



DESIGN ISSUES SERIES

THE ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE SYMPOSIUM 2021

BUILDING JUSTICE





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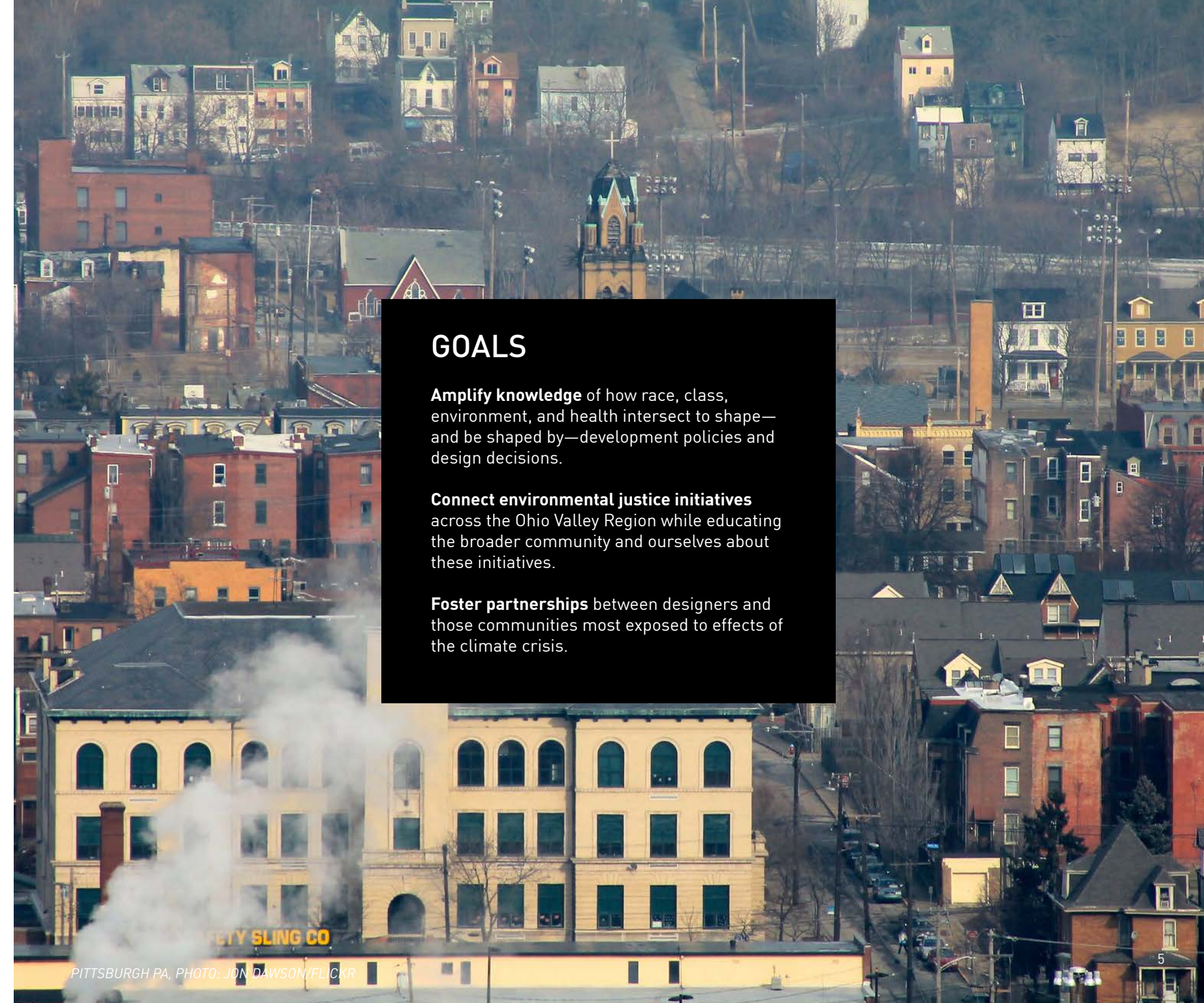
SOCIAL JUSTICE IS ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

2020 was a year of crisis, but also one of hope. A global pandemic, widespread economic disruption, and a long-overdue reckoning with the enduring legacy of racism in the United States are all taking place against the backdrop of an ongoing climate crisis. At the same time, unprecedented numbers of people are rising to the challenge, organizing themselves to call for investments in education, public health, and affordable housing, and launching grass roots initiatives to strengthen their communities and build a more sustainable world.

