



# PILLARS

LEADERSHIP TRAINING PROGRAM

**2020–2021 REVIEW**



**AIA**  
Kansas City



## 2021 PILLARS CLASS

Jake Brannon - Gould Evans

Ashlee Deck - ACI Boland

Andrew Fabin - RMTA

Trevor Freeman - Pulse Design Group

Harriet Grindel - SFS Architecture

Mackenzie Koepke - New Horizons LLC

Michael Kopper - Turner Construction

Annie Merrill - HOK

Tim Ockinga - JE Dunn

Kevin Pearson - Smith and Boucher

Chris Penland - Studio Build

Dan Pierce - GLMV Architecture

Jessica Reed-Shultz - Finkle + Williams Architects

Mike Schwaller - Helix Architecture + Design

Allison Wonder - The Clark Enersen Partners

## ABOUT PILLARS

The Pillars Leadership Training Program of the American Institute of Architects Kansas City prepares a representative cross section of the chapter's emerging leaders and individuals from the building community for their role in shaping the future of both the architectural profession and the greater Kansas City metropolitan area. The training program includes active participation in programs and exposure to community leaders and issues. Each class spends their time exploring core issues that affect our profession and the region within which we practice. Through discussions with leaders and colleagues, dialogue among themselves, tours and research the group will be able to understand and present to the AIA as a whole how we can make a positive change within our community. The AIA Kansas City Pillars program is a nationally recognized program for its originality and depth and has inspired similar AIA leadership studies in other US cities. The program continues to raise the bar of what young professionals want out of their profession and how we as professionals can make an impact on our built environment.



*Bike Route highlighting KC's new Complete Streets ordinance.*



*Our team did a test run of the route utilizing KC's RideKC public bikes.*

## OCTOBER SESSION - INFRASTRUCTURE

From Kansas City's founding in 1850, its urban fabric has been molded by its transportation networks. Streets and neighborhoods that were once centered around pedestrians and public transit eventually gave way to multi-lane highways, surface parking lots and urban sprawl. The effects of a car-centric culture have been felt heavily in Kansas City and other metropolitan areas like it across the country. In recent years a push to return to the multi-modal networks of the past has gained traction, often with cycling being at the forefront.

In 2019, Kansas City, Missouri put the Bike KC Master Plan into place. This new plan comes at a time when the city is making significant investments in its future. The Bike KC Master Plan looks to continue this momentum by recommending progressive approaches to bicycling infrastructure improvements and programs, while also acknowledging the pragmatic realities of fiscal constraint, maintenance needs, and the size of the City.

Our October planning session was planned as 3 mile bike tour of the newly constructed "Complete Streets" along the Gillham corridor in Midtown Kansas City. Unfortunately due to steady rain all day, our session was moved to the safety of the AIA KC office. However the rain did not impede our board of presenters.

Michael Kelley from BikeWalkKC started our presentations for the day. Michael gave us an overview of the history of BikeWalk as well as their recent successful campaign for a Complete Streets ordinance in Kansas City. Our discussion focused on how these public transit corridors are designed, as well as some of the challenges associated with bicycle infrastructure.

Councilman Eric Bunch kicked off our second presentation. As well as being the Fourth District Councilman, Eric is a co-founder of BikeWalkKC and has served four years as Mayor Sly James appointee to the Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee. Our discussion focused on how public transit initiatives are enacted at a government level, as well as how the sprawl and racial dividing lines of our city often affect the financing and approval of these initiatives.

Elizabeth Bejan and Sam Swearngin ended our day with a presentation on their mission with the Revolve KC bicycle shop. Bejan, stated, "I think a bike shop is the perfect place to make a difference in the community". It was apparent that Revolve KC is part bike shop and part community pillar for the neighborhood surrounding 51st. and Troost. Our discussion led to how the bicycle is a necessary means of transportation for less affluent communities and the importance to maintain and develop this infrastructure.



Wyandotte County Juvenile Justice Center presented by TreanorHL

## NOVEMBER SESSION - SOCIAL JUSTICE

In November, Pillars took a deep dive into current events within our country in relation to criminal justice reform. Social unrest this past summer underscored the need for our society to take a deeper look into the operations of the criminal justice system and policies that put people of color under more legal scrutiny than other members of our community. Many current policies lead to biases within the criminal justice system and further disenfranchise members of the community from a social and economic standpoint. We focused on gaining a better understanding of what these policies are, the role policing within Kansas City plays, and how regional police forces are responding to the current climate and desire for police reform.

