

Minutes

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

Present:

Antone Frisina
Antonio Gómez-Palacio
B. Horley
Baruch Zone
Bindya Lad
Bruce Semple
Carina Cojeen
Carlo Milessa
Chris Hardwicke

Debbie Wadsworth
Gabriel Li
Heather Dubbeldam
James Rice
Jurij Leshchyshyn
Jutta Court
Karl Sarkis
Kathryn Scharf
Kubo Dzamba

Lauren Baker
Lubomir Dzamba
Matt Galvin
Medhat Soliman Rofael
Nancy Smith
Natalie Walliser
Owen Peat
Phil Goodfellow
Rafid Kustou

1. Introduction

- Antonio welcomed everyone to the meeting. He noted that the meeting would start with introductions which would give an opportunity for everyone to share something they are interested in, then highlights of upcoming would be provided, and then the Urban Affairs portion would begin.
- 'Around the room' introductions followed.

2. TSA Initiatives

- Antonio noted that this was the last monthly meeting before the summer hiatus. The next TSA Monthly meeting will take place in September. The following other TSA initiatives were also discussed:
 - **fAd:**
 - Antonio noted that fAd was wrapping with some tail end events. Those interested were advised to consult the City of Toronto website.
 - **designmatters t-shirts:**
 - Bindya noted that t-shirts featuring the winning design of the 2007 TSA Poster Competition had been printed and were available for sale.

- Anyone interested in purchasing a t-shirt should contact tsa@torontosocietyofarchitects.ca.
- **NCARB Workshop:**
 - Phil noted that an Intern Graphic workshop has been scheduled at the end of June.
 - The workshop will take place at the Faculty of Architecture, Landscape & Design at the University of Toronto.
 - The deadline to register is next Wednesday.

3. Urban Affairs – Food in the City

- Phil noted that the Urban Affairs discussions are held on a monthly basis. A current topical theme is selected and three to four key panelists are invited. It is an open discussion, where everyone is encouraged to ask questions and participate.
- Phil shared that he spoke on the radio with Andy Berry in the morning. The opportunity recognized that the Urban Affairs Forums are of interest to the public.
- Phil advised that tonight's discussion was themed upon 'Food in the City'. He noted that he is fascinated with aspects of food, how it is grown, how it is consumed, the opportunities in Toronto to experience food, food on the street (i.e., food carts), etc.
- Phil introduced Chris Hardwicke, an Urban Designer with &co.

shared that she has been researching the local food movement and urban agriculture for her PhD thesis. She advised that she is interested in local food economies; noting the connection between economy, culture, and the environment, and that local food is couple with the environmental movement. She

- **The Food Crisis:**
 - Kathryn acknowledged the current food crisis by noting the state of food in the city. She also stressed the loss of community and public space associated with food.
 - It was advised that the food crisis, is a crisis of access and distribution and not a crisis of production.
 - Kathryn noted that the food crisis is an interconnected problem related to the systems surroundings agriculture, economics, and social justice.

- Kathryn shared that food had become a commodity. She advised that problems included: distribution bottlenecks, processed foods being the cheapest price, and that those who work in the industry are only paid minimum wages. Lauryn noted that there is a crisis of employment in the food industry where we are not paying workers enough. She advised that Mexican workers in the Halton Marsh area, are not given any insurance or benefits.
- Kathryn discussed Raj Patel's research noting how the process of purchasing food has been revolutionized.
- Lauryn advised social justice in connection with environmental issues should be considered when discussing the food crisis.
- The food terminal was discussed as a government intervention and institution noting that it was a semi-socialist Canadian model.
- ***Food, Culture, & Diversity***
 - Chris shared that a city without food is a city without soul. He noted that we often take food for granted.
 - Kathryn noted that people gather around food.
 - Chris questioned how food within the City defines the City. He noted that there is an Urban/Architectural understanding of Toronto, but Toronto is made up of neighbourhoods that in turn are comprised of cultures.
 - Chinatown, Little India, and Little Italy were recognized as being anchor neighbourhoods.
 - Chris noted that we are tempted to buy foods we do not know how to cook.
 - Kathryn noted that immigrant food cultures have also changed. Immigrant populations no longer reside proximate to the former ethnic enclaves. This is most prominent in places such as Little India where the South Asian immigrant population has moved to suburban areas outside of the City such as Brampton. In this new setting, restaurants are more likely to be located in strip malls.
 - Chris noted that when one travels, taste is a part of the experience. He provided the example of Taste of the Danforth which is about the multicultural community that lives there and giving them an opportunity to bring food out into the open and share it with the City. The Taste of the Danforth is a cultural destination, where food becomes capital.
 - Chris noted that there is a disjuncture when one leaves the downtown core. Retail stores become homogenous, smart centres are carved out in parking lots, the spaces are devoid of reference and culture. This is different in Toronto, as the City is a cultural destination; it is a food capital, where citizens and visitors are able to savour tastes and flavours.

