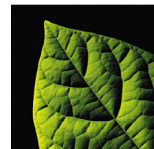


## Loeb Fellowship Research Initiative

**THE FABRIC OF HEALTH - GREEN COMMONS**  
Buffalo, New York

**RESEARCH FINDINGS**



Rick Reinhard, LF  
David Kamp, FASLA, NA, LF  
September 25, 2015



## Acknowledgements

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Our deep gratitude extends to Matt Enstice, Executive Director, Buffalo-Niagara Medical Campus, and Bob Shibley, Dean of the University of Buffalo School of Architecture and Planning. Their expertise, vision and generosity were instrumental to our research.

And finally, our thanks extend to the entire team of committed workshop participants:

Jamie Hamann-Burney, Mark McLaern, Bill Smith, Jonathan McNeice - BNMC  
Bradshaw Hovey, Sean Brodfuehrer - University of Buffalo School of Architecture  
Seth Amman, Richard Haynes - Allentown Association  
Lynsey Weaver, Timothy Vaeth - Kevin Guest House  
Craig Coyne, Jim Constantin - Roswell Park Cancer Institute

Respectfully,

Rick Reinhard, LF ('96)  
David Kamp, FASLA, NA, LF ('96)

Loeb Fellowship Research Initiative  
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## Introduction

Probably nowhere is the need for a connection to nature more poignant than in times of illness and crisis, where balance and continuity is threatened and our sense of isolation and vulnerability heightened. A growing body of research is confirming that a connection with nature is essential to health and wellbeing. This benefit manifests itself in many ways: it reduces stress and depression, encourages exercise and social interactions, and accelerates healing with less medication.

Such a shift in attitude and perspective demands a design response that is sensitive, adaptive, creative – in short, holistic. It requires us to reflect on the historical and cultural underpinnings of the art and science of healing as we embrace a future of dramatic and complex change – in climate, resources, and a multitude of other forces. It also requires that we practice design as a social art, with dialog and in collaboration.

Any complex designed environment requires collaboration between designers and specialists who can articulate both conceptual concerns and the myriad of details that must be addressed if a project is to succeed. Several of the most exciting developments underway are collaborative research projects connecting design and health. The benefits of such collaborations are being recognized in a variety of settings – from established healthcare ones such as hospitals to the larger environment including specialized gardens in parks, healthy communities, and restored ecosystems. At the heart of this attitude towards design is the concept of biophilia, the intrinsic connection we have with nature.

Collectively these collaborations strengthen what we call “the fabric of health”. This phrase asks us to focus on exploring the threads that build and maintain health at every scale – from personal needs woven through communal ones to policies governing our overall environmental health. The questions growing from these collaborations are beginning to show us the need to develop research programs for engaging and accommodating health concerns into the mainstream of our lives.

The Loeb Fellowship Research Initiative provided the opportunity to explore this attitude towards design and health in a challenging urban environment. Promoting the idea of health activism, the project explores how the built environment can help define our individual and collective perceptions of health. Our efforts sought to find a design response that strengthens our ties to nature and to the threads that tie individual experiences to larger social and environmental needs.



## Summary

The City of Buffalo is going through many positive changes recently in its post-industrial period. For example, the Buffalo-Niagara Medical Campus (BNMC) is focusing its “eds and meds” initiative in the city core. Neighborhoods are being revitalized into commercial and residential hubs. The downtown waterfront is being renewed as a community resource. The Buffalo River is being cleaned and made into a natural resource. The City’s Olmsted-designed parks are being restored. In addition to “bricks and mortar” revitalization, Buffalo is undergoing a renewal of its spirit.

