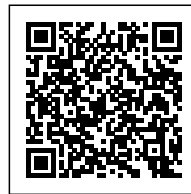


Tampa as the Ecological City.
Living with and Inhabiting
the Estuary and the Swamp.
Shannon Bassett

TAMPA AS THE ECOLOGICAL CITY. LIVING WITH AND INHABITING THE ESTUARY AND THE SWAMP

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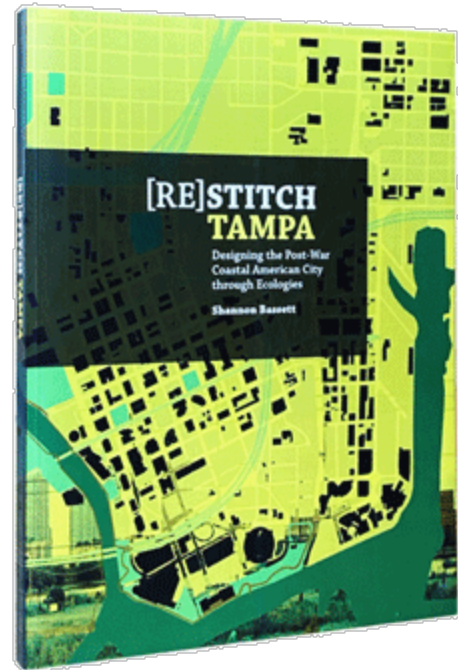
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The (Re) Stitch Tampa project was initially conceptualized during 2010 around the advent of the announcement of what was to be the first high-speed rail line in the US. The Obama Administration had just announced as part of its "New" New Deal program, that the region was to receive 1.2 billion dollars in federal monies earmarked for the construction of a high-speed rail line along the Tampa-Orlando corridor. The program was reminiscent of Franklin D. Roosevelt's WPA program, during the great Depression, where the federal government funded large-scale public infrastructural projects with the intent of jump-starting the economy. In Florida, such projects included the Rural Electrification Program of rural farms, running wire to over 54,000 farms, and the development of much of the Florida State Park System.

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Plan

Tampa, a post-war coastal American city, was reeling from the worst recession since the great Depression. Arguably, it was also located in one of the regions the greatest impacted in the country by the 2008 economic bust and mortgage crisis. The region had developed around car privileging infrastructures and an economy predicated principally on real estate and its speculative practices. The real-estate bubble had burst hard here, where real-estate speculation and flipping were part of the main sources of the economy. It was not uncommon, beginning in 2007 and continuing onwards, to see hand-crafted signs dotting the on and off ramps of Tampa's highway infrastructures and byways of the city advertising short-sale, foreclosed houses, or offering flat-out cash for houses. *"We buy up houses-\$50,000.00 each and 3 for..."*

By 2011, however, this "New" New Deal in the form of high-speed rail infrastructure had been squashed, and the 1.2 billion dollars of federal monies returned to the federal government. The stymying of the project had been largely due to the prevailing anti-smart and, arguably, anti-urban politics which did not support the funding of public transportation. This was even despite the efforts of mayors in the 6 cities who would be positively impacted by the high-speed rail system, who self-organized at a local-regional level to accept the federal monies, although in the end they were not able to do so. The aggregated land for the high-speed rail station in Tampa was also left vacant, left to return back to nature. Therein existed other such aggregated plots of land or "land-banking" which had occurred at the height of the real-estate boom, such as on the north end of the Riverwalk, the northern anchor of the competition project site, where the developer had acquired and aggregated land and had then, subsequently, gone bankrupt. The Trolley Barn- Armature Works lay in decay, as a relic of the post-industrial landscape, and the former affluent trolley-car suburb and trolley system which was one of the most successful in the US before it was ripped-up and replaced by the roads of the predominant automobile culture. This aggregated lot lay in urban decay; the ecology and the bio-diversity returning back to it and recovering the site's natural landscape. This urban aggregate added to the 50% of surface parking, as well as to the additional vacancies in the downtown core.