Responding to this unprecedented time, GBBN's annual, community-centered research initiative, the Design Issues Series (DIS), began 2021 by asking how environmental justice—or its absence—is embodied in the built environment. And how do we build a more just, more sustainable world?

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE IS SOCIAL JUSTICE

Over two days, GBBN hosted a series of panel discussions, convening community organizers, city sustainability officials, mission-driven developers, academics, architects, and elected officials from Cincinnati, Louisville, Minneapolis, and Pittsburgh to discuss **how we can work together to build an environment that nourishes everyone.**

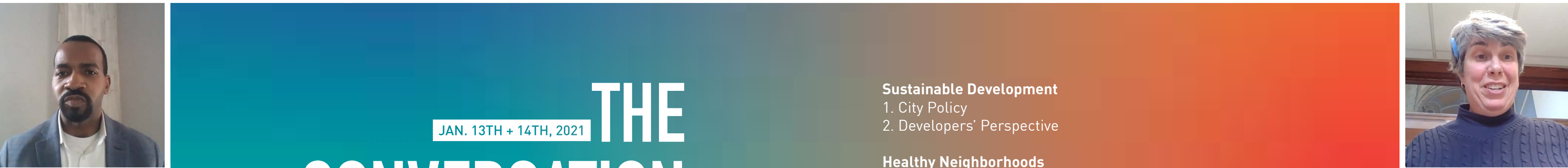


GOALS

Amplify knowledge of how race, class, environment, and health intersect to shape—and be shaped by—development policies and design decisions.

Connect environmental justice initiatives across the Ohio Valley Region while educating the broader community and ourselves about these initiatives.

Foster partnerships between designers and those communities most exposed to effects of the climate crisis.



JAN. 13TH + 14TH, 2021

THE CONVERSATION

Five Panels Over Two Days

Sustainable Development
 1. City Policy
 2. Developers' Perspective

Healthy Neighborhoods
 3. Water, Air, & Greenspace
 4. Affordable Housing, Food Access, & Transportation

Mayoral Panel
 5. The Marshall Plan for Middle America



SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: CITY POLICY

Reckoning with our history means acknowledging that governmental policies often resulted not only in segregation, but also in environmental harms being concentrated in communities of color. A panel of city sustainability officials discussed that history and how they're trying to turn the page. They described steps cities are taking to ensure development is not only sustainable but also equitable; the challenges they face; and opportunities for people and organizations to shape their city's development to ensure that the built environment supports everyone.



CARLA WALKER
Climate Advisor, Cincinnati
Office of Environment & Sustainability



GRANT ERVIN
Chief Resilience Officer,
Pittsburgh Division of
Sustainability



GRETCHEN MILLIKEN
Former Director, Louisville
Department of Advanced
Planning & Sustainability



KELLY MUELLMAN
Sustainability Program
Coordinator, Minneapolis
Office of Sustainability



SAVANNAH SULLIVAN
[MODERATOR]
Climate Policy Lead,
Green Umbrella

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Concentrated disinvestment, concentrated harms.

Environmental harms have accumulated on the same communities, especially communities of color. They're more likely to be forced into substandard housing, be exposed to pollutants, and live in warming heat islands. Policy decisions created these concentrations. They can and must be dismantled.

Energy formed a big part of the conversation.

Equitable cities need to ensure that low-income residents are not saddled with unaffordable energy bills. It's encouraging to see cities develop energy efficiency and renewable energy programs that address this issue.

Cities can help make emerging sustainable design strategies more affordable.

While new design and construction processes often carry an initial premium, cities can use zoning, incentives, and procurement to help build the workforce capable of delivering more sustainable design. Minneapolis and Pittsburgh are doing a great job of this.

“...If you have professional expertise that you feel could help your community then offer it up...City government does not have the resources to fix everything, but as a community we do.”

GRETCHEN MILLIKEN
Former Director, Louisville
Dept. of Advanced Planning & Sustainability



SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: DEVELOPERS' PERSPECTIVES

For many communities across the country, investment is badly needed to improve the safety and environmental quality of their neighborhoods, but too often investment means higher rents, services designed for wealthy newcomers, and ultimately, the displacement of long-term residents. Our panel of nonprofit and mission-driven developers discussed how to foster development without displacement.



DERRICK TILLMAN
Founder and President,
Bridging the Gap Development



GILL HOLLAND
Managing Partner,
Portland Investment Initiative



BEN EILERMAN
Project Manager, Over The
Rhine Community Housing
(OTRCH)



TIFFANY BROYLES YOST
[MODERATOR]
Director of Sustainability
& Resilience, GBBN

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Sustainability is not just green, it's also community-minded and location-based.

