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Little Rock's Emerging Nonprofit Corridor

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One of the defining ideas of the twenty-first century will be the emergence of the nonprofit sector as a dominant force in shaping social agendas—a prediction recently voiced by former President Bill Clinton. While innovation is the expected course of business in the marketplace, nonprofit organizations are typically known for their delivery of services in the aftermath of market or planning failures. Rather than limit their identity to the mitigation of marketplace and government shortcomings, new, enterprising nonprofits have committed their resources to modeling best development practices in their own communities.

This is the case with Little Rock's self-dubbed Nonprofit Corridor, anchored by its first completed projects, the William Jefferson Clinton Presidential Center and the Heifer International World Headquarters. Both exemplify the role of green building in urban recovery, and have been recognized nationally with awards from the American Institute of Architects' Committee on the Environment (COTE)—in addition to other environmental awards for brownfield remediation and industrial waste recycling. Both have also been cited for superior design accomplishment, having received Institute Honor Awards (Clinton Library, 2006; Heifer Headquarters, 2008), the highest distinction for built work granted by the AIA.

The Nonprofit Corridor and Brownfield Redevelopment

In 1997 an abandoned rail-switching yard and warehouse district on the Arkansas River in downtown Little Rock became the designated site for the proposed Clinton Presidential Center. Since then, there has been more than \$1.4 billion in surrounding mixed-use urban redevelopment.

Indeed, the former President consciously chose this brownfield site to spark reinvestment in the languishing downtown where he served as governor for twelve years. Completed in 2004, the \$165 million center is the only Presidential facility committed to downtown recovery, and the center's new University of Arkansas Clinton School of Public Service offers the only degree of its kind in the nation.

Acting on a petition from the Clinton Foundation, other locally based global nonprofits have purchased adjacent property, forming a sixty-acre greenbelt along the river. The first of these, Heifer International, a world-hunger organization recognized by *Forbes* as a "Gold Star" top-ten United States charity, completed its headquarters there in 2006. It is the first of a three-phase \$100 million "Global Village" development by Heifer that will include education and interpretive centers.

Two other major nonprofits are slated to build headquarters next to the Clinton Presidential Center and Heifer International. The Lions World Services for the Blind will soon break ground on a \$25 million headquarters and campus. CareLink, which provides services for the elderly and employs more than 650 people, is in the planning stages of its new headquarters.

A self-organizing nonprofit corridor should not be altogether surprising in Arkansas, because, along with Mississippi, the state leads the nation in philanthropic giving as a percentage of income. Arkansas also ranks third in the nation for assets owned by nonprofits, totaling \$279 billion, exceeded only by Illinois at \$321 billion and California at \$787 billion, according to the National Center for Charitable Statistics. The state excels in providing economic incentives for recruiting and retaining qualifying nonprofits. Arkan-

