

February 18, 2020

**Written Response and Firm
Profile for Integrated Master
Planning RFI**

Patti Wallace
Purchasing Director
Sewerage & Water Board of New Orleans
625 St. Joseph Street, Room 131
New Orleans, Louisiana 70165

Dear Patti Wallace:

We submit here profiles on behalf of Stamp Studio LLC, Strategic Outcomes LLC, and the Water Leaders Institute (WLI), with the purpose of showing how we might contribute specific skill sets, experiences, methodologies, and tools in support of a robust integrated master planning process. Our team has deep knowledge and proven impact in the realms of community engagement, strategic planning, and facilitation, as well as hazard mitigation, water management, resilience planning, and climate adaptation.


Led by Aron Chang, Stamp Studio specializes in urban design, resilience planning, climate adaptation, and education. Aron has 10+ years of experience, and has played leading roles in efforts ranging from the Greater New Orleans Urban Water Plan to the development of New Orleans's Gentilly Resilience District. He is also a co-founder of the Greater New Orleans Water Collaborative, Ripple Effect, and the Blue House.

Led by Tanya James, Strategic Outcomes facilitates conversations to help people and organizations create visions that inspire and catalyze innovation and action. Tanya has 20+ years of experience connecting partners and people to expanded networks that support growth, transformation, and organizational change. Her practice focuses on developing community-driven programming, capacity building, multi-stakeholder engagements, and bringing social justice issues to the forefront of efforts.

Together, Tanya and Aron co-created the Water Leaders Institute in 2018, and have used that platform to build the capacity of leaders working at the intersection of people, policy, and practice. Working with diverse partners, WLI explores ways in which community members and technical experts can build common language, exchange knowledge and wisdom, and work collaboratively on community-led projects that support living with water, environmental stewardship, and climate adaptation.

Each of these entities is prepared to contribute to the three phases of the integrated SWBNO planning process. We look forward to joining planning workshops and working collaboratively towards equitable and transformational outcomes for all New Orleanians.

Sincerely,



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STAMP STUDIO



ORGANIZATIONAL PROFILES

STAMP STUDIO

Aron Chang, founder and principal, has over a decade of experience in New Orleans, not only working as an urban designer and planner to shift water management practices and systems towards greater sustainability and resilience, but also working across sectors and disciplines to support robust civic dialog, policy change, leadership development, and cultural initiatives that are crucial to the kinds of systems change necessary for us to live here in the delta.

As an urban designer and planner, he served as design team lead and outreach coordinator for the Greater New Orleans Urban Water Plan, and also as the design team lead for the city's National Disaster Resilience Competition proposal, which garnered the city \$141 million for the Gentilly Resilience District. He currently serves as urban designer and community engagement lead for the St. Anthony Green Streets component of the Gentilly Resilience District, which will transform two neighborhood streets and parks in the St. Anthony neighborhood.

During the development of the city's resilience strategy, Aron served as co-chair of the Education and Engagement working group. He also served on then Mayor Elect Cantrell's Transition Team Infrastructure committee, as well as then Councilmember Cantrell's appointee to City Council's Environmental Advisory Committee.

In the past six years, Aron has joined Tanya James in co-founding the Water Leaders Institute, worked with a teacher to found and direct Ripple Effect, and joined diverse stakeholders in forming the Water Collaborative of Greater New Orleans. He is project lead for the multi-disciplinary Mixed Media: Water Systems project, and teaches studios and seminars on community-based planning and design at the Tulane School of Architecture. He is also a co-founder of the Blue House, which is a shared work space and design collective based in Central City. He is currently working with the LA State Museum on the redesign of the "Living with Hurricanes: Katrina and Beyond" exhibit, which receives over 70,000 visitors each year.

