

Exploration of an architectural idea many times begins with a “first mark,” a strong concept or idea that becomes concrete through the tangible act of drawing simple lines to illustrate relationships. A line, at this stage, can define what is and what is not. Lines can delineate processes and flows, and declare limits or boundaries. In our business, lines are meaning.

Thus, where and how are we drawing our lines as architects today? And what does that mean for the future of our profession?

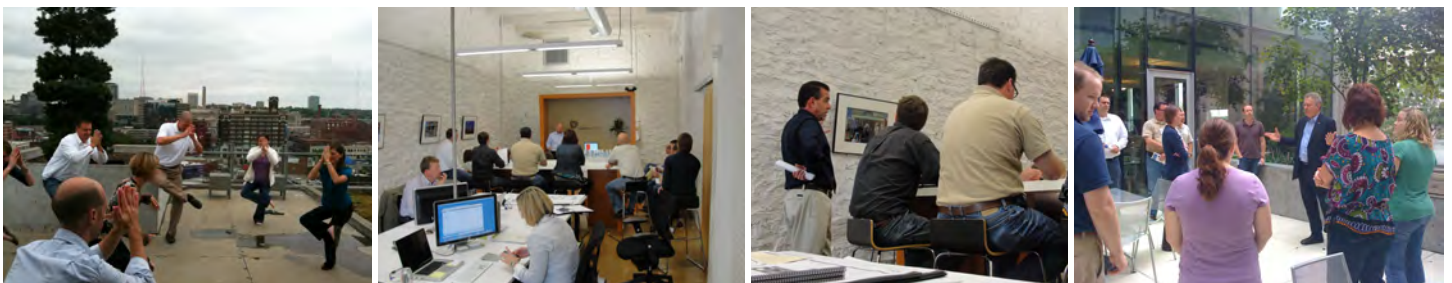
We began our group’s explorations looking at our place as architects in the grander scheme of the building process. The discussion sparked by our first session’s guests seemed to suggest we had drawn our lines a little too tightly, and only in the spheres which didn’t require us to leave our comfort zone as designers.

At the offices of Centric Projects and J.E. Dunn, our speakers encouraged us to challenge our notions of our role in relation to our clients and our communities – and also to the contractors/collaborators who help our work become built reality. Get out into the community, they said. Serve on a community board, or even better, a building committee. Try to see things from the community or client perspective. Shift scales. Cross disciplines. Develop relationships. Get involved with organizations or causes you feel passionate about, even if they have nothing to do with architecture.

But they also admonished us to hold dear our unique roles as architects. We need to keep talking to people about how great design can make people healthier, even wealthier. Talk to them about why we value what we value so our voice does not get lost. As project delivery methods shift, we need to be ready to shift with them, to collaborate and communicate. We need to use digital tools to broaden visual understanding of a project, but also know when it’s time to pick up a pen for a design conversation needing the human touch.

We need to build relationships and solve problems at the same time to hold on to our relevancy; our clients should be able to say, “An architect helped me \_\_\_\_\_.”

Look, another “line.” How do we write something meaningful on it?



\*special thanks to Richard Wetzel and Centric Projects, Neal Angrisano, David Disney and JE Dunn, and Vicki Noteis

\*\*and to Lisa Murphy at Boulevard Yoga and Healing for helping us loosen up

Our fair Kansas City once sat on the dividing line of a nation -- a line between that which was "East," and that which was "West." St. Louis may claim its gateway status, but it was in Kansas City where all vestiges of "East" truly fell away, and the hopes of nation hung on the frontier spirit of individuals who struck out for the unknown to start new ventures.

Dominique Davison, of Davison Architecture + Urban Design, evoked the notion of Kansas City's inherited "frontier spirit" when she spoke to us about the positives of running her own design business in KC. After spending time on both coasts, Davison settled here. The city may have retained some of its forward-thinking spirit of days past to give a creative business a chance of making it here, still remaining a friendly Midwestern place where a young business owner can grow a nurturing support network. Matthew Hufft, of Hufft Projects (and Make Studio, and Edwin Blue, his new outdoor furniture venture) similarly gained experience elsewhere in the country. Stanley Tigerman told him that if he ever wanted to get his own gig, he needed to go back to where he was from, where he had roots and connections. He had to come back to KC.