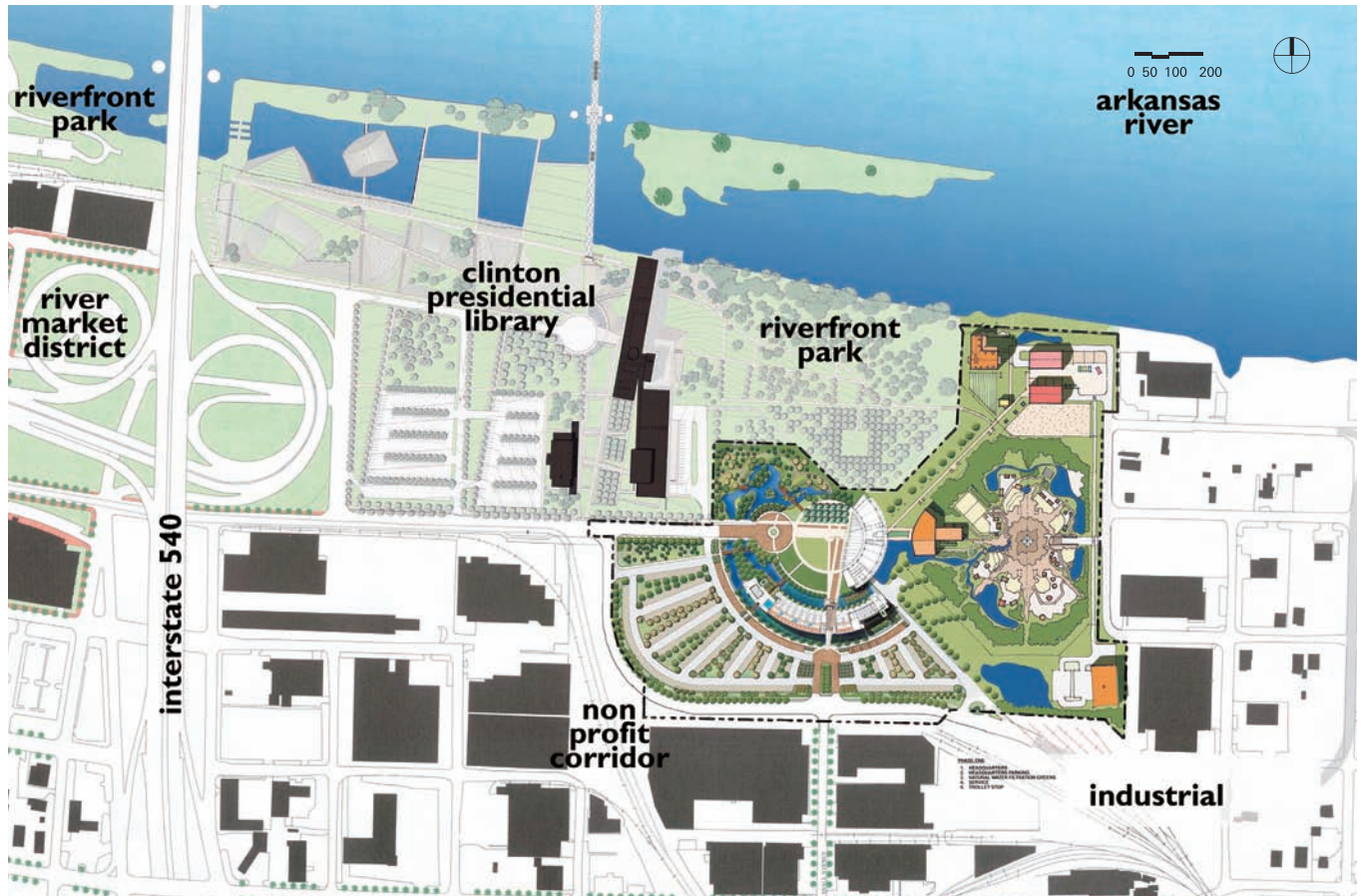
sas recognizes that nonprofits bring premium economic development and exemplary standards of stewardship to their home communities.

Anchored by the shared commitment of the Clinton Center and Heifer International to showcase sustainable development practices, sometimes at considerable expense, Little Rock is making a powerful case for the nonprofit corridor as an important urban development tool.

Heifer International World Headquarters and Low-Impact Development (LID)

Designed by Polk Stanley Rowland Curzon Porter Architects, of Little Rock, the \$17.5 million Heifer Headquarters was named one of the Top Ten Green Projects in America for 2007 by the AIA COTE. The project also received a Platinum Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design certification for New Construction (LEED-NC) from the United States Green Building Council; the platinum certification is the construction industry's highest honor for buildings that demonstrate environmental responsibility. It is one of forty-five buildings in the nation to have achieved a platinum rating and the only one in the south-central United States to have done so for new construction. It uses 55 percent of the energy of a comparable building utilizing conventional construction methods. The monthly water bill for this 94,000-square-foot facility with more than two hundred staff is only \$150.

Heifer's implementation of Low-Impact Development (LID) embodies longstanding wisdom that the preparation of a building site is the first important architectural act. LID is an ecologically based site-development model that minimizes the impacts of stormwater runoff. Runoff from



hard parking lot and roof surfaces is the single largest contributor of nonpoint-source pollution in watersheds. In the first hour of rainfall, urban stormwater runoff has a pollution index far greater than that of raw sewage. Heifer built a demonstration green parking lot to address these pressing sustainability issues.

The entire Heifer site is designed as a sponge to capture, filter, infiltrate, and cleanse stormwater runoff. This state-of-the-art stormwater management system employs bioengineering techniques to facilitate natural hydrological processes (i.e., evaporation, transpiration, and groundwater recharge). Runoff-treatment elements, including pervious surfaces, filter

strips, landscaped bioswales, retention basins, and reconstructed wetlands, essentially form a closed-loop system that keeps rainwater on site. Such bioengineering avoids the costly pipes, curbs, gutters, and catch basins in typical civil-engineered systems, which merely transport polluted stormwater elsewhere and burden municipal sewage infrastructure.