Services and Offerings

- Urban Design
- Resilience Planning
- Community Engagement
- Community-based Planning and Design
- Environmental Policy
- Multi-disciplinary, Collaborative Processes
- Multi-media Projects and Curation



STRATEGIC OUTCOMES || strategicoutcomes.org

Strategic Outcomes has a long history of assisting public and institutional partners in developing equitable and inclusive planning processes. Tanya James, Managing Principal, has over 20 years of experience developing community-driven programming, capacity building, and bringing social justice issues to the forefront of efforts. Tanya led the program design for the 2019 BUILD Health Mobility leadership development program held in early 2019, through which twenty resident leaders explored intersections in social determinants of health, transit, and mobility, and continue to represent their communities in larger policy conversations underway with the Regional Planning Commission.

Tanya served as a lead collaborator for the Office of Neighborhood Engagement and designed the annual Neighborhood Summits from 2012 through 2016. Tanya also co-designed the Neighborhood Capacity Building Institute on behalf of the City of New Orleans with support from the NeighborWorks Institute and Rockefeller Foundation. In her leadership role with Central City Renaissance Alliance (six years as executive director), she has led place-based community engagement campaigns across a number of issues including housing, transportation, and health care. She has also led efforts to inform the city's Comprehensive Master Plan, Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance, and the Citizen's Participation Plan, led by Committee for a Better New Orleans (CBNO). Previously, Tanya served as the VP of Capacity Building at Louisiana Association of Nonprofit Organizations (LANO), where she supported design and recovery efforts in the social sector post Katrina.

Tanya James has also served as an Adjunct Instructor at Tulane University School of Social Work, where she taught courses in administration planning and organizing. Tanya has served as guest lecturer at Tulane University School of Architecture on best practices for community engagement to inform design and planning.

Services and Offerings

- Facilitation and Training
- Leadership Curriculum Development
- Strategic Planning
- Organization Development
- Transformational Coaching
- Community Engagement
- Participatory Research
- Program Documentation and Evaluation



WATER LEADERS INSTITUTE || waterleadersinstitute.com

The Water Leaders Institute -- co-founded by Stamp Studio and the Central City Renaissance Alliance with support from the WK Kellogg Foundation -- is dedicated to co-creating strategies for ensuring inclusive public planning and the development of equitable policy solutions. WLI has a record of building capacity and leadership across public and nonprofit sectors, as well as the capacity of people of color and other underrepresented voices (e.g., native New Orleanians, LGBTQ+, seniors, youth).

WLI provides resources, training, and networking so that New Orleans residents can deepen our understanding of water and water infrastructure, and lead community-driven processes that address safety, access, equity, ecology, health, and culture. Together, we explore ways in which community members and technical experts can build common language, exchange knowledge and wisdom, and work collaboratively on community-led projects that support living with water, environmental stewardship, and climate adaptation. We work to:

- Establish a neutral forum for connecting science and community
- Develop cross-sector leadership to address climate adaptation and resiliency challenges faced by New Orleans and other coastal communities
- Bring co-creation into resilience planning processes so that they are equitable and inclusive
- Identify shared values and priorities for resilience and adaptation, in support of both top-down and bottom-up solutions

Since its founding in 2018, WLI has worked with a cohort of 5 co-creators and 20 neighborhood leaders, organized a water leadership and climate adaptation briefing for the mayor and 20 Orleans Parish departmental heads, and collaborated with the Arts Council on connecting artists to technical experts and community members in service of public art projects that speak to themes of resilience and “living with water.”

WLI is also a network of highly skilled technical experts, community leaders, educators, facilitators, strategic planners, artists, and storytellers who are connected by the shared goals of bridging science and community, reshaping public dialogue on water and climate adaptation, and ensuring that community voices are central to planning and design processes.

