

Silver Medal Winner
Congo Street Initiative
Dallas, Texas



Photos by Noe Medrano & buildingcommunity WORKSHOP

This is an expert from:

Inspiring Change

The 2013 Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence



BRUNER FOUNDATION, INC.

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Overview

*Submitted by: buildingcommunityWORKSHOP
Completed: 2012
Total Development Cost: \$975,000*

Congo Street Initiative involves the renovation/reconstruction of five houses and construction of a sixth, in collaboration with residents, along a rebuilt one-block long street in the East Dallas community of Jubilee Park.

The idea for the project emerged from a desire to stabilize home ownership for the families living in the houses, many of which had occupied their homes for generations. The houses, modest one-story, 600 square foot frame structures built in the 1920's, were significantly deteriorated. The entire street had been targeted for demolition and redevelopment in plans developed by Jubilee Park Community Development Corporation and adopted by the City of Dallas.

“THE PROJECT PROVIDES A DIFFERENT WAY OF THINKING ABOUT COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, INCORPORATING EDUCATION AND PARTICIPATION IN A MEANINGFUL WAY.” —2013 Selection Committee

buildingcommunityWORKSHOP (bcWORKSHOP), a Dallas-based non-profit community design center, began working with residents in 2008, exploring approaches that would enable them to remain in place without undue financial burden. Together with residents, the City, corporate and nonprofit partners in the Dallas community, they crafted an alternative strategy for “redevelopment” that focused on rebuilding the existing homes and street infrastructure over the next five years, without displacing a single resident.

Residents worked together with staff from bcWORKSHOP and volunteers from the community to renovate or reconstruct each home one at a time, reusing existing materials and maintaining the small footprints and front porches. A new “Holding House” was constructed on an empty lot donated by one of the residents and served as a temporary residence for each family, in turn, as its own house was being renovated, allowing them to remain on the street during the process.

All six houses have been certified Leadership in Energy Efficiency and Design (LEED) for Homes Gold or Platinum by the US Green Building Council. The homes incorporate solar panels and solar thermal systems and bcWORKSHOP staff worked with residents to help them understand and reduce energy consumption.

Congo Street itself was rebuilt by the City of Dallas with design support from bcWORKSHOP, and incorporates permeable pavement along with storm water management, retention and bio filtration. Now

recognized as Dallas’ first “green street,” the project has inspired the current mayoral administration to consider applying the approach to other streets in the city. Congo Street has garnered local and national awards and sparked new investment in Jubilee and the adjoining neighborhood of Dolphin Heights.

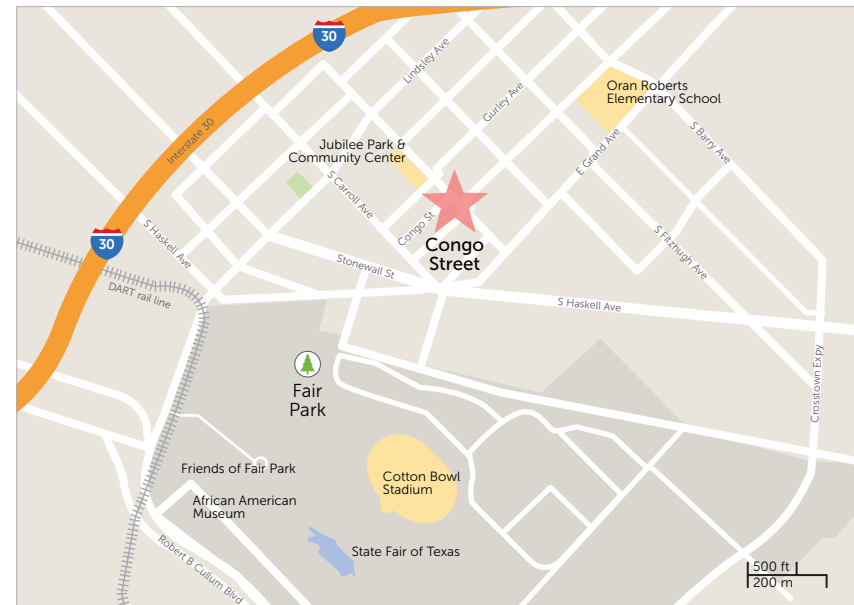
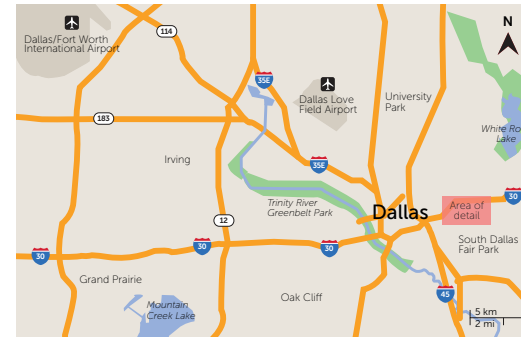


Photos by Noe Medrano & buildingcommunity WORKSHOP



Project-at-a-Glance

- Six adjacent houses on a one-block long street in Dallas, Texas.
- The rehabilitation and expansion of five existing, owner-occupied homes – the designs of which were individually tailored for and in collaboration with resident families to meet their needs while maintaining the vernacular character of the street – and the construction of a new “Holding House” that provided temporary housing for each family while its own home was being rebuilt, so that no residents were displaced during the process.
- Reconstruction of Congo Street as Dallas’ first public “green street” incorporating permeable paving and landscaped bio-swales in the public right-of-way while preserving its role as a social space for the community.
- A collaborative, community-based approach that involved existing homeowners, architecture and engineering students, and volunteers in the design and deconstruction/construction of the six houses and re-engineering of the street.



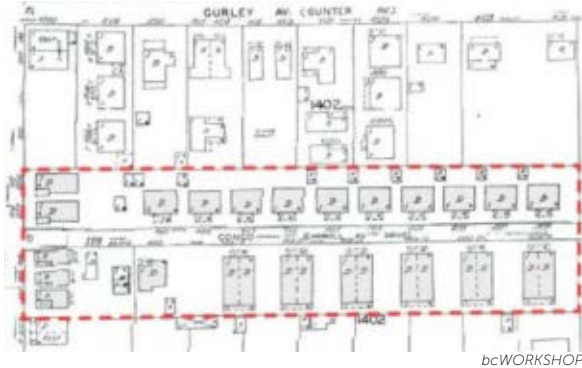




Project Goals

- Disrupt the systemic inequality threatening the residents of Congo Street
- Improve the livelihood and housing conditions of the residents without displacing any resident in the process
- Maintain the social fabric of the community
- Enhance the quality and energy efficiency of the housing while maintaining affordability
- Improve the street in a manner that is consistent with its history, culture, and character
- Create trustworthy relationships with the families in order to serve and empower them
- Create a viable model than can be reproduced

Chronology



1890 City of Dallas annexes East Dallas.

1920s Carroll Drive develops as residential street.

1933 City of Dallas changes name from Carroll Drive to Congo Street in preparation for the Texas Centennial at Fair Park.

1970s Jubilee Park neighborhood begins to decline due to Ford manufacturing plant closing.

1992 Family of Congo Street landowner deeds six homes/lots to multigenerational renters/residents.

1997 As part of the Silver Jubilee celebration for St. Michael and All Angels Episcopal Church, community leader Walt Humann establishes a neighborhood revitalization effort to turn around the neighborhood, founding Jubilee Park and Community Center.

2004 Jubilee Park and Community Center hires planning consultant (Antonio Di Mambro) to develop a neighborhood revitalization strategy, which includes community residents in planning efforts through engagement.

2005 Dallas architect Brent Brown founds bcWORKSHOP as a donor-advised fund of Dallas Community Fund with two gifts totaling \$35,000.

2007 T. Boone Pickens funds new community center, park and neighborhood police station with \$6 million gift to Jubilee Park and Community Center Corporation (JPCCC).

Brent Brown/Brown Architects receives commission to design community center and incorporates six-month community engagement as part of the design process; community engagement is under bcWORKSHOP project label.

During community engagement sessions, Brown meets Congo Street residents Ella Garrett, Vivian Garrett and Frankie Boulden.

2008 Spring: Brown teaches a design studio as an Adjunct Professor at University of Texas (UTA)-Arlington School of Architecture. Studio researches and visits two neighborhoods for selection as studio project area – Trinity Heights and Jubilee Park – with the class voting to engage work in Jubilee Park.



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UTA students conduct a project to say "hello" to the neighborhood and meet Jubilee residents. Four different community strategies are developed, one of which engages Congo Street residents and incorporates a potential "Transitional House" as a model for street revitalization.

bcWORKSHOP incorporates as a Texas Non-profit Corporation and applies for IRS 501(c)3 status in order to receive donation of lot at 4537 Congo Street.

Fred Bowie, a Congo Street homeowner, gifts 4537 Congo Street property to bcWORKSHOP for construction of the Transitional House.

