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Postcard from New England

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by Rocco Landesman

Last week I was New England bound, with visits to Hartford, Connecticut, and Boston and Cambridge, Massachusetts. Hartford was a MICD 25 showcase and model of what we're hoping for with Our Town. Hartford is a beautiful city, and it was great to be there physically and to visualize what can happen with its MICD 25 project—the iQuilt. This iQuilt project is really neat. There is a cultural district in Hartford that people don't realize is there because there are different institutions and different buildings that are spread out a bit. There needs to be connections and some development. The intent of iQuilt is to make people feel like they can move from one to the other and that they're in a cultural area. For instance, there is a main street with one of the big museums on it that is essentially barricaded from street. It needs to connect with the street, and they have plans to make a kind of greenway. And there will be signage, there will be internet connections, there will be ways for people to know that they can move from one institution to another. This project is really going to be transformative to downtown Hartford.

We've given a planning grant for this to the Bushnell Center for the Performing Arts, and it's something that was great to see, how they've conceived of it and how they've laid it out. I met with Ronna Reynolds who is the executive director of the Bushnell. She is a real leader and has been instrumental in this project for which a lot of different elements in Hartford have come together. David Faye is also a big part of the initiative—I knew him from when he ran the Fox Theater Complex in St. Louis. He's the Bushnell's president and CEO, and it was great to reconnect after all these years. One of the things that I'm always hoping for is that our funding and our work can be a catalyst for the engagement of others in a place. The Educational Foundation of America—which is in Westport—is now interested in the iQuilt and is giving the project some significant funding, equal to or more than ours. If we can be an instigator or catalyst for private sector involvement for a lot of these projects, they're going to have a lot more resources, and that's one of the things that I'm excited about. It's great to see the Educational Foundation step up there and get involved. That was very encouraging to me.