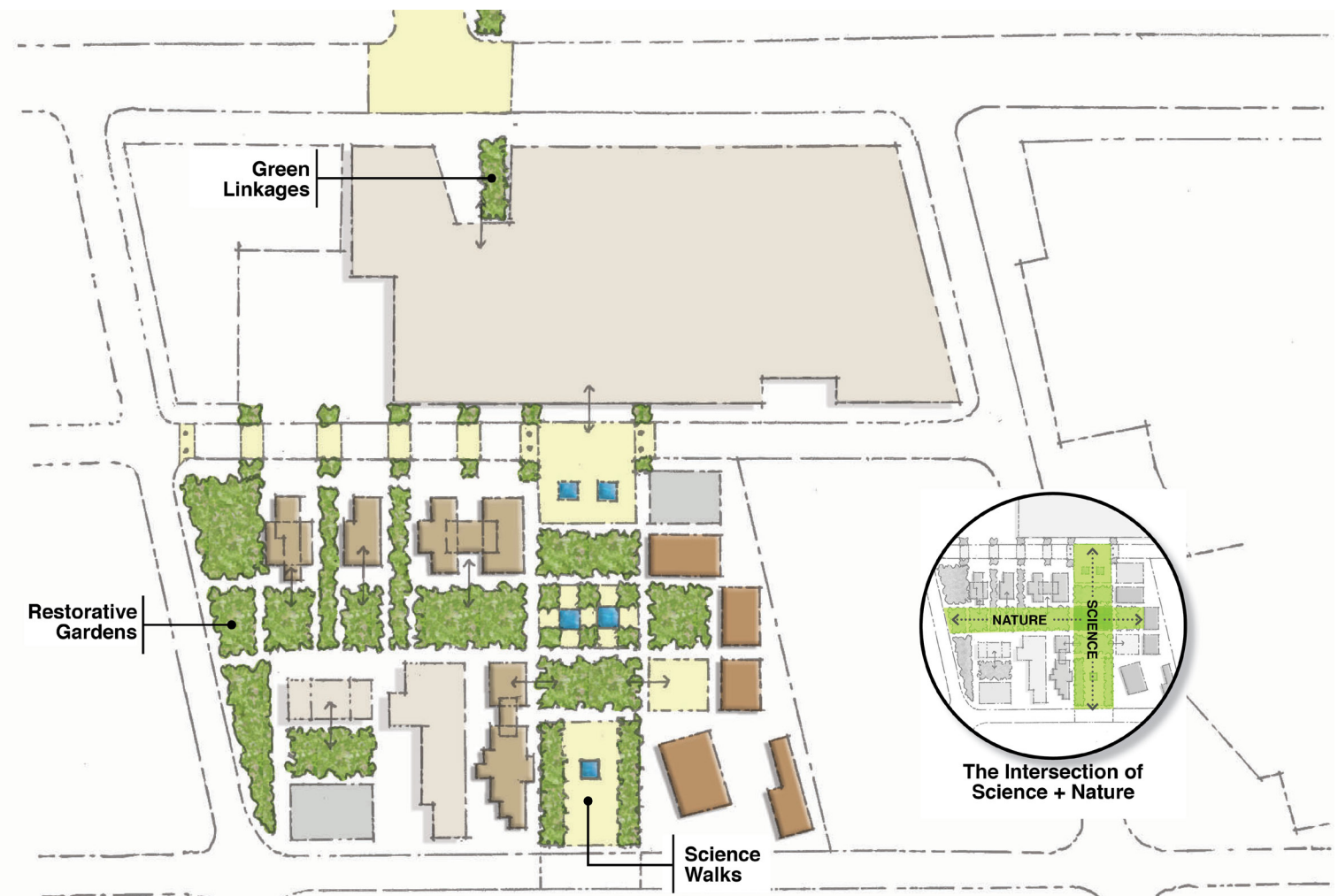
Loeb Fellows Rick Reinhard (LF '96) and David Kamp (LF '96) brought together a range of interested community groups, including representatives from the Buffalo-Niagara Medical Center, University of Buffalo School of Architecture, Roswell Park Cancer Center, Kevin Guest House and the Allentown neighborhood, to examine the critical intersection of physical development and public health in Buffalo. Through interactive work sessions with the collective group and key partners the team sought to establish specific implementable results. A key component of the work sessions was to initiate and nurture a collective dialogue that asked the basic question: “How does this place, this strategy, this policy actively promote health?”