All our panelists stressed that sustainable development is multifaceted. It is something that needs to be thought of in terms of location (how that affects transportation, access to services, and carbon footprints), but it also needs to be thought of in terms of its day-to-day effect on tenants (e.g., lower energy bills). It also needs to be approached in terms of different communities' histories.

Build trust before buildings.

As Gill Holland put it, "helicoptering" into a neighborhood with the attitude that "'we have all the answers, this is going to be great for you,' is NOT the way to do it." Everyone agreed on the importance of being present and building relationships within a neighborhood, before doing any work there.

Our cities need a multifaceted, affordable housing strategy.

With affordable housing shortages in the tens of thousands of units in Cincinnati, Louisville, Minneapolis and Pittsburgh, it's essential to develop a long-term affordable housing strategy. We need to create new affordable housing while preserving existing units. But it's also important to recognize that we can't build our way out of it. Our cities have thousands of vacant and abandoned properties, so we need to think about how to make them habitable again – and cities need to be ready to use all the tools in their toolkits to make that happen (incentives, zoning policy, permitting, etc.).

We think about sustainable development... as an opportunity to right wrongs that have been done traditionally in our community, ...



DERRICK TILLMAN
Founder and President,
Bridging the Gap Development

HEALTHY NEIGHBORHOODS: WATER, AIR, GREENSPACE

Within some of our cities, neighboring zip codes see life expectancies that vary by 25 years. This panel brought together community organizers to explore inequities in environmental conditions such as water, air, and greenspace within our cities; how they shape people's lives; and the initiatives community organizers are pursuing to mitigate environmental harms.



CLARK BECK
Board President, Communi-
ties United for Action (CUFA)



LINDSAY DILL
Marketing & Communications
Director, Allegheny Land Trust



MARY METZMEIER
Executive Director, Communities
United for Action (CUFA)



JESSICA BROWN
Planning Director, Center
for Neighborhoods



ISAAC BUNN
Founder, Braddock Inclusion
Project



CHAS WIEDERHOLD
[MODERATOR]
Designer, GBBN

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Disparate environmental harms accumu- late on the same communities.

Whether you're talking combined sewer overflows, pollution, or industrial waste, communities of color and poor communities have been—and continue to be—exposed to a range of pernicious influences that suppress their health and wellbeing. These add up to huge health disparities.

Our struggles are connected.

While each community organization had a different focus—air, water, greenspace—it took no time to discover the links that connect their work. For instance, Allegheny Land Trust's effort to preserve greenspace helps to mitigate the kind of storm water runoff that causes the same problems in Pittsburgh that CUFA is addressing in Cincinnati.

Designers: Be the person to ask if the neighbors have been consulted.

Community engagement is not easy. It takes time, and it needs to start early enough to enable the community to shape the project in meaningful ways. Fortunately, architects and designers are in a good position to ensure this happens.

(BLM organizing) has enabled us to be more clear and specific about the neighborhoods we want to push resources into.... (Now we're) able to have explicit conversations about health disparities across neighborhoods.



JESSICA BROWN
Planning Director,
Center for Neighborhoods

HEALTHY NEIGHBORHOODS: AFFORDABLE HOUSING, FOOD ACCESS, & TRANSPORTATION

With affordable housing shortages of tens of thousands of units in the cities we call home, the task of ensuring people have a roof over their heads is monumental. But it's also important to ensure that their housing is safe and comfortable, and located in a manner that provides access to essential services like transportation and healthy food. This panel described ongoing challenges to creating neighborhoods that offer secure, comfortable, and affordable housing while supporting the health and well being of all.



KRISTEN BAKER
Executive Director,
Local Initiatives Support
Corporation (LISC)



CASSIA HERRON
Bridge Fellow,
Common Future



JEREMIAH PENNEBAKER
Community Impact Associate,
United Way of Greater Cincinnati



DR. MARK MUSSMAN
Director of Education,
Greater Cincinnati
Homeless Coalition



JANERA SOLOMON
[MODERATOR]
Cultural Strategist,
Fieldwork

KEY TAKEAWAYS

A healthy neighborhood is an empowered neighborhood. This discussion began with the question of what makes a “healthy neighborhood.” But it quickly turned towards questions of power because the health and wellbeing of the community are better when a wider swath of its residents participate in the power to shape its future.

