

Crosstown 116: Bringing Habitat II Home from Istanbul to Harlem

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Crosstown 116: Bringing Habitat II Home from Istanbul to Harlem, a partnership of the American Institute of Architects New York Chapter, the City College of New York School of Architecture and Environmental Studies, and community groups in Upper Manhattan, is supported the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development. It is one of the four United States initiatives following up on the Habitat II Agenda of United Nations Conference on Human Settlements, which took place in Istanbul in 1996. The Crosstown 116 initiative has had four components:

- Briefing Book: information collected and disseminated to local residents and organizations, schools and libraries, agencies, and participants
- Seminar Series: weekly discussions involving community members, students and faculty, planners and architects, on critical issues in community-building
- Design Studios: student work in architecture and urban landscape at City College and urban design at Columbia University, based on the Briefing Book and Seminar Series, all focused on Crosstown 116
- Design Dialogue: a Community Dialogue and a day-long Design Charette, bringing together all the components of a Civic Triumvirate, working collaboratively in teams

THE DESIGN CHARETTE

On Friday evening, November 7, and all day Saturday November 8, Crosstown 116 was in full swing. Four working teams assembled in Shepard Hall. Each team set forth its issues, policies and topics - and the Crosstown 116 sites that would be their focus:

- The Street as Public Realm
- Housing, Street, and Community
- Embedding Performance Spaces in Community
- Cultural Preservation, Renewal, and Development

Friday evening was a Community Dialogue. It was an exchange of viewpoints between local residents and community leaders, and representatives of each of the four teams. It set the stage for the Design Charette.

Saturday, all day, was the Design Charette. It had workshops for each of the four teams. Local residents, students and faculty, planners and architects talked, argued, sketched and developed their proposals.

Because the Crosstown 116 Design Dialogue brought together people from many places, many communities, and many walks of life, it brought to the table many profound questions:

- How can we connect? How can we help each other more? care for each other more? learn from each other more? How can we help each other build community?
- How can we connect the local community agendas and the world-wide agendas of the United Nations? How can we preserve and build good places for everyday life?
- How can we connect two sources of knowledge and imagination, one coming from inside, from the communities, and another coming from outside, from the professions?

Late Saturday afternoon, on the walls of Shepard Hall's curved gallery, everyone pinned up their work. The four teams argued for their proposals. It was a remarkable event. A happening. The Exhibition, akin to an action painting, shows the traces of the Crosstown 116 Design Charette.

HOUSING, STREET, AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZED BY THE AIA NEW YORK CHAPTER HOUSING COMMITTEE

Goals:

- Design of affordable housing in an urban context
- Housing as a fundamental component of Community
- Community as partnership

We selected King Towers and its relationship to a redeveloping 116th Street as our Dialogue. King Towers is a New York City Housing Authority super block development between 112th and 115th Streets and Lenox and Fifth Avenues. We worked to understand King Towers' organization, its amenities and services and its relationship to the surroundings.

King Towers is itself a community, composed of 13 residential towers with day care and recreation facilities for many age groups. The development is well maintained and pleasantly landscaped, with off-street parking for a small number of cars.

As successful redevelopment of 116th Street requires fortifying the surrounding areas, we looked at how King Towers proper, and redevelopment of the largely vacant block of 115th Street immediately north, might enhance the commercial and residential viability of 116th Street. This was our Site.

Community as Partnership

The Design Dialogue was truly a chorale of many voices that only rarely veered toward cacophony. Some of the participating voices were:

Tower Residents: Ms. Ruby Kitchen, the President of King Towers Tenant Association and two of her associates indicated some basic concerns of the residents of the Towers and the community at large:

- The need for jobs for young people

- The need for year-round recreation and activity spaces serving people of all ages
- How to use the open amphitheater/basketball court year-round
- The need for services for seniors
- The need for more laundry spaces

Community Residents

The need for recreation spaces for young people

The relocation of the Market, a bazaar of products, many of African origin, currently located on the corner of 116th and Lenox Avenue

Local Developers: Carlton Brown of Full Spectrum Development described his master plan and its elements, including:

- The market and type of residential units appropriate to the site
- The need for retail to serve the immediate and larger communities
- The need for a vendor's market
- The African Market, as a (partially) underground market, will not provide significant income, and yet is important to the community, and therefore would be positive to maintain as a part of the redevelopment efforts.

The AIA Senior Round Table Members offered their experience in housing and urban development, dealing with both the realities and recent history in New York City.