- Chris indicated that culinary experiences had started out as small businesses, brought to the City by new immigrants from different ethnic groups. These restaurants serviced communities, and have become part of their urban form.
- Chris advised that he has been a gardener all his life. At a past residence, his 70 year-old Chinese neighbour was growing five times the amount he was using vertical trellis systems.
- It was noted that Canada's agricultural history does not reflect its diversity.
- **Food in Other Places:**
 - Kathryn noted that when food is subsidized it becomes affordable. She advised that there were programs addressing problems with access in other places. Kathryn noted food policies in New York and Brazil that they permitted food carts. She advised that the US provided a voucher program for pregnant women, where vouchers were only valid at farmers markets where the produce was the most fresh.
 - Lauryn noted that while finishing her PhD she looked at local food networks in Mexico and the community's responses to agro-diversity and genetically modified foods. Lauryn advised that local food economies and networks in Mexico were involved in projects about building food economies, and that infrastructure was required to regionalize the food strategy.
 - It was noted that in China new immigrants are given access to land (a previous a barrier), and trained to grow food through an incubator program.
 - Kathryn advised of the Cuban organic food revolution where the government decided to change the food system through necessity and belief.
 - Lauryn shared changes to food policy that had occurred in Cuba where there was a lot of agricultural pollution from agrochemicals. The collapse of the Soviet Bloc in 1989-1990 deprived Cuba of its main source of agrochemicals. These included the fertilisers for the hydroponic units which were the market gardens of the city. The conversion of the hydroponic units, which created the first organopónicos, was one element of the almost complete adoption of the methods of organic farming as implemented in the mid 1990s. Thousands of new urban individual farmers called *Parceleros* and farmer cooperatives were developed with the support of the *Cuban Ministry of Agriculture* (MINAGRI) making Cuba the only country in the world that has developed an extensive state-supported infrastructure to support urban food production.
 - Lauryn noted that in Havana, there were different scales of production: yard size; organopónicos, and co-ops. Each scale was associated with a different structure, and there were various systems of extension. For example, in Havana there is a network of stands and stores for selling produce, which are regulated by external officers.

- Chris advised that he had visited India, for a Doors of Perception conference, which brought designers to New Delhi to learn from local culture, and to see how they deal with food. He was advised that 90 per cent of their food supply was produced within a one kilometre radius. A system was uncovered revealing farms attached to water, bicycle street food cart based on same system to sell food on street, cooking utensils built into cart, and food commerce being amplified by the use of mobile phones. The system depicted the contrast of high tech and low tech coming together.
- **Scales of Food:**
 - Kathryn advised that it was important to talk about the micro and macro scales of food.
 - Lauryn discussed the idea of food scale noting community gardens to the front yards. She suggested that these spaces should be networked and linked to each other as the City has many social contexts and social involvements. Lauryn advised by articulating the linkages, we can build policies and practices for urban agriculture and the extension of the system.
 - It was noted that diversity found in culture and in food, and local food systems should be added to larger scales.
- **Food & Community Development:**
 - Kathryn noted that recent analysis looked at using food as a community development tool. She advised that such analysis created food security in neighbourhoods.
 - Kathryn shared instances of urban agriculture in her neighbourhood where residents have started using their front lawns for growing food.
 - Kathryn advised that there are limitations on community-based food alternatives; noting that scale, accessibility and equity become issues.
 - Lauryn noted that everyone should be proximate to food production at any scale to the point where it is a normal activity. Getting people close to food production, makes them understand the value of food, and realize the moral consequences of discarding it.
 - It was noted that community gardens should be included community housing developments as there are instances where residents do not have access to grocery stores but still need to feed themselves.
- **Food Projects:**
 - Kathryn distributed an article on the Green Barns project noting that project's mandate had been expanded to include programming such as educational activities, a Café, and a bake oven.

- Lauryn noted that she had been working on several food strategies. She shared that she was involved in developing an evergreen strategy for the Brickworks, and on-premises farms for the Toronto District School Board.
- **The Market:**
 - Farmer's markets were discussed using Dufferin Grove Market as an example. Kathryn noted that these markets were interesting to the public as they allowed us to value the experience rather than the reality. Retailers saw potential in this interest and have tried to replicate the market experience in stores. As a result, the experience of the farmer's market is no longer authentic
 - She raised issues of accessibility and equity to food sources as concerns; noting that markets in the City were a local and sustainable solution for food distribution.
 - Kathryn advised that there are issues related to farmers supplying to urban markets; questioning the distance farmers are willing to travel to sell food.
 - Kathryn advised that it was important to understand the market as a historical public institution, and introduce distribution for growers to the market. She suggested that the local market become an urban institution through re-introduction.
- **Farmers**
 - Farming as a profession was questioned. Lauryn noted that farming does not make sense economically as the average farmer makes an annual income of \$25,000.
 - Lauryn noted that farmers have expertise, and the city needs expertise; however there is no connection. She advised that Kraft has a program that encouraged urban residents go to farms on internships and return to the to the city with the knowledge they have gained. Such models should be developed by municipal and regional governments to facilitate exchange of ideas and methodologies.
 - Lauryn suggested that farmers and city growers interchange ideas. She noted that food as a static idea is now a dead paradigm. She advised that the challenge is to think about food systems in the making.
- **Food Infrastructure**
 - Lauryn advised that the last canning company in Ontario, Cangrowth Food, a subsidiary of a transnational firm, was closing on June 29th. This was the only canning company located east of British Columbia.

