

The New York Times

The Many Faces of Innovation in U.S. Cities

July 21, 2016 - Innovation has always been a messy business, a twisting path of colliding ideas and accidental discoveries. What has changed over time is not how we innovate but *where* we innovate.

Bruce J. Katz, who founded the Brookings Institution's Metropolitan Policy Program and is an author of the "Metropolitan Revolution," said it had shifted from research parks and suburban corporate campuses to companies that work with networks of researchers, entrepreneurs and investors.

And innovation isn't limited to start-ups. Cities are undertaking groundbreaking projects to remake themselves physically, culturally and economically.

—*Eilene Zimmerman*

CHICAGO

Stony Island Savings & Loan

Cities are full of restored buildings. But perhaps none has quite the significance of the Stony Island Savings & Loan on Chicago's South Side. With holes in its roof and pieces falling onto the sidewalk below, it was closed in the 1980s. Now the 17,000-square-foot neoclassical building has been brought back to life by Theaster Gates Jr., an artist and professor at the University of Chicago who lives in the impoverished neighborhood. He bought the property from the city for \$1 and raised money for the restoration through his nonprofit Rebuild Foundation, which has the goal of revitalizing neighborhoods one building at a time.

The idea was to do more than just restore a building, however. In a neighborhood that is 97 percent black, the center celebrates African-American culture in a place where there had been no cultural center at all.

It reopened in October as the Stony Island Arts Bank, with collections, exhibits and programs that focus on emerging and established artists of color, said Amy Schachman, director of strategic operations for the foundation.

Among them is the book collection of John H. Johnson, the founder of *Ebony* and *Jet* magazines, and the record collection of the disc jockey Frankie Knuckles. Perhaps most unusual is the bank's "negrobilia" collection — assembled by a lifelong South Side resident, Edward J. Williams— 4,000 objects and images with stereotypical depictions of minorities dating from the 19th century.



Westport Commons, a former middle school. Credit Rendering courtesy of the project's architect, BNIM, and SDPKC

KANSAS CITY, MO.

Westport Commons

Kansas City, Mo., will soon have the largest co-working space in the world, one that was a large vacant middle school in the city's center. It will also be among the most diverse co-working spaces — places shared by people working for more than one employer — with both for-profit and nonprofit organizations. The former sports field will be a large urban farm and the headquarters of Cultivate Kansas City.

Why a vacant school? Because Kansas City has a lot of them, so many that in 2011 it started an initiative to sell, lease or reuse them. Of the 39 that were vacant, one was Westport Middle School, built in the 1920s.

In December, Sustainable Development Partners Kansas City, in partnership with the co-working company, began work to convert the school into a huge co-working space it has named Westport Commons.

The developer also has development rights to the vacant, 212,000-square-foot Westport High School, which sits across the street on 9.5 acres. It is envisioned as Phase 2 of the project. The campus will house event spaces and a recording studio, lab, game room, coffee shop, barbershop, fitness center and food bar. And it should be able to accommodate more than 50 companies and over 150 entrepreneurs.

Kansas City has become a hub for tech start-ups. It was the first community to receive Google Fiber, which is much faster than basic broadband.

NEWARK, NJ

Triangle Park

The city of Newark is undertaking a major revitalization that includes Riverfront Park, 31 acres of land on the Passaic River that was once home to a smelting plant and that required environmental remediation to make it usable. In February, Newark's City Council passed legislation allowing the development of 22 acres of vacant land around the Prudential Center Arena, creating what will be known as Triangle Park. The park, which will link Newark Penn Station, the Prudential Center Arena and the Ironbound District, will be the centerpiece of a plan to reinvigorate downtown and increase the city's tax base. The cost of the project is estimated at \$30 million.

The park will be pedestrian-friendly and will include restaurants and bars, as well as 2.5 acres of green space. Deputy Mayor Baye Adofo-Wilson said the goal was "to bring vibrancy back to some of the more distressed neighborhoods within the city."