The Housing Committee charette team (with CCNY Professor Stephen Campbell and student volunteers) addressed:

- How best to reinforce the existing street grid and revive the Avenues by permitting the extension of 113th and 114th Streets to travel east-west through the site, and to identify land uses more appropriate along the Avenues
- How redevelopment of the north side of 115th Street could best enhance 116th Street
- What combination of commercial, residential and community facilities would best enhance 116th Street in that block. One scheme developed a through-block open market between housing blocks to create a direct connection from 116th Street through to the Martin Luther King Houses to the south

The Charette was an intensive, though intentionally not comprehensive masterplan study of our Site: 116th Street and the blocks south to 112th Street. We hope the drawings demonstrate our concerns and stimulate continued discussion, with a positive effect on future developments.

EMBEDDING PERFORMANCE SPACES IN COMMUNITY

Organized by the AIA New York Chapter Minority Resources in Architecture Committee.

Chitlin/Circuit Theater — 116th Street between Madison and Park Avenue — East Harlem: The subject of this study is a theater. It is to be part of a through-block development, the other parts being apartment and row housing, shops along 116th Street, a picnic garden, and green garden plots for the residents.

In the traditions of the Chitlin' Circuit, the theater is to be a self-sufficient unit for its company, as well as a roadhouse for other groups not so well provisioned.

The core space of the theater is to be a large performance room with a proscenium stage. This room is arranged to allow both theater performances and nightclub acts. The nightclub/buffet dinner operation is vital to the company's survival as the big business in Harlem is luring tourists uptown for an evening's look-see. The other performance spaces are an open-air grandstand and a covered gallery (enclosable in winter) for performance art, rehearsals, and exhibitions. Support spaces include a scene shop, storage, and a large kitchen.

Our response is to place the theater within the protective fortress of the block, and to lift its major space above the precious open courtyard, a place of two gardens and the covered gallery, marked

out by glowing floor lights. The open-air grandstand is placed on the roof, where not only is the sky most visible, but the performances and movies can be glimpsed from the passing trains, moving along the elevated Park Avenue railroad tracks. The theater itself steps gently down to the stage, while the softly glowing night sky remains visible through the skylights above.

The tectonics of the building are kept intentionally simple. The stage house and the lobby block act as bearing supports for the massive bridge girders which span between them. And which, in turn, support the theater's suspended seating trays and trussed skylights.

Exterior cladding is tiled panels on masonry. The one major luxury is the extensive use of "structural" glass as a part of the grandstand seating/skylight to below and as hung below the partly grated floors of the theater trays. Thus the life of the theater illuminates its surroundings both day and night.

THE STREET AS PUBLIC REALM

Organized by the African American Architects Roundtable for Entrepreneurs (A3rE).

Too often development issues are hammered out among the "professionals" and solutions are imposed on neighborhood residents.

This reality is in direct contradiction to Urban Planning strategies outlined by Kevin Lynch in the following statement:

At every instant, there is more than the eye can see, more than the ear can hear, a setting or a view waiting to be explored. Nothing is experienced by itself, but always in relation to its surroundings. The sequences of events leading up to it, the memory of past experiences... Moving elements in a city and in particular the people and activities, are as important as the stationary physical parts. We are not simply observers of this spectacle, but are ourselves a part of it, on the stage with the other participants.

A discussion of working definitions for paths, edges, districts, nodes and landmarks yielded the following analysis:

- Crosstown 116 from River to River was viewed as a path.
- The MetroNorth elevated train at Park Avenue, Morningside Park, and the Columbia University Campus were seen as edges.
- Currently, Crosstown 116 is devoid of any real nodes. Area churches and some of the more popular commercial enterprises are the only points of foci.
- Lastly, the issue of landmarks opened the door to larger cultural issues rooted in the need for people to define territory and label it as theirs. In a multi-cultural environment culturally based landmarks help to define one's place in the larger community.

Beyond the physical environment, issues of sustainability were paramount to the dialogue. All agreed that the words "value" and "sustain" had varied meanings for differing individuals. With several community residents present (people who actually live or work on 116th Street), the team transcended the professional barriers often innate to this process. A(3)rE demonstrated its ability to listen, listen, and listen some more to community residents. An added benefit was the cultural affinity between A(3)rE and community residents. Charette members moved from listening to hearing to analyzing and finally to interpreting the basic ideas and concerns that were shared. The morning culminated with the identification of three separate and distinct areas of exploration for future development.

