

# MANHATTAN, KANSAS: A NEW VISION

BY GAIL GREET HANNAH

We have a perfect storm of activity. Manhattan is going through a period of tremendous growth and we are engaged in a comprehensive planning process that will give us ideas on land use. For this event we want to think about life in the city after the planning is done. What will Manhattan look like and what will it be like to live here?

**Stephanie Rolley, Kansas State University**

On October 7, 2014 a group of twenty young design professionals, identified by their firms as potential leaders of their professions, arrived in Manhattan, Kansas for two days of intense charrette focused on envisioning a new urban landscape for the fast-growing city. The group, composed of landscape architects, architects and interior designers, was joined by a dozen Kansas State University design students in architecture, interior architecture, product design, landscape architecture and planning, along with two distinguished landscape architects who served as team leaders for the

challenge: Peter Schaudt of Chicago-based Hoerr Schaudt Landscape Architects, and Shane Coen of Coen + Partners based in Minneapolis. The KSU campus was home base for the Xtreme LA (Extreme Landscape Architecture) event sponsored by Landscape Forms and co-hosted by Landscape Forms President, Richard Heriford with Barbara Deutsch, Executive Director, Landscape Architecture Foundation, and Stephanie Rolley, Professor and Department Head, Department of Landscape Architecture and Regional & Community Planning, Kansas State University.

### The Situation on the Ground

Manhattan began as a settlement on the route west during the mid-1800s and soon became an economic hub for the region. A picturesque community built on a grid of brick streets lined with towering elm trees, its population of about 60,000 in 2010 is projected to exceed 80,000 in the next twenty years. Today the city is home to Kansas State University and Fort Riley, giving it a strikingly high concentration of young adults: approximately 43% of county residents are 20 to 34 years old. As the new site for the National Bio and Agro Defense Facility (NBAF) and the Kansas Department of Agriculture, construction is booming and KSU's aggressive Vision 2025 plan promises to bring additional growth and development. The city has been recognized by Forbes magazine as one of the top five Best Small Place for Business and Careers. But growth is outstripping the city's projected plans. A housing shortage forces many people to commute to work from outside and homes spill over ridge tops. New big box retail stores line highways. While some local and regional businesses are thriving, others unable to compete in the new economy have been lost, leaving infill sites empty across the community.

All this is happening within the ecosystem of the tall grass prairie, which gives the illusion of limitless room for growth but in fact has an underlying geology that resists human habitation. Tall grasses grow in a thin layer of soil on top of alternating layers of limestone and shale and are maintained with annual burning. Deceptively steep slopes limit opportunities for new infrastructure, and development in the hills comes at great financial and cultural costs. The city rests at the juncture of the Kansas and Big Blue Rivers and flooding is a regular event. Impacts on the natural environment caused by encroachment in the floodplain and construction in the prairie will require mitigation and conservation as future growth proceeds. A viable vision for the future of Manhattan must accommodate the ecosystem and meet the needs of residents and businesses in ways that ensure a sustainable environment and a sustainable high quality of life. Xtreme LA participants were asked to address those issues in several specific ways.

### The Challenge

- Develop a vision and plan for appropriate population density and mix near the university and downtown areas for a community in transition from small town to growing city, and consider how growth in outlying areas can respect the cherished Flint Hills landscape.
- Propose a future urban form and massing that will maintain the quality of life that Manhattan residents value while providing new places for people to live, work and play including places that are attractive to millennials, and environments, infill or greenfields that encourage innovation and creativity.
- Apply design strategies that address sustainability to ensure that future Manhattan residents can live and work within a fair share of the earth's resources. Participants were referred to the 10 One Planet Principles advocated by the Landscape Architecture Foundation to guide them in their sustainability efforts.

## The 10 ONE PLANET Principles

Zero Carbon

Zero Waste

Sustainable Transport

Sustainable Materials

Local And Sustainable Food

Sustainable Water, Land Use And Wildlife

Culture And Community

Equity And Local Economy

Health And Happiness

The awe we experienced as we drove through the Flint Hill on our approach to the city is something we were not expecting.