- Technical Experts, including scientists, planners, designers, and engineers
- Community Organizations, such as Central City Renaissance Alliance and L9 CSED
- Community Leaders and Co-Creators from all five council districts
- Photographers, Designers, and Storytellers, such as CFreedom, Maggie Hermann, Maria Hinds, and Kelly Harris
- Strategic Planners and Facilitators such as Lolita Ross



A Framework for Community-Driven Climate Adaptation



CURRENT REALITY

Science and decision-making are disconnected from culture and community
 There are few clear implementation pathways for water management and climate adaptation plans
 There is no shared understanding of environmental challenges or shared vision for the future

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Co-Create

- Water Leaders Curriculum
- Outreach and Engagement Strategy

Educate

- Policy Makers
- Sector Leaders
- Neighborhood Leaders
- Youth Leaders

INCLUSIVE PLANNING

Guide

- Shared principles and priorities
- System and neighborhood recommendations
- Community leaders integrated into planning teams

Plan

- Hazard Mitigation and Recovery Planning
- Sewerage and Water Board
- Complete Streets and Parks Planning
- Neighborhood, District, and Waterfront Planning

DECISION MAKING

Inform

- Changes in policy and executive actions (top down)
- Funding for projects and programs (top down and bottom up)
- Community-driven solutions (bottom up)

Methodologies and Research Questions

How can we synthesize and communicate current science and planning efforts for community members without specific professional expertise?

What are the best ways to empower a broad range of stakeholders to take part in planning processes through hands-on workshops, field trips, and briefings?

How can we create tools and frameworks for water and climate adaptation planning that are inclusive of voices throughout the community?

How can these planning frameworks support both top-down and bottom-up processes?

How can community-driven planning support broader engagement and buy-in during implementation?

DESIRED OUTCOMES

Shared language and understanding of challenges
 Decision making based on science and community needs
 Community representation, advocacy, leadership, and buy-in throughout critical planning processes
 Shared vision for future, and coordination of efforts
 Clear implementation pathways, with agency and accountability across sectors

The WLI Framework for Community-Driven Climate Adaptation is the basis for structuring activities that build shared knowledge of environmental and infrastructural issues, and that integrate diverse leaders into official planning and design processes.



CHALLENGES

There are multiple sets of challenges that the SWBNO is facing that relate to the stormwater, drinking water, wastewater, drinking water, and power systems. The first set is environmental.

- The ground itself is sinking, and this condition is further exacerbated by sea level rise. This basic fact speaks to a broad set of issues and critical relationships. The decomposition of organic materials and the slow collapse of deltaic soils, without replenishment by the river, exerts an unsustainable pressure on all three systems -- subsidence strains and breaks pipes and culverts, while the loss of elevation increases reliance on pumping. This, in turn, increases operations and maintenance costs.
- Climate change is exacerbating severe weather patterns, increasing the frequency and severity of heavy rainfall events, tropical storms, and also droughts. Existing engineering paradigms rely on stationarity, in order to set design objectives and engineering targets. As weather patterns become more extreme as well as more unpredictable, the data that engineers have relied on for the past century are no longer sufficient. This requires new approaches to planning, design, management, and operations that prioritize flexibility and adaptability.
- Climate change and sea level rise is changing boundary conditions for all of SWBNO's systems. Changing rainfall patterns and flow in the Mississippi River Watershed threaten the very structure of the Mississippi River, flood protection systems, and the river's relationship to neighboring cities like New Orleans, which relies entirely upon the Mississippi for drinking water. A change in the river course towards the Atchafalaya, long feared, or other upstream disturbances places the entire city at risk, as the Mississippi is both source and outfall for the drinking water and sewerage systems. During dry periods, sea level rise raises the likelihood of saltwater intrusion, both from Lake Pontchartrain, and from the saltwater wedge that makes its way from the Gulf up into the river channel, threatening local water intakes.
- SWBNO's systems are completely dependent on fossil fuels to generate the electricity necessary to operate pumps and other critical system components. Given the city's geography, SWBNO systems are constantly working against gravity, moving massive volumes of drinking water, stormwater, and wastewater across large distances, and often uphill, or sometimes even over or under other waterways. This is heavy work, requiring massive expenditures of natural resources and of capital, and contributing to carbon emissions that themselves contribute to global warming. This reliance means that water systems operations are contingent on functioning power systems, which are themselves at risk from many of the same environmental challenges, and which are also subject to changes in oil and gas markets as well as global geopolitics. As the rest of the world seeks to shift away from fossil fuels, New Orleans will likewise need to reduce its dependency on oil and gas.



