

Designing Better Designers: Families First

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Abstract

Affordable housing design has evolved significantly during the past several decades. The needs of communities have changed. The roles and responsibilities of designers, developers, and policymakers have also evolved—sometimes in response to the needs of the communities they serve, other times in response to market forces. This article contemplates the perspective and evolution of the role of the designer, focusing on developments from the past 10 to 15 years. Looking through the lens of the Enterprise Rose Architectural Fellowship, a 3-year fellowship that pairs an emerging designer with a host community development organization, I share valuable insights and lessons learned that could be leveraged into a new normal for affordable housing design practice. In particular, I argue that collaborative design is no longer about one-way community engagement; it is about two-way, long-term, place-based community relationship—designers living in the communities that they serve. In addition, I suggest that good design in affordable housing is incomplete without the supporting infrastructure that provides access to transportation, employment, renewable resources—electricity, water, and food—and the positive human interaction of a thriving neighborhood. Good design goes well beyond the physical and temporal boundary of a completed building. To move the affordable housing industry forward, we must first design better designers—designers who see the part and the whole, the individual and the community, the house and the neighborhood, and the past and the future.

Introduction

Numerous architectural treatises have been put forth that imagine a future in which all people have a beautiful home that not only provides a safe, stable, enriching environment, but also that is part of a thriving neighborhood with all the necessary resources of transportation, schools, health care, and nutritious food. Recent initiatives in the affordable housing community are attempting to make this designed vision a reality. Who determines the form of housing? Is it the traditional aggregation of designers, developers, and policymakers, or is it the resident families and communities?

Many trends have occurred in the process and form of affordable housing development. Large-scale public housing blocks epitomized low-income housing in the latter half of the 20th century. Pruitt-Igoe in St. Louis and the Robert Taylor Homes in Chicago are examples of a class of public housing that ultimately failed to uplift the communities they were trying to serve. The density, seclusion, and poor design of these developments created environments that increased social isolation, stigmatization, crime, and, increasingly, poor health outcomes (Dannenberg et al., 2003). Scholars and practitioners have credited these failures to the lack of sensitivity to residents' needs (Frumkin, 2002). Critics have argued that architects traditionally are at worst detached idealists and at best service providers too far removed from the experiences of low-income residents. Then-president of the National Urban League, Whitney Young, Jr., publically aired this sentiment at the 1968 American Institute of Architects' Annual Convention: "... you are not a profession that has distinguished itself by your social and civic contributions to the cause of civil rights, and I am sure this does not come to you as any shock. You are most distinguished by your thunderous silence and your complete irrelevance" (Young, 1968).

In the past decade, however, the quality of affordable housing design has vastly improved, supported by efforts like the Affordable Housing Design Advisor,¹ the networks of the Association for Community Design, and the documentary exhibits and monographs produced by numerous architectural scholars. Examples of this qualitative shift abound in the contemporary affordable housing world. These structures are changing the image of design among housing advocates from one of stagnation and social isolation to one of leadership and progress, especially in the sustainability conversation.

Via Verde in the Bronx, New York—which is perhaps the most notable recent example of transformative collaboration between community, developer, and architect—received national acclaim for both design excellence and progressive social impact at the neighborhood scale. The roof gardens and integrated food systems, in particular, demonstrate the power of systems-level design thinking. The Codman Square EcoDistrict project in Dorchester, Massachusetts, is proposing a neighborhood-scale solar project that has the potential to promote energy independence for the whole neighborhood and to provide a measure of socioeconomic equity to the residents. On the west coast, community developers—like Central City Concern (CCC) in Portland, Oregon—are systematically evaluating how they implement sustainability throughout their building portfolio.

In this article, I look back at how the perspective and role of architects in affordable housing development have evolved using the lens of the Enterprise Rose Architectural Fellowship (hereafter, the Rose Fellowship), a program that embedded its first class of Rose Fellows with community developers in 2000. In particular, I argue that programs like the Rose Fellowship that focus on the professional development of young architects have—

- Increased awareness of neighborhood-scale civic relationship and collaboration within the broader profession.
- Increased the number of designers interested and working in affordable housing.
- Ultimately produced high-quality housing and communities with the capacity to thrive beyond the completion of a building.

