

# 3 Principles for Town-Gown Projects (of Any Size)



Luanne Greene

“If I think back to the '90s and even the '80s, the town-gown relationship was more that colleges tended to circle the wagons and worry about what was inside their realm,” says Luanne Greene, president of the Baltimore-based architecture and planning firm Ayers Saint Gross. “What was outside was outside.” But times have changed, she says. “I can’t think of an institution that’s thinking that way any more.”

Now colleges and their communities assume that what’s good for one is good for the other, Greene says. “They are thinking collaboratively, small liberal-arts colleges as well as big giants that almost create their own weather — the Ohio States and the Purdues of the world.”

In the coming years, she says, campus officials should watch for several trends:

**Development partners will continue to be an important part of colleges’ campus planning.** Historically, such private partnerships have focused on either student-housing projects (now ubiquitous) or research environments (such as the Cortex Innovation Community, in St. Louis, or the Jewelry District, in Providence, R.I.). But Greene sees more blurring of lines ahead. After all, she says, city-building is at the core of any capital project: finding the right scale for structures, attracting lively ground-floor retail, and assuring population density that supports transit and other services in demand.

**Cities and colleges will have to figure out how to handle transit challenges and the advent of autonomous vehicles together.** Communities and institutions will also need to collaborate on crucial energy issues, she says — like limiting carbon emissions and improving the efficiency of distribution systems.

**The common thread will be compaction: keeping people and ideas close to each other.** Whether it’s the crossroads of urban and campus development or the future of transportation, utility infrastructure, or buildings, compaction is essential, Greene says, to “that classic college-town intellectual buzz.”