

Introducing the 2010  
Next American Vanguard

# BETTER CITIES? THEY'RE ON IT.

**This past May, Next American City, with generous support from the William Penn Foundation, hosted the second annual Next American Vanguard conference, bringing 32 of America's most accomplished young urban leaders to Philadelphia.** The participants, all under 35 and selected following a competitive application process, represent federal and local governments, arts organizations, community development corporations and advocacy groups. They hail from 25 cities including Allentown, Austin, Boston, Chicago, Fargo, and St. Louis.

During the two-day conference the members of the 2010 Vanguard presented their work, learned from experts and each other, toured Philadelphia and most importantly, identified strategies to leverage the group's collective experience to effect positive change. In small sessions with seasoned experts, they studied advanced professional skills such as entrepreneurship, using new media tools in business development and nonprofit management. Later, they broke into informal groups to teach one another about their own areas of expertise. Topics included local climate-change preparedness, African-American-led gentrification and the needs of post-industrial communities.

As one attendee put it, the advantage of this gathering is that this extraordinary group understands how everything is connected in cities — how the sectors of education and health care and climate advocacy and governance and business and physical development must all work together to make livable places. This special section of Issue 29 introduces the members of the 2010 Vanguard, highlighting several individuals who, thanks to their efforts to lead their class throughout 2010, were elected members of the Class Council. Visit [americancity.org](http://americancity.org) for weekly interviews with Vanguard members, and dozens of articles about the 2009 and 2010 class members' work. As we prepare for the third conference, to be held in the late spring of 2011, we invite urban thinkers and doers of all ages and backgrounds to seek inspiration from these remarkable young citizens who are truly walking the walk.

**Opposite page:**  
Phil Kidd of  
Youngstown, Ohio,  
leads a discussion in  
front of the Painted  
Bride Art Center.



## THE 2010 NEXT AMERICAN VANGUARD

Emma Berndt  
*Chicago, IL*

Sean Brown  
*Camden, NJ*

Sam Butler  
*Detroit, MI*

Megan Canning  
*New York, NY*

Marvin Chaney  
*Austin, TX*

Amy Cheung  
*Boston, MA*

Andrew Dahl  
*Minneapolis, MN*

Kevin Donoghue  
*Portland, ME*

Katie Drennan  
*Washington, DC*

Kristi Wamstad-Evans  
*Omaha, NE*

Jessica Garz  
*New Orleans, LA*

Gary Gaston  
*Nashville, TN*

Bethany Henderson  
*Los Angeles, CA*

William Herbig  
*Washington, DC*

Phil Kidd  
*Youngstown, OH*

Laura Kushnick  
*Cleveland, OH*

Nikki Lowy  
*San Francisco, CA*

Rory Neuner  
*Lansing, MI*

Nebahat Noyan  
*Portland, OR*

Karen Beck Pooley  
*Allentown, PA*

David Rand  
*Chicago, IL*

Taryn Roch  
*Chicago, IL*

Karis Thompson  
*Fargo, ND*

Zoe Towns  
*New York, NY*

Bethany Wilcoxon  
*Des Moines, IA*

James Wright  
*Philadelphia, PA*


**Michael Allen**

Founder, Preservation  
Research Office; Blogger,  
Ecology of Absence  
*St. Louis, Missouri*

Photo by Meredith Turk

## Looking to the Past to Plan for the Future

You might not expect the field of architectural history to be a path to deep involvement in neighborhood redevelopment, public policy, education reform, tourism, marketing, economic development law or civic-minded social-media networking. I didn't either. Yet I am involved in all of these areas and others, working as an architectural historian in St. Louis. You are working with architectural history, too, if you are doing any kind of development or policy work in an older American city.

