

THE HOPEFUL PROMISE OF BIOPHILIC CITIES

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(Opposite)
The Southern Ridges,
Singapore
Photo Credit: Tim
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We are very excited to share with you our inaugural issue of the *Biophilic Cities Journal*. With this first issue we are embarking on a new effort at more effectively sharing information, summarizing new research and practice, and telling the compelling stories of cities around the world helping to design and grow more nature-ful cities. We envision at once a journal that serves as a forum for discussing and sharing new insights and information, but also for inspiring us about the many creative projects and initiatives in cit-

ies, and the work of passionate people in these cities. We hope our journal will inform and inspire, and add an element of hope and optimism about the future of cities and of urban living. The nature in our lives and in our neighborhoods is one of the most powerful (partial) antidotes to the chaos, fear, and cruelty that seem to carry the day.

I am happy to report that the vision and practice of Biophilic Cities continues to gain traction. The second half of 2016 was a particularly exciting



Hot Metal Pedestrian Bridge
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
Photo Credit: Tim Beatley

period for the Biophilic Cities Network. In May, we added two high-profile cities, Washington, DC, and Edmonton, Canada. We participated in and helped to organize celebratory events in each city, marking the promise and potential of the Network and what it might mean for these two cities. Edmonton is pioneering a commitment to a nature-connected city, and one that values the easy movement of animals through the city. It has now completed its 27th wildlife passage. Some 250 attendees joined us at the Edmonton Public Library to hear about Biophilic Cities and celebrate that city's natural wildness and impressive green ambitions for the future. Hundreds of miles to the east, celebrants in Washington, DC, still a highly fractured, segregated city, considered how the role of its already abundant nature could play an even greater role in enhancing livability and security for all there. At a launch event co-organized by Biophilic DC, one speaker, Sabine O'Hara, Dean of the College of Agriculture, Urban Sustainability and Environmental Sciences (CAUSES) at the University of the

District of Columbia told of an initiative to establish urban food hubs in each of the city's nine wards. She also took a group of attendees to see the impressive 20,000 square foot green roof on the rooftop of her School's main building, growing a remarkable amount of food. It was a visceral demonstration of sometimes hidden, underappreciated ways in which individuals and groups and universities are helping to pioneer new pathways to resilience, sustainability and biophilia.

In September, we participated in a wonderful press conference at the Phipps Conservatory in Pittsburgh announcing that city's joining the Network, and presented Mayor Peduto with a framed membership certificate. For me it was also an opportunity to experience first-hand some of the impressive qualities of a nature-rich city like Pittsburgh. The successful efforts at regeneration in this former industrial city, built from steel and coal are well-known (and on display everywhere in that city, including Station Square, where I stayed) but the

nature story is less well-known. This is already a remarkably green city, a tree-immersed city with a canopy coverage of 42%. A new 660 acre park, Hays Park, has been purchased that will be larger even than the city's existing (and quite large) Frick Park, and the new connections to water are especially exemplary. The morning of our press conference with the mayor I walked along a beautiful trail and pathway, hugging the south bank of the Monongahela river. Along the way I saw the new South Riverfront Park, a lively and resilient new connection to the river. A former dock for steel mill barges, this park opened in 2013. Part of a larger (and growing) network of riverfront trails and bike paths in Pittsburgh, on this sunny September morning there were lots of residents out enjoying nature. I ended my walk by crossing the Hot Metal Pedestrian bridge. Originally built in the 1880's as a railroad bridge, and later in the 1880's as a railroad bridge, and later to transport heavy carts of molten steel across the river, it is truly, as one newspaper article heralded "a Bridge to Pittsburgh's Industrial Past." It was incredibly busy with bicyclists and joggers and baby carriages

on the day I walked across it and back, a visual blending of this city's steel town history with its emerging love of and connection with the outside nature in which it sits.

Pittsburgh has had remarkable success in recycling its former industrial landscape and in infusing green, nature-ful qualities in its neighborhoods. There is wildness around one here, from the visually-present forested hilltops to the water's edge. I walked a portion of the South Side Riverfront Trail, along the southern edge of the Monongahela River. Along the way, wild nature emerges, for instance in the form of the hardy, emergent plants and moss that spring out from the large retaining walls.

