the WAGNER PLANNER

Fall 2013

MOVEMENTS

4 | 1 Year After Sandy
by Melinda Hanson

6 | New Mayor, Old Challenges
by Max Weselcouch

8 | Citi Bike: A [Re]Balancing Act
by Lily Gordon-Koven + Justin Tyndall

12 | A Sleeping Giant Awakens
by Tracy Rodrigues

13 | Could a New Layer of Government be Created Overnight?
by Colin Furness

14 | Urban Villages
by Elliot Ward

16 | Revisiting Your Rural Roots
by Chris Penalosa

18 | A Book Review: Happy City
by Kirk Hovenkotter

the WAGNER PLANNER

VOLUME 12, ISSUE 1
APRIL 2013

CHIEF EDITORS
Vrunda Vaghela
Chris Penalosa

ASSISTANT EDITORS
Ian Hartz
Kirk Hovenkotter

Letter from the Editors

By Vrunda Vaghela + Chris Penalosa + Ian Hartz + Kirk Hovenkotter

The Fall 2013 edition of The Wagner Planner, *Movements*, is an exploration of the many changes taking place in the world of urban planning today. This issue first follows up from the previous issue's feature on climate change and the aftermath of Superstorm Sandy, and takes a look at how New York City has evolved one year after Sandy in its long-term recovery and resiliency efforts. This issue continues, as it moves across a global spectrum examining the movement towards a new mayor-elect in New York City, the emergence of Citi Bike, Brazil's planning for the World Cup, changes in Kenya's government, the rural-urban migration taking place in China, to the rural methods of farming taking place at NYU. As students and practitioners study the movements taking place in urban planning today, this issue is a call for greater awareness of the effects on the environment and communities that reside within.

1 Year After Sandy

Rebuild by Design: Resilience Through Collaboration

By Melinda Hanson, MUP 2014

On October 28th, 2013—one year after Superstorm Sandy—ten design teams unveiled 41 design ideas aimed at strengthening resilience in the Sandy-effected region. Two events—one in Manhattan and one in Newark, New Jersey—attracted more than one thousand community members, designers, activists, and other stakeholders.

The ten teams involved that day are all part of Rebuild by Design, a multi-phase design competition realized by members of President Obama's Sandy Task Force and directed by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development. Sandy was no ordinary storm, and fittingly, Rebuild by Design is no ordinary design competition. Indeed, the only competitive part was phase one: the selection process.

Rebuild by Design sets itself apart from your typical development request. Rather than responding to a "request for proposal," teams wishing to participate in Rebuild by Design responded to a "request for qualifications." To qualify, team leaders had to pull together an interdisciplinary group drawing upon diverse backgrounds and experience. In August, ten teams were chosen from almost 150 applications. One team is co-lead by New York-based architecture firm, WXY and Dutch landscape architects West 8, and includes artist Mary Edna Fraser, graphic designer Yeju Choi, and scientist Orin Pilkey. Another is Interboro architects and Apex consulting, and includes the Center for Urban Pedagogy, the New Jersey Institute of Technology, and the graphic design firm, Project Projects.

Since mid-August, NYU's Institute for Public Knowledge (IPK) has led team members through a graduate crash course of Sandy-affected regions. IPK is organizing seminars, taking teams on site visits around the Sandy-affected region, and introducing them to community members, policy-makers, and experts from Bridgeport, Connecticut to Asbury Park, New Jersey, and everywhere in between. These experiences informed the design ideas that were unveiled in late October.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR REBUILD BY DESIGN?

Phase three of Rebuild by Design runs from November 2013 to March of next year. On November 13th, HUD Secretary Shaun Donovan announced the winning design idea for each team. Taken together, the selected designs span the region and address conditions specific to a variety of place types. One team, led by Scape Landscape architects will focus on Staten Island and Raritan Bay, where the team will work to create a living shoreline to attenuate waves and protect local neighborhoods, while at the same time, restoring habitat. Another team, led by OMA,

Source: http://www.rebuildbydesign.org/

will develop a comprehensive plan to better protect Hoboken from future floods while at the same time creating additional public space.

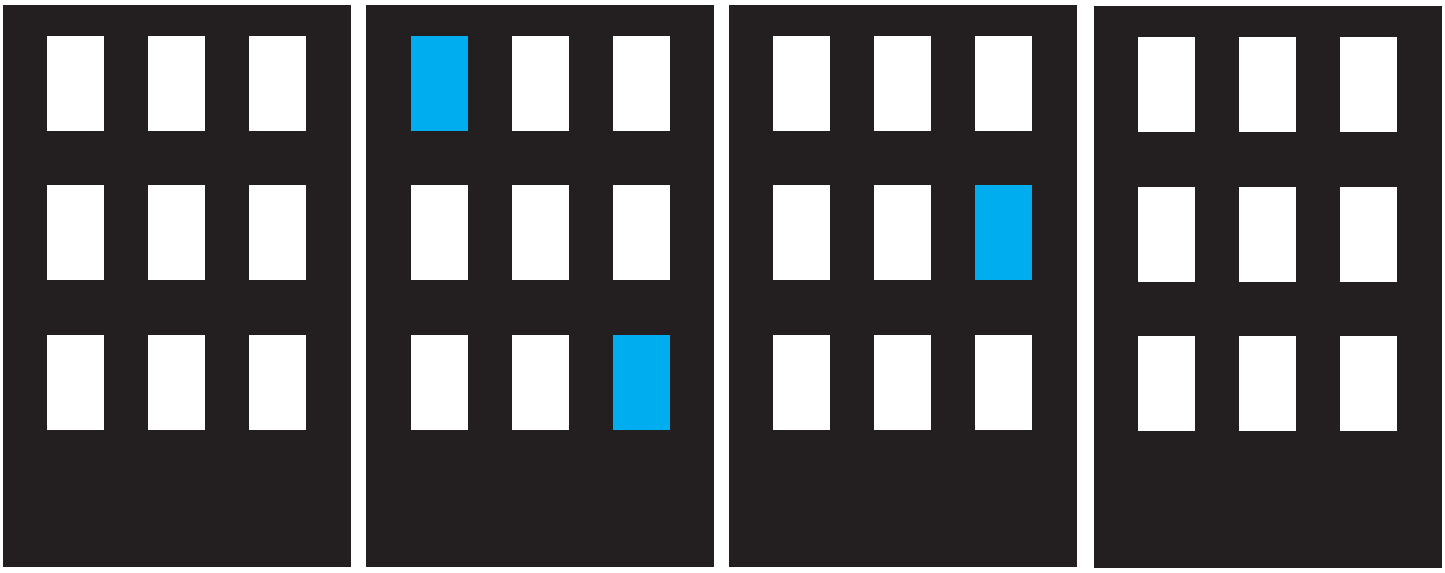
The hope is that Rebuild by Design will result in a comprehensive regional plan for the entire Sandy-affected area. While design proposals are location specific, they were selected because they have the potential to be replicated in other parts of the region. Designs will ultimately be piloted on select sites throughout the region—they will be funded through to implementation. Demonstrating success is a key part of the Rebuild by Design process; the resilience solutions that surface must have an adaptation feature to transfer to other vulnerable communities.