The focus of the competition brief shifted, at this moment, to a critical re-thinking of the ebbs and flows of circulation and movement throughout the city, and how these might contribute to more sustainable development and ecological practices. The competition brief posed the question, how might the re-calibrating of infrastructure serve as an opportunity to re-choreograph the flows and the movements of people and habitat to and from its natural lifeline running through the city, and

how might it bring the River into the city?

Paradoxically, the recession and the mortgage crisis with its foreclosures, vacancies, and halted development, had actually provided an opportunity to take stock, as well as to critically reassess a legacy during the 20th century of largely unsustainable building and development practices and seemingly unlimited growth, much of which was eating up valuable wetlands and ecologically sensitive lands. Unsustainable land development practices had been catalyzed by the rationalization of the pumping system. Dredging, as well as the canalization of swamplands pushed by real-estate speculation and tourism, had largely trashed the natural environment and its ecologies. Further, the invention of air conditioning had perpetuated the development of housing typologies divorced from their natural systems and local ecologies, dissimilar to Florida's earlier vernacular housing typologies, such as the Florida Dogtrot. The Dogtrot's design was more integrated with passive design strategies, such as breezeways as well as the natural Florida landscape. The competition also prompted a re-thinking of the current oppositional relationship of the city to its water, as well as the potential to re-stitch, re-cover and re-claim the landscape of the Post-War Coastal American City through Ecologies.

Tampa- the Beginnings of the Post-War Coastal American City

Unlike their counterparts to the North, the Sunbelt coastal cities of the south, including Tampa, did not experience the same overarching opposition to the top-down urban renewal planning practices of the 1950ies, largely inspired by the Modernist City. During the 1960ies, freeway revolts occurred in many American cities, opposing the byproducts of the 1958 Federal Highway Act, which included cutting highway infrastructure through swathes of the city in order to expedite commuters out to the suburbs. The post-war suburbs had been federally subsidized in the form of inexpensive mortgages to returning war vets from World War Two. Jane Jacobs, author of the seminal text, "The Death and Life of Great American Cities", successfully organized her community to oppose and subsequently defeat Robert Moses' attempt to bulldoze part of the West Village in New York City with a cross-town expressway infrastructure. Further, grass-roots community opposition to urban renewal projects and the bulldozing of Boston's historic West End and Scollay Square, as well as New York City's Penn Station, lay the groundwork for the bottom-up preservation movement of cities and their historic fabric beginning in the 1950ies. It also ushered in the establishment of the National Park Service in the US. Tampa's period of urban renewal happened later, in the 1960ies and 70ies. Unlike

their northern counterparts, many of the community leaders in the districts designated for urban renewal, actually embraced it, as opposed to attempting to fight it, such as in Tampa's Ybor City. As Tampa historian Emanuel Leto writes, "these projects were also motivated, in part, by racial divisions within urban communities, and the desire for segregation in districts and enclaves of the city." The erasure of one such community known as "the Scrub", was one of the three major urban renewal projects carried out by Tampa in the 1960ies as part of the Federal Urban Renewal program. Its name came from its natural landscape, referring to the territory outside of the protected Fort Brooke boundary which was settled by white settlers, and referred to the small brush-like vegetation of scrub and Florida brush. The area was settled by freed African-American slaves and the neighborhood had a vibrant music scene, including Ray Charles and Ella Fitzgerald. The inhabitants were re-located to public housing and the city became largely zoned as single use as part of the CBD (Central Business District), with highway infrastructure cutting through the urban fabric, carrying people out to the suburbs in the wetlands and the reclaimed swamplands, which lay beyond a middle landscape of trolley suburbs, largely vacated

Tampa as the Ecological City

Prior to the period of urban renewal which radically transformed the urban space and fabric of Tampa, the settlement of the area had a much more intrinsic relationship to the landscape and its natural ecologies, living more symbiotically with the Tampa Bay natural estuary. Historical natural atlases and guides of Tampa from the turn of the 20th century boasted in their descriptions of Tampa's natural landscape, as well as its estuary. "People came from miles around to eat the fish and oysters out of the Tampa Bay". Such sites as Sulphur Springs, located further north up the Hillsborough River were, in fact, natural springs where people came from afar for their natural healing powers. Other sites of intrigue included an alligator farm adjacent to the natural spring. The site became contaminated and trashed in the middle part of the 20th century, however, although ecological remediation and recovery is currently being undertaken in the area by the City.