Summer: Transitional House is re-designed based on resident feedback and renamed the Holding House. The house is funded by a \$38,000 grant from The Real Estate Council Foundation and completed by end of summer.

Fall/Winter: Frankie Boulden and her daughter Erica move into the Holding House while reconstruction begins on their home (4529 Congo Street).

Holding House receives Dallas AIA Excellence in Community Design and Excellence in Sustainable Design Awards.

2009 Spring: Frankie Boulden's Home (4529 Congo Street) is completed.

The Holding House (4537 Congo Street) receives LEED Gold certification.

Vernessia Garrett and family move into the Holding House as construction begins on her home (4523 Congo), funded by a \$40,000 grant from The Real Estate Council Associate Leadership Council (ALC), who also volunteer in the construction of the home.

bcWORKSHOP receives IRS 501c-3 status.

Vernessia Garrett's home is completed.

Brown teaches a design studio as an Adjunct Professor at UTA. The first investigation includes the exploration and development of proposals for the renovation of the street infrastructure. These proposals are the result of extensive resident input and review including a final pin-up where key elements are selected by the residents. The second studio project included the programming and design of Pat and Earnest Garrett's home (4525 Congo). Design is approved in May and Pat and Earnest Garrett move into the Holding House.

Chronology *continued*



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City of Dallas Housing Department commits \$100,000 to 4525, 4539, and 4533 Congo Street.

Summer: The Meadows Foundation commits \$142,000 to the Congo Street homes. An additional \$25,000 is donated by an anonymous individual.

4525 Congo St is rebuilt. Students from UTA are given AmeriCorps positions.

Four bcFELLOWS (funded through AmeriCorps) refine the conceptual design of the street improvements.

Fall: Fred Bowie moves into the Holding House as renovations begin on his home (4539 Congo)

2010 January: 4529 Congo Street receives LEED Platinum certification

Spring: Mr. Bowie's home renovations are complete.

Jubilee Park and Community Center opens.

A team of investors, led by Robert Camacho, purchase and rehabilitate the rental duplexes on the south side of Congo Street.

Summer: Ella Garrett and family move into the Holding House as construction on their home begins (4533 Congo), funded in part by an individual donation of \$30,000.

Southern Methodist University Lyle School of Engineering Students provides technical support for the design of the street improvements.

bcWORKSHOP engaged by the City of Dallas to design senior housing project adjacent to Congo Street homes on Gurley Avenue.

Ella Garrett's home is completed.

Fall: Sue Pope Foundation donates \$250,000 to Patriot Solar Power, a subsidiary of a partner group. bcWORKSHOP is asked to manage a portion of the grant for use on Congo Street. ONCOR Alternative Energy Rebate provides an additional \$25,000 towards the installation of solar arrays on the Congo Street homes over the next year as a pilot program through Patriot Solar Power.

Winter: Holding House is occupied by bcWORKSHOP staff after the final home renovation/reconstruction is completed.

Project Description

Congo Street Initiative is the renovation/construction of five owner-occupied houses and construction of a sixth, in collaboration with residents, along a rebuilt one-block long street on the east side of Dallas, Texas. Sponsored by the nonprofit buildingcommunityWORKSHOP, the project entailed a collaborative, community-based approach that involved existing homeowners, architecture and engineering students, and volunteers in the design and construction of the six LEED-certified houses and re-engineering of Dallas' first public green street. The construction of a new house, known as the "holding house," provided temporary housing so that no residents were displaced during the process.

CONTEXT

Dallas

Dallas was founded as a trading post by John Neely Bryan in 1841 on the shores of the Trinity River in north central Texas. Dallas quickly grew into a center for commerce, initially serving the surrounding rural communities and later, with the arrival of the Houston and Texas Central Railroad in 1872 and Texas and Pacific in 1873, growing into a regional shipping point for raw materials like grain and cotton.

Business and manufacturing dominated Dallas' economy during the latter part of the nineteenth century. The discovery of oil in 1930 and the development of the East Texas Oil field – "the largest petroleum deposit on earth at the time" – further fueled the Dallas' growth as it became the financial and technical center of oil industry. Business expanded with the introduction of aviation and development of Love Field Airport during the early twentieth century, and again with the opening of Dallas Fort-Worth International Airport northwest of the



Edwin J. Foscoe Map Library, Central University Libraries, Southern Methodist University

1933 aerial view of Dallas

city in 1973. By the end of the twentieth century, Dallas was home to numerous corporate headquarters, serving as a hub for transportation, finance, industry and technology, which continue to drive the economy.

The 1963 assassination of President John F. Kennedy was a defining moment for the City of Dallas and the nation. The Dealey Plaza National Historic Landmark District and Sixth Floor Museum commemorate the event, serving platforms for collective remembrance and inspiration.

Like many Southern cities, racial segregation has been a factor in the development of the city and its neighborhoods. Texas seceded from the Union in 1861 and after the Civil War it struggled through reconstruction. The Ku Klux Klan became a dominant presence in the city in the 1920's, holding parades and mass swearing-in of new members in Dallas' Fair Park. Dallas remained a segregated city until 1961 and school integration progressed slowly. However, the demographics are changing. According to a 2010 Wall Street Journal article (*Segregation Hits Historic Lows*) "Dallas Fort-Worth and Houston were the country's least segregated large cities," although pockets of segregation persist, particularly in the lower-income neighborhoods surrounding the city's core.

In 2013 Dallas was the ninth largest city and fourth largest metropolitan area in the United States. The city covers approximately 343 square miles and has a population 1.2 million people. The City is part of the Dallas–Fort Worth–Arlington Metropolitan Statistical Area, which encompasses 12 counties and was home to an estimated 6.5 million people in 2011.

In Dallas cheap land, convenient highway access, and pro-growth land-use policies have contributed to significant physical sprawl. The suburban development that began after World War II exploded following the opening of Dallas Fort-Worth International Airport, which precipitated a real estate development boom that gave rise to the city's current downtown skyline, replacing much of the historic core. It also led to the development and growth of additional, outlying communities that pulled more residents away from older neighborhoods.

There are indications that attitudes in Dallas towards the urban core may be changing. As in many American cities, there is renewed interest in downtown and investment in new housing, cultural attractions, and the Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART) light rail system. There is also increased attention to planning. In 2009 the Dallas CityDesign Studio opened, funded through a grant to the City from the Trinity Trust and housed within City Hall. The Studio, directed by bcWORKSHOP's Brent Brown, is raising awareness about urban design in Dallas through public events, design review and projects.

The pioneering spirit and "can do" attitude that defined Dallas' early days remain dominant in the City's culture, which values entrepreneurship and risk-taking, and are central themes in the Congo Street Initiative story.

East Dallas and Jubilee Park

The Congo Street Initiative is located in Jubilee Park, a neighborhood located in East Dallas. East Dallas emerged as a result of the routing of the Houston & Texas Central Railroad through North Texas in 1872. The community was incorporated as an independent town in 1882 and annexed by Dallas in 1890, making Dallas the most populous city

in Texas. New neighborhoods developed in East Dallas throughout the early 20th century as streetcar lines pushed the city outwards. Today the area is home to a collection of neighborhoods that are diverse in race, income and urban fabric – ranging from mansions along Swiss Avenue to modest craftsman bungalows on Mount Auburn Avenue. Over time, both East Dallas and Jubilee Park have evolved in conjunction with economic, social and physical changes in the neighborhood and Dallas.

Development in the area began with the arrival of two railroads in the 1870's, with the majority of growth occurring in the 1900's to 1930's. Ford operated an auto assembly plant on East Grand Avenue from 1925 to 1970. East Dallas has been the site of the State Fair of Texas since 1886. In 1936 the city of Dallas hosted the Texas Centennial Exposition, building a large complex of buildings in East Dallas now known as Fair Park that comprise the city's first National Register Historic District. The construction of Interstate Highway 30 in the 1950's, the closure of the Ford Plant in 1970's and increased crime in the 1980's contributed to white flight, unemployment and disinvestment in the community.

Jubilee Park, a 62-block neighborhood in East Dallas, was settled in the late 19th-century. The neighborhood is located two miles from city center and three blocks from Texas State Fair Grounds, and is bounded on the south by the Texas State Fair Grounds and the Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART) rail line, Interstate 30 to the north and west, and East Grand Avenue. The majority of homes in the neighborhood are modest, one-story frame structures dating from the early 1900's to the present. More recently constructed, one-story homes developed by the City of Dallas, Habitat for Humanity and a local church are scattered throughout the neighborhood.



