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*Boston Globe*

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# Beyond the Big Dig

*Robert Turner*

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*For more than a decade, from the day that the decision was made to put Boston's Central Artery underground, many forward-looking planners and designers have been conjuring up visions of the mile-long street-level corridor that would replace the elevated highway, reshaping the heart of downtown.*

*By the end of 2001, the corridor had acquired a name, the Rose Kennedy Greenway, but work was far more advanced on the traffic tunnel underground than on the open space above.*

*These precious twenty-seven acres had the potential to flower into a magnificent, vibrant urban oasis that would become known the world over. But some pessimists predicted they would soon deteriorate through indifferent maintenance and become barren dustyards, dividing the city as surely as the elevated highway had.*

*During the first half of 2002, a unique public information campaign was mounted to encourage the former result, rather than the latter. Called Beyond the Big Dig, it included community forums, ambitious news coverage in the newspaper and on TV, a dynamic website, an expert panel discussion televised live from Faneuil Hall, a dinner with business leaders, and literally dozens of editorials and op ed columns. The conveners were the Boston Globe and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and the core partners were WCVB-TV Channel 5 and the Boston.com website. But the project also drew on the active participation of many agencies and advocates, public, private, and nonprofit. Indeed, the very cooperation needed to plan the Beyond the Big Dig campaign likely contributed some badly needed collegiality to the Greenway planning.*

*This article is written with the view that the Rose Kennedy Greenway is still a once-in-a-century opportunity for Boston to redefine its central district, that the Beyond the Big Dig campaign provides a useful lens through which to view Greenway planning during a key period, and that the campaign itself may be seen as a model that could be employed to good effect in addressing other complex public issues.*

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**A**s an editorial writer at the *Globe*, I had been fascinated with this project for years, but, by 1998, was growing increasingly frustrated that some of the major questions were not being answered.

What would be built on the twenty-odd parcels in the corridor? Would three-quarters of it remain open space, as the state environmental certificate mandated? And what was "open space" anyway, given that an ambitious, nine-story glass winter garden, which would charge admission, was included under that rubric? With some parcels designated as parks, and others for development, how would they be coordinated? Who would do the designing? And the programming? And who would pick them? Would the designs seek to serve abutting neighborhoods, or a larger audience

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including all of Greater Boston — and the world? Once designs were set, who would manage construction? Who would be in charge of programming, and of maintenance? Who would pay?

Incredibly, even as the Ted Williams Tunnel was already built and operating, and work was well advanced on the underground artery itself, not one of these questions had a firm answer in 1998.

The trigger for me came in November of 1999. The Legislature had been trying — unsuccessfully for more than a year — not to solve any of these problems, but merely to create a commission that would address a few of them. City, state, and other officials bargained hard, feeling that the make-up of the commission would dictate its conclusions, shortchanging anyone not adequately represented. Finally, then-Representative Joseph Sullivan, a Braintree Democrat who was House chairman of the Legislature's Transportation Committee, felt he had a deal. Legislation to create a commission was expected.

Then, unexpectedly, the state's Administration and Finance Secretary, Andrew Natsios, Chairman James Kerasiotes of the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority, and House Speaker Thomas Finneran all had conflicting last-minute changes they wanted to make in the commission membership. The deal collapsed, and there was no apparent way it could be revived.

It was maddening. Boston is famous for civic infighting, parochialism, and the ease with which small interests can block big projects. Some of this reputation is unfair; quite a few large projects have gone forward in Boston in the past two decades. But in this case it and the Turnpike Authority were all at odds. Even within the administration of Governor Paul Cellucci, the secretary of administration and finance had a different agenda from the secretary of environmental affairs. The House and the Senate couldn't agree. And even within the House, the speaker had cut the legs from under his hand-picked committee chairman.

From the perspective of the *Boston Globe*, the frustration was overwhelming. We had been writing about the importance of the project, and trying to encourage progress. The issues that we and many others raised were widely discussed, but there was very little movement, if any.

Desperate to find a way to push the process more effectively, I turned to two people who had some experience that seemed promising. The *Globe* had previously partnered with MIT's School of Architecture and Planning on three projects that had elevated the public awareness of major issues. Coordinating all three were Tim Leland and Tom Piper. Leland, an old colleague and friend, had retired after a long career including years as the managing editor and then assistant to the publisher of the *Globe*. But he is still active, working out of an intown office at the historic Old Corner Bookstore, at Washington and School streets. Piper, whom I had never met, is a principal research scientist in MIT's Department of Urban Studies and Planning and an experienced organizer of unusual initiatives.

Over many months, Leland, Piper, and I planned a project that became Beyond the Big Dig, an effort that turned out to be more ambitious than the other three.

When it was all over, several aspects of the project had won prizes, and an independent study by members of the Emerging Leaders Program at the University of Massachusetts at Boston concluded that "the Beyond the Big Dig campaign was a phenomenal success and far exceeded all of [its] stated objectives." Candidly, the three of us, Leland, Piper, and I, think that some parts of the project were more successful than others. But we are gratified at the comments from the UMass-Boston group, including its estimation that the model could be used again.

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## The Concept

At first, Leland, Piper, and I, whom I will call the project directors (we have had no such label until now), had a visceral sense of where we wanted to go, but very little idea of how to get there. We thought initially of sponsoring a high-level public forum, as the three previous *Globe*-MIT collaborations, all presented under the name The Boston Conference, had done. But we soon realized this would answer only a part of our intent. Finally, after months of strategizing, we focused on three goals, which then led us to the content of our campaign.

The goals were these:

1. To encourage bold and brilliant planning by elevating the debate, by looking at exciting projects elsewhere that Boston might learn from, and by soliciting smart and provocative views.
2. To broaden the debate so that all of Greater Boston, not just the corridor abutters, would participate in the design and take an ownership interest in the corridor. We felt that, while the parks had to work well for their immediate neighbors, it was crucial that the Greenway become a common ground for all of Boston, including the suburbs. We did not pay much attention to tourists, on the theory that a public space that is vibrant and attractive to local people will soon be sought out by travelers. World-class public spaces generally succeed first as local gathering-places.
3. To help resolve the intractable governance issues, such as who would be in charge and who would pay.

