

The Cultural Landscape Foundation

Pioneers of American Landscape Design

WILLIAM “BILL” JOHNSON

ORAL HISTORY

REFLECTIONS

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Reflections on William “Bill” Johnson by Bob Chipman

January 2017

Bill,

It's hard to know where to start, and even harder to compose the right words on a smartphone, but I have to tell you that the general session was absolutely perfect in every way. Undoubtedly the best session I can remember seeing. You guys were all fantastic.

I wanted to wait for things to calm down before sending a note, and now there's a chance to write a few words. Certainly, they won't come close to being adequate. After having breakfast together and then seeing you and Charlotte at the LSU party, together with James Turner and Joe Porter, I was already in great spirits about the profession and its connections.

So then, the next morning, seeing what unfolded on the stage was even more fun, knowing a little of the background. It was an engaging, well-organized, elegant, and powerfully moving event. I may be going out on a limb here, but think it may become one of the most memorable and important sessions in the history of the ASLA.

It was a beautiful point in time! Susan Apollonio said to me immediately afterwards that it was the highlight of her career, and that is quite a huge statement. We all cried, and the tears were so joyful!

The whole day was beautiful after that because of the discussions generated by the morning conversation. Everyone spoke of not only the historical facts they learned but of how it all made the profession make sense and have such clear purpose; purpose through process and collaboration. Brilliant clarity in the words of wisdom that were passed on by you and Peter. Just amazing and inspirational for all!!!

(A note about the keynote at the American Society of Landscape Architects in New Orleans, October 22, 2016.)

Reflections on William “Bill” Johnson by Frank Clements

January 2017

Bill, as you are truly one of the pioneers of our profession, I *was* pleased to learn you are to be featured in the Pioneers Oral History series being produced by the Cultural Landscape Foundation. I know the video will be highly professional and will capture the essence of your body of work, your design process and philosophy, but I am not sure it will adequately capture the influence you have had on my life and career as well as hundreds of other landscape architects. I say this, because you may or may not be aware of your influence on us as a role model, teacher, and legendary figure in landscape architecture. The following short story is but one example of how without you knowing, you personally influenced my career.

We both grew up in Lansing, Michigan, a mid-sized mid-western town with those famous mid-western values, so we were probably destined to cross paths and become friends and professional colleagues. Being slightly older than I and going to that crosstown rival high school, J.W. Sexton, we never met during that time. It was only until I was a landscape architecture student at Michigan State University that I became aware of you and as an alumni of the department. Having just recently formed the landscape architecture firm Johnson, Johnson and Roy, JJR, the firm was making a great impact on our profession through its groundbreaking campus planning work, urban design and large land planning projects. As students, we followed you and the firm’s progress carefully studying your projects, particularly your unique graphics and legendary sketching techniques.

I vividly recall the day our senior class visited JJR’s office in Ann Arbor. For most of us it was our first office visit with a practicing landscape architect. In your modest mid-western professorial way, we all have come to know you by, you selflessly spent most of the day explaining about your projects, practice, design process, and philosophy. Needless to say, your session sent all of us back to school full of excitement and hope for our futures as Landscape architects. It was a day we all talked about into the many hours of the night in the studio as we worked on our class projects.

I know this experience touched me and my classmates in ways hard to describe, but I also know it was inspiring and enriching to our lives and to our eventual careers as landscape architects. On behalf of all of us who had the experience of meeting you and working with you, or just being able to study your work, thank you as you are truly a pioneer to our profession.

Reflections on William “Bill” Johnson by Kurt Culbertson

December 2016

Here is my favorite story from Bill. It was very insightful of the challenges of balancing a viable business and a truly design oriented practice. As JJR grew the firm by necessity became more management oriented. One day a project manager came to Bill as he was sketching and said: “Mr. Johnson – we don’t have the money in the project budget for you to do that sketch. To which Bill gracefully (as always) responded. Young man, the only reason you have a job is because I can do this sketch.” To me this story offers a great lesson. You can build a successful business but you must always keep your eye first and foremost to design. I live by that rule! Hope this helps!

Reflections on William “Bill” Johnson by Nancy DeBoer

January 2017

My first encounter with Bill Johnson centered in a community charrette about Downtown Holland well over a decade ago. Something moved within me at that meeting. Bill's gentle, wise leadership of the assembled and his personal encouragement to me ignited my passion for city planning and involvement.

As time went by, I watched as one volatile or enigmatic situation after another calmed to clarity under Bill's kind and wise community exercise. At one meeting after another, every person felt heard. Every opinion valued. Every statement of summation from Bill seemed to crystallize and elevate all that had been said. Even one's own ideas seemed to sound better when Bill said them.

It was amazing to me as strong, bristly opinions would be aired. Bill would listen, sometimes sketch, affirm, tell stories, galvanize principles, till eventually heads were nodding, and all would leave better than they came. They had felt what was good about coming together and growing the Norman Rockwell sense of community.

William means "Resolute Protector" in the Old German, and such is the core of Bill. His whimsy, creativity, and wonder belie his depth. It is with such gentle packaging that his deeper values find their wings and their audience. People are drawn to his vision beyond today, his patience with process, and his rock-hard commitment to the very best, the unique, the authentic

It is Bill's nobility of spirit that has helped Holland find its voice, create its legacy, and grow its stellar future. He has helped us dare to dream big and then have the confidence to embrace those dreams with tenacity and longevity.

I know my life and the lives of the 34,000 plus in Holland are touched every day with the goodness of Bill's investment here. We are forever grateful.

Reflections on William “Bill” Johnson by Mark Hieber

December 2016

When I was a boy, my family attended the same church as Bill Johnson and his family. Typically, a bulletin was provided to anyone coming to the service that would indicate the order of the service. I would occasionally be sitting near Bill Johnson during these Sunday morning services. Bill would always have a pen in hand during the sermons. In addition to making notes on his bulletin about the sermons I would watch Bill sketch beautiful drawings and detail studies of nature scenes and landscapes and architecture while the sermon was being delivered. Bill was always sketching something. His ability to communicate nuances of light, shade and shadow and movement with such a minimal number of lines drawn is without equal.

We now know that studies have shown that drawing while listening to speech can help people stay focused, grasp new concepts and retain information. So Bill was ahead of his time in truly paying attention to the sermon being delivered by the speaker by simultaneously drawing.

Frequently at the end of the service, Bill would leave his bulletin with its amazing study sketches on the chair in the sanctuary or throw it away. Sadly for me, I never picked any of them up. But the lesson of studying and understanding design relationships through constant sketching, communicating from mind to hand, is a lesson that I have taken into my professional practice. Bill has always been a mentor to me, even when he was unaware.

Reflections on William “Bill” Johnson by Greg Holcomb

December 2016

Bill Johnson is an extraordinary Landscape Architect, an amazing Planner and Designer... He takes an array of disparate ideas and aspirations, opinions and notions, anxieties and visions of grandeur and creates a new vision, a new drawing or sketch, a path to improvement for the stakeholders around the table. That’s what Bill does. That’s Bill’s magical talent.

But at the core of Bill Johnson is his truly deep, persistent, and intentional ability to Listen, to thoughtfully probe and truly hear what others are saying...sorting through and digesting those many inputs... to create something truly “new and authentic”, to create “art”. That is my strongest impression of Bill’s enduring legacy.

Reflections on William "Bill" Johnson by Dean Johnson

January 2017

There are times when one can reflect back over one's life and question if a particular moment or a particular person effected one's career (or life) for all time. There has been no question for me. That person was Bill Johnson and the moment was at my drafting desk in Senior Design at Michigan State University,

I was to graduate in another month and was a nickel short of destitute, having spent my last bit of money on photographic reproductions as part of my brochure. The brochure was to be sent to landscape architecture offices and landscape contractors to see if there was anyone hiring. The prospects seemed pretty slim as there were few jobs on the horizon at that time. Finally, an offer had come through from a large landscape contractor in the Chicago area. I was set or so I thought.