I started along my career path six years ago when I began work as a research assistant at the St. Louis Building Arts Foundation. One of my first tasks was ironing hundreds of rescued historic drawings from a custom lighting manufacturer. How did that have anything to do with urban affairs? Each drawing connected to a specific building, and many of them still stood. Redevelopment involving federal and state historic tax credits often involves having to learn details as specific as what missing lighting fixtures originally looked like. My work suddenly was at the center, not the edge, of reshaping my city.

Around this time, I also created a blog about the architectural history of St. Louis called Ecology of Absence; I still write it today. The blog allowed me to further connect architectural history to efforts to renew the city by telling

the stories of how buildings, neighborhoods and places got to be the way they are — and how they might be transformed. I have presented stories of sad losses, wonderful opportunities and — most of all — successes that preserve our historic buildings and move our city forward.

From 2005 through 2009 I worked at our regional historic preservation advocacy organization, Landmarks Association of St. Louis. I rose to the position of assistant director by 2007, and was involved in both programming and administration. Landmarks' wide range of activities connected me to elected officials, developers, architects, historians and concerned people across the region.

In August of last year I founded the Preservation Research Office (PRO), an evolving, project-based organization that provides technical assistance to neighborhood organizations, building owners and governments. Services include landmark and historic district designation, tax credit application preparation, public history program design and even building stabilization fund development. I am happy that we are growing a culture of awareness, especially in parts of north St. Louis that preservationists have long ignored. I am equally happy that in one year PRO has grown from just me to three employees; job creation is crucial to St. Louis' future.

Photo by Stephanie Betesh



**Ana Teresa Dahan**  
Education reform activist  
Los Angeles, California

## A Voice for Struggling Students

When I was a senior there, the 9-acre Belmont High School campus was home to 5,400 students, most from neglected neighborhoods just west of downtown Los Angeles. I never realized how crowded it was until an ABC News reporter stopped me between periods to ask me for my reaction to a vote to halt the completion of the Belmont Learning Center.

My class, which started as 1,042 freshmen, was supposed to be the first to graduate from the Learning Center, a state-of-the-art facility meant to relieve the overcrowding at Belmont High School. When I heard construction was stalled, I immediately organized a walkout to the Board of Education. This was the first of many battles I have fought for equity in public education — that time, in the honor of 482 classmates who never made it across the graduation stage in June 2000 because they got lost in a broken educational system that couldn't even provide facilities the community had waited for and deserved, let alone an effective academic program.

The demonstrations were one of the key factors leading to the largest public school facilities program in the nation. Since 2000 the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) has built 80 new schools and returned 139 schools to a traditional school calendar.

After finishing college, I jumped at the

opportunity to join the emerging charter school movement because I knew that solely creating new public school facilities was not enough if high-quality teaching was not occurring in each classroom. I worked for the California Charter Schools Association and managed a multimillion-dollar grant program that funded the startup of independent charter schools. As a result, California now leads the nation with more than 900 charter schools.

Feeling that change was not occurring fast enough, I decided to run for the LAUSD School Board on a reform platform soon after I turned 23. I received endorsements from the *Los Angeles Times*, *LA Weekly* and former Mayor Richard Riordan. While I did not win the election, I was able to influence the dialogue and agendas of the other candidates.

It's been 10 years since I graduated from Belmont High School, and while I can't say education is perfect in Los Angeles, there is positive momentum as we embark on several innovative education reforms. I am now exploring the possibility of starting a new company to support charter school operations and demonstrate a new model to maximize the quality and efficiency of school district operations. Until no child is truly left behind, my work continues for the next 10 years — or however long it takes.


**Abby Hall**

Policy analyst, Environmental Protection Agency Smart Growth Program  
Washington, DC.

