



PILLARS

LEADERSHIP TRAINING PROGRAM

2024-2025 REVIEW





2025 PILLARS CLASS

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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.



Tour of the Juniper Gardens Training Farm with Cultivate KC



Discussing food access and redirecting food waste at Kanbe's Markets

OCTOBER: SUSTAINABLE AND EQUITABLE FOOD SYSTEMS

In October, Pillars explored the processes in our city that bring food from the garden to dinner tables and even beyond. The session appropriately began at Fortunati Pizza in the West Bottoms, a restaurant utilizing flour from Marion Milling which is a local flour company focused on sustainability, nutrition, and, of course, flavor.

Pillars then traveled to Cultivate KC's Juniper Gardens Training Farm in KCK. Pillars spoke with representatives to learn how Cultivate KC advocates for local farmers and agricultural businesses, sustainable food systems, and equitable food access. Cultivate KC hosts a wide variety of organizations focusing on local farming including the Dotte Mobile Grocer, Double Up Food Bucks (allowing more fruits and vegetables to be purchased with EBT), and urban growing sites across the KC metro area. While touring the 9-acre site in KCK, Pillars also learned about the New Roots program. This initiative supports resettled refugees and new Americans through their first years working to become independent farmers supplying healthy food to our communities.

After touring the farm, it was time to witness the farming process firsthand. The Pillars spent time volunteering in one of the Cultivate KC's gardens weeding planting beds and applying new mulch around apple trees. Gardens such as these allow residents to take an active role in the production

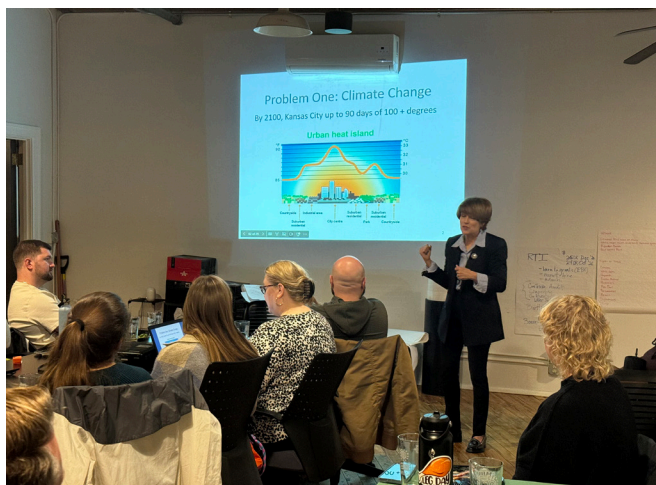
of food in their communities and better understand the effort and process that puts food on their tables.

Moving from the start of the food cycle to the end, the Pillars traveled to Kanbe's Markets to see how the nonprofit organization diverts excess food in our city from landfills to convenient healthy grocery corner stores, community pantries, and food banks. The Pillars toured the storage and sorting area for a wide variety of fresh produce destined for community consumption and learned about Kanbe's Markets' work with KC Can Compost to send imperfect food to local farmers as animal feed or compost.

With a new understanding of local food systems, the Pillars ended the session with a happy hour back in the West Bottoms at Voltaire.



Volunteering at Juniper Gardens Training Farm



Speaking with Bridging the Gap, KC Can Compost, and Recyclers for Change



A tour of the Overland Park Arboretum and Botanical Gardens

NOVEMBER: SUSTAINABILITY

In November, Pillars took a look at local sustainable initiatives at the individual, organizational, and municipal scale. Starting at the offices of Bridging the Gap in the West Bottoms, the Pillars heard from Executive Director Kristin Riott about the organization's history of environmental education and volunteer action. Programs such as the Heartland Tree Alliance, the KC Wildlands Team, and local recycling centers have helped plant countless trees and prairie lands and preserved native ecosystems.

The Pillars also heard from Kristan Chamberlain, Co-founder and CEO of KC Can Compost, a non-profit diverting food waste from landfills to compost and helps train people for employment in green industry jobs. The group heard about the history of the initiative and ways in which it offers different methods for all interested citizens to participate in composting.