As I sat at my desk that afternoon, this fellow comes up to me and begins engaging in small talk. There had been no advanced warning of who his was or what he wanted, but it was to change my life forever. After an explanation of my situation and that I simply couldn't afford graduate school at least for a few years or maybe never, Bill began to work his magic. Would I be interested in going to the University of Michigan? Yes, but I had no money and on the other hand, a solid offer for a job from a landscape contractor in Chicago.

He then began to outline what he could do to help me get into Michigan and survive while I was there. First, he offered me a tuition scholarship. That was big in my book. Then he offered a job in his firm---- Johnson + Roy. They were only a 5-person firm at that time. He offered me the option that I could take on as much work as my schooling would allow and I could spend the coming summer and future summers working full time for the firm. This seemed a dream come true. And as a cherry on top, he would offer a TA, working directly under him. It couldn't have been better. Bill proved to mean what he said on all accounts.

This was only the beginning of a great two years of graduate school and then two years working fulltime work at Bill, Carl and Clarence Roy's great firm. It was topped off by my receiving a Fellowship at the American Academy in Rome. I was told by our office manager at J,J +R at the time that Bill and Clarence's Letters of Recommendation were spectacular.

Having now reached my 80th year, I appreciate more than ever the time and effort that Bill put forward toward all the students that were to come under his tutelage, first as full professor and later as Chairman of the Department. I will always be indebted to him for his dedication to the profession, his creation of an excellent and enduring private practice and his personal friendship and sharing. It has meant all the difference in my life.

Reflections on William “Bill” Johnson by Al McGeehan

December 2016

Surely it has been noted throughout the ages that some of history’s most admired leaders are those of whom it could be said they were also excellent attentive listeners. During the past twenty-five years that Bill Johnson has been assisting the City of Holland, Michigan with urban planning efforts, I have watched as he has quietly listened and then led our city as no other consultant had ever done. To put it simply, Bill Johnson is not only a world renowned urban planner and landscape architect, but he is without a doubt the best listener that I have ever met!

In the 1980’s our city, just as other American urban centers, was confronted with the same economic realities that were drawing new development away from traditional downtowns to less expensive rural green field sites. Holland went through a number of consultants who each came to town with pre-determined professional conclusions that they “sold” as our pathway to reversing this alarming national trend. Here in Holland we were not convinced. Remembering Einstein’s definition of insanity, we looked elsewhere for help. Because of an earlier professional relationship and friendship with the president of our city-sited small liberal arts college, our city hall was introduced to Bill Johnson.

Bill brought to our dialog, deliberation and decisions an entirely new attitude and approach. From those earliest discussions to current opportunities with which Bill continues to “unofficially” assist us here in his now adopted hometown, he has never told us “what we had to do”. He has, rather, helped us to discover that the “process is crucial to the outcome”. He has instilled in us a strategy of involvement and empowerment of community players which when working collaboratively insures the creation of a vision that Bill often calls his “big picture”. Years ago as part of this process Bill taught us the meaning of the word “charrette”!

As a longtime educator, I learned in the classroom that not all students learn or interact in the same way. Simply verbalizing concepts one person to another leaves many participants on the outside of an initiative. That’s where Bill demonstrates another of his professional leadership gifts. I have watched Bill listen to a conversation for hours, sometimes days on end. Then, when the dialog ends Bill quietly goes behind closed doors. There alone or sometimes with a small team he begins to contemplate what he has heard. Then he takes a marker in his hand and begins to sketch. He is a master of incorporating the thoughts of a room full of people into his drawings. When the discussion group is reconvened Bill unveils his visuals and amazingly participants across the room are energized to “see” their idea in Bill’s work.

Bill Johnson has come alongside not only the City of Holland, but he has assisted our community hospital, college, schools, senior center, churches and neighborhoods in their individual but more importantly their collective efforts to understand and to create the synergy and sense of place that makes our city among the best in the nation.

Bill Johnson’s “fingerprints” are seen and appreciated all over this “All America City”.

Had my role as a city mayor and Bill’s career been like “two ships passing by in the night” and we had never connected, I would not want to consider how much of his passion and talent that I would have missed and how different our city and many of its institutions would look and function.

Today I value our past professional relationship that now in our retired years has grown into a much-valued personal friendship.

Reflections on William “Bill” Johnson by Ed Mickelson

December 2016

I first became aware of Bill Johnson in 1977 as I began my career joining the firm Hansen Lind Meyer, in Iowa City, Iowa. At that time JJR was a highly visible firm winning national ASLA design awards annually and was clearly among the most successful and influential landscape architecture firms in the US. When a co-worker left HLM to join JJR I traveled to Ann Arbor, Michigan to visit him and see the office. I was blown away by the incredibly beautiful work covering the walls and desks in the office and the rigor and professionalism which permeated this high-powered practice. From that point forward I kept close track of JJR’s work and was driven to raise my level of design thinking and expression.

In 1980 I traveled to the National ASLA meeting in Denver and attended a lecture by Bill which was my first personal contact with him. Wow! His lecture spoke to me in a powerful way as he shared insights into an expanded view of landscape architecture and the potential of the profession to impact built environment and society. This began my appreciation of not only his deep thinking, but also, importantly his ability to humbly and clearly communicate in a manner that truly inspires.

Fast-forwarding to June of 1997, I was recruited to join NBBJ, a 700-person design firm as Design Leader for their well-established landscape architecture studio located in the Columbus, Ohio office. While in negotiations I was informed that Bill had agreed to serve as an exclusive consultant in the firm’s Seattle office. He had just wrapped up his five-year partnership with Peter Walker in California and he and his wife, Charlotte, were looking to settle in the northwest. I was thrilled knowing that I would have the opportunity to work directly with the person I respected as much as anyone in the profession.

Over my 20 years with nbbj, Bill has played an influential role engaging primarily in planning and urban design projects in the northwest, but he has also made numerous trips to the Columbus office to participate in project work, join in practice retreats, assist in marketing pursuits and share his insights related to the principles of planning, design and landscape architecture to the office staff and also to students at the Ohio State University. Not a time has gone by that we have not also had him share his skills in graphic communication as well. Learning from the master is something that no one in the studio would miss!

In 2008 I was elected to the American Society of Landscape Architects Council of Fellows and was so pleased that Bill agreed to serve as my sponsor during the induction ceremony in Philadelphia. I vividly recall our dinner at a restaurant the next evening with a conversation that went on for a few hours as we covered topics from the profession to our shared midwest upbringing to family and faith. From that time forward our connection has gone beyond our shared passion for the practice to a solid and treasured friendship.

In 2014, Bill and Charlotte decided to depart Seattle and move to Holland, Michigan to be closer to family. My wife Wendy and I visited them in Holland this past spring and we continue to stay in touch.

In my view, if there is one person who exemplifies what it means to be both a great landscape architect and person to aspire to, it is William J. Johnson. I am honored to call him my friend and mentor and am so pleased that this Oral History project will capture, in some significant ways, the genius of this talented and humble man.

Reflections on William “Bill” Johnson by Cyril “Cy” Paumier

January 2017

I was in a relatively same class at Harvard’s Graduate School of Design with about 25 or 30 students. Within a day or two I met Bill Johnson. We had a number of common interests, both coming from Big 10 schools. We hit it off well. I was dating a beautiful gal that I later married and we would go out together frequently.