Trickle down city planning. Panelists were critical of neoliberal development policies in our cities, which they described it as privatizing profit while the public assumes the risk. There was a lot of concern, in particular, that our cities’ emphasis on growing their tax base by subsidizing development for the wealthy results in the displacement of long-term, lower-income residents.

The importance of language. The language we use to discuss “affordable” and “subsidized housing” tends to obscure the public support that is given to homeowners while treating those who receive other forms of housing assistance as different and less deserving. We need to start thinking of investments in affordable housing as investments in “us,” in our community, in our neighbors.

“...I, as a leader, found it imperative that we create opportunities for our community to envision – and not just envision, but invest in their own destiny.”

CASSIA HERRON
Bridge Fellow,
Common Future



MAYORAL PANEL: THE MARSHALL PLAN FOR MIDDLE AMERICA

Mayors of eight Rust Belt cities have called for a Marshall Plan for Middle America – a large-scale investment in our infrastructure, government institutions, and workforce to lay the foundation for an inclusive, green economy – one that would address systemic inequities, improve public health, and alleviate the burdens of climate change. The panel discussion sought to put the mayors’ vision for a regional, clean energy transition program into dialogue with AIA’s Blueprint for Better campaign to enlist architects’ help building, “a zero-carbon, resilient, healthy, just, and equitable built environment.”



JOHN CRANLEY
Mayor of Cincinnati



BILL PEDUTO
Mayor of Pittsburgh



DR. LESLIE MARSHALL
Associate Director of the
Center for Sustainable Business,
University of Pittsburgh



WILLIAM BATES
Past President, American
Institute of Architects



ANNE CHEN
[MODERATOR]
Principal,
GBBN

KEY TAKEAWAYS

It’s time to dream big.

The Marshall Plan for Middle America addresses three intertwined issues—the climate crisis, social justice, and economic crisis—because, for a region whose economy was built on the extraction of fossil fuels, these issues are intertwined.

The value of a regional vision.

Cincinnati’s 100 megawatt solar array illustrates the value of a regional climate strategy. Lacking space within the city to build a solar farm the size of 750 football fields, Cincinnati partnered with a neighboring county to find an appropriate site. Smaller municipalities were also able to buy into the project at the same pricing, enjoying the economies of scale. Projects like this can only happen through regional cooperation.

Environmental stewardship involves preserving the existing building stock.

William Bates pointed out that the Ohio Valley Region is “fairly well built out,” but due to economic circumstances and marginalization, its housing stock is deteriorating. Retrofitting these buildings to decrease energy use would not only be a matter of sustainability, but it would be a matter of economic justice, to ease the cost burden on the region’s low-income residents.



“We have the capacity right now in this region to build the world’s future buildings...”

