

# What’s wrong with generic?

## Bloomberg bust, part 2

By Mary Grace Barry

*Editor’s note: In part one, Mary Grace assessed the shortcomings of Lexington’s entry in the Bloomberg Mayors Challenge. Here, she examines what that proposal says about how the city sees itself.*

Well, we didn’t win. Twice. Lexington didn’t come out as either the “fan favorite” in the Huffington Post’s people’s choice for the Bloomberg Mayors Challenge or as a real winner chosen by Bloomberg Philanthropies. Bummer. Who did win? The fan favorite was Houston, which proposed the next advancement in curbside recycling. Milwaukee came in second with its idea of turning vacant and foreclosed lots into spaces for urban food production. Of the 58,000 votes cast, Houston pulled in 15,000 and Milwaukee 13,000. Both projects will receive a boost with coverage and promotion from the Huffington Post; in addition, Houston will receive a \$50,000 in-kind grant from IBM to implement its project. (Houston also won one of the \$1 million Mayors Challenge innovation prizes.) The big winner, though, was Providence, RI, with its “Providence Talks” program. Bloomberg Philanthropies awarded it the \$5 million grand prize in the challenge. From Providence’s winning pitch: “By their fourth birthday, children who grow up in low-income households will have heard thirty-million fewer

words than their middle- and high-income peers. Providence Talks solves this problem, for good. Children need to hear approximately 21,000 words per day for their vocabularies to develop at an appropriate pace. But research has shown that children growing up in less affluent homes hear significantly fewer words each day than their peers in middle and high-income households. “This word gap quickly adds up. In fact, by the time a child growing up in a low-income household reaches their fourth birthday, they will have heard 30 million fewer words than their peers in middle- and high-income households. Providence Talks—a free, confidential and completely voluntary early intervention program—is our plan to solve this national challenge, starting right here in Providence.” To me, Providence’s proposal is an interesting one in that it combines issues related to education and socio-economic status with a seemingly simple and elegant approach: engage children in language more, something caregivers can do relatively easily if they are aware of it. As a program that represents a city, its needs, and its vision, the proposal also admits the city’s own deficiencies—something that it would behoove Lexington to confront directly with “bold and innovative ideas,” to borrow the parlance of the contest proposals.

**Concrete conditions and needs**

Providence’s proposal admits that there is poverty in Providence.

According to the Census Bureau, the percentage of persons below poverty level in Providence County, which includes the city, was 16.2 from 2007-2011. For a Kentucky comparison, the Lexington-Fayette County the rate was 17.9 percent and the Louisville-Jefferson County rate 17.5 percent during that same period. (In terms of county population, Providence and Jefferson Counties are closer in size—both around 600,00—and Fayette County is half that with 300,000 residents.) All three counties come in above the national rate for persons below poverty level, which was 14.3 percent from 2007-2011. That Providence recognizes it’s own poverty may seem like an uninspired observation, but it points to a city that

sees its biggest contribution to national urban innovation as remediating economic and educational disparities, which is incredibly important for all of us. As these disparities often also fall along racial, ethnic, and cultural lines this idea addresses (in theory) some of our nation’s most enduring problems. Not all of the top 20 finalists had the same priorities. While a good number were addressing various symptoms of poverty, several—our city included—were more focused on methods of data collection for the city. If you remember, Lexington’s pitch was for CitizenLex.org, a “knowledge management system” that would gather information and ideas for initiatives in the city. It

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“The heavy anchor of the Foucault Pendulum hovers lazily over a blue and gold map of the United States.” Photo by Brian Connors Manke.

# The Lexington Central Public Library is a home

**Text by Tony Stilt**  
**Poems by Eric Scott Sutherland**  
**Images by Brian Connors Manke**

Everyone who knows the Lexington Central Public library knows that the fifth floor doesn’t matter—it is comprised of administrative offices, board rooms, et cetera. But the other four floors have a life of their own...

**Floor One**

The heavy anchor of the Foucault Pendulum hovers lazily over a blue and gold map of the United States, its golden pointer aiming one moment at Ohio, the next at an area I assume to be Missouri, but it doesn’t matter. It is swaying and it is the centerpiece and it is ignored, largely. Across from it a congregation is forming: people in ragged-looking coats and winter hats stand before a set of metal doors, watching them. *Ding*. The noise echoes through the building, its high pitch ringing into the creases of the New Releases; it rustles the protruding slips of names hanging from items on the Requests shelves; its persistence breezes lightly its neighbor, the pendulum, towards Georgia. One of the two elevator shafts is broken, leaving the crowd to wait on just the one, collecting gradually more people into its mass, listening to the *ding* of the elevator reach floors above, its cry audible because of the open-air center that the library boasts, elegant

architecture. A little girl in a pink bubble-wrap coat tugs at her mother’s arm. A man clears his throat and more throat clearings follow suit. They are all hungry for a lift. *Ding*. The metal doors open and those getting off struggle through the impeding army of up-goers, all racing for their turn. Of the twenty or so waiting, only ten manage to get on. The doors slam like angry teeth. *Ding*. I look over to the stairwell; it is lonely and red. Meanwhile I go find a seat in a red-clothed chair. A woman in a black hoodie is sitting on the opposite side of the room, reading. She is to herself, but when a library worker asks her if she would like to check out the book she is reading, whether he asked her out of profiling I do not know, she looks at him with a crooked kind of guilty face: “Can I?” she asks him, eyes squinted slightly, maybe embarrassed. “Of course. Do you have a library card?” She shakes her head. “Well then you can apply for one,” he tells her. “Do you live in Lexington?” “I do for right now, but probably not for long.” ---“Argo!” A man yelps, almost galloping over to the New DVDs section. He picks up his new companion and explains hastily to a nearby librarian that, although he already has the full

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# Common visions

## On the Town Branch, part 2

By Danny Mayer

I first heard about the Town Branch in a geography class at the University of Kentucky, early in 2001. We didn’t talk much about the creek itself. It was the thing that oriented us differently on the maps: our skeletal framework, a north-westerly axis, something railroad ties covered. It would be another six years before Town Branch appeared to me in all its cavernous damp wonder. While visiting a farm in Keene, Kentucky, I happened upon an urban caver and all-around fire-master—a man who introduced himself as “Thom-with-an-H,” the last three syllables rolling away from the lazy ‘m’ like the sharp uncoiling of a lasso (**tom,with-in-atche**). Over long fires that spanned several days, *Thom-with-an-H* recounted to me stories of cave trips taken beneath the greater Lexington substrata. Several of these stories began or ended nearby the Town Branch Creek. A few involved walking up-creek from the edge of the Rupp Arena parking lot, into the culvert, and underneath downtown. I could sit for hours and listen to *Thom-with-an-H* during that summer of 2007, marveling all the while at the holes the caves were poking into my Lexington maps. It was quite heady stuff, sitting around those Jessamine County fires, to imagine descending underground at Cardinal Valley and emerging in Southland, or disappearing into the west end of Rupp

only to re-appear one block east of the East End. *Thom-with-an-H* was a well-meaning and sometimes brilliantly insightful person with a lust for knowledge and a true gift for intensely managing a fire, but he also had a little bit of the Lost Sea Scrolls in him. I was never able to make out if the stories he told were of his travels, of some obscure piece of historical writing (say, George Washington Ranck’s 1872 opus, *History of Lexington, Kentucky: Its early Annals and Recent Progress*, which mentions the existence of Indian burial grounds located in caves beneath the city), or, indeed, whether the stories he told were intensely imagined suppositions based solely upon a few contemplative visions experienced whilst pouring over a few area geology maps in the UK Map Library. But by that time it didn’t matter. The jig was up. In the intervening years between my college lesson and meeting *Thom-with-an-H*, I’d developed such a nasty habit for traveling the slack waters of the Kentucky River that it was threatening to explode into a full-blown worldview. By point of current geological fact, the river here as it enters the inner blue-grass carves a nearly 180 degree, 300 foot deep, moat around Lexington. Many eons ago, when the Kentucky cut a northwesterly course on its way out of the Appalachian Mountains and

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## Common Good in the community

### Youth talent show April 19 at Embrace

By Taylor Riley

1, 2, 3... Jump!  
I walk past a group of enthusiastic jump-roping children as I search for John and Laura Gallaher.  
There are at least 20 kids outside North Limestone’s Embrace United Methodist Church around four p.m. this particular Friday. If I didn’t know any better, I would think these kids were at recess.  
School is over for the day, though, and the kids are involved in an after-school program.  
I walk inside the church and spot John and Laura rounding up a couple kids for snack time in the basement home of Common Good, the north Lexington non-profit the Gallahers opened last year.