Moving fast forward – I asked Bill to help me on a master’s project that I had been working on for a new Public Square in Canton, Ohio (Sadly, the two buildings that created the sense of place is no longer there). It was a rather large square in the middle of town with three or four banks and around 25 parking spaces. It was all paved. I had this idea to take 35-40% of square and turn into a large plaza, with a café (the best parks had cafes). I also proposed an arts building, an exhibit building. At the time, I took the design proposals to the Timkin Family and they committed \$3 million then (which is about \$5 million today) and I started working on contact drawings. I took this project to JJR where we worked on it for the better part of two-to-three years. It was during this time that Bill did a series of sketches so that they could visualize what the square looked like. We were finished in 1962 or 63, and by this point I had become the Downtown Development Director. Bill’s drawings were really effective and once it was built the square made a difference for many years.

Looking back at our time at Harvard, Bill came to graduate school with all kinds of relative experience and his ability to draw – everyone would say, “how did he do that.” What he could do in a half hour, others could not do in a day. Bill had developed his skills to draw – and with Bill it was all admiration – You could not help but notice how this guy had a lot of humility.

After a few years passed the three JJR Partners asked me to join the firm in 1964 – I became a partner that year (but not in name). I was the one at that time who was able to get a lot of work, and this was helpful as they were not strong at getting work. That was my strength – in selling this great firm. I had one great client – Metropolitan Structures – and for them we worked on Illinois Center. I think I was at JJR from 1964-69. Then I moved to Columbia, Maryland, for the Rouse Corporation.

Over the years’ I have never lost respect for Bil – he would say, “You know Cy – you were the spark of our company, and soon after you left I decided that I didn’t need to be there.” I was also able to be a bit of a go between the two brothers. (Bill’s brother was a workaholic while he spent ¾ of his time at the university.)

I feel very fortunate – if I had not met Bill and worked with him I might have chosen to be an urban planner – Instead I chose to become a landscape architect – it was all because of Bill.

When I went to graduate from Harvard 18 months later – any idea how I got here? It was the letter I got from my coach – he said you were one of the most devoted, hard-working people he had on the team.

Like that coach, who wrote that letter that got me to Harvard with a full scholarship, Bill Johnson was one of those two or three people in my life who made a difference.

Reflections on William “Bill” Johnson by Joseph Porter

December 2016

I met Bill Johnson in a summer design studio at Michigan State University in 1962.

I was a student in a small two-faculty landscape architecture department at Utah State University. Michigan State held a five-week summer design course with five leading landscape architects, each teaching a one-week studio. The program provided a unique opportunity to broaden my understanding of the profession. The faculty included Bill, Hideo Sasaki, Stu Dawson, British landscape planner Brian Hackett and Bill Carnes, Assistant Director of the National Park Service. This introduction to Bill has led to over fifty years of friendship, collaboration and growth.

Bill is known for his near magical ability to process and visualize ideas and values through drawing. His early planning work on the Upper Peninsula of Michigan had a significant influence on me and many other young professionals at the time by demonstrating how quick, focused, hand drawn sketches could be used to develop and build on ideas with others at a regional scale. This work was proof that the design of regions was within the purview of landscape architects.

I was one of many students who experienced Bill’s process of teaching how to draw a simple perspective sketch and, in the process, instill confidence that one can draw. Bill’s motive was to teach sketching as a tool to focus on issues rather than artistic persuasion. I later watched him repeat this with my own students.

Bill collaborated with us at Design Workshop on a number of projects that involved placing major infrastructure or development into the open landscapes in the West and in large urban spaces. Examples include studies for widening the constrained Highway 82 entrance into Aspen, Colorado; design of several mountain resorts; and the redevelopment of the Central Platte Valley in downtown Denver.

We started using the tools of the time to understand and design these projects. We would prepare a rough scale model of the development; photograph the site with helium balloons to establish building height; enlarge or reduce sketches of the model and site to the same size; and prepare a drawing of the proposed project - not a quick integrative process. In 1985, Bill acquired one of the first computer graphic workstations, a Mindset computer with a Lumina program, and began using the system to apply his analytic and idea-generating sketching process. Bill saw such great value in the capacity that the systems provided to work in layers that he personally purchased two additional systems for his students at the University of Michigan to use in the studio because the university would not fund the purchase. I joined Bill for the first weeklong workshop when he introduced the system to the students. The technology was new, but they quickly got the concept of exploring with quick sketches and working in layers. The Mindset computer was chosen for a place in the Museum of Modern Art.

During the same period, Design Workshop purchased a highly sophisticated Silicon Graphics IRIS 3D computer simulation workstation on the advice of Lucas Films. Bill contributed to the purchase, and we collaborated in combining and applying these technologies. These were significant investments at the time, and as far as I know, Bill and Design Workshop were the first practicing landscape architects to seriously commit to their application.

I have been privileged to spend time with Bill walking in the Olympic Peninsula rain forest and along a hundred miles of the Cotswold Trail in England; sailing on his classic sailboat on Lake Michigan and

cruising in the San Juan Islands in his Grand Banks, another classic (Bill has nice toys); watching his growth as a fine artist; and periodically getting together to talk. I benefit from his wisdom every time we meet. Bill has had similar significant influence on hundreds of landscape architects.

**Reflections on William “Bill” Johnson by Philip Power
December 2016**

I knew Bill Johnson in the late 1980’s when he was Dean of the School of Natural Resources at the University of Michigan and I was a member of the Board of Regents. I had acquired 125 acres of fallow fields northeast of Ann Arbor and he and I did much of the land planning while sitting in the various woodlots, which is where he (and I) felt most comfortable and where we could see the configuration of the land as it rolled.

So when I decided to build my house, he and I spent lots of time together. We would sit on a rise overlooking a five-acre pond, sometimes having a drink at the end of the afternoon and sometimes with coffee in the morning. As we talked, Bill would sketch, putting his ideas into paper with tremendous facility and taste, all the while listening carefully with his head characteristically cocked to the side. Taken together, his sketches constituted a perfect decision-making model for how to take a relative neophyte through the process of land planning and home siting. Put it on top of a nearby hill? Not in a million years. Put it across the pond? Not if you wanted to have the glare of the southern sun in the winter. Put it exactly on the shore, using the blue clay as a form for pouring concrete footings and peeling the clay off once the house was completed? You bet.

I’ve always held that you can recognize a true genius from the childlike look in the eyes of special people. Bill always had that look: Far off, yet amazingly open and engaged. Working with him is one of the few experiences I have ever had working closely with a genius. It changed forever the way I look at land and feel about how it fits with one’s emotional makeup.

Reflections on William “Bill” Johnson by Vicky and George Ranney

January 2017

Bill Johnson was the lead designer for Prairie Crossing, a residential community forty miles north of Chicago which demonstrates that development can actually promote conservation. Bill was chosen especially for his knowledge and love of the historic Midwest landscape, his commitment to the environment, and his marvelous ability to sketch freehand the components of a new kind of community.

From the outset Bill favored returning the open areas of the 677-acre site to native Midwest prairie, replacing the mechanized corn and soybean farming that had dominated the rolling land for decades. He highlighted the beauty and diversity of the native plants, which were not then widely appreciated. He also paid attention to the interdependence of plants, animals and water, creating a 22-acre lake as the defining visual center of the community. It was not just a visual feature; he added a popular beach for swimming and boating and overlooks for fishing.

With an eye sensitive to both history and community, he arranged the 359 single-family house sites in farmstead-like clusters, along a century-old hedgerow, and in villages centered around greens. A hundred acres became a working organic farm, including community gardens and a farmer training center. All these elements Bill connected with ten miles of trails that encourage outdoor exercise and serve as meeting places for adults and children alike. Two schools emphasizing the environment have been founded at Prairie Crossing. The more than 400 children being educated there each year have the advantage of a landscape designed as much for them as for adults.

