

Build a Better Burb PARKING PLUS

Build a Better Burb: ParkingPLUS *An Invitational Design Challenge*

There are more than 4,000 acres of surface parking lots in and around Long Island's downtowns – that's about 6.5 square miles solely dedicated to parking. These acres of asphalt present an opportunity to rethink these downtown areas and create design solutions that balance the need for parking with other uses, give priority to pedestrians and promote ecological alternatives to these acres of "grayfields."

Across the country, suburban towns have been trying to create more vibrant, walkable and attractive downtowns. While the need for parking persists to bring people to these downtowns, innovative design solutions are needed that integrate parking into a mixed use and livable downtown.

Since 2002, the Long Island Index has been working to discuss challenges facing the Long Island region and potential catalysts for new directions. A critical part of this work has been its annual reports highlighting different issues from housing, to traffic, to economic development among others.

DESCRIPTION

The ParkingPLUS Design Challenge is a key component of the Long Island Index Special Analysis for 2014. The Challenge will match four design teams with four selected Long Island downtowns with a supply of surface parking lots and vacant land, therefore identified as "Places to Grow." The brief will be to develop – and graphically communicate to a lay audience – innovative designs for structured parking solutions that support downtown revitalization and transit-oriented development (TOD). The designs should demonstrate how structured parking supports a larger strategy that encourages better land utilization, promotes transit accessibility and improves the downtown experience.

Recognizing that sufficient and efficient parking is critical to a resilient future for this suburban region's downtowns and their ability to grow smartly, the Long Island Index, a project of the Rauch Foundation, seeks to engage the general public in a productive design conversation by providing compelling images of conceptual solutions that are both inspiring and feasible. Structured parking facilities are generally thought of as being single-purpose, stand-alone structures that are ugly, unsafe and out of place in our downtowns. Designers will be encouraged to expand the concept of "parking" beyond standard practice and to demonstrate how these structures can be architecturally innovative while anchoring creative strategies for downtown parking. Some of the "PLUSes" that could be explored include:

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Garden City, New York 11530
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- New civic amenities such as a YMCA or performance space,
- The creation of new public spaces such as plazas and parks,
- Improvements to the pedestrian experience both in the immediate station area and throughout the downtown,
- Accommodation of intermodal opportunities: buses/shuttle buses, biking, and the “last mile” connections to the train,
- Support for other agendas, such as renewable energy or creative storm water management,
- Opportunities to enable the redevelopment of other sites in the downtown by accommodating remote or shared parking for other projects.

The core of this challenge is to demonstrate how such structures, when exceptionally well designed and featuring innovative architectural, technical, operational and financing strategies, and when part of a larger strategy for managing downtown parking and mobility, could be potentially transformative to their suburban downtown settings. Design teams will be asked to demonstrate feasibility for their solutions with an emphasis on a clear and convincing narrative as opposed to highly developed cost calculations.

Building on the successes of the 2010 Build a Better Burb open ideas competition (<http://buildabetterburb.org>), the goal of this initiative is to help promote new thinking about Long Island’s mass transit-served downtowns. Utilizing the power of design and visualization of ideas, the Long Island Index sees this Design Challenge as an opportunity to engage Long Islanders in a robust conversation through special events, web-based media and other publicity.

BACKGROUND

THE LONG ISLAND INDEX

The Long Island Index, a non-profit organization based on Long Island since 2002 and funded by the Rauch Foundation, aims to gather and publish data on Long Island to chart how the region is performing on an annual basis. The goal is that the data provided is useful, unbiased information that will lead to greater community awareness of Long Island issues and to serve as a catalyst for action. The Index does not advocate specific policies. Instead, the goal is to be a catalyst for action, by engaging the community in thinking about the Long Island region and its future. The Build a Better Burb: ParkingPLUS Design Challenge stems from findings in the [2010 Long Island Index Special Analysis](#) that highlighted vacant land and surface parking lots in a number of towns as underappreciated “Places to Grow.” Concurrent to this Design Challenge, the Regional Plan Association will be updating these findings for the 2014 Special Analysis.

www.longislandindex.org

http://www.longislandindex.org/interactive_map

BUILD A BETTER BURB

In 2010, the Long Island Index held an open ideas design competition, called Build a Better Burb, calling for bold ideas from architects, urban designers, planners, and visionaries for the 8,300 acres of underutilized land in Long Island’s downtowns. The goal was to reimagine what *might* be possible for the region. The distinguished jury selected five professional winners and one student winner; public voting online determined a seventh People’s Choice Award. Build a Better Burb has since evolved into a curated website presenting a wide array of ideas, case studies, photographs, images and designs — an inspiring palette of possibilities that could work on Long Island. Competition consultant June Williamson’s recent book *Designing Suburban Futures: New Models from Build a Better Burb* documents and analyzes the winning schemes.

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THE SITES

This design challenge is meant to be independent from any actually in-progress redevelopment plans for Long Island downtowns, and instead is intended to instigate further conversation for development in the selected towns and in Long Island in general. However, it is anticipated that the design challenge will be based on identified needs in these downtowns.

Sites are currently being finalized and include incorporated villages and hamlets in both Nassau and Suffolk County. Each community has expressed an interest in participating in this challenge and has potential sites in the downtown that can be redeveloped. Further each community has a significant population that utilizes the Long Island Rail Road station and with new development planned for the rail (including East Side Access and Double Track to Ronkonkoma), an expanded ridership is anticipated bringing with it the heightened need to address parking in a way that allows the downtown to expand economically rather than create more surface lots.

ParkingPLUS

As part of this Challenge the design teams are expected to identify potential “PLUSes” that enhance the experience and utility of the parking structures in consultation with leaders and planning authorities in the selected downtowns. These components might be fully integrated with the parking structure or located on land currently occupied by surface parking that might be freed up by structured parking. They may include additional uses and amenities such as: the generation of renewable energy or revenue, new civic, public spaces such as plazas and parks, additional infrastructure such as for biking, new multi-unit housing, or a new civic amenity such as a YMCA or performance space.

DESIGN CHALLENGE CONSULTANTS

June Williamson was the competition consultant for Build a Better Burb’s 2010 open ideas competition and is author of *Designing Suburban Futures: New Models from Build a Better Burb* (Island Press, 2013) and co-author of *Retrofitting Suburbia: Urban Design Solutions for Redesigning Suburbs* (Wiley, 2009, updated 2011). She is associate professor of Architecture at The City College of New York. **Kaja Kühn** is principal of youarethecity, a research, planning and design practice, and adjunct professor of Urban Design at Columbia University. She previously worked as an urban designer at the New York City Department of City Planning.