

URBAN DESIGN & PRESERVATION



American Planning Association
**Urban Design and
Preservation Division**

Making Great Communities Happen

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Welcome to the Urban Design & Preservation Newsletter Winter 08/09

We hope you find this issue full of good ideas and interesting projects from around the country. If you have thoughts or ideas for future issues, please contact us at: info_UDP@planning.org

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Scholarships Now Available

Applications are now available on APA's website for our 2009-10 scholarships and fellowships. Use our site as your first resource for information on these and other planning scholarships and additional sources of financial assistance.
<http://www.planning.org>



Katrina stricken communities come out of the fog

By Jason L. Beske, AICP



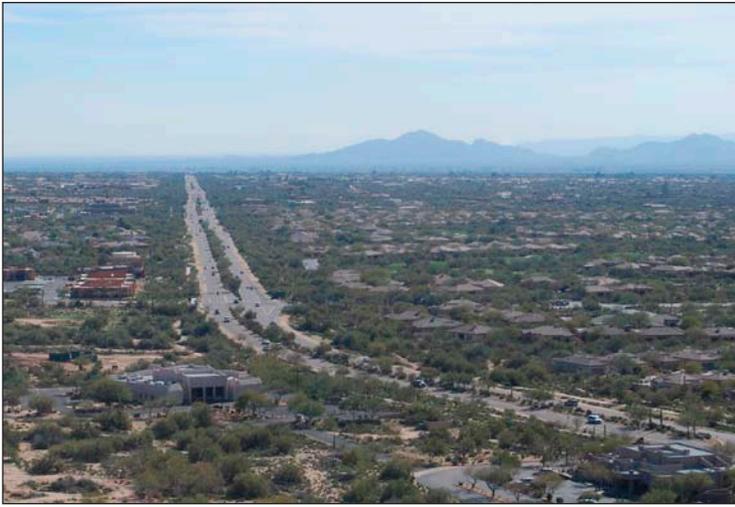
The Antique District of Slidell was relatively unscathed in Hurricane Katrina and will likely serve as the epicenter of revitalization in Old Town Slidell.

As Hurricane Katrina unleashed a devastating blow on the City of Slidell, LA, in 2005, any thoughts of city planning were replaced with the will to survive and the hope of someday re-emerging as a community.

Situated at the northeast corner of Lake Pontchartrain, a majority of Slidell was under several feet of flood water. On top of that, tens of thousands of trees were strewn across roads, yards, and homes. Lives, dreams, and a large part of the community had been destroyed. However, in observing the damage, Mayor Ben Morris was more determined than ever to rebuild a community that residents and visitors could be proud of. As many Katrina stricken communities come out of the fog of the event, they are recognizing an ever-increasing need for quality planning to launch a clear path to recovery. Ever more, the mayor recognized that any recovery effort would begin and end with good planning and design.

continued page 3

The Sonoran Desert is an arid region covering the southern half of Arizona, portions of southern California and Mexico. The hottest North American desert, with winter storms and summer monsoons makes this area rich in biological diversity. Northern Scottsdale, Arizona is located in the upper Sonoran Desert. Hills studded with Saguaros and lush with plant life, make this the backdrop to the Desert Foothills Scenic Drive.



The Desert Foothills Scenic Drive with a 100-foot natural landscape buffer on each side of Scottsdale Road

Located on Scottsdale Road, these six miles of roadway are dedicated as a scenic corridor. Seen as a community landmark, preservation efforts have been made for over 45 years to maintain the Scenic Drive's natural desert character. Neighboring communities, volunteers, non-profit organizations, and the City of Scottsdale have made substantial contributions to preserve and restore the natural desert environment and enhance its character as a distinctive tourist destination. Improvements along the drive have also been made incrementally through the city's plan review process.

Designated by Scottsdale's General Plan, scenic corridors are to be major thoroughfares that require expanded scenic desert landscape setbacks to preserve a sense of openness for the community. The principle goal is to achieve minimal visual impact of the built environment on the natural desert setting.

Along this drive the goal is to preserve native vegetation and scenic vistas, and reflect a subtle design approach that responds to the rural and equestrian character.

With the implementation of the Scottsdale Bond 2000 program, the citizens had an opportunity to further preserve the environment along the drive. Voter approved, this authorized bonds for "scenic corridor preservation, restoration and enhancement." The bond issue also provided for the development of a streetscape enhancement program for the entire 24.5 miles of Scottsdale Road. This included creating the Scottsdale Road Master Plan and Design Guidelines to establish Scottsdale Road as the signature corridor in the city.