Competition Brief

The competition brief is premised on a critique of the failings of the post-war American City, the

prevailing traces and conditions of which can be seen in Tampa. The brief also calls for resilient design strategies, which address its coastal location, as well as the re-articulation of its land-water edge between the city and the water. It proposes possible design strategies, which might begin to de-construct, de-engineer, as well as to de-laminate the previous infrastructures that are part of the legacy of these predominantly short-sited planning strategies. The competition framed a re-thinking and re-programming, as well as the re-articulation and re-consideration of the possible occupation of infrastructures operating at a large-scale.

(Re)stitch Tampa serves as a research platform. The publication serves as a useful toolkit and handbook for disseminating design strategies which both design for resiliency, as well as addressing the conditions which are resultant from the failings of the policies around the post-war American city, and their unintended consequences. Designers are trained to be strategic, innovative and tactical in design, as well as having the ability to synthesize multi-scalar systems, and to conceptualize multiple scenarios for different conditions. The brief also encouraged designers to work across a spectrum of design scales, while addressing issues of recovering a landscape. Arguably, the state of Florida and its coastal cities will be some of those the worst impacted in the US by sea level rise and climate change. Whereas human settlement and inhabitation in these locations initially co-existed in a much more symbiotic relationship with their natural landscapes and ecologies, the natural geography of this territory writ-large has been significantly impacted and altered by a manufactured landscape. Design strategies can also build on new modes of design representation, employing mapping as a process of design research.

The competition brief challenged designers to develop schemes addressing the perceived failings of the post war American city, offering solutions for the vacancies from previous failed urban renewal programs, and the ensuing urban decay and flight from the city. Perhaps, most importantly, is the ability of design to act in a milieu not possessing the political will or agency to address the pressing issues of sea-level rise and climate change in coastal cities. The schemes should offer design strategies, which lie in more symbiotic relationships between city and nature, including the Hillsborough River and the Tampa Bay and its estuary. It should be noted, however, that recent trends currently show, in fact, the population to be actually increasing as migration flows of the Baby Boomer retirement generation move to Sunbelt coastal cities seeking warmer climates and cheaper housing prices than those available in the North.

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Site Plan

The Competition

The competition had both national, as well as international participation, bringing forth the best practices for designing for resiliency in coastal cities from all over the world. The invited jurors, prominent theorists as well as practitioners in urban design and landscape urbanism - Margaret Crawford, Juhani Pallasmaa, Chad Oppenheim, Chris Reed and Charles Waldheim - discussed the opportunities for the envisioning, as well as the re-thinking of these urban landscapes.

Juror Charles Waldheim lectured broadly about the agency that the Design Ideas Competition possesses, and the pivotal role that it continues to play in re-defining urban design and theory, citing such seminal examples as the competition for the Parc de la Villette in Paris' nineteenth arrondissement, a former slaughterhouse. Both Bernard Tschumi's project, as well as the OMA scheme for Parc de la Villette, reconsidered the re-programming of the urban condition through the programming of the landscape of a thickened surface, as well as the juxtaposition of programmatic bands with indeterminate and flexible programs. As Waldheim discussed, more recent design competitions, such as that of the Downsview Park competition, an international competition for an urban park design for a former military base in Toronto, Canada, have focused on the integration of ecologies and habitat into design schemes. So did the naturalization of the Mouth of the Don competition, also located in Toronto. Here, the previous infrastructure of the Don River was softened and re-naturalized at its mouth where it empties out into Lake Ontario, thus creating an urban estuary, as well as catalyzing a re-thinking of the co-existing natural habitat with landscape systems.