AeroFarms, an indoor, aeroponic farm whose global headquarters are in Newark, is building the world's largest indoor vertical farm on Rome Street in the Ironbound section, in a 70,000-square-foot former steel mill. Once fully running, it is expected to produce as much as two million pounds of leafy greens each year.

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C.

Creative Corridors Bridges

Many cities have indelible images associated with them, like the Empire State Building in New York, the Space Needle in Seattle and the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia. Now Winston-Salem, N.C., will have one, too — 11 beautiful bridges across a one-mile stretch of highway that cuts through its downtown. The bridge project is the result of work by the Creative Corridors Coalition, a volunteer nonprofit organization in Winston-Salem formed to capitalize on the North Carolina Transportation Department plans to rebuild Route 421, known locally as Business 40.

That renovation plan includes replacing 11 aging bridges, and Creative Corridors wants to rebuild them as "green, artful and iconic," said Kristen Ford Haaf, its board's chairwoman. The bridge design upgrades and enhancements will cost \$20 million. Eight of the bridges will receive significant upgrades and three will have major redesigns to transform them into symbols of the city.

The transportation department is hiring a contractor. The first of the bridges will be in place by October at the intersection of Route 52 and Research Parkway, said Lee French, a Creative Corridors board member and the previous chairman.



The Pizitz building. Credit Bayer Properties

BIRMINGHAM, ALA.

The Pizitz Building

An area of downtown Birmingham that the Agriculture Department designated a food desert will become a foodie's heaven this fall. An ethnically diverse food hall is opening, along with an unusual start-up incubator program for chefs, all of it inside a redeveloped department store. The food hall will be on the ground floor of the redeveloped Pizitz department store, once a hallmark of the city's vibrant downtown. Bayer Properties bought the building in 2000.

It has preserved much of Pizitz's original architecture, even restoring its ornate, terra-cotta facade from the 1920s. The project is costing about \$70 million, said David L. Silverstein, a principal at the company. It will have six floors of residential space with 143 multifamily apartments and modern office space on the mezzanine. Bayer worked with the group What to Eat in Birmingham — a Birmingham food blog — to choose restaurants and local products to include.

In partnership with Rev Birmingham, an economic development organization in the city that aims to stimulate business growth, the food hall will recruit up-and-coming chefs who may not have the business background or money to open their own restaurants. They will spend four to six months working in their own kitchens, dedicated 150- to 330-square-foot stalls in the hall.



An aerial view of the Chevy Commons project. Credit Courtesy of the Genesee Land Bank

FLINT, MICH.

Chevy Commons

This city, roiled by controversy over its water quality, is reinventing itself, reclaiming vacant industrial sites and creating green space. Part of the reinvention is the Chevy Commons project, which will turn 62 acres of a former Chevrolet plant site — a fenced-off, weed-infested brownfield once known as “Chevy in the Hole” — into an urban park. The automobile manufacturing center along the Flint River is being redeveloped into open grasslands, woodlands and walking trails, with views of the river and restored meadows.

Another 20 acres of the blighted Chevy in the Hole site will be redeveloped by Kettering University and General Motors, creating research grounds for students, faculty and visiting companies to test automotive technologies, especially for self-driving cars.

CHULA VISTA, CALIF.

Bayfront Development

It has been called the last great waterfront development on the West Coast, and clearing the hurdles in its way took decades, but next year the design phase of the Chula Vista Bayfront development will begin. The project will transform 535 acres on the southern portion of San Diego Bay — midway between downtown San Diego and the Mexican border — into a destination that will include a new convention center, hotels, 1,500 apartments, office space and retail.

Chula Vista is the second-largest city in San Diego County, after San Diego. What is unique about a development this size is the amount of preserved open space — nearly half the property will be parks with trails for pedestrians and bikes.



