

Preface: Common Ground, Common Good

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I have loved cities for as long as I can remember. Born in Brooklyn, I grew up in rural New York but made regular pilgrimages back to the enchanting place we called "the City." There was no finer treat for me as a child than seeing a Broadway show after spending the day on the Lower East Side, first with my parents and later with my friends, hunting for bargains and drenching my senses in all the intense sights, smells, and sounds of the city, which linger to this day.

When the urban cacophony overloaded my senses, I discovered sanctuary in Central Park and drank in the refreshing calm of lawns and meadows, tranquil lakes, and miles of tree-lined paths. As a child I must have assumed that these "natural wonders" had always graced the island of Manhattan.

Later, I learned that Central Park was the result of a monumental 15-year greening project during the mid-1800s that demolished neighborhoods, removed more than 10 million cartloads of soil and rock, and planted more than 4 million trees, shrubs, and plants.

I also learned that Central Park was the vision of landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, who considered equitable access to green and open spaces as part and parcel of the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Describing the Central Park project as "a democratic development of the highest significance," Olmsted dispensed valuable advice to the growing nation: If you want a healthy democracy, you must cultivate greener cities.

My appreciation of this vital link between healthy democracies and greener cities deepened when I came to Philadelphia to become president of the University of Pennsylvania in 2004. Penn is embarking on a once-in-a-century campus development project that will extend the university eastward across fallow industrial parcels of land toward the center of the city. As we discussed our future with neighboring residents and businesses and with our own students, faculty, and staff, my colleagues and I more fully discerned how our plans for greening surface parking lots would dramatically boost the cultural, recreational, and economic health of Philadelphia while securing Penn's future as a premier urban teaching and research university.

Our plan, which we call Penn Connects, has been embraced enthusiastically by all our constituents while earning several awards for design and planning. Today, as we begin transforming those parking lots into urban parkland, we at Penn look to seize this moment in time to serve our city, country, and world as a leading agent of long-range urban thinking and action, which will help to sustain humankind today, tomorrow, and for generations to come.

Thanks to a confluence of factors--including the popularity of former Vice President Al Gore's documentary on global warming *An Inconvenient Truth*, the tragic devastation caused by

a tsunami and Hurricane Katrina, and the alarming escalation of gasoline prices to all-time highs-many Americans now consider securing a healthy future for our planet to be the defining challenge of our time.

What critical roles can today's research universities play in meeting this global challenge? How can we help to maximize the potential for 'progress unleashed by our growing sense of urgency?

I believe institutions of higher education can make a profound difference in three ways: as generators of ideas, as models of best practices, and as catalysts for collaborative approaches to urban sustainability.

First, we can assure that the best research and scholarship informs global strategies for addressing these complex issues.

Back in the 1950s, while large-scale development projects were, in Jane Jacobs' words, "reducing city and countryside alike to a monotonous, un nourishing gruel," Penn created its path-breaking department of landscape architecture and regional planning. The department's founder, a passionate Scotsman named Ian McHarg, pioneered the concept of designing built projects with nature. He created a series of maps that enabled designers to incorporate essential elements such as wildlife habitat, historic landmarks, scenic views, and existing land use into their planning. His maps laid the groundwork for the development of computer-based geographic information systems (GIS), on which urban planners rely today. By 1960, the charismatic McHarg was hosting a nationally televised series called *The House We Live In*, which introduced millions of Americans to the religious, ethical, and philosophical issues surrounding the environment.

While McHarg was integrating nature into analysis, his colleague David Wallace, a professor in the Department of City and Regional Planning, was working with cities to redevelop their degraded industrial sites, especially those along the waterfront. Baltimore's Inner Harbor and Lower Manhattan's Battery Park City resulted from this work.

The work that McHarg and Wallace began at Penn seeded a generation of urban planners, designers, and budding environmentalists.

Penn faculty members today remain at the forefront of enhancing global sustainability. They are advising Central American governments on strategies to preserve vital biodiversity. They are using cutting-edge technology to design more energy-efficient buildings with partners in Europe and Asia. They are exploring more efficient ways to use solar energy. They are addressing the business, legal, and ethical considerations inherent in today's environmental issues. At the same time the university is establishing new environmental research programs and corporate internships and developing a new post-graduate degree program to train future leaders.

Yet urban research universities can and must do more than help to answer questions and solve problems. In his book *The Idea of the University*, the eminent historian Jaroslav Pelikan observes, "The university as institution, employer, wage-payer, and property-owner contributes to its local society and in turn depends on it: if either of these partners is sick, the other suffers as well."

As anchor institutions, universities like Penn have a responsibility to serve as models for creating and implementing best practices in sustainable development. For example, Penn for some time has been one of the largest private purchasers of wind power in the nation, obtaining 30 percent of our energy from wind-generated power. We also are a national campus leader in the adaptive reuse of existing buildings and materials. We are cutting energy usage during peak hours by nearly 20 percent and are testing vehicle fuel made from kitchen waste.

Equally important, we are engaging our students in sustainable activities, including recycling, managing energy use, supporting local farmers, and composting. Earlier this year, we signed a historic higher education pact to develop a comprehensive sustainability plan by 2009. We are committed to finding ways to do more to point the way toward excellent environmental citizenship.

At the same time, the challenge of sustainable development is global in scope. According to the UN Commission on Population, half the world's population live in cities. Many of the world's problems including housing, rising infant mortality, asthma and obesity, poor nutrition, illiteracy, income inequality, and crime-arise with greater frequency and intensity in cities, gravely threatening a sustainable future.

Yet urban greening projects are generating tides that can lift other boats. For example, North Philadelphia artist Lilly Yeh launched her Village of Arts and Humanities by transforming a blighted site into a sculpture garden. Today as a vibrant community enterprise comprising 260 square blocks of art-filled gardens, green spaces, and a working tree farm, the village has jump-started efforts to improve neighborhood health care and social services, education, and safety.

Urban research universities have the capacity and the resources to build effective partnerships for greening initiatives that simultaneously generate momentum to revitalize our communities. We also have strong ties to the government, business, nonprofit, and civic interests that must work together to make our cities more livable. Why not leverage these relationships to mobilize a new framework of collaboration for the sustainable good of our cities?

Penn's Institute for Urban Research took the first steps toward developing such a framework in Philadelphia when it joined with the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society in organizing the conference Growing Greener Cities at Penn on October 16 and 17, 2006. More than 200 community leaders, policymakers, nonprofit developers, horticulturalists, and researchers discussed issues ranging from the business prospects for "green building" practices to race in environmental education.

The essays compiled in this volume present some of today's most creative strategies for sustainable urban thinking, planning, and practice. They also highlight how much work remains to be done to create cities where all urban residents can see and live green.

Jaroslav Pelikan reminds us that the Italian Renaissance was primarily an urban phenomenon, created in Florence by the interaction of "civic humanism" and "classicism." Today, the dynamic interaction between the powerful teaching and research engines of great universities and the cities in which they are fortuitously anchored can spark what future generations will describe as the "Great Urban Renaissance of the Twenty First Century." Thus we will greatly improve the prospect that generations of children to come will inherit the riches of great urban parks, a healthy democracy, and a sustainable planet.