Donna McCullough and Kathy Leopp then gave the Pillars insight into their organization, Recyclers for Change and how individuals can implement sustainable change in their community. This organization of female cyclists increases awareness of climate change and ways to reduce its causes by creating a network of environmentally-conscience bike riders and local food waste management programs.

From the West Bottoms, the Pillars traveled to the Overland Park Arboretum and Botanical Gardens for a look into ways people can experience nature at the personal level. The group spent time exploring some of the park's 300 acres over 1700 species of trees as well as some of the local art on display.

Lastly, the Pillars sat down with Overland Park's Sustainability Manager, Laura Isch, for an open discussion about her work to identify and implement the city's sustainability goals, including the pursuit for LEED for Cities. During the open forum, the Pillars learned about what sustainability looks like at the scale of a city, how to measure environmental factors and milestones, and strategies for creating resilient communities that will stand the test of time.



An interactive talk with Laura Isch, Sustainability Manager for Overland Park



Christina Hoxie presents on community engagement strategies



Panelists discuss the current land bank framework & future opportunities

DECEMBER: LAND BANKS & INCREMENTAL DEVELOPMENT

In December, the Pillars Program focused on the relationship between government and infrastructure – particularly the importance of the land bank in urban communities and how the AEC industry can advocate for and develop meaningful incremental development on neglected or vacant lots. The session started with an energizing presentation focused on intentional community engagement with Christina Hoxie, who shared insights into her contextual research and work with the Lykins and Marlborough neighborhoods of Kansas City.

It was then followed by a walking tour of Lykins Square Park with Gregg Lombardi, Executive Director of Neighborhood Legal Services and the Lykins Neighborhood Association. Gregg highlighted the concentrated effort the Lykins Neighborhood Association has made towards developing land bank properties. The group learned about the legal implications and framework provided by the association to facilitate this type of development, while witnessing firsthand a variety of properties being restored into new homes by local developers and organizations like Habitat for Humanity.

From there, the group traveled to the Kansas City Design Center to attend a panelist discussion with a focus on various stakeholders involved in the land bank planning process. Facilitated by Abby Newsham, the panelists provided perspective on the relationship between the city, developers, and community groups. Panelists included Dominique

Davison, Terrell Jolly, and Gregg Lombardi. Topics included the challenges and opportunities within the current land bank framework, and neighborhood-specific/city-wide goals.

Lastly, the group traveled north to the Columbus Park Neighborhood where they met with Ben Hlavacek of Harrison Street DIY Skate Park to learn more about their volunteer-led story and future goals in Kansas City. To provide some warmth from the chilly weather, the group grabbed coffee at Cafe Cà Phê and enjoyed a discussion with owner, Jackie Nguyen, who shared her story and mission to bring representation to the Vietnamese community in KC, while providing a welcoming space to all community groups. Finally, the group concluded the day at J. Rieger and enjoyed a holiday happy hour.



Pillars enjoy a tour of Harrison Street DIY Skate Park



Pillars enjoy lunch & a presentation at Strang Reserve



Brad Moore shares about the Overland Park Historical Society

JANUARY: GOVERNMENT & INFRASTRUCTURE

The January Pillars session braved the cold after the big snowstorm and explored the relationship between government and development, focusing on the City of Overland Park. In this session, the group explored how Overland Park's past has led to one of the largest and most successful suburbs in the Midwest, how government attempts to guide and encourage development, and what the results of those efforts are.

Overland Park traces its roots back to 1905 with the arrival of its founder William B. Strang Jr., who platted subdivisions, including one named "Overland Park," along a military roadway southwest of Kansas City. Strang envisioned a self-sustaining, well planned, "park-like" community that had strong commerce, quality education, vibrant neighborhoods, convenient transportation, and accommodating recreational facilities. The city today encompasses 75.6 square miles of Johnson County, and has more than 200,000 residents, making it the second most populous city in Kansas and metropolitan Kansas City.

The session started with lunch at Strang Reserve and a presentation on the history of Overland Park by Brad Moore of the Overland Park Historical Society. The group then walked past the Farmers' Market, which is currently under construction. The award-winning Farmers' Market is undergoing a \$34 million renovation to expand the layout and add an indoor pavilion. The group then continued to the

Overland Park Historical Society's current office, where Brad told stories and showed relics from OP's past.