John, a former youth pastor, and Laura, a former social worker, have always been involved in their community. Based on their jobs, they knew that helping kids in their neighborhood was what they were meant to do. “The work we did in church was good, but it fell short in some ways,” John said. “We were helping to meet the spiritual needs of the community, but there were a lot of other needs.”

This particular part of town is home to many refugee and immigrant families who are rebuilding their lives in a foreign place. The Gallahers were very familiar with the youth of the community from their former careers, and they knew that they wanted to invest long-term in helping adolescents excel in their lives. They started Common Good in 2011 to help local kids improve socially and academically, giving them a “place to belong” in a supervised environment.

Every Monday through Thursday during the school year, 50 kids, 40 mentors, and two staff members meet to improve the students’ academic, physical, and spiritual life.

Three classrooms are crowded with kids studying multiplication tables, reading chapter books, and playing pool. The students are divided into kindergarten through second grade, third through

fifth grade, and middle and high school children.

#### With great love

Black and white pictures of John and Laura with the kids clad in big smiles line the hallways. They remind me of family portraits. Common Good definitely has a family feel.

“We are hardcore about the consistency aspect,” John said. “The best thing to have is consistency. We want Common Good to be a stable place. That’s what makes it special—the relationships.”

The Gallahers’ goal for the program is simple: to give opportunities to the kids in their community. “We want to empower students, whatever that means to each student,” Laura said. “We want to help them to realize their full potential.”

The middle and high school classroom contains a wall of dreams, which poses the question: “What will your future be like?” Diverse answers are posted: going to college, traveling the world, owning a house, having money and a good job, getting straight A’s.

“It’s not an issue of not dreaming,” Laura said. “It’s more like, what is your dream? How are you going to get there? These kids face a lot of obstacles. We want to teach them wise decision-making when it comes to their future.”

John and Laura want to expose the kids to as many life experiences as possible.

Each day, the students come straight to the church after school for an hour of homework time and lessons in music, art, cooking, and more.

John and Laura’s long-term vision for the program is to cultivate a new generation of leaders. “There are strengths in this community, and we want to invest in the good things,” Laura said. “We want to build on the kids’ strengths and encourage growth.”

Another opportunity for growth is Common Good’s summer program. Free from homework constraints, kids



Arlington Elementary sits across the street from Common Good services. Photo by Danny Mayer.

can spend the day visiting colleges and socializing with other kids. “With Common Good, kids are safe, challenged, and engaged,” Laura said.

Childcare services are often out of reach for parents in this community. Common Good charges an affordable \$10 per school year for each kid involved. Funding for the program comes from individual donations. “We can’t do it alone; people have stepped up,” Laura said.

The program has flourished in the past year, but John and Laura have no inclination to expand to other communities. “We want the highest quality program possible,” John said. “The

program is rooted here; we are invested in the community. We are confirmed every day that we are doing something good.”

“I’ve always thought that Mother Teresa’s quote best described what we are doing with the program: ‘We can do no great things, only small things with great love,’” Laura added.

*Common Good will host a community talent show fundraiser April 19, at 7:30 p.m., at Embrace Church, Epworth Campus. For more info on the talent show, see below. For more info on the non-profit and talent show, visit CommonGoodLex.org.*

### Join us for the Common Good Youth Talent Show: Invitation from Laura Gallaher

Please join us for the 2nd Annual Common Good Youth Talent Show. The evening will be a showcase of the considerable talents of our youth. It will include original song, dance, drama and creativity of Common Good students in grades 5th-12th.

We invite you (as well as your friends, family, and anyone else you know) to join us in enjoying and celebrating the many talents of our

students. It is one of the most important events we do all year because it gives the students the opportunity to lead and shine.

The show is a student-led fundraiser for our upcoming Summer Program. Donations will be accepted, but admission is free. Complimentary homemade treats, desserts from local bakeries, and coffee will be served. Mark your calendars and invite people!

## Human trafficking, film and media talk at BCTC

Bluegrass Community and Technical College is happy to have Dr. Yana Hashamova of Ohio State University speak on human trafficking, film and media.

According to most recent research, media environment influences the viewer’s emotions, attitudes, and behavior; establishes opinions on given social issues; and shapes young people’s perception of reality to a considerable degree. Various media venues are the main source of information about trafficking in people. This presentation examines cross-cultural and transnational media products on trafficking as well as attitudes toward trafficking, utilizing U.S. and Balkan media and social attitudes case studies.

The talk will take place Thursday, April 25, from 6:30-7:45 pm in the Oswald Auditorium.

## Berry-inspired exhibit opens at LASC April 19

The exhibit title is taken from Kentucky poet Wendell Berry’s poem “Sabbaths 1999, VII.” Like the poem, the exhibition will celebrate the pleasures and awe that are created by looking deeply into the natural world. We will view flora and fauna as depicted by Kentucky artists who find unique beauty and character in roots, seeds, flowers, and foliage. Opens April 19 at the Living Arts and Science Center, located on the corner of MLK and Fourth Street.

## Accents’ Katerina Stoykova-Klemer Frog Mantra continues publishing co.’s global offerings

By JW McAndrews

Is it possible to keep literature alive and affordable? Absolutely! Just ask Katerina Stoykova-Klemer, senior editor and founder of Accents Publishing. In its three years of operation the independent press has published more than twenty chapbooks and full-length poetry collections, a pace it intends to continue. According to Katerina, the original mission of the press was “to publish a book every month or two.” She adds, “Our mission is to promote brilliant voices in an affordable publication format, and to foster an exchange of literature among different world cultures and languages.”

A native of Bulgaria who immigrated to America in 1995, Katerina operates her publishing press out of her Lexington, Kentucky home. Each of the poetry chapbooks produced by Accents is made by hand and sells for \$5 or (for full-length books) \$12.

Although her background is in software engineering, Katerina returned to her love of poetry later in life. In 2009, she graduated from Spalding University in Louisville with an MFA in poetry. She founded Accents Publishing a year later. Katerina says, “I feel intense love towards poetry books. I don’t think I can not publish them. It makes me spectacularly happy to publish poetry. I’ve been born to do this.”

Beyond her editorial and publishing skills, Katerina is an accomplished poet

herself and has published four poetry collections: *The Air around the Butterfly* (2009) and the Bulgarian-language *Indivisible Number* (2011) through Fakel Express, *The Most* (Finishing Line Press, 2010) and, her latest, *The Porcupine of Mind* (Broadstone Books, 2012). She also hosts Accents—a Radio Show for Literature, Art and Culture weekly on WRFL 88.1 FM Lexington, Kentucky.

#### Frog Mantra

While Accents has published many Kentucky-based authors such as Richard Taylor, Jude Lally, Matthew Haughton, and Bianca Spriggs, it seeks out authors all over the world, striving to publish unique poetic voices such as poet Thom Ward, whose book *Etcetera’s Mistress* enthralls readers with lyrical dexterity.

One of Accents latest chapbooks is *Frog Mantra*, written by retired professor and Korean War veteran Suchoon Mo. Part reminiscence and part postmodern poetic Zen, *Frog Mantra* emerges as a psalm encapsulating the drama of our often-disjointed lives, an enchanting gathering of poetry infused with ancient wisdom and contemporary philosophy. Mo creates poems that are reflective and adroit in their ponderings and display an uncommon and wondrous vernacular. “In an empty theater the stage is set,” Mo writes at one point, “for a mute tragedy of chorus singers who are mute on the stage.”

In *Frog Mantra* readers gradually enter a world encompassed by a

merciful but silent moon as themes echo “the sound of civilization” in a chant of war, death, life, love, and, ultimately, reverence for “the faint groaning elegy no one can sing.” Whetted observation and contemplative lucidity fuse in the collection to create an innovative style that inspires the heart and incites the imagination. *Frog Mantra* is yet another gem in the already considerable crown of Accents Publishing.

*For more information, visit the Accents website at [www.accents-publishing.com](http://www.accents-publishing.com). See also selections from Eric Scott Sutherland’s forthcoming Accents book, pendulum, on page 4 of this issue.*





“It didn’t matter how factually true *Thom-with-an-H*’s stories were. They felt real.”

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## Town Branch, cont.

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toward confluence with the Ohio River, it passed near present day Lexington. But then a millions-year-long series of upthrusts in the earth’s surface lifted the inner bluegrass above the mainstem of the river. Over time, things moved.

Geologically, the process is termed an orogeny. *This* specific orogeny, the Taconic Orogeny, bore the Cincinnati Arch, a rock bulge that runs northeast from Alabama through Nashville, peaks nearby Nicholasville, and then slowly loses height as it passes through its namesake city and splinters its way into Ontario.