East Side Waterfront and Transition to El Barrio

Strategy: The creation of a strong commercial district on the East Side with waterfront development. Vacant buildings could house specialty shops and restaurants. Commercial enterprises should be a mix of small, medium and large-scale ventures each complementing



Fig. 1. Gathering at CCNY for the Crosstown 116 Design Dialogue on November 7, 19997, architects, professors, and member of the community speak to students and colleagues about the program's goals. Pictured here are Crosstown 116 Co-Directors Robert Geddes (second from left) and Lance Jay Brown (third from left). Other panelists invluced Ghislaine Hermanuz, RA, director CCAC (far left), architect Erik Wood, The Praedium Group (third from right), Alex Saavedra, Upper Manhattan Empowerment Zone Development Corporation (second from right), and urban planner Mitchell Silver, president, American Planning Association New York Metro Chapter (far right).

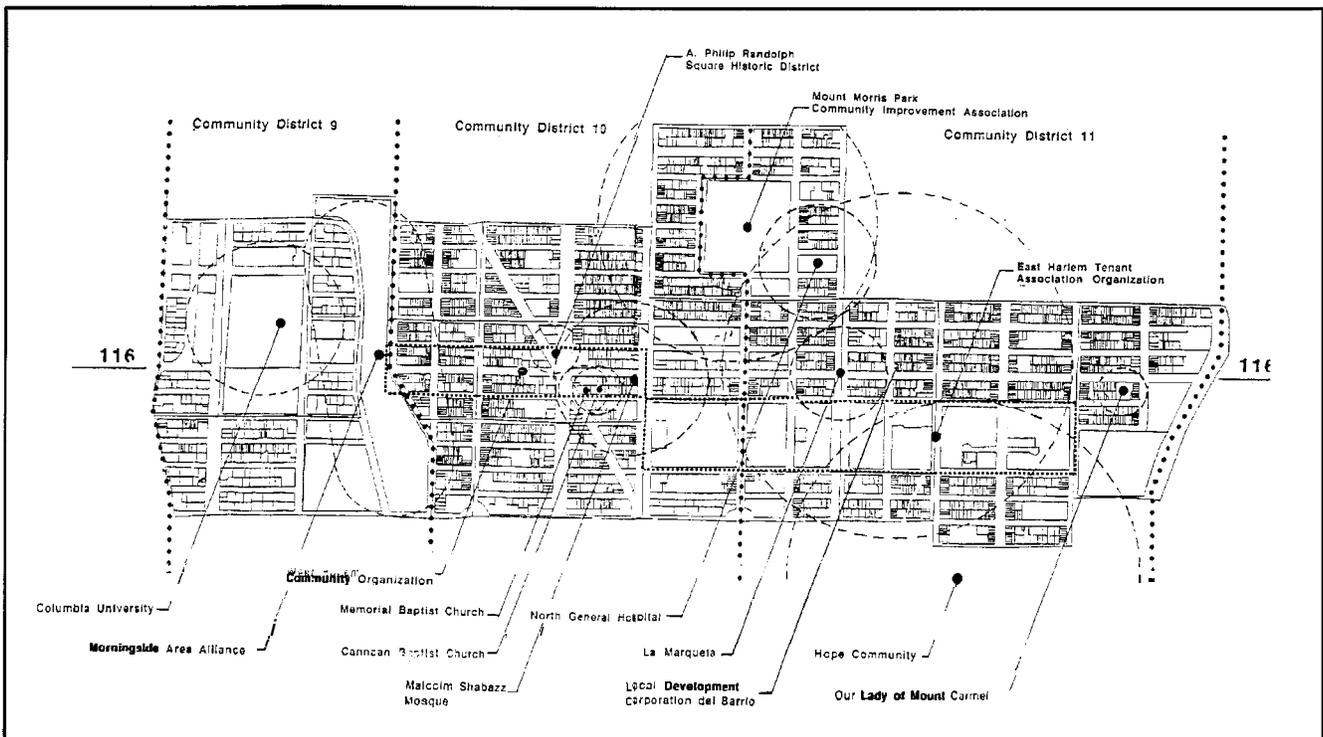


Fig. 2. Physical environment map of the Crosstown 116 project

and serving as anchors for each other. Waterfront should be developed as a recreational node, much like Chelsea Piers. Additionally, landmarks could be incorporated to mark the eastern terminus of the Crosstown 116 district.

