

'Breath of fresh air': Residents impressed by design ideas, engagement for Bailey Green Initiative

Ben Tsujimoto

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UB graduate students engage with members of the Bailey Green community in a skills park setup on Saturday.
Ben Tsujimoto/Buffalo News

What Ray and Sandra Moss saw Saturday looked nothing like a group of vacant lot. The couple, introduced as the unofficial mayors of the Bailey Green neighborhood, watched a green space bustling with activity – seed planting demonstrations, healthy cooking demos and youths learning to use tools – about halfway down Zenner Street, just north of Genesee.

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Graduate students from the UB School of Architecture and Planning shared proposals – developed using insight from Bailey Green residents – at an event Saturday on Zenner Street. Pictured is a rendering of the neighborhood.

Courtesy UB School of Architecture and Planning

The 37-year residents of the Bailey Green neighborhood stood at the future site of Bailey Commons, an ongoing neighborhood development project that includes a graduate design studio from the University at Buffalo School of Architecture and Planning.

Promises of development in their neighborhood have largely rung hollow, the Mosses said, with resident turnover and absentee landlords **accompanying the violence** by which the area east of Genesee and Moselle streets has been plagued. But they're hopeful the UB design studio's efforts – and eagerness and creativity in engaging the surrounding community – could be one step

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forward for the neighborhood.



Ray Moss, left, and Sandra Moss have lived in Bailey Green for 37 years
Ben Tsujimoto/Buffalo News

Conrad Kickert and Joy Kuebler, co-teachers for a design studio called Architecture 606, displayed their students' 13 sketched proposals for public viewing at Bailey Commons, as about 50 people – a mix of residents, graduate students and community organizers – ate hot dogs, tossed a football and mingled on the lawn.

The proposals for the eight empty lots were drawn from insight gained at

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three monthly meetings the studio had with neighborhood residents: a group walk in February, a collage creation in March and an outdoor building night with cardboard boxes and pool noodles in April. It's part of Kuebler's philosophy of play, which she calls "humans' first language" and "the easiest way we learn and communicate."

"Continuing playing and continuing relationships have been the strongest part of this project," Kuebler said.



Joy Kuebler, right, is a co-teacher at UB whose philosophy of play has been pivotal in the Bailey Commons project. Ben Tsujimoto/Buffalo News

"This is not a UB design, it's a resident design," Kickert said of Saturday's display. "We're showing off today what we think could be the future."

Kickert believes Bailey Commons can be a central hub of the Bailey Green

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neighborhood – it's a wide green space that bisects Zenner and Kilhoffer streets, essentially connecting two long, separate blocks into more of a unified community. A playground, pavilion, community garden, basketball court, skills park, an office for Buffalo Peacemakers and walkways were among the features in the student proposals.

UB's efforts are in conjunction with **the Bailey Green Initiative**, started in 2008 by John Somers, the CEO of Harmac Medical Products, an international contract manufacturer of single-use medical devices. Instead of moving his company headquarters off Bailey Avenue, Somers chose to try to revitalize an area in which about a quarter of his Buffalo-based employees live.

His friendship with Robert Shibley, dean of UB's School of Architecture and Planning, has kept the university involved in the endeavor since 2014, with UB **professor Hiroaki Hata** developing the master plan for the transformation of a neighborhood comprising four streets and about 33 acres. Between 30 and 40 UB graduate students have been involved so far.

"We're trying to re-stitch the neighborhood back together," Somers said Saturday. He cited a few of the success stories at Bailey Green in the last eight years: the **Groundwork Market Garden**, a 2.5-acre urban farm that supplies restaurants and offers a community-supported agriculture association that connects consumers and farmers, as well as construction of 15 of the 21 houses that Habitat for Humanity committed to building or restoring.



Conrad Kickert, a co-teacher for the UB design studio, said Bailey Commons isn't a park space, but it's a green space with ample potential.

Ben Tsujimoto/Buffalo News

Several projects remain in the works, Somers said. Westminster Economic Development Initiative has committed to opening a microfinance office on Bailey Avenue, and Urban Fruits & Veggies intends to start a hydroponic garden in the neighborhood. Algonquin Sports for Kids and Heart of the City Neighborhoods were originally involved in the project but backed out, **The News reported previously**. Somers said that about 30 organizations remain involved with the Bailey Green Initiative, counting consultants, financiers and others.

The Mosses are grateful their voices – and those of other residents – are being

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taken seriously.

"Now I understand their vision is my vision," Ray Moss said of UB's and Harmac's efforts. "If I live long enough to see that, I'll be grateful."

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