

Forum

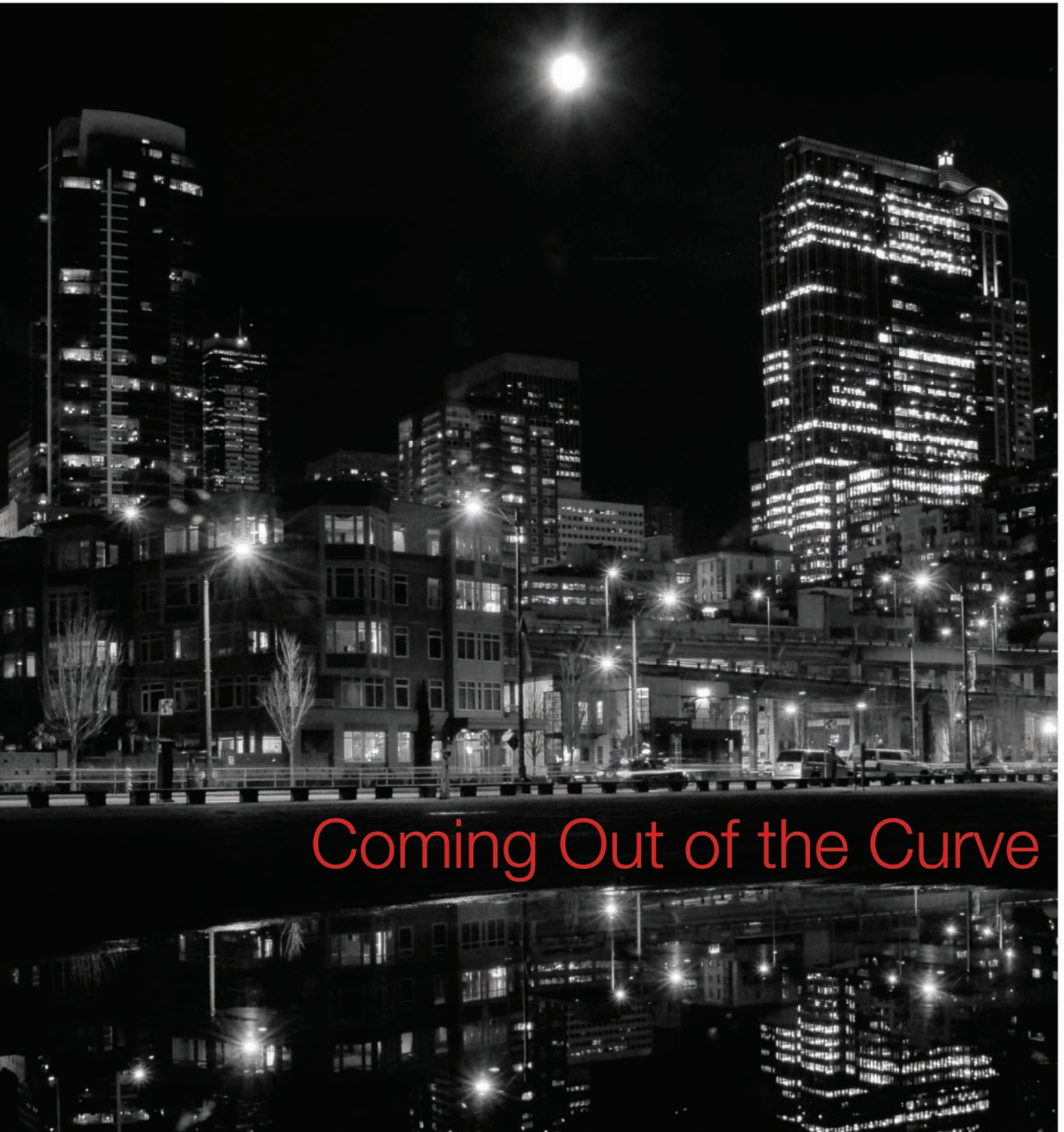
AIA SEATTLE

Ideas Toward a
Renewable City

Passions Over
Pocketbooks

Separating the
Wheat from
the Chaff

New Edge /
New Blood



Coming Out of the Curve

Ideas Toward a Renewable City

by Kate Cudney AIA and Tom Mulica



Josh McDonald's plan for activating the dead space underneath properties owned by City of Seattle and WSDOT adds a cultural and retail component to Seattle's underbelly.