**Nick Gotthardt, Surfacedesign, Inc., San Francisco CA.**

Participants made the trip from the Kansas City airport by coach, driving through a landscape of low hills and valleys under a dramatic expanse of sky and approaching Manhattan through the Flint Hills, one of the last remaining tall grass prairies in the US.

The following morning the group was divided into two teams and after a brief tour of key areas of the city, met together to share overall impressions. They were impressed by Manhattan's unique ecological context and dismayed to find no reflection of it in the landscape of the city. Even at the Flint Hills Discovery Center, a venue for the celebration of the tall grass prairie, there was no prairie grass to be found on a site landscaped by lawns. Participants noted the car centric focus of the city with its many multiple-lane streets, some very wide, few heavily used. They welcomed Manhattan's warm small town feel but observed a scarcity of pedestrian walkways, the absence of bike lanes, and the lack of public transportation. They noted the absence of a ceremonial gateway into the city and the presence of a levee obscuring the Kansas River and creating a barrier to public access to the water. There was universal agreement that Manhattan needed connections – between the city and the prairie; between the diverse groups in its population; between residential, commercial and recreational areas; between people, the waterfront and the experience of nature. And so a theme emerged.

## **LIVE WHERE YOU LIVE**

### **Welcome Home Prairie: Bringing the Flint Hills In**

The goal was to “connect Manhattan with the Flint Hills in a tactile way on a daily basis,” and implement changes that would make living in the city a more active and rich experience. Solutions were organized around three big ideas and four strategies for growth.

### **Three Big Ideas**

Connect the city with its surrounding ecology through innovative infrastructure to bring in the prairie, restore the flood plain, and engage the river.

Promote a healthy lifestyle and environment by creating a walkable and bikeable city and by building in tactical approaches to sustainability, including recycling, reuse, composting, and community agriculture.

Link all the parts by creating new connections between neighborhoods, activity centers within the city and the natural settings around it.

### **Four Strategies For Growth**

These strategies were informed by growth patterns identified in Manhattan's 2035 plan which projected 20,000 + new residents and the need for 10,000 + new housing units.

**Grow In and Up:** Create greater densities through cluster housing and preserved open space; establish height restrictions; develop underutilized space; limit growth on the hillsides outside the city to preserve views and limit sprawl.

**Plan for Diversity:** Encourage and support diversity through mixed housing types and affordable solutions with a variety of sizes, densities and price points; consider students on budgets, families concerned with accessibility and safety, young professionals seeking an urban experience, and retirees who want proximity to community services and university activities.

**Integrate New Development with What Already Exists:** Build compatible architecture; maintain scale; implement mixed-use development of residential, office and retail with upper story setbacks and internal parking; preserve street life on ground level; enhance streetscapes to include activities such as sidewalk dining.

**Fill In the Gaps:** Develop the spaces between activity centers making use of unused land to address housing needs; build vertically in open areas; and make development easier in these areas through strategies such as tax credits.

The group focused on seven areas within the city that it called Pockets of Possibility, chosen because they contain important economic, social and recreational resources that could be developed and connected to enhance life in the community.

#### **Pockets of Possibility**

**Poyntz Avenue** - Manhattan's main street with shops, galleries and restaurants

**Aggieville** - the district for student nightlife, close to campus, inactive during the day

**City Park** - 40-acre park, self contained, highly programmed

**Gateway** - the un-ceremonial entry to the city from the highway: no gate/no glory

**Big Box Mall** - an underused parcel with vacancies; requires a car to access

**Stadium** - the KSU athletic field at the north end of the campus

**NBAF** - (National Bio/Agricultural Research Facility) a large government project under construction

The large teams broke into small self-selected groups based on interest and expertise and set to work. By using maps, surveys, current planning studies, regulatory guidelines and revisiting sites for closer examination, they researched, collaborated, and were mentored by team leaders. In 24 hours, they had created a comprehensive vision for the Manhattan of the future. On the morning of the third day the teams faced an audience of students, faculty and invited guests, including representatives from the City of Manhattan, local business associations, the Flint Hills Regional Council and property management companies. Tim DeNoble, Dean of the Kansas State University School of Architecture, Landscape Architecture and Planning welcomed guests and thanked the hosts for "the engagement of practice, industry and government with Kansas State, which advances the knowledge of our students and faculty, and advances our community and society." Then, in narratives and images the teams presented their vision for a more vibrant, beautiful and engaging city.