Both Davison and Hufft share a drive to do what they do out of a sincere love of their work and the process of making. If you are going to start your own business, Davison said, it has to be on your own terms, and the work has to be something "you just can't stand not doing." They also talked about the issues every business owner faces and/or fears – crafting elevator speeches, getting financing, dealing with HR issues and the challenge of a down economy.

It may not be easy, but there is a lot of value in being your own boss and setting your own schedule, said Herb Sih, of local business incubator ThinkBIG Partners. An entrepreneur himself, he presented "Top 8 Myths of Entrepreneurship". Did you know the average/median age of entrepreneurs when they started their current company is 40? Did you know that only the top 10% of entrepreneurs earn more money than their employees?

We ended the day with another KC entrepreneur, Ryan Sciara, founder and manager of the Cellar Rat. Like the others, his business grew out of passion and talent for his craft, good community connections, and a little luck. You know you're frontiersman entrepreneur when the wine-centered business you want to start doesn't really fit into any of the bureaucratic structures available for getting a liquor license. His retail wine shop/tasting room business concept had no precedent in Kansas City, and Sciara had to end up petitioning to change the law make his vision come to life. Now there are others who want to copy his concept.

Ah, the economy may be ailing, but the frontier spirit is still alive and well in Kansas City.



\*special thanks to Dominique, Matthew, Herb and Ryan for sharing their insights on entrepreneurship.

\*\*additional kuddos to Ryan for hosting our wine tasting at Cellar Rat.

A line connects two points. When different lines start connecting multiple points, you get something more akin to a web. For our third session, we began to see how a complex network of connections was growing Kansas City's cultural scene.

A visit to Roeland Park introduced the group to a discussion on the success of their "Art in R Park" program, which has placed numerous public art projects in the path of its citizens as they go about their daily life in the Kansas suburb.

The other speakers we had throughout the day ranged from "down in the trenches" architectural salvage maven Adam Jones, to a panel of arts patronage heavy-hitters assembled at the corporate offices of Hallmark. Our speakers addressed public initiatives like One Percent for Art. We also got to see how artists were being supported through independent groups like the Charlotte Street Foundation, and how corporate entities like Hallmark make their mark on the cultural landscape of the city.

Although sometimes hard to quantify in terms of impact, random acts of culture like "Art in R Park" and "One Percent for Art" do make difference in the quality of life across the metro and are helping to prop up Kansas City's street cred as a cultural hub.

All of our guests spoke about their passions for connecting the city's artistic impulses with the spaces and patrons that drive projects and installations throughout the city. It was clear to see that development of a great cultural community doesn't hinge just on work being done by an edgy arts underground or just big checks written by patrons. A supportive web of linkages is required to make this all happen, resulting in a culturally-rich urban environment.

"When people think about Kansas City," Director of the KCMO Municipal Arts Commission Porter Arneill said, "I want barbeque and the arts to be mentioned in the same breath."



Give, then Save, then Spend.

December 9, 2010



Sometime during his mid-thirties, Pat McCown began to reorder his priorities.

The CEO of McCownGordon had been following the personal finance mantra, "Spend some, save some, give some," generally in that order. But as McCown came of age as an emerging leader, he found that the "giving" portion needed to come first, and began to reframe his life and business in those terms.

"There has to be something beyond making the doggone buck," he said, expressing that today's corporate environment begs to be purpose-driven and not just profit-driven.

McCown joined representatives from KCP&L and American Century to speak to us about the importance of giving back, and the efforts they were making in their own organizations to help support the Kansas City community.

We also met with representatives from Harvesters, the United Way of Greater Kansas City, Children's Mercy Hospital, the Ronald McDonald House Charities and Habitat for Humanity/Habitat ReStore, and discussed or saw first hand how donation dollars were being utilized for community betterment projects.

We saw how Habitat and its retail cousin, ReStore, have kept tons of material out of landfills while using retail profits to help fund Habitat's operating costs, meaning more donor dollars were going directly to help rebuild ailing neighborhoods. We toured the Ronald McDonald House facility and saw how just little bit of homey comfort could be delivered to a family whose child was receiving treatment at Children's Mercy.