Thanks to Bill’s thoughtful and interactive design at Prairie Crossing, many of its residents participate in preserving the landscape through work in the Homeowners’ Association and various committees. In fact, a recent book by John Scott Watson (*Prairie Crossing: Creating an American Conservation Community*, published by the University of Illinois Press) maintains that Prairie Crossing residents participate much more actively in environmental and civic realms than in other communities. The book also points out that Prairie Crossing has influenced many other conservation communities that followed.

Our warm thanks and admiration go to Bill.

Reflections on William “Bill” Johnson by Jim Richards January 2017

I think about Bill Johnson more days than not. I don’t believe there’s an individual whose life and work have had a greater impact on my career direction. There’s no way to count how many day-to-day decisions, from project approaches to major career turns, have been given a greater degree of clarity by asking myself, “What would Bill Johnson do?”

This is remarkable mostly because I was never a classroom student of Bill’s. I was never his employee. I didn’t really meet Bill until well into my career. But over 40 years later, I remember the impact that seeing his remarkable drawings had on my thinking as an undergrad. Even then, they spoke to me about how the joy I experienced in drawing could be channeled into a successful and meaningful career that could make a difference in people’s lives.

Shortly after, I was truly honored to join Johnson, Johnson and Roy, some six years after Bill had departed the firm to accept the Dean’s position at the School of Natural Resources at the University of Michigan. I was fortunate to be taken under the wing of Dale Sass, a young protégé of Bill’s, who spent countless hours with me on project work, in office talks and through daily lunch discussions, shaping my thinking and skills. Often as not, these lessons began with, “Bill says, “or “Bill would think about it this way.” In the evenings, I would pull stunning project publications from the office library and take them home—the University of Michigan Central Campus Plan, the Chicago Lakefront Plan, the Grand Valley College Master Plan, and many, many others—where I would read them like a menu. I looked for overarching ideas and principles, I diagrammed the project processes, and I noted particularly well-phrased passages that communicated complex ideas with remarkable, plain-spoken clarity. And I traced Bill’s drawings—scores of them—to try to unlock their secrets. I applied what I learned to new projects and, over time, saw progress in my thinking, drawing and professionalism.

Through my years at JJR, Clarence Roy purposefully paired me with Jim Christman and other principal designers that had worked closely with Bill to further my education, and I learned more about the values and attitudes that were the foundation of Bill’s teaching:

- To trust the process of discovery
- That you can’t do it alone
- That properly understood, open space can be the primary shaper of long-term growth and development strategies
- That when planning and the building arts are considered comprehensively as mutually reinforced influences, both are enlarged rather than diminished
- That we draw to see, to help others see, and to have early influence

In the ensuing years, I left JJR to start my own consultancies, held several university teaching positions, collaborated with a number of national firms, and mentored many young professionals. More recently, I’ve found myself spending a good deal of time chatting with Bill, in interviews for an upcoming book on the creative process, and to facilitate the 2016 ASLA Annual Meeting General Session, in which Bill and Peter Walker shared foundational ideas, stories and life lessons from 60 years of friendship, practice and partnership in front of a rapt audience numbering well into the thousands.

Now, like Bill, I’m stretching into new creative directions and striving to grow as an artist to further enrich the journey during this “third third” of my career. And at the onset of most of these new endeavors, I’ve stopped to ask myself, “What would Bill do?” The answer is always enlightening.

Thank you, Bill.

**Reflections on William “Bill” Johnson by Linda Samelson
December 2016**

Bill Johnson is an outstanding man and one I am honored to call a friend. While he is certainly one who has spent time *out standing in a field* due to his long and illustrious career as a landscape architect, he is not only OUTSTANDING in that field but he has been an OUTSTANDING friend to our family.

My parents, Dave and Ruth Penner, met Bill and Nancy Johnson at church in Detroit in 1957, almost 60 years ago. They hit it off and Cheryl, Mark and Kevin were close in age to the oldest three of the five kids in our family. I was the oldest and have many fond memories of outings with the Johnsons, visits at each other’s homes, and lots of laughter wherever we went with them. Bill always has a twinkle in his eye and desires to make those around him feel at home and appreciated. He and my dad, who was a thoracic and cardiovascular surgeon, shared many common interests. Bill was a sailing enthusiast as was my dad. My dad loved to play tennis and so did Bill. Both loved to talk about philosophy and theology. Both were devoted to faith, family and friends. And both did everything with a STRONG sense of humor. Both were always scheming to share their next spoof, pun, parody, satire, anecdote, wordplay, screwball antic, double entendre, self-deprecation, or just plain joke. They were hilarious together! I remember many times sneaking away from where my mom was expecting me to help get dinner on the table, on a Sunday afternoon, to go to listen to them in the library, talk about deeply significant theological issues one minute and then launch into side-splitting jokes the next.

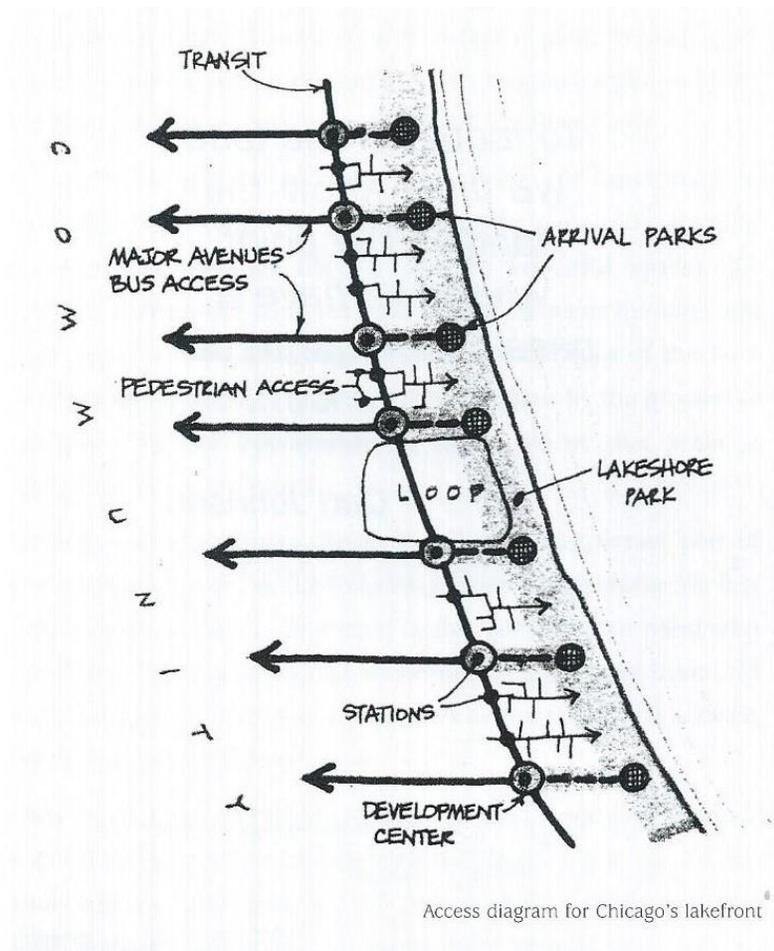
Our family was always in great awe of the various accomplishments of Bill Johnson.

I feel so honored to know this great man who became the Dean of School of Natural Resources at the University of Michigan while I was still young. I could tell that my parents were in awe of this and other great accomplishments of his career, when they spoke of him to others. But I feel our family owes a huge debt of gratitude for introducing us to Green Lake in Interlochen, Michigan. This is where our families vacationed together at their cottage, which Bill designed and had built. When another property across the lake became available, my dad snatched it up. Since then, it has become a wonderful family ‘cottage’ where our growing family has spent time almost every summer enjoying each other’s company. After Dad died, Mom expanded it and made it her residence and her 20 grandchildren have become best friends enjoying the lake and each other there. Bill, thank you from the bottom of my heart for this! You have been a positive influence on me and our entire family and we will always hold a special place in our hearts for you.