We felt these three goals were important, and were not being addressed sufficiently by others. We wanted to help move the process along in new directions, and not duplicate efforts already under way.

In pursuing the first goal, we were encouraged by Boston architect Hubert Murray, who has worked on aspects of the Artery project for a decade. One danger of a design process that has a great deal of public participation, he said, is that bold ideas will be too challenging for many individuals, so the result will be a lowest-common-denominator design that tries to please too many interests, with little imagination. The way around this, he said, is to elevate everyone's vocabulary, so that a vigorous public debate will encourage ambitious design, not block it.

We were already fastened at this point on the idea of case studies — fairly detailed looks at cities that had already done interesting urban design that Boston might learn from. Not much comparative work had been done. One of the fascinations of the Greenway is that there is no exact model. Rarely does a large part of a major city's downtown become available for development all at once, and a winding corridor is even more unusual.

Berlin seemed of interest, since the fall of the Berlin Wall opened up a huge slice of the city suddenly and unexpectedly. But one senior planner in Boston said the lessons of that model had never been considered.

As we looked at what cities would make the best case studies, we eventually decided not to include Berlin, because the space involved was so large, and the questions of design were so overwhelmed by the politics associated with the collapse of the Soviet Union. However, we did solicit an op ed column for the *Globe* from Rachel Munn, a young Boston architect who had spent a year in Berlin.

All through the project, we tried to draw lessons from examples closer to home. The Norman Leventhal Park at Post Office Square, for instance, is beloved by many in Boston who view it as a jewel of an urban oasis in the financial district. But it is only one block, plus a small appendage, and its major funding source, an underground garage, could never be duplicated on the Greenway. The Southwest Corridor provided other lessons, especially about the necessity for first-class maintenance and security, but it was not in a downtown location.

The cities we did settle on for significant case studies were Paris, Barcelona, and San Francisco.

The second goal, helping the Greenway to become a common ground, was easier to grasp in conception than to deliver in practice.

The problem is familiar to anyone who knows Boston. The city's relentless demographic changes over time have found social acceptance lagging behind. As Irish and Italian immigrants surged into the city in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, they were not greeted warmly, and assimilation was slow. Even between those two groups, it took decades for tribalism to melt.

At the dawn of the twenty-first century, Boston is on the verge of becoming a majority minority city, with large populations of southeast Asians joining a growing number of Hispanics and a sizeable community of African-Americans. Large contingents of Russians, Brazilians, and other nationals add to the mix.

But, as before, assimilation has been slow, and it is evident everywhere. A Boston Symphony Orchestra performance of a Brahms symphony will find an overwhelmingly white audience in Symphony Hall. And this is not only true of high — and high-cost — culture. In Fenway Park, the Red Sox also play to a largely white contingent of fans. And even the Boston Celtics, most of whose players are black, attract a white crowd. Many young blacks in Boston actually follow other NBA teams.

And the social balkanization of Boston does not separate Bostonians along racial lines alone. Some of it is geographic. Many thousands of Bostonians who live at a distance from downtown, in neighborhoods such as West Roxbury, Brighton, and East Boston, rarely find a reason to come downtown. And the same is doubly true for many suburbanites, except for those with a daily commute.

David Lee, one of Boston's best-known architects, says the one real common ground that works in Boston is Downtown Crossing, where young people, food vendors, dancers, artists, musicians, and others mix with shoppers in a colorful and upbeat street scene that perpetuates itself day after day.

Much of the early planning work for the Rose Kennedy Greenway mentioned the desirability of attracting a wide audience, but the Beyond the Big Dig project directors felt that not nearly enough attention had been placed on the importance of the common ground goal not only to the success of the Greenway, but to the future of Boston.

Governance was at once the most obvious problem and the toughest to crack. Many high-level players were sniping at each other, and trying to outmaneuver each other, both publicly and privately, yet all that did little to loosen the gridlock.

Many people had an interest; no one, seemingly, wanted to let anything go.

The entire Big Dig project, both above ground and below, was being managed by the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority. But the area where the Greenway parcels will be created when the elevated highway comes down is owned by the state, except for a small portion owned by the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority. The Turnpike, although a state authority, is semi-autonomous and its board and chairman have not

always agreed with the state administration, as a long list of crackling headlines in the last five years amply demonstrates.

And the state, of course, refers not just to the gubernatorial administration of the moment, but also to the Legislature. House Speaker Finneran, in particular, took a keen interest in the project, saying he felt he had a stake in the outcome because he had been chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee when the land involved was bought by the state from the City of Boston for \$41 million.

Boston, meanwhile, has more riding on the outcome than anyone, but little immediate control of its destiny. All of the designs must adhere to Boston zoning regulations, and the city has regulatory oversight, but no overall authority. Even though the Greenway would redefine the heart of Boston, the city had no active role in design and would not necessarily have any say over programming or maintenance. Indeed, some state officials who originally advocated turning the project over to the city when it was done began to talk about placing it under a state agency such as the Department of Environmental Management, which controls some rural parks.

A comprehensive 1998 study called Boston 2000 recommended that a new single-purpose entity — a semi-autonomous authority or trust — be created with the sole mission of building and managing the Greenway. This proposal attracted substantial support, especially in the Legislature.

But as the Beyond the Big Dig project directors planned their events for 2002, there was no consensus, and the uncertainty was hurting the project. Several prominent architects and landscape architects predicted that a number of high-quality designers, both American and foreign, would be discouraged from competing for the Greenway work if they didn't know who would be in charge.

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## Organization

To advance each of these goals, we decided that a public information campaign blitz was needed — some of it spread broadly, some of it focused more narrowly.