The Competition Schemes

Many of the competition schemes featured here investigate resiliency as a design strategy. The winning schemes distinguished themselves by addressing the issues of the competition framework, including landscape recovery, in addition to the contemporary urban issues in the post-war Coastal American city such as designing with vacancies. This also included the de-engineering of infrastructures from the failed paradigms of post-war city planning policies, at the same time as layering resiliencies and ecologies into strategic planning and frameworks. The competition entries,

which are featured here, are analyzed and considered for their contribution to new and more flexible frameworks of urban design and planning design for the Post-War Coastal American city through Ecologies. The winning schemes for (Re)stitch Tampa distinguish themselves by challenging existing planning norms through ecological urbanism. Schemes also examine alternative methods of representation and process in urban design. The featured schemes address the city through the three mutually reinforcing lenses, which framed the competition, those of **ecology, infrastructure** and **connectivity**. Landscape infrastructure becomes the underling structure and connective tissue of the urban system. The schemes also critique the single-use zoning, of the Modernist, post-war city.

Winning Schemes

1. **Flowscape- A Vision for a New Urban Estuary** proposes the de-engineering and re-programming of the previous regimes of historic infrastructures, resulting from poor-sighted urban policy decisions. Its underlying concepts propose the re-calibration of the historically oppositional relationships between land and water, in addition to critiquing the previous regimes of decades-old infrastructural projects and their resulting fragmentation of cities. It also proposes the reclaiming, as well as the re-assigning of new and layered programs between the interface of the city and the water.

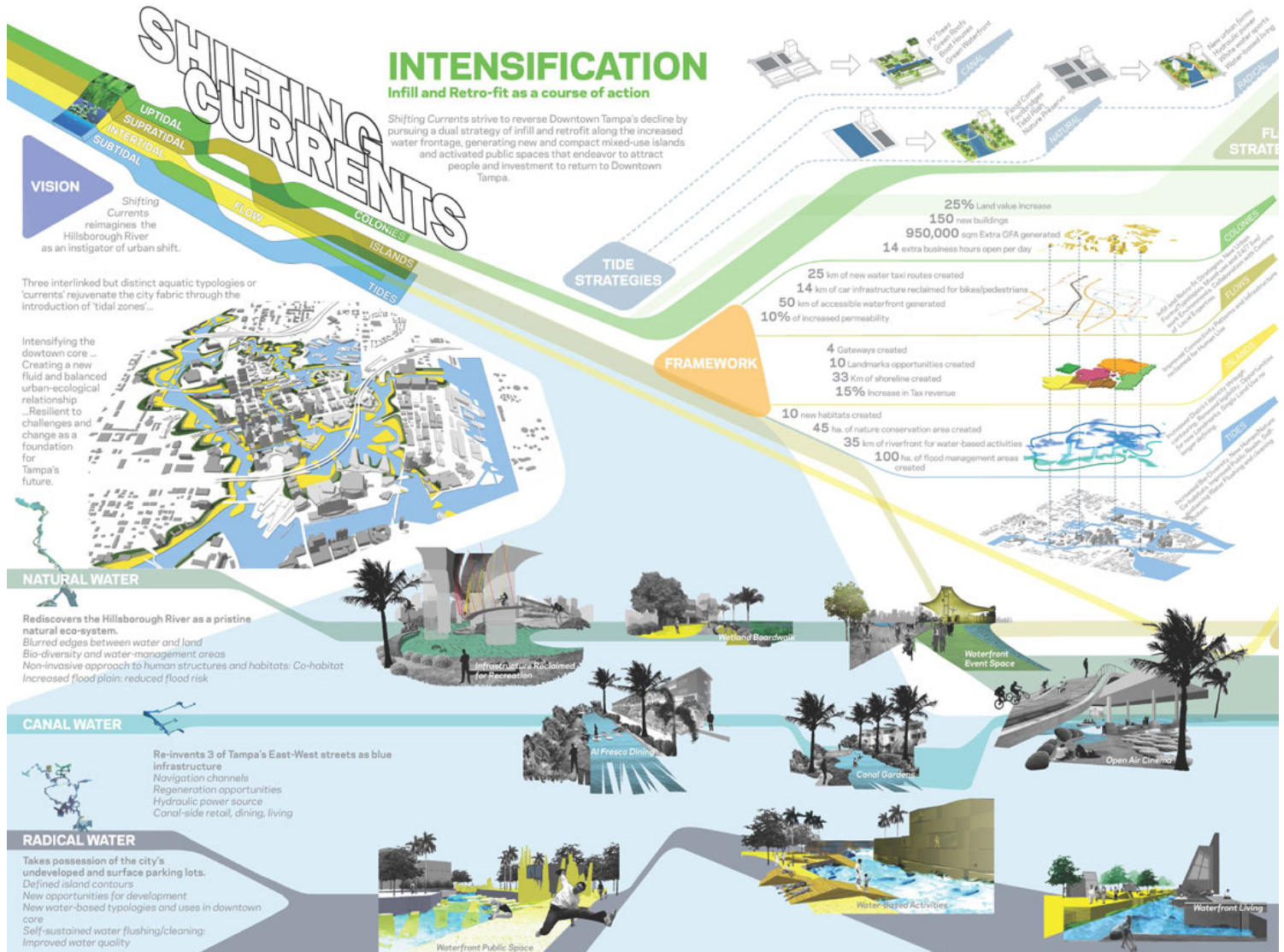
The scheme introduces an urban bayou along the underside of the Crosstown Expressway along its right of way. It affords a large-scale re-stitch in a swapping out of parking on the land for an ecological system. Thus, the bayou is connected to the Tampa Bay natural estuary, the city, and the Shipping Channel. Here, design strategies engage ecological processes in their frameworks. This scheme creates urban marshlands that integrate liquid programs into the city, as well as integrating both urban, and ecological relationships within the city. This scheme re-organizes and aggregates the surface, re-stitching the forgotten layers of the city, creating a layering of programs, as well as new flows and movements. Soft-infrastructure can accommodate flooding.

