections to find funding.

- La Kretz Innovation Campus + Arts District Park was a joint initiative between the City of Los Angeles and its Department of Water and Power (LADWP), the nation's largest public utility. It was initiated by Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa as part of his environmental and employment programs and implemented under Mayor Eric Garcetti. Civic leadership extended to the Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA-LA); however, when that agency was dissolved as part of a statewide shake-up, LADWP stepped in to assume the lead, with the support of the mayor and the area's city council representative. Without this coordinated support, the project most likely would have been abandoned.
- Although initiated by a private developer, Iberville could not have happened without support from the City of New Orleans, the Housing Authority of New Orleans, and the New Orleans Redevelopment Authority.

Public Investment and Leveraging of Private Funds

All of the winning projects were made possible by tapping into a combination of local, state, and federal funding sources, many of which encourage or rely on mobilizing private investment. For each project, assembling the financing required navigating the challenges of what were in some cases unfamiliar systems with complex requirements, as well as leveraging personal connections and relationships for assistance and expertise to secure private financing and local matching funds.

- SteelStacks was funded using Tax Increment Financing, state and county sources (Pennsylvania Revitalization Capital Assistance Program grant funds), New Market Tax Credits, and shared gaming revenue from the casino.
- La Kretz, which lost a key funding source during development due to dissolution of a state-wide program, was financed with grants from the US Departments of Commerce, Energy, and HUD and City of Los Angeles bonds and grants. Public funding including LADWP was supplemented by an in-kind contribution from a private donor.

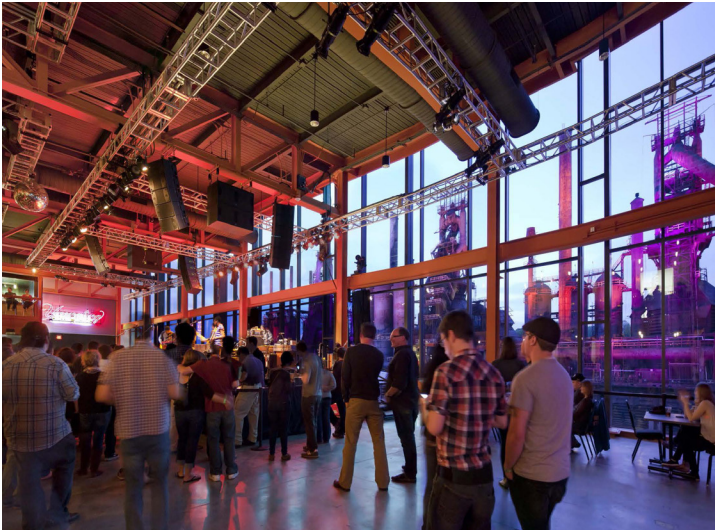
- The City of Chicago tapped local, state, and federal funds including Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act financing, a highly innovative use of funds typically used for roads and other types of transportation projects rather than a pedestrian pathway along a navigable river.
- The City of Boston used federal New Market Tax Credits for the first time to help finance the development of the Bolling Building, one of the first municipal buildings funded through the national program.
- Iberville was largely funded using Low Income Housing Tax Credits that complemented and leveraged existing federal investment in the community via HUD's HOPE VI and Choice Neighborhoods programs. Additional support was provided by rental subsidies from HUD and the City of New Orleans and Prudential's Investment Impact Unit. The developer also chose to meet Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Historic Rehabilitation in order to qualify for historic tax credit financing, although this source wasn't utilized until a subsequent phase.

Civic Aspiration and Ambition

Excellent projects are born from the aspiration to achieve something of significance combined with sufficient ambition and commitment to see them through, generally over extended periods of time while encountering and overcoming many obstacles. Leadership must provide not only bold vision but also follow-through and perseverance to see projects into implementation. In four of the projects—SteelStacks, the Bolling Building, Chicago Riverwalk, and La Kretz—this leadership and vision came from local governmental entities in partnership with community organizations. For Iberville, the developer took the lead, enlisting the support of governmental agencies, without which the project would not have been possible.

- SteelStacks, the Selection Committee noted, illustrates “the importance of seeing something positive come out of loss,” offering a valuable model for other older industrial cities and rust belt communities.

Paul Warchol, Courtesy of Spillman Farmer Architects



SteelStacks events draw thousands to the former mill site.

© Christian Phillips Photography



The Riverwalk has become a popular waterfront destination in downtown Chicago.

- The Bolling Building offers a “great example of civic leadership” and reinforces the notion that “strategic public action can stimulate private development” in a neighborhood that had suffered greatly from neglect and disinvestment and multiple failed attempts at redevelopment.
- Chicago's Riverwalk is “ambitious and bold...a marvelous example of a civic project” that demonstrates the city's “continued commitment to the tradition of civic investment in the public realm and excellence in infrastructure.”
- Recognized as one of the premier cleantech programs in the world, La Kretz supports development of the cleantech industry, helping to promote and build the twenty-first century economy and illustrating a “different way for a city to participate in economic development.”
- Iberville's attention to excellence in design, preservation, and sustainability offers a model to “push the conversation in other cities” and “re-imagine the future of public housing.”