#### **A NEW VISION**

In this vision for the future streets and water play transformative roles.

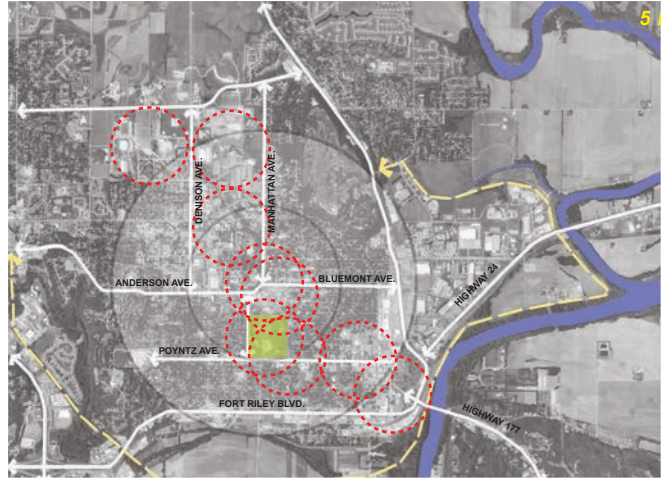
Streets take up the most public space in most downtowns. They set up the framework for city development.

**Kody Smith, Dix.Hite + Partners, Inc., Longwood, FL**

With the manifesto "The Street Is For The People," participants looked at how streets impact the life of the city by providing circulation, connectivity, amenity, character, access and safety, and how Manhattan might redefine its corridors to change the way it looks and functions. Citing some obvious barriers to a more fluid city, including street grids that dead end at the KSU campus and City Park, and very wide thoroughfares like Bluemont and Anderson that cut through the heart of town and are difficult for pedestrians to cross, they visualized opportunities and illustrated them with successful examples from other US cities. The overall approach was to make streets a secondary circulation system for pedestrians, bicycles and water by: reducing the number of traffic lanes, widening sidewalks and creating more pedestrian walkways, encouraging streetscape activity such as outdoor cafes and sidewalk marketing, creating dedicated bike lanes, providing parallel parking on both sides of the street in front of businesses, and constructing medians as separation between pedestrian and vehicular areas and planting them with prairie grasses to manage storm water. In two key moves designed to improve connectivity the group proposed a Five Minute Walking Trail between major points of interest and a public bus loop connecting the seven Pockets of Possibility.



**Blumont Avenue Before**



**Five Minute Walking Trail**



**Blumont Avenue After**

For downtown Poyntz Avenue and the areas above City Park and to the east along the main route into the city, the group proposed some single-family homes and 3 to 5 story mixed-use retail, housing and restaurant development with internal parking. Set backs at the office level in vertical construction were proposed to provide a buffer between the street and upper level residential units. Wide sidewalks, median plantings with seating, and streetscape amenities were recommended to activate civic life in these areas. A similar strategy was proposed for the NBAF property, a potentially world-class research facility that will bring many professional scientists and support personnel to the city, providing jobs but also putting further pressure on housing. In Aggieville, the teams advocated for creation of welcoming entryways to the district



**Poyntz Avenue Before**



**Poyntz Avenue After**

to provide identity, a focus on business development to increase daytime activity, and construction of residential and commercial units with greater massing and density as infill and on underutilized space including parking lots.

