



LEADING WITH LANDSCAPE III: RENEWING SAN ANTONIO'S BRACKENRIDGE PARK SUMMIT

MARCH 3, 2017: THE STABLE AT PEARL, SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS

PRESENTED BY: **THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE FOUNDATION AND BRACKENRIDGE PARK CONSERVANCY**

WITH SUPPORT FROM: PEARL, THE JOHN AND FLORENCE NEWMAN FOUNDATION, CITY OF SAN ANTONIO – PARKS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT

Abstracts

Setting the Stage:

Charles A. Birnbaum, FASLA, FAAR, *President + CEO*, The Cultural Landscape Foundation
Laying the Groundwork for a Brackenridge Park Renaissance

Change and continuity is endemic to all cultural resources, but finding the balance is essential. Change is inherent in all cultural landscapes; it results from both natural and human conditions. Sometimes change is subtle (the ongoing and incremental loss of mature-canopy trees one-by-one) or barely perceptible (the loss of historic views from roads in the upper park as invasive understory plants take over). At other times, it is strikingly obvious, as with the death of a single tree species, the addition of a new playground, or expanding parking areas. This dynamic quality of all cultural landscapes is balanced by the continuity of distinctive character-defining features retained over time. Despite a landscape's constant change (or perhaps because of it), resources like Brackenridge Park can still exhibit continuity of form, order, use, features, or materials.

Embracing a holistic approach to stewardship at Brackenridge Park—valuing and understanding its inherent and unique natural, historical and cultural assets is how the Brackenridge Park Conservancy will be able to measure success going forward. As a public, *municipal park* (and not a national or state park), Brackenridge Park is unequalled across the United States. Its nuanced and layered history, spanning more than 11,000 years, is ripe for rediscovery, documentation, analysis, and interpretation.

This presentation will offer the curatorial vision for the summit whose goal is to inaugurate a spirited a lively conversation between public users, stakeholders, stewards and experts (from both inside and outside of San Antonio) that will place an emphasis on a strong research and planning foundation to help inform and guide future design and management decision-making.

Panel 1: *What San Antonio's Brackenridge Park Can Learn from Local Successes*

Panelists:

Andres Andujar, *CEO*, Hemisfair Park Area Redevelopment Corporation
Hemisfair, San Antonio, Texas

The vision for the Hemisfair transformation is to become one of the world's great public spaces. After nearly 50 years of waiting and five years of planning, efforts to expand the parks at Hemisfair are paying off for the benefit of the San Antonio citizens and visitors. While construction capital to build the parks to a world-class level is challenging, benchmarking with dozens of park systems across the United States also shows long-term difficulties in sustaining funding levels to properly maintain, operate, and activate these public spaces. Efforts at Hemisfair address construction capital; operation, maintenance, and activation funding; and leverage to generate private investment and long-term financial self-sustainability.

At nineteen acres, designated parkland is Hemisfair's largest land use. Additionally, seventeen acres of land adjacent to the park have been set aside as developable parcels to frame the urban open space. These sites will allow the reinstatement of the neighborhood's density before the 1968 Fair. This will bring people to live, work, and shop in residential and mixed-use developments, and in turn populate the park. When people live next to a park, we maximize passive security through the effect of "eyes-on-the-park."

Hemisfair will be our vibrant gathering place for everything from a day with friends to the San Antonio's biggest celebrations.

Bob Harris, FAIA, LEED Fellow, *Partner*, Lake|Flato Architects
Historic Main Plaza and Confluence Park, San Antonio

The spiritual heart of San Antonio since 1730, Historic Main Plaza has served as the prime place of celebration and gathering for religious, social, political, military, economic, and civic purposes. At the turn of the 21st century its place and purpose had been all but lost in the context of the modern city. The civic space upon which life in San Antonio revolved was lost as automobile-centric infrastructure, outward sprawl, and urban erosion hollowed out the city's core public space. Bringing back the "heart" in Main Plaza required a reimagining of what it might become: a dramatic change both in use and purpose through design that evolved from its cultural history and community's aspirations for the future.

Shifting scenes from the city's core to the convergence of the San Antonio River and San Pedro Creek, Confluence Park provides a new opportunity to celebrate the ecology of South Texas, to demonstrate the value of natural resources, and to foster environmental stewardship through education in a traditionally underserved portion of the city. What does it take to create a new river landmark, a linkage, a destination, a place for gathering, education, and artistic inspiration, and fresh take on a place we thought we already knew? Where Main Plaza speaks to history, Confluence Park - the latest addition to the Historic Mission Reach portion of the San Antonio River - is an exploration of how art and architecture might combine to do the unexpected, creating a fresh perspective on public space and what the river means to San Antonio.