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Shifting Currents

The strategies used here address the disinvestment of the public realm, as well as integrating flood protection onto the city grid and its systems.

2. **Stitches and Fabrics**, another winning scheme featured here, offers a proposal for not only a singular scheme, yet for a number of possible different scenarios, which are flexible, operating

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within the framework of the post-war coastal American city. Schemes plan for a shifting landscape, through both flexible, as well as indeterminate programs, where design has the agency to address uncertainties. The proposal identifies points for individual stitching to occur. These stitches, when aggregated or combined, have the agency to become activated as part of a larger, scalar proposal. In their overall totality, they have the agency to activate new programs within the city. Strategies include those of infill, as well as the introduction of tidal zones and aquatic typologies within the city grid. The scheme reclaims infrastructure for other uses, introducing layered programs within these substrates.

3. **(re) stitch Resilience** is an elegant design strategy which pays homage to the intrinsic relationship and symbiotic siting of the initial human settlement in the region with respect to its fragile eco-systems and their natural resources. The design's overarching intent is to make the city more resilient to sea level rise, in addition to creating a public water space in the River which registers the changing water levels.

An archipelago design strategy addresses the current vacancies in the urban fabric, which are aggregated through the recovering and reclaiming of the landscape. A floating public square acts both as a public space and as a scaffolding for layered programs and ecological services. It also acts as storage for storm water and purification systems. PARK in lots re-introduce layered programs, which engage both the water, as well as the integration of urban and ecological systems and the transformation of infrastructures. It creates different matrices of green infrastructure, in addition to re-naturalizing the post-war coastal city.

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layered ecological functions. The scheme identifies four layers, which are focused as areas for focal pleats, which create a layering of activities. It underlines the agency of ecology to transform and reshape the city, by the intensification of programs, as well as the re-envisioning of infrastructures and ecologies.

The pleat is an analogy to the stitch, which becomes the area for engagement where the infrastructure is spatially operated on through the pleat intervention, and where the overlaying of ecological infrastructures become new substrates and scaffoldings for multi-layered and multi-programmed surfaces. The spatial operation of the pleat creates both transitions, as well as habitats with local ecologies. The typology of the pleat, as well as the scaffolding and the spatial focusing, is a similar strategy but different to that of another scheme, the Eco Grid. The Eco Grid proposes the superimposition of an ecological grid onto that of the gridded generic American city, which is irrespective of natural geographies and ecologies.