We recruited WCVB-TV's "Chronicle" evening newsmagazine, which had also partnered with the previous *Globe*-MIT effort. Piper invited Chronicle's executive producer, Chris Stirling, to become a regular at our downtown planning sessions. With Piper again leading the way, we also developed a website, [beyond-bigdig.com](http://beyond-bigdig.com), to build information, display case studies, and encourage two-way conversations with the public.

We also looked for help from the news side of the *Globe*, and struck gold with Robert Campbell. The *Globe*'s Pulitzer Prize-winning architecture critic was intrigued with the possibilities for the Greenway, and with the Beyond the Big Dig project. Campbell and Stirling helped greatly in picking the cities to be visited for case studies. Another key contributor was Rebecca Barnes, who was the president of the Boston Society of Architects until the spring of 2001, when she moved to the Boston Redevelopment Authority as the city's chief planner.

In planning for the common-ground aspect of the project, many people contributed, but two stood out. Marc Margulies, a successful Boston architect, took many dozens of hours away from his firm to help plan the two "community conversations" that we planned, and to prepare the public so that these sessions would be productive. Geeta Pradhan, a project director with The Boston Foundation, took charge of planning for the actual events, choosing not to run informational meetings where people would be updated by insiders, but rather to organize four-hour workshops that would center on intense planning efforts by the participants, split up into small groups.

Our efforts to encourage movement on the governance front were concentrated mostly in news coverage, frequent editorials, and op ed columns in the *Globe*. Also, the case study reports from Paris, Barcelona, and San Francisco looked specifically at the issues of common ground and governance.

In addition to those mentioned above, numerous others helped with planning. The Boston Redevelopment Authority and other city agencies, the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority and other state agencies, the Artery Business Committee representing corporate neighbors near the corridor, the Boston GreenSpace Alliance, the Boston Society of Landscape Architects, the Arts and Business Council of Greater Boston, Professor and former Dean William Porter of the MIT School of Architecture and Planning, and William

Taylor and Thomas Winship, the former publisher and editor of the *Globe*, all participated in lunch sessions and made contributions, some of them substantial. From the Turnpike, Fred Yalouris, director of architecture and urban design for the project, was unfailingly cooperative, and Chairman Matthew J. Amorello attended all of our events.

While the take-out sandwiches supplied by Leland were, candidly, no gourmet prizewinners, there was a strong sense that the relationships being developed in those lunch meetings were proving of value not only to our project, but to the Greenway itself.

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## Funding

The Beyond the Big Dig project raised and spent a bit over \$250,000, most of which went for Piper's time and travel expenses, other MIT research services directed by Piper, preparing Faneuil Hall for the live television broadcast, travel, and other costs. The *Globe* and WCVB paid their own expenses.

Early in our planning, the State Street Bank Foundation granted the project \$100,000. Foundation head George Russell, a former treasurer of the city of Boston, saw potential benefits from the start. But from there, the scent grew very cold very fast. Because of the declining economy, and the unusual nature of our proposal, numerous potential funders declined to participate. Finally, late in 2001, the Boston Foundation, under new president Paul Grogan, approved another \$100,000 grant and we were almost in business. Smaller contributions came from Equity Office Partners, the Artery Business Committee, the Boston GreenSpace Alliance, and an anonymous foundation. *Globe* Publisher Richard Gilman also directed a grant toward the development of the case studies at MIT.

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## Critical Issues

Because our project was unusual, several difficult questions arose during our planning.

How could a newspaper be part of an aggressive public campaign with a particular mission? For me as an editorial writer, opinions are everyday work. But the news side was not compromised either, because the project's goal was simply to stimulate debate toward a higher result, not to achieve a specific outcome. But would the newspaper's independence be jeopardized in collaborating with others, including a TV station and advocate groups? This was a serious question that turned out not to be much of a difficulty in practice, as no one felt bound by the others. Even within the *Globe*, for instance, Campbell's case study reporting repeatedly emphasized the



importance of strong city controls to a good outcome, while the editorial page was pushing for a semi-autonomous trust to be created. In the end, the news side was not compromised either, because the project's goal was simply to stimulate debate toward a higher result, not to achieve a specific outcome.

Another question was whether the project could work closely with the authorities — the city, the Turnpike, and others — without being co-opted? This was ticklish. At one point, we considered asking the city and the Turnpike to contribute to our funding, but decided against it, even when our fundraising prospects looked bleak. Later, city officials, apparently wary of cooperating in an endeavor that was out of their control and might turn against them, wanted to be “partners” in the project. We wanted to work closely with these authorities, and to be a positive force, but we balked at full partnership. Fortunately, at a meeting where it appeared the city might not cooperate, threatening the entire project, Marc Margulies was able to define the relationship satisfactorily for both sides. In practice, no serious difficulties appeared.

September 11, 2001, changed everything in America, and our project was no exception. At first, we were stunned and uncertain how, or even whether, to proceed. A presentation we were scheduled to make the following Monday to the Artery Business Committee seemed insignificant. Through those dark days, though, we convinced ourselves that Beyond the Big Dig had potential worth. September 11 was an attack on America, and specifically on America's cities — the nation's urban heart. Our project was designed to help revitalize our city and make it thrive as a center of commerce and community. In our small way, perhaps the best response we could make to the terrorist attacks was not to abandon our efforts, but to redouble them.

One other pivotal moment for the project directors came later in 2001, when funds were still short of our budget and it seemed we had to make a choice between the travel expenses involved in doing the case studies and the costs of televising the Faneuil Hall forum. Domestic case studies, closer to home, were a possibility. But we felt that, while Providence has some genuinely exciting programming that could indeed provide lessons for Boston, if we were pushing for world-class results, we had to report the best the world offered. We took a chance. Trusting that the project would generate support as it went along, we committed to the European trip. In the end, there was enough money to do both.

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## Execution

Nothing, it seemed, came simply. Even the project name was After the Big Dig until Renee Loth, editor of the *Globe's* editorial page, suggested substituting Beyond.

As 2001 ended, however, we were ready to go, and the project played out as follows:

*February 5.* A kickoff breakfast at the *Globe* hosted by publisher Gilman and including MIT Dean William Mitchell, Boston Mayor Thomas Menino, and others.