The second set of challenges is socio-cultural and political, and should have equal bearing on the design and implementation of the master planning process.

- There is a lack of understanding and trust. Much of the SWBNO customer base does not have a deep understanding of New Orleans geography, geology, hydrology, and how infrastructural systems work. While this is slowly changing, critical knowledge such as the relationship between pumping and subsidence is lacking amongst residents, media, decision makers, and institutions. At the same time, there is widespread mistrust of the SWBNO due to perceived and actual failures in everything from billing to repairs to boil water advisories to risk reduction. Consequences include political backlash and pressure after events that often are not aligned with critical needs and priorities, and also lack of public support for policy changes and systems changes that are necessary and that will become even more necessary in the years to come.
- The future of the SWBNO is the future of New Orleans. Every aspect of life in this delta city depends on functioning water systems, just as every aspect of the water systems is dependent on functioning transportation, communications, public health, education, taxation, permitting, and coastal restoration systems. What's missing, however, is a compelling vision how our various systems will function in the 21st century New Orleans, in ways that support health and well-being for all residents. There isn't yet a shared narrative like the one that came about at the end of the 19th century, which led to the city's first drainage master plan, the creation of the SWBNO itself, sweeping technological change, new policies, and a radical reshaping of the city's footprint. SWBNO planning has to connect to the other planning efforts that are underway -- e.g., parks master plan, hazard mitigation plan, disaster recovery plan, statewide watershed planning. And SWBNO must contribute to the development of a shared narrative that drives collective action, and that helps citizens and institutions make sense of the changes in municipal financing, in water systems operations, and leadership that they are asked to be a part of.

APPROACH

The diagram on page 4 of RFI shows community visioning/outreach as vital to the process, but also completely separate from the actual planning work. To drive systems change and to address the challenges identified above, community visioning must be integrated into the planning processes, rather than being handled as an adjunct to the formal work.

With the project pages that follow, we hope to show that such integration of community visioning is possible, and the we have developed, tested, and utilized a wide range of tools and methodologies that can support community-based planning and design. By integrating community visioning and planning, there will be far greater likelihood of successful implementation, because there will be broad ownership of the results. Public ownership will be the basis for real buy-in and stewardship.



PROJECT

ST. ANTHONY GREEN STREETS

St. Anthony Green Streets is a \$13.4 million component of New Orleans's Gentilly Resilience District, which is a combination of efforts across Gentilly to reduce flood risk, slow land subsidence, improve energy reliability, and encourage neighborhood revitalization. As part of Batture Engineering's project team, Stamp Studio leads the community engagement process, and ensures that community voices, ideas, and knowledge are integrated into the overall planning and design process throughout.