"A year ago, when Hurricane Sandy devastated communities in the region, we were reminded of the importance that climate change will play in all development and planning for our communities to become more resilient and sustainable," Secretary Donovan said during a talk about Rebuild by Design. The competition has the potential to catalyze a shift toward more sustainable and resilient development. To respond to the challenges that climate change brings, Rebuild by Design is a process that reminds us about the importance of collaborative planning. ■

"A year ago, when Hurricane Sandy devastated communities in the region, we were reminded of the importance that climate change will play in all development and planning for our communities to become more resilient and sustainable." - Secretary Shaun Donovan

New Mayor, Old Challenges

Affordable Housing Challenges for the New Mayoral Administration



By Max Weselcouch, MUP 2014

As New York City heads into a new mayoral administration, residents of the city have an opportunity to reflect on what the last administration did well, where it missed the mark, what the city's goals should be for the next four years, and how the city should achieve those goals. The Bloomberg administration famously touted its New Housing Marketplace Plan, which planned to finance the creation or preservation of 165,000 affordable housing units within 10 years. However, as Mayor Bloomberg's term wraps up, it stands to question whether that goal was ambitious enough and how the next mayor could do better. In August 2013, the Furman Center for Real Estate and Urban Policy released a series of issue briefs on ten questions that next the mayor should consider, several of which will be addressed below.

The New Housing Marketplace Plan produced fewer than 60,000 new affordable units between 2004 and 2012. During the same time, nearly 200,000 market-rate housing units were developed. The sum total of all of this development, however, has left more New Yorkers struggling to pay their rent than when Bloomberg took office. Between 2002 and 2011, the median rent in the city rose by 19 percent while the median income remained stagnant. By the end of Bloomberg's term, more than half of renters living in New York were rent burdened, paying more than 30% of their income toward rent.

The next mayor should aim to reverse these trends and, indeed, Mayor-elect Bill de Blasio has proposed an ambitious plan to build or preserve 200,000 units of affordable housing. To achieve this ambitious goal without sacrificing other priorities, he will have to be creative, especially when it comes to funding. Some of the major sources used to fund the New Housing Marketplace Plan are either shrinking or no longer available. By far the largest source of funding for affordable housing is the city's capital budget. The capital budget, however, is a fairly fixed pot of money and allocating more funds to affordable housing would require either diverting funds from other city agencies or taking on additional debt. The second largest source of funding came from HDC's corporate reserves, which had higher than expected revenues during much of the last decade. These reserves will likely continue to be an important source, but it is difficult to predict exactly how much they will be able to contribute. Two large federal funding programs, HOME and CDBG allocations, have been cut in recent years and will likely suffer further cuts from the recent federal sequestration. And several smaller, one-time programs such as the Neighborhood Stabilization Program and the Tax Credit Assistance Program are no longer available.

Most current affordable housing subsidies expire after a set number of years at which time an owner can

opt out of the subsidy program and convert their units to market rate. Preservation is a key part of De Blasio's housing plan and during his first term, over 45,000 existing units of subsidized affordable housing will expire from their current affordability restrictions. While preservation is generally faster and cheaper than new construction, it isn't without its challenges and it is unlikely that the city will be able to finance the preservation of all expiring properties. The last administration was sometimes criticized for overemphasizing preservation, with 65 percent of the New Housing Marketplace Plan units achieved through preservation. The next mayor must consider that although preserving properties alone will not increase the stock of affordable units, allowing these properties to opt out and instead focusing exclusively on new construction could leave the city with fewer affordable units overall.

One way that housing advocates have proposed to address the problem of attrition of affordable units is by requiring housing developers to keep their units affordable in perpetuity. This requirement may increase the cost of the development of affordable housing as developers demand a larger subsidy from the city at the outset. Furthermore, requiring permanent affordability does not guarantee that the existing affordable housing will remain in good condition without an additional subsidy in the future. If this is a policy that de Blasio pursues, he must first plan how to fund the higher upfront costs of such developments and second, figure out how to ensure that building owners properly maintain their properties going forward.

Finally, Bill de Blasio has included mandatory inclusionary zoning as part of his housing platform as a strategy to create 50,000 affordable units. Advocates of such a requirement claim that it could increase the supply of both affordable and market rate housing without any direct subsidy from the city. However, the mayor elect must carefully design such a program. If the requirements for a mandatory inclusionary zoning program are too strict, developers may decide that it is no longer worthwhile to build. Then, with little new housing coming online but continuingly increasing demand, housing costs could increase for all residents. On the other hand, developers may instead choose to build but pass on the increased costs imposed by the affordable units to market rate buyers, thereby increasing housing costs for anyone in the city unlucky enough to live in an inclusionary unit.

Bill de Blasio's record and platform indicate that he thinks affordable housing should be a priority. However, with limited capital resources and no perfect solution, designing and implementing an affordable housing plan will be challenging. ■

Preservation is a key part of De Blasio's housing plan and during his first term, over 45,000 existing units of subsidized affordable housing will expire from their current affordability restrictions.

Citi Bike: A [Re]Balancing Act

By Justin Tyndall, MUP 2014 +
Lily Gordon-Koven, MUP 2015

May 2013 saw the arrival of Citi Bike in New York City. Although the uptake of Citi Bike has exceeded many people's expectations, the challenge of managing such a large system in a high density city has proven difficult. Five months after the initial launch, Citi Bike boasted over 90,000 annual members and more than 9.5 million miles travelled on the bright blue bikes. Although its system of 6,000 bikes pales in comparison to others in dozens of European and Chinese cities, when it launched, Citi Bike became the largest bike share system in the Western Hemisphere. Citi Bike is one of over 400 bike share systems to launch in the last five years, marking a 700 percent growth in systems worldwide.