¹ <http://www.designadvisor.org>.

Through a discussion of specific examples, I will share the returns that I have witnessed from this bottom-up investment strategy, which I believe is creating market demand for higher quality design in affordable housing today than we experienced 10 to 15 years ago, when the Rose Fellowship began. Housing designers can learn from the great strides forward that the fellows have made in their respective communities. I specifically highlight the value of understanding and appreciating the specificity of place alongside the social imperative of providing supportive housing infrastructure in tandem with quality housing.

The Enterprise Rose Architectural Fellowship

In the year 2000, community developers and emerging architects were first invited to apply for the 3-year Rose Fellowship, funded by a grant from Enterprise Community Partners, and named for Frederick P. Rose, a prominent developer and philanthropist who believed in the value of good design and the spirit of public service. A community development host organization would hire a Rose Fellow onto its staff to bring the vision and resources of design to the development team and into the critical path of affordable housing projects. The Rose Fellowship was designed to provide these emerging architects first with enough time to become immersed in listening to the unique circumstances of their new community. Then, enabled by earned trust and relationship, credible, catalytic interventions would emerge in the spirit of the Rose Fellowship's mission to create sustainable, equitable, connected communities for people of all income levels.

In 2000 and 2001, nine Rose Fellowships formed, in communities as diverse as a tribal housing authority in northern New Mexico; a border community in San Ysidro, California; inner-city Los Angeles; and the Martin Luther King district in Atlanta. The Rose Fellowship hosts of those early years ranged from regional affordable housing developers, to neighborhood-based developers, and to university design centers such as the Rural Studio outreach program at Auburn University.

The early Fellows were pioneers in many ways. The nine individuals worked in diverse communities across the country, with a shared fellowship but with nearly no structure from the program. As a group, they came to develop their own set of values and a shared vision for the Rose Fellowship. Together, they developed a set of principles establishing what good design meant in the context of their communities. They also formed an informal support network for one another—sharing projects, stories, best practices, and, perhaps most importantly, failures.

Most Rose Fellows entered the program with skills in community engagement and green building. Learning the affordable housing design, development, and financing mechanisms was new for nearly all of them. Few had received training in real estate development, and understanding how to bring priority to design excellence was a shared challenge. The language of many Community Development Corporations (CDCs) at that time still spoke to the primacy of providing shelter, or providing fit and affordable housing.

Jim Rouse, who founded Enterprise Community Partners in 1982, was quoted as saying, “We believe, because it is true, that people are affected by their environment, by space and scale, by color and texture, by nature and beauty, that they can be uplifted, made comfortable, made important” (Columbia Association, 2011: 9). Although community developers certainly had a goal to create

quality housing, no stated methodology incorporated design principles into the development process. Convincing CDC leadership to invest in design quality was a major challenge in the housing community in recent decades, but the investment in integrated design has since become a central component in the community development field. The demand for professionals with the capacity to work in this field has increased consequentially, as exemplified by the competitiveness of the Fellowship.

In attempting to understand the gaps in the traditional training of architectural practitioners that the Rose Fellowship and others are filling, it is helpful to look at key skills Rose Fellows practice in their fellowships.

- Building relationships between community members and designers.
- Demonstrating the propensity and capacity to be more innovative in design, based on both funding constraints and developer broadmindedness.
- Understanding affordable housing developers' organizational practices and redefining their missions to include design skills.
- Developing functional programs tailored for residents and occupants that may not match the traditional conceptions taught in architectural education.
- Scaling design interventions to incorporate neighborhoodwide and communitywide considerations beyond a single development or unit.

In the following sections, I demonstrate the acquisition of these skills with specific examples.

Community Relationships

Developing community relationships has been a core strategy of the Rose Fellowship since day one, and the understanding of the importance of participatory design to creating lasting, healthy communities continues to unfold. Many development projects either choose or are mandated to perform some form of community engagement as part of their development process. The Rose Fellowship has shown that when designers enter into a long-term relationship with a community—and the lines between community member, planner, designer, and advocate for a better future are blurred—the rewards are robust. The Rose Fellowship therefore seeks not only to build excellent projects, but also to support those communities that continue striving to create a more sustainable, equitable, and healthier future for residents long after design and construction are complete.