The press conference announcing Pittsburgh's joining the Biophilic Cities Network was held in a beautiful open-air patio (itself an example of overcoming indoor-outdoor barriers) of the [Center for Sustainable Landscapes at the Phipps Conservatory](#). It is a spectacular green building, the first certified Living Building in the City. From its daylit interior spaces to its reclaimed



Pittsburgh Mayor Bill Peduto Receives Partner City Certificate, Photo Credit: Tim Beatley

wood siding (from Pennsylvania barns!), it is a building that exemplifies the importance of connections with nature that we want to design into all of our living and work spaces. Later in the day, I had the chance to visit the recently-completed [Frick Environmental Center](#), at Frick Park. With some work still underway (the elaborate waterfall and feature on the exterior of the structure was not yet functioning) it was another beautiful addition to the biophilic architecture of this city.

Pittsburgh has clearly had much success in re-imagining itself and moving from "steel city to biophilic city." The development community is not surprisingly quite aware of these new nature amenities, especially the riverfront trails and parks. A 2015 study by Sasaki found that the investment in riverfront parks and trails (something on the order of \$130 million) has helped to stimulate much development (more than \$4 billion) along or near the water. [Property value increases](#) were found to be much higher for property near the riverfront (and especially so in the area around South Shore Park).

Much credit for Pittsburgh's joining the Biophilic Cities Network must go to Richard Piacentini, the energetic director of the Phipps Conservatory. Their work began several years ago when they started convening a monthly biophilia group. They invited speakers and engaged in discussion about how their city could be more connected to the natural world. I gave a lecture in 2015, hoping the city would join the Network, and the next meeting of the Biophilia group was aimed at an open discussion about what participants want to see their city aspire to, and becoming a biophilic city was a main conclusion. Piacentini and his

colleagues at Phipps were able to advocate and actively push the mayor and his staff to apply for partner city status. At least in Pittsburgh this is a model of grassroots, bottom-up citizen activism, some form of which could work, I believe, in almost any city. It remains to be seen how this group of activated citizens, and the staff of the Phipps Conservatory, will be a part of what the city does in the future to advance biophilic urbanism, but I know they will be watching and likely pushing the city ahead.

We have been active in other cities in recent months, as well. We had a wonderful time in Baltimore beginning filming for our new documentary film about Blue Cities and Blue Urbanism. We spent much of the morning filming young adults participating in a City Parks and Recreation Department program to teach about kayaks and canoes. We watched and filmed as city staff taught the kids how to balance and paddle, first on the firmness of land, and then on the water.



Baltimore Alley Painting
Photo Credit: Tim Beatley

These were kids who had grown up in troubled neighborhoods, not far from the water, but never actually visiting or recreating on the water.

They seemed to be having a great deal of fun, and hopefully the initiative serves to ignite a lifelong love of these watery refuges. Later that day we filmed one of the City's impressive alley makeovers. This one took place in the Patterson Park neighborhood, a diverse, though struggling neighborhood. The dramatic result in this alley was the painting of a linear blueway, a ground level mural produced by some 80 residents of the neighborhood who came together in a moment of collaborative hope.

Biophilia, in all its forms and expressions, has special import to neighborhoods like this one. Social justice demands that the beauty and profound benefits bestowed by nature be made available to all. The most disadvantaged neighborhoods and cities deserve these connections to the natural world. We know of course that too often the result of introducing new nature (whether it is the High Line in New York or the Belt-Line in Atlanta) has the unintended consequences of gentrification and displacement, and we must continue to find the tools and the will to mitigate these kinds of impacts. But we know the power that planting fruit trees or creating a pocket park from abandoned lots or starting a community garden can have in creating community and building resilience. One example can be found in the profile in these pages of the work of Kemba Shakur and her organization Urban Releaf, working in the minority neighborhoods of Oakland, California. When she arrived there in the 1980s, she was struck by the absence of trees: there were more

trees on the grounds of Soledad prison, where she worked, than in her Oakland neighborhood! Planting trees, as Shakur demonstrates, can change lives, can open up new opportunities, can foster optimism. And trees, in no small ways, can help us build hope.

So, I circle back to the sources of hope. There are many, but I find the view of the white oaks outside my office window, the birdsong I hear on the way to class, the persistent stream near my home, and the many remarkable ways cities around the world are protecting, nurturing, celebrating their own nature(s) as some of the most important sources of hope we have today.



Baltimore "Kids in Kayaks" Program
Photo Credit: Tim Beatley

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