JOSH MCDONALD

Last spring, *Forum* issued a challenge to designers and artists to think boldly on how to rethink, reuse, or repurpose underutilized land, buildings, or infrastructure. “We are living a new economic paradigm, with profound impacts on our built environment,” stated the online call for submissions. “To what creative uses can we put vacant or underutilized buildings? Can partially constructed projects contribute to, rather than diminish, our neighborhoods? Are there more constructive uses for vacant lots than just another parking lot? How might we rethink outmoded infrastructure? How does the new economy create opportunities for lean, fresh solutions to our urban problems?”

By mid-May 2010, over twenty photos and drawings had been received. Some were pure concept, some were proposals for upcoming projects; none had been published before. Kate Cudney AIA and Tom Mulica, *Renewable City* project chairs, comment below.

Our concern is not how to worship in the catacombs but how to remain human in the skyscrapers.

Abraham Joshua Heschel

The call for “Renewable City” was ambitious—Seattle architects, come one come all, bring us your best, your freshest, your leanest solutions to our urban problems. Show us, in your jpgs, how to reuse and repurpose the vacant and underused spaces of our city.

Such a call is not new: we architects fancy ourselves among the best, brightest, and most creative—and of course we want to make the world better—and so we pass these calls, these



CAST ARCHITECTURE

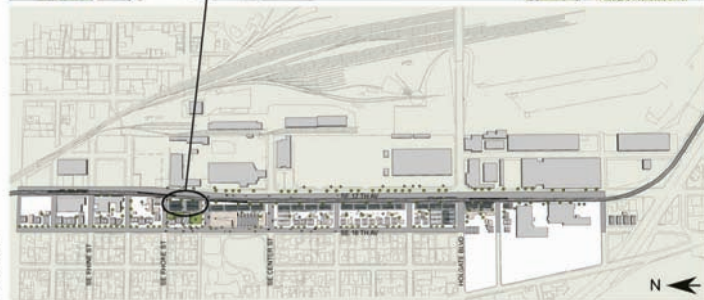
CAST Architecture's Sunset Substation Park is part of a proposal for a series of community-designed pocket parks equipped with solar arrays to generate electricity for City Light, build Washington's alternative energy industry, teach about sustainable energy and provide relief shelters during emergencies.

torches of idealism, from generation to generation. In another city or another era, asked-for solutions might have centered on housing the homeless, teaching youth, entertaining the masses, or simply providing green space.

The call this time, issued last spring, was for ideas toward a “Renewable City” that could repurpose Seattle’s vacant and underutilized spaces. The proposals that came back to us focused on production of food, clean energy, healthy bodies, a vibrant community. What we organizers found remarkable is not so much your desire to create a better world, but what, in fact, you see as requiring improvement. It’s a reflection not only on us as a profession, but perhaps on a greater zeitgeist for our city. Are the designs submitted band-aids on civic wounds? Or can they make a difference?



IBI GROUP



IBI Group's Transit Oriented Farming for Urbanites (TOFFU) brings local food production closer to the urban food market by utilizing a surplus strip of light rail right-of-way.

We don't have the answer. But as you reflect on the selected entries, you might consider what it means to reclaim private sites for the public good in a time when private interests have little financial incentive to create *anything*, much less things that promote community, sustainability, health, and the collective good.

Man, despite his artistic pretensions, his sophistication, and his many accomplishments, owes his existence to a six-inch layer of topsoil and the fact that it rains.

Author Unknown

Of all the entries proposed, the urban farm (a bandwagon we are all jumping on, perhaps?) was the most common solution. What does this say about your attitude toward the city and its ailments? Are architects in survivalist mode? Do you wish to liberate our food sources from hydrocarbons? Or perhaps just desire to have dirt beneath your nails? Isn't development—our own arena of the built environment, essentially—the polar opposite of agriculture and often, its conqueror? (Witness the

fertile valley of the Duwamish, now paved and polluted.) And yet the proposals insist, in hopes that poultry and pole beans, watermelons and worm castings can rebalance and replenish what's removed from the local environment.