An example of a commitment to a long-term relationship came from the beginning of the Rose Fellowship's history. A member of the first class of Rose Fellows in 2000, Jamie Blosser, partnered with the Ohkay Owingeh Housing Authority (OOHA) at Ohkay Owingeh, a Pueblo established centuries ago on the east bank of the Rio Grande River in northern New Mexico. OOHA had a long waiting list for families seeking housing, and a new U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) guarantee program passed in 1996, which for the first time granted access to conventional mortgage lending for families living on tribal trust lands, had not yet been implemented there, making rental housing the only option to increase housing supply. To build 40 new units

and a community center, the Director of OOHA, Tomasita Duran, used the 1996 Native American Housing Assistance and Self Determination Act (NAHASDA) Indian Housing Block Grant and the Rural Housing and Economic Development grant to leverage five other sources of financing, including low-income housing tax credits (LIHTC) totaling \$4.8 million.

NAHASDA created an opportunity for local residents to institute their own vision and make decisions regarding land use planning. It also created a unique opportunity for architects, planners, and landscape architects to bring their skills to the benefit of these communities.

Since the 1960s, lacking mortgage financing, the Pueblo had typically received single-family HUD bungalows spread out on 100-by-100-foot lots. The new development built on the ancient, community-oriented settlement patterns of the historic plaza and village center, Owe'neh Bupingeh. The plaza area was once lined with several hundred historic adobe homes dating back at least 700 years. More than 60 percent of these adobe homes had fallen into ruin and disrepair by the turn of the 21st century and were used only for tribal feast days, if at all. HUD investment in the single-family, subdivision-style bungalows outside the historic core—the classic suburban sprawl 'American dream' of the mid-20th century—sped the decline of the traditional adobe homes.

During the development process, some tribe members at first had difficulty with the notion of attached housing, having become accustomed to single-family homes, but tribal elders began to tell stories of what life was like growing up on the plaza before it had fallen into disrepair. Blosser recounted—

During the community design meetings, we learned that on the traditional feast days the women typically worked in cramped kitchens preparing food for hundreds of people, which was then served throughout the day in cramped living and dining room quarters. We designed open floor plans to accommodate more flexibility on these busy days. (Morrish, Schindler, and Swenson, 2009: 55)

The new project using NAHASDA funds in combination with LIHTC at Ohkay Owingeh, called Tsigo bugeh Village, was designed to set a standard for incorporating community-driven, culturally significant design into all aspects of the planning, and its success set a new precedent for the tribal council (exhibit 1).

A few years after the completion of Tsigo bugeh Village, Duran said to Blosser, "I wish we could bring families back to the Pueblo—what if we restored the housing there?" (Blosser, 2006). Thus was born the Owe'neh Bupingeh Rehabilitation Project, a multiyear affordable housing rehabilitation project within the historic core, consisting of four plazas. Of the several hundred homes that once surrounded the historic core, only approximately 60 remained, and the rest were abandoned because of deterioration. Robert Gauthier, from the National American Indian Housing Council, stated—

In more than 30 years of affordable housing experience with HUD construction certification, I have never witnessed a more complex project. From an outsider's point of view, this project was brilliantly conceived and illustrates an uncommon level of sensitivity and intelligence. This potential to bring back to life, as the heart of the tribe, up to 60 homes, is an unprecedented effort to preserve the culture as well as cultural activities associated with traditional living. (Gauthier, n.d.)

Exhibit 1

Homes at Tsigo bugeh Village, Ohkay Owingeh, New Mexico



Source: Harry Connolly

Every member of the project team learned about the tribe's history, saw ancient settlement patterns with fresh eyes, thought about how density might protect precious tribal land, listened to individual needs, and tapped into the community's culture. That process led to the realization of a first successful housing development—Tsigo bugeh Village—and its success continued with the Owe'neh Bupingeh Rehabilitation Project, providing a clear example of why and how relationships between housing designers and the recipient community create better designers. The spirit and learning of that process then led the tribe members to see their sacred plaza with a fresh perspective and enabled families to move back again. Blosser said, “The rehabilitation of the village was successful because we opened a discussion of underlying cultural values and were able to manifest some of them in architecture” (Blosser, 2009). The investment of time, energy, resources, and care in fully exploring with a community their vision, history, values, and aspirations led to meeting shorter term goals and to reinforcing a resilient optimism in community members.