**Reflections on William "Bill" Johnson by Dale Sass
December 2016**

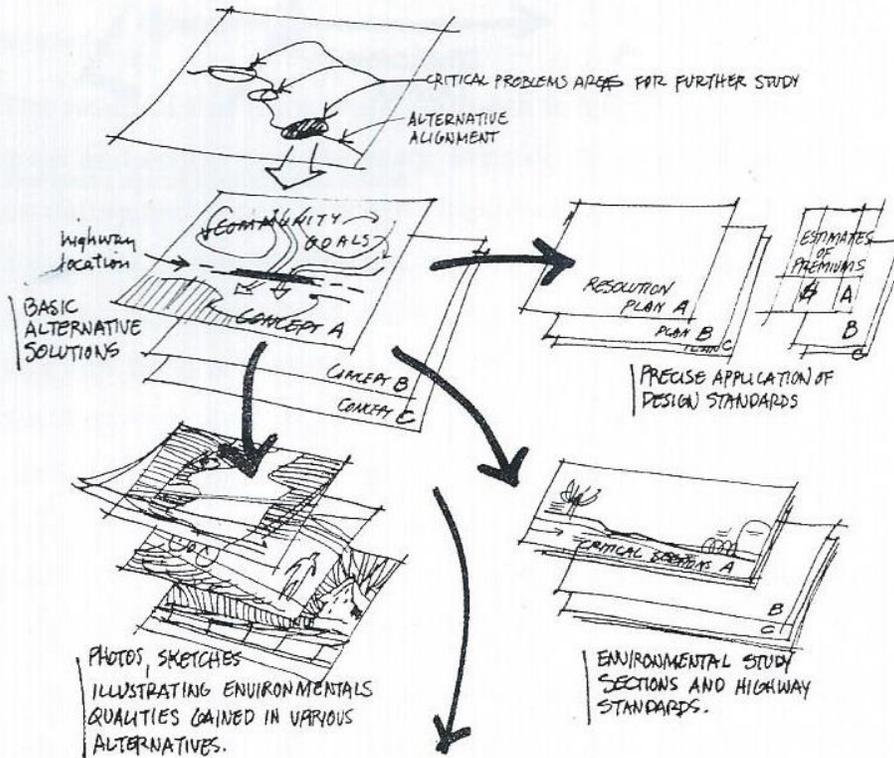
Bill Johnson FLSA founded Johnson, Johnson & Roy Inc. in 1961 with his brother Carl Johnson FLSA and Clarence Roy FLSA to prepare the University of Michigan Central Campus Master Plan. That plan created a revolutionary flexible framework process used by many firms to this day. The campus planning principles inspired by that plan formed the foundation for over 300 campus master plans prepared by JJR over the last five decades.

I met Bill Johnson when he awarded me first prize in a design competition when I was a junior at Michigan State University in 1966. He offered me an internship that summer and a job at JJR after graduation. That summer I worked with Bill on the Chicago Lakefront Study which re-established community access to 26 miles of lakefront parks as Lakeshore Drive was becoming a limited access freeway in the 1960's. Bill was very generous with his time and shared the entire planning process with me throughout that visionary plan. That summer experience was like having a year of grad school before I even graduated. The fundamental principles of that plan inspired decades of community waterfront planning at JJR throughout the Great Lakes.



In the early 70's Bill developed the Michigan Environmental Features Inventory which became a model for the type of environmental resource planning we do today with GIS.

Carefully selected layers of environmental patterns, combined with an ingenious evaluation matrix provided the State with a powerful objective tool to evaluate potential environmental impacts of large scale construction project alternatives. In addition to being used to evaluate highway and pipeline corridor alternatives the process is useful as an 'early warning system' for sensitive environmental resources in the path of trending development patterns. This study provided a platform for dozens of regional and county wide environmental planning projects throughout the country at JJR.



	POTENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL GAINS	NATURAL SYSTEMS	COMMUNITY GOALS	COST PREMIUMS	CHART THE RELATIVE ADVANTAGES OF EACH CHOICE w/ RELATED COSTS.
ALTERNATIVES	A	===== GAINS	===== GAINS	\$	
B	=====	=====	=====	\$	
C	=====	=====	=====	\$	

DESIGN RESPONSE
 SEEK TO RESOLVE PROBLEMS ON THE BASIS OF ENVIRONMENTAL GAINS - RETAIN REALITY IN PLANS AND RELATE TO SPECIFIC CONSTRUCTION COSTS.

On a personal note, I want to thank Bill for the challenges, guidance and inspiration he provided which gave me an exciting, rewarding and successful 43-year career at JJR. Bills 'legacy' projects along with many others authored by Carl Johnson and Clarence Roy inspired hundreds of JJR landscape architects, planners, and environmental scientist to work collaboratively and create 'a balance between man and nature' as we coexist on this planet.

**Reflections on William “Bill” Johnson by Jane and Mike Sullivan
January 2017**

It is a pleasure to send our comments regarding our friend, Bill Johnson. We are so pleased that your organization is honoring the wonderful gift of his work to cultures in the United States and around the world.

We met Bill Johnson in the 1990’s when he agreed to serve on an Environmental and Natural Resource board at the University of Wyoming.

It took very little time to realize our common interest in landscape architecture and on many occasions we discussed the importance of this profession not only for government concerns but for community references in our state.

Bill always brought his “gentle wisdom” to these discussions...listening, sketching and presenting special possibilities and solutions.

Following Mike’s completion of his time as Governor of Wyoming and during his tenure as U.S. Ambassador to Ireland, we invited Bill and Charlotte to come to Dublin, Ireland and the American Ambassador’s Residence to help guide us with the maintenance and restoration of the historic gardens and grounds at the residence which dated back to 1776!!

The Ambassador’s Residence was a former British property in Phoenix Park (largest walled park in Europe). The grounds were approximately 70 acres and included green houses, gardener cottages, formal gardens and “pleasure grounds”!!! We were faced with honoring the history of this special place but bringing it into a scale, which could be maintained with a limited budget and only two gardeners!!!

With Bill’s special communication skills, adopting a maintenance and preservation plan and appreciation of history, economics and beauty, we made significant advances. And as always, Bill was a consummate gentleman and artist! He and Charlotte the perfect guest!

Bill gifted the residence with one of his special “paintings of the estate” for those who would follow us that they recognize the importance of the history and able upkeep!!

Now...one last comment! Please know, the only accommodation we were able to provide was a small apartment over the Kitchen!! Bill and Charlotte accepted with grace. Got to know the cooks!...became friends with the Irish people and helped make the Residence grounds an even more stunning arrival destination for all!!

You are honoring a very special individual!

**Reflections on William “Bill” Johnson by Mark Tanis
December 2016**

I have been privileged to get to know Bill in the past few years and decided to write some things down. Thanks for what you do. Bill is one of my favorite people of all time.

Selected Ideas and Quotes:

“Being content is an initiative, not an apology.”

“Some people are better at designing curbs.”

“Honoring people is best done by being a Scribe. Drawing their idea and listening to anyone in the room.”

“Truth doesn’t grow Old.”

“Ordinary things are beautiful.”

“Today people are taught Action. We are not taught to Vision first and then Act.”

“Don’t look back unless you plan to go that way.”

“Don’t ever retreat! That is what the word ‘retire’ means.”

“Idea come in pieces, and so do messages.”