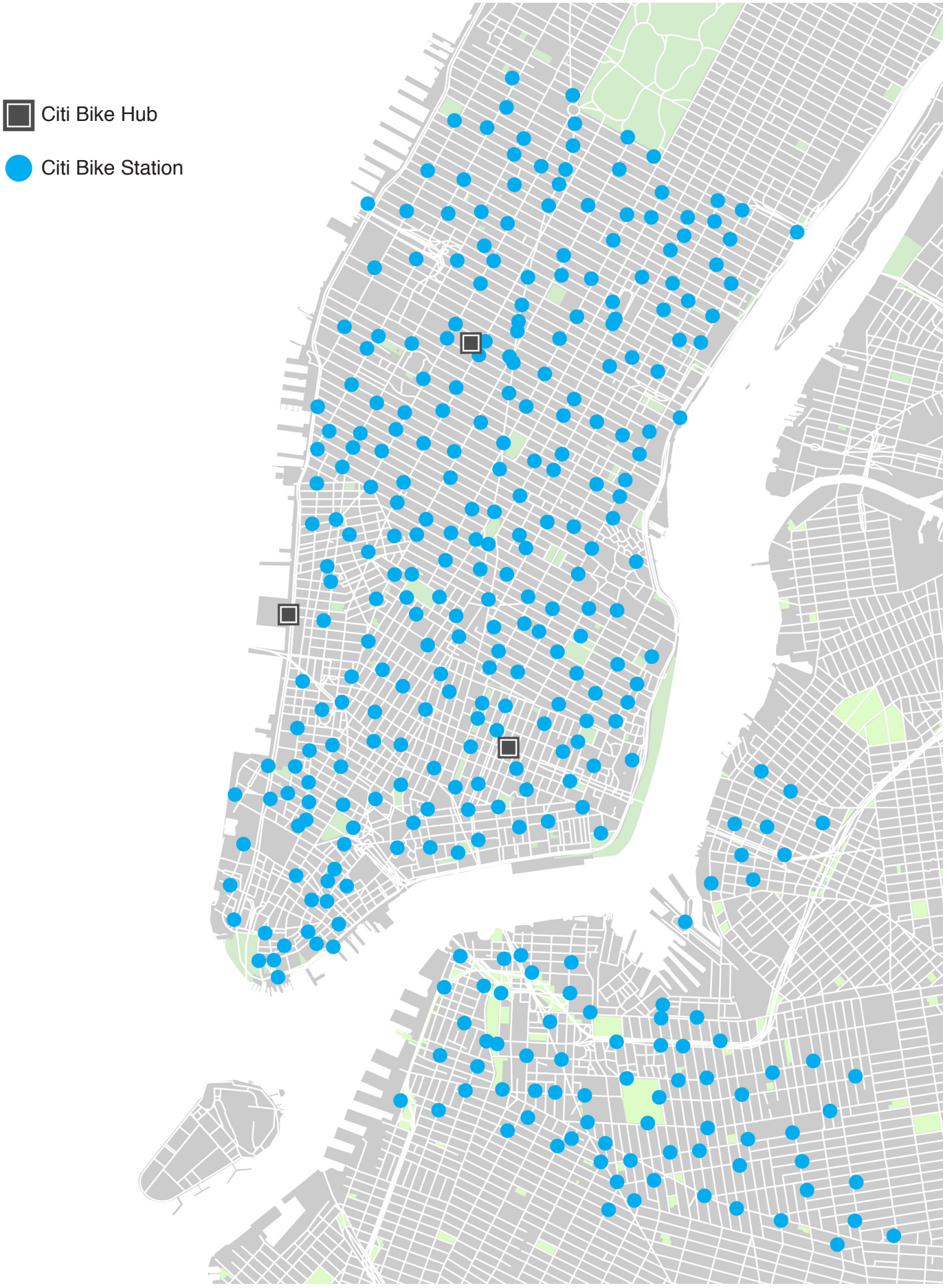
This explosive growth hasn't been matched by a solution to the greatest challenge facing most bike shares: rebalancing, or the process of redistributing bikes between 'attractive' and 'repulsive' stations. As with all transportation systems, bike share systems exist within diverse commuting, topographical, and geographic environments. As commuters ride into business districts in the morning, 'repulsive' stations empty out and leave few to no bikes. Conversely, 'attractive' stations in busy neighborhoods fill up, leaving no place for riders to dock their bikes.

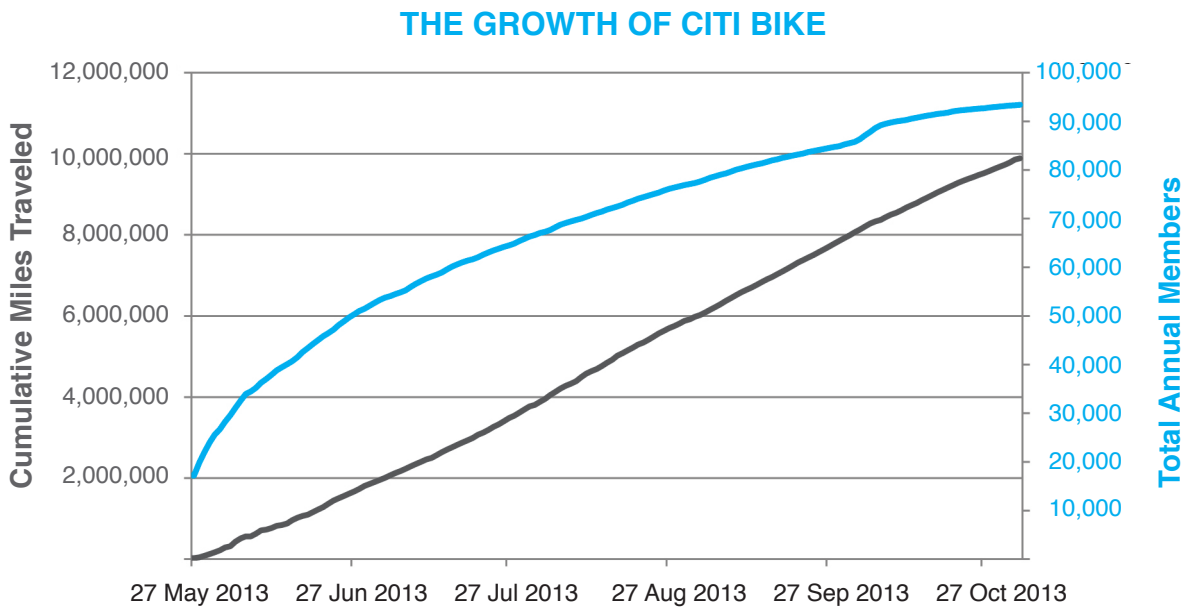
According to a September poll of thousands of system users, 64 percent of Citi Bike riders are most concerned about finding an empty station when they want to ride a bike or a full station when they want to return a bike. These station outages, when an 'attractive' station is completely full or a 'repulsive' station is completely empty, mean riders wanting to return or borrow a bike have to travel to a nearby station, resulting in delays and frustrations.

