

The future of the Providence Waterfront rests in a negotiation between three forces: a neighborhood organization focused on expanding recreational and public space, marine and public infrastructure industries fighting to preserve industrial zones and access to the existing 40' deep waterway and the City of Providence determined grow its tax base by increasing higher density housing.

In this project, design is far more than determining physical locations and material means, it is the structure of the process itself, beginning with the inception of the Bay City Project, a public and private partnership between the City of Providence, two design firms, Thurlow Small Architecture and Muchi East, and the Rhode Island School of Design Center for Design and Business. The role of the Bay City Project has been to expand the conversation between all groups, to gain a global view of the possibilities that could not only satisfy the existing stakeholders, but arrive at options that engage a broader public and offer a new waterfront identity-- to elevate the project from compromise to opportunity. The organizing strategy is to thus develop a systems-based urbanism that does not result in a singular, static vision or plan, but rather projects inherent variability.

The process of planlessness requires four specific aspects:

1. networks - The project started way before we arrived in it-- the failures and alignments between political, economic and institutional forces shaped the nature of the design question itself. Partnerships have and will develop from specific and anticipated needs. There are absent partners as well, as we've moved

along the holes in this network tell us as much about where we aren't as much as where we are.

2. expertise - Design is the arrangement of ideas and structures from information; getting real information is key to having ideas and structures that work. Expertise for planlessness requires local and global study of the existing human and natural systems: transportation, hydrology, water infrastructure, energy, habitat, social, cultural, educational, air and soil quality, media, economic, and development. Getting funding for this is difficult; missing expertise tells us partner priorities.

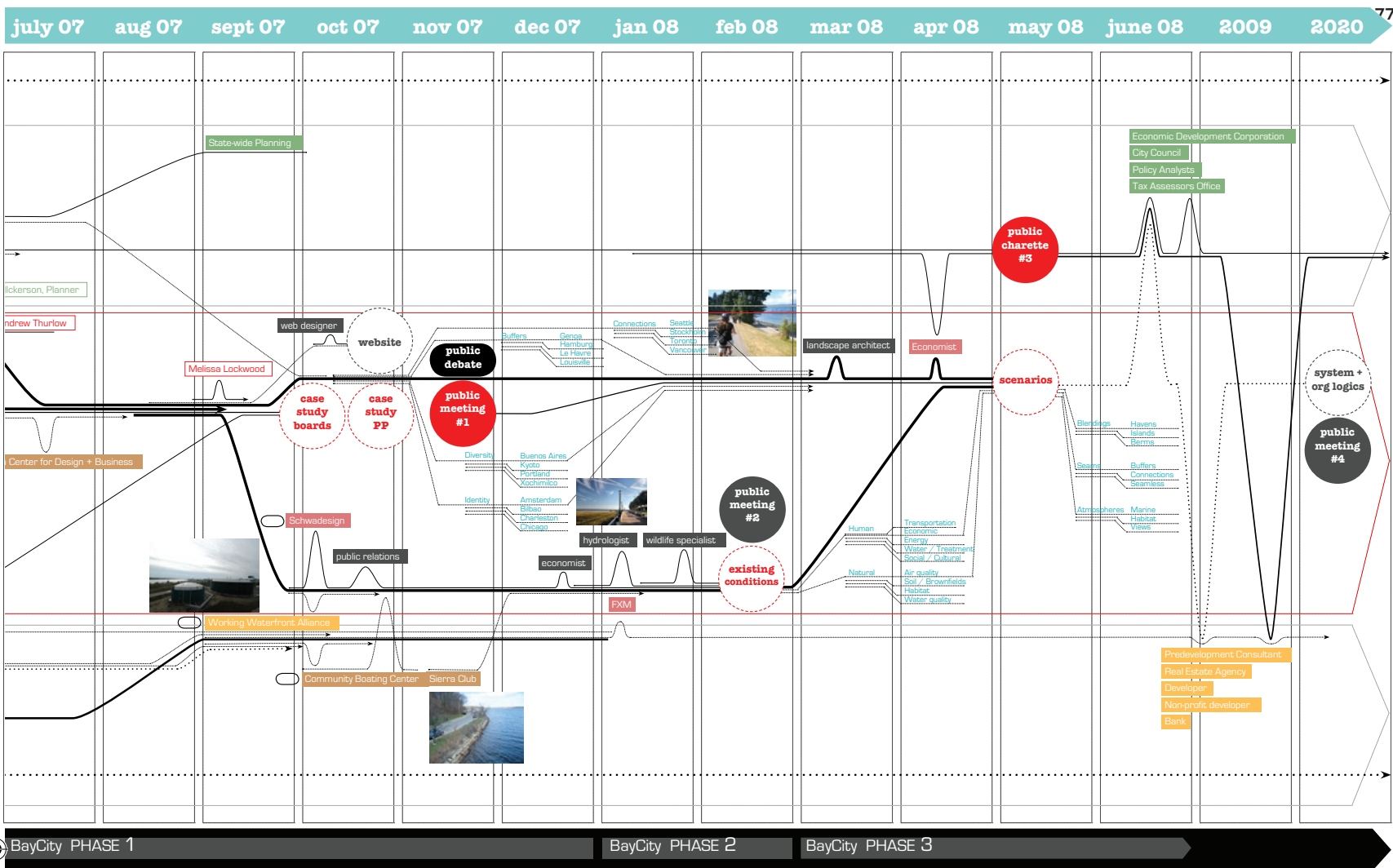
3. scenarios - Systems-based urbanism lets existing motivations and rules cultivate desired incremental change with many partners creating a diverse and stable result. Logics, not objects, apply. Our directive for the providence waterfront offers three 100-year scenarios of urban systems that take each group's motivation to its most extreme:

Berms: a system of water barriers and plateaus motivated by public space and a system of green links.

Havens: a system of water inlets and jetties that emphasize marine and industrial use.

> Islands: a system of physically independent yet linked zones that make new land to highlight mixed-use development and tax revenue

These are not plans; the proposal is a set of iterative blendings between these three motivations. Here adding together the logics makes three times the opportunity, not a distilled compromise. What happens when a haven pier is pulled up into a berm?



Perhaps public and industry become compatible through section. Then, through a further set of sectional microblends, a strategic series of formal moves take the more specific needs of each site and adapts them for new uses.

4. structures - In planlessness, policy shifts, development incentives, leverage and negotiation become design tools. Priorities, such as density, growth zones, and activity types, shape decisions; action mutual reinforces, becomes synergistic and catalytic.

While the developments in the project have taken the urban experiment far, our greatest conclusions in the political process have come through an experience of failure. The public is talking about zoning in five years; we want to talk about all urban systems in a hundred. In our network, there are key voids: little technical expertise in urban systems, few crossovers between community leadership and design, burdensome and ineffective public engagement and absent trust in process. We realized that if this was happening in Providence, that it was happening elsewhere. In a time of massive economic, resource, and environmental change on a global scale, this was terrifying. We also realized that the answers would not come from international debate or conference presentations, nor from an exclusive set of remote power players, but instead from matching of global expertise and local knowledge through projects. Thus we've begun to take an even more macro look and instigated the Global Waterfront Project as an action-based knowledge network for urban water-

front projects. The Global Waterfront Project is a platform that supports a network of experts and information applicable to urban waterfront conditions. It originates as an enabler for active match making and capacity building amongst different experts, organizations, stakeholders and practitioners around the world, who have interests in urban waterfront projects. It facilitates new conversations, links and networks at different levels (urbanistic, architectural, economic, infrastructural, legislative and political, environmental, etc.) for the general benefit of urban waterfront design and implementation. Sea levels are rising. Public budgets are shrinking. Cities are more complex. Public process is simplified. We believe design and expertise are more important than ever.

above: Two earlier projects by Rocha reveal a strategy similar to that of the Programa Art Center: minimal interventions that dramatically transform existing spaces. In the 1996 Galeria de Arte Contemporanea (top three images), Rocha created a new visual axis at the spectator's eye level. In the 1999 Ex Teresa Arte Actual (bottom), a new platform was constructed out of the existing floor of a church.

above, right: Rocha left the Programa's facade relatively blank, articulating the

entrance as a void, which then transforms into the vertical internal circulation.

right: Floor plan.

facing page, top left: The main access stair leads to the double height gallery.