\*Thanks to Brian Alferman with Habitat ReStore, Craig Colbert with Habitat KC, Kerry Stein from Children's Mercy Hospital, Holly Buckendahl and Megan Harding from Ronald McDonald House Charities, Pat McCown from McCownGordon Construction, Elizabeth Danforth with Kansas City Power & Light Company, Barbara Wurlitzer from United Way Kansas City, and Angie Heer from Harvesters.

\*\*A special thanks to Brad Cloverdyke with American Century Investments for also hosting our roundtable discussion.



We live our lives along invisible lines that have immeasurable impact – the lines of race and the lines of class. Nowhere are those lines more recognizable than in our education system. And, in a time when school closings are front-page news, these lines become all the more clear.

This month, we welcomed representatives from the Blue Valley School District and the KCMUSD to discuss the status and trajectory of their respective educational communities. Many were surprised to find that the two districts, perhaps excellent examples of the demographic lines we draw, were learning from and partnering with each other as they charted their course. While tasked with different challenges, both districts were focused on preparing a 21st century curriculum for its scholars, bearing little resemblance to the way we remember being educated: grade levels sorted by academic skill level and not age, and more self-directed studies stressing student contact time with working professionals in the community.

Teaching and mentoring within the greater community-at-large were mentioned as keys to boosting student performance, and we heard from two groups who have taken this effort to task. Kauffman Scholars, Inc. discussed their unique “all-in” scholarship program that gives its selected students a hand-up, not only by offering scholarship funds toward a college education, but by developing a “scholar-centric network” of role-models around the student during middle and high school. ACE Mentoring shared its vision of helping support students who are interested in the AEC fields by providing mentoring services from area professionals.

With all the school closings in the metro, a community-driven campaign to reopen Hale Cook Elementary in the Waldo-Brookside area looked to be a positive turn for re-crafting our city school system. We got an update on the effort to recreate a true neighborhood school – walkable and sustainable – from Hale Cook Steering Committee Chair Ashley Hand, architect with AECOM. In Ashley’s effort, we saw how voices from our profession could have an important role in re-conceptualizing our public schools, perhaps even starting to blur the lines that divide our modern cities.

“How you create cities,” KCMUSD Board President Airick Leonard West said, directing a finger at the young builders in the room, “Know that it has an impact for public education.”



In the past months, we have been writing about how we -- as architects and citizens -- are people who draw lines. We are makers of things and definers of space, in the most literal and figurative of terms. As a collective, we make cities.

But exactly how do we make cities? And more specifically, how have we made Kansas City? Pillars welcomed Dr. Daniel Serda and Bradley Wolf to present a short development history of the area. Of course, Mr. Nichols' name came up. But we also talked about trails, rivers and highways; we addressed railroads, race and class. We learned how these elements had framed two cities, one in Kansas and one in Missouri.

While marks on the landscape like rivers and trails have defined Kansas City's past, could it be that a sustainable philosophy drives development in the future? Representatives from the Greater Downtown Area Plan team walked us through the multi-disciplinary process of making a city plan for the new century. Not surprisingly, terms like "bike-ability" and "walk-ability" peppered their speech, as they shared a vision of the Kansas City of the future.

Sustainability, it seems, has a reserved seat at the planning table. The Downtown Area Plan calls for a doubling of the population of the urban core, densifying the downtown and allowing citizens not only a culturally rich city life, but also one that embraces a greener settlement pattern.

As designers and builders, we should all know by now that sustainability is not just a contemporary ethos. It's an increasingly obvious imperative : especially if we look at the Transportation Outlook 2040 Plan, a study generated by the folks at the Mid-America Regional Council. We spent the remainder of the afternoon at their offices, talking about development issues facing the region as a whole.

When it comes to planning for the region's transportation future, the study shows we can't simply just do what we always have done in the past. Projected land use patterns don't follow the trends of the last 50 years, and natural resources certainly won't keep pace either. The group is busy working on implementing a number of regional sustainability initiatives that will build more greenways, promote cleaner water and improve mass transit, among other things.