The Stadium, currently disconnected from the campus and city by limited access except by car, is a large space used only for sports events. The teams proposed creation of pedestrian walkways and bike lanes connecting the Stadium to the places where people live and work and interfacing with the proposed new Bus Loop, moves that would improve access and mitigate traffic congestion on game days. They advocated resurfacing the parking area to manage storm water and using the underutilized space for community

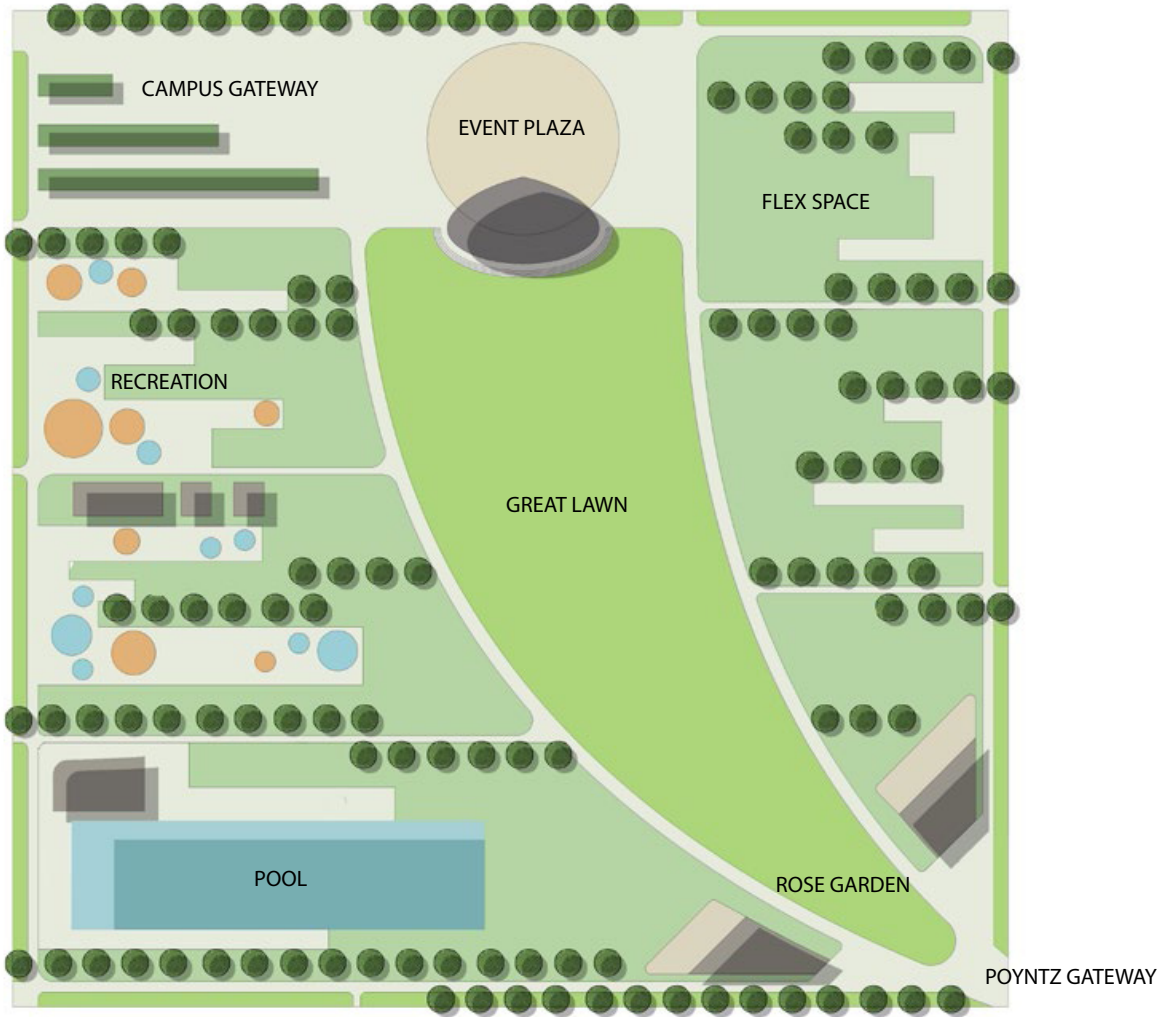
activities, such as a Farmer's Market, when games are not being held.