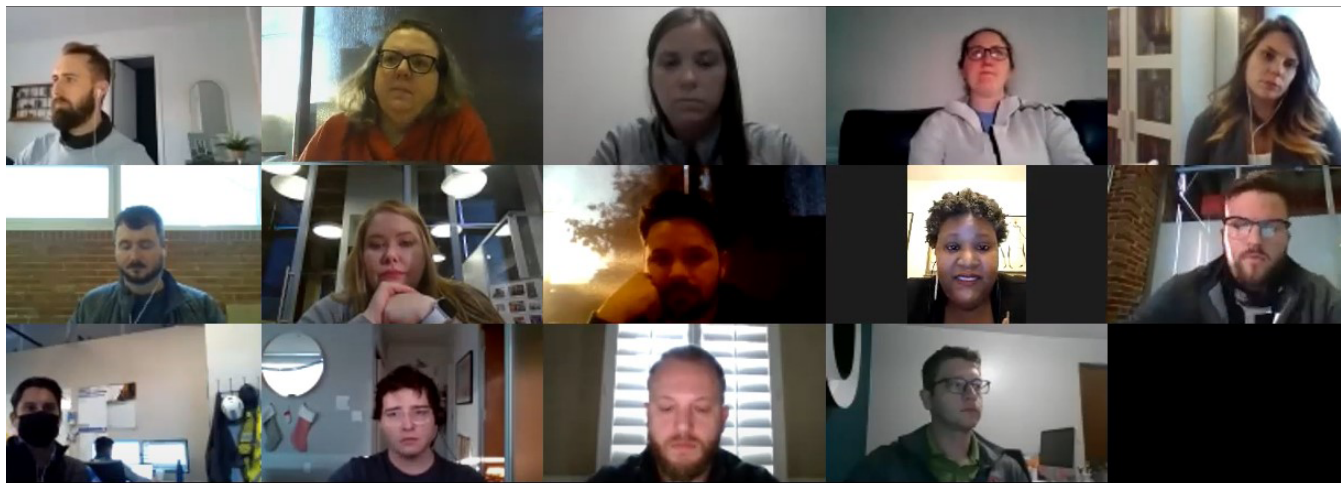
Jay Kovach from the North Little Rock Police Department began our presentations for the day by highlighting the differences between his police force and that of Kansas City. Comparing these two police departments furthered our understanding of ways policing might be changed in Kansas City to reduce the biases toward communities of color. Jay discussed the new justice center being built within his jurisdiction, giving insight into the role of the community in design decisions and a desire for changes in Justice Architecture.

The session continued with a panel discussion led by Jacob Becchina of the Kansas City Police Department, Eric Wesson, managing editor for the Kansas City Call, and Dave Helling with the Kansas City Star. The panel focused on

current policies and areas of improvement within the KCPD, as well as the role that media, including social media, has played in the dissemination of information in the past year. The discussion touched on the role traditional media can play in providing useful and timely reporting of facts as well as combating misinformation, especially in regard to reporting of criminal cases. The unique structure of the KCPD having very little local control was discussed in detail, shedding light on the benefits and shortcomings of a Police Department controlled by a board of directors appointed by the Governor of Missouri rather than appointed by the Mayor or elected by the residents of Kansas City.

Jeff Lane, Gwen Gigous, and Drew Hustedde of TreanorHL concluded our session by presenting the current and future state of Justice Architecture. Current design trends are focused on creating environments for prisoners that will lead to greater reform and preventing recidivism. Designing open environments with greater access to natural light facilitates growth and more meaningful interactions for prisoners. TreanorHL also focused on available programs within the facility that promote life skills and ease the transition for prisoners back into society after their release.

Lunch for this session was provided by Urban Cafe, a local minority owned restaurant in Kansas City. The session concluded with a virtual happy hour, due to COVID-19 restrictions, to discuss the topics of the day and reflect on the information presented throughout the session.



*A virtual Q&A discussion with Justice Gatson with the ACLU.*

## DECEMBER SESSION - SOCIAL JUSTICE

Reconvening for our December Session, our Pillars group explored difficult topics related to race, social justice, and policing. We began the session by ordering food from Ruby Jeans Juicery, an effort to not only support minority owned business during the pandemic but also introduce the class to a delicious meal from a business many of us were not familiar with.