Design Quality

Relationships between designers and communities consequently also yield better design. In Los Angeles, Theresa Hwang, a Rose Fellow partnered with Skid Row Housing Trust (SRHT), worked to house and empower formerly homeless individuals through better designed housing, resident engagement, and social services. Supportive housing has been a recent innovation in the housing sector, based on the realization that providing housing alone is not enough. Housing providers

have found that incorporating social services and medical care into their buildings creates better success rates for residents, especially chronically homeless individuals or those with addictions or disabilities. Supportive housing models typically have two legs: (1) the permanent apartment unit, and (2) the social services, including physical and mental health care.

With the creation of Hwang's main project, the Star Apartments, SRHT and its partner Michael Maltzan Architecture pushed this model to include a third leg: nonclinical therapeutic amenities such as yoga, basketball, gardening, and art classes. Star Apartments provides more than 15,000 square feet of community space with amenities that contribute to the integrated approach to resident support (exhibit 2). For SRHT, design goes beyond aesthetics; it enhances programs and building functions. The building and the overall living environment have a significant effect on the rehabilitation process and the challenge of ending homelessness.

SRHT initiated a participatory design process during the early development stages. The team brought in residents, social workers, and maintenance staff from its existing housing portfolio, collecting feedback on which building features worked and which did not. For example, glazing proved very important, because it allows for visual transparency for a welcome and open feel but is also safe and secure for staff and workers. This process directly informed the spatial layout, incorporating what residents actually wanted rather than assuming what they needed. In her nearly 5 years working

Exhibit 2

Star Apartments, Los Angeles



Source: Skid Row Housing Trust

with SRHT, Hwang has developed a community engagement model based on trusting relationships with residents, staff, and the design and development team. SRHT has an ongoing feedback loop with the designers and users of the buildings to create an open conversation about what works, constantly testing and discussing ideas. This type of innovation is not possible without the consistency of grounded relationships.

Technological Innovation

Another outcome of exposing professionals to affordable housing needs is the increased ability to experiment with new technologies—a clear opportunity often embraced to a much greater degree by affordable housing developers than by commercial developers, especially for energy-efficient and green building techniques.

Since its inception, green building has been catalytic for community development, in that it has brought a rigorous methodology for measuring quality. The converse is perhaps more provocative: affordable housing has been transformative for the green movement, in that it brings into question the ultimate goals of *sustainability*—that which creates a more sustainable environment for both people and the planet. Although the environmental movement goes back decades, green building became increasingly well established and codified with the emergence of the U.S. Green Building Council's LEED (Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design) program in the late 1990s. Other green building standards and guidelines soon followed, including the Enterprise Green Communities (EGC) Criteria for assisted housing projects in 2004. EGC was the first green building rating system designed specifically for affordable housing. In addition to including many LEED-like criteria, EGC emphasized the importance of site selection, encouraging access to transportation and neighborhood amenities, and also emphasized indoor air quality, resident engagement, and asset management. Michael Gatto, a Rose Fellow with Foundation Communities in Austin, Texas, helped author the criteria and developed more specific expertise in the field.

In the early days of the Rose Fellowship, only a few affordable housing developers were thinking about green building. My personal experiences serve as an example for this change in practice. When I started at Piedmont Housing Alliance (PHA), in Charlottesville, Virginia, in 2001, PHA gave little if any thought to green building or to architectural design that considered environmental impact. Builders essentially designed the house, building according to the standard practice of maximizing efficiency within the constraints of the building code, with 2-x-4 framing, batt insulation, vinyl siding, and a heat pump. For me, building green was the surest way to argue for upgrading the building quality in every way, including lowering energy bills, removing air pollutants, increasing durability, and improving aesthetics. At the time, however, tension existed on the PHA Board of Directors between those who were committed to providing no-frills housing and those who saw that the quality of the housing mattered—and that it brought more benefits than costs.