Photo by Clark Wilson

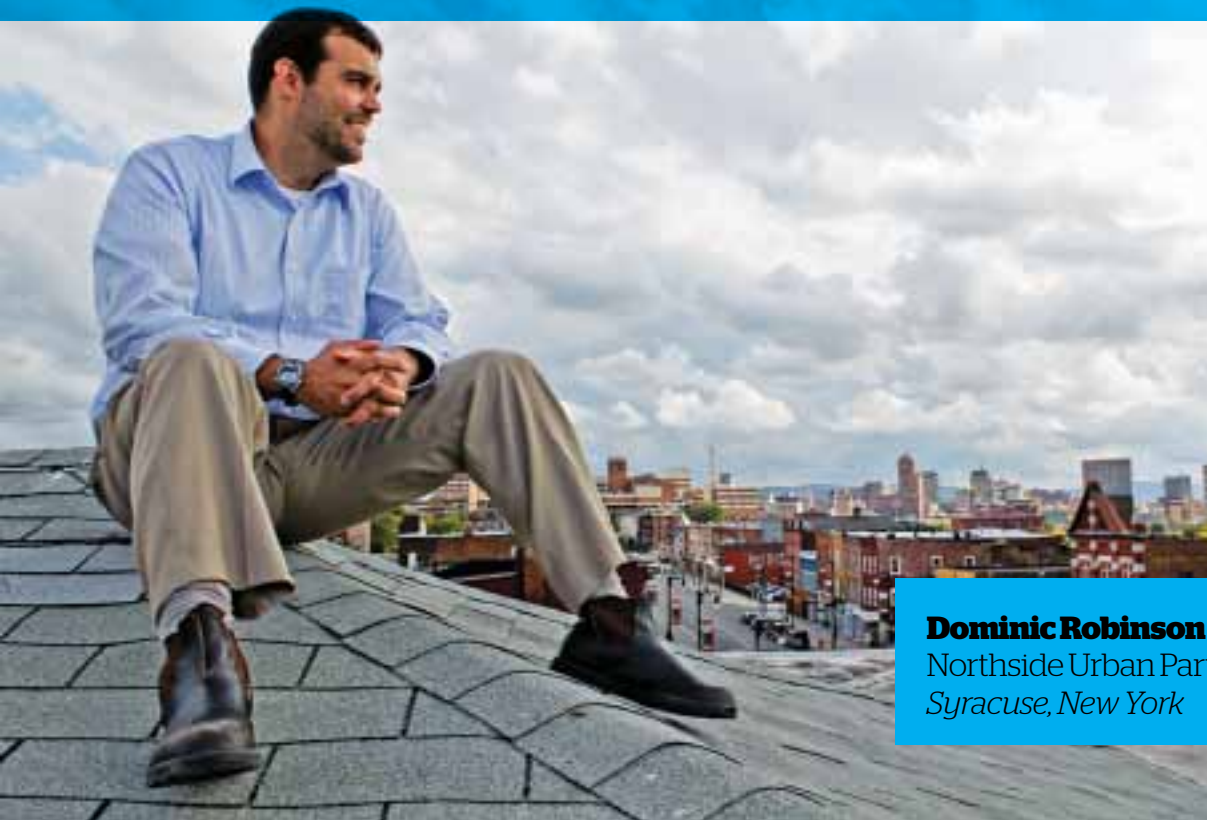
## Greening America, One Town At a Time

When I started working at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) three years ago, I felt I'd landed my dream job. I was hired to research local stormwater-management practices, which was sexier than it sounds — I got to travel the country from Philadelphia to Santa Monica, Calif., talking to innovative policymakers who were literally greening their cities with trees, new parks and green roofs. I always landed back in Washington, D.C., to reflect on the impact of national policy and the role of the federal government in supporting better community investments. I was pleasantly surprised to see how such a big federal agency was working with states, counties, towns, cities and even nonprofits and private-sector partners to help them meet clean water and clean air requirements in ways that would produce other local benefits.

Today I work for the EPA's Office of Sustainable Communities during a very exciting time for cities, trying to make smarter investments that simultaneously improve affordable housing, increase transportation options and protect the environment. Through the new Partnership for Sustainable Communities, the EPA, the Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Department of Transportation are working together — in some ways for the very first time — to align our funding and programs to make it easier for communities to get the support they

need and deserve from the federal government.