*April 4.* An unusual two-page spread in the *Globe* Focus section, designed largely by Margulies, landscape architect Steven Cecil, and the *Globe* design department, with graphics that encouraged readers to try their own designs for various parcels, and bring them to the upcoming neighborhood forums.

*April 13.* The first forum, attended by some two hundred persons at Rowe's Wharf.

*May 11.* The second forum, at English High School in Jamaica Plain, attracting some one hundred-twenty persons, including a table of high schoolers.



*May 23.* A dinner for business leaders, hosted by State Street Bank President Ron Logue.

*May 30.* The Faneuil Hall forum, attended by Senator Edward Kennedy, Mayor Menino, and other civic leaders, with two panels, one national and one local, moderated by former Governor Michael Dukakis. The entire event was telecast live by WCVB.

For this forum, we were fortunate to attract an exceptionally able national panel, made up of:

Jill Ker Conway, author, chairman of the Lend Lease Corporation, visiting professor at MIT, and former president of Smith College.

Hubie Jones, then special assistant to the chancellor for urban affairs at UMass-Boston and co-director of the Boston City-to-City Program.

M. David Lee, a leading architect of public spaces, partner at Stull and Lee Architects in Boston and adjunct professor at the Harvard Graduate School of Design.

Laurie D. Olin, one of the nation's premier landscape architects, partner of Olin Partnership, and former head of the department of landscape architecture at the Harvard Graduate School of Design.

Elizabeth Barlow Rogers, a guiding force in the rebirth of New York's Central Park and director of garden history and landscape studies at the Bard Graduate Center in New York.

These five proved a dynamic, challenging force in the Faneuil Hall forum, and they also put their heads together to come up with nine specific recommendations for the Greenway. In brief, these were:

1. For public officials to establish a public-private trust to take over design, construction, and governance of the parks.
2. To establish a "Common Ground Task Force" that would aggressively promote use of the new space by people from all over the city, and all their diversity.
3. To encourage the creation of a large Garden Under Glass on parcels near South Station, either as suggested by the Massachusetts Horticultural Society or through another group.
4. To promote the addition of a second large, iconic public attraction.
5. That the three parcels containing ramps leading to and from the highway below be covered and disguised as much as possible.
6. That at least two thousand new housing units be created bordering the new parks.
7. That the city actively encourage a burst of activity in the buildings and lots on the edges of the new Greenway to encourage a thriving year-round environment.
8. To plan as well for the upgrading of the streets that cross the Greenway, such as Hanover, State, and Congress streets, to help re-knit the city and reinforce its connection to the sea.
9. For the national panel to meet again after a year to review progress.

In addition to these events, the Beyond the Big Dig information campaign was at full throttle on several fronts. Altogether, in the four-month period from February through May, the *Globe* ran eight editorials, fifteen op ed columns, a magazine

cover story, and many news stories. In the meantime, WCVB was airing four full Chronicle shows featuring Campbell and the station's own reporting. And the website was up and buzzing.

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## Results

The project definitely raised Boston's sights toward a high-quality outcome for the Greenway. Now, in the spring of 2003, the design teams working on the park parcels are using some of the Beyond the Big Dig material, especially the dozens of suggestions from our community forums.

The project encouraged the goal of common ground as a central theme for all future planning, and that appears to have stuck.

As for governance, this is Boston, and the final result is uncertain. No trust has been created, and the prospects for one do not seem bright now. The Turnpike, although cooperative with other parties, has been in the driver's seat and has not given up any real power. Still, the Beyond the Big Dig emphasis on the need for a strong city role seems to have helped.

Beyond the Big Dig lives on in continued focus from news and opinion pieces in the *Globe*, and the website is upgraded regularly by Boston.com and MIT. We have helped advance other forums, and plan to reconvene our panel at a future date, but are not attempting to play the role we did in early 2002.

For the future, if the Beyond the Big Dig model is to be useful again, it will likely grow out of frustration that the normal political and civic channels are flagging, and need help producing the results that are normally their responsibility.

The confidence expressed by the Emerging Leaders Program at UMass Boston that our model might indeed be put to good use again is highly gratifying.

It is hard to imagine what specific issue might trigger a similar project. But we found that there is an extraordinary amount of talent and energy in many parts of Boston that is eager to work for the city's future, if only the right vehicle can be found to bring them together for a common goal.

*The editorials that follow appeared in the Boston Globe on February 5, March 12, April 29, May 6, May 13, and May 20, 2002, respectively. They are reprinted with permission.*

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## TIME TO THINK BIG

**U**NIQUE. ONCE-IN-A-LIFETIME. Olmstedian. Such adjectives have been applied hundreds of times to the opportunity presented by the demolition of the elevated Central Artery, now scheduled to begin in 2004.

The words are hardly adequate. The mile-long string of public open space parcels that will wind through the heart of downtown from Chinatown to North Station could become one of Boston's treasures — as much a signature of the city as the Mall is of Washington.

Children and adults from nearby neighborhoods could thrive in the corridor's parks. Residents of outlying Boston neighborhoods and the suburbs could flock to the new spaces for a myriad of activities, making this a prime area of common

ground for all of Greater Boston. Visitors from all over the country and the world could make a perambulation of the corridor one of their travel goals for generations to come.

But none of this is guaranteed. More than a decade of active planning has produced some givens. For instance, there will be surface traffic all along the corridor, but it will be slowed by frequent lights and sharp corners to make the area friendly to pedestrians. Also, environmental regulations require that 75 percent of the area be devoted to public open space, with only 25 percent to development.

Yet there is still vigorous debate over the definition of “open” space, and last year’s master plan left wide open the question of what will actually be done on these spaces. Final designers won’t even be selected until September at the earliest.

Financing is also up in the air. The Massachusetts Turnpike Authority has allocated \$31 million for initial construction, but this will likely not be enough for an ambitious plan. And who will own, manage, and maintain the new parcels? The state owns most of the property, and the Turnpike Authority is for now managing the project above ground as well as below. The authority has been working cooperatively with city officials, but the city would like more direct authority, while a legislative commission has pointed toward creation of a single-purpose agency with state, city, and private-sector participation.