As a result of Lexington’s rising foundations, the river began to pool, stretched west, then unnaturally south, feeling all the while for cuts through the uplift and generally scouring its way back into a northwesterly kind of flow. Which it did, many millions of years ago, at a point not far from present day Camp Nelson, 25 miles south of Lexington. To look on the area now from a satellite map is to see Lexington sitting centered atop a palisaded south-reaching peninsula with a radius holding steady at an erratically stable 25-35 miles distance from Lexington’s CentrePointe. For a flowering river rat like myself, this quirk of geological history was a lucky gift, a surfeit of water outlets all located within a 45 minute drive.

By 2007, I had paddled the Elkhorn’s forks, and Boone after a heavy rain. I had hiked sharply-cut, nearly-no name creeks like Minter’s Branch from source to mouth, and no-name ones that tumbled into the ruins of eighteenth century mills to swimming holes hidden beneath a state highway rumbling a century of feet above. By 2007, I was already jumping headfirst into the cold waters of the Dix, conducting rural night-time hunts for spring houses, and spending summer nights bobbing in a john boat with fellow river rats beneath the stone gaze of the Seven Sisters—just because we could—a peanut butter sandwich and six beers in stow to tide us through sunrise.

It didn’t matter how factually true *Thom-with-an-H*’s stories were. They felt real. By the time he was telling me about caving Town Branch, I had walked enough cuts, descended enough karst geology, stepped around enough springs and contemplated enough water flow to know that *something* was there, that *whatever it was* was wondrous, and that whatever its wonder, it likely lay just out of view or focus from straight-seeing and -focusing eyes.

The beauty of all rivers, and this is especially true of those in Central Kentucky, lies in their cut. To be on the river is to descend into the earth, to pass below banks and beneath view. For a variety of reasons, this perspective is radically freeing and, as *Tom-with-an-H* was beginning to make clear to me, readily available to all Fayette Countians if only we knew what to look for, and where.

I don’t know what to make of this story, other than that I feel compelled to offer it, and perhaps use it to underscore what may not be evident otherwise, which is that I should be one of the primary supporters of the proposed

Town Branch Commons, the linear urban park that will stretch from Rupp Arena to Isaac Murphy Memorial Park. I should love that the plan by Scape Landscape Architects entrenches a city commitment to public space—a commons—that has the byproduct effect of proclaiming and celebrating waterways as places deserving of our civic, social and environmental respect and care.

Beyond my specific water interests, though, I should also love that the project reflects and celebrates my interest in Lexington history. As a downtowner, I should love its urban location and its threading together of Rupp Arena and the East End’s Isaac Murphy Memorial Park, the latter a short walk from my home. A biker and sub-urban hiker of area lands, I should love its connections to the proposed Town Branch bike trail, a path that first will take me to a different public park located in a different locally historic watershed, McConnell’s Springs flowing into the Wolf Run Watershed, and then beyond that to a pastoral equestrian countryside. I should love that the plan itself is gorgeously rendered, environmentally conceived, for the most part practical and—above all else—generally committed to the public commoning of unproductive or poorly used land.

And. I. Do. Love. All. Those. Things.

But I think that misses the point entirely.

### World class and local class

The dominant narrative surrounding the selection of Scape Architecture’s plans for the Town Branch Commons is that they are a byproduct of Lexington finally thinking big and swinging for the (global) fences. This narrative, largely redemptive, sprang to life during the World Equestrian Game buildup—over \$100 million and five years in public investments for 10 days of the city presenting itself to “the world.” But it has really taken off during Jim Gray’s reign as Mayor.

The most updated version goes something like this: At the early fevered moments of economic decline during the late-Bush years, before the real panic set in, real estate developers Dudley and Woodford Webb callously destroyed the city’s central downtown block in a failed bid to construct a generically massive office/condo tower, an act which sparked a new generation of urban activists who, in 2010, elected a different Mayor who “got it.” Said Mayor has inspired new confidence in downtown by creating a synergy with local actors who are also big thinkers. Together, these important actors have attracted “really important” global actors—design people, business people, artists, academics—to forge an authentic and world class plan to move the city into tomorrow. Synergizing all that energy is a bold plan to redevelop 50 acres around Rupp Arena, an act which promises to act as both stimulant and complement to new private investment attracted to a now-booming downtown.

Here’s a generally representative version, this by Tom Eblen in an article describing why the Scape proposal for

## The authentic Mayer’s Challenge A call to commoners

*NoC* editor Danny Mayer is sponsoring a Town Branch Commons design challenge. He’s calling on area commoners to come up with a functional design to redevelop a portion of downtown Lexington’s 151 East Vine Street, a .62 acre publicly owned surface parking lot that runs between Vine and Water Street. He will present the winning idea to a meeting of the city council, where he will formally request public funding for the project.

The idea for Mayer’s challenge began after the *NoC* editor read about the Lexington Fayette Urban County Government’s recent admission that closing down surface parking lots on Vine Street is “clearly implementable” and “within the realm of do-ability.” The observation came in response to the recent selection of Scape Landscape Architecture’s proposal for a linear downtown park named the Town Branch Commons.

“I think it’s great,” Mayer said, “that city leaders are finally acknowledging the benefits of transforming under-used government property into human-scaled places of interaction and mobility. I want to do my part to encourage more of that thinking.”

But what really stirred this Mayer to action was a deep conviction that local FUCers should take the lead in

developing any areas the city deems a “commons.”

“How can a commons be world-class?” Mayer asked last week outside his downtown home during the press conference to announce the design challenge. “That sounds like nonsense. Aren’t commons supposed to just be common, to humbly serve our needs, their aesthetic charms growing from time lapsed and the close, personalized care we give them? I say, let us county folk and friends design our own commons. We now have the Scape blueprint to help guide us, but we can take things from here.”

Mayer’s local-first conviction is rooted in several economic realities. Public budgets are tight. World-class labor costs way more than locally engaged labor. In a world of competing desirable locations, authentic things produced from a studio in New York tend to be considered less authentic than authentic things made in the source location. Beyond the commercially dulling authenticity problem, though, the very complexity of world class designs also tends to increase costs, not to mention what complexity does to completion times (and repairs).

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*Mayer’s Challenge design site: 151 East Vine Street. Photo by Danny Mayer.*

the Town Branch Commons was “the most authentic to Lexington.”

“How could little Lexington attract such talent? One reason is the personal connections Michael Speaks, dean of the University of Kentucky College of Design, has in the global design community. Another is Mayor Jim Gray’s vision for a world-class downtown. And another is the successful Arena, Arts and Entertainment District Task Force process, which engaged a world-class master planner (Norway-based Space Group) and is now following through on its recommendations. Lexington has a lot of work to do before these grand plans can become reality. But, for the first time in a very long time, it at least has some truly grand plans.”

As a teacher of rhetoric (er...ENG 101), what stands out to me is the implied comparisons between Lexington and other places. Lexington is “little,” and it “has a lot of work to do,” in part because until recently it has generally been unable to attract “such” talent, a description applied liberally to things that are “world class.” This term, world class (cognate: global), seems to refer generally to something important and large. Beyond that, the term’s primary reference shifts. At times, it categorizes, certifies and grades, the development equivalent of Grade A 100% All Natural Organic Beef. At others, world-class connotes cosmopolitan urbanity, a thing to contrast with vulgar suburbanism.

Of course, the word is also a location, a someplace not here where people and things are generally better. Thus, “world-class master planner” Gary Bates is such based on his corporate home in Norway. But for Lexington-bound leaders, excellence comes from somewhere else. The local college design professor attracts “such” talent because he has “personal connections...in the global

design community.” The local Mayor gets it because he flaunts a gigantic “vision for a world-class downtown.”

The effect is to create a distortion of value between world-class and, as it were, local-class. We are told by leaders with world-vision that our town is not urban enough, that it lacks a good enough convention center, that it needs an arts center and more parks, mis-uses one-way streets, needs a boutique hotel, lacks a defining downtown landscape, and most recently, that it does not have a strong enough water presence to be able to realistically consider itself a truly great American city. Listening to our leaders talk, it’s hard not to feel like a verbally abused kid whose parents always compare them to the dipshit Harvard-bound cousins living down the block.

Here’s one leader describing why the Town Branch Commons are good for us: “Lexington is one of few American cities without a body of water or piece of compelling landscape to give it a sense of place...Like a well in the desert, our downtown is so small and intimate that every option for maximizing its quality and economic potential is essential to pursue.”

Locate that metaphor. Downtown is a well, around it is a desert. Where are you in this geography?

### Re-telling local stories

Of course, nowhere in Fayette County resembles a desert. Like the back of a vein-throbbing hand, the county sits atop a fistful of watersheds, and they run through most of our neighborhoods. This is the second problem with the narrative of Lexington’s world-class resurgence: it doesn’t really tell the truth, it imposes it. The origins of Town Branch are no exception.