The renovated Stony Island Savings & Loan. Credit Tom Harris/Hedrich Blessing; Courtesy of Rebuild Foundation

]CHICAGO, IL

Array of Things

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Fourth& combines residential condos and commercial space with shared recreational facilities. Credit Rendering by Dart Frog Creative for Capsa Ventures

AUSTIN, TEX.

Fourth&

Fourth& is a mixed-use development that is intended to meet the needs of people yearning for collaboration and connection. Fourth&, the brainchild of Rance Clouse and his development firm, Capsa Ventures, will sit on 2.2 acres at East Fourth Street and Chicon, just south of the MetroRail line and less than a mile from downtown Austin. It will have 97 residential condominium units and 42,000 square feet of street-level commercial space.

The 130,000-square-foot development — one of the largest in East Austin — is meant to capitalize on the blurry line between life and work. The recreational facilities like the pool, for example, are open to businesses and those who live in the development. Ample open spaces, businesses and even music venues are nearby.

It will feature what Mr. Clouse describes as “Texas-size microlofts” ranging from 510 to 1,100 square feet, and urban walk-ups with a first floor of commercial space and two floors of living space above.

RENO, NEV.

West 2nd District

The city used to be known for casinos and quick weddings. But the West 2nd District project aims to change that in part by revitalizing the city’s core. Colin Robertson, a partner at the Don J Clark Group, which is managing the project, said it would be the largest redevelopment effort ever for downtown Reno, at a construction cost estimated at \$900 million.

It is needed, Mr. Robertson said, because of economic development in Reno that is being led by technology companies like Switch and Tesla, which is building its

Gigafactory there. It's estimated that an additional 50,000 people will move to Reno over the next six to 10 years. The project will reconfigure the city's skyline, transforming 17 acres into a downtown area with 30 new buildings — including the city's tallest, at 40 stories — and 1,900 residences, 20 percent of which will be designated affordable and work force housing.

SEATTLE, WASH.

South Lake Union District

The city's South Lake Union district hadn't received much investment in more than 50 years when Vulcan Real Estate, a division of Vulcan Inc., the Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen's company, began leading the effort to revitalize it. According to Vulcan, it became the catalyst for \$8.5 billion of private and public investment in building and infrastructure to transform 60 acres here. Twenty years ago, the area was a neglected patchwork of parking lots and crumbling industrial buildings. Today, it has 11 million square feet of commercial office and life science research space, 10,250 residential housing units for sale and rent, and 1,358 hotel rooms (with another 778 going through the permit process).

Early next year, Vulcan will break ground on a 600,000-square-foot urban campus for Google and on the area's fifth life sciences research facility for the University of Washington School of Medicine. Over the next few years, skyscrapers will be added to the mix.

NEW YORK

LinkNYC

This is an effort to replace New York City's aging network of more than 7,000 remaining public pay phones with new gigabit Wi-Fi stations, giving city residents and visitors free, fast access to the web. Although other cities, like Paris and London, provide public Wi-Fi, it is inconsistent and very slow, said Colin O'Donnell, chief technology officer of CityBridge, a consortium of technology companies deploying LinkNYC that includes Intersection, Qualcomm and Civiq Smartscares. By year's end, Link NYC's booths will be in every borough, said Mr. O'Donnell, and it will be the "largest, fastest free municipal Wi-Fi in the world." The average speed on a public Wi-Fi, he said, is about 10-15 megabits per second, but with fiber-optic cable being installed throughout the city, New York's will be "100 times faster than that."

The units are slim, rugged booths built by Civiq Smartscares with digital ads on the two flat sides and the ability to make public calls using voice over internet protocol, courtesy of Vonage. They also have a 911 button for emergencies, a 311 button to report a city problem and a tablet built into the booth that will allow users to browse the internet and use city services and maps. USB charging ports, with fast charging technology from Qualcomm, will allow most smartphones to recharge 75 percent faster than they usually do. The project is being funded by those digital ads on the booths, so it costs taxpayers nothing.