From there, the group walked through downtown OP to the Strang Depot Building. The Depot Building was a stop on the Strang Line Interurban Railroad in the early 1900's and is currently being restored to serve as the new office for the Historical Society. A round table discussion was held at the Depot with Jack Messer - Asst. City Manager for the City of Overland Park, Hal Shapiro - Founder and Managing Principal Partner of REAL Property Group, and Kristina Stanley - Manager of the Overland Park Farmers' Market. The discussion focused on the government's efforts to encourage and guide city growth and the resulting benefits and challenges for developers, the community, and AEC industry.



Panelists discuss OP government efforts in the city's future development



Presentation given by Cate Smith



Construction tour at a new Children's Mercy clinic

FEBRUARY: SOCIAL IMPACT & MENTAL HEALTH

Originally delayed by a winter storm, the February Pillars session persevered, bringing the group together at Children's Mercy Research Institute (CMRI) to explore how design shapes pediatric behavioral healthcare environments in Kansas City.

The day began with Catie Smith, Director of Planning and Design at CMH, presenting on Behavioral Healthcare and the Illuminate Campaign. She introduced various care models and key design strategies, emphasizing sensory-friendly elements for calming environments, privacy and security measures to protect patients and caregivers, and flexible design to accommodate evolving care needs.

Pillars then assembled Happy Kits for young patients before hearing from Donald "Scribe" Ross, a local artist whose murals at CMH demonstrate how art contributes to healing environments through storytelling and color.

The afternoon continued with a tour of CMH's Partial Hospitalization Program (PHP) Clinic, currently under construction. Catie Smith and Travis Lourens of Kelly Construction Group led the group through the space, discussing the importance of designing secure yet welcoming environments, balancing clinical functionality with patient comfort, and ensuring a smooth transition from construction to medical operations.

At The Children's Place, Ann Thomas (President & CEO) and Erin Nybo (Project Designer) shared how trauma-informed care models influence design. Their discussion focused on space planning for therapeutic support, asking the right questions early in design, and creating impactful spaces within budget constraints. They emphasized how the built environment can foster a sense of safety, stability, and routine for children who have experienced trauma. The conversation highlighted the importance of collaborating with clinicians, educators, and families to ensure that the space aligns with the needs of both the children and the professionals who care for them.

This session reinforced the critical role of design professionals in shaping supportive healthcare environments, highlighting the power of interdisciplinary collaboration in pediatric mental health care.



"A place where hurt finds hope" mural at the Children's Place



Panel discussion at KCAI



Group photo at the entrance to the Rabbit hOle

MARCH: ARTS AND SMALL BUSINESS

A week after making up the February session due to a weather delay, the March session started at the Kansas City Art Institute (KCAI). At KCAI the Pillars group learned how to better incorporate art into the built environment. Randy Williams, Associate Vice President of Corporate and Community Partnerships at KCAI, lead an engaging discussion about how designers, developers, and building owners can work with local art students and art institutions to incorporate their work into the design process. Randy was joined by fellow arts advocates: Dana Knapp, President & CEO of ArtsKC; Ashley Hand, current AIA KC President and former Director of Strategic Communications with the County administration for the Unified Government of Wyandotte County and Kansas City, KS (UG); and Joshua Rizer, the Community Story Teller for the UG. This brilliant group helped this year's Pillars class to better understand the arts environment that exists in the Kansas City metro and how we as designers can use our skills to work with local artists. The panel concluded leaving the group with fresh perspectives to ponder while we toured the facilities in use by students at KCAI.

The session shifted gears to a more immersive environment at The Rabbit hOle in North Kansas City. The owners and founders, Pete Cowdin and Deb Pettid, gave an overview of their inspiration and how the museum, dedicated to bringing countless works of children's literature to life, came to fruition. From there, Jay Holley of MultiStudio and Matt Mastroly,

Digital Design Coordinator at The Rabbit hOle, dove into the design process and code challenges they faced. Once we were better educated on how the museum came to be, we were taken on a tour of the museum, fabrication shop and an in progress exhibit. A friendly atmosphere encouraged Pillars to ask questions to learn how intricate designs go from thoughts to a part of the living exhibit. After the discussion and brief preview of the space the group was let loose to explore the museum.