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*May 2006 hike down Minter’s Branch to Kentucky River. Photo by Danny Mayer.*



“Voices rise and fall near me and break my attention. I focus on the upturned magazine on my table, its large, colorful neon-green advertisement ever-so-appealing.”

Milkshake Ricky  
by Eric Scott Sutherland

loves oatmeal cookies  
and peanut butter shakes,  
dresses in cutoff sweats  
over full length  
sweats, looks like he flew  
out of the cuckoo’s nest,  
lost four pair of glasses  
and two umbrellas  
last week.

Milkshake Ricky is losing  
more than his mind. The way  
he fumbles through  
layers of worn cotton  
searching for his billfold  
he may have also  
lost what little  
money there is left  
from his monthly check.

Library, cont.

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number of items that he can check out out—I think it’s 35—he would like to put one back in order to get *Argo*----“I haven’t seen it!”

The woman without the library card walks across the floor towards the exit. Her head is down in disappointment, it can be assumed.

A memory comes to mind: San Francisco, Eureka Valley Branch: “If you don’t live here, unfortunately, you can’t check out a book.” *Ding*.

Floor Two

At closing time at the library you can stand on Floor Two—on any floor, really—and watch down over the railing into the center of the library for each *ding* and, as the elevator doors open, see that, despite the library’s deception in creating the illusion that it must be empty, it is indeed not, and its inhabitants file out in droves at 9 o’clock, Monday through Thursday, hours are different the rest of the week. The Second Floor at night is, though, quiet and desolate. Not Third Floor quiet, but close to it. There are DVDs and CDs here, so it is a convenient stop.

In the day, however, the large floor-to-ceiling windows are magnificent in their inconspicuous view, from which an observer can watch the functions of the city—the changing traffic lights, the eternal flames of Phoenix Park, the couples walking Main Street hand-in-hand—in action. Near the window sit studious young men, each indulged in a laptop or an annotated book, all very successfully not allowing the tempting view beside them to derail their focus. I am not one of them. To my left I hear: “Where do we go now, mom?”

A boy with a little book in his little hand is being half-drug by his mother, her jeans faded and torn. Her hair is unkempt. She wears a look of confusion on her face and leads her son to a table to sit. Once seated, she surveys the room in boredom and desperation, and her little son looks in his little book.

A memory comes to mind: Subway restaurant, near Civic Center: A homeless father and his little son take turns

eating from a six-inch sub, chewing slowly, making it last. *Ding*. Eternal.

Voices rise and fall near me and break my attention. I focus on the upturned magazine on my table, its large, colorful neon-green advertisement ever-so-appealing: American Spirit. The mother with the son surveys the floor still and the children’s section is empty I refrain from spending too much time there because I already feel suspicious enough so I must look it too I’m sure and a strange man standing near a child’s section of anything has never been taken lightly not when taking notes especially but it is there nonetheless and the mother too and the American Spirits and the dwindling subs and the burning blazes of Phoenix and the Courthouse juxtaposed and it’s freezing outside and the *ding ding ding*.

Floor Three

“Do you guys keep a complete list of all of the magazines that you carry?”

He says he doesn’t know and will ask Patrick. I wait. Not far from me sits a teenager, two-toned hair, black and blond, reading at his laptop.

The man returns, his voice is soft-spoken, he says: “He doesn’t have one anymore. Patrick used to be real vigilant about keeping a list.” I assure him it is not a problem. He says: “It’s funny, I’ve worked here 22 years and for 19 of them we had a list. No one has ever asked for one until now. I’ll tell you what; let me try to look it up on our online catalog real quick.”

(A man in a raggedy blue coat and raggedy blue beanie gets off the elevator *ding* and sets himself at a table not far from the teenager. From what I can tell, it is only the four of us around. The man promptly, almost procedurally, sits back in his chair, pulls the front of his hat down over his eyes, and, within seconds, is making a deep snoring-like sound. Bedtime in the library.)

“Here is how you can find the magazines in alphabetical order,” the librarian tells me. He shows me how and I thank him gratefully. I wander around past the newspapers and back to the area of the teenager and man. The teen seems to not be disrupted in any way by the man, whose snores are now echoing through the hall, combating, or mating maybe, their deep bellows with the high-pitched shrills of the *ding* but nothing is there, the doors must have opened on another floor.

A memory comes to mind: Presidio somewhere, shivers and through the fog Golden Gate, backpack as pillow, woken up at seven



“Noises of clack-clacking keyboards and mice and pesky children and Skype calls and unintelligible words and laughter consume the area.” Photo by Brian Connors Manke.

fishing for change  
by Eric Scott Sutherland

lost skipper, Phoenix Park, far from sea  
hair grayish green like rocky coast  
moss tangled under an old sock hat  
a body of wire wrapped in a ragged coat  
shredded to stuffing and thread  
an unlit cigarette hangs between thin lips  
a ship tossed in the storm of his beard  
every morning voyage passes the pay phone  
he casts his finger into the coin return slot  
but I have never seen him get lucky  
never seen him catch a dime

and finding another place. Quiet, sleeping Third Floor: *Ding*.

Floor Four

All is quiet, when, suddenly, *ding* and they are off, both of them, pace quick and authoritative and a walkin’ like they have a place to go and they do: the computers. Computer vacancies fill up quickly, especially at this point in the afternoon and especially when it’s this cold outside. I follow the young men and quickly lose them to the beast that is the Public Computer Area of Floor Four. There is a radiant Microsoft-blue emitting from the corner, it is blinding and distracts from the view of the city in the background (better seen on Floor Two). It is an abyss that I stare into. Noises of clack-clacking keyboards and mice and pesky children and Skype calls and unintelligible words and laughter consume the area. Tetris, Facebook, Gmail, Word.

Otherwise on the wall hangs a blue myriad piece, it contrasts the white walls and is easy to neglect because it is bland. A library worker is shelving books back into the Cooking section. He looks tired and sincere. He is to himself. Everyone is to themselves, save those in the computer area.

*Ding* the descending elevator stinks of body odor and bad food. A memory comes to mind: last train to Mission, running through grey corridors, torn carpet on the floor and it smells like piss.

Finally I am out of the library and walking through Phoenix Park in the winter ice. The library towers behind me, a nurturing home, loyal and grand and asleep.

Check out our website, [noclexington.com](http://noclexington.com), for more Connors Manke images and some audio by Stilt. Eric Scott Sutherland poems will appear in his forthcoming *Accents* publication, pendulum.



“At closing time at the library you can stand on Floor Two—on any floor, really—and watch down over the railing into the center of the library for each ding...” Photo by Brian Connors Manke

have and have-not  
by Eric Scott Sutherland

In the dim rotunda  
two people sit,  
inanimate as mannequins.  
One is dressed in a slate  
three piece uniform.  
The other wears a rainbow  
of second-hand mismatches.  
They watch a pendulum  
swing beneath the eye of the sky,  
marking the miserable  
seconds of the day,  
the tick tocks of rat claws  
as they race.  
In one’s wide dark  
pupils, the dream is unattainable.  
And in the others the myth is  
exposed, hope already lost.



Local cannibal praises HB 279

The leek: a satirical take

Guest editorial by Wilbert Trooghspoon

Socrates. Henry David Thoreau. Mahatma Gandhi. These giants of moral courage inspire us to follow our own deepest convictions, braving even the wrath of the State when integrity puts forth its most exacting demand. Yes, history narrates the battle between the individual human conscience and the State’s gunpoint demand that its subjects march lock-step in its arbitrarily-chosen order. Only in rare moments do we behold a government so enlightened that it elevates its people to their rightful place as free moral agents.

We are witnessing such a moment. Thanks to House Bill 279, passed on March 26 over Governor Beshear’s veto, Kentucky’s citizens are now free to ignore state laws that contradict their “sincerely held religious beliefs.” Like the Magna Carta and the Bill of Rights, HB 279 upholds the unalienable right of religious conscience for its people. But unlike England’s monarch 800 years ago, Kentucky’s lawmakers were moved not by threat of force, nor by base political self-interest, but solely by the power of truth. (The governor’s craven act of political expediency in no way mars our state’s achievement, but only highlights the courage of our lawmakers.)

As a founding member of the Devoted Independent Congregation of Anthropophagie Practitioners (DICAP), I risk rejection, ridicule, and legal censure daily for pursuing my sincere religious beliefs. Though some find anthropophagie (still referred to by the archaic and disparaging term “cannibalism”) difficult to comprehend or even offensive, these practices have expressed our deepest religious convictions since our congregation’s inception in 1987.