Perhaps it's this desire to find equilibrium that led to the preponderance of green power proposals. Some of the best ideas attempted to subsidize urban consumption. What's possible, for instance, if the city's vast square footage could be tapped for solar or wind power? Small, intensive solutions repeated on a city-wide scale can make a difference.

As we went through the submissions, it became clear that what you desire is a healthy, productive place—a place where, despite the frenetic pace and density, citizens can flourish. To be fit and healthy. To be free of the guilt of buying kilowatts made from coal, or tomatoes trucked from Chile. To gather, to exercise, and to create.

We admire your stamina and your vision. And we wonder if Ernest Callenbach wasn't dead-on, in his 1975 classic *Ecotopia*, when he suggested that the essence of his utopian world was balance and equilibrium.



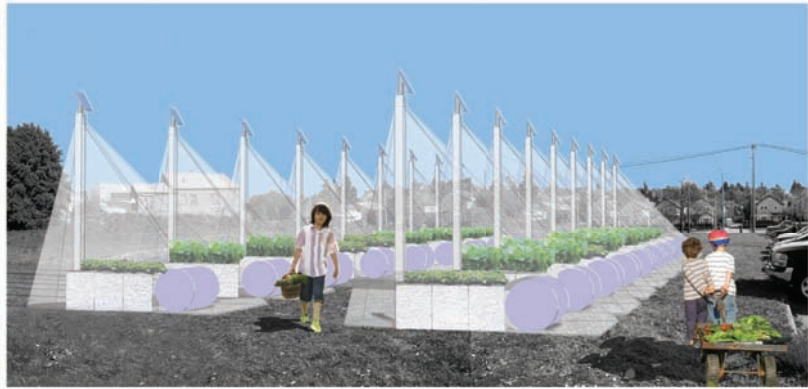
Elizabeth Golden activates empty lots with an array of community-building activities.

FRANCESLY SIERRA



Francesly Sierra repurposes dormant, vacant lots into kinetic bike havens with the installation of bike-trees that allow cyclists to harness and donate kinetic energy.

ATELIERJONES



atelierjones' Deployable Greenhouses are demountable and mobile, self-sufficient units that harvest rainwater and enough solar energy to power a grow light.

Bike trees

Francesly Sierra

If there's anything Seattle likes more than bikes, it's trees. This proposal is reminiscent of merry-go-rounds built in Africa that harness children's energy to pump water. We love the idea that play and recreation can also produce power and create a glowing, interactive experience.

Pick tag & share

LMN Architects

Big things come in little boxes. This proposal demonstrates how even two square feet of underutilized space can make a huge social impact when aggregated on a large scale. We're thinking—public library of the future?

Overpass

Josh McDonald

It's so simple, and the city could really use the rent. ■

Kate Cudney LEED AP is an architect with Owen Richards Architects. Tom Mulica is an architect with Domestic Architecture. Kate and Tom both hold Masters of Architecture degrees from the University of Washington at University of California at Berkeley.

Selected Renewable City submissions:

art + garden + food + sport + picnic + play

Elizabeth Golden

One of the only entries to propose a diverse mixture of programming, this submittal suggests that the sum of the parts are greater than the individual elements. Reflecting the nature of the community-at-large and their diverse needs, synergies and vibrancy are created by the coexistence of diverse activities.

toffu

IBI Group

While we love the name, we like the concept even more. It attempts to link mass transit to the reclaiming of industrial space for food production, making urban farming on a larger scale accessible to all.

Deployable greenhouses

atelierjones

Beyond just making us nostalgic for the Sputnik era—saving the world through sheer ingenuity—this solution packs a lot into a small space. This is an entirely self-sufficient, off-the-grid system for winter gardening. We can imagine these compact veggie pods inserted everywhere, from parking strips to shopping malls.

Solar substation park

CAST Architecture

This proposal takes outdated substations slated for decommissioning and repurposes them for mini solar arrays. The kicker: a closed-off concrete bunker, inaccessible to the public, now recharges our grid with green power while simultaneously providing a cool urban park.



LMN ARCHITECTS

LMN Architects' DIY Library repurposes some 3,000 vacant newsstands, left behind by the Seattle Post-Intelligencer, as a free-for-all book sharing program.