Energy and water efficiency could be monetized, but the other benefits, including indoor air quality, could not be measured at that time. As PHA built the first ENERGY STAR house in the community, and then the first EarthCraft house, the excitement began to build. Not only was the product innovative, it was aesthetically beautiful, leading PHA to commit further to both design and green

building. A partnership with the University of Virginia School of Architecture led to the EcoMOD design-build program. As PHA began to earn recognition and win awards for its green building, the housing organization caught the spark of innovation and went on to do increasingly challenging work, like modular and prefabricated construction. Building green changed the way PHA thought about its mission, from that of providing affordable housing opportunities to that of providing quality of life for its residents.

Organizational Changes

Rose Fellow Colin Arnold, meanwhile, was working with Community Housing Partners (CHP), one of a few groups in 2001 to see the potential for sustainability to reshape its organization. CHP's President and Chief Executive Officer, Janaka Casper, is one of the most sought-after leaders in the community development field. Casper has grown the organization exponentially during the past 13 years and now manages a portfolio of more than 6,000 units. When CHP brought on Arnold, it set about using the concepts of sustainability to affect every aspect of its business, from construction to accounting. Arnold pushed CHP to build to a high green standard and constructed a LEED Silver-certified boys home in 2003, which became both a symbol and a learning laboratory for research (exhibit 3).

Casper said to a crowd of about 300 people at a Housing Assistance Council meeting that the "Rose Fellowship was the single most transformative program that CHP has ever experienced" (Casper, 2012). The Rose Fellowship gave the organization a method and the resources to evolve its mission, and CHP has deepened its commitment to sustainability over time. Arnold is still with CHP

Exhibit 3

Tekoa Boys' Home, Christiansburg, Virginia



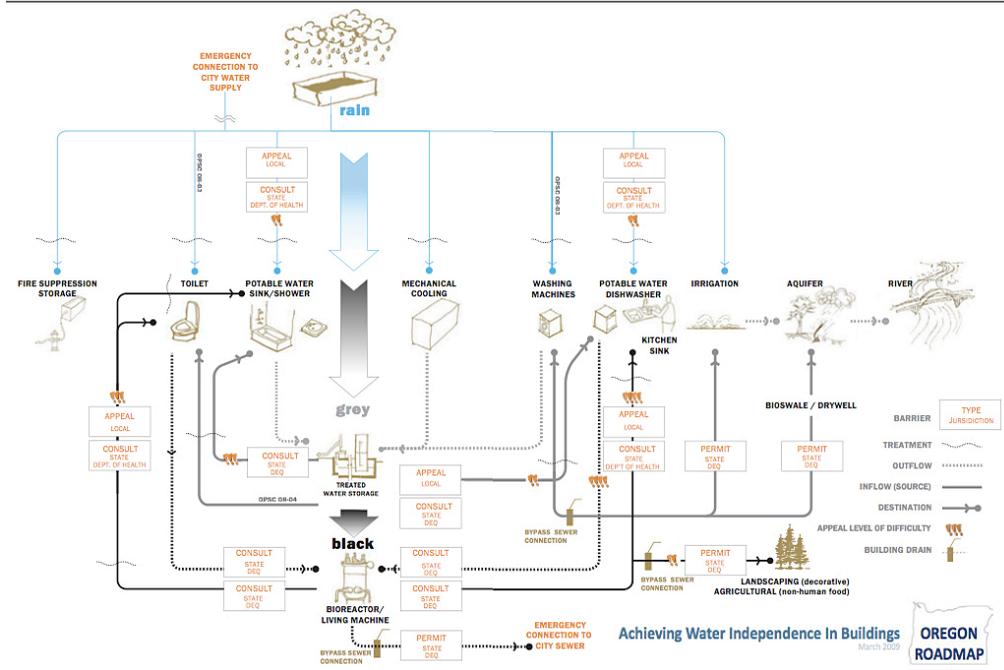
Source: Alan Scherry

13 years later, now leading perhaps the only design division of a CDC, with four architects on staff. Whereas most CDCs contract out their architecture and design services, CHP not only has the design function in house, it uses its expertise in designing green affordable housing to serve as a consultant for other, less sophisticated housing groups.