At City Park participants saw a beautiful place with many large old trees, its sense of cohesion interrupted by a profusion of programming features. Their ambitious proposal was to bring back what they called the "core simplicity" of the park by removing some dedicated programming, implementing more flexible multiple uses, and moving programming to the perimeter. They envisioned a Great Lawn as the center focus of the space and proposed eliminating vehicular traffic and creating two walking paths through the park from south to north, connecting neighborhoods at both ends. They would bring streets from the city grid as "fingers"



**North 14th Street Rediscovered**

into the park, making walking and biking connections with the north/south pathways and increasing circulation through the heart of the city, and would bring in vendors to create food opportunities to generate social gathering. Along the streets bounding the park they proposed new mixed-use development to bring greater residential density and commercial activity to the area.



**City Park**





### **Welcome Home Prairie**

Bringing in the prairie is important for identity, but it is also a great way to manage storm water. Tall grasses are a natural system that is ideally suited to infiltrating and treating storm water.

**Emily Bujold, Damon Farber, Minneapolis, MN**

Participants proposed a watershed-wide approach to water management that would embrace the Flint Hills and balance natural systems and infrastructure. They created compelling images of how Manhattan might green its streets through artful storm management, including planting prairie grasses in medians and in strips along roadways and installing permeable paving. They cited the opportunities that a new approach to storm water infrastructure in the city could bring for expressing identity, building a sense of community and encouraging public involvement in environmental stewardship, suggesting for example that implementing rainwater re-use strategies could create incentives for property owners to engage in sustainable practices. They suggested that the city study hydrology patterns and investigate a hybrid, engineered solution to bringing back the creek as a connector between places.

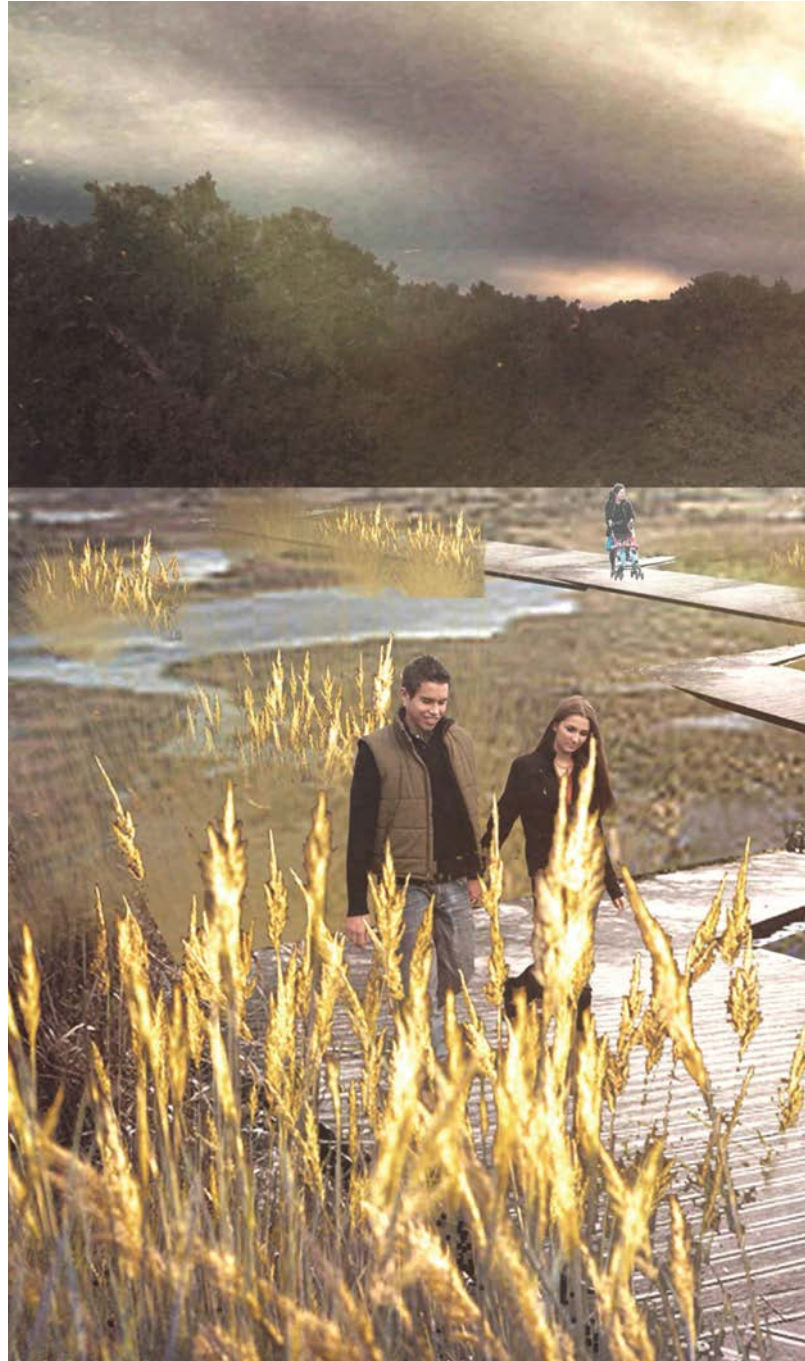
What if we peeled back the levee and created a setback that gave more land to the flood plain? That would allow a beautiful restored grassland to be the entry sequence into the town.