Fair Park (top), an example of a typical older home and street (middle), more recently constructed house (bottom)



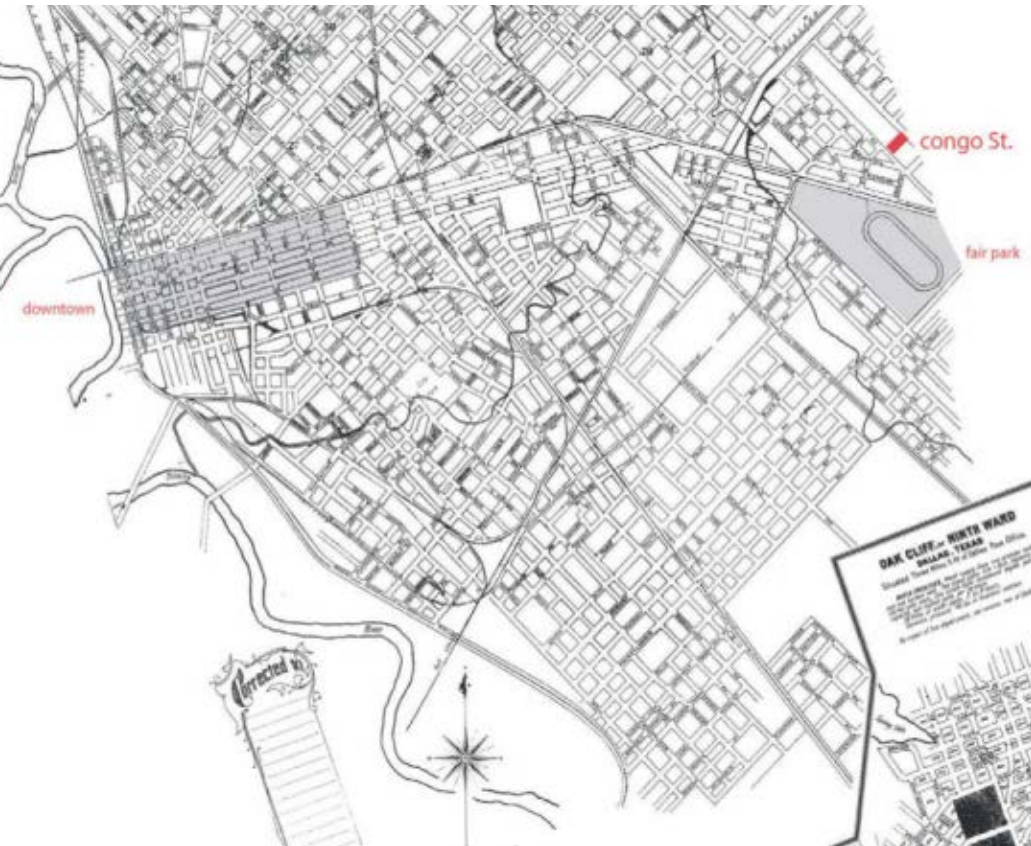
David's Place (top) T. Boone Pickens Community Center

According to demographic information supplied by bcWORKSHOP, in 2013 Jubilee Park was home to 1,488 residents, with a median age of 26.6 years. The community is racially diverse – 38% White, 38% Other, 17% Black, and 7% American Indian, Asian or more than two races (the majority of the latter is of Hispanic origin). There were 302

families, with an average household size of 3.97. In 2013 the median household income was \$19,920, compared to \$39,172 for all of Dallas. In 2013 the community had 450 dwelling units, 41% of which were owner-occupied, 42% rental, and 17% vacant. The median home value is \$72,945, compared to \$137,595 for Dallas.

The area immediately surrounding Congo Street contains a number of newly built community-serving facilities, including the T. Boone Pickens Community Center and fenced community park, developed by Jubilee Park & Community Center. Other nearby amenities, also developed by Jubilee, include a community resource center and police station; David's Place, which provides early childhood education; and Gurley Place, a 24-unit complex of senior housing. A new facility for Oran M. Roberts Elementary School, part of the Dallas Independent School District, opened for the 2013-2014 school year.

Jubilee Park & Community Center was founded in 1997 by members of Saint Michael and All Angels Episcopal Church in conjunction with the church's 50th anniversary. During this celebration the neighborhood was renamed "Jubilee Park." Today it is a community and social service organization that provides education, housing, meals and other programs to support residents in East Dallas communities, although the majority of the members and live in North Dallas. Jubilee Park and Community Center Corporation (JPCCC) has acted as a developer in the neighborhood, building community service facilities and investing \$15 million in property acquisition and construction of new homes in partnership with Dallas City Homes, Habitat for Humanity and The Meadows Foundation. According to several sources, board member Walt Humann was a "driving force" behind Jubilee's development efforts in the community.



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Congo Street

Congo Street is a one-block long, 19-foot wide street comprised of one-story wood frame houses built in the 1920s. Initially known as Carroll Avenue, the street was renamed "Congo Street" in 1933 – reportedly to deter whites and other Texas Centennial and Fair Park visitors from venturing into the area – a blunt reminder of the segregation that existed at the time. It is considered by some to be a historic line of demarcation separating the African American and Anglo communities in the neighborhood.

The houses had for many years been owned by Topletz and GW Works, established real-estate businesses in Dallas, which control rental properties throughout the community. After the death of a member of the GW Works family, the heirs elected in the 1992 to deed several adjoining and deteriorating properties on north side of the street for \$10 each to the families living in the houses, most of whom are the children and grandchildren of former renters.

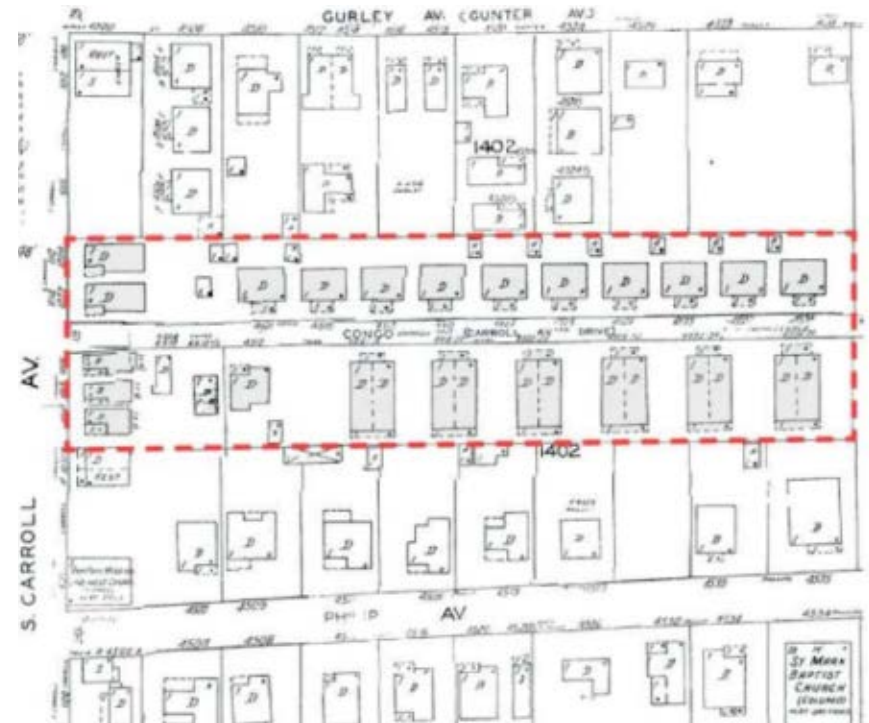


1905 Sanborn map illustrating Congo Street in relation to downtown Dallas, a neighboring house (bottom right)

The original buildings on the street each contained one or two units, each with approximately 600 square feet of living space. At the time of the transfer of title, all had been neglected for decades, suffering from leaky roofs, crumbling front porches, gaps and holes in the walls, windows and doors that didn't close properly, and outdated or absent plumbing and wiring.

Congo Street itself had also been neglected and not improved in over 40 years. The width of the paved surface ranged from 10- to 18-feet, in some places less than half the size of the typical 26-foot wide Dallas street, and looks more like an alley. The street contains one of the lowest elevations in the neighborhood, and flooded frequently due to an antiquated storm sewer, with water occasionally entering homes.

Congo Street and the houses were slated for demolition and redevelopment in a plan sponsored by JPCCC and adopted by the City of Dallas. Plans called for tearing down the houses and consolidating the lots.



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Clockwise from top: 1924 Sanborn map illustrating Carroll Drive (revised in 1952 with current street name), views along Congo Street

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The revival of Congo Street was made possible by buildingcommunityWORKSHOP (bcWORKSHOP), which was founded in 2005 by Dallas architect Brent A Brown. At the time, Brown had a private architectural practice (which he since closed in 2009) and was an adjunct faculty member and lecturer for the School of Architecture at University of Texas Arlington. The WORKSHOP was initially established in 2007 as a donor advised fund of the Dallas Community Fund with two gifts of \$35,000. It was incorporated into an independent 501(c)3 in 2008.