I don't think I'd like my job nearly as much if I didn't get to leave D.C. and work on the ground with rural towns and big cities nationwide. What's nice about all these efforts is that we go beyond policy-wonk talk — we're actually working with and for communities through direct-assistance programs. I run two of them: One is the Smart Growth Implementation Assistance program, which received 158 requests for assistance in 2010 with issues ranging from shrinking cities to historical preservation. The other is Greening America's Capitals, through which the EPA will organize teams of landscape architects and urban planners to help Little Rock, Ark.; Hartford, Conn.; Jefferson City, Mo.; Charleston, W. Va.; and Boston create models that other cities can look to in creating their own sustainable designs. We're working on other types of assistance that will let us reach more communities each year that are asking for this kind of help. I'm thankful, at this early stage in my career, for the chance to see so many great American cities and towns and to learn more about how our built and natural landscapes can grow, shrink and change together over time to become beautiful and sustainable places.


**Dominic Robinson**

Northside Urban Partnership  
Syracuse, New York

Photo by Clare Rauch

## Finding New Frontiers in Urban Development

As a teenager I never could have imagined living in Syracuse, N.Y. After growing up in the popular metro areas of Los Angeles, New York and Denver, I figured I wouldn't move anywhere that didn't have similarly glamorous credentials. Fate, however, brought me to St. Louis for college, where I encountered a class of young citizens bucking the trend of brain drain and ignoring the lure of bigger cities. These were folks who were developing innovative community programs, converting vacant spaces into art galleries and generally bootstrapping the reinvention of St. Louis.

Seeing them in action, I found my calling. I wanted to blaze a trail in the new frontier of urban development, and I recognized that America's rustbelt was the place to try.

So when a Franciscan friar invited me to start my own revitalization program on Syracuse's Northside four years ago, I jumped at the chance. The Northside has long been Syracuse's point of entry for immigrants and refugees, originally from Europe and now from across the globe. It's a neighborhood rife with challenges, but it is also full of promise, thanks to its proud history, good urban fabric and amazing diversity.

In January 2007 we started the Northside Collaboratory and engaged in what we called "project-based community organizing," assembling diverse stakeholders, from resi-

dents to institutional leaders, to develop common goals and facilitate projects that produced tangible results, ranging from staging cultural festivals to developing employment programs. Despite our meager budget, this approach yielded success, which we have built on ever since.

Today we're called the Northside Urban Partnership, and we're sponsored by our neighborhood anchor, St. Joseph's Hospital; our region's business leadership organization, the CenterState Corporation for Economic Opportunity (CEO); and Catholic Charities. We believe that good neighborhood revitalization requires an integrated approach, involving people, place and business. We create workforce programs, develop neighborhood businesses, install public art and gardens, fund infrastructure improvements and foster cultural identity. As a result of this work, I now also tackle larger rustbelt urban policy issues within CenterState CEO.

Sometimes when I talk about my work in Syracuse, I feel like I'm showing off a scar. Urban revitalization doesn't come easily in a place associated with record snowfalls and industrial decline. But I'm happy to be among a class of pioneers working to revise Syracuse's script. It seems the city's troubled past only makes its future more malleable, and the challenges we face make our success more rewarding. This makes me proud to call Syracuse home.

**Emily Sadigh**

Sustainability Project  
Manager, Alameda County  
Oakland, California



## Keeping Government Fresh

I see my hometown in California in a different light after working to reduce its ecological footprint. After graduating from Harvard College, I worked for several years at Harvard's Green Campus Initiative, 3,000 miles away from the San Francisco East Bay, where I grew up. When I moved back, I joined the Sustainability Program at Alameda County, where I develop partnerships and strategies to reduce the environmental footprint of the county's operations and services and encourage citizens and businesses to do the same. The community centers and libraries I once visited are now potential sites for solar panel installations or community gardens.

