

# A new cycle of street life in Boston

Shauna Gillies-Smith ASLA, LEED AP, principal of Ground Inc., and Mark Pasnik RA, LEED AP, principal of over,under, gave a recent talk co-hosted by the BSA and LivableStreets Alliance. We caught up with them afterwards.

## What role should design play in creating livable communities?

*Shauna:* A major premise of our talk was that design matters. We fundamentally believe that the quality of city life is affected by design decisions. We tend to think of nice cities as being old, historic places that were designed on a different scale for a different set of constraints. In a contemporary city, we can still design that experience in, but we have to do it with a different set of parameters and goals.

*Mark:* Good design is about making smart decisions about a place and its qualities. It's not just window-dressing. Thinking about issues as they relate to transportation, community building, public space—all these things are crucial to the success of a street.

*Shauna:* During a Build Boston panel on landscape urbanism, Tim Love AIA brought up the ecological street and the urban street. When you add on the concept of a livable street, it becomes an exciting possibility where the street can be designed for use by a full range of transportation modes and be an enjoyable experience while working in an ecological way, like treating the stormwater.

## How do we carry forward the momentum from Boston's anticipated bike-share program?

*Mark:* At the BSA/LivableStreets event, we were very pleased to see an enthusiastic army of people who are interested in design and improving the city even though they are not designers themselves—actually, because they're not.

*Shauna:* The logical place to start with the bike-share is the stations' design. If we design these bike stations with the same sort of interest and enthusiasm that was in that room, we can catalyze even more energy about the program.

*Mark:* Yes, the city could promote that enthusiasm further by running a design competition for the stations, signage or another component of the program's implementation. This would be a fresh way to implement a bike-share program in Boston, which doesn't have the kind of infrastructure that Paris, Barcelona and other cities have.

*Shauna:* Visibility and identity are important. Having some recognizable theme or identity would make people who weren't cyclists more aware of the program as a part of our everyday city. You wouldn't have drivers leaning out their windows saying, "Get on the bike path!"

*Mark:* My partner and I went to Paris last year. The Vélip' system changed the way we saw moving through the city. You get your bike, you ride it, you leave



"Things don't have to look the way they always have been. I designed a big rock as a traffic-calming measure. You can combine function and interest together," says Shauna Gillies-Smith ASLA, LEED AP.



"At Wentworth Institute of Technology, we're encouraging architecture students to consider the relationships between design and alternative transportation, making livable streets a part of their mindset," says Mark Pasnik RA, LEED AP. A design for a LEED facility for bicycle storage, changing rooms and showers by Wentworth student James Jarzyniecki is pictured above.

it behind and then you walk somewhere else and get another bike. In Boston, we're so used to locking up our bikes, being concerned about them and having to come back to the same place. Under the bike-share model, the experience is fluid between biking, walking and public transportation, all without ever having to return back to something you own.

*Shauna:* My last trip to Paris was a very nodal experience. We'd

absorb the place we were in, then get on the subway and go underground to the next node. Metro Boston has similarly developed around T stops. For me, it is exciting to have another means of shared transportation that is about a continual experience of the city.

*Read Mark and Shauna's thoughts on changes in the design curriculum and process, Boston spaces they'd redesign and more in the "Featured Article" section of [architects.org/chapterletter](http://architects.org/chapterletter).*