According to its mission statement, "The buildingcommunityWORKSHOP is a Dallas based nonprofit community design center seeking to improve the livability and viability of communities through the practice of thoughtful design and making. We enrich the lives of citizens by bringing design thinking to areas of our city where resources are most scarce. To do so, the bcWORKSHOP recognizes that it must first understand the social, economic, and environmental issues facing a community before beginning work."

bcWORKSHOP has expanded rapidly since its inception. In 2013 the organization operated three offices with a combined staff of 30. In 2009 bcWORKSHOP was instrumental in helping to establish the CityDesign Studio through a partnership and grant to the City of Dallas from the Trinity Trust Foundation, funded with a \$2 million gift from Deedie and Rusty Rose and a five-year contract with the City of Dallas. Housed within City Hall, the purpose of the studio is "to elevate the design consciousness and culture of Dallas, while working to balance social, economic, environmental and design sustainability towards enhancing livability of all Dallas residents."

In 2011 bcWORKSHOP established an office in the Rio Grande Valley in south Texas and in 2013 an office in Houston.

Current funding for the workshop and its projects is derived from a mix of public and private sources, including individual gifts, foundation grants and corporate contributions. Additional support has come through the form of service partnerships with AmeriCorps and local organizations.

Known as bcFELLOWS, the service program has engaged over 100 participants in work with bcWORKSHOP. Between 2007 and 2009, more than 80 individuals were supported through a partnership with CitySquare and the OneStar Foundation. Since 2009, 34 individuals were recruited from across the United States through a direct partnership between bcWORKSHOP and OneStar. In 2013 bcWORKSHOP began funding the program independently from the AmeriCorps model, with the goal of placing 10 to 14 individuals annually. Several participants in the bcFELLOWS program have joined bcWORKSHOP as permanent staff members after their service was completed.

Recent planning initiatives include:

- **Activating Vacancy:** a collaborative effort to engage residents in positive redevelopment of Dallas' historic Tenth Street District, funded with \$50,000 from the 2012 National Endowment for the Arts 'Our Town' grant program
- **City Builder Lab:** an educational program for middle school students held with Big Thought's Thriving Minds camp
- **POP Dallas:** a public design effort to strengthen the social, economic and physical health of Dallas' neighborhoods through three steps – Knowing Your City, Planning Your Neighborhood and Exploring Your Street

- **Power Plus:** an energy education initiative addressing underlying social, economic and environmental factors that influence energy use
- **sustainABLEhouse:** a partnership with community development organizations, cities and neighborhoods that provides design services to any family that wants to build and own an affordable and efficient home within the Dolphin Heights and Frazier neighborhoods in Dallas and areas of the lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas.

bcWORKSHOP evaluates its programs and projects by measuring the number of participants, the percentage of stakeholder involvement and gathering comments and criticism.



buildingcommunityWORKSHOP office in downtown Dallas

PROJECT HISTORY

Approach to the Project

In 2007 Brown’s private architectural practice received the commission to design the Walt Humann – T. Boone Pickens Community Center. The project, located a block away from Congo Street, was developed by Jubilee Park & Community Center with funding from a \$6 million gift from T. Boone Pickens.

Brown included a six-month community engagement process as part of his contract and decided to brand it as a project of buildingcommunityWORKSHOP. Ella Garrett, who owned a house on Congo Street, participated in the regular community meetings held at the site of the future center. During the course of these meetings Brown got to know her as well as Frankie Boulden and Vivian Garrett, and learned about the families living on Congo Street, walking the street with them and visiting Frankie and Ella’s homes.



Brown discovered a close-knit, multigenerational community of related families living side-by-side in five houses along the north side of the street and learned about owner finances that limited their ability to make necessary repairs and improvements. Driving the street with officials from the City's housing department, Brown learned that existing programs and policies did not address owner occupied homes and he identified Congo Street as an opportunity to make a positive change.

At this time Brown was teaching an architectural design studio at University of Texas Arlington that focused on the City of Dallas and his students had selected the Jubilee Park neighborhood as their focus for an urban neighborhood project. Together Brown, a contractor, and the students began working with Congo Street residents to craft a plan to begin renovating the five houses. Key to the plan was the construction of a new "Holding House" that provided temporary housing for each family while their own home was under construction. This idea emerged from conversations with the residents who were reluctant to leave the community during the renovation of their homes. The site for the Holding House was donated by Fred Bowie (Frankie Boulden's uncle), who owned the adjacent property at 4539 Congo Street. bcWORKSHOP changed its status from a donor-advised fund to an independent 501(c)3 organization in order to acquire the property.

In 2008 bcWORKSHOP received a \$38,000 grant from The Real Estate Council (TREC) Foundation, secured with support from Jubilee Park Community Center president Don Baty to support construction of the Holding House. The Holding House was designed and constructed by University of Texas Arlington architecture students and neighborhood residents with oversight from bcWORKSHOP staff, along with guidance



Green Street

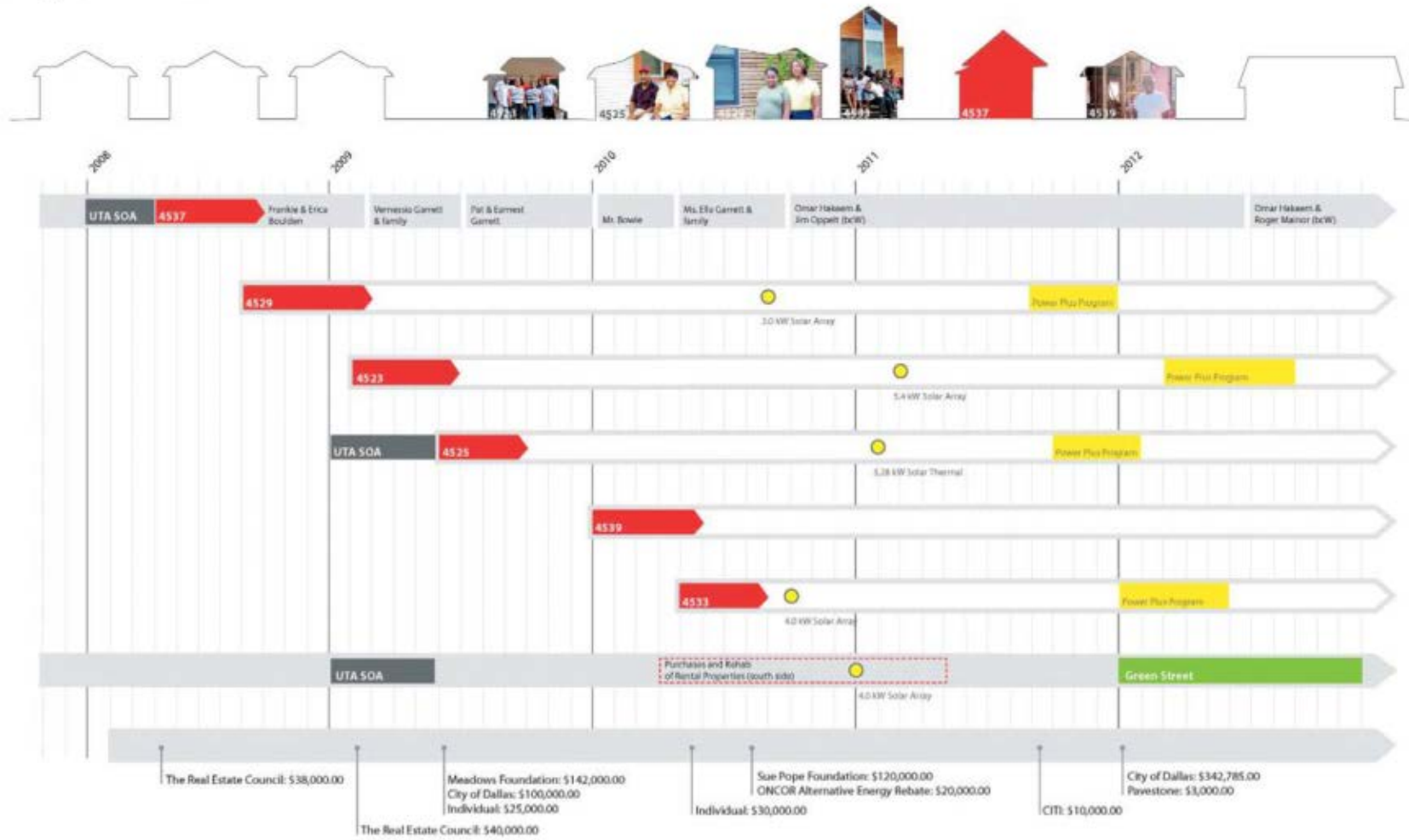


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Congo Street and the six properties prior to reconstruction (circa 2008)

Project Timeline



and support from Rusty Goff, a Dallas-area custom home builder and member of Saint Michaels Church and the Jubilee Park Building Committee. Homeowners, their families and other residents in the community were recruited to work on the project and provided with onsite training. Construction was completed in 2008.

bcWORKSHOP staff worked with residents to determine the order in which the houses would be renovated/reconstructed. The construction phase for each home took approximately three and a half to six months. One at a time, each family moved into the Holding House for four to six months while their own home was renovated or rebuilt. 4529 Congo Street, Frankie Boulden's house, was the first, with construction beginning in 2008 and completed in early 2009. It was followed by 4523, 4525 and 4539. 4533 Congo Street, the two-story home occupied by Ella Garrett and her extended family, was the last to be completed in the summer of 2010.