From our days as a cow town, Kansas City has always embraced ideas rooted in the earth. Our city? It's an urban outcropping on a vast agrarian plain. Even in city clothing, we are still a people with our hands in the soil. There's a pretty good chance that as city-makers, the lines we draw in the future will be green ones.



Bradley Wolf discusses the land annexation history of KCMO.

*The History of Kansas City Development*

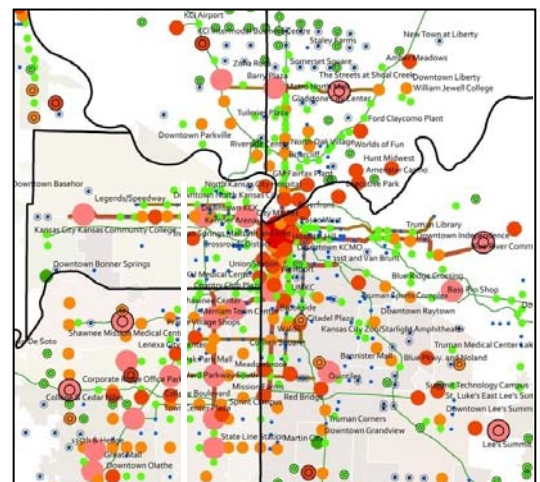
- > **Dr. Daniel Serda**, University of Kansas
- > **Bradley Wolf**, City of Kansas City, Missouri

*A Look at the Kansas City Area Plan*

- > **John DeBauche**, City of Kansas City
- > **Christina Hoxie**, BNIM
- > **Christopher Kinzel**, HDR Engineering
- > **Gerald Williams**, City of Kansas City

*Kansas City Development: A Regional Perspective*

- > **Tom Gerend**, Mid-America Regional Council
- > **Tom Jacobs**, Mid-America Regional Council



Snippet from a land use map in the Transportation Outlook 2040 Plan by the Mid-America Regional Council.

What if we could direct development with as much ease as we draw lines on a piece of trace? What if we could coax communities to take steps toward sustainable living – to rebuild central city neighborhoods ridden with poverty and years of disinvestments, just with the stroke of a pen?

In the real world of cities, it's not that easy. In March, our study focused on how policy-driven development incentives were influencing growth and re-investment in the Kansas City area.

We began at the Independence Ennovation Center – an incentive-based redevelopment project itself, which was once the Independence Regional Medical Center and now has become the community's business incubator. There we got a primer on the alphabet soup of development incentives at the fingertips of developers, business owners and governmental entities hoping to spur development – TIF, CID, CIP and the like. City of Independence officials also presented an overview of the State of Missouri's 353 Tax Abatement program and talked about how it was being used to breathe new life into the area's older neighborhoods. Helping prop up these areas with new investment, they said, decreases municipal costs for code violation enforcements and crime, and increases property values.

Back in KCMO, we stopped off at Project Living Proof, a sustainable model home project of the Metropolitan Energy Center (MEC). After a brief tour of the property, representatives from the MEC and the City of Kansas City sat down to discuss with us how sustainability incentives were starting to be introduced into the broader development conversation.

As Kansas City officials look at future development of the city, the philosophy has to be "taking a triple bottom line approach", said Dennis Murphey, the city's Chief Environmental Officer. Any policy stance that we will take toward development/redevelopment, he said, should address social equity and environmental quality, as well as making financial sense. He discussed a number of initiatives on the plate of the policymakers at City Hall, ranging in scale from the city's Climate Protection Plan to the smaller scale efforts being made in individuals' neighborhoods. For instance, Energy Works KC, a joint effort between MARC, MEC and the City of Kansas City, offers KCMO residents the chance to "green" their existing buildings through assistance in navigating the myriad financial incentives to improved energy efficiency. The program also boasts a workforce development component, creating green jobs in the course of implementing these sustainability strategies.

We headed for happy hour a few minutes early this session, in the spirit of green beer for the holiday. Whether incentives are green or come dressed up in a three-letter acronym, the process of designing good policy, like a physical structure, is both a science and an art. Only time will tell if these systems will build better environments, create community value and be able to weather the changes in a constantly evolving world.