Wetland landscapes with wild grasses and reedy plant material are substituted for the chemically dependent green lawn, and they surround the building. The shallow-arc glass building essentially sits within its own stormwater treatment landscape, which has become a diverse habitat for ducks, watersnakes, dragonflies,

butterflies, turtles, and indigenous plant life. Besides water treatment, the wetlands at the Heifer headquarters will store nearly four million gallons of water for reuse as site irrigation and aid building temperature control. Temperature control will occur as the result of four-story glass-enclosed exterior stair towers extending over the wetlands, which will induce convective ventilation from the water through open metal

Above: The site plan for the Heifer International World Headquarters shows its proximity to downtown Little Rock and the Clinton Presidential Library. Drawing by Polk Stanley Rowland Curzon Porter Architects.



floor grates, negating the need for air-conditioning. Here, landscape systems are not just green (energy neutral), but regenerative, as they foster net energy production.

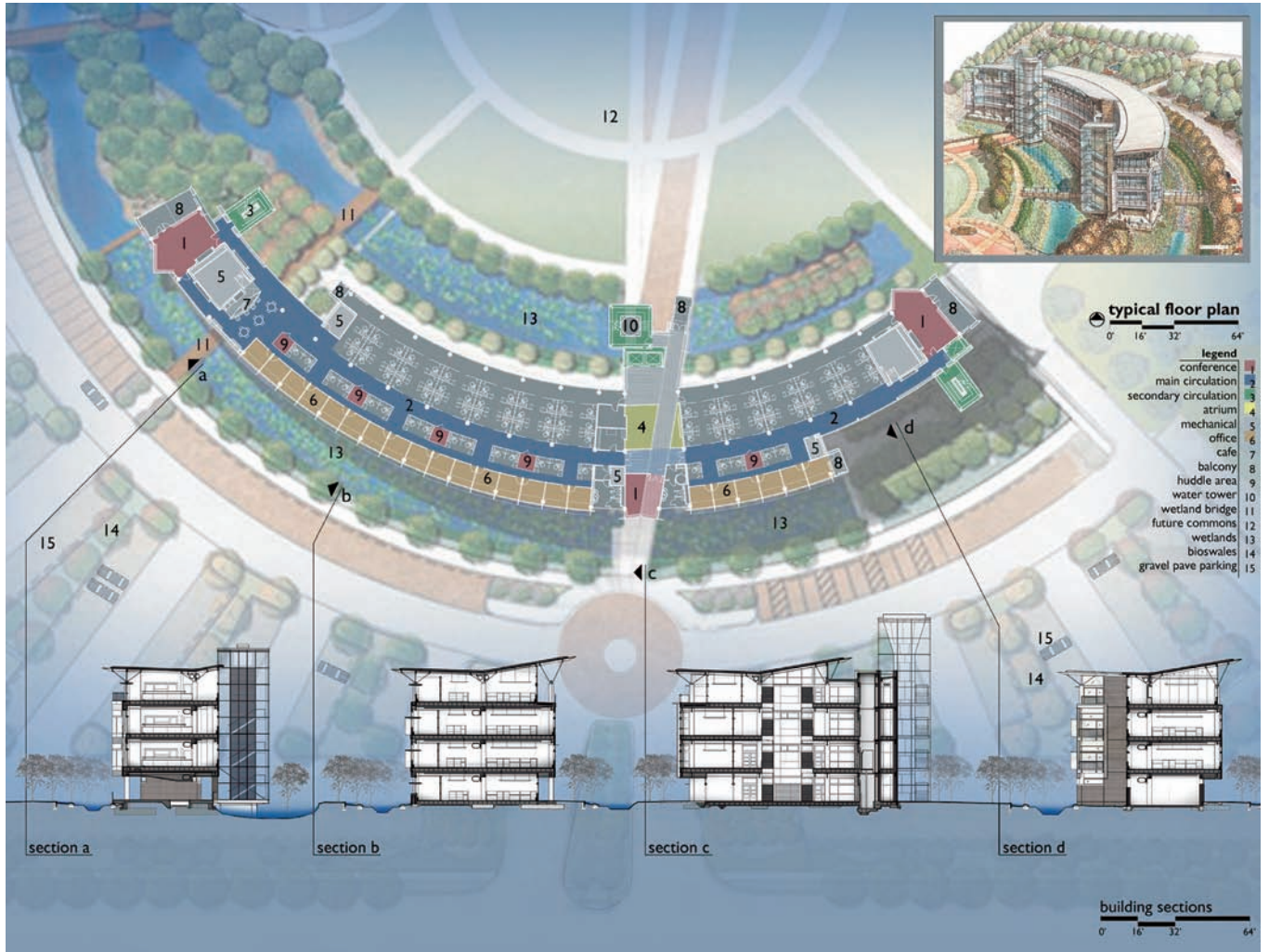
The project's handsome skin and plan configuration further estab-

