GARDEN CITY OF RE-USED WASTE

A proposal for a new garden infrastructure within the vacant lots of a shrinking U.S. city
Assembled entirely from reclaimed materials and salvaged objects, this project introduces a public, garden city infrastructure into an urban area defined by vacant lots and abandoned dwellings. At the center of this new garden city is the architectural salvage yard of the not-for-profit social enterprise group, Buffalo ReUse.

The salvage yard, with its promise of recovery and reclamation, is regarded as the locus for this community development project. The boundaries of the salvage yard are expanded into a 3 x 8 block area surrounding the main warehouse of Buffalo ReUse. Within the vacant lots of this focus area, residual materials are collected and re-distributed to form a new, aggregated network of public spaces, places and events.

In contrast to the massive, labor intensive, economically ambitious projects that typified the WPA era of American infrastructure, this project proposes a restrained, scavenged infrastructure of material economy.
With over 16,000 vacant properties and 10,000 houses on its demolition roster, the city of Buffalo, NY typifies the problems facing shrinking post-industrial cities across the United States. The city’s population is now roughly half of what it was in 1950. In addition, 12 percent of all land in the city, or 3,200 acres, is currently vacant. As residents continue their exodus from Buffalo’s urban center, entire sections of infrastructure are literally being left to waste. Clearly, what is needed is a new kind of infrastructure, one that regards the context of waste and decay as a seed bed for a regenerative urbanism. Working in conjunction with neighborhood groups, social activists, and residents, we propose to sow a garden city of recreational spaces and social gathering places within patches of vacant land.

The unique features of this project include the large-scale re-purposing of vacant land as well as the exclusive use of reclaimed objects and materials. The site for our project centers on the architectural salvage yard of the not-for-profit social enterprise group, Buffalo ReUse. An organization that specializes in building deconstruction (a process of strategically dismantling derelict homes in order to harvest salvageable materials) Buffalo ReUse has established itself as a pillar of community engagement and a model for progressive urban transformation. We have proposed a master plan for a 3 x by 8 block radius surrounding Buffalo ReUse and we are currently focusing our efforts upon the development of a small portion of this larger project (see focus area, pages 9-10).

To this end, our goal is to establish a series of social/recreational spaces immediately adjacent to the ReUse warehouse. These new interventions will constitute the seeds for the future garden city, providing nearby residents with access to fresh produce, water collection for irrigation, leisurely activity in the form of linked community gardens, and social spaces that are within walking distance of home.

Project Implementation

In the summer of 2008, the preliminary stage of this garden city project was initiated, with the construction of a series of raised vegetable and flower beds upon the identified site. Currently, these preliminary gardens are functioning well and are tended by neighborhood residents as well as by Buffalo ReUse volunteers. The next phase will involve the building of selective elements of the garden city infrastructure, including such features as a greenhouse (assembled from salvaged window frames), a small public performance space (assembled from an abandoned boat), and a monument to housing re-use (assembled from the facades of deconstructed homes). In addition, it will involve the extensive seeding, bedding, and planting of the site. Materials for the project will consist entirely of salvaged and donated artifacts and will be acquired with help from Buffalo ReUse.

We have formed a design/construction support crew that includes students from the University at Buffalo’s Department of Architecture, volunteers from Buffalo ReUse, as well as neighborhood residents. In addition, we will merge our efforts with Buffalo ReUse’s Youth Mentorship Program, a pilot project that strives to provide educational opportunities for young men and women. Support will also be provided by PUSH Buffalo (People United for Sustainable Housing), a non-profit organization that is working to renovate abandoned homes for low-income residents and to stabilize vacant properties. We will work to leverage any awarded funds upon outside sources in order to further advance the project. Additional funding will be sought from local government, from local charitable foundations, as well as from regional and national sources.
Rather than approach this project with a set of pre-conceived, total design agendas, we have allowed processes of continuous dialog and exchange (mediated by our collective collages) to suggest possibilities for the built environment that we could not previously have imagined. Our design process has been characterized by a patchwork approach that synthesizes maps of the city, site photos, and images of salvaged materials. While freely exchanging our various drawings, sketches, models, and photos, we have sought to produce a plan of layered complexity and shared diversity. Within the wide range of textures, surfaces, marks, and images, we have intended to discover the broadest possible range of garden city experiences.

We have included within this proposal a general master plan for the development of the project (above), as well as our specific plan for the focus area adjacent to Buffalo ReUse (pages 9-10). The inventory of re-used elements includes such common, everyday materials as brick, lumber, and doors, as well as less common, playful objects such as a reclaimed swimming pool, abandoned boats, and portions of deconstructed houses. One feature of the project is a greenhouse, the skin of which is constructed entirely from salvaged window frames. The images that we have provided illustrate our view of this sustainable, garden city as one of multiplicity, patchwork, and amalgamation, a shared vision open to constant growth and accumulation.

Methodology: Collectivity and Collage

Scrap yard detail of garden city intervention showing placement within existing urban fabric (top half of page) and without (bottom half of page).
BUFFALO REUSE SALVAGE YARD

FOCUS AREA PLAN

1. Boathouse Performance Stage
2. Greenhouse
3. Raised Garden
4. Raised Garden
5. Raised Garden
6. Monument to Re-used Homes
7. Bathtub Depot
8. Pool
9. Water Collector
10. Giant Twine Ball
11. Debris Bridge
12. Music Maze
13. Bicycle Station
14. Snow/Ice Sculpture Space
15. Playground
16. River Walk
17. Hammock Bunk Beds

The adjacent focus area plan identifies the first phase in the construction of the garden city. This portion of the project shall in turn be constructed in four separate stages, allowing for the gradual cultivation of residual material.

greenhouse to be assembled from windows salvaged by Buffalo ReUse

patchwork a strategy of aggregate assembly and connection

flows of residual material meander and pool within a landscape of lost and found objects