Under contract with the City, NYC Bike Share faces financial penalties when multiple complete station outages occur for more than one hour. To avoid outages, dozens of rebalancing teams shuttle bikes between full and empty stations. Big box trucks that carry up to 60 bikes help restock large, busy stations like those around Penn Station. These trucks carry high volumes of bikes but have difficulty navigating narrower streets and cutting through city traffic.

Perhaps the most visible rebalancing vehicles to New Yorkers are the Citi Bike-branded white sprinter vehicles that carry 25 to 30 bikes. Sprinter vehicles can effectively maneuver smaller city streets more easily than rented big box trucks, but must also navigate city traffic. Sprinter vehicles can often be seen outside of the Puck Building, removing bikes after the morning rush hour.

The newest rebalancing vehicles are bike trailers, capable of attaching to Citi Bikes, and hauling three additional


Citi Bike Hub
Citi Bike Station



bicycles. The new trailer bikes, while only able to carry a few bikes at a time, can smoothly and quickly maneuver through traffic. In creating station pairs and shuttling bikes back and forth, Citi Bike is able to rebalance between residential and commercial neighborhoods. This small scale intervention takes advantage of the same reality that makes bike share popular to consumers: over short distances, cycling is almost always the quickest way to get between two points in the city.

Despite the varied forms of rebalancing, Citi Bike still struggles to meet demand for riders. Citi Bike recently opened three hubs near Penn Station, Pier 40, and Delancey Street where broken bikes can be repaired and working bikes can be staged for vehicle pickup in order to shorten the travel distances of rebalancing vehicles. The main Citi Bike warehouse is in Sunset Park. A rush hour trip from South Brooklyn to Midtown could take upwards of an hour and exceed the one-hour outage limit.

Citi Bike's vehicular approach to rebalancing mirrors tactics used by other systems, including Paris's Velib, Washington, DC's Capital Bike Share, and Chicago's new Divvy Bikes. Beyond the use of vehicles, some other cities have been able to institute incentive structures that encourage riders to transfer bikes from overstocked to under supplied stations. In Paris, the Velib system offers riders fifteen free minutes of ride time in exchange for returning a bike to a designated V+ station, in outage prone areas. Annual members can store this credit for later while short-term members receive a discount on their ride.

In Washington, DC, Capital Bike Share introduced a rewards program to encourage rider rebalancing, offering a free yearlong membership to the rider who completes the most trips on particular 'off-peak' routes. Velib and Capital Bike Share have also used rider competitions in the hopes of sparking rebalancing activity; the success of these programs has not completely alleviated rebalancing woes.

While over half of users surveyed expressed frustration with bike distribution, officials at the City's Department of Transportation believe commuters are tweaking their schedules and destinations to ensure easier access to bikes and docks during the morning and evening rushes. City officials and transportation experts also see the rebalancing struggle as a sign of the system's success. If and when the system expands to include new business hubs and commuters with different travel habits, some of the demand challenges may begin to resolve themselves. In the meantime, mathematicians, programmers, and planners in New York City continue to experiment with new algorithms, models, and methods in an attempt to predict demand and balance the system. Fortunately for the planners of New York, many other jurisdictions have dealt with similar problems before, and there is a wealth of best practices to draw upon. Citi Bike has quickly become a visible and vital part of New York's transportation infrastructure and by ensuring its dependability for all users the system will endure as an element of life in New York. ■

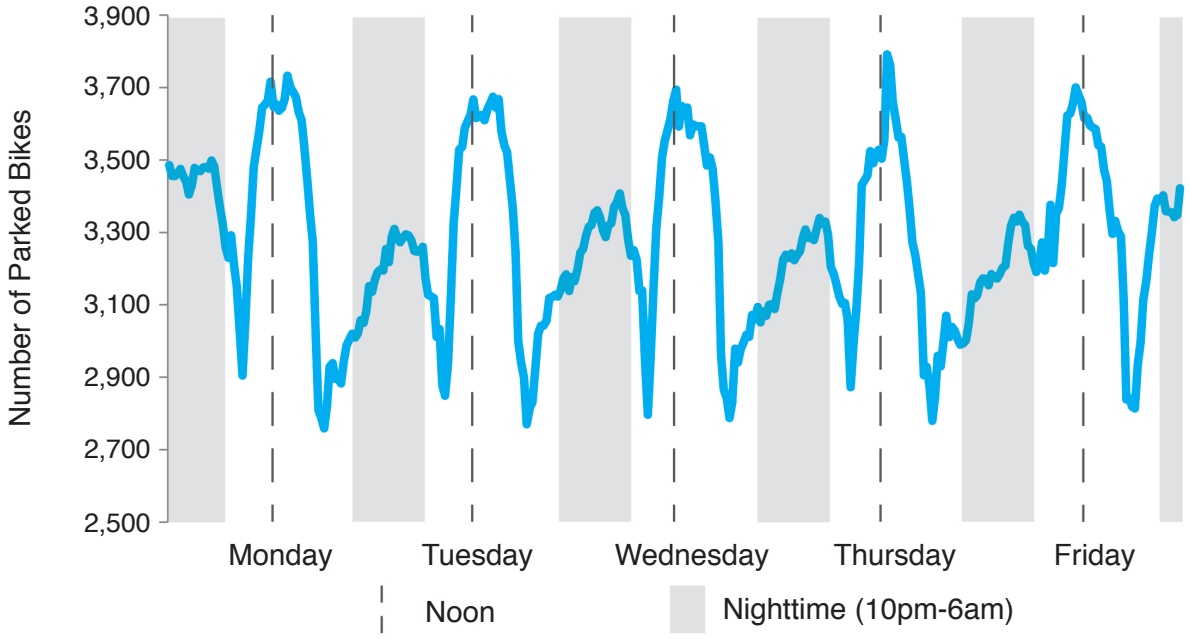
Sources:
US News. http://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2013/06/05/the-exploding-growth-of-bikesharing

