

Minutes

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

Present:

Antonio Gómez-Palacio
Baruch Zone
Bindya Lad
Bruce Semple
Carlo Milessa
Chris Hardwicke
Christopher McCormack
Daniel Egan
Elyse Parker

Edmond Bintaku
Heather Dubbeldam
Ivan Martinovic
Kiana Keyvani
Martin Baron
Medhat Soliman Rofael
Mike Smoughton
Nancy Smith
Ni Ni

Ning Cheng
Owen Peat
Phil Goodfellow
Rafid Kustou
Scott Sorli
Stig Harvor
Susan Lewin

1. Introduction

- Antonio introduced himself as the TSA Chair, and thanked everyone for coming. He noted that meeting agendas were available on the table.
- ‘Around the room’ introductions followed.

2. Approval of Meeting Minutes

- Approval of the previous meeting’s minutes were deferred to the next meeting.

3. TSA Initiatives

- Upcoming TSA Initiatives were briefly discussed including:
 - **Harbourfront Centre:**
 - Antonio shared the Harbourfront Centre has dedicated a permanent space to architectural exhibitions. The Centre will host four exhibitions a year. Scott Sorli is part of the curataion board. The first exhibition, dedicated to Open Spaces will open on Friday 7th March.
 - **fAd:**
 - Antonio noted that the Festival of Architecture and Design will occur in May.

- Elyse Parker shared that it was the fourth year of the program and that it provided a snapshot of events that occur in the design and architecture community. It is an opportunity to devise new events to celebrate architecture and design. Elyse noted that advertising is featured in NOW magazine.
- **Poster Competition:**
 - Antonio shared the TSA will be launching a poster competition. The theme of the competition is heritage. TSA has teamed up with Heritage Toronto to develop ideas about how Heritage matters to the City.
- **IIDEX:**
 - Antonio noted that the deadline to submit events for IIDEX was approaching at the end of the month and encourage everyone to be involved.

4. Urban Affairs – Open Spaces and the Walkable City

- Antonio noted that the TSA runs a series of initiatives, and that we also run different events throughout the City. We find resources to make the events happen. He passed the discussion over to Phil who was responsible for assembling the Urban Affairs component of the meetings.
- Phil explained how the Urban Affairs component of the evening worked, as there were many new faces present. He shared that this component allowed the TSA to open up the discussion of Urban Issues with members. Every month two to four professionals, specialists, concerned citizens, etc., are invited to generate discussion around a particular theme. Today, three individuals would be speaking about transportation in the Urban City. Scott Sorli, TSA Vice Chair, who also is responsible for the Convenience gallery, would moderate the discussion. Phil encouraged everyone to participate.
- Phil shared that next month's meeting will discuss Employment Lands with Joe Lobko acting as the moderator, while May's meeting will discuss Transit and Transportation. Phil encouraged anyone with ideas for future themes to contact him, and then passed the discussion over to Scott.
- Scott asked everyone to think about how they came to the meeting tonight. Scott shared that he usually 'bikes,' everywhere. However, he had a flat tire, and given the upcoming storm he was not comfortable riding his bike amongst various vehicles, and therefore, had opted to take the TTC. And unless, Susan gave him a ride home tonight, he would probably be taking the same mode of transport back home.