Photo & plan by bcWORKSHOP



Planning meeting with residents (top), site plan illustrating phasing of construction including relocation of families into the Holding House (in red)

Construction was made possible with funding from the City of Dallas, TREC Foundation, other corporate and philanthropic sources, and private individuals. The project also benefited from in-kind contributions of materials and a significant amount of pro-bono services and volunteer labor (refer to the Financing section for additional details).

As the last home was completed, solar panels were installed on four of the homes through a partnership with Central Dallas CDC and Patriot Solar Power LLC. Additional solar panels were installed on

one of the houses across the street that are owned by an investor group. bcWORKSHOP staff provided education and energy audits for residents through the organization’s PowerPlus Program to help them understand and reduce their initially high electric bills.

bcWORKSHOP worked with a student team and faculty from the Southern Methodist University (SMU) Lyle School of Engineering to create a conceptual design for addressing problems of the street. The City of Dallas reconstructed the street in 2012 using detailed plans and construction documents developed by Dallas engineering firm.

DESIGN

The new Holding House and renovated/reconstructed homes are distinguished from other homes along Congo Street and in the neighborhood by their design, use of building materials, and construction details.

bcWORKSHOP staff and University of Texas Arlington architecture students worked with each family to develop plans for the renovation or reconstruction of their home. In each case, the process was iterative. bcWORKSHOP representatives would meet with each family, generate a design, review it with the family, revise it and meet with the family again. Sometimes the process went through as many as four full iterations. As a result, according to one resident, each house reflects each family’s personality.

The initial plan was to renovate the houses, however all but one were too deteriorated and were instead taken apart and rebuilt from the foundation. In all cases, materials from existing structures were carefully

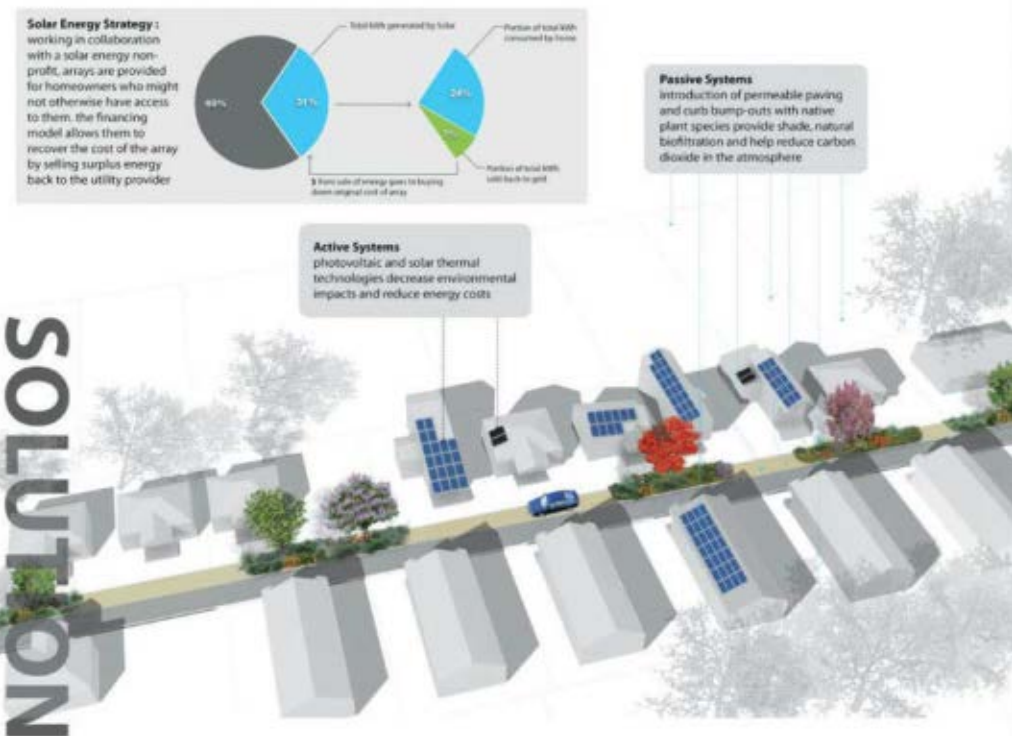


Diagram illustration solar energy strategy



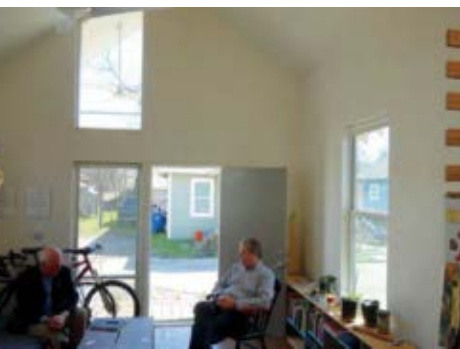
sorted and placed in piles as they were removed to be recycled and reused whenever possible. According to several residents, reusing materials helped preserve for them the history and memories of their homes.

The plan for each house maintained the modest footprint of the original structure and limited the square footage in order to minimize costs (typical new affordable homes in the city average 1300-1400 square feet, about one third larger than these homes). Front porches were considered to be key elements of the homes, contributing to a sense of community and the physical and social character of the street, and are part of the unique design of each home. The rooflines of four of the houses were tilted up from the street to accommodate second floor storage areas and living spaces while maintaining the rhythm of roof eaves and small-scale character of the street.

The reconstructed houses make use of new and recycled traditional building materials – such as wood sheathing and siding, asphalt roof shingles, vinyl windows and wood doors – that are used in combination with modern materials – such as galvanized and painted metal siding – and detailed in new ways. Original wide plank wood sheathing (used under wood siding on the existing structure) is used here as exterior cladding in contrast to traditional wood siding. Other boards are used as casing around windows. Cleaned and stripped wood siding is re-installed as a rain shield over new exterior walls.



Planning meetings with residents and construction details



Clockwise from top: property prior to construction, exterior, living room

Residents of the street have given each building a nickname that reflects its external appearance:

4537 Congo Street is the Holding House. It is owned by bcWORKSHOP and at the time of the site visit housed two of its staff. The house is referred to as the "House on the Lake" by Congo Street residents. Designed to house each family while their own home was under construction, the two-bedroom, one bath house has a living/dining room/kitchen with a cathedral ceiling and storage loft.



Clockwise from top left: exterior before and after, interior looking towards kitchen, Frankie and Erica Boulden, living room

4529 Congo Street is occupied by Frankie Boulden and her daughter Erica. Referred to as "Little House on the Prairie," the reconstructed house has two bedrooms and one bath. The lower level contains the living room/dining room, kitchen, a bedroom, bathroom, and alcove that Ms. Boulden uses as a study. An open stair to the second floor bedroom acts as a divider between the living room and kitchen. Cleaned and stripped wood siding was reinstalled on the interior living room wall and on the exterior rain shield.

Photos by Noe Medrano & buildingcommunity WORKSHOP



Clockwise from top left: before, side view, Vernessia Garrett and her family, front facade

4523 Congo Street, known as the "Sleigh House" is occupied by Vernessia Garrett and her family. The original, one-story, 525-square foot structure was replaced with a deep, narrow house that rises from one story in the front to two stories in the back with a wood-clad room that juts from one side. The reconstructed house provides 880-square feet of living space.



Clockwise from top left: Pat and Ernest Garrett, after, side view, before

4525 Congo Street, "The Business House," is owned by Pat and Ernest Garrett. This renovated house retains the original floor plate. A new foundation was installed and the roof of the house was raised and tilted up in back to accommodate second floor living space.



2013 RUDY BRUNER AWARD



Clockwise from top left: before, Frank Bowie, interior, after

Clockwise from top left: before and after, Ella Garrett and her family, stair

Photos by Noe Medrano & buildingcommunity.WORKSHOP

4539 Congo Street, the "Western House," is owned by Frank Bowie, who donated the adjacent property for construction of the Holding House. From the outside, this house appears the most "traditional" and resembles the original structures on the street. It is one of two houses that were renovated rather than rebuilt. The interior rooms were opened up per Mr. Bowie's request.

4533 Congo Street, the "Titanic," is occupied by Ella Garrett and her extended family of six. The existing, single story, 525 square foot structure was replaced by a new, two-story, approximately 800 square foot structure. The compact floor plans include a living/dining room, kitchen, bedroom and bathroom on the first floor and three bedrooms on the second. To maximize floor space inside the house the staircase to the second floor was pushed outside the building footprint and is enclosed in red metal siding, which gives it the ocean liner appearance and nickname. The house is the only two-story structure on the street and has enclosed porches on both floors. The owners have added plastic sheeting inside the screening of the first floor porch which now functions as storage space. Staff from bcWORKSHOP acknowledged that while this personalization by the owners suited their needs for additional space, it was unanticipated and detracts from the intended purpose of preserving the front porch as an outdoor living room and social space open to the street as it functioned on the original house.

