

Minutes

Toronto Society of Architects
April Meeting
1 April, 2008 – 6:30pm to 8:30 pm
Arts and Letters Club, 14 Elm Street

Present:

Aaron Landau
Alex Soloviev
Alex Speigel
Alex Temporale
Alice Da Silva
Alice Liang
Andrew Jeanes
Andre Le Roux
Andrew MacPherson
Andrzej Schreyer
Antone Frisina
Antonio Gómez-Palacio
Azor Mercer
Baruch Zone
Bindya Lad
Brad Collard
Bruce Semple
Carla Munoz
Carlo Milessa
Catherine Labelle
Chris Phibbs
Christopher McCormack
Danielle Haufschild
David Butler
Debbie Wadsworth
Deborah Cowen
Deborak Seaton
Dusan Stupar
Elisa Cabrera
Elyse Parker
Erik Andersen
Erika Sildva
Erin Shnier

Erkki Pukonen
Geoffrey McGrath
Geordon Green
Gerry Rogalski
Graham Caswell
Hon Lu
Irina Sozontova
Istiak Ahmed
Ivan Franko
Ivan Martinovic
Jane Farrow
Jay Levine
Jeffrey Cheng
Jeffrey Steiner
Jeff Seider
Jessica Russell
Joe Lobko
Joey Giaimo
Johnson Martin
Josh Hilburt
Jurij Leshch-Ishyn
Karl Sarkis
Ken Greenberg
Kirsty Bruce
Kyle Anderson
Lee Haust
Lianne Calder
Linda Varekamp
Lou Kahssay
Lyn Northey
Lynne Eichenberg
Marie-Pauk Macdonald
Mark Ostler

Martin Baron
Matt Galvin
Matt Somerville
Medhat Soliman Rofael
Melanie Schade
Michael Loberto
Mike Sutherland
Nancy Smith
Ni Ni
Owen Peat
Paul Bedford
Paul Jurecka
Paul Vaughan
Perin Ruttonsha
Phil Goodfellow
Rafid Kustou
Rafiq Azam
Rota Kostyan
Robert Freedman
Rod Robbie
Rollo Myers
Ronji Borooah
Rosalie Dawson
Sara Yonson
Sebastian Whyte
Shawn Micallef
Stephen Sanhill
Steve Heuchert
Tatiana Graham
Thomas Wicks
Vidya John

1. Introduction

- Antonio welcomed all to the General Meeting of the Toronto Society of Architects. He noted that the group meets once a month. He introduced himself, as the TSA Chair, and shared that ‘around the room’ introductions would follow; encouraging those in attendance to discuss upcoming events that may be of interest to others.
- Antonio noted that an agenda had been provided and that ‘Introductions’ would be followed by approval of the previous meeting’s minutes, discussion of current and upcoming TSA initiatives, and then the themed discussion would occur.
- Around the room introductions followed.

2. Approval of Meeting Minutes

- Antonio requested that the meeting move forward by approving the minutes from the previous meetings.
- Phil motioned to approve the minutes from February’s meeting, Nancy seconded the motion, and the minutes were approved.
- Phil motioned to approve the minutes from March’s meeting, Nancy seconded the motion, and the minutes were approved.

3. TSA Initiatives

- Antonio shared upcoming TSA initiatives that may be of interest to those in attendance:
 - **fAd:**
 - Antonio advised the Festival of Architecture and Design (fAd) was kicking off in the month of May. He asked Elyse Parker to share more details.
 - Elyse noted that the kick off for Doors Open would take place at the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM). Other fAd events would include: Contact Photography Festival; TSA Film Series; lectures; charettes, and exhibitions.
 - **Poster Competition:**
 - Antonio shared that the TSA will be launching the annual poster competition soon. This year the theme is heritage. Winners will be announced at the Toronto the Good Party at the end of May.
 - **Harbourfront Centre:**

- Antonio noted that a permanent exhibition space had been dedicated to architecture at the Harbourfront Centre. The next exhibit will feature Sacred Spaces in conjunction with the Doors Open theme.
- **Urbanscape Gallery:**
 - Antonio asked Ivan Martinovic to share what was currently being shown at the Urbanscape Gallery.
 - Ivan shared that Urbanscape Gallery is located at 2959 Dundas Street West. He noted that the current exhibition features submissions for the prototype competition held in Vancouver.