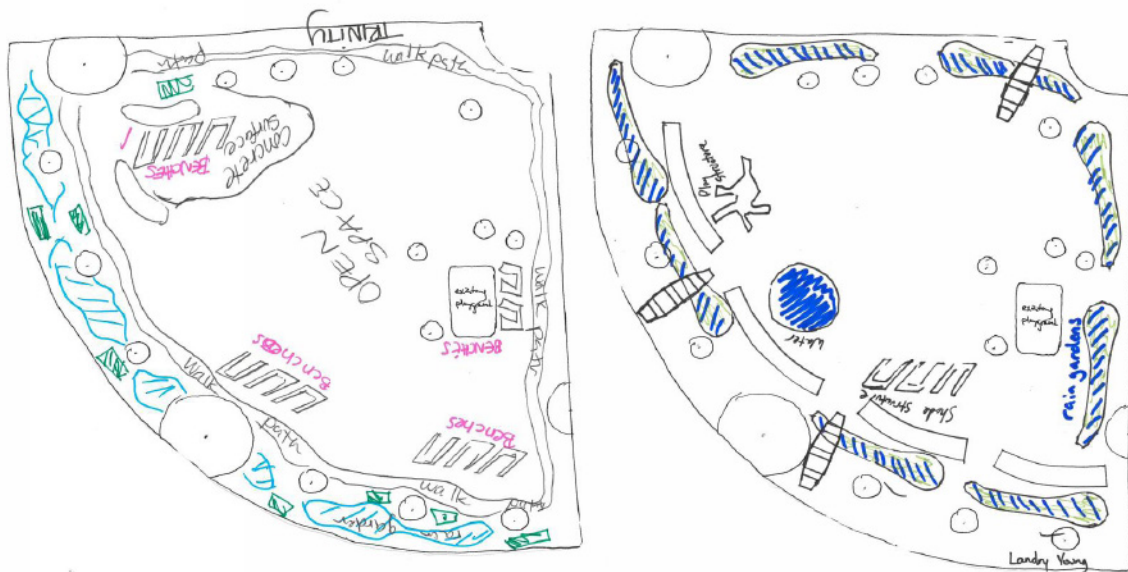
ABOVE

At the 2018 kickoff design workshop neighborhood residents and other stakeholders use collages to explore and describe desired outcomes for St. Anthony parks and streetscapes. This hands-on visioning activity precedes and directly informs the planning and design process.

RIGHT

At a later design workshop, a young family develops drawings illustrating their ideas for the park that their home faces. The young girl clutches a stencil in her mouth -- the stencil is part of a set of tools that supports residents in communicating their ideas and knowledge to technical experts.





ABOVE
 Drawings created by St. Anthony neighborhood residents demonstrate the capacity of ALL New Orleanians, even those without training in drawing or design, to contribute significant ideas and knowledge that pertain to water management and infrastructure design, provided they are given the technical support and tools with which to share their ideas and knowledge through drawings, collages, and other rich forms of communication.

LEFT
 At a St. Anthony design workshop, Stamp Studio led a process whereby community drawings, like the ones above, are immediately placed into a map/model of the entire neighborhood, and used to facilitate dialog between residents and technical experts on the impact and desirability of different ideas.

NEXT

The St. Anthony Green Streets project shifts from 60% to 90% design in spring 2020, with construction slated to begin in late summer or fall. The project will demonstrate new best practices for the design and construction of neighborhood streets and parks.

Post-construction monitoring should yield useful data on the impact of the project on the drainage system and groundwater levels. The design team is also working with researchers from the Tulane School of Public Health to conduct surveys to evaluate the impact of the project on public health outcomes and perception of the neighborhood.

PROGRAM

WATER LEADERS INSTITUTE

WLI utilizes proven methodologies to build capacity and leadership amongst different stakeholder groups. The WLI team develops and refines these methodologies with community co-creators, while drawing from the practices of science and environmental education, community development, community advocacy, organizational development, leadership development, urban planning, and strategic planning. Methodologies include story circles, drawing and mapping workshops, skill shares on topics such as research and advocacy, field trips, and facilitated discussions and visioning sessions.



ABOVE
During a 2018 workshop with neighborhood leaders from the city's five council districts, participants study water system components, and trace the flow of water from their respective homes through the city's drainage network and out to Lake Pontchartrain.

RIGHT
In January 2020, WLI leads a water and community resilience walking tour. The tour brings together neighborhood leaders, technical experts, and artists to explore rain gardens, neighborhood parks, streets, DPS 4, and the London Avenue Canal Levee Breach Site. WLI facilitates a discussion on the interrelationship between water, infrastructure, and risk across multiple scales and geographies.





In September, 2019, WLI provides a briefing on water and climate adaptation for Mayor LaToya Cantrell and 20 departmental heads, including city attorneys, chiefs of staff, communications officers, social media managers, public health officials, emergency managers, and others. They explore topics ranging from environmental stewardship to deltaic geohydrology to the impacts of climate change on local weather and infrastructure.