The City of Scottsdale's Advance Planning Department conducted a study with the purpose of developing a set of community driven recommendations to guide the use of bond funds for roadside improvements along the Scenic Drive. This study examined a six mile segment of Scottsdale Road, known as the Desert Foothills Scenic Drive. A number of project scope alternatives were developed and analyzed based on priorities developed by community input. Each alternative was examined closely to determine the ones that best fit the community's needs with budget limitations in mind. As a result the five alternatives listed below were identified for further study for the preservation and restoration of the desert buffered setbacks.

- Establish a contiguous scenic corridor easement on each side of Scottsdale Road.
- Establish a comprehensive trail system as set forth in the Scottsdale Trails Master Plan.
- Re-establish native vegetation adjacent to the roadway.
- Underground the remaining portion of overhead power lines.
- Install minimal streetscape elements that reinforce the rural equestrian character of the Desert Foothills area.



Scenic Corridor adjacent to roadway includes native vegetation and meandering trail



Jeff Soule, FAICP presents findings of the Planning Assistance Team to the community

continued from page 1

Responding to a request for planning assistance from the Mayor, the American Planning Association (APA) sponsored a four-member volunteer planning team that was supported by the Tulane Regional Urban Design Center in New Orleans. The APA Planning Assistance Team (PAT) assembled in Slidell from October 13-15 to begin an assessment of the city's urban design, infrastructure, and budgetary needs. A majority of the team's time was spent working with local experts, citizen groups, and municipal participants.



Trails and pedestrian plan recommendation for the Slidell area

To learn more about APA's Planning Assistance Teams:

<http://myapa.planning.org/cap/pat.htm>

The team's experience in Slidell, including a picture gallery, visit the Urban Design and Preservation Division blog:

<http://apaudp.blogspot.com>

TEAM WORK



The PAT team in action on the streets of Slidell

As a member of the team, my task was to focus on urban design issues and to provide recommendations for future implementation. Key issues identified by the team included the need for pedestrian and bikeway connectivity, sound urban design guidelines, a renewed focus on downtown Slidell, and the need for a variety of funding sources for implementation of the city's vision to become a reality. The efforts of the team's on-site analysis culminated in a community presentation that gained favorable reports by several of the region's media outlets. As a capstone to the planning assistance, the team is in the process of writing a final written report that will serve as a future guide for the community's planning initiatives.

DISCOVER

continued from page 2

The study process was structured around these five goals:

- 1) meet with local residents and stakeholders to gain direction,
- 2) achieve a comprehensive understanding of the area through documentation of the existing conditions,
- 3) analyze opportunities and constraints,
- 4) review findings and prioritize options, and
- 5) provide long term recommendations for the completion of the Scenic Drive enhancements.

The process to collect information of the study area combined numerous techniques: visual surveys, research of past and current development cases, and related plans and policies. This information was then placed into a GIS (Geographical Information System) database to produce maps and graphics to analyze.



Photosim / rendering of native plant revegetation and decorative screening

The technical data, along with cost estimates were brought back to the community for them to decide and prioritize options. Study findings showed that the expense to procure the needed scenic corridor and trail easements, combined with the estimated cost to construct a continuous trail system, exceeded the current project budget. Therefore, the community set their priorities on more affordable solutions that would also make an enhanced visual impact. The following alternatives were identified and prioritized through a public participation process. Options are ranked in order of importance and available funding.



Winter 2008/09

Priorities

1. Underground the remaining overhead power lines. Remaining funds will be put towards priorities two and three.
2. Provide native plant revegetation and install minimal intersection improvements reflecting the rural/equestrian character of the area.
3. Improve the trail system as allowed by any remaining project funds.



Photosim / rendering of an intersection

The photosimulations provided give a sense of what it could look like before and after the improvements are made. For priority one, undergrounding the remaining overhead utilities would open up views and enhance open space. Remaining funding will be put towards native plant revegetation along the roadside and mechanical equipment screening. Priority two also includes minimal intersection improvements for pedestrian safety and comfort.

So where do we go from here? Public outreach will be an ongoing process throughout the entire project to ensure the community's vision is achieved. The next steps for implementation are first to create a work program, assign roles, hire consultants to draft the plans, and finally send them out to bid. The findings of this study will be incorporated into future Community Area Plans and the 2011 General Plan Update.

Joanie Cady, LEED AP is a Planner with the City of Scottsdale's Advance Planning Department. She has professional planning experience in long range and current planning and an educational background in environmental planning.