- Scott introduced the invited guests: Daniel Egan, Manager of Pedestrian and Cycling Infrastructure at the City of Toronto; Chris Hardwicke, Urban Designer, Associate at &Co; and Antoine Beliaeff, Planner at Metrolinx, the newly formed regional transportation agency.
- ***Metrolinx and the Regional Transport System:***
 - Scott started the discussion by asking Antoine what Metrolinx was. Antoine explained that the name Metrolinx was selected to represent the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority (GTTA). The acronym GTTA was being confused with Greater Toronto Airport Authority (GTAA). Essentially Metrolinx is a crown agency established by the province in 2006. The agency's responsibilities include: formulating a regional transportation plan that encompasses the Golden Horseshoe; creating an integrated fare card for the region; and, taking over GO transit over time.
 - Scott questioned whether taking over GO transit will also require consolidating regions, highways, etc. Antoine explained that the current systems are a mess. Responsibility for various transport systems fall within different levels of government and there is little coordination between each of the different agencies. This is problematic as most transport systems cross multiple boundaries, and therefore, require some coordination. He noted that when travelling, transit riders have to pay multiple fares as well as board various systems. For example, when travelling from Toronto to Mississauga, one would potentially have to take the TTC, GO Transit, and Mississauga Transit. As a result we are significantly behind other world class cities when it comes to transit.
 - Antoine added that the regional transportation system needs to incorporate more transparency. Antoine also noted that the problem is not just about transit, but about coordinating discussion of roads, goods, movement, and also questioning how we access transit stations by either driving, walking or cycling. Antoine advised that various green papers have been prepared, and are available online (<http://www.metrolinx.com>) in .pdf format.
 - Antoine advised that part of the problem with the transport system in Ontario is that we severely underestimated in it 30 years ago. Now we need the capital to upgrade it. However, people do not understand what transport choices cost us in the long term.
 - Baruch questioned why a Rapid Transit line has not been created to the Airport, noting that Eglinton Road would be a prime venue for one. Antoine advised that in creating a Transit City, the focus is on local neighbourhood service. Prior to the formation of Metrolinx, there was a proposal for the Georgetown GO line to connect to the Airport. As the different levels of

government, are organized and operated differently, there is no coordination. It was noted that this is related to the way the Constitution works, as responsibilities are divided between the federal, provincial, and municipal governments; however, coordination between each is limited.

- ***Toronto's Walking Strategy:***

- Scott noted that the discussion should move to the municipal level and asked Daniel to share what his interests are. Daniel noted that the City is complex in itself with all of its divisions, agencies, and cultures. He advised that for two years the City has been developing a walking strategy that promotes the culture and value of the activity. He noted that there were people out there that have never driven a car. Nevertheless, there are less people that identify themselves as pedestrians when compared to cyclists.
- Daniel noted that we take the act of walking for granted. In order to develop leadership and support for walking, the City has established a unit within the Transportation Department. The Department is also responsible for the delivery of the co-ordinated street furniture projects as well as the Clean and Beautiful City Secretariat. Consequently, it can look at integrated networks for walking. The City is also interested in producing a better designed environment by looking at the pedestrian network as an entire piece.
- Daniel added that traffic systems and the design of streets can make a difference to pedestrian environments. Scott noted that it is also important to create places and spaces along pedestrian networks such as parks and plazas so that people had destinations to walk to.
- Daniel advised that priority neighbourhoods had been selected. However, as the City is vast this presents a challenge. The idea is to focus on neighbourhoods and develop a template.
- The usability of the walking strategy in winter months was questioned, as snow removal in the City has been atrocious. Daniel noted that this was a concern that the strategy is exploring.
- The notion of putting pedestrian in the middle of roads was also questioned, as it had been done in some areas in the City and seemed unsuccessful. Daniel noted that part of the City looked at the design of sidewalks, exploring where they should be located, how wide they should be, and how they should be programmed.
- Many questioned the applicability of the Walking strategy in suburban environments as they are typically not pedestrian friendly. Antoine noted that the suburbs of Toronto are diverse, as they accommodate people

from around the world who are forced to walk, and used to it. He noted that walking has more of a culture in the suburbs, and that the issues/solution in a suburban environment differ from those of an urban environment.