Streetsblog. http://www.streetsblog.org/2013/10/17/ta-poll-majority-of-citi-bike-users-want-protected-car-free-bike-lanes/

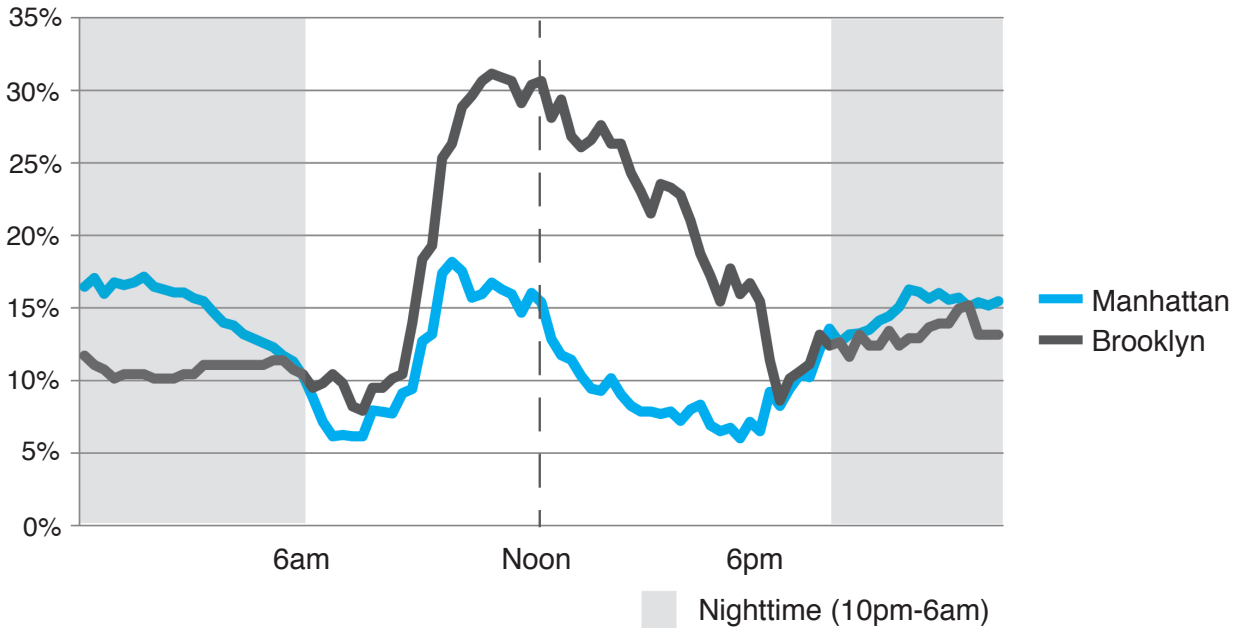
Velib. http://www.velib.paris.fr/Comment-ca-marche/Les-stations

Capital Bike Share. http://www.dc.gov/DC/DDOT/About+DDOT/News+Room/Press+Releases/ci.Capital+Bikeshare+Launches+Summertime+Competition+to+Reward+Reverse+Riders.print

NUMBER OF CITI BIKES PARKED IN MANHATTAN
Monday, October 28 - Friday, November 1, 2013



PERCENTAGE OF DOCKS WITH NO BIKES
Typical Weekday, Averaged Over November 4-8, 2013



A Sleeping Giant Awakens

Why the World Cup is about more than just soccer for Brazilians

By Tracy Rodrigues, MUP 2015

This summer, as the most anticipated World Cup in decades comes to Brazil, spectators will be in awe. In the streets or on TV, fans can expect to be swept up in a sea of yellows and blues, the very recognizable colors of the national flag. Less recognizable though are the words inscribed on the flag, "Ordem e Progresso" (order and progress). For the government, the spectacle is an opportunity to show the world that the state has fulfilled its potential. Known abroad for its popular soccer stars, models, and scenic beaches, Brazil is just as infamous for its corruption and favelas of the kind portrayed in City of God. Major international events like the upcoming World Cup and the Olympics in 2016 could possibly show an orderly and thoroughly modern state with efficient transportation and top rate technology. Billions of public tax dollars have been invested in the World Cup alone, more so than the last three world cups combined. However, the primary funders, the Brazilian people, will likely be unable to attend a single match. Nor will they see the profits, as FIFA will pocket those. This has left residents questioning whom the World Cup really benefits.

Eduard Paes, the mayor of Rio de Janeiro, is especially enthusiastic about the changes underway. In February 2012 he was invited to give a Ted Talk in which he shared his commandments for cities, which included high-capacity transit to allow for greater social integration and mobility. He explicitly mentioned the ambitious Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system, which will connect the entire city and supposedly benefit the various favelas nearby. However, human rights organizations have reported that rather than improving slum conditions, transportation projects have been used as an excuse to evict residents, demolish their homes and rebuild hotels and luxury apartments in their place. According to Amnesty International's 2013 report on Brazil, "In Providência, in the centre of Rio de Janeiro, 140 houses were demolished during the year as part of an urban revitalization project in the port area, where up to 800 houses had been slated for removal." Donald Trump has already been commissioned to build luxury towers on this spot. More and more favela residents all over the city return home to find their house marked for demolition with little notice or explanation given.

In addition to anger in Rio, frustration is mounting as areas lacking basic healthcare, security, and education see stadiums being constructed as the public's bill for the World Cup rises. It's not just the cost of building the stadiums that have residents worried, but also the cost of upkeep long after the World Cup ends. In the city of Manaus, located in the least inhabited region of Brazil near the Amazon River, there is little benefit to having a stadium once tourists leave. The glaring truth is as loud as samba: Brazilians do not need more stadiums, parties, or tourism. They have far more basic needs.