Our congregation believes that the entire family of sentient beings—we the living, the deceased, and the many

deities and spirits who surround us (we refer to them as “the differently-embodied”) dwell together in a single, seamless community. Our rituals honor those who have passed before us by perpetuating their embodiment for another generation, and preserve the cosmic order by propitiating the differently-embodied via our reverent sacrifices.

Our ceremony is a faithful contemporary rendering of ancient ritual. After ingesting various combinations of traditional hallucinogenic plants, our congregants put on masks depicting the primeval forces of chaos and order, then engage in ritualized combat with poisoned darts and Melanesian daggers. Grave wounds or fatalities in our rituals are quite rare, and not a single poisoned dart injury has ever been reported outside of our ceremonies. (Our religion requires members to carry concealed blowguns on the street at all times.)

Despite our nuanced theological understanding, grounding in ancient religious tradition, and sincere intention, our religious practice has been found in violation of Kentucky Revised Statutes 525.120 (“Abuse of corpse”), constituting a Class A Misdemeanor. In a previous court case, our attorneys argued forcefully that our ceremonies violate neither the letter nor the spirit of the KRS 525.120. The state failed to prove that we “abuse” our corporeal materials, which indeed we treat with the greatest

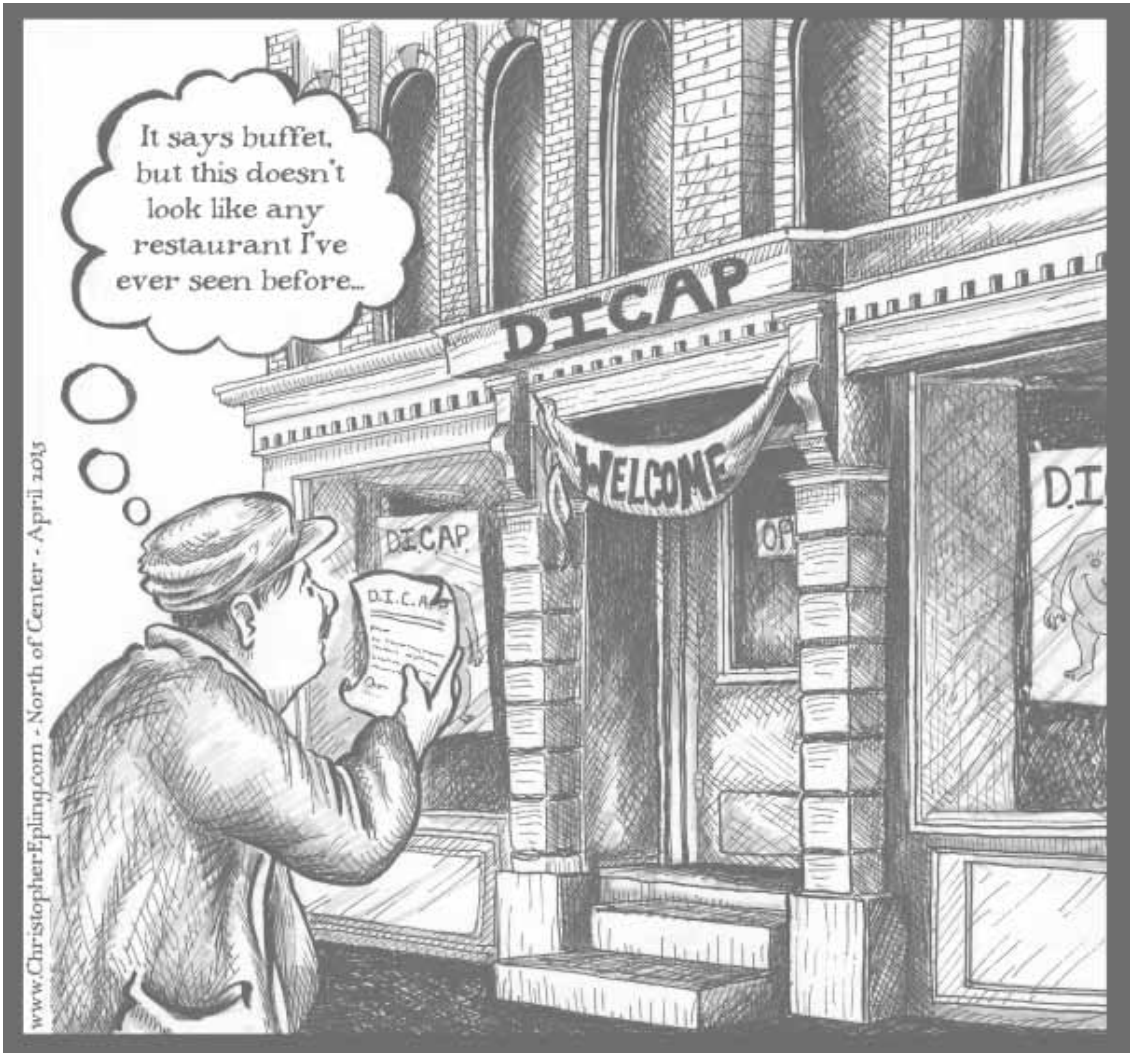


Illustration by Christopher Epling.

reverence, nor did the state demonstrate conclusively that our rituals “outrage ordinary family sensibilities.” What is an ordinary family these days?

Unfortunately, the court was prejudiced against us from the beginning. The judge expressed into an open microphone his hope to “pack these nut jobs off to the crazyhouse by lunchtime.” Needless to say our arguments did not prevail, and several of our members are now facing long terms of confinement in prisons or other facilities.

With the passage of HB 279, such injustice will be redressed. Since it is

beyond dispute that our ceremonies enact “sincerely held religious belief,” the anthropophage community will now enjoy the same protections accorded to other traditional systems of worship. It is a great day for our Commonwealth, and indeed for the ideal of religious liberty.

So please, consider a visit with our congregation when our new facility is completed next summer. All are welcome, except for redheads, people standing under 5’ 6”, and those whose last names begin with “Q.” (These persons must be excluded because of ritual impurity.)

Bloomberg, cont.

Continued from page 1

is an idea that sees the big needs of the city abstractly—as data—and the concrete needs of residents as the smaller potatoes.

(Lexington’s original proposal prioritized funds for the website and personnel for CitizenLex.org; smaller portions of the funds would go to smaller-scale projects like The Better Bites food program, the Fayette County Schools Delivery-to-Diploma program, and more bike lanes and walking trails.)

In other words, conceptually CitizenLex.org presents Lexington-Fayette County as kindof, um, generic.

**What’s wrong with generic?**

That’s a valid question. As I pointed out in my last article, Lexington’s wasn’t the only proposal for an upgraded information system, and, in fact, Chicago’s more generic “SmartData Platform” won one of the \$1 million prizes. (At least we had a better name for our system.) And, one of the conditions of the contest was that idea be replicable in other cities, so something abstract like a knowledge management system makes sense in that regard.

The thing is, Lexington is markedly different from some of the other cities that put forth data-junkie proposals like Chicago, Boston, and Cincinnati. Size, history, and culture are the most obvious differences. The other is that those cities, because of their size and history, have a clear and multifaceted sense of who and what they are and have been. They have been Polish, Italian, Irish, and German immigrants; they have been railroads and meat-packing plants; they are and have been machine politics and race riots; they are and have been Lake Michigan, the Atlantic Ocean and Boston Harbor, and the Ohio River.

Being generic in this one sense really doesn’t hurt them.

Now, before you local history buffs and city promoters start sputtering, hear me say this: Lexington, of course, does have a history and is self-consciously aware of that history. But the way that history is presented minimizes the depth and valences of our place and its past—which is, of course, also its present. Mostly, we just get the horses, bourbon, Civil War, and Lincoln mantra. That’s what is talked about and trumpeted. Our historical and contemporary racial situation is largely obscured; as are historical and current waves of immigration; as are, until relatively recently, waterways and environmental impact. These things, as much as Lincoln and bourbon, have helped determine the character of our city.

So, to say that our city’s most innovative idea is a knowledge management system is to say that we really don’t know who or what Lexington is. It’s to say we’d rather be on the bandwagon parroting the business-speak about “innovation” than to address, in a major way, the character of our city and county. And being on that bandwagon makes us appear generic.

Why not envision, become, and trumpet ourselves as the most racially and ethnically progressive city in the South? Or the most-forward thinking region for the connections between obesity reduction



and sustainable agriculture? Or as having the smallest carbon footprint in the southeast?

Doing any of these things in a big way—a way big enough to win the

Bloomberg Mayors Challenge—would recognize our current deficits, their historical roots, and show a city with depth and gumption. A knowledge management system, not so much.



They really love us! We must be important! Photo by Danny Mayer.





# The Netflix revolution

By Cameron Lindsey

Netflix is singlehandedly changing the way Americans watch television, and I am talking about something more than making us stay awake for days watching seasons of *The X-files*.