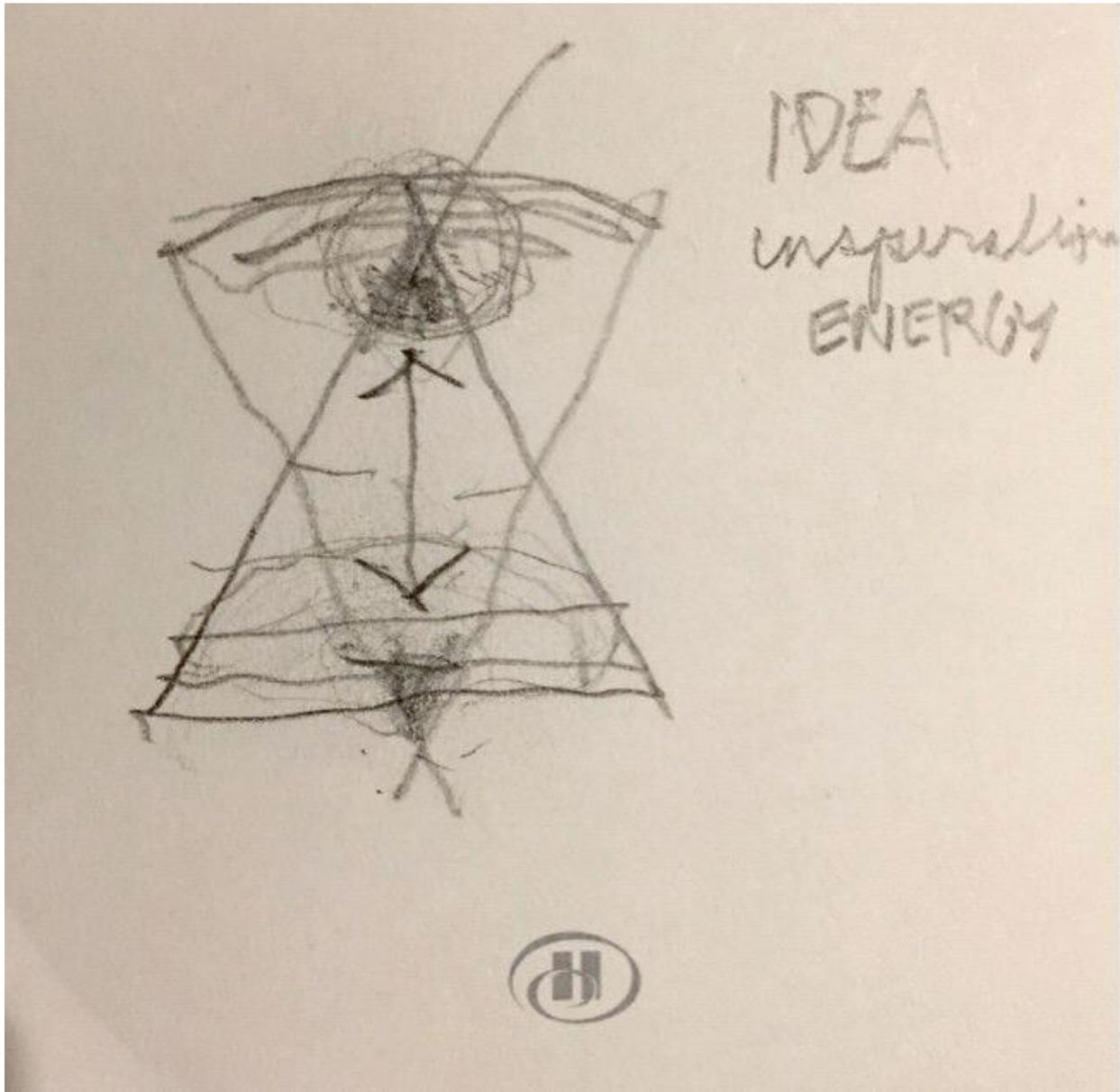
“I choose to be where ideas start, because what happens after that, is where ideas are lost.”

“It’s all about fostering and causing dialogue, because what happens, you can’t predict.”

“Focus on systems that feed objects. Don't focus on objects, they become outdated too quickly.”

“Alone and without a vision, we go to numbers. It kills what was about to happen.”

“How do I disarm a challenging group? I draw.”



“Living on the Arrow”, A sketch over “a cup of coffee” by Bill Johnson. (courtesy of Mark Tanis)

Living on the Arrow (cont'd)

Bill's Arrow goes through the cyclical notion of process and through the dichotomy between the moving parts of planners vs. designers. Bill says agility and alertness is the answer to effective measures. In order for that to take place you must have confidence in the discovery and idea phases.
Through the Arrow- strategy, process, form (finished product)

Environmental Problem Solving:

- working with fields of interests
- those who dream of protecting and preserving
- those who dream of creating and building

Thanks should be given to both sets of dreamers. Because- without the other, nothing would be able to happen. Nor- would one group of people be able to do it all.



Bill and his friend Peter Walker on stage to do the keynote at the American Society of Landscape Architects in New Orleans, October 22, 2016
(courtesy Mark Tanis)

**Reflections on William “Bill” Johnson by Charles Wenzlau
December 2016**

Small Town, Big Heart

A few years back I had the chance to lead a design team to charrette on ideas for growing our small downtown on Bainbridge Island, near Seattle. I was told I was given a “crack team” of consultants to work with. I wanted to be sure I got us off to a good start so I was careful to be organized, finding roles for each of my team members.

We each moved off to our corners and got to work. I immediately noticed this quiet gentleman, Bill Johnson, as he pulled out the pastels and trace. Flowing lines enveloped our downtown. These were followed by simple but evocative concepts about the forces shaping our community; how we might channel them like water connecting people to each other and the waterfront nearby.

It was apparent I did need to say much more to Bill, just enjoy the unfolding pictures, each so simple and compelling. Bill endeared himself to me on the spot and I feel so privileged to have worked alongside him, always as a valued partner. How lucky our little town is, and other communities across the country to have Bill’s big heart become a part of our town.

Reflections on William “Bill” Johnson by Greg Weykamp
January 2017

Thank you for this opportunity.

I first learned started learning from Bill Johnson while studying landscape architecture at Michigan State University, and then again at my first job out of school with a former principal of Johnson Johnson and Roy and again later at EDAW. While I never had the opportunity to meet Bill during the early years of my career, my most important mentors that were teaching me the profession during that period had all been influenced by Bill and shared much that they had learned from him. The most important lessons they shared were always about taking the time to listen, observe, and ask many questions during the design process, and to be open to ideas from everyone around you. His thought process and approach filtered down to me through many of the people he taught and influenced over the years. Twenty years later, having just been hired to begin some planning work in the City of Holland, Michigan, a local official told me there was a gentleman in town who had moved to the city after retiring. I was told he had been involved in much of the planning and design of the city’s downtown over the years on a volunteer basis, and would I be willing to meet with him? His name is Bill Johnson...

It is something of an experience to meet someone for the first time after so many years of stories passed on from friends and mentors, and it was a real treat to have Bill walk me through years and years of sketches, plans, and ideas for a very special community. I was struck most by his commitment to a long term vision that addressed what at first seem to be intractable problems, and see that so many of those problems have been solved through patience, a willingness to be flexible in approach, and most important certainty that the vision is correct and will be accomplished. Bill’s vision and leadership, expressed through his drawings, sketches, and passionate conversation has inspired a whole community to become just a little bit better every day. His daily walks throughout all parts of the downtown area helped us find connections that were not at first apparent, and over time the vision has become the reality. This has become the foundation for the opportunities we were given in Holland, and together with this community we have found that there is beauty and wonder in the ordinary every day activities that make up our lives. This thought, inspired by listening to so many stories from the community, became the basis for our work together and the inspiration for creating a place that celebrates just how extraordinary the ordinary can be if only we have the wit to notice it.

It has been a real pleasure working with Bill over the past few years. His passion and vision never tires, and I’ve never seen anyone who can draw and communicate as well as he does. He has brought out the best in me and the other members of our team, and he has provided a steadfast voice of reason in support of the vision when others get lost in the details of short term challenges. He is relentless while remaining patient, and he has spread that attitude to everyone around him. I feel very fortunate to call him my friend.