Suzanne B. Scott, *General Manager*, San Antonio River Authority
How a Rekindled Love of the San Antonio River Can Spark Renewed Passion for Brackenridge Park

You would think that a city known for its River Walk would have an intrinsic value for the ecological and quality of life benefits of its waterways. The truth is after the completion of the famous San Antonio River Walk other reaches of the San Antonio River and its tributaries were channelized for flood control purposes, denuded of natural habitat, or transformed into the drainage ditches to convey runoff from a growing urbanized area. That all changed in 1998 when the San Antonio River Authority, the City of San Antonio, and Bexar County partnered to initiate the San Antonio River Improvements Project, a stakeholder-driven project to enhance and restore thirteen miles of the San Antonio River north and south of downtown. With more than \$384 million invested over fifteen years, a community vision to make the San Antonio River more than just the River Walk has been realized. Today, residents live, work, and play along the river and restored ecosystems thrive. This renewed appreciation for the river catalyzed the creation of 52.6 miles of creekway trails and sparked a recent initiative to restore two-miles of the historic San Pedro Creek, a drainage ditch in the heart of San Antonio's bustling downtown. These projects enjoy strong community support and are generating a renewed interest in the use and value of urban green spaces. This presentation will discuss how this community network should be leveraged to build broader stakeholder support and passion for the redevelopment of Brackenridge Park.

Christine Ten Eyck, FASLA, *President*, Ten Eyck Landscape Architects
Lessons Learned from Projects in the San Antonio Broadway Cultural Corridor

In the last five years we have experienced the pleasure of collaboration and design on three important projects for the City of San Antonio along the Broadway Cultural Corridor – the Doseum (San Antonio Children's Museum), the Pearl, and the San Antonio Botanical Garden. This presentation will focus on similarities, differences, and lessons learned from each.

This presentation will contrast the developer driven four and one-half-acre Pearl Plaza and Cellars project with the privately funded five-acre Doseum and with the private/public partnership of the San Antonio

Botanical Garden's New Entry and Family Adventure Garden project which is located on eleven acres of City of San Antonio property. There are many successes to share but also lessons learned. How do we incorporate the rich history, culture, and ecology of San Antonio into these and future projects? How do we ensure a commitment for resilient ecological and landscape architectural master planning, design, and construction with the maintenance required to nurture a public landscape in a drought stricken, flood and freeze prone climate? Most importantly, how do we make all San Antonians feel welcome in these new additions to the Broadway corridor? It is important for all of the cultural destinations including Brackenridge Park to learn from each other and work together to create a cooperative and visionary plan for the future that tells the rich story of the City of San Antonio and its people.

Panel 2: What San Antonio's Brackenridge Park Can Learn from Other Cities

Moderator:

Chris Reed, FASLA, *Founding Director, Stoss*

Introductory Remarks to Panel 1

The last two decades have witnessed a resurgence of landscape in the remaking and revitalization of cities all across North America. From New York to Los Angeles, and from Toronto and Chicago to Houston and Dallas, both existing parks and leftover industrial spaces have been given new life as part of broader efforts to revitalize cities.

Yet parks today have a broader and more diversified set of agendas that they must address, a different set of pressures that they must respond to. Urban populations continue to diversify and they bring a wider range of cultural traditions (and uses of and in open space) with them. Storm intensities and frequencies have increased, as have the severity of drought conditions and drought-flood cycles; how can landscape help here? Local governments are strained for resources, which demands new models for sponsorship and funding and operations. And most of these projects fall under complex jurisdictional authorities, requiring new levels of coordination but also offering opportunities for how new policies can be set for open spaces and cities moving forward.

This panel looks to the lessons learned from other cities as a way to contextualize the challenges and opportunities ahead for Brackenridge Park. Douglas Reed sets the stage for us, drawing on the cultural legacies of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century park traditions (and cultural traditions) as a way of informing the rejuvenation of open spaces for the 21st century. Kinder Baumgartner discusses the issues of competing uses and users for contemporary parks, using Houston's Buffalo Bayou Park as an example of open space that mediates between local / neighborhood and regional users. Gina Ford talks of the radical diversification of voices and stakeholders involved in park-making, and how these can coalesce in new kinds of public spaces like those along the Chicago River. And Mia Lehrer shows how a strong vision for a park—in her case the remaking of the concrete channel Los Angeles River—can catalyze public and political support and spur changes in policy that lead to significant improvements in open space both within and beyond the immediate project and site.

Panelists:

Douglas Reed, FASLA, RAAR, *Principal, Reed Hilderbrand, LLC*

The Promise of Brackenridge Park

"The great work of the 21st century will be to reconnect to the natural world as a source of meaning."