The five reconstructed houses have been certified LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design Homes) Platinum (the highest rating) and the Holding House has been certified Gold by the US Green Building Council. Green features include recycled/reclaimed materials, super-insulated building envelope, high efficiency/multi-zone HVAC systems, Energy Star fixture/appliances, solar photovoltaic panels, EPA Water Sense interior plumbing fixtures and high-efficiency glazing units.

Street Design and Reconstruction

A team of two Southern Methodist University engineering students overseen by a PhD student and a professor conducted research and developed a design for the street that integrates techniques such as permeable paving and bio swales. Huitt-Zollars Inc., a Dallas engineering firm, provided guidance with technical details and helped producing drawings. After the design was approved, the City commissioned Huitt-Zollars Inc. to develop more detailed plans and construction documents. buildingcommunityWORKSHOP recruited engineer Nigel Smallridge from Nigel Nixon & Partners to assist with the design.

The reconstructed street, completed in 2012, maintains the existing, narrow right-of-way. The primary right-of-way is paved with asphalt and has concrete curbs and a central storm drain. Four areas lined with concrete pavers along the north side provide space for parallel parking and access to driveways.

A landscaped bio-swale along the north side collects water from house roofs and properties, where it is filtered before draining into underground storm drains (required due to dense, clay soil). The concrete pavers are intended to provide permeable surface that allows rainwater



The reconstructed street includes permeable paving (with standing water at time of site visit) and a landscaped bio swale

water to drain slowly into the ground rather than running directly into the storm drain and sewer. Congo Street is the first publicly developed street in the City to incorporate a bio swale.

Unlike neighboring streets, Congo Street has no sidewalk, except for a small section in front of the Holding House. This section was constructed before residents decided that a sidewalk was not needed and requested an exception to the requirement. The narrow roadway functions as a sidewalk, a street, and – according to Brown – “the kids’ playground. The neighborhood is like one big house.”

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

While it is likely that Congo Street would not have happened without Brown and bcWORKSHOP, additional community partnerships and resources – many of which the two brought to the table – were instrumental in facilitating the project's completion.

AmeriCorps members have contributed significant technical expertise and labor to the project. AmeriCorps provides opportunities for adults of all ages and backgrounds to serve through a network of partnerships with local and national nonprofit groups. AmeriCorps members have worked as bcFELLOWS over the years through a program funded by the OneStar Foundation and managed by CitySquare, a Dallas-based nonprofit that offers a variety of programs that address poverty in the city as well as in San Antonio and Austin.

The City of Dallas provided funding via the Department of Housing/Community Services and the Department of Public Works and Transportation to support construction of three houses and the reconstruction of Congo Street.

Jubilee Park & Community Center/Jubilee Park and Community Center Corporation (JPCCC) was founded in 1997 by members of Saint Michael and All Angels Episcopal Church in conjunction with the church's 50th anniversary. Today it is a human and community service organization that provides education, housing, meals and other programs to support residents in East Dallas communities, although the majority of the members work and live in North Dallas. JPCCC's investment in the community has drawn support from other funders, including the City of Dallas and Meadows Foundation. While JPCCC did not play a direct role in the Congo Street project, many volunteers and

leaders associated with the organization did, and the organization's investments in the community and their decision to hire Brown and bcWORKSHOP to design several facilities were key to its inception.

The Meadows Foundation is a private foundation established in 1948 with a broad mission to benefit the people of Texas. Since 2009 Meadows has granted a total of \$312,000 to bcWORKSHOP, including \$142,000 to support the Congo Street Initiative. The project is aligned with the Foundation's interest in addressing the need for affordable housing in Dallas and its significant investments in Jubilee, including Jubilee Park and Community Center. Foundation staff like bcWORKSHOP's innovative and creative approaches to addressing urban problems including the process of working with the neighborhood and engaging people in the process, keeping residents in place, and connecting green building goals with affordable housing.

Patriot Solar Power LLC supplied solar panels for Congo Street houses. It is a limited liability company that makes solar power available to residents living in areas where the median income is less than 80% of the Dallas Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) through a partnership with Central Dallas Community Development Corporation. Panels are installed at no cost, with the company receiving as lease payments a portion of the utility bills paid by participants.

The Real Estate Council (TREC) is a membership organization that provides networking for professionals in the real estate industry (Brown is a member). The TREC Foundation is a 501(c)3 philanthropy that invests the resources of the commercial real estate community in low-to moderate-income neighborhoods. The Foundation provides grants, loans and pro-bono services through an annual Associate Leadership

Council (ALC) class project. Each class selects a service project and contributes time, talent, services and dollars to the project. In 2008 the class chose to work on the reconstruction of 4523 Congo Street.

Southern Methodist University (SMU) and the University of Texas at Arlington provided in-kind support through student labor. The University of Texas at Arlington School of Architecture students provided initial design and construction services for Congo Street through design/build studios taught by Brown. Several students have gone on to work for bcWORKSHOP including associate director Benje Feehan. The Southern Methodist University Lyle School of Engineering supplied in-kind support via students and faculty who provided design and engineering services in connection with the reconstruction of Congo Street.

FINANCING

The total development cost for Congo Street Initiative was \$975,000. Funding for the project came from a broad range of public, private and non-profit sources, including the City of Dallas (53%), private foundations (23%), businesses and corporations (10%) and individual contributions (10%). The balance came from the ONCOR Energy Rebate (3%), and Brown’s architecture firm and teaching stipend (2%).

Expenses included property acquisition, construction, professional services (design, engineering, project management, etc.) and construction materials. Construction costs for the houses totaled \$473,550 or 51%. Reconstruction of the street totaled \$413,785 or 44%. The remaining costs included site acquisition and bcWORKSHOP’s PowerPlus program.

TABLE 1: PROJECT BUDGET

Overall Project Budget	
<i>Sources</i>	
City of Dallas - Street	\$396,130
City of Dallas - Buildings	\$100,000
Meadows Foundation	\$142,000
Sue Pope Foundation	\$70,535
The Real Estate Council	\$78,000
Individuals	\$90,927
Oncor Alternative Energy Rebate	\$29,215
Citi	\$10,000
Pavestone	\$3,000
Subtotal	\$919,807
<i>Uses</i>	
Buildings	\$473,550
Street	\$413,785
Property Acquisition	\$22,472
PowerPlus Program	\$10,000
Subtotal	\$919,807

TABLE 2: 4523 CONGO STREET PROJECT BUDGET

4523 Congo Street Project Budget				
	bcWORKSHOP	TRECALC*	In-kind	Total
Construction Management	\$8,480	\$4,000		\$12,480
Consultants (geotechnical, structural, survey)			\$4,000	\$4,000
Materials	\$5,000	\$19,000	\$6,000	\$30,000
Subcontractors (electrical, mechanical, plumbing, insulation, pest control, roofing, security, storage, windows)	\$400	\$16,950		\$17,350
Americorps	\$18,000			\$18,000
LEED Home	\$1,500			\$1,500
Total	\$33,380	\$39,950	\$10,000	\$83,330

*TREC Association Leadership Class

According to bcWORKSHOP, the construction costs for the individual structures ranged from \$27,615 to \$104,515 each, with total construction averaging \$65 to \$75 per square foot. These costs do not reflect the entire value of in-kind donations of materials and services which included a variety of donated building materials and a significant amount of pro-bono or discounted design services and volunteer labor. The kind and value of the contributions varied greatly from house to house and there is little documentation of value and number of hours provided.

The most detailed records exist for 4523 Congo Street, which was funded and constructed by The Real Estate Council (TREC). TREC provided the first outside funding for the Congo Street project, making a \$38,000

grant to bcWORKSHOP in 2008 to support construction of the Holding House (4537 Congo Street). Then, in 2009, TREC provided a \$40,000 grant and pro-bono services for the demolition and reconstruction of 4523 Congo Street through its Association Leadership Class (ALC). The twenty-five members from the class gave assistance securing in-kind contributions of building materials and provided pro-bono services including volunteer and staff management; construction and schedule management; design and estimating; public relations and marketing; fundraising and donations; and title, tax and legal services. The latter included title work and surveys, waivers/memos of understanding between bcWORKSHOP and the homeowner, a restrictive covenant on the sale of property that protected the Foundation’s investment, and a legal instrument alleviating the tax burden on the property owner

that was used on all the Congo Street projects. The total construction cost of 4523 Congo Street is valued at about \$83,330, including grants and in-kind contributions of materials and labor, including over 2,000 volunteer hours (at \$10/hour) from 25 volunteers in the class.