Reflections on William “Bill” Johnson by Soren Wolff December 2016

I was hired in 1988 as the City Manager of Holland, Michigan. Let me first give a brief background of my educational and professional experience, as it is important to understand the impact Bill Johnson had on my career and the City of Holland. I graduated in 1971 with a BA from Central College, Iowa with majors in Political Science and Economics, and in 1973 with a Master of Public Administration specializing in City Management from Kansas University. I spent seven years as an assistant city manager, in two different cities and nine years as city manager prior to the City Manager position in Holland, all in small to medium sized cities from 12,000 to 32,000 populations.

As noted, I did not have an educational background in urban planning, and my sixteen years in the workforce had been in the city manager’s office. My work experience with urban planning had primarily been with zoning issues, planning ordinances, approval of certain major developments, and the updating of several master plans that came before the City Council. In the city manager’s office the city master plan was unfortunately simply considered the basic legal document that supported or guided the various land use, zoning changes and other development decisions. They certainly provided a vision of the future development aspirations for both private and public lands. But, for me it was not a living document and ended up sitting on the shelf most of the time. That may have been the result of my management background and lack of planning education and training.

As I began my city management position in Holland in 1988, the City was facing suburban sprawl as were so many other small and medium size central cities in the country. A new 500,000 sq. ft. indoor mall, just outside the city limits, opened about six months after I arrived. Soon the Walmarts and other big box retailers followed. The City of Holland with a population of about 35,000 was sitting in the middle of an urban area of about 110,000 so there were plenty of customers. However, the real challenge was how to prevent the decay of the central core of the City and adjacent neighborhoods which had happened and was continuing to happen to small and medium size cities across the country, especially in the Midwest.

The City was fortunate to have a large and strong manufacturing base that had been started and developed primarily by citizens that lived in the Holland area. Through the leadership of Edgar Prince, owner of Prince Corporation (then a leader in automobile interior design and manufacturing), the Riverview Group was created in 1987. The group was comprised of about fifteen members who were primarily successful private entrepreneurs. Believing that combined resources could have greater impact than individual effort, this group also provided a substantial financial pool to support their overall purpose which was to address the “Quality of Life in the Greater Holland/Zeeland Community”. They brought on Gordon Van Wylen as their director, who had recently retired as Hope College President (Hope College is a Liberal Arts college of about 3,000 students and located adjacent to the City of Holland’s Downtown) and former Dean of Engineering at the University of Michigan. Soon thereafter, Greg Holcombe was hired as Gordon’s assistant. Greg was a Hope College and Harvard graduate with degrees in regional and urban studies.

Riverview’s first major project and concern became Holland’s Downtown. They realized the challenge was to maintain and improve a viable core City while there was rapid commercial development in the mall area just outside the City limits. In addition to having a concern about the community’s welfare, I believe there was also a somewhat selfish yet positive motivation by the Riverview Group. They knew that in order for them to attract the best and the brightest employees to work in their businesses,

Holland must be a viable and vibrant community to live, work, play, and learn in. And, their challenge would begin with the Downtown.

This is somewhat of a long way to get to Bill Johnson. As I look back over the past 28 years (1988-2016), Bill has been a key factor in the success we have had not only with our Downtown, that has won numerous state and national awards, but Holland has also become one of the most livable medium size cities in the Midwest. So let's go back to 1988 to try to determine why our City succeeded while so many other small to medium cities failed.

In my opinion, Bill was the key player that made our group function and made our Public Private Partnership (PPP) successful in the revival and future development of our Downtown and in many respects the entire City. There was no formal agreement or contract between the public and private sector to establish the PPP. There was, however, a strong consensus between the elected public officials and the private sector, represented by the Riverview Group (RG), that it would take a strong commitment of human and financial resources if we were going to succeed.

The PPP is a delicate process as there are very distinct roles and responsibilities by the public and private sectors that must not be or even perceived to be crossed. So the PPP process must be honest, trusted, open and transparent to the citizens. This is not always an easy objective to achieve. This is where Bill becomes such a key player. Bill had been retained by the RG in 1987 as a result of Gordon's relationship with Bill at the University of Michigan where they had both served as Dean's (Bill as the Dean of the School of Natural Resources). Bill at this time was living in Seattle, Washington and came to Holland on an "as needed" basis and was paid 100% by the RG. Bill's daughter and son in law, a professor at Hope College, lived in Holland which probably got Bill to Holland more often than he perhaps would have. My first meeting with Gordon, Greg and Bill was somewhat awkward. In late 1988, shortly after I had arrived in Holland, we met in the RG's office in Downtown Holland. As I entered I saw the room full of impressive maps, renderings of potential developments (some on public land), and even a full-scale model of the Downtown. I thought these were items that should be in the planning office in City Hall-not in the RG office. I soon learned many of these drawings had been developed by Bill at the direction of the RG and that is where they stayed for the next 4-5 years.

During this time, the City was in the process of completing a major Downtown streetscape project that included a snowmelt system fed by our Municipal power plant located on the edge of the Downtown. At the time, I believe it was the largest public snowmelt system in the country and covered the main street, downtown sidewalks along with several public parking lots. Today the system covers over 800,000 sq.ft and includes numerous other areas fed by individual private boilers adjacent to the public system. The City also had a very active Main Street program modeled after the National Main Street framework formed in the late 1970's/early 1980's, during the period of the rebirth/revitalization of downtown Holland. The combination of downtown main street program, supportive RG initiatives and a groundbreaking snowmelt system contributed to the rehabilitation of many of the existing buildings in the Downtown area. During this time the RG was purchasing a substantial number of properties in the Downtown for future redevelopment. During this period, there was continual communication between the City, the RG, and the Main Street program and Bill was a major link and contributor to that dialogue. At this same time the Mall and surrounding big box retailers were thriving, but Downtown Holland was holding on. Then in 1993 our City Planner, Dale Wyngarden, was no longer able to dedicate the amount of time to planning functions as he had been delegated many other responsibilities in the City organization because of his diverse talents (After Dale retired he was asked and honored to serve on the RG Board as one of the few non-entrepreneurs, and still serves on the Board today). After a national search, we hired Phil Meyer. Phil had Master degrees in both Architecture and City Planning from Penn,

had served in both the private and public sector, and prior to Holland had been the Urban Designer in Portland, Maine.

This really finalized the team that worked so well for the next 18 years. The team included me as City Manager and Phil as City Planner representing the public sector on behalf of the Mayor and City Council, Gordon and Greg representing the private sector on behalf of the Riverview Group (RG), and Bill who was the creative and unifying force that made the PPP work. With this team in place, the comprehensive Downtown planning process was brought into City Hall in a collaborative manner engaging RG and other stakeholders, rather than being housed in the private RG office.

Bill provided the template for “Visioning as a Process” (attached hereto and which I had laminated and placed prominently on my desk for the rest of my career as a process that could be utilized in so many applications). This template, I believe, is the core of how Bill operates and advocates it as the way to “Inform, Involve and Inspire” neighborhoods and the community. Bill emphasized the Visioning Process is not just “once around the circle” but it is reiterative and continuous. To do this we used a form of the Charrette process which was developed with Bill’s guidance and leadership.

Through the thoughtful engagement of many stakeholders, a geographic area or special project could be explored at a variety of scales and in greater context through a repetitive discovery and feedback process. Over a period that could be hours or several days, summary drawings and key bullet points were documented expressing and interpreting what stakeholders had expressed. The stakeholders and broader community were then invited back to hear the presentation by the design team with Bill’s leadership and made up of various professional disciplines depending on the area of study. The stakeholders were then provided an opportunity to give additional feedback. The team of Phil, Greg and Bill would then take this information and develop a “vision/framework document” for the area or project as defined. Depending on the scope of the focus, the substance of this document formed the basis of a further design and implementation effort that could be completed in a few months or in some cases a couple of years and involving many more private and public stakeholders.