**Aubrey Weeks, Mithun Partners, Seattle WA**

Having created a vision for a future Manhattan that celebrates the prairie with ribbons of grasses threading through its streets, the group turned to restoring the relationship between the city and the river. It proposed a new processional gateway to the city constructed on an artificial hill, like the hills and ravines of the tall grass prairie surrounding the city, creating a “glorious vista” of the surrounding ecology and linked to a storm water park along the river on property adjacent to the Big Box Mall. A proposed elevated pedestrian/bicycle bridge across the river would connect with an expanded Linear Trail around the borders of the city, with a repurposed train station serving as the trailhead. The expanded floodplain, with walking decks meandering through the restored grasslands, would celebrate the waterfront and create a destination for recreation, bird watching and community life.

If you can do what has been proposed, you will have people coming from all over the world to look at your prairie streetscapes. There's a real opportunity to make Manhattan a great place to live.

**Barbara Deutsch, Landscape Architecture Foundation**





Team leader Shane Coen thanked participants and the audience, declaring “You are seeing an amazing amount of talent and power here. Thank you so much for being part of it with us.” Peter Schaudt pronounced his profession in good hands: “The next generation of landscape architects will provide an amazing future.” Landscape Forms President, Richard Heriford, a Kansas State University graduate in architecture, closed the presentation on a personal note. “It’s very good to be back at K State. I feel like I have 35 new friends,” he said, inviting attendees to continue the friendship through a Landscape Forms online community designed for Xtreme LA participants to help them stay connected, networked and learning into the future.

## ADDENDA

**Professional Participants**

Rodrigo Buelvas	Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, LLP	Chicago, IL
Emily Bujold	Damon Farber Associates	Minneapolis, MN
Jon Champlin	EDSA	Fort Lauderdale, FL
Meredith Epley-McWilliams	Gensler	Houston, TX
Joe Giangrandi	LandDesign, Inc.	Washington, DC
Nick Gotthardt	Surfacedesign, Inc.	San Francisco, CA
Shannon Harbers	CSW Landscape Architects Limited	Ottawa, ON Canada
Heath House	PWP Landscape Architecture	Berkeley, CA
Jenna Jones	site design group, ltd.	Chicago, IL
Matthew Leasure	MKSK Studios	Columbus, OH
See-Yin Lim	Terraplan Landscape Architects Ltd	Toronto, ON
Daniel Mescher	M2I Associates Inc.	Houston, TX
Katie Piasecki	JPRA Architects	Farmington Hills, MI
Kaylynn Primerano	Norris Design	Phoenix, AZ
Eric Silvey	The Clark Enersen Partners	Lincoln, NE
Tim Slazinik	HOK	St. Louis, MO
Kody Smith	Dix.Hite + Partners, Inc.	Longwood, FL
Amy Syverson	Sikora Wells Appel	Haddonfield, NJ
Drew Vanderwert	Davis Partnership	Denver, CO
Aubrey Weeks	Mithun Partners	Seattle, WA