Engaging and Embracing Community

These outstanding projects created places that foster interaction, community building, and civic pride. They are inclusive, providing opportunities for people to come together and interact with each other, and they enhance quality of life by offering access to affordable housing, arts and culture, the innovation economy, municipal services, and natural resources and recreation. Indeed, four of the medalists—SteelStacks, Bolling Building, Chicago Riverwalk, and La Kretz—created significant new public gathering spaces. The design of each project reflects its unique history, culture, and aspirations, making meaningful connections to the community's past, present, and future. Projects that succeed in doing this are, in turn, embraced and valued by the community.

- SteelStacks created a new civic commons with a tremendous entertainment and cultural draw in a place once inaccessible to all but those who worked at the mill. The project embraces the history of

the city and the mill, celebrating and honoring the site's industrial heritage and sharing the stories of the steelworkers through interpretative features and programs, and offers thousands of arts and performance events that attract local and regional audiences.

- The Bolling Building offers a “place to go rather than a place to go through.” By incorporating community gathering space and dramatically improving access to services by putting “Boston Public Schools in the heart of the neighborhood,” the building brings “centralized public functions out into the community.”
- Chicago's Riverwalk restores access to the river and shifts the center of gravity of downtown, creating a “symbol of the re-emergence of place” while building on Burnham's planning legacy and the city's bold architectural heritage. Its multiple activity “rooms” attract a diversity of users.
- La Kretz brings together cleantech innovators, entrepreneurs, and university research centers from around the city and the region in a supportive “village” that includes an advanced prototyping center. The addition of Arts District Park provides much-needed open space in the heart of the neighborhood.
- Iberville preserves New Orleans' unique cultural and socio-economic diversity by restoring historic homes for low-income residents, those most threatened by displacement from the renewed interest and investment in the city.
- La Kretz's cleantech incubator and Bolling's Roxbury Innovation Center both seek to increase diversity by providing access to the innovation economy for people who have traditionally been marginalized.

Restoring and Renewing Places and Communities

The RBA regularly recognizes projects that renew places and communities by restoring and revitalizing otherwise degraded, deteriorated, or overlooked buildings and sites. These projects draw upon the unique embodied energy



La Kretz is a creative hub for Los Angeles's cleantech industry.



Iberville preserves New Orleans' distinctive architecture, culture, and socioeconomic diversity.

of each place—its rich cultural and social narrative and architectural heritage—while improving, enhancing, and positioning it for continued and/or new uses. This may follow the loss of a valuable asset such as the key industry and major economic engine in Bethlehem, the slow deterioration of a neighborhood center like Boston’s Dudley Square, or a major disaster such as Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans. It can also result from the desire to realize the untapped potential of an underutilized asset such as the Chicago riverfront or Los Angeles’ warehouse district. In either case, these projects, when born out of respect for and celebration of the cultural and physical fabric of the community and focused on current and future opportunities and needs, can serve as a catalyst for positive change and development. Each of the 2017 medalists manages to achieve this delicate balance.

- SteelStacks preserved and repurposed striking, large-scale remnants of Bethlehem’s industrial history, demonstrating to members of the devastated community that their lives and work matter while creating a spectacular venue for contemporary art and performance.
- The Bolling Building “restored the center of the community that once was a beacon and an icon” but had fallen into a very long stretch of decline and disinvestment. The design respectfully integrates the facade of a neighborhood landmark and two adjacent buildings into a contemporary facility.
- Chicago’s Riverwalk builds on the legacy of Burnham’s *Plan of Chicago* and reclaims the riverfront, illustrating the city’s continued commitment to investment in public infrastructure and transforming the riverfront into a magnet for residents and tourists.
- Iberville demonstrates the “value of historic preservation as an economic development tool,” renovating “abandoned and blighted buildings while preserving historic charm and delivering them specifically to low-income people.”
- La Kretz symbolizes the City of Los Angeles’ efforts to position itself as a cleantech leader and sustainable urban center. Drawing upon its

manufacturing legacy and repurposing old warehouse buildings, the campus incubates new businesses and technologies that contribute to the city’s future.

CREATING AND SUSTAINING URBAN EXCELLENCE

All over America, cities are investing in urban infrastructure, many examples of which have garnered the Rudy Bruner Award over the past 30 years. While the 2017 winners vary in approach and scale, they share a commitment to tackling the big urban challenges of our time: affordable housing, community regeneration, socioeconomic equity, climate change and environmental sustainability, reclamation of industrial and waterfront land, and adapting to changes in technology. Regardless of their focus, the projects also demonstrate the critical role of public leadership and investment in fostering hope and change. They illustrate how visionary leaders can inspire, engage, and empower their communities to imagine and realize projects that reflect their aspirations and collective potential.

While federal leadership and investment in urban development will be critical to the future of our cities, it is not enough on its own. As Simeon Bruner observed in his preface to the inaugural publication of the RBA, “A city’s vitality cannot depend on one person’s vision of urban development. Real vigor requires the continuing infusion of fresh ideas”—ideas like those embodied in these projects.