With such major questions needing resolution, the *Globe* and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology are announcing today that they will undertake a four-month information campaign in conjunction with WCVB-TV (Channel 5) that will produce case studies from other cities near and far and broaden public awareness and participation.

Called “Beyond the Big Dig,” the campaign will feature articles by *Globe* architecture critic Robert Campbell and other *Globe* writers, lively debate on the *Globe*’s editorial and op-ed pages, four programs on WCVB’s “Chronicle,” an interactive site on Boston.com, two large-scale community meetings in April and May and a town forum in Faneuil Hall on May 30.

The Boston Society of Architects and the Boston Society of Landscape Architects are lending their expertise.

The campaign is not designed to compete with the efforts of the many city and state officials and community leaders who are already working on the project but to support their progress with some fresh perspectives and growing public awareness. Because the final design will be based in part on public participation, an ambitious and high-quality result will be achieved only if many people are well informed and actively involved.

While the *Globe* and WCVB will be paying their own expenses, the MIT case studies and forums have received major funding from the Boston Foundation and the State Street Corp., with additional sponsorship from Equity Office Properties of Chicago, the Artery Business Committee, and the Boston GreenSpace Alliance.

The Legislature has designated the planned surface roadway as the Rose Kennedy Greenway, and Senator Edward Kennedy is working for high-quality results. Surely Boston, combining its rich sense of history with its position on the frontiers of education and research, should be able to aim high and marshal the political and community will to achieve its goals.

After all, this is a city where teamwork and grit make anything possible.



**A PARIS MATCH? BOSTON CAN LEARN SOMETHING ABOUT CREATING NEW CIVIC SPACE FROM THE CITY OF LIGHT.**

Robert Campbell

**D**ATELINE: PARIS, FRANCE. A historic design question faces Boston today. What should we do with the thirty acres of land that now hunker down in the dark shadow of the Central Artery? When the artery comes down in 2004, we'll receive a remarkable gift of real estate, a swath of land a mile and a quarter long and about as wide as Paris's famous Champs-Elysees, slicing through Boston's downtown. What should it become? The *Globe* went to Paris to seek ideas. We weren't looking for models that Boston can copy directly. Boston and Paris are different. But nobody in Boston has yet been able to come up with a compelling vision for the artery. We're trapped in cliches. Park lovers are afraid that greedy businessmen want to fill the artery surface with profitable development. Some urbanists, on the other hand, fear that park lovers will turn the artery surface into a vacant green wasteland of wind-blown newspapers and homeless men. It's time to get beyond such caricatures. One way is to look at what other cities are doing.

As most people know, the majority of the artery land is supposed to be something called "public open space." Alas, we live in a culture where nobody is quite sure what public open space should be. We've often courted disaster when we've tried to create it. City Hall Plaza, that baked clay desert of emptiness, is only the most egregious example.

There exists a so-called master plan for the artery surface, done by planning consultants last year. The planners listened to everybody at stupefying length. Not surprisingly, they ended by proposing the lowest common denominator. Mostly grass, trees, and paths. There's nothing wrong with grass and trees.

But we wondered if, along with welcome greenery, there might not be other exciting things to do with civic space in a busy downtown. There's still time. Designers of the artery surface won't begin to finalize their work until perhaps the end of this year.

So we took a look at Paris. [In coming weeks, we'll also be reporting on other examples of downtown public space — in Barcelona, in San Francisco, and elsewhere. And WCVB-TV's "Chronicle" (Channel 5, weeknights at 7:30), which accompanied the *Globe* to Paris, will be looking at them too.]

By contrast with Boston, Paris is a bracing shock. The quality of new civic space here is stunning. And — just as with our artery — Parisians create it on the sites of old industrial infrastructure. The astonishing Parc Citroen replaces a former auto factory. The Parc de Bercy was once a tangle of rail yards and warehouses. Both are as fresh and inventive as Boston's master plan is tired and platitudinous.

But the case study that really wipes you out is the Viaduc des Arts.

The Viaduc was an abandoned, crumbling, decaying nineteenth century railroad viaduct. It was scheduled to be demolished. Instead, it has been transformed into a rich twenty-first century combination of shops and parkland. The shops are tucked into the arches that support the viaduct. The park is a strip of green that follows the old train bed, up on top of the arches. You get the life of commerce and the peace of greenery in the same place.

The shops recall the history of the neighborhood, which was once the blue-collar home of artisans, craftspersons, and antiques shops. The shops, therefore, display the arts and crafts of today, some of them made on the premises. Each shop occupies a single arch of the old viaduct. The arches have been refaced in a handsome orange-red brick that deliberately recalls another historic icon, the famous Place des Vosges not far away. Parking is tucked almost invisibly underground. The shopfronts themselves are elegantly detailed in glass, metal, and wood in a taut, minimalist architectural language that is very much that of today and becomes a kind of modern craft in itself. The architect was Patrick Berger.

The shops, though, wonderful as they are, are less than half the story. The rest is the park upstairs. It's called the Promenade Plantee. Three miles of the old track bed have been converted into a linear park, a kind of aerial nature walk in the city. The landscaping is a botanist's dream. You're never bored. Your path is endlessly varied. Some of the plants ripple in the wind like natural marshland. Others resemble formal parterres. In places, the park spreads out into playing fields and strolling parkland. At other times it narrows to a tight file edged by dark trees. Or it becomes a courtyard where oldsters, sipping their wine, watch kids playing games. Sometimes you walk through a trellised arbor. In one place, there's a cave-like hideaway. In still another, the park shears its way through a new building, splitting it in half. The designers — Philippe Mathieu and Jacques Vergely — seize every chance to dramatize the anomaly of a linear park that slips through Paris like thread through a needle.