The Civic Center

Strategy: The central portion of the Crosstown 116 spine is critical. This area should become a real node servicing the entire district. A library, health clinics, social institutions, cultural theaters, etc. should find a home in this area. The concentration of social services helps to create a more legible environment while providing structural fabric for community sustenance.

Outcome: Services are more readily accessible to community residents without their traveling a great distance. If varied social services are sought a resident should be able to visit several offices in close proximity to one another without the added time and financial expense of travel. A civic employment base has been created along with the basic building and street maintenance associated with government structures. It adds a sense of stability, safety and structure to a community that often feels forgotten.

Morningside Park and the Columbia University Community

Strategy: Breakdown material edge that serves as a true barrier and provide a bridge for two distinctly separate communities. Provide some use of activity in the park itself that will draw residents from each community. The general idea is to provide neutral ground where people can discover that they have much more in common than they think. Park could house a cafe and/or small performance space. Additionally, foot paths and routes of travel to the top could be made easier with outdoor escalators or lifts. This technology is used in other parts of the world and has proven to be beneficial for traversing similar terrain.

In the final analysis, we again quote Lynch: "Moving elements in acity and in particularthe people and their activities, are as important as the stationary physical parts." A3rE's exploration of the "Image of the Environment" represents a broad stroke that covers the very importune ideas of culture and the active role that residents with a vested interest must play in the development process.

CULTURAL PRESERVATION, RENEWAL, AND DEVELOPMENT

Organized by the City College Architectural Center.

Task

Development always brings the dilemma of what to change and what to keep. The need for continuity, in a community that has experienced the kind of devastation visible within the 116th Street corridor, is as great as the need for transformation. The group tried to develop a conceptual framework that would allow for a vision of 116th Street as a place where community history would be celebrated and would become an anchor to the infusion of new elements that are needed to make it again the vital neighborhood center it once was.

Definition of Cultural Preservation: When cuture is the cuture of daily life, cultural preservation is...

- the-preservation of social networks
- the recognition of the uniqueness of each group
- a means to make development work in the best interest of people in the community
- an exploration of things that have meaning in the community
- a means to involve young people into their community history
- a means to make tangible the history of a community
- a means to community empowerment: history is empowering
- an opportunity to make culture a resource for the future instead

- of a commodity
- the reclamation of the neighborhood for its people
- a building block of community building
- means to give relevance to physical places
- re-creation of the concept of "public work" and work for the "public interest"

About 116th Street: How does cultural preservation and its many definitions apply to the conceptualization of 116th Street development? Here are some of the questions debated in the group's discussion.

- Why does 116th Street need to be an event?
- Why call it not be the bargain strip of a decent working class neighborhood?
- Why not reconfigure transportation systems to make then meet people's needs?
- How to recognize and integrate the uniqueness and diversity of cultures found along 116th Street?
- How to translate socio/political and cultural considerations into the present landscape of 116th Street?
- What can 116th Street offer to meet the need for capacity building?
- Can tourism be used as an economic development tool?!

Goals: Exploration of 116th Street as a cultural landscape, as a foundation for a vision of:

- How to recreate a decent working people neighborhood;
- Where to design the interface between the cultural and the physical features; and
- How to understand 116th Street as a local. neighborhood shopping/cultural center.

Methodology: How do we translate cultural/political/social/economic conditions into a physical place? How do we make cultural preservation tangible? The group opted for the development of a map of the cultural landscape of 116th Street Corridor as a basis to understand/propose its physical transformation.

DESIGN STUDIOS — CCNY SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE AND ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES

Fifteen design studios worked on a variety of projects as a response to issues raised in Istanbul and the 1996 "Partnership to Save the Inner City: A Harlem Dialogue," and as restated in the Briefing Book for the Crosstown 116 initiative.

The School of Architecture and Environmental Studies has design studios that start in the second year and continue through the fifth year. Studio work, conforming to the requirements of curriculum and syllabus was, for this year and the first time, fully coordinated with the concerns of one context, that of neighbor and neighborhood: Crosstown 116.

The first part of the Fall semester was devoted to the analysis of the area and the development of resources that would inform the design work to follow. Much of this work, including analysis maps and diagrams, models, street stories and photodocumentation, is on display in the Community area of the Crosstown 116 exhibit.