The second part of the briefing is a field trip that follows the path of water from City Hall and Central City down to DPS 1 and DPS 6. Then, we follow the high ground of the Metairie Ridge and Bayou St. John, all the while building shared knowledge of water systems and environmental challenges based on on-the-ground experiences.

WATER AND CLIMATE FIELD TRIP



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MAP KEY

- TOUR STOPS
- PATH OF WATER
- HIGH GROUND AND HISTORY



NEXT

In 2020, WLI continues working with the Arts Council New Orleans and Resilient NOLA to support artists in creating public art pieces for the Gentilly Resilience District that support community engagement of the themes of “living with water” and community resilience. WLI also works with a cohort of 20 neighborhood leaders from St. Bernard Parish, along with other stakeholder groups and leaders from around the region.

In addition, WLI joins Stamp Studio and Antenna Gallery in creating an online and paper **Water Map of New Orleans**, giving residents across a three-parish region ready access to historical maps, present day information on water infrastructure and water resources, and a platform for developing and sharing ideas about the future of water in this region. This can become a significant tool in supporting civic dialog and community-based planning.

PROJECT

MIXED MEDIA: WATER SYSTEMS

Told through pictures and the stories of SWBNO pump station operators, this multi-disciplinary project describes what it takes to move water through and out of our city, and the kinds of labor and knowledge that are necessary to operate the pumps. We explored, too, the limits of the mechanical drainage system that has existed and grown with the city over the past century. This project exists as a publicly available online resource, a special print feature distributed by the Times Picayune in 2019, and an exhibition called “Moving Water” that is on view until April 2020. See more at <https://issue2.mxd.media/>



ABOVE

This picture, taken the day after a storm at DPS 1, captures interactions between pump station operators, supervisors, and electricians. The project seeks to understand the interdependencies within the drainage system, and between the drainage system and other infra-structural networks.



MIDDLE

These two images describe change and adaptation within a complex system. The image on the left shows generational transfer of knowledge between a superintendent and a utility plant worker. The image on the right shows communications systems, from phones to radios to walkie-talkies, that pump station operators use. Each piece of equipment represent a different technological era.



BOTTOM

Pump Station Operator Dominique Coleman describes the relationship of DPS 19 to the Industrial Canal.

Photos: CFreedom/Maggie Hermann



ABOVE

The opening for Mixed Media’s Moving Water exhibit features Sewerage & Water Board pump station operators alongside the documentary art photography of Christine “CFreedom” Brown and Maggie Hermann, the paintings of Anne Nelson, and musical sketches by Sly Watts.

RIGHT

The process for creating Mixed Media: Water Systems involves a team of photographers, writers, and researchers making multiple visits to five different drainage pump stations over the course of 2019, and learning about pumping operations through the perspective of pump station operators.