The project was financed through a variety of sources over the five years of the project. Initial funding for site acquisition and construction materials was provided by bcWORKSHOP, with Brown paying some of the expenses with his personal credit card, which illustrates both the risk taking and the level of trust that enabled the project to go forward. As bcWORKSHOP became more formalized and the project more established, additional contributions were received.

The City of Dallas provided significant financial support for the project that totaled \$496,130, including a two-year \$100,000 loan from the Department of Housing/Community Services to support deconstruction/reconstruction costs for three houses (4525, 4539 and 4533 Congo Street) and \$396,130 from the Department of Public Works and Transportation to reconstruct the street. The loan was forgiven once construction was completed. Brown cites Jerry Killingsworth, former Director of Housing for the City of Dallas, as a key proponent of the project.

The Meadows Foundation contributed a total of \$142,000 in grants to support renovation/reconstruction of the five existing houses. Additional funding was provided by the Sue Pope Foundation (\$70,535), Citi (\$10,000) and individual donors (\$90,927).

Considerable volunteer hours (in addition to TREC's Associate Leadership Council 2008-09 class detailed above) came from students from the University of Texas at Arlington School of Architecture, AmeriCorps volunteers, Volunteers in Service to America, and local service groups. A full accounting of total volunteer hours and their value in dollars has not been made.

IMPACT

According to several people interviewed for this case study, Congo Street Initiative changed perceptions and expectations in Dallas about affordable housing, green design and how to approach redevelopment of existing communities as well as ways to attract new investment to the community.

Changing Perceptions about Affordable Housing

The project has inspired people in Dallas – including community residents, builder's, designers, developers, funders and city officials – to think differently about affordable housing. The striking design of the houses has challenged assumptions about what affordable housing looks like, and the feasibility of constructing energy-efficient, LEED certified homes that are also affordable.

The new and reconstructed homes on Congo Street do not resemble other affordable houses in the community constructed by the City of Dallas or Habitat for Humanity. The City of Dallas develops approximately 500 new units of affordable housing a year. They range from 300 to 1400 square feet and cost an average \$75,000. Typical new homes in the Jubilee neighborhood are simple, one-story, slab-on-grade ranch-style homes with brick facades. Unlike these houses,

the Congo Street homes been referred to as “artful” and “interesting” architecture, appreciated for their creative recycling and reuse of existing materials.

Community reaction to the completed project has been positive. bcWORKSHOP is working with Dolphin Heights Neighborhood Association on a housing development project modeled on Congo Street, described in the next section.

Rethinking Approaches to Community Redevelopment

Congo Street appears to have influenced how designers, developers and city representatives think about the design process. The project has inspired them to do more to engage residents and the community in the planning process, and make better use of existing, small building lots rather than merging them into larger ones.

The project has had a “trickle-up” effect, encouraging people who work for the city to consider different approaches to affordable housing, community engagement, redevelopment and sustainable development. It has inspired the city and other developers to think more globally and approach development differently. The City has begun encouraging other developers to look to Congo Street as a model and has established an ongoing relationship with bcWORKSHOP.

Congo Street has become a popular attraction for people interested in architecture, planning and sustainable development. The Dallas planning department regularly takes people on tours of the street to look at the Holding House design and Green Street elements.



Clockwise from top: Cobbie Ransom and Henry Ngyen from City of Dallas, landscaped bio swale, children at play



Green Streets and Sustainable Development

The project has also influenced the city’s attitude towards street design. Congo Street is the first public street in the City of Dallas to incorporate permeable paving and a bio swale. The City of Dallas is now looking at incorporating rain gardens and bio swales in other projects, and has started sending staff to training programs on green design. The Assistant City Manager has directed the Public Works Department to develop new standards for storm water retention on streets.

Clockwise from top: Gurley Place senior housing, neighboring property for sale, house renovated by investor group

Attracting Additional Investment

This project has attracted additional development and investment. In 2010 a group of investors assembled by Robert Comacho, a local real estate broker and investor who owns and manages 45 properties in the area, purchased six duplexes containing twelve units on the south side of Congo Street. Approximately \$30,000 to \$40,000 was invested in each unit to upgrade foundations, electrical and plumbing systems, kitchens and bathrooms. Based on the appearance of the units from outside and reports of residents, the quality of these renovations is not up to the standards of the five houses reconstructed by bcWORKSHOP. The units now rent for \$495-\$595 per month. The Topletz family continues to own the corner properties on the street, one of which was being offered for sale at the time of our visit.

There has been additional development adjacent to Congo Street. In 2012 24 units of senior housing developed by Jubilee Park and Community Center and designed by bcWORKSHOP were completed on Gurley Avenue, the next street to the north.

bcWORKSHOP began working in a neighboring community with the Dolphin Heights Neighborhood Association (DHNA) on a housing development project modeled on Congo Street. The goal of the project is to construct three holding houses for use in neighborhood revitalization, using Neighborhood Stabilization Program funding awarded by the state to DHNA. bcWORKSHOP has a strong and ongoing relationship with the Dolphin Heights neighborhood and has been involved in several efforts since, including designing a playground, providing support for the neighborhood association and after school programming, and conducting a National Endowment for the Arts POP Neighborhood Stories event in March 2013.



Brent Brown

Leadership, Trust and Risk Taking

Many of the people directly and indirectly involved in the project note the critical role that bcWORKSHOP and particularly Brown played in this process. He and bcWORKSHOP effectively leveraged relationships with the city and other partners to bring resources – such as the City, TREC, Meadows Foundation and others – to a street that had been largely overlooked. As one person put it “But for Brent Brown, the houses would have been torn down.”

Key to the project was establishing trust with residents on a street that had been overlooked by the City of Dallas and written off by the local nonprofit leading investment efforts in the neighborhood. Brown established trust by spending time getting to know the residents of Congo Street and by following through on his commitment to the project. As one person noted, “Brent is a person of his word. When he says he will do something you know he will do it.” The project may not have gotten started without Brown paying the back taxes owed on the

property out of his own pocket. He risked his personal resources on this project but, locals repeatedly point out, risk taking is considered to be a part of Dallas’ entrepreneurial culture. Brown’s “can do” approach was an important aspect of making an initially risky project like Congo Street possible. One person referred to his “tenacity” and “impatience” that made it possible to get the project going.

Brown also needed to overcome resistance to the project by Jubilee Park and Community Center, which had invested in a community plan that called for demolition and redevelopment of Congo Street. At one point Walt Humann from Jubilee told Brown to cease and desist because this project didn’t fit into the Jubilee master plan, but Brown persisted because of his personal commitment to the residents.

Brown and bcWORKSHOP succeeded in bringing the community – including local residents, the city and organizations in the broader, Dallas community – together to make the project possible. He has been visibly active in design, development and planning in Dallas and he has been able to leverage personal and business relationships to broker key partnerships with the City of Dallas, TREC and Meadows Foundation to bring resources to the project.

Brown has also been a leader nationally in the fields of community and public interest design. The bcFELLOWS program attracts recent graduates from architecture, planning and other disciplines from across the country and introduces them to the practice of community design at bcWORKSHOP’s three locations in Texas. One recent participant joined bcWORKSHOP after working at the Gulf Coast Design Studio in Mississippi and went on to become an Enterprise Rose Fellow at the Detroit Collaborative Design Center.

Much of the success of the Congo Street project rides on Brown and his force of personality, talent and will power. He has succeeded in attracting a significant amount of monetary and social capital to the project, that made it possible. It is not clear to what degree a similar project could happen or if bcWORKSHOP would continue without him.

The Value of Human and Social Capital

The Congo Street Initiative would not have been possible without significant contributions of pro-bono and discounted professional services, and student and volunteer labor, including donated design and engineering services from bcWORKSHOP, SMU and UTA students and faculty. In addition to construction labor, TREC volunteers working on 4523 Congo Street supplied estimating, scheduling and construction management, public relations and marketing expertise, fundraising, title, tax and legal services and homeowner education including financial planning and homeowner manuals.

The project exposed students, AmeriCorps VISTA participants and TREC volunteers to a different side of Dallas and a different way of working with clients and community. Several formed strong bonds with Congo Street residents and regularly stop by to say "hello" and participate in celebrations and other events. Two bcFELLOWS continue to live on the street in the Holding House, which is owned by bcWORKSHOP.

The five renovated/reconstructed houses are owned by members of the extended Garrett family. It is unclear how this project might have proceeded without such close connections among the residents.