Back in early 2012, a little eight-episode show called *Lilyhammer* aired on our trusty video subscription service, where it received little attention. The show originally aired in Norway and stars one of Bruce Springsteen's guitarists, Steven Van Zandt, who you might remember from back in the day on *The Sopranos*. The show centers around Van Zandt's character, a former mafia boss, who relocates to Norway as part of a witness protection program. Sounds okay, right? You can still watch every episode of the show on Netflix, so check it out if you like.

But more importantly, remember the title, *Lilyhammer*. That way, when you get a trivia question in 2025 that asks, "What was Netflix's first original show before they changed television forever?" you can jump up and say, "I know this one."

And since it will be 2025, maybe you and your friends can turn on Netflix and watch one of the many new Netflix shows appearing on it. If you are looking for comedy, you could watch *Bad Samaritans*, the reboot of the Ricky Gervais show *Derek*. Maybe you could turn on the fourth season of the long awaited *Arrested Development*, followed by the Netflix produced *Arrested Development* movie. Looking for dramas? Why not Eli Roth's *Hemlock Grove*, *Sense 8* by the Wachowski siblings, or maybe *House of Cards*, starring Kevin Spacey and directed (for several episodes) by David Fincher. Maybe you're hope is to get the kids down for something. Netflix won't disappoint with the spin-off of their animated film *Turbo*.

Of course, you don't actually have to wait until 2025 to watch these shows. All of them are scheduled for release by 2014.

**A viewing revolution**

But this is supposed to be a revolution! Down with the TV-executives! Up

with the commercial-less programming! Don't worry, it's already happening. For several years now, television as we know it has begun to fade away. Shows like *Friends* and *Cheers* are quickly being replaced by *The Voice* and *Splash*. You TV lovers may be confused.

After all, why not have another great sitcom to watch every week instead of a show about celebrities jumping into a pool (yes, that really is the plot of *Splash*)? The answer is simple, and it has been for a long time. Ratings. A show might be the reincarnation of *MASH*, but it will fail if viewers do not sit for the commercials and make the ratings go up.

That means that if you DVR or Tivo your favorite shows, you are not helping their ratings. The same is true if you watch them online illegally the next day, or if you live on a college campus. (For whatever reason, campus cable has a hard time figuring our viewing). Simply put, television shows exist to sell you the things that are shown to you during commercial breaks. If you don't see those commercials, then they don't get their money. Interactive reality shows, on the other hand, are the number one way to get people to watch the show as it airs.

So where does Netflix factor into this? Netflix doesn't make their money through commercials, though there is a lot of conspicuous product placement. Netflix doesn't have to worry about who is watching the commercials because their servers can already see directly who is watching and who is not.

By allowing you to watch amazing original programs all at once, Netflix is moving the television experience online and away from standard commercial advertisements. No more waiting a week between each episode. Now you can watch entire seasons at your leisure. And there's more. It could mean more reboots of fan favorites like *Arrested Development*. It could mean, as *AD* creator Mitch Hurwitz suggests, that episodes can be freed from being watched in any specific order. Shows with complex storylines like *House of Cards* can

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create longer episodes and take the needed time to add to their cinematic beauty—all things broadcast television simply can't provide.

Other companies have recognized the new trend. Verizon, which owns Redbox, as well as Amazon and Hulu are all trying to catch up in the original programming game. HBO already has the HBOGO website for their subscribers. Even the networks recognize the change. Most shows are uploaded onto the network's website a few hours after the episode airs.

As this trend progresses, television will become a place where people go to watch live events, sports, news, and reality shows. The internet, on the other hand, will be where audiences go—on their Roku's, iPhones, Playstations, computers or whatever other online enabled device comes along—to watch the best programs without commercials and without the constraints of the typical thirty minute weekly block.

And it all started with a little show called *Lilyhammer*.

## Mayer's challenge, cont.

Continued from page 3

Tapping the unknown, often unrealized, multiple knowledges and skills of our community is a way more efficient process when it comes to building a public park. It is also, according to Mayer, a way to keep inflated costs and projects in check.

"Do you think a commoner would propose a hundred million dollar park, or write a design plan with no thought given to the price tag? That's just more nonsense to me. Commoners by definition are frugal, in part because their lives are here and they are bound to the wise collective use of city capital. With this challenge, I want to leverage that common tendency."

.....

The spot chosen by Mayer for the challenge is a uniquely positioned

surface parking lot located on Vine Street. It sits directly across from the Lexington Transit Center and is bisected by the Martin Luther King viaduct. To the north rises the back side of city hall. Within a block from there, the Kentucky Theater and Public Library beckon. Upwards of 15,000 automobiles travel Vine Street daily.

Successful submissions should include a developed design plan that covers one-fourth of the parking lot area; *the design must incorporate the area covered by the Martin Luther King viaduct*. Commoners must submit a cost proposal for the project that does not exceed \$70,000. We expect attention to be given to how the design integrates and enhances the local environment, the potential of any non-monetary capital (donated skills, time, etc.), programming, and anything else we missed.

Submissions will be judged by Mayer's five-person design team. The team specializes in generating low-cost, high-value re-developments of public space. *This* Mayer is an urban walker, a mover and a shimmie-shaker. And so is his team.

Mayer will present the winning submission at a meeting of the City Council. He will request that money for the project comes out of the \$250,000 publicly-funded salary paid out to twice-retired Frank Butler for overseeing the Rupp Arena Arts and Entertainment District plans. Project work can expect to commence January 2014. Sketch renderings may be hand-drawn, CAD-certified, or of any other medium, but all written text should be printed. Deadline: May 15. Submit submissions to

430 N. MLK, Lexington, KY 40508, or electronically to noceditors@yahoo.com.

If you would like to drop off submissions personally, discuss an idea, or otherwise meet with the authentic Mayer, he will be holding open office hours through May at Al's Bar on Wednesday nights from 5:30-6:30 pm.



Underneath the MLK overpass. This section must be addressed in all design submissions. Photo by Danny Mayer.



Disenfranchisement: a tale of two votes

By Danny Mayer

In early March, members of Lexington’s city council voted unanimously to pass a resolution in support of the restoration of voting rights to felons who had served their time in prison. The resolution was largely symbolic—the legal authority to re-enfranchise former felons lies in the hands of state lawmakers, not city council members. The resolution’s main purpose was to offer a demonstration of unified local political support for HB 70, a state bill sponsored by Fayette County congressman Jesse Crenshaw. His bill would allow Kentucky citizens to vote on a constitutional amendment that will automatically restore voting rights to most Kentucky felons who have completed the terms of their sentence (as happens in most other states).

In addition to the show of support, the council’s vote also sent another message to Frankfort politicians: let democracy happen. For the past seven years, the Kentucky House of Representatives has voted on and overwhelmingly passed HB 70, only to see it killed by Republicans Damon Thayer (Georgetown) and Joe Bowen (Owensboro) in the Senate’s Committee on State and Local Government. Consequently, despite the bill garnering increasingly bipartisan support among both state politicians and the general public, HB 70 has yet to leave its assigned Senate subcommittee.

An earlier non-vote

The clear, articulate and unanimous council support for both disenfranchised felons and the democratic process offers quite a contrast to the actions of at-large council member Steve Kay, who served as co-chair (and chief public representative) for the Mayor’s Commission on Homelessness.

The commission was formed in July to great fanfare and citizen engagement: over 110 people volunteered to serve on it (several *NoC* workers included); of that number, 33 were asked to serve. Over the course of six months, commission members held over thirty large and small meetings, and advertised two public gatherings. (Though all meetings were open to the public, the latter two were advertised and oriented as such.) In January, the commission issued a 63 page report that included 48 recommendations on homeless-related topics ranging from age demographic studies and day center counts to the city’s housing/wage gap and its system of data management.

Of the nearly fifty explicit calls to action, the number one recommendation given by the Mayor’s Commission in its report back to the Mayor—cited in the Executive Summary as a “comprehensive and foundational” need for addressing the other action items—was this:

“Increase from 5% to 6% the present fee assessed on insurance premiums, to create an Affordable Housing Trust Fund that will provide a consistent, reliable, dedicated funding stream to address the recommendations contained in this report.”

The report went on to contextualize the fee, noting that it represented “an increase of .5% above the recommendation of the Affordable Housing Task Force proposal presently being considered by Urban County Council and reflects the expanded scope of programs and services included in this report’s recommendations which would be funded in part by the fee increase.”

Sitting before the city’s Budget and Finance Committee on February 19, Kay delivered the Commission’s “foundational” proposal. I wasn’t at the meeting and can’t find the committee meeting notes online, but you can find the text of Kay’s address at his website. Delivered two weeks before he publicly joined fellow council members in symbolic support of HB 70 and the democratic process itself, Kay’s comments deserve scrutiny.

