# plan-less-ness\*

# the baycity project.

While current American urban planning is driven by **Victorian** zoning logics, **Modernist** planners and **Post-Modern** New Urbanism, contemporary American cities are Post-structural, driven by incremental **infrastructure**, development **incentives**, and negotiated **partnerships**.

No wonder **plans don't work.** 

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 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. 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:



### networks\*

- > 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 drives. 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.

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.

#### \* it takes a village to make the village:

collaborative structures are more important than ever. projects emerge from redundancy rich environments.

#### \*the top is tasty, but penultimate

**is power:** the public puts pressure on governmental leadership; agility lies in non-profit and semi-public agents.

#### \*negotiate. then do it again. cross connect. then do it again:

reinforcement. iteration. redundancy. build strength in networks.

\*architect as active agent: projects are born by design.

\*leverage: be honest and project big: build one action into a larger one.



# expertise\*

#### \*case studies





#### \*existing conditions





economic



cultural



energy



transportation



environmental



property value



topography



informal

## scenarios\*



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#### berms

protection from sea level r

multiplying surface area + creating barrier - ideal for public space and environmental conditions

blend logics

public space

mixed-use

#### havens

multiplying linear edge and surface area - ideal for marine and industrial uses

ax linear edu

#### islands

multiplying linear edge and surface area - ideal for increasing tax revenue by building ground





1.2x linear edge

This is a parametric process: form has direct programmatic, spatial andinfrastructural effects. When the three strategies are blended the result is not a reductive compromise, but rather an amplification of each. A singlular percentage is never chosen, but rather evolves over the 100 year period of time as the needs for industrial, public and residential zones shifts.

marina / industrial

#### \*blendings



#### \*atmospheres