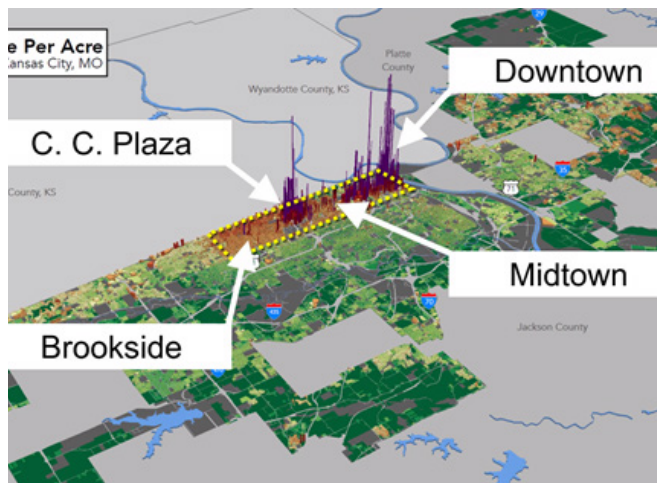
Jacob Becchina of the Kansas City Police Department joined us for another panel discussion, continuing the conversation on the unique model of state control over the KCPD. In the 1930's, Tom Pendergast and his political machine returned control of the police department to the office of the Governor in an attempt to remove the influence of local political figures acting for personal gain. Kansas City is the only major city in the United States which does not maintain local control over its police department. Jacob with co-panelist Lora McDonald, Executive Director of MORE<sup>2</sup>, examined the pros and cons of the current model through the contrasting lenses of the activist and the department. Currently, KCPD is overseen by a 5 person Board of Police Commissioners appointed by the Governor; a structure identified by many in the community as a significant issue. Through the conversation we often found ourselves coming back to the issues of accountability in our current system, as the board and chief do not answer to local constituents since they are appointed and not elected. While acknowledging that cities of similar scale (ie. St. Louis) have their own issues even under a system of local control, Lora continuously reminded the group that passing legislation to return control to Kansas City should be the priority, while the specifics of the structure could be worked out over time.

Later, we were joined by Garrett Griffin, Author of *Racism in Kansas City*, where he gave an in depth summary of the history of Kansas City. Garrett covered many of the not-so-pleasant policies throughout the city's history, but also often focused on the activists and civil disobedience that slowly led to positive policy reform. He began the lesson back in the 1820's and 1830's, highlighting the unique geographical location of Kansas City on an ideological border between the free soil in Kansas and the slave state of Missouri. This set the tone for many of the policy tensions in the following centuries including the eras of segregation, redlining, and unpaid prison labor still unjustly allowed under the 13th amendment.

Concluding our session, Justice Gatson of the ACLU, led a discussion on the topics of criminal justice and social equity. We discussed improvements to criminal justice practices, including bail reform, the need for a conviction integrity unit, and reducing the gap in traffic stops relative to race. People of color are stopped 93% more than their white counterparts despite making up only 10% of the population. Justice highlighted the importance of being an informed voter, expressing opposition to components of the recently passed controversial crime bill SB 600, citing \$16 million of unnecessary incarceration costs, and increasing the prison population by 2,500 inmates. Though it passed, she mentioned successes in getting some components of the bill removed.

Lunch was provided by Ruby Jean's Juicery, a local minority owned business in Kansas City. We ended our session, toasting to another round of great topics and even greater panelists with another virtual happy hour.





Value per acre shown in three dimensions (source: Urban3)



Aerial rendering of KCI (source: SOM)

## JANUARY SESSION - INFRASTRUCTURE

From Kansas City's founding in 1850, its urban fabric has been molded by its transportation networks. Streets and neighborhoods that were once centered around pedestrians and public transit eventually gave way to multi-lane highways, surface parking lots and urban sprawl. In this sense, Kansas City is no different than most communities in the United States. In the past 70 years, the physical size of Kansas City has quadrupled while the population has remained relatively stable. Put another way, every resident of Kansas City is on the hook for maintaining four times as much of the city as their predecessors. This sprawl has been the driving force behind two major advancements to Kansas City's public transportation infrastructure.