4. Urban Affairs – Past, Present, and Future of our Brownfields

Moderator: **Joe Lobko** – Principal, du Toit Allsopp Hillier | du Toit Architects Ltd

Guests: **Ken Greenberg** – Principal, Greenberg Consultants Inc
Jeffrey Seider – Principal of MKI, Senior Economic & Strategic Planning Policy Advisor
Robert Freedman – Director of Urban Design, City of Toronto
Paul Bedford – Member of Metrolinx, former Chief Planner for the City of Toronto

- Phil noted that this was the tenth monthly discussion that is themed on a different idea. Past discussions had been well attended, and the room was also very full tonight. He explained how the discussion typically works noting that it was more of a round table format to allow for open discussion.
- Phil noted that Joe Lobko would act as the moderator for the night's discussion.
- Phil requested that anyone with ideas for future themes for discussions should contact him. He shared that this month's theme was brought to his attention by Joe. He noted that next month the theme will be Transit and the City, and turned the discussion over to Joe.
- **Urbanized Brownfields:**
 - Joe shared that the topic of this meeting is intended to discuss the role and function of brownfields and employment lands in the city, how they are used and urbanized, and how they fit within a long-term vision. Examples of urbanized brownfields include the likes of Eglinton-Laird, Golden Mile, the Inglis Lands, the Film Studios along Eastern Avenue, and the Kodak Lands. It was noted that the Eglinton-Laird area is one of the last vestiges of industrial heritage left in the city.

- Joe questioned if these lands ought to be revitalized, and how to do it.
- **City Policy:**
 - Joe noted that City Policy has responded to a concern of job growth when dealing with Employment Lands. Policies generally protect employment lands as intensification occurs, as these lands are constantly under threat for residential development.
 - Current City Policy uses restrictive methods, which has resulted in growing Big Box retail and contributed to an unsustainable, car-dependant environment.
 - Joe advised that rather than exporting urbanization, suburbanization has been imported. This is evident in the fact that Employment Lands lack uses typical of mixed use neighbourhoods.
 - Joe questioned whether a better job can be done that would still honour the historical land use policy.
 - Joe questioned whether the Employment Lands debate has become formed into ideology.
 - It was suggested that Big Box retail provides a form of social justice as it provides blue collar jobs.
 - Joe recommended that the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB) not be blamed in the discussion. Rather, citizens and professionals should take responsibility for what has happened.
 - Joe suggested that minimum density and heights, street networks, and the introduction of public space in private parking lots as ways in which these large parcels can be more tolerable in the urban fabric.
- **Zoning:**
 - Joe shared that the origin of zoning was based on the idea of incompatibility between most forms of employment and other uses. An idea which is informed by an era when employment was primarily related to manufacturing and warehousing, (i.e. noisy and polluting).
 - The failure of zoning practices was noted with the understanding that excluding mixed use does not produce employment.
 - It was agreed that a mixed city pattern is more resilient. The King's neighbourhood was named as a successful example. Originally the area prohibited mixed use, as living there was illegal. However, with the conversion of industry, this area saw new residents move in. Now, as a mixed-use environment, it is one of the richest areas in terms of creativity, talent, and economic output.

- **Sustainability:**
 - It was noted that the current typologies of Employment Lands development has resulted in suburban form and in under-building. As a result scarce land with good infrastructure is poorly utilized with its built form being unsustainable, and contributing to increasing its environmental footprint. Building environments that are based on the suburban model of development results in a loss of opportunities to reduce travel time.
- **Basket Strategies:**
 - Joe suggested several basket strategies that are not to be pursued in isolation when considering development on Employment Lands and brownfields. These include:
 - **Placemaking** – Achieving a desirable quality of life (currently a focus on the Waterfront).
 - **Transit Support and Transit Supportive** – A critical mass of residential population and activities in proximity to Employment Lands that enables great transit connections.
 - **Central Area Plan** – In the 1970s employment ‘gobbled up’ everything, and we could not get residential zoning strategies; now we are experiencing the opposite. We need to create a mix.
 - **Built Form and Typologies** – We should be learning from lofts and warehouse districts. In the 1970s several Toronto architects such as Ed Zeidler, and Diamond helped the City find typologies of mixed use. The exercise was a great success, and got the architecture community involved.
 - **Economic incentives** – Current tax policies are punitive to Employment Uses.
- **Economics, Industry, and Employment Lands:**
 - Joe introduced Jeffrey Seider who has worked on international and social policy.
 - Jeff noted that he had been engaged to do work for Transport Canada. Through his work his was interested in understanding how they protect Employment Lands as these lands form logistics support.
 - Jeff confessed that he is not an architect or planner.
 - Jeff indicated that the government helps development through Economic Development Strategies. In areas such as Eastern Europe, and Peru,

different strategies are in place. These strategies foster a common objective, which question how brownfields can be put back to work.