Frustration over World Cup planning and its associated projects finally gave way to action when a fare increase was proposed for the nation's buses to alleviate not only the budget's suffering due to massive World Cup spending, but also corruption and mismanagement. Protests are fairly uncommon in Brazil, but one night in June, in the streets and all over social media, the phrase "O Gigante Acourdou" which translates to "the giant awoke" was born. From Rio to Sao Paulo to Natal, Brazilians marched to protest the fare hikes, corruption, and lavish spending on sporting events, and to demand better social services. This was the largest protest Brazil has seen in more than twenty years. They are expected to continue throughout the World Cup tournament and 2016 Olympics if conditions remain unchanged.

It is too soon to know what effect these protests will have on future planning, but it is safe to say that when Brazil's soccer stars step on to the field this summer the world's eyes will be on more than the "beautiful game" being played. The giant has awoken and so must we. ■

Could a New Layer of Government be Created Overnight?

By Colin Furness, MUP 2014

On a sunny Friday afternoon Evans Odhiambo sat in his dinged up silver Toyota RAV4 on Waiyaki Way. Creeping forward inch by inch, Evans blended in with the other old silver Toyota models. Vendors sold mdizi (bananas) for 10 ksh (15 cents) each. A full matatu (mini bus) aggressively cut off Evans and he glared at the conductor, but then shrugged and continued chewing his khat inconspicuously. A man was selling trinkets and toys, but Evans only noticed the large portrait he was offering. It was the recently elected, President Uhuru Kenyatta. He looked at the smiling image of the newly minted President, and Evans said to himself, "The new Kenya will finally be the one that gets it right."

Devolution swept across Kenya in the lead up to the March 2013 elections. The highly centralized government in the capitol Nairobi was finally forced to relinquish some of its authority. The new 2010 constitution created a new layer of government, the county. The previous 8 provinces were transformed into 47 counties and city governments ceased to exist. The long-standing and powerful Nairobi City Mayor and Nairobi City Council were replaced by the Nairobi County Governor and Nairobi County Council. The 695 sq. Km. Nairobi County has the largest population at around 3.5 million, and while the much larger, 6,500 square kilometers, Lamu County only has a population of only 100,000. The new Nairobi County has the same historical boundaries as Nairobi City. However, Lamu County incorporates Lamu Town, 6 distinct villages and an extensive rural area.

Certain public services—public health, water, and sanitation—were devolved to the county governments and the federal government maintained large-scale sectorial goods, such as national security and education. The new county system was meant to bring local government services closer to the population. Inclusive, accountable, local governments were to maximize benefits, while counties were to collect local revenues, and locally elected officials were to determine the counties' public expenditures. If the local population did not agree with the decisions of the local public officials they could easily vote them out of office. The new devolved system looked good on paper, but could a new layer of government be created overnight? Could the newly elected government officials manage local services in a sufficient manner, and meet the expectations of Evans and his fellow Kenyans?

Currently in Kenya, the Members of Parliament are the highest paid on the African continent, and both county governors and local county councils members contend they do not receive enough compensation and threaten to strike. County governors have demanded diplomatic passports, and they have held discussions about solidifying their respective county boundaries and borders. Empowering a novice group of elected officials has gotten off to a rocky start, but there are green shoots of decentralization emerging. County governors challenged the President on their allotted funds amount, fired unproductive local county workers, and have raised local revenue for local projects.

Devolution in Kenya is far from perfect, but with the right strategy, county governments can continue to grow and provide essential services to their respective populations. As the sun sets on Evans' drive home to Meru County, he can not help but smile at the construction workers improving his local road with his local tax dollars. ■

Urban Villages

A Human and Physical Manifestation of China's Urban-Rural Divide

By Elliot Ward, MUP 2014

One of the more unique features of Chinese cities is the phenomenon of "urban villages". These are former rural areas that, with rapid urbanization and rural-urban migration, have been enveloped by ever expanding cities. What once was farmland is sold to developers and annexed as city territory, while the village itself remains in the hands of the villagers. Unincorporated and administratively independent, the villages often become migrant housing communities known for poor sanitation, substandard roads and infrastructure, cramped living conditions, and crime.

The particular state of these "urban villages" is in large part the legacy of one of the major elements of China's development path, the separation of urban and rural life. From just about day one of communist rule, the country was divided into urban and rural districts which not only created different systems of administration, the unequal distribution of public investment, and a history of divergent government policy, but led to social stratification enshrined in the hukou registration system, which to this day labels individuals as either rural or urban with power over the quality and location of public services a person can receive.

"Urban villages" represent this division from two angles: through quirks in land and administrative policy that have allowed the development of these non-city areas within cities, and through the concentration of rural migrants in urban villages that makes them microcosms for the challenges

Source: www.baidu.com

and disenfranchisement facing rural migrants hoping to make it in the city.

Urban and rural areas have very different property systems in China. In rural areas land is collectively owned, and individuals with rural hukou registration are entitled to a portion of land on which to work and live. As cities expand, developers work with city officials to buy land from nearby villages and incorporate it into the city administrative area. This is particularly profitable because land markets are heavily controlled, often meaning a big price gap between what developers pay to villagers and what they can sell for after the land has been incorporated into cities and developed. Further, because village land is collectively owned, decision-making power over land sales falls into the hands of a few local leaders, setting the stage for influence peddling and leading to forced evictions of resistant residents. The worst cases have led to riots and even self-immolations as villagers resist eviction or protest compensation levels.

Urban villages are in part a result of avoiding the thorny issue of compensation and relocation. As developers are looking for the best deal and the least headaches, they often choose to buy only the farmland surrounding villages, but not the village residential area itself. In addition to the unwanted trouble of potential resistance from disgruntled local villagers, and in part because of general public disapproval of forced evictions, there are increasingly complicated rules governing compensation for relocated residents, making the whole affair expensive and unpleasant. Add that villagers realize they will soon be property owners in the middle of the city and you have reasons why developers don't want to buy and villages don't want to sell the residential core of urbanizing rural areas.