The team examined a two-square block area that forms the major entrance to the medical campus from Buffalo’s metro system, forming what was named, The Green Commons. Specific areas and projects were identified, including:

**Restorative Gardens.** Amid the massive buildings of the medical campus, five former single-family houses adjacent to one another will be preserved. The team examined the five houses and their surrounding land and considered potential uses that illustrate and promote individual, community and environmental health.

**Science Walk.** The new University at Buffalo School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences is built directly over the medical campus metro station. The team examined ways to make the pedestrian experience between the metro station and the medical campus a welcoming, educational and healthy experience.

**Green Linkages.** Building large complex medical facilities presents a challenge to the concept of neighborhood linkage. The team examined ways to insure that the medical campus could be linked to the adjacent smaller-scaled residential neighborhoods in meaningful ways.





## Overview

Design is an expression of values. And within the designed environment - through the places we build to play, live, work, learn, and heal - we express our hopes and aspirations. The designed environment can be instrumental in promoting health, both in helping individuals cope with ill health and in shaping individual choices that promote health. This attitude about design can transcend any one particular scale: By putting individual human health on a continuum with environmental health, design can help coalesce individual choices into collective ones to make our communities, our cities, and our world more vibrant and equitable.

The following provides the framework for The Green Commons, a special place on the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus that celebrates health at every scale, honors the individual experience, and welcomes everyone regardless of capability. The design concept preserves the existing scale and character of the area and incorporates enhancements around the themes of nature, science and their intersection.

## Legend

1. **Medical School Forecourt.** Large, flexible open space for a variety of venues. Central focal point (sculpture, fountain) with ample seating. Distinctive educational paving pattern announces beginning of the Science Walk, linking the Medical School and BNMC.
2. **Grove.** Tree canopy creates a more intimate scale and provides transition between major spaces along Science Walk; ample seating for individuals and small groups.
3. **Commons.** Symbolic heart of the Green Commons formed by the intersection of the Science Walk and Green Spine. Composition of water, paving and trees creates a dynamic space that encourages discourse and thought.
4. **Campus Plaza.** Forecourt to the BNMC campus. Central focal point (sculpture, fountain) highly visible from Ellicott Street. Plaza culminates the Science Walk's distinctive paving pattern. Perimeter trees provide seating areas, frame space and screen adjacent buildings.
5. **Restorative Garden.** Private, serene, secure garden for Kevin Guest House residents. Filtered views of Commons. Anchors north end of Green Spine.
6. **Activity Terrace.** Flexible, secure space for activities and socialization for Kevin Guest House residents. Secured entry to Grove, providing convenient access to adjacent food venues.
7. **Green Spine.** Series of garden spaces highlighting health. Publically accessible with seating to encourage day-to-day engagement, spaces provide variety of educational opportunities (food, environmental stewardship, etc.). Direct access from adjacent houses to extend educational program, special events, etc.
8. **Green Linkages.** Specialized gardens highlighting sustainability; secondary access to/from Washington Street to encourage day-to-day engagement.
9. **Community Demonstration Garden.** Culmination of health/stewardship mission and southern anchor to Green Spine. Highly visible from Carlton Street and accessible to nearby housing.
10. **Park.** Public accessible green space for passive activities.
11. **Washington Street Plaza.** Controlled access to encourage pedestrian use. Easy access for food trucks and other mobile venues.
12. **Allentown Linkage.** Future linkage to neighborhood, encouraging daily use and collaborations between science and the arts.
13. **Parking.** Dedicated, secured parking for use by Kevin Guest House residents and Archdiocese.
14. **Kevin Guest House.** Opportunities for future expansion frame Restorative Garden and Activity Terrace.
15. **Partners in Healthy Foods.** Renovation and expansion of existing building to house multiple food venues. Strategic location adjacent to the Campus Plaza and Kevin Guest House.
16. **Partners in Health & Well Being.** Renovation and expansion of existing buildings to house organizations that support individual, community and environmental health initiatives. Strategic & prestigious location.