— *Richard Louv*

We like to think of parks as places that humanize and civilize our cities. In them we see a record of how we have lived on the land, what we have valued, what the land has meant in providing the routines and rituals of daily life. They are part of the making of culture. Brackenridge Park does this for San Antonio. In this one tract of land we find evidence of some ten thousand years of human occupation, organized around the source of the San Antonio River. You feel sanctity here: you sense that water is the reason there is life here. Today it is the people's park, where citizens come together to reconnect with one another and with the natural world. The park's story is San Antonio's story. And there is no place quite

like it in our country. We see in Brackenridge Park so much that might serve emerging San Antonio. In celebrating its heritage, we not only protect Brackenridge against irretrievable loss. We engage its wealth and beauty in response to critical needs of contemporary life.

The park's promise for the future will be explored in three ways:

1. Why look back in order to move forward?
2. Interpreting the story of water
3. Unifying the park; bringing cohesion

Kinder Baumgardner, ASLA, Managing Principal, SWA | Houston **Resolving Conflict in Historic Urban Parks**

Brackenridge Park's most precious resource is its relationship with the San Antonio River. From its spring fed origins at the "Blue Hole", to the Spanish *acequia* that moved water to their settlements, to today's civil infrastructures, the San Antonio River is a cultural landscape in its own right. But the river is under great stress and is compromised by urban run-off, waste water, and sedimentation. As Brackenridge Park's importance as a cultural and natural resource is elevated in this rapidly growing city, a plan must be devised that accommodates and resolves the conflicts inherent in Brackenridge Park's open spaces and its river system. Over the past 100 years the park has been colonized by a variety of revenue producing entities, resulting in a park that is becoming less of a respite and more of an extension of the city's urban fabric. Many of the historic resources within the park require significant restoration; however, contemporary ideas of how we use parks must also be addressed if it is to be relevant to today's users. This session will illustrate how to resolve these inherent conflicts to create a world class amenity for the City of San Antonio. Houston Texas' Buffalo Bayou Park and the Baton Rouge Lakes Master Plan will be used as benchmark projects illustrating planning and engagement strategies.

Gina Ford, ASLA, PLA, Principal, Sasaki Associates **Cultivating Brackenridge Park: An Ecosystem Approach to Community-Driven Master Planning**

The future success of San Antonio's Brackenridge Park will depend upon successful consensus building and outreach within the city's uniquely diverse community. Today, the park is perceived as a collection of distinct parts, rather than a unified whole. Our conversation will focus on the idea of an "ecosystem approach" to the park's future. This approach posits master planning as tools to look holistically at the interconnected systems of place (the park's physical environment), people (the park's broad and diverse constituents), and time (the park's unique and evolving heritage). We will include three national examples of master planning processes that brought together diverse constituencies to articulate and implement a powerful landscape vision.

The Place: How can we stitch the park together again and unite its identity? We will cover our recent work on the **Chicago Riverwalk**, a six-block long, \$100 million dollar linear park along the Chicago River. We will highlight the project's unique funding approach, effective partnership model and operational strategies.

The People: How can Brackenridge Park's master plan truly engage the region in its transformation? We will talk about the **High Line Canal**, a 71-mile long resource in the Denver region – crossing diverse communities and landscapes. The Vision + Action Plan, created via a diverse, fun series of forums for public engagement and meaningful input, is a success story for multi-jurisdictional, regional collaboration.

Time: How do we facilitate a public conversation about change while respecting the heritage of a place? We will look at **Moore Square**, a 4-acre historic square in the heart of Downtown Raleigh. To renovate the square to address meet the changing needs of its users and address years of over-use, we listened closely and integrated a wide-ranging array of voices to develop a consensus-driven plan for the square.

Mia Lehrer, FASLA, *Founder + President*, Mia Lehrer + Associates

Master Planning a Vision, Implementation, and Management Strategy: Lessons from Los Angeles

It has been ten years since the City of Los Angeles partnered with Friends of the Los Angeles River and dozens of stakeholder groups to publish the Los Angeles River Revitalization Master Plan. The plan, itself a culmination of years of thought and collaboration, established a framework for the planning, development, and management of projects along the thirty-two-mile stretch of river in the City of Los Angeles. The effort engaged hundreds of community members, stakeholders, non-profits, and federal, state, county, and city agency representatives to come up with a tangible blueprint for the future. In twenty years, the Los Angeles River went from being a forgotten gutter behind the City's all but abandoned industries to the forefront of a national discussion related to enhancing community health, improving ecological function, and sparking economic revitalization.

This presentation will share lessons learned through the master planning process to develop a shared vision for the river and ten years of subsequent bureaucratic and policy shifts, planning and project developments, and river restoration and management strategies. We will present the Los Angeles River Revitalization Master Plan and several of the projects that were influenced by the Plan, including the Ecosystem Restoration Feasibility Study, Northeast LA Placemaking Plan, Confluence Plaza, the Los Angeles Zoo parking lot, and miles of riverfront bicycle trails.