So while the city extends its network of services—roads, sewers, schools, hospitals—and massive housing complexes go up, the village is left to fend for itself, an unincorporated but entirely surrounded not-technically-city within the city. But there is an economic opportunity for villagers: with relatively little investment, and unburdened by city codes, villagers construct apartment buildings and become landlords. Over a few years, what was once a village of a few families becomes an urban area housing hundreds or thousands.

And while some of these landlords become quite wealthy, living conditions in the urban villages suffer. Administratively divorced from the city, service provision is left to the original village leadership. Beyond the reach of city police and organized garbage collection, devoid of connections to public transportation, denied recognition by city school districts, and without links to city sewer and water systems or incorporation into almost any other city services, not even the best intentioned village leaders could be expected to provide much. To be sure, some urban villages do better than others, but most seem to descend into dirt, poverty, dilapidation, and crime.

Borne of the administrative quirks separating rural and urban, the residents of urban villages represent the human side of the rural-urban divide. Drawn to the city by jobs and the promise of social mobility, urban village residents are disproportionately rural migrants, a manifestation of how inequality and discriminatory practices push rural hukou registration holders to the fringes of society. For example, while urban villages certainly offer the benefit of lower rents, rural migrants are barred from many low-income housing options. Much of government subsidized housing is limited to those holding local urban hukou. The lack of public services within the urban village reflects rural hukou holders' ineligibility for many other public services, with schools, hospitals, and employment opportunities restricted by hukou status.

A precise count of urban villages in China is probably impossible, but in the biggest cities, best estimates put the number in the hundreds. The phenomenon is perhaps most famous in southern factory cities. Guangzhou is reported to have 277 urban villages housing 1 million people, and Shenzhen with 241 urban villages housing more than 2 million. I've heard numbers of more than 150 in Beijing. The issue makes it into the newspapers sometimes, and there have been cases of redevelopment that usually involve demolition and relocation and have been criticized for simply moving, not fixing, the problem.

The central government recently concluded a major high-level policy meeting, the outcome of which included broad pronouncements for a new direction in the country's urbanization strategy. If followed, the new direction could do much to temper the rural-urban divisions that have made urban villages what they are. While still only broad statements of intention, the official document endorsed the idea of unifying the land administration system to eliminate divided rural-urban land markets. It also promoted the extension of experiments in some cities to ease or eliminate the distinction between rural and urban hukou registration status in the provision of services.

These are promising developments. And while many commentators believe in this case the government will follow through, there is a long road ahead. Whatever the outcome, for the time being, urban villages remain a reminder of the ongoing dichotomy between rural and urban that continues to shape the social as well as physical landscape of China.■

Revisiting Your Rural Roots

Urban Farming at NYU

By Chris Penalosa, MUP 2014

Daniel Bowman Simon is flipping through the pages of a book from the early 20th century; inside, it contains photos of people gardening on huge plots of land in New York. The aged book contains a piece of history at NYU that most people have never heard of. Simon read from the inside cover, “This book Children’s Gardens for Pleasure, Health, and Education by Henry Parsons was written in 1910 and published in New York. He was the secretary and practical adviser of the Children’s International Farm League and director of the Department of School Gardens at New York University.”

Simon is a PhD student at NYU Steinhardt’s Food Studies program. He describes how the Gardens department offered courses to teachers as part of a continuing education program. This was a time when people had a much different relation to farming. “At that time, most businessmen had grown up on farms,” recalled Simon. “There was still some real connection between city dwellers and their rural roots.” This rural connection Simon was talking about evaporated as New York developed in the 20th century. Simon mentioned how one large garden in Hell’s Kitchen was paved over by Robert Moses for the West Side Highway project. However, in recent years, there has been a renewed interest in raising food in urban areas.

In 2010, Simon, along with other Steinhardt students and faculty, wrote a petition to NYU administration for an urban garden. The petition included components such as a mission statement, goals, site design diagrams, examples of programming, and even an operating budget. It was well thought out. The proposed space was an eighth of an acre plot behind Silver Towers, on West Houston, which currently houses faculty. The towers were designed by the architect I.M Pei in the 1960s. Amy Bentley, Professor at Steinhardt’s Food Studies program, recalls when Simon pitched the idea for an urban garden. She quotes Simon, ‘You know that piece of ground in back of Silver Towers? That’s grass. There’s a fence around it. There’s nothing. I think we should put a garden there.” Bentley was living in Silver Towers at the time and Simon asked if she could take pictures of the site for him. She recalls the condition of the lot, “It really was dead space. There was a fence around it, it was a grass museum, nobody noticed it when they waked past, it was definitely unused space, but it had a really good south facing orientation.”

But there were a few hurdles to overcome before seeds could go in the ground. First, it took a bit of advocacy work to get NYU administration on board. Simon recalls the back and forth process with the administration. “On July 29th 2010, there was a meeting; myself, some members of faculty here, students and a whole bunch of people from NYU administration, people from sustainability, up on the 12th floor of Bobst where President

Sexton has his offices. And it was this really optimistic meeting," Simon said. But later that year in December, NYU told Simon that it wasn't quite ready for an urban garden.

It may have not been the right time for NYU, but meanwhile, in New York city and on the rooftops of Brooklyn, urban gardening was really starting to take off. Professor Bentley recalls the policy shift, "And then, I think one of the turning points was two or three years ago, Scott Stringer, Manhattan borough president, did a big report on urban gardening in New York City. Bloomberg is quite interested and involved in public health campaigns, bringing fresh fruit to people, vegetables, [to] increase the health of the population and understood and got that this was a good thing for the city... I think that got NYU's attention."

Nearly a year and a half after Simon's meeting in 2010, NYU Green Grants released a Request for Proposal (RFP) for a campus innovation challenge. A green grant is available to students, faculty, and staff to help pilot and incubate environmental projects at NYU. Dave Seward, coordinator for Green Grants, describes that special challenge. "With the Green Grants, we have an open RFP. Tell us what you want to do. With the campus innovation challenge, we actually stated, we're looking for an urban farming proposal. That one was specifically was allowed to have a higher budget as well because it was a special RFP."