## Detailed Findings

The Buffalo-Niagara Medical Campus community has identified a “Green Commons” located within the block defined by a line 100 yards south of High Street on the north, Carlton on the south, Ellicott on the east and Washington on the west. Amid the high-density development and hustle and bustle of the Medical Campus, the Green Commons is typified by a scattering of 19th and early 20th-century houses surrounded by grassy lawns, peppered currently with a few tarmac surface parking lots.

Directly west, across Washington Street from the Green Commons, is the giant, new University at Buffalo School of Medical and Biomedical Sciences. The new SBMS building has located underneath it the Allen Street subway station. A pedestrian linkage through the Green Commons to the Medical Campus to the east (and to the Allentown neighborhood to the west) is critical to the success of the entire neighborhood.

The Medical Campus has experienced considerable growth over the past decade and is projected to experience even more over the next decade. The surge in its growth makes it even more critical to carefully plan and preserve the Green Commons as a place to enrich, enlighten and refresh the Medical Campus’ workers, customers and visitors.

## Recommendations

The Green Commons has the potential to brand the Medical Campus spatially every bit as much as its major institutions brand it in the fields of science, health and medicine. The BNMC community has the opportunity to design and implement a Green Commons and its pedestrian linkages in a way that will capture the attention of local and national audiences. Specific Recommendations include:

1. The Green Commons should have a detailed plan. The plan should feature health, healing and meditation. The plan needs to include building uses, landscape, streetscape, parking and linkages to the rest of the Medical Campus, the subway and Allentown.
2. Building uses. BNMC should develop a plan for mid- to long-term uses for all of the buildings on the Green Commons. The uses should “make sense” with each other and with the rest of the Medical Campus. With the exception of the Kevin Guest House, there should be a minimum of new construction to preserve the nature of the Green Commons.
3. Kevin Guest House. BNMC and the City should partner with Kevin Guest House to evaluate a potential land swap, which would allow the building of a new structure on the BNMC parking lot behind Kevin in return for the former law firm house being transferred to BNMC. This transaction would create a “campus” for Kevin and allow the proper construction of a pedestrian right-of-way from the subway to the rest of the Medical Campus. An interim walkway may need to be constructed in the short

term in a way that allows Kevin Guest House to operate a “split” campus while still serving the needs of Medical Campus constituents.

4. Allentown. The Allentown community, working with the City and BNMC, must arrive at a decision about the Allen Street streetscape. The streetscape should feature a public art-related “announcement” of Allentown at the intersection of Main and Allen. Otherwise, the Allentown community will fail to benefit adequately from the Medical Campus revitalization.
5. Roswell Park. Roswell Park Cancer Institute should consider altering the configuration and management of Kaminski Park and the area around the park to complement the revitalization of the Green Commons.
6. Construction decisions. BNMC should carefully consider any major short-term construction decisions in and around the Green Commons to ensure that such construction does not preclude completion of the Green Commons plan.
7. Finance decisions. To pay for many of the improvements required in the Green Commons, BNMC should consider urging public bodies to form a Tax-Increment Financing District or some other form of innovative financing in which the growth in Medical District buildings helps pay for public infrastructure.
8. Task force. BNMC may wish to consider forming a Green Commons Task Force comprising major stakeholders around the Green Commons and other public health stakeholders to plan and implement the Green Commons plan.

## Conclusion

It is our hope that this initiative presents cost-effective examples of the sort of positive community change that is replicable throughout Buffalo and other Rust Belt cities.

We believe that the designed environment can be instrumental in promoting health both in helping individuals cope with ill health and in shaping individual choices that promote health. And this attitude about design can actually transcend any one particular scale: By putting individual human health on a continuum with environmental health, design can help coalesce individual choices into collective ones to make our communities, our cities, and our world more vibrant and equitable.