The address begins, “I would like to provide an update on where I think we stand regarding the specific proposal before the committee, which is an ordinance that would create an Affordable Housing Trust Fund and increase by 1% the fee presently imposed on a range of insurance premiums.”

Spoiler alert: things devolve from this brief moment of clarity, at least if you are a fan of the two principal actors undergirding calls to pass HB 70: disenfranchised human beings and the democratic ideal.

Ultimately, Kay went the disenfranchised route, declining to even bring the proposal to a subcommittee vote, though if you read the report given to the committee, you may have a difficult time getting that message. Kay, who holds a UK PhD in meeting-facilitation-and-effective-corporate-communication, packaged his pass at democracy in textbook A+ conflict avoidance manner. Here’s the playbook.

First, open with three paragraphs that accentuate the positive: “I have discussed this issue with all council members and with the administration.... appreciation for the work of the commission and a clear recognition of the need that exists.... significant level of commitment to create the structures and find the resources.”

Next comes the soft hinge paragraph: “...not adequate support at this time for the specific path forward ... Those with reservations would like to see... Some believe that...”

Follow with a responsibility dump-off to the next schlub: “In a moment I will ask Mayor Gray to provide information...”

Finally, in paragraph seven of Steve Kay’s nine-paragraph address to the LFUCG Budget and Finance Committee regarding a “specific proposal” of the Mayor’s Homeless Commission, comes the content. You knew it was coming, didn’t you?

“I had intended to make a motion to move the proposed ordinance onto the council docket. I have become convinced that doing so without addressing the concerns that have been expressed, and without, as a consequence, adequate votes to win approval from council, would be counter-productive...I am asking that the proposed ordinance be kept in committee...until such time as it either makes sense to move the proposed ordinance forward to council in its present form, or until such time as there is an alternative proposal...”

In terms of leadership, think of it as the anti-Crenshaw, the act of giving up before even registering an at-bat (much less seven of them).

One, two, many disenfranchisements

For the many individuals and groups who have toiled over the past decade lobbying lawmakers and building support for HB 70, the refusal by two Republican politicians to stonewall a committee vote has been a particularly sore point. It is a telling and frustrating irony that in attempting to continue with the status quo of disenfranchised former felons, Thayer and Bowen have had to disenfranchise all sorts of voting citizens: members of church groups, KFTC members, prisoner families, Republican and Democrat politicians. The Lexington resolution channeled those frustrations by calling upon the General Assembly to perform a basic function of elected office: to vote on issues that come before them.

But let’s be clear, felons are not the only people who have been restricted from full participation in our voting republic. And obtuse, flat-earth Republicans are not the only people limiting citizen attempts at participation in their government.

Writing in this month’s *Rolling Stone*, journalist Matt Taibbi detailed a group of Californian’s push to repeal the state’s Proposition 184, known more commonly as the Three-Strikes Law. Enacted as part of Republican “tough on crime” initiatives, Prop 184 mandated



Homeless clients must use back door to enter the New Life Day Center on Martin Luther King Boulevard. Photo by Danny Mayer.

that citizens receive an automatic lifetime sentence up their third convictions, many of which ended up being ridiculously petty offenses: stolen pizzas, baby shoes, video tapes.

Interestingly, as the collection of Stanford law students, some of their professors and a variety of prison activists began to take up the cause of overturning Prop 184, they found that liberals, a body they supposed would support their measure, never stood up. Instead, it was conservative Republicans, citing their values based in fairness, who offered support. Liberals, Taibbi records one activist telling him, “would say things like, ‘I hear you, but I really care about environmental causes, education for the poor.’ What it came down to, though, is that these people just don’t care about the poor people of color who are locked up, and would as soon see them not released.”

It’s hard not to think of Steve Kay when reading the above description. If you want to see where progressive politics have gone here, consider this: as an overseer of the recently opened New Life Day Center that sits on North Martin Luther King Boulevard, Kay is one of the architects of a policy requiring homeless clientele to enter through the back door. That’s right: some people on MLK still do have to use the back door. And he also instituted a neighborhood watch whose sole goal is to monitor crime that occurs within a 2 block radius of the Center. (When I asked if he was monitoring bars, too, for lawbreaking, I received no answer.) Kay’s argument for his actions: he must balance the needs of area “neighbors” against those of the homeless—people, apparently, whom he does not consider his neighbors.

Kay voted symbolically for felons to get a vote. He should reconsider his own anti-democratic actions as a local representative. Because it’s not just the homeless whom he has silenced. A collection of 33 community members who worked diligently to produce a detailed report were also silenced, and neighbors like me—people who prefer to act upon the principals claimed by progressive rhetoric—are also getting disenfranchised, not represented.

Unlike his HB 70 vote, Kay can actually do something about this re-enfranchisement—if only he stands up and acts like a leader. In the words of homeless activist Jerry Moody: “Let them vote. Let us know where the votes are; let us know the concerns; let us do our job as citizens to persuade our representatives with good arguments, just as Crenshaw has done with HB 70.”

*North of Center* is a periodical, a place, and a perspective.

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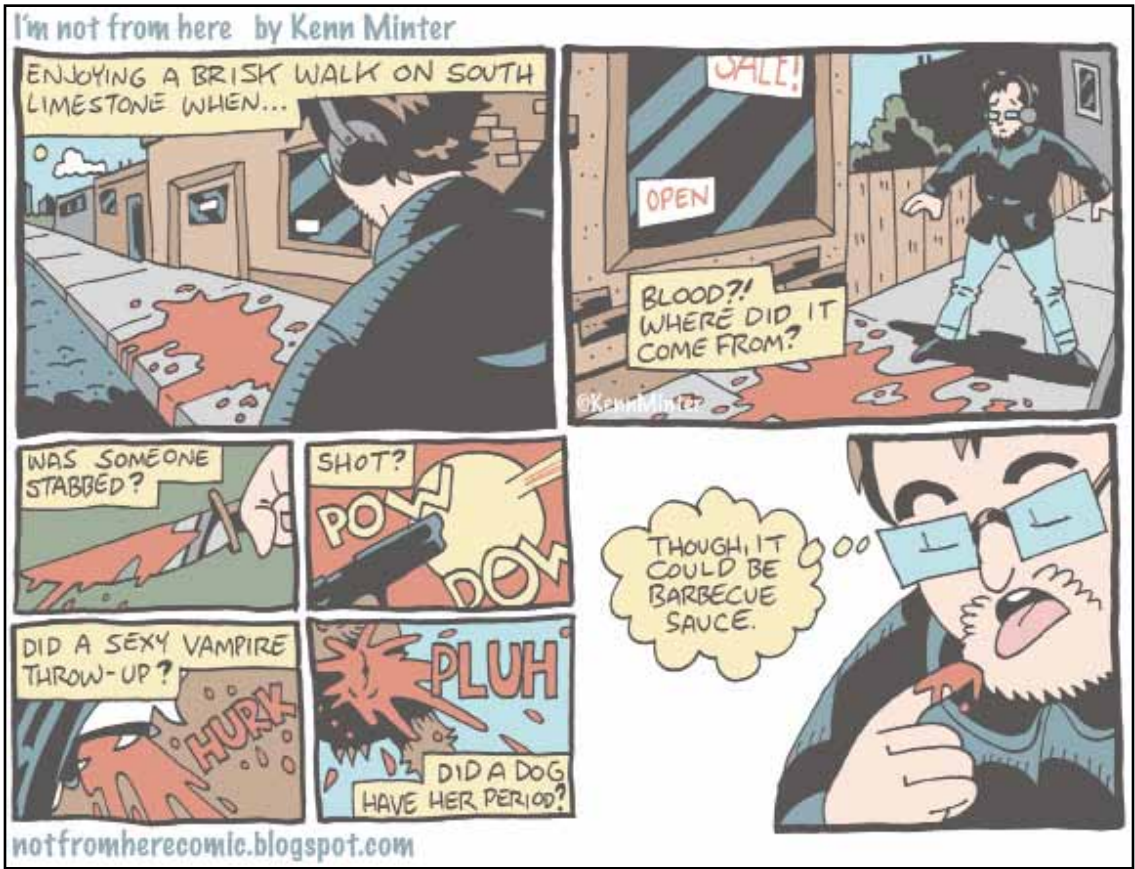
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I’m not from here