In January 2021, \$174 million in federal funding was secured to extend the KC Streetcar south on Main Street. This project extends the rail 3.6 miles south on Main Street, adding 16 stops, and connecting the Downtown line to Midtown, Westport, the Art Museum District, the Plaza, and UMKC. Current schedules estimate construction beginning by early 2022 and the opening of the extension system in 2025. This project is a partnership between the city of Kansas City, Missouri, the Kansas City Area Transportation Authority, and the Kansas City Streetcar Authority.

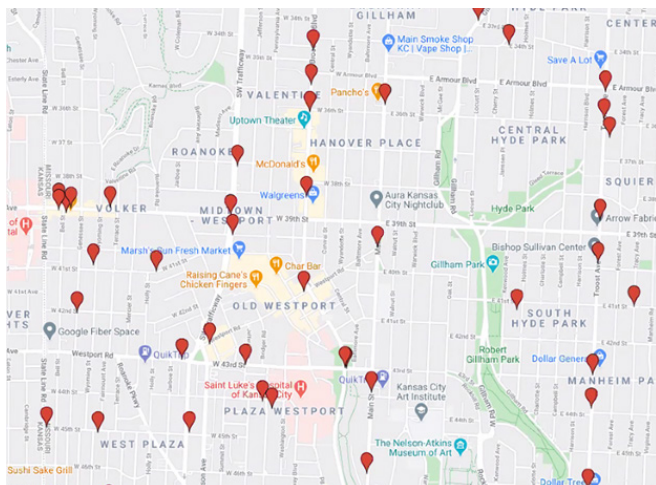
Construction of a new single-terminal at Kansas City International Airport was overwhelmingly approved in 2019.

The 1 million square foot terminal is the largest infrastructure project in Kansas City history. The project will be completed in March 2023, about four years after construction began.

The possibilities are nearly endless with a single-terminal. For travelers, it means no more shuttling from one terminal to another to make connections between airlines—all with the same convenience for which the current airport is known.

Dennis Strait, Principal at Gould Evans, started our presentations for the day. Dennis explained the history of how Kansas City became what it is today in terms of land use and transportation. He touched on the impossibility of the expectation of today's resident being responsible for four times their predecessor in infrastructure maintenance and outlined the steps needed to move forward to rectify the current situation. In resolving the infrastructure issue through many changes in zoning and tax policies to encourage productive development the current affordable housing issue this city is currently experiencing begins to be resolved as well.

Kevin Klinkenberg, Executive Director, Midtown KC, next echoed the dilemma outlined by Dennis with emphasis on Midtown and the streetcar. The average value per acre in Midtown is six times more valuable than other neighborhoods in the city; it produces an incredible value for the city. The urban core population is about half of what it was at its peak



Midtown grocers in the 1950s (source: Kevin Klinkenberg)



Construction camera live image during our session (source: Justin Meyer)

## JANUARY SESSION - INFRASTRUCTURE

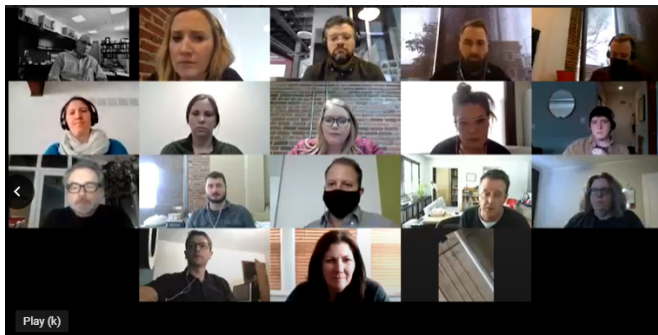
in the 1950s. The streetcar system is what made the population we had reached in the 1950s work. The streetcar is part of the DNA that made development successful back then. It cannot be underestimated how important free fares are to making this system work today to create a frictionless situation for people to get into utilizing this system.

Cindy Moses, Regional Engineer for the Kansas City Region of the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), followed up with a walkthrough on the process of obtaining the \$174 million in federal funding received to extend the streetcar south to UMKC and add six additional vehicles to the system. She also discussed the build grant that was just awarded to go north from the River Market to Berkley Riverfront Park and the study just ordered by the city of North Kansas City to explore continuing to extend the streetcar north.

Keith Novorr, owner of Michael's Clothing, next discussed the experience of being a business along the streetcar route and the process leading up to that. Keith explained the Transportation Department District (7-8 blocks on either side of the rail lines), the additional 1% sales tax, and the 5% real estate tax that the local community of the streetcar paid to create what we have today. This financing model is what allowed the streetcar transit fee to be free and as previously

noted, what has led to its success. Keith was not an initial proponent for the streetcar development in front of his business but now advocates that when rail lines are put in, economic development will follow. He says the streetcar has dramatically increased his foot traffic into the store by nearly 70%.