- Lauryn noted that in the Niagara region fruit trees had been torn up and replaced with vineyards. Lauryn advised that this was an example of how the global food economy was controlling the food industry.
- Lauryn indicated that there is a clash between food provision and local policy. She noted that the closing of the canning company, will contribute to infrastructure being dismantled which will be needed to be reassembled in the future. Lauryn recommended that such infrastructure should be transferred to support regional agricultural systems.
- Lauryn questioned how we are developing infrastructure in Toronto. She noted that there are growing grass roots innovations being explored to meet different ethno-cultural food needs. Gardeners are bringing experience with different crops from homelands to Toronto which use ideas such as trellising systems and intercropping. These innovations are evident in the various ethnic food markets where: the African's are producing sweet potatoes; and, the Chinese are producing greens, herbs, and bittermelon.
- **Food in Legislation:**
 - Chris noted that there is no zoning for agriculture in the City. He advised that a community garden is only protected if it is located within a park. It as noted that agriculture is thought of as a provincial system and therefore occurs outside of the City, making it difficult to protect the economics of such land in urban areas.
 - Chris noted that condominiums are required to provide amenity areas, which are typically realized as party rooms. Similarly, in subdivisions land is reserved for open spaces, which is realized as recreational purposes. However, unlike agricultural land systems, recreational land systems are not productive. Chris advised that these requirements are outlined in the Planning Act, which seeks to protect public good rather than private rights.
 - Chris shared that the Toronto Region Conservation Authority's (TRCA) original mandate was to protect agricultural land. Now its mandate is conservation based. The TRCA control the largest piece of land in Toronto. Chris suggested that their efforts should be merged with the Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC) and the Toronto Economic Development Corporation (TEDCO), to develop land in productive way.
 - Kathryn noted that we currently have a Ministry of Agriculture which is large-scale focused, but we need a Ministry of Food, which is policy-based.
 - Lauren shared that she worked with FoodShare, a Toronto-based food security organization. In 2007, the Toronto Sustainable Energy Action Plan, recommended that a food working group be established. The goals of the group were to remove barriers to markets, and develop policy. Lauryn noted

- that she was approached by individuals who were interested in starting urban agricultural projects, but lacked the experience.
- Chris noted that the City is growing conscious and consulting with zero foot print performance. They are looking at programs for carbon neutral measuring. He questioned the carbon impact of an organic community, and how we assign metrics on things that fall within a non traditional market (i.e., economic value of growing own food). It was suggested that 'buy local' cards, and tax credits be introduced, as these strategies can be measured and provide an idea of success.
 - It was noted that adding agriculture to any development gives it value, and that we need to change our expectations of what urban agricultural lands are worth.
- ***Can architects be chefs?***
 - It was suggested that architecture and food production be married. Designers should be paired with local community farmers, chefs, and growers.
 - It was noted that Canada and China, have the same latitude and the same ecology as growers in other countries; however, Canada just needs to extend its seasons.
 - Noting that India grows 90 per cent of their food supply within one kilometre radius, it was questioned how far could we sustain our food supply in Toronto? It was suggested that technology and architecture that augments and/or facilitates urban agriculture be explored.
 - It was suggested that architects should look at buildings as machines, to establish symbiotic relationships. Building skins have the ability to create energy which could be harvested for food growth. In China, protein is grown in cylinders attached to front facades using off gases produced by the buildings. This demonstrates a closed loop approach in dealing with building design as we commonly struggle with discarding such gases.
 - ***Other Discussion:***
 - It was noted that most food plants are annuals and are dependant on planting every year.
 - It was noted that there is a huge monopoly of food distribution in Canada, and there is a lot of money in the systems; however, these monies are consumed by distributors. The local food box should be the new distribution model as growers are given more equity and access to food is increased.
 - It was agreed that food affects many things.



- Phil encouraged anyone with additional questions to speak to the guests after the end of the meeting. He thanked Kathryn, Lauryn, and Chris for bringing so much to the table, and invited everyone to attend September's meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:45 pm.

The next TSA General Meeting will take place on Wednesday September 10th, 2008, at 6:30 pm, at the Arts and Letters Club.