For more information, readers can go to the City of Scottsdale's website: www.scottsdaleaz.gov or contact Joanie Cady at jcady@scottsdaleaz.gov

Change we can design with?

by Brad Davis

The election is over and the national “to-do” list is being created to address the (insert environmental, economic, social crisis here). Lately I’ve been reflecting on our historical responses to troubling times and the issues that lie before us. I have also been struck by the unique opportunities that as designers, planners, and preservationists we are now faced with. Where before our nation has muddled through with different development strategies, we are now being forced to shift our focus and responses in a more profound and directed way.

As planners, designers, and preservationists, what are we to do? How should we respond to our current crises? There is no doubt that we are going to participate in infrastructure investment similar to the New Deal and the National Interstate Highway System. The response will resemble the New Deal in scope by addressing a range of infrastructure elements and it will be similar to the National Interstate System in terms of its adoption of a unified design focus. Going forward, we must use the successful elements

of these programs to guide our responses while learning from their limitations. Below is my list of considerations that I feel must be incorporated into our future infrastructure investment strategies.

Address the two elephants in the room

There are two major issues that must be addressed in order to deal with the future needs of our physical infrastructure. First, the era of cheap, or continually cheap, oil is over. The fluctuations in availability and price will continue as the recent price spike in oil indicated. Although many of us can adapt in the short term, the long term health of our current infrastructure systems are stretched thin. We need to design and invest in systems that are able to handle adaptations to these conditions. The second major issue is the negative effects development has on our natural environment. As the recent flooding in the Midwest showed, increased impervious surfaces and run-off rates and man-made drainage avenues can contribute to the severity of flooding.

continued page 6

LEED for Neighborhood Development 2009 Open for Public Comment

USGBC is pleased to announce that the new LEED for Neighborhood Development 2009 Rating System is now open for public comment. We anticipate receiving many insightful comments on the rating system draft, especially from our corresponding committee members.

Those of you who have been following the progress of the program over the past few years know what an important moment this is for the LEED for Neighborhood Development program. The revised rating system is built upon the LEED for Neighborhood Development Pilot Rating System, which nearly 240 projects have been using since July 2007 as part of a successful pilot program. Eighteen projects have been certified. Their invaluable feedback, combined with countless hours of USGBC volunteer time, has produced a more sophisticated, market-responsive rating system that we look forward to sharing with you. A special thanks to those corresponding committee members who have provided us with feedback in the past, e.g. through our “Write Your Own Credit” exercise earlier this year.

Any member of the public may submit comments.

To view the rating system draft and comment, please see the LEED Rating System Drafts webpage:

<http://www.usgbc.org/LEED/LEEDDrafts/RatingSystemVersions.aspx?CMSPageID=1458>

The public comment period will be open from November 17, 2008, through January 5, 2009 at 11:59 PST.

For more information about the LEED for Neighborhood Development program please visit our website:

<http://www.usgbc.org/leed/nd>



continued from page 5

Our attempts to separate the built environment from the natural environment have their limitations. If we are going to create healthier and safer places to live, we are going to have to integrate healthier natural systems into developed areas.

Prioritize infrastructure investments

Infrastructure investments must be prioritized. Is a four lane road through the rural countryside providing the same investment return as creating walkable streets in urban areas? Likewise, is expanding traditional stormwater systems a better option than reducing impervious surfaces? We must make infrastructure design and investment decisions in a more systematic, predictable, and equitable way. Integrating new infrastructure components, such as commuter rail lines, must be balanced with maintenance of our existing infrastructure.

Diversify infrastructure systems

The current national situation has shown that having systems that are catered towards one auto-oriented solution carries additional risks. The gas price spike highlighted this point by reducing the affordability of auto-oriented mobility options. When looking at nature, the healthiest natural systems are those with the greatest biodiversity. These natural systems provide for the greatest buffer and adaptability to changes in the environment. The same should hold true for our infrastructure. As part of a sustainable transportation system, public transportation, walkable streets, and automobiles should all be mobility options. These options need to be available to a greater number of people too if they are to create sustainable solutions.

Consider infrastructure deconstruction

It is clear that government budgets are stretched thin by continued expansion and delayed maintenance of infrastructure. Just as companies downsize to reign in costs, so should our nation and local governments consider reducing the amount of infrastructure it has to maintain. In addition, there are some cases where communities would be better served if current infrastructure were removed. An example of this is the elevated, limited access highway in an urban setting. The physical structure of this highway type creates two costly situations. First, the elevated nature of the road requires additional engineering and maintenance costs.