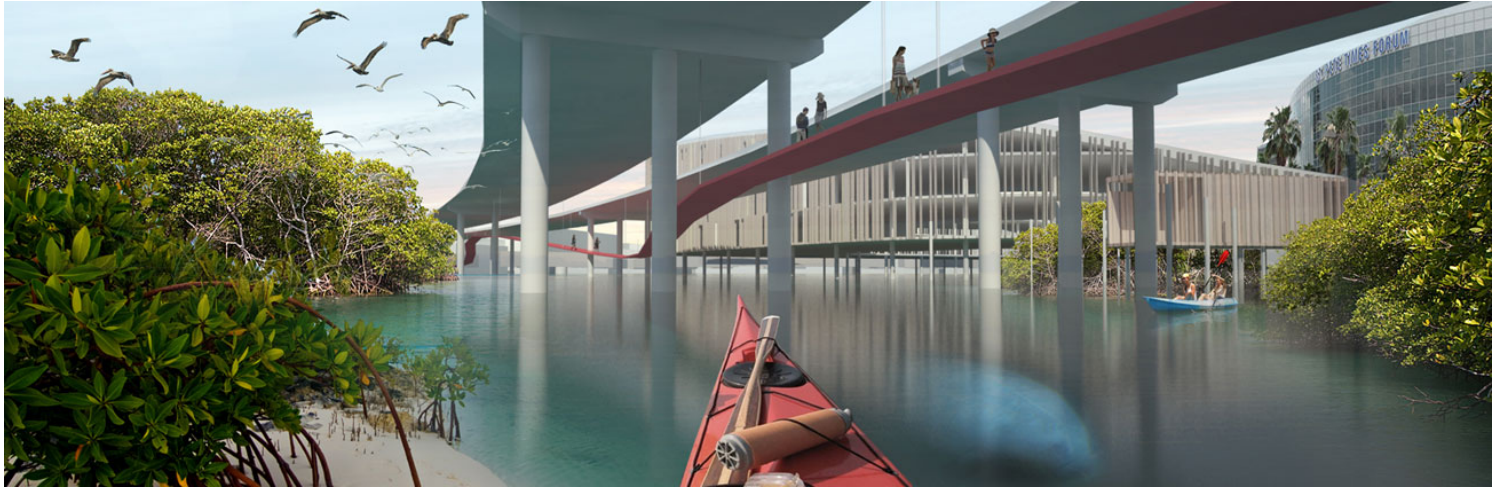
2. Rehydrate Tampa proposes an overlay of ecological systems and infrastructures. These create new armatures for the city, in addition to investigating and reconstructing the current land-water edge condition, proposing the transformation of the hard infrastructures into performative soft infrastructures. This strategy re-choreographs the ebbs and the flows of the city, in order to repair and recover the landscape, while addressing the current nitrogen loading and algae blooms that are impacting it. It focuses on performative water systems, proposing a framework of "plumbing" strategies. These are integrated into the neighborhood building typologies, as well as overlaying and blurring the grid, thus creating new spatial conditions for the post-war coastal city. New micro-industries are created, which serve to replace the obsolete and abandoned former post-industrial industries. These include street interventions, as well as the integration of flooding design strategies. The scheme, like many others, challenge the prevailing urban renewal decisions still omni-present within the city, with its heavy-handed infrastructure and its unintended consequences including the fragmentation and the disconnection of the urban fabric to the River.

3. Re-stitch Tampa. The Sub-urban Mix is one of the few schemes that addresses the reconnection of the outlying suburbs - where, in fact, 80% of Tampa's population currently live - back to the city. The scheme activates the middle landscape which lies in between - the former trolley suburbs and vacant, interstitial lands. It insightfully critiques the post-war city's characteristic single-use zoning. The scheme introduces a larger, regional scale back into the city, connecting the post-war suburbs through meaningful ecological networks, as opposed to solely by highway infrastructure and vehicular transportation. It also overlays the possibilities of alternative methods of transportation

onto them. The scheme identifies the River as the geographic center and the new spine for the city, while re-introducing ecologies and new programs as well as new systems along the river, making it culturally meaningful. It densifies the aggregated vacancies on the West side of the Hillsborough River within the city, opposite the northern anchor of the Riverwalk. These areas were subject to the urban renewal clearance projects in Tampa during the 1960ies and never fully rebuilt.