BILL PEDUTO
Mayor of Pittsburgh



CONCLUSION

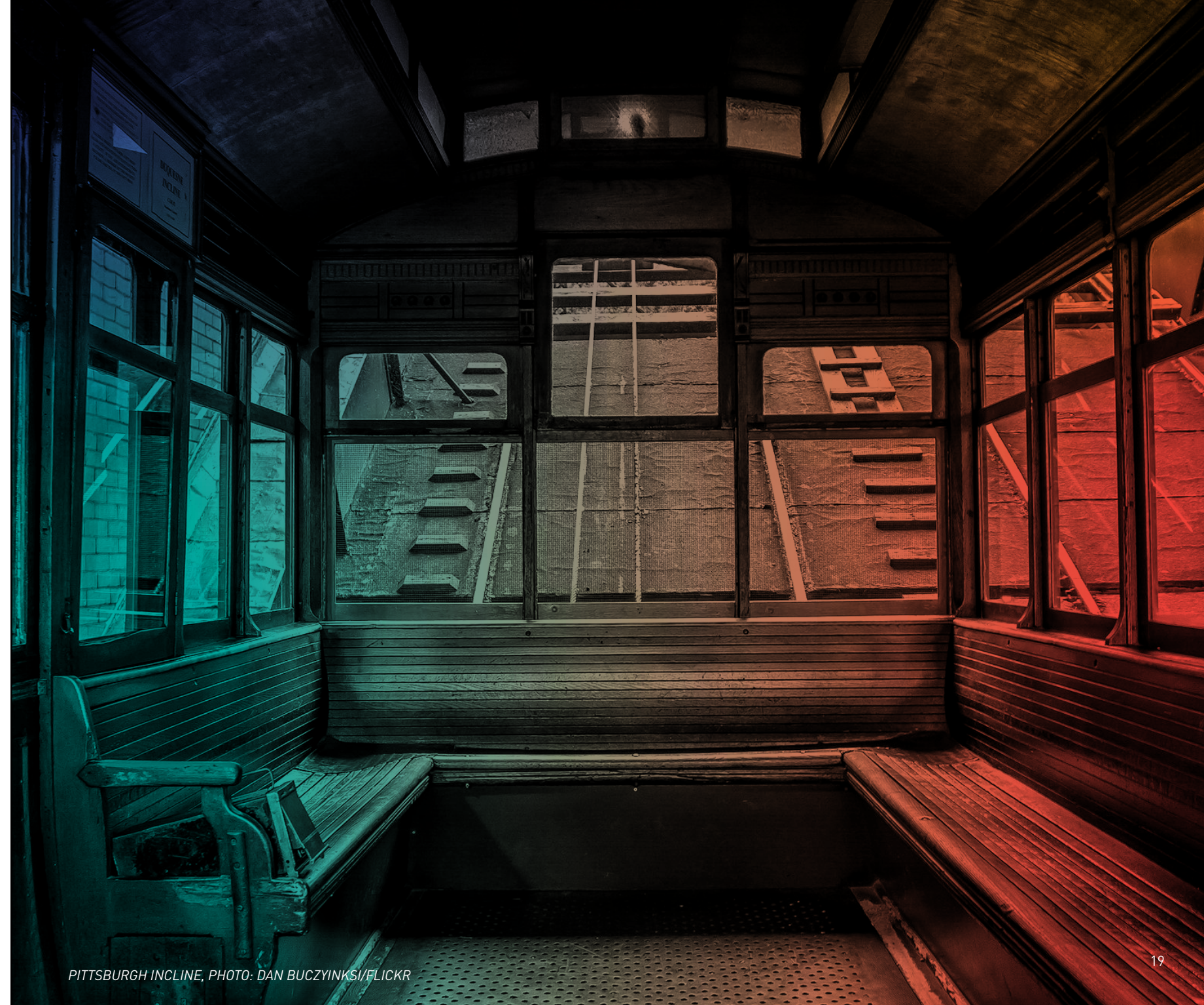
There are so many people and organizations doing great work to address environmental injustice. We are deeply grateful to those who participated in the symposium for sharing their knowledge and passion. It was such a rich set of discussions that we can't really hope to 'sum up' what we learned in nicely-phrased takeaway.

Instead, we offer a short-term, strategic consideration:

Our struggles are connected, we should be too.

One thing we noticed was that the organizations who are doing the work don't always know who they would benefit from knowing: Who can support their campaign? Who can offer the resources—e.g., expertise, labor, grant money—to empower their work?

Exciting connections were made during the panel discussions. Plans for future collaborations were hatched. As architects, we're constantly working between disparate groups, drawing on the expertise of others. This puts us in a good position to help make and sustain the kinds of connections and partnerships that would empower us all to build a better world together.



WE ARE STRONGER TOGETHER.

Big thanks to all the organizations that were represented by our 19 panelists and 759 attendees!



“... (the) conversations captured my attention, and (panelists) sentiments stuck with me after the session.”

—SURVEY RESPONDENT

RESOURCES

Missed the event? Complete Recordings Here:

[Sustainable Development: City Policy](#)

[Sustainable Development: Developers' Perspectives](#)

[Healthy Neighborhoods: Water, Air, Greenspace](#)

[Healthy Neighborhoods: Affordable Housing, Food Access, Transportation](#)

[Mayoral Panel on the Marshall Plan for Middle America](#)

Learn more about & support these organizations:

[Allegheny Land Trust](#)

[Communities United for Action \(CUFA\)](#)

[Minneapolis Office of Sustainability](#)

[American Institute of Architects](#)

[Fieldwork](#)

[Over The Rhine Community Housing \(OTRCH\)](#)

[Braddock Inclusion Project](#)

[Greater Cincinnati Homeless Coalition](#)

[Pittsburgh Division of Sustainability
Portland Investment Initiative](#)

[Bridging the Gap Development](#)

[Green Umbrella](#)

[Center for Neighborhoods](#)

[Local Initiatives Support Corp.\(LISC\)
Greater Cincinnati](#)

[United Way of Greater Cincinnati](#)

[City of Cincinnati](#)

[Louisville Community Grocery](#)

[University of Pittsburgh's Center
for Sustainable Business](#)

[City of Pittsburgh](#)

[Louisville Department of Advanced
Planning & Sustainability](#)

[Cincinnati Office of Environment &
Sustainability](#)



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