Second, the typical design disconnects surface roads. gets and better local road connections can be made. Where highways are removed, tax generating property can be created to boost government budgets and better local road connections can be made.

Develop new models for guiding and financing new investments

Just as our current physical infrastructure systems are outdated, so too are our tools for guiding and financ-



Seattle Metro bus tunnel

ing them. In order to deal with new infrastructure needs, we will need to develop new approaches, ensuring that our investments properly address our new situations. Public and private financing tools must be capable of generating investment funds and accounting for the life-cycle costs of our infrastructure. Also, municipal incorporation, annexation, and tax revenues need to be modified. For the modifications to be effective, they must limit municipal competition for bad development (e.g. big box stores, office parks, and suburban sprawl) and the associated infrastructure glut.

Engage in the process

Now more than ever, designers, planners, and preservationists must advocate for the principles of good urban design. As bills are passed, laws are modified and made, and investments are prioritized, we need to ensure that strategies that support quality design are included. We must participate in the new investment process to create better models to fund quality urban design.

It is such an exciting time to be a part of our field. We have a unique opportunity to make big strides rather than small steps towards making the places we live more livable. The New Deal and the National Interstate Highway System created a holistic investment approach and a unified design focus. By adopting a similar but modified approach to our current infrastructure needs, we will be able to create more sustainable infrastructure systems.

Brad Davis

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To Re-Imagine Cities, Re-Imagine Urban Design

by Nate Berg

Oil is running out and the climate is changing. How this impacts cities will largely be determined by how the urban design field reacts.

By name, the field of urban design is only about 50 years old. It was born at the 1958 “Conference on Urban Design Criticism” held at the University of Pennsylvania, attended by such legendary urban thinkers as Jane Jacobs, Kevin Lynch, Lewis Mumford, Ian McHarg and Louis Khan – each before publishing the seminal works that cemented their places in the history of urban planning practice and theory. They gathered together to discuss a new vision for American cities, one in response to the wide-scale urban renewal focus that was destroying communities across the country. But the field this historic conference created was nothing especially new. Many of the principles it endorsed -- from the importance of public space to the need for equitable housing -- were already being considered by planners, architects and designers, albeit from outside the encompassing shadow of that which we now call urban design.



Seattle cyclist

Today, as the world struggles with escalating energy demand and wildly fluctuating prices, increasing temperatures and a changing natural environment, new questions and challenges confront the field. Like the 1958 conference before it, a recent symposium at the University of Pennsylvania sought to define those challenges, and provide a manifesto for approaching them. “Re-Imagining Cities: Urban Design After the Age of Oil” solidly established that designing urban places in an era of climate change will require major



Seattle in the Fremont neighborhood

ideological and technological shifts.

But as much of the symposium discourse illustrated, these shifts are already occurring. In the same way that urban design existed before it had that name, urban design for a changing climate and post-oil world already exists -- though often only in separate pieces and standalone projects. But now with a manifesto being drafted by hundreds of the field’s brightest thinkers, a more formal and directed discussion can begin on unifying the goals of urban design to address these major issues.

The challenges are immense. We’ve all heard that more than half of the world’s population now lives in urban areas, a figure that will rise to three-quarters by 2050. That’s almost 7 billion of the future world’s 9 billion people living in urban areas. Many in the urbanist camp will herald this demographic shift, as cities are often seen as the most sustainable places to live. But they’re going to have to get a lot more sustainable if they want to be able to maintain anything similar to the quality of life they’ve been able to muster over the last 100, 50, or even 10 years. Cities are not going anywhere, but without some major paradigm shifts, they’re going to

continued page 9

Winter 2008/09



FORUM

The Sixth National Forum on Historic Preservation Practice

The sixth national Forum on Preservation Practice will explore the challenges that preservation faces in becoming a critical component of the national debate about sustainability. It will bring together anthropologists, architects, landscape architects, economists, geographers, planners, scientists, resource managers, urbanists, and preservationists from higher education, government offices, non-profit institutions and private practice to focus on a critical assessment of current preservation and sustainable practices and how they can be integrated to create a sustainable future.

The purpose of the Forum is to provide an opportunity for a limited number of preservation and sustainable practitioners, academics and others from varied backgrounds to come together to discuss our evolving understanding of the nexus between historic preservation and sustainability. To facilitate discussion, enrollment will be limited to a maximum of 150 registrants. Attendees will be provided with copies of papers to be presented in their registration packets. Each session will be followed by a discussion period and a break for refreshments and informal discussions.