A small selection of projects done in the studios this semester is presented as part of this exhibit. Many of these projects are accompanied by detailed descriptions of their objectives. Many of the design studio programs are also included as part of the exhibit, but in general, studio activities fall within the following categories:

The second year studios investigated interventions of a smaller scale. Projects for subway entry kiosks and park pavilions, reflecting cultural considerations, were explored as ways of increasing opportunities for reinforcing community using these settings as places of interchange and empowerment.

The third year studios addressed issues of intermodal transportation activities followed by the exploration and design of park spaces, market areas and community centers. The definition of community

center was a loose departure point for the investigation of many types and forms of activities to which expanded visions of cultural preservation might be applied.

The fourth year devoted its energies to the exploration of habitat in its broadest definition. Different locations along Crosstown 116 were either revisited or newly identified as housing sites. Some sites were sufficiently large as to require comprehensive or master planning before the more focused task of specific building and dwelling unit design could proceed. Considerations that related to the UN Habitat Agenda such as alternative housing arrangements, sustainability and live-work options were an integral part of the semester's investigations.

In the fifth year Thesis/Independent Work studios a group of students also chose Crosstown 116 as their context, their projects ranging from a community college to special housing and children's facilities.

The design studios also became an interface among professionals, community residents and students, as studio critics invited members of all groups to discuss in open forum the design investigations underway. The students had further interaction with both community and profession via the Crosstown 116 Seminar Series, and by volunteering to work with the Design Dialogue Charette teams.

Planning for the Spring semester is currently underway. The SAES will continue to focus its attention on Crosstown 116 and the upper Manhattan communities. A small selection of the visions that have been developed for this area so far are available for review in this exhibition. New partnerships have been established between the school, the community and area professionals. The continuation of these partnerships will be a fitting legacy of Crosstown 116.

2ND YEAR DESIGN STUDIOS

Morningside Park Connection

In doing a memorial I started with a room and a garden. That was all I had. Why did I choose a room and a garden as a point of departure? Because the garden is a personal gathering of nature, and the room is the beginning of Architecture.

— Louis I. Kahn

Subway Entry Shelter

During our initial site analysis exercise, the student observed a high degree of informal use on the site, especially by young people. By way of response, he elected to expand the project brief beyond the immediate requirement for sheltered transition to include a bus shelter, news stand, seating, lighting, planting, and expanded corner areas as a kit of place making elements. The inclusion of a bus shelter is also a specific response to the intermodal transfer currently available through Metrocard.

Morningside Connection

Through section studies and observation during the initial site analysis phase, the studio determined that the greatest physical impediment to entry into the park and use by the Central Harlem community is a lack of visibility between the main north — south park path and the street level. This foreboding entry condition is the weakest link in what is now an otherwise visually open system of paths and stairs between the upper and lower neighborhoods.

3RD YEAR DESIGN STUDIOS

Project I: Area Survey And Analysis

The intent of this first project was to record & document the 116th Street site by three distinct methods: mapping by model building, "stealing," and photography. Students constructed a model of the site from Morningside Park to the East River and one block deep to

the north and south. The model focused on defining primary fabric, aberrations in this fabric by intrusions/erasures, and boundaries. The "stealings" involved collecting artifacts from the site and organizing them as a form of documentation. The result was an installation of rubbings, sound recordings, and a collection of menus. The study revealed a palimpsest of cultural complexities and their territories. The photographic study was primarily an investigation of the street to facade relationship through photographs and a figure ground model.

Project 2: Tectonic Investigations

Based on an understanding of the site, this project required the students to intervene into the current condition of the site. Interventions were limited to being tectonic (about materials, connections, proximities, and structures) and without programmatic definitions (function, area, etc.) The intent and result of this project was an investigation in designing solely in response to contextual and physical conditions of the site.

Project 3: Community Center

The students were given the program of a community center. Although the introduction of a community center to the site was a given, it was justified after the fact through site visits to similar organizations in Manhattan (Henry Street Settlement, Schomburg Library, and the 52nd Street Project). As in the previous projects, the physical urban context was given emphasis in the selection of site(s) and the development of the design. Additionally, the students were required to consider the program as generic and were encouraged to "design" the program to the context of 116th street.

Greenthumb Gardens

As urban living rooms of the inner city, community gardens provide amenities to neighborhoods. There are many of these small and medium sized open spaces along the 116th Street Corridor: randomly distributed abandoned lots held by the city that have been designated as Greenthumb Gardens. They are managed by local residents, who use them to fit the needs of their blocks. The students in this studio investigated several of these gardens and considered their uses: whether they provided food, a playground, a community meeting place, a place to escape, or a private utopia. They came up with a variety of solutions, some park-like, some sculptural, and some with planting areas for vegetables and flowers.