Kenn Minter



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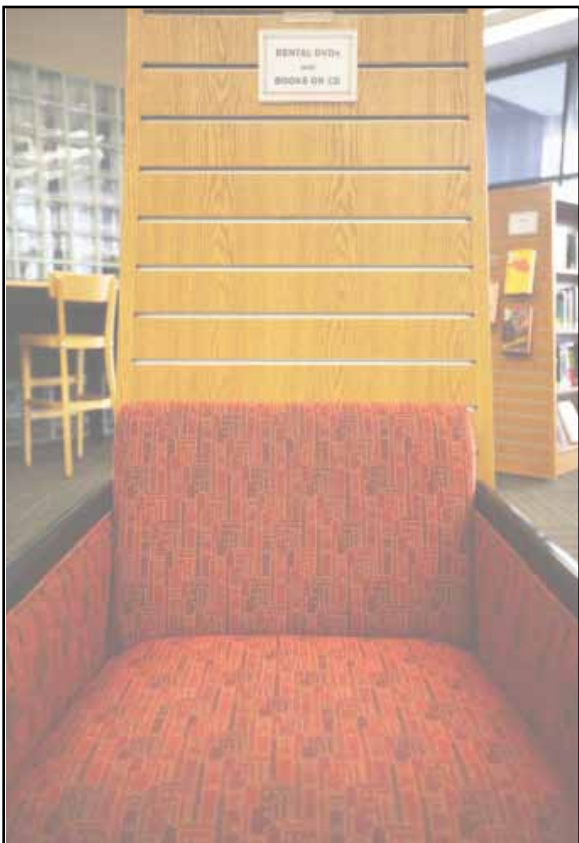
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Salubrious Soup

Christopher Epling



A final library image: chair. Photo by Brian Connors Manke.

Town Branch, cont.

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In October 2005, Lexington Vice-Mayor Mike Scanlon appointed a city task force to “further define the existing vision for a ‘linear park’ on Vine Street.” The task force featured several council members, Lexington Downtown Development Authority president Harold Tate, developer Phil Holoubek, and former mayor Foster Pettit. It was chaired by urban landscape designer Steve Austin, who worked for the city’s Bluegrass Community Foundation. With interests in public greenways constructed around waterways, urban environmental design, and (later) biking, Austin was a wise choice to head the group.

In August 2006, two years before the CentrePointe block came down, five years before Master Planner Gary Bates issued a Downtown Plan that envisioned a Town Branch Commons threading through town, and seven years before Kate Orff’s Scape proposal symbolically reconstructed the creek to run along Vine from Midland to Oliver Lewis Way, Austin presented city council with a 24-page report. In it, he and the other Lexington members of the panel argued for a “Vine Street ‘linear park’ [to] be connected to the Town Branch Trail planned for west of downtown, or other greenspace as planned in LFUCG’s Greenways Master Plan.”

Map images of the 1804 Commons running downtown along Water Street appear first on page two of the report. On page eight, the report suggests not raising Town Branch to the surface, but instead “including water features that are representative of the Town Branch.” It concludes, “[t]he concept is historically accurate. It takes us back to a time when Vine Street was referred to as ‘The Commons,’ the Town Branch was an open canal, and this area was a major congregating place for citizens. “Though

it advocates no specific designs—calling instead for a national search of the kind SCAPE recently won—the report did offer various sketch ideas, one of which (also first appearing on page two) looks quite similar to the Orff/Scape design.

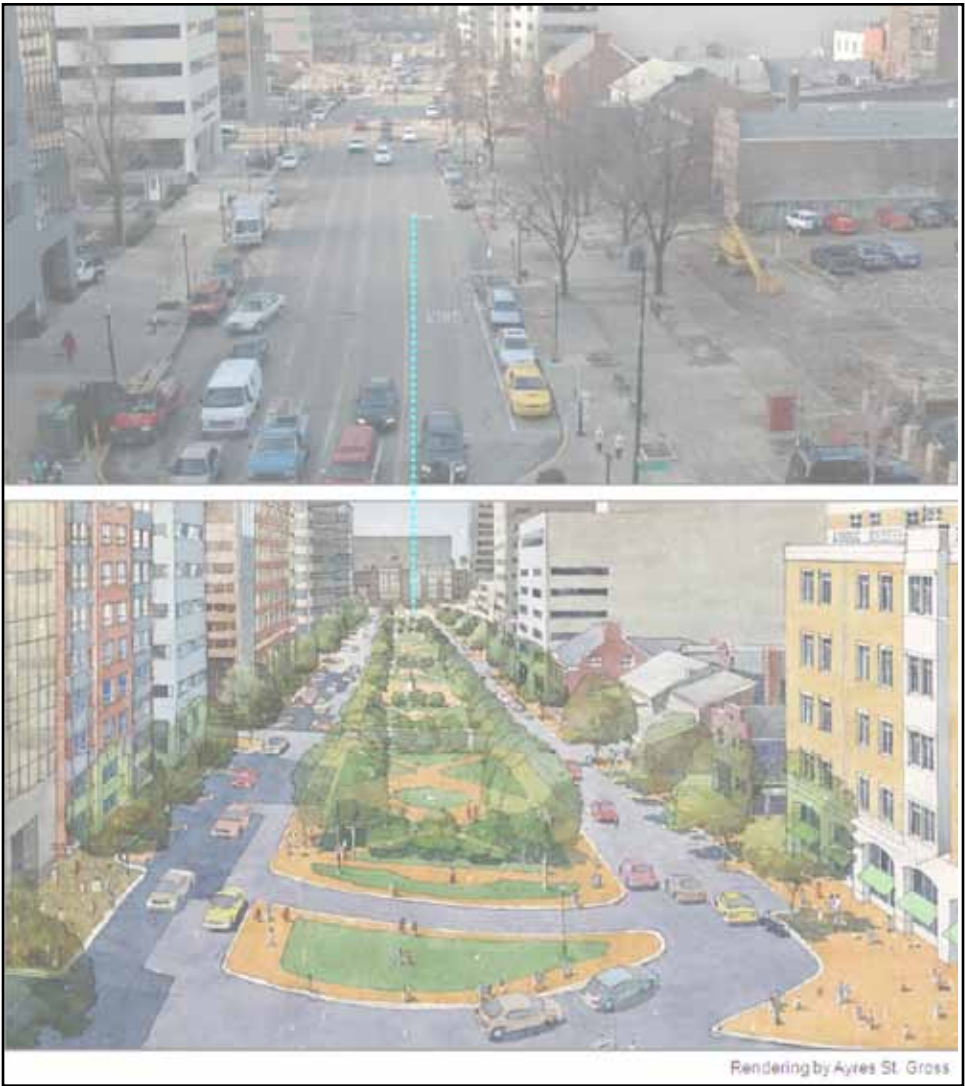
Austin, along with the commission he chaired, has been mostly written out of the triumphant story of Lexington’s new world-class plans. But then again, admitting him into the story would require a recognition that what we’re cheering (and soon to be paying for) is a world-class landscape architect’s authentic vision for the city—which looks similar to the ideas generated a half-dozen years ago by a local city council ad-hoc committee operating under a conservative vice-mayor at the height of the irrationally exuberant Bush years. Is that sort of progress worth all the fuss?

**Different values**

OK, I know what you are thinking. Delayed victory, good things take time to convince the “people.” The Orff design kicks ass. All true.

But take a look at what gets valued in the choice. World class has done well. It authorizes the \$150 million “gold standard” upgrades to Rupp Arena; it’s giving downtown businessmen an upgraded convention center to show off to their buddies in Chicago. Already, within a week of proclaiming that “the people I’m talking to are taking notice of Lexington,” UK Architecture Dean Michael Speaks leveraged his connections for a new job in Syracuse. Meanwhile, up-and-coming landscape architect Kate Orff will be returning shortly to Lexington from her home in New York to further develop her big plans for the commons (and, presumably, to pick up an equally sized paycheck).

And Steve Austin? Austin, who moved to Lexington as a teen in the early 1980s, lost his position with the



Design proposal for Vine Street rendered by Ayres St. Gross for 2006 Vine Street Linear Park LFUCG Task Force final report.

city in 2012, about six months before it hired UK double-retiree Frank Butler at \$250,000 a year to manage the Rupp Master Plan developed by world-class master planner Gary Bates (and, presumably, now also to interface with Town Branch Commons designer Kate Orff). Amazingly, though he chaired the task force that first officially introduced the now-hot Town Branch idea, Austin was let go by an administration publicly concerned with keeping and celebrating local talent in emerging fields.

This is a shame, but one that is not entirely a surprise. Austin was one

of the few people in this city taking a vocally active interest in truly sustainable practices. He was the only public official I know of who was biking streets throughout the city to think of alternative pathways of transportation. He was also one of the most attuned to planning in the age of climate change. Austin’s now kicking around Europe, building upon the interests he first developed in Lexington: sustainable development and low carbon urban designs—an occupational focus for which the New Yorker Orff has been lauded as an emerging global leader.