Heifer International World Headquarters. The AIA's Committee on the Environment honored this complex in 2007 for a "top ten" award based on its response to issues of land use and site ecology. Photos by Timothy Hursley. Drawings and photos courtesy of Polk Stanley Rowland Curzon Porter Architects.

lish strong connections to the site. Outdoor rooms within the building's mass connect ground-floor public spaces to wetland boardwalks and provide porch-like spaces on the upper floors. The building's narrow, 62-foot, width and its east-west orientation also assure that all workers have access to views and natural light. Finally, vertical fins and horizontal sunshades integrated into the building's porous, responsive skin are designed to maximize solar gain or screening according to diurnal and seasonal solar cycles.

One of the upsides of locating within this industrial district is that Heifer's steel was fabricated three blocks down the street. Its aluminum curtain-wall system, constituting more than 90 percent of the exterior, was fabricated just across the street.

To top off these remarkable design accomplishments, the Heifer project recycled 97 percent of the demolished material from the warehouse complex that had occupied the site, helping make it this brownfield remediation project the largest by volume in Arkansas history.





William Jefferson Clinton Presidential Center and Park

Designed by Polshek Partnership Architects, of New York, the Clinton Center includes a Presidential library and museum, an adjacent archive and research center, and the University of Arkansas Clinton School of Public Service. The Presidential library received a Silver LEED-NC rating when it opened in 2004, but this rating has since been superseded because of continuous improvements in sustainability by the center's management. Last November the Clinton Presiden-

tial Library became the first federal building to receive a Platinum LEED certification for Existing Buildings, the highest green building rating.

The riverfront Presidential complex holds the most consequential position in Little Rock's Nonprofit Corridor, serving as a terminus to the riverfront road in the walkable downtown River Market District. Separated from downtown by an elevated interstate bridge, the library responds with a 420-foot-long elevated glass porch facing downtown. The porch is foregrounded by a dramatically sculpted

28-acre riverfront park, designed by the San Francisco-based landscape architecture firm Hargreaves Associates. In order to overcome the fragmenting effect of the highway bridge, the Presidential park creates a shared space between downtown and the iconic edge of the Presidential center, on the opposite end.

Unlike the preceding twelve Presidential library complexes, the Clinton Center avoids both overt monumentality and remoteness. Rather, it incorporates pedestrian-scaled urban plazas, terraces, gardens,



and porches within a larger campus that triangulates the Presidential center with downtown Little Rock and with North Little Rock, across the river. The center's exterior entry plaza aligns the Clinton Library with the adjacent renovated Victorian-era Choctaw Station (where the Clinton School of Public Service stands) and the abandoned Rock Island Railroad Bridge. The 1899 bridge will be restored as a pedestrian link to North Little Rock and will become part of the 24-mile Arkansas River Trail system. Motivated by the need for urban repair and concern for context, the center's campus plan reconnects disparate elements without compromising the resolute formality expected in a Presidential center.

On approach from the popular River Market District one-third of a mile away, the Clinton Library's west-facing glass-screened porch strikes an imposing figure as it cantilevers over the sculpted riverfront park. The

multistory porch is part of a 14-foot-wide double skin, accessible from the museum and great hall. The glass facade is made of laminated panels infused with black dots for tinting and white dots for reflecting sunlight, cutting heat gain by 50 percent. The glass porch is a sunscreen by day and a grand stage for public galas at night offers dramatic views of the downtown.

Solving for the Triple Bottom Line

Both the Heifer International Headquarters and the Clinton Presidential Center create strong relationships between architecture and the land, but in different ways. In Heifer's case, ecological modeling frames the planning approach, resulting in a "productive park," measured by natural resource yields. In the case of the Clinton Center, a social ecology of representational spaces extends the pedestrian culture of downtown.

It is further interesting that both projects are developed in a modern

idiom that is uninhibited when it comes to expressing architectonic systems. Both also convey a convincing public semantic not often seen as possible in a modern syntax.

Both projects were highly capitalized efforts, and set truly high standards of stewardship for future projects in the Little Rock Non-profit Corridor. While the corridor does not have a master plan, non-profits will likely continue to be the self-appointed agents for bringing green urbanism into the mainstream. They do this by solving for the triple bottom line, integrating social and environmental measures into economic development.

Clinton Presidential Center. The AIA's Committee on the Environment honored this complex in 2007 for its role as a urban catalyst. Opposite and left photos by Timothy Hursley. Right photo courtesy of Polshek Partnership Architects, LLP.