Something else very special happened in this process because of Bill’s character, leadership and involvement. Bill has a very special ability to listen to anyone and everyone. He gives as much and equal attention to an average citizen as he would a top CEO of a major company. He believes that all ideas have value and should be considered. People who talk to him can feel that and trust him through his quiet leadership ability. As a result, the final product had credibility by the community because of their involvement in the process and exposure to Bill.

Let me provide an example of this. After we had completed the 1995 vision document for the Downtown there were many major public improvement projects within the area that were being considered. We began to use the Charrette process as outlined above for each of these public projects. Located at the very West end of the Downtown was Kollen Park with extensive public water frontage. A major objective in the vision/framework document was to connect the Downtown to the waterfront. We had a couple of hundred citizens who showed up for the Kollen Park Charrette. During a stakeholder session, a grandmother stood up and said “I take my granddaughter to the park all the time and she loves to be down by the water. But every time she is there I’m scared because she loves to run to the playground, and I’m afraid she will be run over by a car”. The park had been developed so vehicles could drive on a road that was parallel and immediately adjacent to the lake and was a popular route for vehicles. That comment was “put on the wall” on various 3x5 index cards by the design team and became one of the key principles in the Kollen Park vision/framework document.

When the final design was completed for the multimillion dollar renovation, the framework plan became the guide. The waterfront became a pedestrian boardwalk and the parking and vehicle traffic was moved to the back of the park. I'm not sure that would have happened if we had not first constructively engaged and thoughtfully listened to all stakeholders before starting the design phase. The 1995 Vision/Framework plan also had a key principle of safe pedestrian walkability. This principle continues to be worked on by both the public and private sectors to achieve the connectivity of the Downtown to the waterfront. In fact, the safe walkability principle is one of the key emphasis through Bill that weave the various areas together in the Downtown.

What also happened as a result of the comfortable public/private way of working and mutual trust and respect was the public and private sectors often felt comfortable sitting down and talking about a project in the very early stages before design started. This gave us the opportunity to review the context of the project as it related to adjacent properties and the principles of the vision/ framework which had been developed by the City through the vision process.

In my earlier experience as a city manager what I experienced was that projects would be submitted to the City after plans had been finalized by the architect and developer. In essence, the developers guided the direction of the Downtown without any real context to adjacent properties or the overall vision and framework for the Downtown, even though they met the zoning ordinances and the land use requirements in the Master Plan.

For me as a city manager this was a different and subtle planning concept to fully understand, accept and implement in practice. From my city management background, there was a tendency to get into the details as quickly as possible once an idea, concept or project scope has been defined. Through Bill's leadership I began to understand that creating the vision/framework which establishes certain principles was essential before getting into the details. The vision documents for the Downtown defined the framework with a set of guiding principles at which point we could then begin to discuss specific public and private developments.

Through a comfortable way of working, thanks to Bill's both active and behind the scenes mentoring and engagement with many stakeholders, the City's entire planning process was positively impacted. Three major Downtown planning efforts benefited greatly from Bill's leadership and manner of working. Through Bill's influence and participation, the following documents were completed and have served and are currently serving as guiding documents for our Downtown Vision: 1995 "Broadening the Vision: A Strategic plan for Downtown Holland, Michigan", 2007 "Sharpening the Vision: A Ten-Year Update of the Strategic Plan for Downtown Holland and an Update to the City's Master Plan", and 2015 "Extending the Vision: An Update of the Strategic Plan for Downtown Holland" (This document served as a supplement to the 2007 Plan).

As the Mayor and City Council and members of the RG were encouraged to participate in the development of these documents, they easily bought into the process and end product. They became documents which were much more useable on a daily basis than the traditional Master Plan and are tools used by both the public and private sector on a regular basis.

As the community became involved in many of the public vision/ framework processes Bill began to be retained by many other institutions in the City including the following: Hope College; Holland Hospital; Holland Public Schools; Holland Christian Schools; Evergreen Senior Citizen Center; numerous private developments in the Downtown through RG and throughout the community; and a number of churches.

Since the early 1990's Bill's services were no longer just funded by RG, but were divided between the City, RG and the other individuals and institutions he provided services to. This was important to make sure there was full transparency of his work. There are few individuals who could serve so many different segments of the City in an objective way with the entire community's best interest at heart. He was able to do this because of his personal integrity and qualities outlined above. As a result, Bill was a key individual that made it possible for the City to have a truly successful Public Private Partnership. Without the valuable services of Bill Johnson over the past 28 years, I can safely say the City of Holland would not look, feel or function the way it does today. On a personal note, Bill had a major influence on how I performed my responsibilities as city manager in urban planning issues, and in many other ways has been a real mentor in my career. My main contribution was that I became a real believer in the planning process we developed and tried to keep it out front, applicable and useful on a regular basis instead of sitting on the shelf.

Just one last note, in 2011 Bill and his wife Charlotte moved to Holland and they reside in a residential unit above one of the retail buildings Downtown. I retired in late 2011 and since then my wife Sue and I have enjoyed our friendship with Bill and his wife. In the fall of 2014, we were privileged to have Bill and Charlotte spend a week with us at our second home on Cape Cod, Massachusetts. It rained almost every day with a gray overcast which somewhat depressed me. We still toured the Cape area and Bill took a lot of pictures. In the mornings, Bill would begin to sketch drawings from the detailed pictures, then watercolor them and then produce an oil painting from the watercolors. Each step had progressively less detail. As I observed this it struck me that Bill did this exactly opposite of how he advocated developing the planning vision/framework process which advocated not to start with or get into the details. So I suspect that Bill probably envisioned a lot of details as we developed the framework, but he never interjected those until we had completed the vision/framework.

Upon our return to Holland Bill gave us three beautiful oil paintings from Cape Cod that we proudly exhibit in our home. In these I see the landscape architecture in Bill more than I did in his urban planning role with the City. With his oil paintings from the Cape he even convinced me that gray is beautiful. So now when I go back to the Cape I actually enjoy the rainy gray overcast days. Today I see the joy that oil painting gives Bill. When I first met Bill he did a lot of his visuals in chalk and pencil sketches which amazed me. As the technology evolved he began to do on the computer what he did with chalk and a pencil which again amazed me. Then he began doing oil paintings in his leisure and has become an excellent artist and amazed me once again.

Since 2011, I have discovered so many projects and events that Bill has been involved with nationally and internationally. Not because Bill voluntarily told me about them, but because I asked a lot of questions about his career. It is perhaps his humility that is one of his strongest personal attributes and why he establishes a strong trust in the people he works with. Today I realize and appreciate even more how fortunate I have been in my career to work with Bill Johnson for over 28 years and how privileged we as a community were to have Bill's services.

Thank You, Bill, for all you contributed to the City of Holland over the past 28 years and to me personally. It has been a privilege to work with you and be your friend!



VISIONING AS A PROCESS BY WILLIAM JOHNSON

“A Vision is not meant to be precise, but rather directional in nature. Its purpose is to help prioritize future occurrences and opportunities so that, for example, when an underutilized defunct Downtown property suddenly becomes available, it is relatively easy to refer to the Vision and have a good sense of what belongs (and what does not) and how development concepts might be shaped to best fit the property into the overall Vision.”



The visioning process is a logical progression of steps which taken together will establish the future goals and direction for a community. This diagram was devised by William Johnson to graphically define the process.



Bill Johnson and Soren Wolff 2014 Cape Cod (courtesy Soren Wolff)