Justin Meyer, Deputy Director of Aviation at the Kansas City Aviation Department, led our last presentation of the day. He explained the strong need the community has for the new single-terminal KCI Airport and has had since less than a month after the existing KCI Airport's opening in 1972 when the FAA began enforcing passenger screening. Needless to say, the existing KCI was designed without consideration of modern day airport security screening, and has been ill equipped to best serve its travelers ever since. The other burden of the existing KCI Airport is not often experienced by Kansas City residents, but by passengers just connecting flights here, and that is changing terminals and going through security again to board your connecting flight. This hinderance has caused airlines to throttle back connections via MCI due to this poor guest experience. The new nearly 1 million square foot, 39-gate, single-terminal KCI Airport resolves all of these issues and more and is currently on time and on budget to open in March 2023.



*Our life on Zoom*

## FEBRUARY 2021

February's session addressed the current state of architectural education, asking questions about the purpose and process behind preparing the next generation of architects and the inextricable link between the industry's diversity issues and inherited educational segregation. The session took place on February 17th, 2021 and was held virtually due to the pandemic. Because the panels were virtual, the planning committee was able to engage national leaders in the education space to provide insight into how practitioners, academics and thought leaders are addressing education challenges in the architecture, engineering and construction industry. Pillars came to pick up lunches and an educational activity at the AIA offices prior to the sessions commencing for the day.

The first panel titled "Is Higher Education Doing Enough to Prepare Architects for the Real World?" addressed the current structure of architectural education. Panelists included Sean Griffiths, Founder of Modern Architect and Professor of Architecture at Westminster; Todd Gannon, Professor of Architecture at Ohio State University; and Timothy de Noble, Professor and Dean of the College of Architecture, Planning and Design at Kansas State University. Inspired by a series of articles published in Architect's Newspaper and Dezeen, including two of which were authored by Griffiths and Gannon, the lively conversation explored if higher education should mimic practice, how to better prepare students to serve clients and how to engage students in



*Kansas City Star Building Tour*

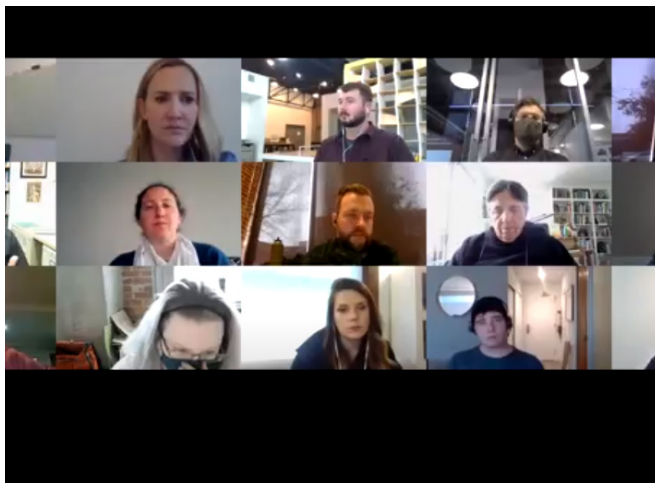
addressing broader social issues facing their communities through design. Gannon and Griffiths addressed the role of architectural students in challenging the status quo before entrenched in the complex economic and political system of practice. "Schools should provide a critical vehicle to actually attack how we practice and explore opportunities to do things differently," said Griffiths. An argument was made for students to be taught thought structures and wide-ranging skill sets that spanned technical knowledge, design thinking and professional skills. The panelists discussed how if we train student specifically to fit into our practices as they currently exist, we miss opportunities for practice to evolve. Panelists spoke in detail about the role our educational systems can play in engaging students in social issues facing their communities while giving valuable real-world experience. DeNoble and Gannon also addressed the exclusivity of the field and the role the cost of education plays in ongoing diversity issues. "Faculties and student bodies need to reflect the world we are serving," said Gannon. "Thankfully things have improved significantly since I was in school, but there is a lot of work left to do." The panel concluded with a conversation about what's next and the future of architectural education, including personal stories about how Gannon, Griffiths and DeNoble are seeing students address specific issues in their communities and changing the system from the inside out. "Education feels like a partnership where I am," said Gannon. "There is a demand for a different kind of world and while education as a right might seem like a tall order, it might not seem that way in 2031. We're moving in the right direction."



