

## Notes from the Roanoke Change Academy's Third Discussion of *Designing Creative Communities*—May 2, 2022



**Thought Homework Discussion:** Doug and Marissa asked the group a question based on the thought assignment posted at the second session: Did you speak with anyone you wouldn't typically talk to? How did it go?

- One participant went out of her way to go to an event that was outside her comfort zone. The event was fascinating, and she ended up speaking with the organizers
- Other participants went to local places and events as well, including a Bakhti yoga class in Blacksburg, an event at 5 Points Music Sanctuary, and the Y

### **Additional Discussion:**

- Doug Jackson mentioned that the city has \$3,000 grants for artists to advance justice, wellness, and inclusion
- A participant asked if there were ways for our homeless community members to have dignified work. The group discussed hiring housing-unstable people to help with the creation of art. One participant listed examples of communities that give dignity to vulnerable people by giving them land (Dignity Village in Portland, OR), helping them run businesses (Delancey Street in San Francisco), and hiring them to make art (Glade Spring)

**Discussion Questions:** Doug and Marissa asked the group a few questions inspired by the third portion of the book. Individual and group responses to these questions often shared similar themes.

- 1) What aspects of Roanoke are most appealing to you? (On page 184, Marshall proposes three categories: social offerings, openness, and aesthetics.)
  - Doug began by polling the group on their opinion of Roanoke's social offerings, openness, and aesthetics. Each was rated on a 1-5 scale, with 5 being the highest. Participants then discussed their rationales for their rankings.
  - Social Offerings: The average score was approximately 3.5 out of 5
    - There's a lot going on in Roanoke that people may not know about or may not be able to get to
    - There are niches in Roanoke
    - The music and brewery scene is vibrant
    - Because of fragmentation, it's difficult to find out what's out there. One participant noted that a Google search for Roanoke Events Calendar yields informative results
  - Openness: The average score was approximately 2.5. (Please note that Doug expanded Marshall's definition of openness to include openness to people different from you)
    - Roanoke's history of urban renewal has caused some social barriers to go up
    - It's easy to go to events with and for people like us. We have to be intentional about planning and attending events in various neighborhoods and for varied audiences. For example, the City's Parks and Arts program brings music to parks across the city.

- The libraries are a place where all people feel welcome
  - Because many Roanokers have significant family connections to the area, it's hard to break in to neighborhoods as a newcomer. Organizations can help give newcomers entry. Participants wondered if the Welcome Basket gave information only to homebuyers, or was restricted to certain neighborhoods. Is it possible for individual neighborhoods to have their own welcoming efforts?
  - Aesthetics: The average ranking was 3-3.5.
    - The aesthetics vary by location. For example, some participants view downtown as grungy
    - The view of the mountains is aesthetically pleasing
- 2) What change do you envision for Roanoke? If you had to make a prototype for your vision, what would it look like?
- Well-prepared neighborhoods of people working together. According to neuroscience, our greatest power is small groups of people working together. (The Margaret Mead quote comes to mind: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.") The prototype for this would be self-organizing workshops in which people share their knowledge, starting from sharing personal aspirations and evolving into group efforts
    - Good local examples: The Tree Stewards, Roanoke's trail builders, the Master Gardeners, and food forests
  - A participant asked if there was a way for communities to require or incentivize participation in groups. The group discussed holding a volunteership/service festival so Roanokers can know about all the different volunteer opportunities in the community
  - Some people don't get involved in their community because they're struggling to make ends meet. It's a privilege to volunteer, but stepping out of your own needs to meet the needs of others can also feed you in important ways
  - Volunteering may not create economic value. Perhaps more people would volunteer if there were paid opportunities that don't require much training or have many barriers.
- 3) What story in our community needs to be more widely told?
- The group was fairly unanimous that Gainsboro's story needs to be more widely known, as well as the stories of the lynchings that happened in Roanoke. People who are new to the area don't know this history. If we don't understand our history, how can we move forward?
  - Participants also discussed talking more about how prevalent hunger is in the community, and how it impacts children's educational outcomes and behavior

**Thought Assignment:** Think about what your vision is for Roanoke's future. This can be a big citywide vision, or as small as you want! What would success look like? Who would be your early adapters? What would your prototype be?