Faculty from the Steinhardt Food Studies program responded to this RFP, with a special classroom component known today as the Introduction to Urban Agriculture course. Amy Bentley describes the idea behind the farm, "We thought, let's do something where we're not just reading and thinking about urban gardening. Let's actually do it and teach students about it through an actual garden. That was really important to us. We thought about it not only as a teaching classroom but a research space as well. We're happy to entertain anybody on campus who wants to test what it's like to grow XYZ in New York City, next to Houston Street. Our hope is that it can be some kind of research lab in thinking about improving urban food."

This academic portion of the urban farm was something that caught the attention of Dave Seward and NYU Sustainability. The Steinhardt Food Studies program was awarded the grant to pilot the urban farm. But there was one final catch. "We hit a huge snag," recalls Bentley. "They said we cannot put one thing on this land until we get landmark status approval because we don't want to have to undo everything if they say, "Sorry, this won't work."

With the help of NYU's legal team, the farm was able to get this approval from the Landmarks Committee in a rather quick process that could have taken years to get. At the moment, it is the first urban agriculture project to get Landmark's approval on a landmarked site. Though the approval was granted for a year, Professor Bentley is confident the farm will get a longer term permit.

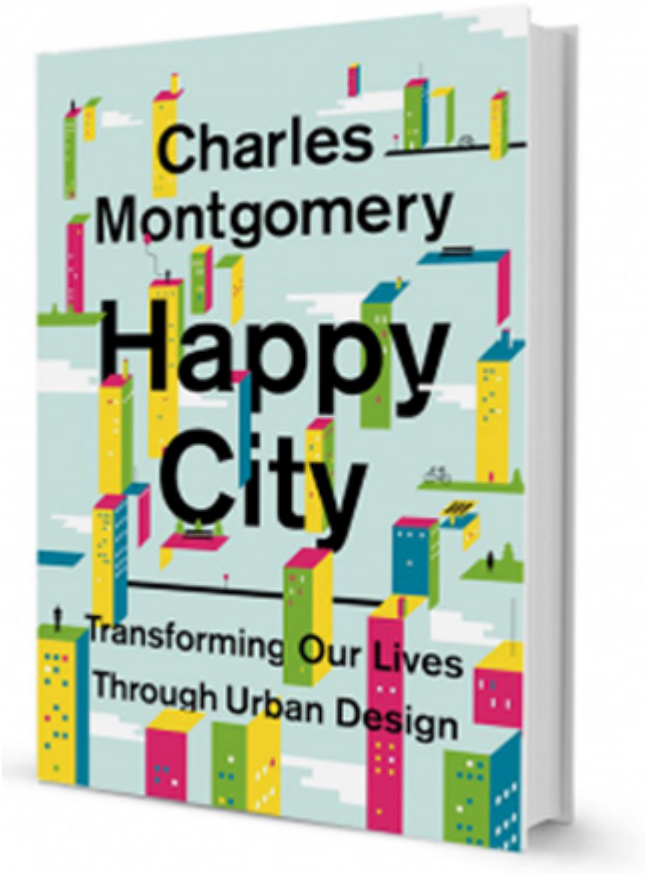
At the moment, the farm is put to rest for the Winter, but Laurel Greyson, professor of the urban agriculture course, proudly rattles off a list of crops the urban farm produced so far since June. "Tomatoes, eggplant, peppers, jalapenos, sweet bell peppers, we had some arugula, different herbs... varieties of watermelon... a whole bunch of different lettuces, beets, radishes, turnips, kohlrabi... some cauliflower..." Professor Greyson hopes students will take away practical farming skills. "We're sort of going over everything you need to know to be a really efficient and self-sufficient urban, or really, rural farmer," she says.

For Adriana Fernandes-Halloran, a current student of the urban agriculture course, the farm lab is a great opportunity to reconnect with growing food. "I just wanted to put my hands in the soil, that's all. I think it's a great asset for NYU students to be able to walk a few blocks and be able to connect with the soil and learn how to grow your own food," said Adriana. She hopes to apply what she's learned in this course to help bridge gaps in food access in low-income communities.

If you are a current NYU student, you can enroll in the two-credit, Intro to Urban Agriculture course, in the Spring. Volunteers are also happily accepted. For more information, e-mail urban.farms@nyu.edu. ■

Images by Jason Hollander

A Book Review



By Kirk Hovenkotter, MPA 2015

What is the purpose of a City? To promote economic wealth? To provide greater opportunity for its residents? To create an environment where $1 slices of pizza and 24/7 delivery service can be feasible business models?

Charles Montgomery provides another answer. Happiness. Cities should and can be designed to make their residents happier. To Montgomery, happiness is not an indeterminate concept but one that is defined by an equation, measureable and directly influenced by our built environment. From crowded subways, to the architectural typologies surrounding us, to the spaces we inhabit, our stress levels, generosity, and trust of others is shaped by our urban design.

Happy City is guided by Montgomery's principle that 'The greatest of human satisfactions lies in working and playing cooperatively with other people.' In illustrating how dense urban areas promote this principle, the author makes a strong rebuke of the sprawling, suburban environments that have characterized the last 50 years of North American development. The 'American Dream' of private secluded lives on beautiful cul-de-sacs has made the wealthiest society in the world one of the unhappiest.

His rigorous use of urban experimentation leads to eye opening conclusions about our values and society. For example, how much is a friend worth? He states that, 'Just going from being friendless to having one friend or family member to confide in had the same effect on life satisfaction as a tripling of income.' Or how likely is it for a lost wallet to be returned? On average people assume a 25 percent return rate, but are shocked to learn it's closer to 80 percent.

There's no doubt that Montgomery makes a strong argument for the ability of cities to make us happier, but at present day the benefits of these environments are out of reach for most Americans. He praises the quality of life in cities like Paris, New York and San Francisco, but the happiness these places provide comes with a price tag. As NIMBYism and restrictive zoning policies increase, the suburbanization of poverty continues, low-income American's will have no other choice than the Dispersed City and a lower quality of life.

'Happy City' is an accessible, page turning read as well as a testament to Montgomery's almost two decades as a journalist. The work is written for a wide range, but can be appreciated by the wonkiest of urban designers to suburban dwellers who are just learning about the field. A wide audience will be necessary if the benefits of our Happy Cities are to be shared by all. ■

The Wagner Planner is an independent student journal of the Urban Planning Student Association (UPSA) at the Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service at New York University.

URBAN PLANNING ANYTIME
www.wagnerplanner.squarespace.com
www.wagnerupsa.wordpress.com