Community Design

The overall approach and tactics that bcWORKSHOP employed – spending time in a community, involving residents and students in the design and building process, and brokering relationships with other partners resources – are shared by other nonprofit community design centers in the United States. What stands out is the degree to which bcWORKSHOP’s staff – particularly Brown – immersed themselves in the community and the project and invested significant amounts of in-kind time and expertise.



bcWORKSHOP

Construction involved residents, job training participants, and bcWORKSHOP staff, fellows and AmeriCorps interns

Also noteworthy is the degree to which Brown and the WORKSHOP work at different capacities and scales – engaging in design/build projects such as Congo Street, involving urban design via the City-Design studio, and providing homeowner educational programs like the Power Plus program. This approach has the potential to yield significance influence over time, helping to increase understanding in Dallas about the role of design in urban development. Additionally, bcWORKSHOP is influencing the future of design practice by introducing recent architecture, landscape architecture and planning graduates to com-munity design through the bcFELLOWS program.

Awards and Recognition

Brown and bcWORKSHOP are gaining local and national attention for their work. The project has won several local and national awards including:

- 2008 Dallas AIA Excellence in Community Design Award & Excellence in Sustainable Design Award (Holding House)
- 2010 Dallas AIA Excellence in Community Design Award & Excellence in Sustainable Design Award (4533 Congo Street/ Ella Garrett's House)
- 2010 AIA & US Housing and Urban Development Department Secretary's Award: Excellence in Community Informed Design (Congo Street)
- 2011 SEED National Competition Winner (Congo Street)

Additionally, the US Housing and Urban Development published a profile of the project in April 2013.



Residents, volunteers, staff and alumni gather at the Holding House to celebrate buildingcommunityWORKSHOP's fifth anniversary

Assessing Success

- [Disrupt the systemic inequality threatening the residents of Congo Street](#)

The project enabled the families who lived on a street targeted for demolition and redevelopment – assuming the Jubilee redevelopment plan went forward – to remain in place. It succeeded in bringing attention to the families and to an area of the city that had been overlooked. At this point it is unclear to what degree the project has disrupted the system as a whole.

- [Improve the livelihood and housing conditions of the residents without displacing any in the process](#)

The project succeeded in improving the housing conditions of five families (a total of 27 people) without displacing any in the process. It is likely that the improved living conditions and stability that comes from not worrying about dislocation will likely make a difference in their lives. One resident was hired as an AmeriCorps VISTA participant during the project and continues to work occasionally for bcWORKSHOP and another contractor. There are reportedly fewer incidents on the street involving the police.

- [Maintain the social fabric of this small community](#)

The approach enabled the five families who have lived together on this street to remain in place, even during construction, and maintained the social fabric of the street.

- [Make the housing more efficient and affordable](#)

The financing of the project enabled residents to move into newly constructed or reconstructed homes without assuming any costs associated with the improvements. Given what we saw and heard about the previous structures, it seems safe to assume that the LEED certified houses are more energy efficient than the previous structures, although that has not been documented by a review of utility bills. bcWORKSHOP worked with residents to understand power usage and reduce their utility bills when they moved back into their homes.

- [Improve the street in a manner that is consistent with its history, culture, and character](#)

Conditions on Congo Street, particularly for residents living in new or reconstructed homes, have improved. The design and construction of the six houses reflect the history and patterns of lives of the residents and, to varying degrees, incorporate the vernacular architectural character and building materials of the original homes. The street no longer floods and the narrow design and lack of sidewalks preserve its historical proportions and function as a social space for the community.

- [Create trustworthy relationships with the people and the families in order to serve and empower them](#)

Brown and bcWORKSHOP established a high level of trust and respect with the families on Congo Street and other people in the community. That trust and the collaborative approach enabled them to engage the residents in the design and construction/reconstruction of their homes and street. The residents had input into the design of their homes, learned about building and design, and participated in the construction. Brown has established a significant amount of trust

with a number of partners in the community – including the City of Dallas, foundations, universities, nonprofit and corporate partners – that, in turn, helped to empower the residents by providing access to resources.

- [Create a viable model than can be reproduced](#)

While the project is compelling and there are lessons that can be applied to other projects, there are circumstances that make this project unique including: Brown and his ability to build trust and attract talent and resources; the intergenerational families living in the five houses; and the risk taking attitude that infuses this venture and Dallas as a whole. When one factors in the value of volunteer labor and services that went into the project that enabled the custom design and construction/deconstruction of each home, the costs of the project become substantial. Even Brown does not suggest that this is a model for Dallas or national development.

SELECTION COMMITTEE DISCUSSION

Congo Street Initiative, like 2013 RBA Gold Medalist Inspiration Kitchens – Garfield Park and Silver Medalist The Steel Yard, illustrates the potential of small projects to drive larger change. As the Selection Committee commented, “it is not about making a big plan, but rather planting small seeds.” In this case a project directly affecting only five families on a tiny street may have changed the way the City of Dallas views the process of involving residents in affordable housing design, as well as their approach to sustainable street infrastructure. The project also illustrates the value of hands-on projects that involve people directly in the process of “making” change in their communities.

The Selection Committee commended Congo Street Initiative for the collaborative process of development, particularly the involvement of homeowners in the design and construction of the houses in a meaningful way. Selection Committee members commented on the importance of the Holding House as an innovative approach to avoid the displacement of residents during the construction process, a common challenge in community revitalization efforts.

The Committee also noted the significance of addressing broader sustainable development and ecological goals in the rehabilitation of existing housing and street infrastructure. The project illustrates that alternatives to more typical “redevelopment” – demolition and new construction – are possible, including more idiosyncratic approaches that retain the unique characteristics of a community’s architecture and culture. Ultimately, it was agreed, Congo Street offers a different way of thinking about community development.



Brent Brown with Ella and Vivian Garrett

The engagement of the local community in the process, including students and volunteers, was recognized as a significant contribution. In particular, the Committee noted the value of involving and mentoring young design professionals, commenting that the bcFELLOWS program "is about education in a very real way." There was excitement about the potential of the program and bcWORSKHOP to influence the next generation of design practitioners and, in turn, shape the future of design practice.



Looking north on Congo Street

Like many of the 2013 RBA winners, Congo Street had been recently completed at the time of our site visit, and it was not possible to gauge its performance and long-term impact over time. Our site visit team and selection committee members expressed concerns about the durability of some of the construction details and finishes, some of which were already showing signs of damage and wear. Much of the appeal of the project has to do with the attention to design, including many innovative and unique details, such as the new rain screen on 4529 Congo Street that makes use of the original wood clapboards. Time will tell whether the construction holds to normal wear and tear and maintenance.

While the committee recognized the importance of Congo Street Initiative in bringing attention to sustainable development in Dallas, members suggested that the project should have considered the project in respect to the broader ecological and community context. Understanding the underlying ecology – such as hydrology and the network of neighborhood green spaces – could have informed decisions on Congo Street and made connections to the adjoining community that may have increased its impact.

Ultimately, the most significant question will be Congo Street Initiative's long-term impact in the community. Anecdotal evidence gathered from interviews with project participants and representatives from the City and immediate community suggest that it has catalyzed interest and generated discussions about sustainable development and new approaches to community development in Dallas, and possibly elsewhere. If so, the idea that a small-scale, organically developed project like Congo Street Initiative can change the way a city like Dallas approaches development is compelling.

Resources

INTERVIEWS*

buildingcommunityWORKSHOP:

Brent Brown, Founding Executive Director
Benje Feehan, Associate Director
Elizabeth Jones, Evaluator

Residents:

Frankie Boulden, owner, 4529 Congo Street
Ella Mae Garrett, owner, 4533 Congo Street
Vivian Garrett, resident, 4533 Congo Street
Ernest and Pat Garrett, owners, 4525 Congo Street

City Agency Staff:

Cynthia Rogers Erickson, Manager/Development Contracts,
City of Dallas Housing/Community Services
Henry Ngyen, Program Manager, City of Dallas Public Works
and Transportation
Cobbie Ransom, Neighborhood Development Manager,
City of Dallas Housing/Community Services
Miguel Serrano, Manager II/Inspector, City of Dallas Housing/
Community Services

Community Representatives:

Don Baty, Jubilee Park & Community Center Corporation,
former board member
Joe Beaudette, Construction Professional, Beaudette Construction Services
Shawn Busari, Jubilee Park community resident
Robert Comacho, Broker Associate, Keller Williams Real Estate
Anna Hill, President & CEO, Dolphin Heights Neighborhood Association Inc.
Jemonde Taylor, former Chaplain, St Michael's Episcopal Church

Consultants and Volunteers:

Kate Alpert, National Business Development Officer, Stewart Title; Volunteer,
The Real Estate Council
Robert Cabral, graduate student in Urban Planning and Landscape
Architecture, University of Michigan
Sarah Hamzeh, University of Texas Arlington student, volunteer
Emily Henry, Associate/Landscape Architect, TBG
Wahid Manawi, PhD student, Southern Methodist University Lyle School
of Engineering
Harry McDonald, AmeriCorps Volunteer

Funders:

Larry James, President & CEO, CitySquare
Michael McCoy, Senior Program Officer, Meadows Foundation
Linda McMahon, President & CEO, The Real Estate Council
Robin Minnick, Foundation Director, The Real Estate Council

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