4TH YEAR DESIGN STUDIOS

Housing

This term fourth year design studio focused on the study of the Crosstown 116 Street project and the development of housing sites within the area. The effort began with an in-depth urban design analysis of the 116th Street corridor, where students worked in teams. Based on these analyses the entire class working together developed a plan encompassing a comprehensive design strategy. Each team then selected individual sites within the comprehensive plan designated for housing development. Concurrently, a detailed program of required apartment units and amenities was developed. Design of the sites began with the investigation of alternative conceptual approaches. Each was evaluated against a set of design issues and one approach was selected for further design development. The development resulted in an outlined design for each site, including detailed site plan, building design and apartment plans. The associated 4871.3 design seminar served as a platform for introducing the students to a broad stage of housing and community design concerns related to this general field of housing and the 116th study area in particular. A series of weekly talks or "dialogues" took place in which experts discussed a wide range of planning and design

issues. Teams of students conducted case studies of different housing design precedents which were compared in graphic, statistical and narrative written form. For this purpose of the study students were required to use one example of housing within the Harlem Community and compare it to notable local or foreign examples. The results or the analyses were presented in the form of a booklet. The design work which was produced this term was based on the development of a clear and rational process of analysis which were then applied to developing visions for the design of future housing in the Harlem Community.

Urban Landscape: 116th Street Stories

As part of Crosstown 116 and as preparation for their semester-long focus on this part of Harlem, the 351 and 471 Urban Landscape Design Studios collected stories, images and souvenirs from along 116th Street. Listening was key to the success of this investigation. This process of collecting and presenting stories may also act as an ongoing reminder of the importance of being sensitive to how, as designers, we affect both the physical and cultural fabric of places.

Redesign of the Malcolm Shabazz Harlem Market

The Malcolm Shabazz Market is both a tourist destination and community gathering place. The designs incorporate influences of Islamic culture, express the temporal qualities of markets, create gathering places, and improve the viability of the street.

Redesign of Phillip Randolph Square

As a way of understanding the importance of concept to both the design process and design, students chose an artist of another medium — music, dance, poetry, literature, film, painting, sculpture — as a theoretical collaborator for their redesign of Phillip Randolph Square.

116th Street Meets Morningside Park

The steep and rocky escarpment of Morningside Park acts as a natural, cultural, physical and psychological boundary between the neighborhoods of West Harlem and Columbia University. Although the current restoration of the stairway across the 116th Street segment of the park provides better access between neighborhoods

the students were asked to more fully establish connections between neighborhoods and between the urban and natural environments.

5TH YEAR THESIS/INDEPENDENT WORK STUDIO

Thesis/Independent Work students investigated projects of their own choosing. This year, five thesis/independent work candidates undertook projects that dealt with issues within the context of the Crosstown 116 initiative. Each student has outlined the issues that are confronted by the project chosen. They have each identified user/client groups. They have acquired and analyzed a client program and investigated a series of case studies related to their project type. In addition to these tasks, each has analyzed the project context and the specific site location. Models of the context and site were developed in the design investigations. The work benefitted greatly from the Crosstown 116 Briefing Book.

The second half of the first semester was devoted to alternative designs that incorporated and responded to the Crosstown 116 information. Periodic reviews by studio members, the thesis faculty and outside critics helped to focus both policy and design concepts towards a selected, preferred design.

In an unusual instance three students chose to work as a team to look at the civic approach to the reuse/reconstruction of the Washburn Wire Factory site at 116th Street and the East River. This 5.5 acre site is currently in private ownership and may be used for a big box retail activity. However, all previous community studies have suggested that the site be used as community-based educational complex with mixed use activity incorporated. Proceeding from the assumption that the site is yet to be built and that alternate uses may yet occur, the team is testing and investigating the community generated vision. A community college with extensive community services and programs that would allow graduates access to locally based professions has been the primary focus of this campus-style complex.

In other projects, a children's facility and learning center, incorporating a museum and exploratory landscape, and a residence for HIV-positive community members are under investigation.

All of the projects are focusing on issues of cultural preservation, support of the local economy, empowerment of the existing communities, and sustainability of the social fabric of the Crosstown 116 communities.