- Jeff noted that industry has changed through legislation such as NAFTA, which has modified how industry operates.
 - He shared that industry is not just concerned with location, but also looks at human capital, environmental constraints, regulated land, municipal politics, speed to market, and infrastructure lifestyle when developing land.
 - Jeff noted that it is a multicultural environment, where there is no place for religion. Fundamentalism leads to exclusionary practice, which in turn leads to stagnation. He suggested that we need to reduce land use conflict, and create a healthy, dynamic, growing environment in our Employment Lands.
 - Jeff suggested that knowledge based industry be challenged. He discussed current development in the King/Spadina area, which had experienced a 33 per cent increase in employment since 1995. Here there was no loss of Employment Lands, and the lands were developed through a maximization of jobs.
 - Jeff noted that how employment demands can be met by laying the fabric for environmental growth.
 - Big Box development was deemed to respond to market demands.
 - It was questioned whether heavy industrial would still be included in the industry mix in Employment Lands. Most agreed that these uses would no longer dominate industrial areas.
 - Jeff shared that it was time to create a new industrial revitalization, and get our Brownfields back to work.
 - He noted that one way of accomplishing such would be developing a better regime that is more collaborative, and less restrictive. Jeff suggested that the strategic components of Employment Lands be identified, while addressing supply and demand.
- ***Employment Lands and Built Form:***
 - Robert noted that he was not an author of City land use policy, but does work in design and is concerned with built form. He shared that there is room for improvement for Employment Lands from a design standpoint.
 - Robert noted that economic growth is driving the economy. The models of Employment Lands development are largely single storey buildings that

are linked to trucking facilities. These facilities are not what we have in mind when we think about our communities but they are a reality.

- Robert shared that the City is undertaking a series of Avenue studies, which touch on Employment Areas and provide built form examples of different land use mixes.

- ***The role of Provincial and Municipal Governments:***

- Paul shared that his career has been dedicated to the life of the city. He noted that the discussion was very timely.
- Paul questioned what is considered 'employment' today, what its purpose is, its role and function, and where it can be accommodated.
- Paul noted that the purpose of Employment Lands is to preserve and accommodate land for uses that make and distribute things and these lands are typically disconnected from other places in the City.
- Though Big Box uses are not highly regarded from a built form perspective they do provide for some daily needs and are a reality. However, they should be located in commercial zones rather than employment/industrial zones.
- Paul noted that in Manhattan, a Home Depot had been designed to complement the built form of the typical city block, which shows that big box development can be accommodated in an urban setting.
- Paul shared that Employment Lands are under threat for conversion to residential. However, there are 120,000 residential units in the City approval processes. This equates to adequate residential land to accommodate demands before the Avenues and Employment Lands need to be converted to residential.
- Paul noted that the provincial and municipal governments need to take leadership. Their Places to Grow campaign was a good start, but they can go further.
- Paul noted that a 'one size fit all' solution may not appropriate when it comes to Employment Lands.
- Paul suggested that lands along the rail corridor have a high potential for mixed uses. These lands should be considered when developing regeneration and reinvestment strategies.
- Paul noted that the provincial government has given new powers to municipalities and the City of Toronto should consider setting new

standards for Employment Lands such as minimum building heights, and maximum parking numbers.

- Paul noted that it is time to take risks, and experiment.

- **Discussion:**

- It was noted that vehicular transportation is still affordable. As oil prices continue to increase, alternatives to this type of transportation will have to be sought. Joe advised that there has been a trend toward decreasing automobile use, which is evident in area such as ‘the Kings’.
- The current distribution model for Employment Lands should be assessed and changed to better suit our current needs.
- The distribution industry is not a compatible use to locate next to residential lands as it requires large spans of land and it is associated with lots of trucks. This industry is better located in areas with better distribution networks.
- It was suggested that preserving heritage buildings on Employment Lands is a feasible way of guiding their development.
- It was noted that compatible Employment Lands models are being achieved with different tools; successful examples should be studied.
- It was suggested that Big Box uses should be faced by other uses as the buildings typically do not have any windows. A new city can be built in-front and on-top of these buildings.
- Whether the Kings scenario can be replicated where there are no heritage buildings was questioned. It was noted that there was an alternative municipal approvals system in place for the Kings.
- It was noted that most of the Employment Lands workers reside in the suburbs. These workers need to be brought back to the city.
- It was agreed that the suburbanization of land produces sameness. Much of the North American population has grown up in the suburbs and they shop at Big Boxes. They do not know any better. We need to change this.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:45 pm.

The next TSA General Meeting will take place on Tuesday May 6th, 2008, at 6:30 pm, at the Arts and Letters Club.