The sixth national Forum on Preservation Practice opens with an evening reception on Thursday, March 19 and concludes late morning, Saturday, March 21, 2009

For more information visit:

<http://www.goucher.edu/x29529.xml>



Winter 2008/09

Division Sponsored Sessions

Thank you to all of those who submitted sessions for Minneapolis 2009. The following are our selected by-right sessions. If you submitted but were not selected by the Division you may still be selected from the pool forwarded to the APA. Please let us know if your session is selected by APA so that we can highlight it in our Spring newsletter and in notices leading up to the conference.

S573 Sustainable Approaches to Planning Downtown Growth 04/28/2009 9:00AM to 10:15AM

The most environmentally sustainable way to accommodate growth is to regenerate underutilized urban spaces with access to existing services, transit, and infrastructure. Examine the unique strategies and plans of San Francisco; Portland, Oregon; and Seattle to regenerate their urban cores with high-density mixed use communities, comparing and contrasting their approaches and discussing lessons learned. Sponsor: Urban Design and Preservation Division.

S648 A Methodical Approach to Urban Design Analysis 04/29/2009 9:30AM to 10:45AM

Learn about this methodical approach to analyzing and evaluating the urban design components of the built environment for the purposes of individual site analysis or neighborhood/district urban design plans. This structured and sequential review shows how urban design concepts relate to themes of form and function, design structure, placemaking, and ecology. Sponsor: Urban Design and Preservation Division

UPCOMING EVENTS

Architecture and urban design events in LA:
<http://www.laforum.org/>

URBANEXUS
Events by Next American City Magazine
<http://americancity.org/urbanexus/>

New York City Forum for Urban Design
<http://forumforurbandesign.org/events.php>

If you have other events you would like to add please contact us at info_UDP@planning.org

continue to guzzle resources and sprawl out their ecological footprints until they can no longer sustain the billions who are going to inhabit them.

Practitioners will need to break free from their silos and forge a better understanding of the interrelatedness of these fields.

Planners, architects, designers, landscape architects and policymakers are going to have to get on the same page to make sure these shifts occur. That's pretty easy to say. But it can also be easy to do -- there just needs to be a better understanding of the scope and

scale of the problem. One of the most important themes discussed during the recent symposium was fusion.

Planners are going to have to be architects are going to have to be urban designers.

To properly address the problems that envelop these

distinct fields, practitioners will need to break free from their silos and forge a better understanding of the interrelatedness of these fields. A building is a building, but it is also part of a neighborhood and part of a city and part of an ecosystem. Pulling out to take a holistic view of the building's place on the block, in the city, in the world will provide context for urban designers to think about the impact of their work at each of those scales. None can be ignored. The fusion of these fields should reflect the global nature of the issue. Climate and natural resources are shared around the world. Addressing climate change at the city-level is great, but if the city next door does nothing, it's harder to achieve those goals. Because the problems are shared, the solutions and the paths to those solutions should also be shared.

Towards that end, a guiding manifesto is in the works. It will surely include many specifics, but the main theme is that urban design must evolve to address climate issues, and soon. This evolution should start with education, where students need to hear up front that unless they understand how their work integrates into the grander urban system, they could be contributing to the environmental problems they've grown up opposing. This perspective should then reveal itself in the work of practitioners to develop. The biggest challenge has always been convincing people to change their lifestyles, but by being better communicators of the direct impacts of today's problems --



Parking Day sponsored by Trust for Public Lands



Renton, WA Transit Center

and by making focused efforts to solve them -- the public will surely buy in.

Of course, this is a simplification of the problems we're facing. But by framing complex problems in a simple way, we can build the basic framework to begin addressing them. Nonetheless, the challenges that face the planet are incredible. There is much critical work that needs to be done, quickly, at all stages of the design process -- from education to policy to implementation to communication. The discussion has only started. It must continue.

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Area around Renton, WA Transit Center

Nate Berg is assistant editor of Planetizen.

He was among a group of bloggers writing about this event as it happened, November 6-8, 2008.

Other bloggers include:

Lloyd Alter <http://www.treehugger.com>

Ryan Avent <http://www.grist.org>

Andrew Blum <http://www.wired.com>

Randy Crane <http://planning-research.com>

Elizabeth Evitts Dickinson <http://www.metropolismag.com/cda/>

Diana Lind <http://americancity.org>

All of the live blogs from the symposium are available at:

<http://americancity.org/afteroil/>