Expanding the role of the professional designer as a resource to affordable housing developers has also led to some unexpected outcomes. Ben Gates, a Rose Fellow with CCC, had ambitions to push green design even further, from energy and water efficiency to net-zero energy and water use. Many nonprofit affordable housing providers, like CCC, that own and manage large portfolios already understand how energy and water efficiency directly affect the bottom line. Inspired by other, more aggressive green building guidelines like the Living Building Challenge and the International Living Future Institute, Gates set his sights on achieving water independence in a new family housing building planned in downtown Portland for residents recovering from drug and alcohol addictions. Gates also mapped all the steps needed to achieve water independence, from conservation, to capture, to reuse, looking at the technological requirements and the policy barriers at the city and state levels. Gates made a series of diagrams (exhibit 4) that revealed many needless barriers and published these diagrams in a book, *Achieving Water Independence in Buildings*, which has since become a critical reference for developers and policymakers seeking to create net-zero and net-positive buildings of all types and to change state law, building codes, and regulatory rules to allow for rainwater and gray water to be recycled in buildings (Gates et al., 2009).

Exhibit 4

Chart From *Achieving Water Independence in Buildings*



Source: <http://www.enterprisecommunity.com/resources/ResourceDetails?ID=67380.pdf>

Functional Programs

Design and development usually involve a program. The program of the building may read: 60 units of one-, two-, and three-bedroom units for residents earning 30 to 80 percent of AMI. Samuel Mockbee, founder of the Rural Studio and a Rose Fellowship mentor from the first year taught students of the Rural Studio the concept that designing the program is designing the architecture. The development of a program is common to professional practice, yet it is often one that is not considered thoughtfully and reflectively—a critical omission when considering communities and occupants with special needs. The practice of architecture, then, has been enhanced with the exposure to programming in these unique and challenging cases and to the methods for eliciting the needed program.

In Roxbury, Massachusetts, for example, Rose Fellow Mark Matel has used a community arts approach to formal programming, not only to revitalize a former bus yard site, but also to reenergize a neighborhood around expressing its own creativity and positivity. Living in a neighborhood with terrible crime and poverty statistics, residents of Roxbury view affordable housing development with skepticism. Some say that the neighborhood already has too much affordable housing; others say that the neighborhood is being gentrified. Matel has been living in the midst of this debate, hearing all sides and getting to know the complexities—and personalities—in the neighborhood. He suggested taking an alternative approach from which everyone in the neighborhood could ideally benefit, investing and celebrating all the positive qualities of the people and culture of Roxbury.

In May 2013, Matel and his colleagues invited 85 local artists to spray paint the garage doors of the bus yard buildings. The event drew more than 1,000 people to the site that had been fenced off for 20 years, energizing it first with art and not long after with music, dancing, food trucks, and ice cream vendors. The electricity of that day, and of the concept of creating a stage for the community's most creative endeavors, led Mark and the organizers to create “Bartlett Events,” which offered a structure through which community members could stage their own events on the site (exhibit 5).

Exhibit 5

Bartlett Events, Roxbury, Massachusetts



Source: Mark Matel

Roxbury still plans for 323 units of housing plus retail, parking, open space, and so on. Now, however, thanks to the energy of Matel and his colleagues, the proposed development is developing an identity, and that identity, or vision, is attracting people who want to animate this formerly derelict site into a creative community that looks to the neighborhood culture as a source of inspiration.

Broadening Scale

Early in its history, Enterprise Community Partners was aware of the broad scope of issues associated with any one housing development. Rouse, for example, recognized that “decent, affordable” housing is a fundamental platform for a successful life, but he knew that housing alone was not enough. “Job training, crime prevention, education and health care, as well as affordable housing, are all part of the solution. We cannot improve the lives of people unless we do all these at one time” (Columbia Association, 2011: 9). In short, housing needs a place within a thriving, uplifting neighborhood.