**Student Participants****Guests**

Eric Conner	Aaron Apel	President	Aggieville Business Association
James DeVault	Rod Harms	Executive Director	Aggieville Business Association
Rachel Fox	Eric Cattell	Asst. Director for Planning	City of Manhattan
Lauren Harness	Jason Hilgers	Deputy City Manager	City of Manhattan
Katherine Leise	Karen Davis	Dir. of Community Development	City of Manhattan
Rachael Mayhill	Rich Jankovich	City Commissioner	City of Manhattan
Teague Peak	Robert Ott	Dir. of Public Works	City of Manhattan
Taylor Ricketts	Ron Fehr	City Manager	City of Manhattan
Dylan Rupar	Gary Stith	Director	Flint Hills Regional Council
Alexsis Stensland	Stephanie Watts	Transportation Planner	Flint Hills Regional Council
Sarah Swaim	Katherine Ankerson	IAPD Department Head	Kansas State University
Timothy Tse	Matt Knox	Arch Department Head	Kansas State University
	Karen Hibbard	Director	Manhattan Convention and Visitors Bureau
	Gwyn Riffel	Owner	Riffel Asset Management
	Monty Wedel	Planning and Special Projects Director	Riley County
	Calvin Emig	Owner	Wildcat Property Management

## BIOS

**Coordinator/Co-Host****Stephanie Rolley PLA, FASLA, AICP**

Professor and Department Head,  
Department of Landscape Architecture  
and Regional & Community Planning,  
Kansas State University

Stephanie Rolley works across scales and boundaries, seeking new opportunities to make connections between people and ideas that can shape places and thinking. Practice in architecture, planning and urban design offices in Boston, Dallas and San Antonio framed her early professional experience. Her teaching is supported by scholarship that includes longstanding engagement in interdisciplinary community-based collaborations, and she has been honored with recognition of her teaching, scholarship and leadership within the university and nationally with honors including the Council of Educators in Landscape Architecture Award of Distinction and the KSU Presidential Award for Outstanding Department Head. Stephanie and has served on the ASLA Council on Education; the Landscape Architecture Foundation Board of Directors; and the Landscape Architecture Accreditation Board. She and her students have received national and regional design awards from the American Society of Landscape Architects and the Landscape Architecture Foundation.

## Team Leaders

Two distinguished landscape architects with experience in successful collaboration between landscape architects and architects and sustainable solutions will mentor the teams:

### **Peter Lindsay Schaudt PLA, FASLA, FAAR**

Partner, Hoerr Schaudt Landscape Architects  
(based in Chicago)

Peter Schaudt is a landscape architect whose numerous design awards and honors include the Fellowship with the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) and the AIA Collaborative Achievement Award. In a career marked with strong credentials in the art of design, stewardship, and social responsibility, he has pursued an approach to urban design that blurs the boundaries between landscape architecture and architecture. Notable projects include the master plan for the transition of the Glenview Naval Station into a successful mixed-use development; Uptown Normal, a sustainable design incorporating landscape, transportation and sustainable infrastructure, recognized in 2011 by the US EPA with a Sustainable Achievement Award; and the Gary Comer Youth Center green roof and the Landscape Preservation Master Plan for University of North Carolina's Chapel Hill campus, which have won national awards from the ASLA.

### **Shane Coen FASLA, RLA**

Founder and Principal of Coen + Partners  
(based in Minneapolis)

Shane Coen is a landscape architect who has led Coen + Partners' innovative practice for twenty years, directing the design vision for each project in the studio. His creativity and disciplined design approach have been honored with numerous awards, including a Special Award for Collaborative Work from the American Institute of Architects Minnesota Chapter. His work, recognized by influential design publications throughout the world, has been described by The New York Times architectural critic, Anne Raver, as "pushing Midwestern boundaries." In addition to his practice, Shane lectures extensively on his work and on the importance of landscape architecture in shaping our urban, suburban, and rural environments, and of collaborative design processes. He was a featured speaker for the Emerging Voices Lecture Series, sponsored by the Architectural League of New York, upon receiving an Emerging Voices Award for 2009.

