

TEAM DESIGN PROCESS: THE OMEGA CHAIN

The Omega Chain design team process is a tried and tested model to evaluate multiple design alternatives and reach a consensus with the design team. This process involved participants from many disciplines such as planners, architects, landscape urbanists, ecological experts, social scientists, coastal, civil, land-planning and transportation engineers. The team also participated in interactive review sessions with the competition committee in public forums.

Participation in the Boston Living with Water competition presented unique challenges for the Beijing, China, office of Howard & Cavaluzzi Architects International. We not only anticipated the logistics of communicating through a 12-hour time-zone difference, but also precise language translations between English and Mandarin. Also, the long distance between the project site and our home office precluded any convenient in-person attendance of special related presentations in Boston. These differences were mediated by flexible office work-schedules; staff team members with ability to speak some English; use of electronic translators; and audio/visual technology such as webinars and video recordings of the Boston events.

Due to the demands of unexpected changes to our work schedule, we were unable to commence with the project until mid-January 2015. The abbreviated schedule necessitated a dedicated project team for efficiency and continuity. Our Phase 1 process consisted of multiple charretts and design review sessions. We experienced brief technical difficulties uploading our files to the competition website, however, after some timely assistance, the files were then uploaded.

After being selected as one of the winning semi-finalist on February 22nd, our team deemed it important for a Phase 2 partnership with local firms to enhance the design concept by grounding our vision with specialized knowledge and relevant practical local experience. Nitsch Engineering (Boston, Massachusetts) was selected to collaborate on the project. Our communication standard included email exchange and weekly audio/visual Skype sessions.

Based on feedback from the jurors and visitors at the April 22nd 'Public Pin-up' session, the team was further expanded by adding STOSS Landscape Urbanism (Boston, Massachusetts) to assist in designing wetland systems. We also communicated via email exchange and weekly audio/visual Skype sessions.

Other consultants were added to the Phase 2 team during the final two weeks prior to the competition's May 22nd deadline, but in more of an advisory role: Varoujan Hagopian, of GEI Consultants (Woburn, Massachusetts) provided coastal engineering input; Holli Semetko, Professor at Emory University (Atlanta, Georgia) provided insight to media and international affairs; disruptive technologies; and political science.

The entire experience provided valuable information and knowledge in addressing future climate change challenges and subsequent impact on infrastructure. We discovered that working across continents is possible despite travel distance, time-zone and cultural differences and language barriers. The power of collaboration is an ideal language for communication. With technology, we can bridge gaps in our thought process. It is our hope to continue this dialog and process, and extend our reach to engage a wider population.