Traditionally, however, architects focus on the specific structure at hand—often at the expense of considering even the neighboring structures, let alone the broader community in which a project sits. The Rose Fellowship exposes young professionals to the task of seeing the larger challenges and aspirations of the community in which they work.

Some of the most exciting design work is going on in neighborhoods where CDCs are investing deeply in green infrastructure at the neighborhood scale. In the early days of green affordable housing, the Rose Fellowship addressed integrated design at the single house or building scale. Buildings became more efficient and then healthier and now net zero or net positive. Solving one building at a time has inherent limitations, however.

A significant challenge of approaching sustainability at the scale of a city, however, is sharing the benefits of green infrastructure equally across the socioeconomic spectrum. In particular, low-income residents are typically left out.

Architects who have been at the forefront of targeted investments in infrastructure at the neighborhood scale can create direct, tangible benefits for those who need it most. CDCs, long skilled in social services, financial counseling, and housing development are maturing into a new phase of their role.

A few miles from Matel’s work in Roxbury, Rose Fellow Mike Chavez is working with three ambitious CDCs that have joined in a collaborative effort to revitalize a transit corridor in Dorchester. Close to the center of Boston, this neighborhood had a commuter rail line running through it that, until recently, made no local stops. Although residents of Dorchester were not far from downtown Boston, they had long commutes on multiple buses. Community organizing led the three CDCs and many others to unite and successfully advocate for new stops in their neighborhoods. Today, four stops are open and three are in process, and the public transit authority agreed to match the regular subway fare rather than charge the higher commuter rate. The successful advocacy campaign gave neighbors in the Talbot-Norfolk Triangle an organizing framework and big ambitions.

The good news about being more connected to transit is obvious, but the danger is that the neighborhood will quickly gentrify, and the existing residents will be priced out. These residents have set an ambitious goal to turn their neighborhood into an “EcoDistrict” where investing in green infrastructure would financially benefit the community. Codman Square Neighborhood Development Corporation, one of the organizations with which Chavez has partnered, is in the planning stages of a community solar project that would invest the benefits of the energy savings back into the community through the CDC. CDCs are taking bold steps to ensure that residents will not only have a better quality of life, but also that they will retain their neighborhood fabric, identity, and commitment to the mutual empowerment of themselves and their neighbors.

Conclusion: Envisioning a New Architecture Practice

All housing is designed by some person or some group of people. A series of decisions, choices, and tradeoffs is always required. The questions, “By whom?” and, “To what end?” are too often unasked. Housing designed by professional designers with the guidance and imperatives of the community can become an architecture that speaks to the past, present, and future of a community. As demonstrated in New Mexico and Boston, housing is designed not only to achieve the highest environmental sustainability standards, but also to reflect the entire community in question.

Mockbee taught architects and community designers many things, but chief among them was that architects should be civic activists.

Architects are by nature and pursuit, leaders and teachers.... It's not about your greatness as an architect, but your compassion.... What is important is using one's talent, intellect and energy in order to gain appreciation and affection for people and place. (Mockbee, n.d.)

To that end, the Rose Fellows are attempting to gain additional skills and to broaden the practice of architectural design through interpersonal skills development.²

To design good housing—housing that has a holistic, collaborative, and place-based design approach—and to achieve better health and an improved quality of life for residents, architects must address broad community needs and integrate transit infrastructure, energy efficiency, food access, and economic opportunity. We—the design profession, the millions of families we serve, the development organizations, and the financing organizations—need different types of designers. We need designers who can listen first. We need designers who can be patient and earn the trust of the people they serve. We need designers with fresh ideas and perspective who can lean on the families for whom they are designing to give guidance that speaks to their ambitions. These designers can give vision and voice to aspirations that they do not create but that they can fuel. Affordable housing design and construction can evolve when affordable housing designers and developers have evolved, to see the part and the whole, the individual and the community, the house and the neighborhood, and the past and the future.

² Through a grant from the Fetzer Institute, Rose Fellows receive personal and professional communication skills training, but they have also received small individual grants for “collaborative actions” in the communities they serve.

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