Our second panel, titled “Diversity, Education and the Future of the AEC Industry,” explored the widespread diversity issues facing our industry. Research shows more diverse teams tend to be more successful, and diversity in the field unlocks a better, and much-needed, understanding of design across the multi-faceted needs of society. A diverse team can mean the difference between reinforcing or dismantling inequality, yet only one in five new architects identifies as a person of color. The planning committee selected panelists who were leading the conversation about diversity and education nationally, including Jason Pugh, Architect and Urban Designer at Gensler and President of NOMA; Natasha Espada, Founder of Studio Enee and former President of the Boston Society of Architecture; and Jonathan Moody, President and CEO of Moody Nolan, the largest Black-owned architecture firm in the country. Our panelists addressed the specific strategies for addressing diversity issues through educational initiatives and shared lessons learned from national programming efforts. The conversation began with a robust discussion about building the pipeline of future talent and ensuring greater diversity through scholarship programs, mentoring and increased access. Panelists also addressed some of the challenges facing diversifying the profession. “The biggest issue with the profession – and education - is how expensive it is and how long it takes to get licensed,” said Espada. “It discriminates against people who don’t have the resources.” All advocated for debt relief and promoting non-traditional paths to careers in architecture and expressed the need for better communication in recruiting and enticing future talent. In their experiences leading educational programming with NOMA and Boston Society of Architects, Pugh and Espada shared how Project Pipeline and KidsBuild! are helping bridge the gap.

The conversation concluded with a conversation about personal bias that occurs within firms and our educational system – and how that negatively impacts the industry’s quest for greater diversity. Pugh added that one of the challenges facing students of color is the “Lack of career development and lack of mentors – whether a key figure at a firm or in school – having someone like that early in your career contributes to retention. You chart your own path by seeing others who look like you moving through their careers.”

Finally, the day concluded with Polly Carpenter, FAIA, the Director of Public Programs at the Boston Society of Architecture sharing details on KidsBuild!, the BSA’s volunteer program focused on introducing young children to careers in the AEC industry. The group gathered together following her presentation to discuss the day, build some creations with the Legos they were provided (an activity inspired by how KidsBuild! introduces children to the field) and socialize.



*Our life on Zoom*



*Kansas City Star Building Tour*

## MARCH 2021`

March's Session was broadly focused on Historic Preservation, but specifically on the future of Historic Preservation regarding the Kansas City metro, as well as the role Historic buildings / iconography have played in the political and societal events of 2020. This session took place on 03.17.2021, a short 3 months after the insurrection at the United States Capitol building, and 9 months after the call for an overhaul of justice sparked by the unlawful discrimination in the summer of 2020. Because this session fell on St. Paddy's Day, the planning committee decided to forego lunches for an after-session holiday treat. As has been the case with most sessions this year, each guest panel was held primarily on Zoom.

Our first panel, entitled "Architecture, Contested Sites and Moments of Crisis", focused on the impact the built world can have, and the role public spaces can play in moments of celebration and tragedy regarding the societal fabric. The planning committee also chose to focus on examples from recent memory, whether it's the Capitol building or the Federal Complex after the Oklahoma City bombing. Our panelists were chosen based on their previous project experience, as well as their expertise with sites devoted to heritage and remembrance. They included Carol Ross Barney (Architect and project lead for the Oklahoma City Federal Building) and Kapila D. Silva (Professor of Architecture + Preservation with research focusing on

UNESCO World Heritage Sites). The conversation, although primarily focused on delicate topics, was very insightful in regard to the way our industry can affect the public consciousness. Both Carol and Kapila were able to touch on the intricacies of how buildings can be designed to prevent future tragedy, and on the broad topic of how to memorialize pieces of history while remaining inclusive / sensitive of all people. We concluded with a brief discussion on how context plays a role in the public memorialization of figures or events. Both panelists spoke as advocates of architecture, but also as citizens, and stressed the importance of recognizing the history of our country, whether good or bad.