There's no commercial activity along the Promenade, no cafes or flower markets or newsstands or museums or cultural attractions. But the life of the street below is always available. There's easy access by handsomely landscaped stairs (plus elevators). Most important, the planners have salted much of the length of the Promenade Plantee with new housing on both sides, modern apartment blocks of maybe eight or ten stories. The same is true of the other new parks in Paris.

Even in January, the shops and the Promenade were alive with people. On the wide sidewalk in front of the shops, teenage in-line skaters performed acrobatically, bothering no one while entertaining the shoppers with their skills. Up above on the Promenade, groups of school kids enjoyed outings in the fresh air and studied the plants. Smaller children and their parents and dogs came out of the apartments to the playgrounds and benches. People need parks, of course. But parks also need people. In Paris, planners have made sure that both halves of the equation are present.

What are the lessons for Boston? Obviously, we're not going to turn our own piece of infrastructure, the overhead artery, into an aerial park. (Although that might have been fun too.) But there are plenty of lessons just the same. Start with who was in control of the project: the city of Paris. There's no question that here, too, the city — not the state or its turnpike authority — should own and run the surface of the artery. It will be part of Boston and Boston should take charge of it.

Another lesson: You need both clout and cash to do a good job in the first place, and to maintain it afterward. Paris is France's show window to the world, and the city spends, we were told, as much as eight times as much per hectare of park as other French cities do. Boston won't do that. But there's no point pretending you can have great public space without spending money. We Americans, unfortunately, are more inclined to spend our money on our private home entertainment centers than on the public spaces we all share. Parisians love their civic space just as much as their private space, and they take equally good care of it. So should we.



Then there's the lesson of comprehensive planning. Open space and the activities that fuel it — shopping, culture, commerce, parking, and especially housing — are understood, at the Viaduc des Arts, to be inextricably intertwined. Each activity lives off the others. Public space is fed with life from its edges. If the artery land is to succeed, Boston will have to find ways to get more people living downtown. Most of the buildings and open parcels that line the artery on both sides have turned their backs to it because it is blighting. But when the artery comes down, this privately owned land will be greatly increased in value by the public investment in the artery open space. Nobody has yet looked seriously at how these parcels can best contribute to the life of the new public space.

A final lesson is that if you want to make a city interesting, save what you can of the past. A good city is a mix of memory and invention. The new and the old comment on each other. At the Viaduc, there's the contrast between the brick, recalling the historic Place des Vosges, and the shopfronts that look brand new. There's the way the character of the old surrounding Paris neighborhood, now largely vanished, is evoked by the presence of artisans. And of course there's the old piece of infrastructure, the viaduct itself, living beyond its first life into a new age and a new purpose. The city becomes a temporal collage, new wine in an old bottle, with both new and old made more vivid by the contrast. The lesson for Boston is that we shouldn't be afraid to be fresh and inventive with what is new. But we shouldn't lose sight of the past, either. One suggestion, put forward by Eugenie Beal of the Boston Natural Areas Fund, is for a museum of the history of the waterfront, perhaps partly underground so as not to occupy too much space.

As noted, we didn't expect to find precisely replicable models in Paris or anywhere else. But there's a lot to learn from the approaches and attitudes of designers in other places. The hope is to help ourselves and everyone else climb out of the box of knee-jerk ideas. Boston needs a vision that will bring everyone together.

*Robert Campbell is the Pulitzer Prize winning architecture critic for the Boston Globe.*

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## **BUILDING SPACES THAT WEAVE IN URBAN LIFE**

Jill Ker Conway

**T**HINK OF ALL THE PARKS you've enjoyed in cities, and then answer the question: What makes them such delightful places to be in?

In every case the answer will be because they are so closely knitted into the warp and weave of the adjoining urban life. In Europe, great public areas are the product of aristocratic societies, so the park was a place of recreation and leisure close to great places, with all the urban clustering that accompanied them.

So the Tuileries gardens are right in the middle of busy residential urban life of Paris. And the Piazza Navona in Rome was a site for a city whose aristocrats loved horses and racing them.

So how can we weave the thirty acres of the Central Artery corridor into Boston's life? And what do we want that space to say about us, how we live now, and what we want to leave to future generations?

We owe a lot to the generations that shaped our urban landscape. The aspirations for the city that gave us Trinity Church and the Boston Public Library, Symphony





Hall, and the Horticultural Society are clear. This was to be a city of high culture that rivaled any European metropolis. And the Emerald Necklace was to give a democratic city the open spaces that commerce alone couldn't provide.

The aspiration for Government Center was grand enough, but its planners misunderstood one important aspect of urban life. They built a place that is dead at night and arid by day, because it has no interaction with the urban space around it and there are no people living there twenty-four hours a day. Urban life is about people in all their wonderful variety, and great public spaces must always relate to that.

So, it's wonderful that we have, not a moment too soon, the beginning of plans for the governance and financing of the Central Artery Corridor Park system. But so far, although there have been very commendable efforts at consultation, we don't have a civic vision for the area. And we need one quickly.

To get us started, here's what I think the components of the vision should be.

First, it must involve a strong public-private partnership. Governments have tax squeezes and recessions that bring shortages of public goods. So, great parks need a committed civic constituency that cares about them, as was necessary to rescue Central Park from New York's fiscal woes.

Second, it must involve a clear plan of how and for whom we will weave a twenty-four hour community into the open space. Although the restrictions on 75 percent of the space are clear, how about some islands of high density housing designed for Boston's young population that can't afford to live downtown and for the elderly whose lives would be enlivened by living close to all the riches of the city?

And how about dedicating some of the rental income stream to maintaining the park? High density housing is the wave of the urban future, evidenced in the prize-winning Olympic villages built for Barcelona and Sydney, which have revitalized rundown urban areas and are highly prized by young and old residents alike. Those islands would give the park the couples courting, the children playing, the bustle of coming and going which make it fun to be a "flaneur" in Hyde Park or the Borghese Gardens.

We could make the park speak for our notion of democracy today by making some of those living spaces affordable housing. If we don't think about twenty-four-hour residents, we will have green acres of emptiness to match the cement and stone of Government Center.