Photos: CFreedom/Maggie Hermann

NEXT

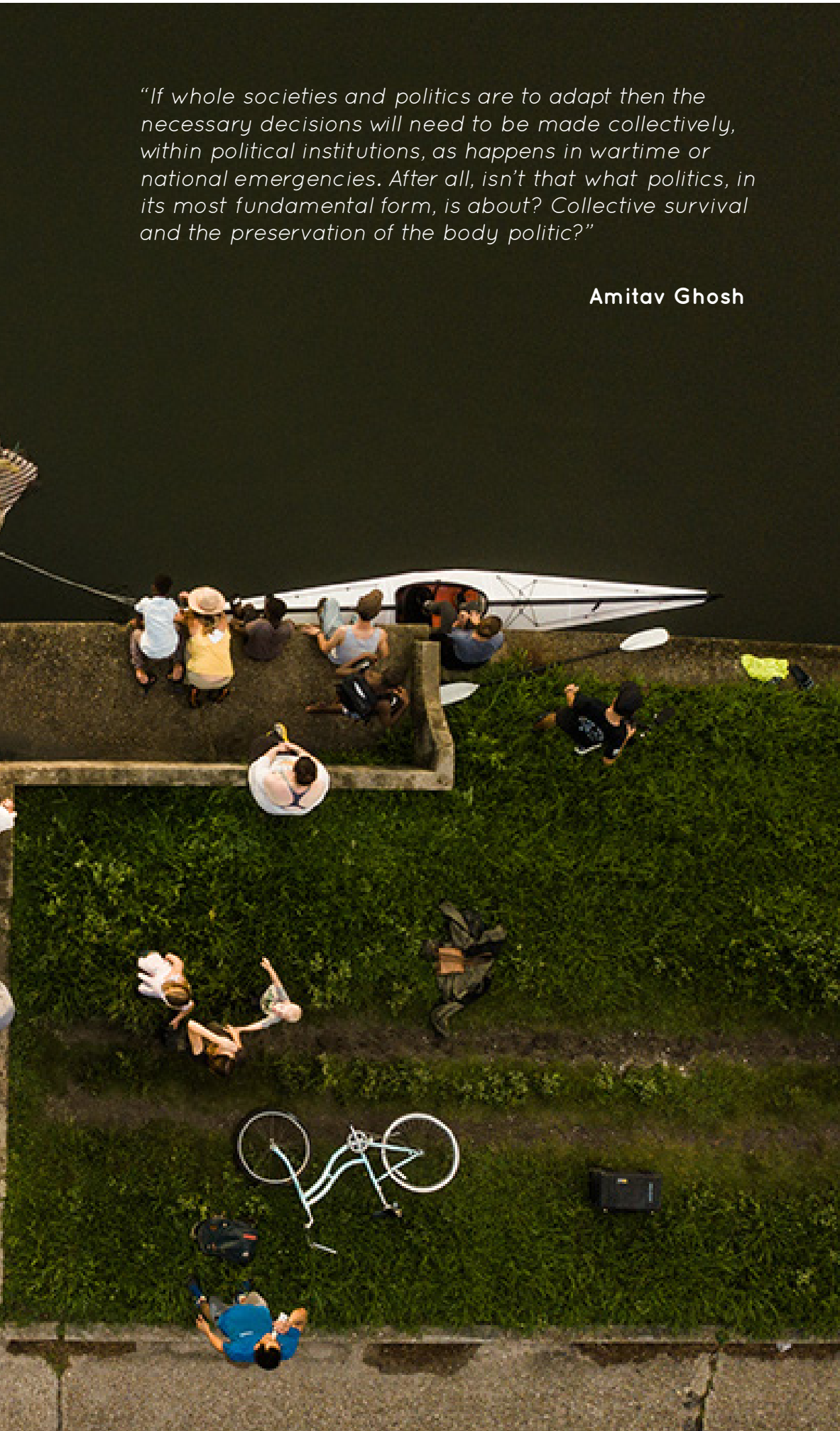
This current effort is contributing to shared knowledge of the SWBNO’s drainage system, as well as a richer understanding of the people that are vital to the operation of that system. The Mixed Media team’s goal is to do similar work with the SWBNO’s drinking water and sewerage systems. Those systems are, of course, vital to the future of the city as well, and there is perhaps an even greater lack of understanding amongst the general public of how our taps are supplied and our wastewater managed.

Building upon Mixed Media: Water Systems will support robust and informed civic dialog, and lay the foundations for community-wide participation in SWBNO planning efforts.



“If whole societies and politics are to adapt then the necessary decisions will need to be made collectively, within political institutions, as happens in wartime or national emergencies. After all, isn’t that what politics, in its most fundamental form, is about? Collective survival and the preservation of the body politic?”

Amitav Ghosh



As part of Mixed Media: Water Systems, the Water Leaders Institute joined the Blue House, artist Carole Alden, and volunteers of all ages in creating “Water Creature,” built out of salvaged materials. This 25’ floating sculpture lived on Bayou St. John for two days and two nights in summer 2019.

Photo: James Collier