- It was noted that sidewalks in the City vary greatly, where road systems are designed for peak use scenarios, and therefore often overcompensated. It was agreed that designing roads to meet average demands would be more appropriate.
 - Antonio commended the notion of a Walking Strategy; noting that it was timely and a priority considering the growing concern of sustainability. Walking is an iconic strategy for the City. Five years ago it would have been a hard sell; however, there is a lot of momentum building around ideas about walking especially with the recently passed Walk21 Conference.
 - Stig shared that he had recently been to Arizona, and that one cannot live there without a car. However, as he had a bicycle, he simply used the sidewalk as there were no pedestrians. Stig advised that neighbourhood and community planning becomes important, and that the Walking Strategy should involve planners.
- **Urban Design:**
 - Scott brought Chris Hardwicke into the conversation by asking him to share the bike freeway project, the role of the urban designer, and the role of the planner. Chris noted that he had worked on a number of large-scale projects, including avenue studies, research into mobility, land use, bus stop location, and sidewalk location. He advised that in Toronto the role of the Urban Designer is underappreciated. For example, in evaluation processes such as the Environmental Assessment (EA) process they are seldom involved and if they are their role is under budgeted and they are brought into the process too late.
 - The safety of walking was also discussed particular where there is little adjacent activity. Chris noted he is working on the Open Space Plan for the West Don Lands and is trying to find street precedents but cannot find any. This was related to the fact that Urban Design is a young discipline and street proportions have not been studied and documented extensively.
 - Chris noted that Urban Design is extremely important in visualizing development proposals as it shows people what it will look like. He noted that in Chicago, the Mayor took design people and put them in every department with allocated budgets.

- The Tower Renewal project was discussed noting how it is looking at taking dense suburban neighbourhoods and making them denser.
- Antoine raised the issue of density in the suburbs. He indicated that roads are constantly being widened in these areas, and that paying for parking needs to be introduced, so that people start to understand the impacts of their modal choices.
- **Active Participation:**
 - Phil brought forth the notion of active transportation, noting how it is generating more discussion. People in the suburbs are not active. In the early 1990s, television programs such as 'Participation' encouraged exercise such as walking. He shared that bicycle leasing programs are becoming more popular throughout various cities in the world.
 - Susan noted that transportation should encourage body circulation, health promotion and maintaining an active society.
 - Antoine agreed and added that we do not learn to walk anymore. Catchment areas for schools are large, which in turn encourage bussing students to schools rather than having them walk. In addition, parents are increasingly choosing to drive their children to school.
- **Making Public Transit Sexy:**
 - Antone noted that people choose to drive to work, because it is sexy, especially if they own an expensive vehicle. He questioned how can we make public transport sexy?
 - Antoine added that people want to take their car to work so that they can run errands during their lunch hour.
 - It was noted that if you want people to ride a monorail system you should get Walt Disney to built it.
 - Notions of the City as a playground were discussed as well as role models, where CEOs of major companies choose to take public transportation to work and set standards for their employees.
 - Antonio shared that five years ago, Vancouver decided not to build any new roads, but rather move people through active transportation systems. Traffic was considered to be a friend as it deterred people from driving.
- **Toronto's Grid:**
 - The monotonous auto-friendly grid of Toronto was discussed describing it as being predictable, and responsible for producing canyon-like microclimates. However, its success was contributed to providing public

access to buildings which made the urban fabric more permeable. The scale of the grid in Toronto was thought of as being too large.

- Antoine advised that his aunt who is an architect, notes that Toronto lacks spaces to rest, pause, and contemplate, such as public squares. In addition, it was noted that the relation of built form to urban space rarely happens in Toronto. In the Metro Region Transportation Plan, mobility hubs inform the urban language. It was noted that we need to come up with metrics for urban design, and that this will require the integration of various disciplines at the planning level.
- The discussion came to end by noting that Toronto is taking a small step, but one that has many positive ramifications. Scott thanked the guests, and Phil thanked everyone for coming noting that the conversation had been surprisingly wonderful. He invited everyone to the next meeting where infrastructure would be discussed.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:35 pm.

The next TSA General Meeting will take place on Tuesday April 1st, 2008, at 6:30 pm, location to be announced.