Third, we must think creatively about commerce and where it fits along the borders and within the park. Without a plan, we'll find the area swamped with the smells of cooking fat from hot-dog stands and hamburger joints or the ubiquitous food trucks that appear beside construction sites. Some would be great. But we need places where we can all sit and relish the green with good food and drink, summer and winter.

Fourth, we need to plan now for the many ways parks are used for athletics. Why not a series of "parcours" beside jogging tracks, space for summer and winter games, lights to extend the outdoor day in winter, athletic spaces to match the scale and significance of our marathon? Everyone knows it's not safe to jog without people around. It's the grandmothers pushing prams, the school expeditions, the old folks enjoying the sun, the local team practices, the wedding parties being photographed, and the families visiting the equivalent of the Public Garden's ducks that make our parks safer than the best policing can.

Fifth, we must never confuse ourselves about pastoral idylls in the midst of urban life. Parks are works of art, not just so many acres of green space. And they never



mix with the suburban ideal of manufactured rural pleasures. We won't serve future generations well, unless we keep this front and center in all our thinking about this priceless opportunity.

If we think about all these things, we'll come close to saying what Boston believes a democratic urban community should look like, and later generations will think we did well.

*Jill Ker Conway, former president of Smith College, is an author and chair of Lend Lease Corp.*

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## CREATING COMMON GROUND

Hubie Jones

**A** COMMUNITY CONVERSATION on the surface Artery will take place on Saturday, May 11, from 10 to 2, at English High School in Jamaica Plain.

It would be a civic tragedy of monumental proportions if planning and decision-making for the afterlife of the construction of the depressed central artery is not driven by the wishes of the potential users of the new surface. Unless our neighborhood leaders wake up and vigorously enter the public conversation and the processes shaping decisions, their constituents are doomed to become victims of the actions of "well-intentioned" planners and political officials.

Good architects and urban planners believe that form follows function. In other words, the wishes and intentions of the users should determine what is physically built. This fundamental principle could be buried by the babble of voices now expressing narrow self-interests.

I am reminded of the architect designing an elementary school who asked the students what they would want to see built. The students said they most wanted a slide from the second to the first floor, something the architect would have never imagined.

We need to discover the metaphoric slides for the Artery surface through a creative process that allows the residents of all the neighborhoods of the city to express their practical dreams.

We must avoid at all costs the creation of an enclave primarily used by out-of-town workers and tourists. Due to the demographic revolution in Boston, we are on the cusp of moving beyond the racial and ethnic enclaves of the past, because substantial diversity now exists in almost every neighborhood. To build on this asset, residents should gain "ownership" of these twenty-seven acres by having their wishes heard and adopted. Without such "ownership," use by residents of this space will be minimal.

The current invisibility of people of color in the downtown area and other public spaces beyond the neighborhoods in the city is unacceptable. This new public space should help to change this condition. Above all, the Artery surface is an opportunity to create social space that is common ground for all who live in, work in, and use Boston. This is the compelling vision that must drive this civic work.

Even building the "right" environment on the surface is no guarantee that it will be accessible and used by everyone in the city. This precious social space should be programmed with imaginative activities and events to attract a diversity of users.

Therefore, I recommend the establishment of a Common Ground Commission, composed of neighborhood, cultural, and business leaders with the responsibility for

programming. Its work would be supported by public and private funding. This commission would work in tandem with the eventual authority that has responsibility for maintenance and security on the surface.

Think how much poorer the city would be if the Parks Department were not holding attractive events in our parks, particularly during the summer. That work should serve as the operational model for the Common Ground Commission.

Also, in a city where leaders have substantial difficulty getting to yes without great struggle and rancor, a mediation process should be established for the fair hearing of all ideas and recommendations by all stakeholders for creating this public space.

Here is a gigantic opportunity to move us toward a culture of collaboration, which is sorely needed. This civic challenge is as much about process as it is about product.

Boston is littered with products that evolved out of contentious battles, only to leave in their wake future recriminations that poisoned the civic life and culture of the city. We do not want to see that old movie this time around. I am afraid that we will not escape this history unless an honorable mediation process is utilized.

Boston still struggles to achieve social integration of racial ethnic groups and social classes. The Artery surface and the build-out of the waterfront in South Boston provide an enormous opportunity to knit the city together. Few cities get such an opportunity through physical development to transform its social fabric. It is an opportunity that we dare not squander.

*Hubie Jones was special assistant for urban affairs to the chancellor of the University of Massachusetts Boston.*

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## **NEEDED: VISION AND GUMPTION**

Laurie Olin

**I** HAVE BEEN A longtime witness and sometime participant in the proposals for the redevelopment of the land now occupied by Boston's central artery.

In 1984, my colleague Joseph Passonneau and I mounted a studio at Harvard's Graduate School of Design for students of Landscape Architecture, Architecture and Urban Design. We asked several questions centered on what physical and social project would be possible if one made changes in traffic and transportation in downtown Boston.

I was also one of several people who offered advice and critiques along the way to the recently completed master plan for the land above the Central Artery. It would be difficult to say with confidence that things have gone smoothly in the production of the current master plan for the territory engendered by the Big Dig.

With everyone and his and her brother trying to put their fingerprints on the plan, I can't imagine that anything special can possibly emerge.

Can a genuine, strong, workable, and beautiful design that looks forward to the Boston of the 21st century be accomplished within the current situation? I can't imagine it. Could Boston and its citizens change the situation? Yes, if there is the desire and will.

Remember Lewis Mumford's profound remark that "trend is not destiny." Or as a transportation planner friend used to say, "that's why we have steering wheels on cars." We can change direction when there is a good reason.

What do I think could happen if things were different and what do I wish would happen?

Put simply, there are two things that must change if this opportunity to reshape Boston's downtown isn't to be wasted. A genuine, first-rate client must be put in charge, and a lot of the petty, foolish, dated, and inane constraints, goals, and guidelines placed upon the project need to be thrown out.