Growing up in the Bay Area, I regularly relied upon county services without being aware that it was a county providing them. In most states, counties run elections, collect property taxes and administer social services. They also perform important behind-the-scenes functions, from inspecting restaurants to overseeing bridge operations and prosecuting elder abuse. The government of Alameda County relies on 9,000 employees working in millions of square feet of buildings. This means that not only the direct services but also how they are provided — say, the extent to which we use clean energy to power the buildings where we administer foster care programs — affect the health and well-being of the local community.

While providing services is crucial, the model of government as being little more than a vending machine — taxes in, services out — overlooks local governments' ability to catalyze citizen participation in improving our cities. The county's role in facilitating transformational projects, such as leading a Bay Area electric vehicle corridor partnership or promoting home energy efficiency retrofits statewide, is a first step in helping to create cities where residents can be engaged citizens in healthy, walkable neighborhoods.

At the moment, I'm delighted to be leading the county's involvement in a program that brings together my passion for public service careers and citizen involvement in climate action: the Bay Area Climate Corps. This AmeriCorps pilot program brings together 30 AmeriCorps members who will each provide a year of service to local governments in the Bay Area. In 2010-'11, Alameda County is hosting six members who are helping to implement our Climate Action Plan for Government Services and Operations and to ensure that eligible community members' homes receive federally subsidized energy efficiency upgrades. Recent graduates can seek out opportunities such as this to explore climate action or local government work. It's rewarding to play a role in making a place you love an even better place to live and then exchange ideas with other communities around the world.

# Linking College and Community

Photo by Marla Blunt Carter

I am a city planner. So far, I have spent my career exploring the question of how anchor institutions such as universities can use their resources to benefit themselves as well as surrounding neighborhoods, cities and regions. While a graduate student in the Department of Urban Studies and Planning at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology from 2006 to '08, I worked with professors Lorlene Hoyt, Xavier de Souza Briggs and Marcia Marker Feld to structure my theoretical and practical training around participation in MIT@Lawrence, a university-community partnership between MIT and the city of Lawrence, Mass. I engaged in MIT@Lawrence via every avenue available: through coursework with the city planning department, as a graduate assistant working with educators in public schools and community organizations, and as a researcher examining the role of urban planning-based engaged scholarship in university-community partnerships. My role in this partnership was that of a connector, networking across the university and Lawrence to bring together people, and, in turn, needs, ideas and resources. Many of the relationships I helped initiate continue to flourish and facilitate the growth of this innovative partnership.

My desire to pursue a planning career in the field of university-community partnerships led me to the Netter Center for Community Partnerships at the University of Pennsylvania. At Penn I work at the intersection of university, community and public schools. As the center's academically based community service coordinator, I help Penn cultivate and channel its human capital — namely faculty, students and staff — in ways that promote its core educational mission and benefit West Philadelphia public schools and neighborhoods. With creative organizational thinking and a strong resolve to effect lasting change, universities can establish innovative, knowledge-producing partnerships. Among other things, these partnerships can play an instrumental role in transforming schools, communities and universities themselves.

I have seen firsthand the critical role that anchor institutions such as universities can play in supporting the forward, positive movement of neighborhoods, cities and regions. I look forward to contributing to the planning profession's ever-evolving understanding of its role in supporting universities in setting and consistently acting on their agendas in order to achieve this movement. ✕



## **Anne Schwieger**

Academically Based  
Community Service  
Coordinator, Netter Center for  
Community Partnerships, the  
University of Pennsylvania  
*Philadelphia, Pennsylvania*

### **NEXT AMERICAN VANGUARD**

is a leadership program and conference that unites urban leaders under age 35 to develop professional skills and networks, teach one another and develop solutions to urban problems. The 2011 conference will be held in the late spring. Those interested in attending must complete an application available in January 2011, at [americancity.org/vanguard](http://americancity.org/vanguard).