The activities and discussions of the day brought new outlooks to an ever-learning crew of designers on how far art reaches into our careers and how we can best support the vast arts community in every step of the design process .



Pillars tours the Rabbit hOle exhibit



Pillars group photo on the rooftop of Cosentino's



Presentation by Meredith Hoenes from Port KC

APRIL

For the April session of Pillars, participants explored the powerful role transportation plays in shaping Kansas City's growth, economy, and urban landscape. The event kicked off with an outdoor lunch, overlooking the iconic Union Station, a historic hub of rail travel and the current southern terminus of the KC Streetcar, now poised for expansion. The setting underscored the session's focus: the intersection of legacy infrastructure and forward-looking transit initiatives.

From there, the Pillars visited the Kansas City Area Development Council's office and heard from Ashley McDonald about the impact of KCADC and Global Design. Tom Gerend from the Kansas City Streetcar Authority and Martin Rivarola from Mid America Regional Council shared insights into the revitalization of public transit in the city. Their stories connected the city's past as a rail hub to its present-day transit evolution, offering a compelling look at how modern infrastructure is reshaping mobility.

The group then boarded the KC Streetcar for a ride to Cosentino's Downtown Market where grocery industry leaders shared behind-the-scenes insights on food logistics in a dense urban setting. John Schweiger from BRR Architecture and David Michael from Cosentino's shared unique solutions to the design problems presented by the project, and they discussed the complex logistics of urban

food distribution, emphasizing the critical role transportation plays in getting fresh products to city residents and sustaining local business.

Next, the group traveled to the River Market, an area with deep historical roots in trade and a focus for future expansion. Meredith Hoenes from PortKC and Christopher Cline from Confluence Landscape Architecture provided an in-depth look at the area's waterfront revitalization efforts and the role of urban planning in shaping how people, goods, and services move through critical city sectors.

The group then rode by Streetcar back to Union Station to wrap up the session with a Happy Hour at Pierpont's. This session gave Pillars attendees a valuable understanding of how transportation is a key driver in connecting people and businesses and how thoughtful leadership can transform Kansas City into a more integrated and thriving city.



Pillars group photo with Steve Foutch on the stairs of HyVee Arena



Panel discussion at CPKC

MAY

For the May session of Pillars, participants explored the role Sports play in shaping Kansas City's growth, economy, and urban landscape. The event kicked off with lunch at HyVee Arena provided by one of the in-house concessions.

From there, the Pillars visited with Steve Foutch, CEO of Foutch Brothers. Steve gave a breakdown on everything that they did to rehabilitate the arena and reactivate as a sports hub in Kansas City. After the Q&A session with Steve, he gave the Pillars class a tour of the facility and continued to answer questions.

The group then headed over to the Kirk Family YMCA, where we met with Mark Hulet, President & CEO of the YMCA of Greater Kansas City. Mark talked about his years of work with the YMCA and the process of opening a new YMCA location and the challenges that came with renovating a historic building into a great community asset. Mark then gave us a tour of the new facility and explained the different community engagement activities that draw families to the YMCA for various needs.

Next, the group traveled to CPKC, the first of its kind stadium dedicated to women's professional sports. The Pillars class was given a tour of the stadium by an incredible docent, Scott Sherry from JE Dunn (contractor that built the stadium), and Andrew Kessel from

Generator Studio (architect that designed the stadium). After the tour the Pillars had a panel discussion with DePrice Taylor, Executive Director of Community Relations for the Kansas City Current, Dave Borchardt, Vice President of Corporate and Community Relations for the Kansas City Sports Commission, Mark Hulet, Scott Sherry, and Andrew Kessel. The Pillars asked were able to ask the panel all of there burning questions about sports and how those impact the city. After the panel was over the Pillars class was able go down on the edge of the field, we didn't touch the grass, and meet with the panelists for a little one on one discussion.

The group then reconvened at The Blue line to wrap up the session with a Happy Hour. This session gave Pillars attendees a valuable understanding of how Sports is a key driver in connecting individuals, community, and businesses and how thoughtful leadership can continue to transform Kansas City into a more integrated, thriving, and healthier city.