I've never seen a superb project anywhere in which there wasn't a good client. Some agency and one (or very few) people with good sense must be put in charge, and everyone else must get out of the way. The corollary of this is that the public and bureaucratic second-guessing, nitpicking, and grabbing for power and pieces of the project must stop.

Questioning any further the balance of building parcels to open space or park parcels seems fruitless. The balance as currently proposed is fine. In fact, using imaginative structures to cover and tame most of the ramps is an excellent idea.

The citizens of Boston have had their say in great volume and detail, far beyond the norm. The various desires are manifest.

This is not a vote against democracy, nor is it one for dictatorship. It is a vote for leadership and art. Now is the time to appoint someone to take charge and to hire talented souls and give them a chance to operate.

Second, if a real and genuine design, one that is imaginative, robust, rich, and whole — even fresh or beautiful — and suited only to Boston is to emerge, the pastiche-laden historicist, precedent-driven, and simplistic constraints forced upon the master planners must be shed.

Normative park and urban design planning today in America has become far too cautious, fearful, and backward. It wasn't always this way, and it needn't remain so.

Surely, this is strange behavior for the most powerful country in the world with the largest economy in history. I prefer the old urbanism to the new one. It wasn't a thin copy of something in the past, but was alive, dynamic, and evolving. It also created public works with generosity of spirit and resources.

Does it matter? Yes. Cities rarely have a second or, in this case, third or fourth try at how to provide structure and purpose to their fabric.

Are there precedents for new work that does such a thing well in our own time? Yes. Think of Barcelona or Paris and the transformative projects enacted there in the past 15 years. These have been bold and unique, specific inventions, not collages of Xeroxed bits and pieces.

The Promenade Plantee/Viaduc des Arts in Paris is composed of only a couple of elements. But it is wonderful. There is nothing like it.

On numerous occasions in the past this is exactly how things worked here. There were grand projects. There was vision, gumption, commitment, and talent — controversy broke like waves over those who took up the challenge — and great things got done.

Boston, get your act together.

*Laurie Olin is a landscape architect, partner in the firm of Olin Partners, and former head of the Department of Landscape Architecture at Harvard University Graduate School of Design.*

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## A CHALLENGE AND OPPORTUNITY TO “GET IT RIGHT”

Elizabeth Barlow Rogers

LIKE DOWNTOWN NEW YORK, downtown Boston has a major planning opportunity and challenge born of change and disaster. Both cities have experienced a changed character as their economic function as ports is no longer paramount and their waterfronts are converted to new uses, primarily recreational ones.

Both cities are engaged in replanning transportation infrastructures and creating new public spaces in their downtowns. The magnitude of these endeavors is often likened to their respective great nineteenth-century public works projects: the creation of Central Park and the Emerald Necklace.

In terms of scope, scale, and capital expenditure this is certainly true, but with regard to the nature of the task at hand both Boston and New York planners have a different, if no less noble, mission than the one that guided their great forebear, Frederick Law Olmsted. Theirs is not the task of building a green armature for metropolitan growth but rather one of remediation as they diagnose problems, perform radical surgery, and provide therapeutic regimens for the urban organism.

To view the mission of the Central Artery/Tunnel project essentially as one of burying a roadbed and building parks in the footprint of the old elevated highway would have been simplistic.

The Boston Central Artery Corridor Master Plan sponsored by the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority is a thoughtful document that seeks to incorporate American planners' belated recognition of the failure of the urban renewal era to provide livable cities. It aligns its vision with the lessons of Kevin Lynch and Jane Jacobs, two great urbanists who early saw that planning should not become the purview primarily of transportation engineers.

The question now is how to turn its prescriptions for a better Boston into reality.

It is presumptuous for a New Yorker to attempt to speak to Bostonians when so much intelligent, thoughtful work is already underway, but these are generic reminders that hold true for planners in both cities where there now exists the opportunity and challenge to “get it right”: The whole should be more than the sum of its parts. Urban space is experiential. People move through space, and the way in which the streets, plazas, and parks appear and function in relation to the buildings that surround them and the way that the buildings appear and function in relation to these public spaces is vitally important.

Some of the best things that will happen in the reborn Central Artery/Tunnel area cannot even be anticipated, but view corridors that delight our eyes and good visual cues for navigating urban space must be considered now. Reciprocity between building design and public space design, especially with respect to circulation, is essential.

Remember that “God is in the details.” A good vocabulary of public space design — streetlights and furniture, environmental graphics, paving and landscaping — is not the result of public agencies simply shopping in manufacturers' catalogs. It comes about when professionally trained architects, lighting specialists, landscape architects, and environmental graphic designers are commissioned to work as a team to design distinctive and beautiful new products that unobtrusively give character and a sense of good management to streets and parks.



Like New York, Boston now has the chance not to choose off-the-shelf, copy-cat “historic” lights, uncoordinated signage, and ugly litter receptacles but to enrich its vocabulary of public space design by getting its best design professionals to collaboratively develop new streetscape and parkscape components during the next phase of the Central Artery/Tunnel planning process.

Start with management. The business improvement district, now a common model of public-private partnership for cities everywhere, is an effective one. The principal districts within the Boston Central Artery Plan form the geographically defined zones for such management districts where citizen leadership, contractually empowered and supported by government, will ensure the real “proprietors” of the public spaces — those who use and benefit from them most — staff and run operations that ensure good daily maintenance, concessionaire oversight, and events programming. It is critically important that before substantial capital investment in the creation of new public spaces is made that sound public-private partnerships with adequate sources of revenue, clear missions, and agreed upon management measurements be in place.

Good cities are the products of the good ideas of many people over time. Two great American cities that have been influential urban leaders throughout the nation’s history now have the opportunity and challenge to reshape urban space in ways that will critically affect their own destinies and influence other place-makers for years to come. It will be interesting to see how well each succeeds in capturing the moment.

*Elizabeth Barlow Rogers is director of garden history and landscape studies at the Bard Graduate Center in New York City, chairman of Cityscape Institute, and the author of Landscape Design: A Cultural and Landscape History.*