*Jenni Mann shows us around the Ennovation Center's incubator kitchen in this repurposed hospital, no these coolers aren't from the morgue.*

#### *The Independence 353 Program*

- > **Jennifer Clark**, City of Independence
- > **Ann Smith-Tate** City of Independence
- > **Jenni Mann**, Independence EDC

#### *Project Living Proof Tour/Green Incentives*

- > **Jennifer Mayfield**, Metropolitan Energy Ctr
- > **Brian Rotert**, Metropolitan Energy Ctr
- > **Dennis Murphey**, City of Kansas City
- > **Gerald Shechter**, City of Kansas City



*Our panel at Project Living Proof educates and motivates the group on the future of sustainable policies in Kansas City.*

## Turning Cash into Community: Development Case Studies

April 21, 2011

Financial and real estate people see lines differently than architects. To an accountant or an investor, a line can represent progress (or lack thereof) on a graph showing data in the positive or negative. Applied to development, is neighborhood or city always on either “on the way up” or “on a downhill slide”? This session, the Pillars looked at some Kansas City development case studies – including projects involving a large amount of capital investment, public and private. But how does that interjection of cold, hard cash turn into the juicy, savory urbanism that attracts more investment and attention?

To kick off the discussion, we started with a development “state of the line” conversation with John Sharp of the Kansas City, Mo. City Council and Brent Miles of the Wyandotte County Economic Development. The two officials gave an update on happenings in their respective jurisdictions, including a Bannister Mall redevelopment update from Sharp. Missouri was disadvantaged in terms of the true effectiveness of its development policy incentives, Sharp said, and wasn’t getting much help from Jefferson City. Miles saw Kansas as somewhat leaner and meaner when it came to dealing with companies looking to locate or relocate on the other side of the line; a lower level of bureaucracy meant increased ability to offer the right real estate to the right client at the right time.

We then moved on to the Park Central Apartments on Armour Boulevard, an area experiencing a great deal of redevelopment in the last few years. The panelists were three: Elizabeth Rosin, of Rosin Preservation; Peter Cassel, a representative from the Silliman Group, the real estate developer with a large investment in several Armour properties; and James Shriever, an officer with the KCMO police department. Rosin gave us a historic overview of the area and talked about how incentives were involved in the projects. Cassel’s New Jersey-based development company picked Armour Blvd., he said, because was a series of unique properties in short supply, near community assets and severely undervalued. But making the development work goes beyond bricks and mortar. He pointed to several efforts the company had undertaken to prop up the neighborhood and reinforce the value of their investments. Officer Shriever echoed this sentiment, illustrating how “C.P.T.E.D” techniques (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design) were being used in tandem with the redevelopment to create space designed to lessen a property’s attractiveness to crime.

The group finished up the day at the headquarters of the Green Impact Zone, a new redevelopment model based on principals of sustainability, and spear-headed by Representative Emmanuel Cleaver II. A community is like the human body, Cleaver said. When one part is wounded, he said, you have to give attention the most vulnerable part or the heath of the entire body is threatened. The area at risk, in this case, is the area generally bordered by Troost, Prospect, 31st and 51st streets, now designated the Green Impact Zone. The panel, including Cleaver and his Zone staff, along with Jacob Wagner of UMKC, discussed the target area and how federal funds were being used to not only revitalize it, but to do it in a way that is environmentally sustainable and creates workforce development opportunities for the Zone’s residents.

So, as a city, are we on an upward trend or a downward one? If these projects succeed, this time may one day be looked upon as a development tipping point – a point on a timeline when our urban core became as juicy and savory as our barbeque.



*At the Kansas City, MO City Hall we were enlightened by representatives from both side of the state line on the strengths and weaknesses of each side’s incentives and programs.*

### *Attracting Development on Both Sides of the State Line*

- > **John Sharp** 6th District Councilman, KCMO
- > **Brent Miles** President, WCED

### *The Armour Boulevard Redevelopment*

- > **Elizabeth Rosin**, Rosin Preservation
- > **James Schriever**, Community Interaction Officer
- > **Peter Cassel**, Silliman Group

### *The Green Impact Zone Redevelopment Effort*

- > **Jacob Wagner**, UMKC Department of Urban Planning
- > **Cokethea Hill**, Ombudsman, Green Impact Zone
- > **Emanuel Cleaver II**, U.S. Congress, MO 5th District



*Scott, one of Pillars’ new Steering Committee members, felt right at home at the Park Central Apartments.*

## End of the Line

May 19, 2011

Our May session of the Pillars Program was our last formal session for the 2011 program. We capped off the year with a couple of tours and speakers illustrating the unfinished story of the development of our fair Midwestern metropolis, an open-ended conclusion to the questions we sought to answer with our explorations.