Our second panel, entitled "The Future of Historic Preservation in Kansas City", focused on the next steps our City will take to further preserve historic remnants and buildings. The planning committee was spurred by the recent unveiling of the design for the new Buck O'Neil Bridge. Our panelists were chosen on their portfolio of work in preserving pieces of the Kansas City Metro, and their community knowledge of the goings-on here in town. They included Eric Piper (Principal at Piper-Wind Architects) and Amanda Moore (Project Designer at STRATA Architecture + Preservation). The conversation started with a dive into the rejuvenation of the Crossroads district, and how that has begun to impact other areas of the City. From here, we took the examples the panelists had given, and focused the conversation on the

financial and political hurdles developers are having to take in our City / State to receive funding of preservation projects. Tying all this together, though, was the importance of a 'sense of place'. Both panelists observed that the necessity to preserve areas / buildings of our City is directly tied to our perception and sense of place. Without this, there can be no character and context of our City.

Lastly, the Pillars class was finally able to venture outside after 5 months of Zoom sessions and take a tour of a project under construction in the heart of the Crossroads. The renovation of Grand Place (formerly the Kansas City Star building) into a community hub is a monumental feat because of its age and its enormous scale. The building itself is slated to hold numerous restaurants, bars, offices and other recreational businesses that will reside in a historic piece of Kansas City. The planning committee chose this building because of its phase of construction, but also because it showcases many different generations of building typology with its many different additions through the years. Greg Hellbusch from 3D Development led the tour. His knowledge of construction and role with the project developer gave great insight into the intricacies of the building.

As was promised, we concluded the day with St. Paddy's day treats at the AIA Office. The planning committee provided shooters of Jameson, Boulevard Irish Ale and personal charcuterie boards for everyone to celebrate the holiday.



*Aaron Prater shares a brief history of food in Kansas City*



*Rita York Hennecke, Chris Vukas, and Peter Ho explain the development process to bring The Merc to KCK*

## APRIL SESSION - DIVERSITY AND DESERT - THE KANSAS CITY FOOD CONUNDRUM

Known around the world for its BBQ style and recent acknowledgment as the so-called 'Taco Capital of the United States', food in Kansas City is both diverse and extremely local. While Tacos and BBQ may be what most think of when the phrase "Kansas City Food" is uttered, others think of high costs, sacrifice, and long drives, leaving those in the heart of the city in 'food deserts', struggling to provide nutritious food for their families.

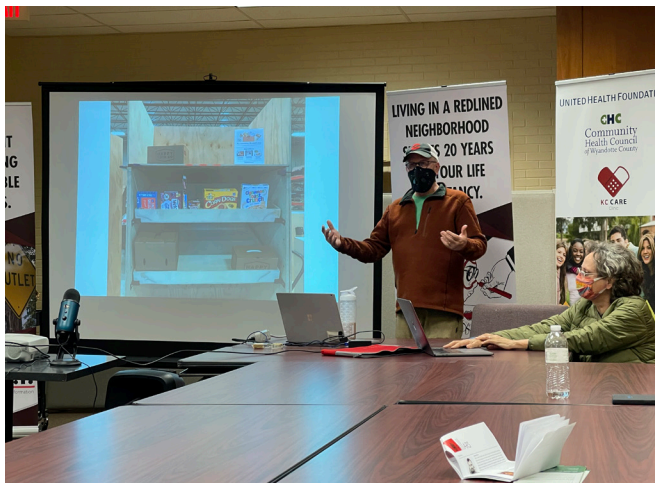
The April session started in Huron Park in Kansas City, Kansas with boxed lunches catered by Thelma's Kitchen. Thelma's Kitchen is a social venture of Reconciliation Services. Every Box Lunch helps provide social & mental health services and reduce food insecurity for KC neighbors in need.

Following lunch, Pillars welcomed Aaron Prater, Associate Professor of culinary and beverage classes at Johnson County Community College. Aaron started the discussion by outlining the history of food in Kansas City. From the early 'New Orleans' style cuisine resulting from the river trade, with a transition to Italian by Father Donnelly, and later Memphis Barbecue making its way to the City through slave movement from the South, Kansas City food has a diverse background.

The conversation shifted to modern day complex topics including cuisine being prepared out of necessity, the current way of making food easy for everyone, the lack of value in food, and accessibility to healthy food. Aaron left us with an optimistic view that we are at a point where people want better food, and he sees an opportunity moving forward to create new valuable cuisine in Kansas City.