4. **Shifting Currents** designs with water urbanisms, with the premise that they have the potential to be transformative for the city. Similar to **(re) stitch Resilience**, this scheme engages the tactic of an island and archipelago design strategy. This creates an urban shift and is speculative with the introduction of tidal zones that which act as catalysts for the intensification of a more fluid and ecological relationship between urban functions. These create resiliency and a foundation for projected future growth and development. It introduces natural water, blurring the edges and boundaries with a layering of biodiversity. It designs around the framework of flooding changes, proposing the flooding of underdeveloped and underutilized parking lots for wetland restoration. While such schemes might suggest erasure, it is projected that they actually serve to increase land-value, while at the same time as creating water-based transportation and layered land-water uses and programs throughout the city.

5. **Symbiosis Ri-verizing Tampa** as with other schemes, is also one of inversion, which seeks to strengthen the relationship between the city and the River, as opposed to polarizing the relationship between the two, a fundamental tenet of the competition. As in many of the schemes, ecology acts as a placeholder for both a sustainable system of storm water management, which can integrate sea level rise strategies, at the same time as providing a placeholder for recreation and programming. This scheme was appreciated by local jurors for its sensitivity to local Tampa issues in its programming.



Additional Selected Proposals

1. **Streets. Branches of the River** proposal literally stretches water tributaries, from the Hillsborough River into the city, replacing streets, thus becoming the conceptual branches or tributaries of the river overlaid onto the city. The scheme locates strategic points within the land-water interface of the city, at the same time as addressing an overlay strategy of constructed wetlands in the vacancies. It also serves as an overlay of the urban watershed. It integrates best practices in storm water management, with its constructing of hydrological systems, and the overlay of these onto the city grid with green and blue corridors that function as new street systems. This has the effect of introducing new kinds of ebbs flows throughout the city, while strengthening the connection to its waterfront.



2. **Tampa (Eco) Grid** overarching spatial operation is one of an eco-grid overlaid onto the generic postwar city grid, which is predominantly irrespective of the terrain's natural topography and geography. The scheme proposes the transformation of the city from one of urban fragmentation and disconnection to new urban public spaces. The River is perceived as a new geographic connector for disconnected programs, activities and districts. Programs create infrastructures with local ecologies, and the highway infrastructure becomes a new substrate and scaffolding for local ecologies, as well as a new platform infrastructure for programs and new ways of experiencing the city.

3. **Spur On / Spur Off Ecology / Infrastructure / Connectivity + Economy** critiques the function or lack of function of the off-ramp infrastructure of the I275 into downtown Tampa, which currently connects to Ashley Street from the north. It explores the possibilities nascent in the in-between spaces that it is currently occupying. In Tampa's case, these were several vibrant neighborhoods, which were "taken" during urban renewal. The infrastructure, in a sense, creates the boundaries and the gaps in-between the neighborhood fabric. Unlike the other schemes featured, it proposes a large "big urban project" which both provokes as well as challenges the competition framework. It also combines ecological remediation, while layering different urban events within the Big Urban Project of the stadium that it proposes.



4. **The Spine** as with many of the schemes, and in keeping with the overarching framework of the design competition, advocates for a more symbiotic relationship between the city and the river through softening the currently oppositional relationship identified between the two in Tampa. The engagement of ecology as active and dynamic, distinguishes itself in this scheme from not simply acting as a placeholder. This scheme comprises a clever, overarching spatial solution where remediation plays an active role. This remediation aspect of the project drives the scheme by making a significant attempt to bring back the once robust ecologies of the river, and, at the same time, creating new and layered programs which choreograph the circulation and experiential qualities of the city vis-à-vis its re-found ecologies.