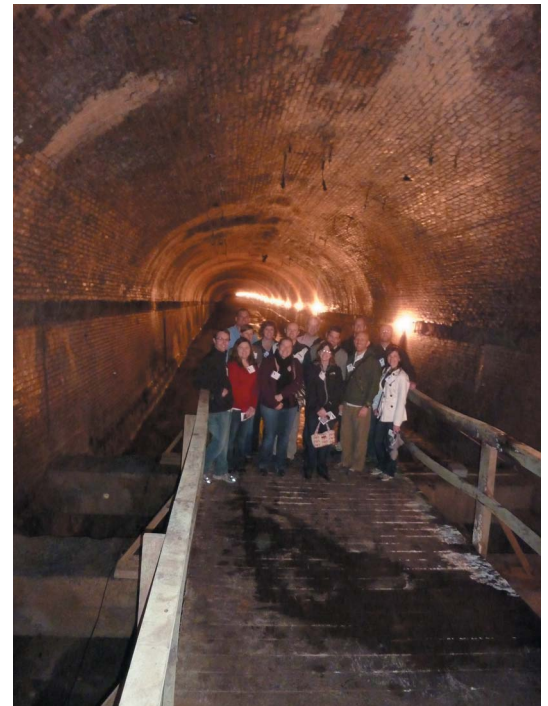
We started our day at an urban development artifact from the 1880s, the 8th Street Trolley Tunnel. Once a competitor with the 9th Street Incline, the tunnel and its trolley car took passengers from the West Bottoms up the bluff to 8th Street and down again. Our tour guide gave us a long history of the tunnel's metamorphosis over the years, going from public transportation portal, to mushroom incubator (yes, spread manure and you've got a perfect climate to grow them down there), to urban archaeological curiosity. The "lost" tunnel was rediscovered when the offices of State Street Bank + Trust were built above. The tunnel helped us frame our understanding of the development of our urban environment with a long view – a multi-layered process of time, people and physicality.

We then traveled to the offices of Polsinelli Shugart, where we continued our discussions on development incentives. Attorneys Doug Stone and Bill Sanders helped increase our understanding of the different types of incentives, how they work and key issues to keep in mind when working with clients who may have an opportunity to use these benefits. Given Polsinelli's role as a poster child for the Missouri – Kansas incentive battle, our visit seemed well-timed for framing our discussion in terms of the development projects currently in flux. "It's easy to get benefits to move (a business)," Stone said, "It's hard to get benefits to stay."

Finishing off our session, we then took a short jaunt down the street to Caymus Real Estate, the company hired to help move the defunct West Edge project forward and hoping to write a new story for the development. It's another project in flux – do they finish it as designed? Do they infill the atrium space to make better real estate sense? Do they scrape the site and start over? Caymus is now in the process of evaluating the options and working with local contacts to help find potential tenants. We were treated to a tour of the project at the end of the day.

We started the year looking at the "lines we draw," as architects and professionals, and in a philosophical sense, as members of our community. We ended the year looking at the physical development of Kansas City, a process we found to be complex, fluid and constantly evolving. Like the projects we toured, we too are "in flux." Have the issues we have explored planted the seeds of inquiry around community and professional issues, making us more ready to draw, create and evolve with our changing urban environment?

That is our hope.



*The class poses for one final group photo in the abandoned street trolley tunnel to the West Bottoms..*

### *Basics of Development Financing Tools*

> **Bill Sanders** Polsinelli Shugart

> **Douglas Stone** Polsinelli Shugart

### *The West Edge Project*

> **Michael Allen** Caymus Real Estate, LLC

> **David Harrison** Caymus Real Estate, LLC



*Kevin enjoys the view from a West Edge penthouse office.*