Pillars took a short walk to the Merc Co+op for the next portion of the session. A brief introduction of panelists' Rita York Hennecke, General Manager of The Merc, Chris Vukas, Sunflower Development Group, and Peter Ho, CBC Real Estate, started the experience followed by a short tour of the newly opened grocery store. When the tour concluded, the group met in the community room and had a Q&A session with the panel. Chris Vukas discussed the tax credits process for the project and how the incentives and the partnership with the Unified Government of Wyandotte County made the project come to fruition, after 8-10 years of work to get a grocery store into downtown Kansas City, Kansas. Rita York Hennecke provided information on the grocery store and answered questions related to products, pricing, customers, and employees. Peter Ho included discussion on development hurdles faced through the project including challenges with the City of Kansas City, Kansas requirements.





*Nils Gore shares how KU students helped develop the Dotte Mobile Grocer*



*Pillars experience the Dotte Mobile Grocer in person*

Concluding the session, the group met with the Dotte Agency and the Dotte Mobile Grocer at the Community Health Council of Wyandotte County. The presentation was led by Shannon Criss, Nils Gore, and Matt Kleinmann, among many other involved community members. The discussion focused on how to achieve community input into what a neighborhood may need, and more specifically how community engagement can help to alleviate poor access to food and expensive, unhealthy food. The Dotte Agency presentation ended with a showing of the Dotte Mobile Grocer which has serviced 15 locations over the last year and provided healthy food to 44,000 people in Kansas City, Kansas through Federal dollars.

As the day wrapped up and temperatures were more brisk than expected, the group voted for an indoor happy hour at Boulevard Brewery Rec Hall as opposed to the outdoor happy hour at Kaw Point Park.



*Darwin Pennye shows off the indoor field at the Urban Youth Academy*



*Rodney Riffle and John Teegarden explain the design for Kansas City's new adaptive softball complex*

## MAY SESSION - ACCESS AND EMPOWERMENT - YOUTH SPORTS FOR ALL ABILITIES

Recently hailed as the ‘Soccer Capital of America’, Kansas City boasts a feverish sports culture and impassioned fan base for all of the city’s professional sports teams. Much of this support comes from the young athletes dreaming of one day hitting a home run at Kauffman Stadium, catching a touchdown from Patrick Mahomes, or burying a penalty kick in front of the Cauldron. For some, these dreams can only be made possible by the support of organizations throughout Kansas City with the mission to empower the city’s youth. From under served communities, to those on track to become professionals, the city offers opportunities for youth to have fun, develop character, and grow not only as athletes, but as leaders in the community.

The May session started with a ‘tailgate’ style lunch and yard games to dive into the sport day experience. The group then toured the Kansas City MLB Urban Youth Academy, led by Darwin Pennye, Executive Director. Mr. Pennye has a vast career in sports and explained how the Urban Youth Academy provides baseball and softball experiences for kids between the ages of 5-18 years old within the urban core. Mr. Pennye discussed the four main pillars of the organization: physical, academic, social and spiritual.

Following the tour, Diego Barrios, the Youth Development Coordinator for the Soccer for Success program at the Mattie Rhodes Center, joined in for a conversation with Pillars and Mr. Pennye to discuss how their organizations have become a vehicle for social change through developing athletic programs to help empower youth in underserved communities. The discussion included challenges to the current environment including transportation, the joy kids get out of the game, and the unfortunate societal norms that surround sports in modern time.

Following the discussion on urban youth sports programming, the Pillars class explored how another undeserved population is gaining the ability compete by listening to a presentation by Midwest Adaptive Sports, a non-profit organization focused on positively impacting the lives of those with physical, cognitive, emotional or behavioral challenges through adaptive recreational and competitive sports. The presentation focused on access to sports for youth and adults and how the Kansas City Parks and Recreation Department is aiding in development of the first complex dedicated to wheelchair softball.



*Steve Foutch gives the Pillars a tour of HyVee Arena*



*Pillars enjoy happy hour with a view of the upper level courts at HyVee Arena*

Rounding out the session, Steve Foutch, of Foutch Brothers gave the group a tour of the Hy-Vee Arena and discussed the challenges of the preparation, design, and construction process. The once 18,000 seat arena was transformed into a multi-level facility where 12 courts are comprised on two separate floors, with dining, business and retail space located throughout the concourse. The arena is a one of a kind experience within the Midwest and Foutch Brothers successfully adapted the historical building into usable space to avoid demolition of the structure. Pillars enjoyed happy hour at the Bottoms Up bar located within the arena where fans, family, and friends can gather to enjoy a drink while taking in the action on the courts.