

A three-part architectural wish list for Rochester in 2020

Each December as we approach year's end and start thinking of what possibilities the New Year might bring, it often seems we are presented with an annual "year in review" or a "wish list" for the coming year.

Construction and the continued optimism of revitalization seem to be a fairly common news topic now. This past year brought plenty of headline-grabbing articles featuring flashy architectural renderings indicating a lot of progress and energy in the region. In fact, one could judge how well the construction climate is in Rochester by this marker alone. Looking back at all the construction stories this year the most promising take-away could be that it wasn't focused on a singular, large scale project of hope. This of course can be attributed to the multitude of projects occurring or perhaps it represents a shift in thinking of our region's growth.

The construction, real estate and design profession is ever-changing and highly influenced. A shift in policy, political leadership or economic forecast can produce a ripple effect that often has large implications for the building profession. Closing on what can confidently be described as a positive year for the industry, I'd like to offer the obligatory wish-list for what one hopes to be another transformative year for our region.

Wish No. 1: Give Credit

Those flashy renderings I mentioned earlier are most often produced by the architects working on the project. These visualizations require a high level of technical difficulty and talent. These images do more than showcase a project-to-



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Jason Streb

be; they are a result of hard work and intellectual property. Properly crediting the firm or individual who produced the work is essential in telling the full story of the project. The national organization of the American Institute of Architects has embarked on a decade long campaign to encourage media outlets to credit designers in their publications.

A construction project always has a team of architects, engineers and planners. They represent a richer, more intimate account of the project that often gets published. My wish is that these people and their stories get recognized during the reporting of projects.

Wish No. 2: Hire Local

The Rochester region is a powerhouse for architecture and engineering design firms. Several local firms are consistently ranked nationally by major industry publications. In fact, five Rochester firms are on Architectural Record's 2019 Top 300 list, a number nearly unmatched by other cities of our size (and larger). Firms such as CPL and LaBella employ numbers that range from 480 to 800-plus. Outside of this list is an equally impressive number of small to medium-sized firms that produce award winning designs all over the East Coast and across the country.

As shop-local and craft movements swell the tenor of regional pride, so too should our view of ar-

chitecture and design. Hiring local architects keeps money in our region and allows our local firms to grow and attract new talent.

There is a greater impact for hiring local besides the financial component. For healthcare projects it means designing a space that your family may receive vital care at. For educational facilities it's where our children learn and grow. The connection a local designer has to a project that impacts their own family or community invariably produces a more thoughtful approach. More than a sense of pride, it's a responsibility knowing that the impact will be felt directly and for years and generations beyond the actual project. This personal connection to a project is a quality that cannot be measured or judged against "out-of-town expertise." My wish is that our civic, public and private institutions tap our local firms for projects now and in the future.

Wish No. 3: Stand Out

Our region was built on a culture of both technological and social innovation. Standing out is what made Rochester a national name—not blending in. Even the Genesee River defies natural convention (one of only a few in the world that flows north). Our most famous culinary contribution is one that sounds understandably strange to outsiders but has inspired and rallied our neighbors.

Yet following a trend is always a safer bet than leading one. New developer-led construction projects in our region and across the nation have recently come to be classified as "developer modernism" for their seemingly similar appearance. A

lack of vernacular language or regional uniqueness in both the design and construction of these projects is making many urban environments feel more like their suburban cousins. Adding to this epidemic of sameness is the inclusion or acceptance of typically suburban materials now proliferating urban streets. Vinyl siding and other low-cost materials have found their way into large scale urban redevelopments. While these materials may seem benign in the larger picture of our city's development, it speaks to a troubling trend. Our buildings are often a larger representation of our community. What image are we presenting if we allow our new, urban construction projects to be on par with the suburbs?

In our immediate region and beyond, our buildings should embrace the culture of our past and look to innovate and stand out as a method of revival. My wish is for the design of all new construction projects to stand out and not blend in. Create the noise—not get lost in it.

There are many things to wish or want for in our region. There are certainly things that are needed. For the construction and design industry it will always be a desire for more. More projects and development, more wins and fewer losses. Wanting to build on the momentum that's been created this year and wishing for new opportunities in the next. Somewhere between the "needs" and the "wants" are the possibilities of a bright future—that's my wish.

Jason Streb is an architect and associate at CPL as well as current president of A.I.A Rochester.