5. **Reclaim Tampa** offers new typologies, design guidelines as well as best practices for stormwater management, overlaid with their potential to become new civic infrastructure, layered with place making. The scheme engages the concept of phasing over time, as well as urban incremental design, with its proposal to decommission the street system, as well as other city systems and the possible return of them to nature. Ecology thus becomes a productive landscape for the city. Aquaculture, as an economy based on local ecologies, is introduced. The scheme is also multi-scalar, reconnecting the landscape, as well as both reclaiming and creating microclimates using native plants. The premise is that these function not just as aesthetic landscapes, yet also as systems, with the agency to become integrated into functioning storm-water management infrastructure.



Conclusions

(Re) Stitch Tampa, as a research platform, fundamentally questions the prevailing frameworks and methods of traditional urban design practices. It also challenges traditional city planning strategies, which design cities through a weightier approach of buildings, which also employ single-use zoning. The schemes featured here and resulting from the competition, reintroduce the River as the new spine and lifeline of the city, while creating new and layered programs along it. This resonates with design strategies of flexibility and open-endedness for programming. It also integrates performative design aspects through a re-working of the river's infrastructure. It begins with a new spine for the city, as well as the re-introduction of new ecologies which re-connect the city to the water.

The projects emerging from the (Re) Stitch Tampa project have the potential to have a life beyond the competition itself. They offer a tool-kit of possible design strategies for architects, planners and city planning agencies, as well as the constituents, stakeholders and developers, vis-à-vis public place-making in the post-war coastal American city. This publication should be used as both a toolkit, as well as a handbook which affords an alternative insight for both designing, as well as recovering cities and their landscapes. These include tactical strategies, designing for resiliency, flexibilities, which engage multiple readings and possibilities.

As initiated by the competition brief, connective urban landscapes and ecological infrastructure have the agency to function as the underlying framework. The featured schemes here robustly address the competition charge, designing *frameworks with ecologies*, as opposed to a singular proposal. Within this framework, these strategies can act as catalysts for the economic redevelopment of the city, in addition to calibrating the reconnection of the city to its nature, while

ameliorating its current fragmentation.

Other notable coastal cities in Florida, such as Port Charlotte, south of Tampa, have adopted more progressive design strategies for their land-water edges, which might also serve as useful precedents. After Hurricane Charley in 2004 severely impacted Port Charlotte, the city engaged a strategy of acquiring land through rolling coastal easements, land banking and compensating those property owners with the properties impacted. The vacated land became part of a public trust for the city of parklands and areas for coastal replenishment, and building for resiliency. As a strategy, the design is more flexible and that allows the city to replenish their valuable wetlands, which can mitigate storm surge.

In a milieu where there does not exist the robust political will to address these increasingly critical issues facing Florida's coastal cities, as well as other coastal cities within North America and the world, it is the charge of designers, trained in stewardship, who must be tactical in their design gestures and strategies, with an overarching agenda for the greater public realm.

Epilogue-DIY (Do it Yourself) (re) stitch Tampa

There were a number of significant public space projects which were actually implemented shortly after the (re) stitch Tampa awards ceremony on April 12, 2012. The city received a significant TIGER (Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery) federal grant, which in part was used to finish the remaining segment of the Tampa Riverwalk, which has recently just opened. Additionally, a green pedestrian right of way is being implemented along the right of way under the Crosstown Expressway. The abandoned Waterworks Park industrial building on the northern anchor parcel of the Riverwalk was adaptively re-used as a restaurant, and the natural spring there as well as a city park. Ulele Spring was recovered and connected to the River, in addition to undergoing a significant shore-softening strategy and habitat restoration. Its warmer water temperatures serve as a destination for the manatee, which swim up the Hillsborough River from the Tampa Bay Estuary into the downtown core.

Perhaps most inspiring is The Tampa Green Artery project, a grassroots, bottom-up organization with a mission to complete a 22-mile planned, perimeter trail throughout Tampa. Through the aggregation of vacancies and other opportunities, this dedicated group continues to connect the neighborhoods of Tampa and various public spaces with off-water and close to water trails.

