

Minutes

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

Present:

Adam Giambrone
Al Witzig
Alex Speigel
Ali Kafari
Andrew Jeanes
Ann Percival
Antoine Belaiieff
Antone Frisina
Antonio Gómez-Palacio
Asher Mercer
Baruch Zone
Bindya Lad
Bob Mindara
Brian Laye
Bruce Semple

Carlo Milessa
David Pritchard
Don Verbanac
Edmond Binyaku
Grace Tyono
Hoda Matar
Howard Katz
Irina Sozontova
Ivan Franko
Ivan Martinovic
James Brown
Joe Lobko
Johnson Martin
Jordan Ludington
Jurij Leshchysyn

Kanishk Bhatia
Karl Sarkis
Lisa Harmey
Lyn Northey
Matthew Blackett
Medhat Soliman Rofael
Melissa Verge
Ni Ni
Phil Goodfellow
Robert Allsopp
Robert Freedman
Roger du Toit
Susan Lewin
Talel Rahmeh
Tina Chu

1. Introduction

- Antonio introduced himself as the TSA Chair, and noted that meeting agendas were available on the table.
- He noted that the meeting will begin through introductions where everyone would get the opportunity to state who they were, and where they are from.
- Antonio shared that highlights of upcoming TSA initiatives would follow the introductions, and then the discussion would be handed over to Phil.
- 'Around the room' introductions followed.

2. TSA Initiatives

- Antonio noted that there are an incredible amount of **fAd** events in month of May, in which the TSA is participating and provided the following details:
 - **Film Series:**

- Antonio shared that the annual TSA Film Series is taking place at the Harbourfront Centre this year.
- A film will be shown every consecutive Tuesday in May. Details about the films will be shared through e-bulletins.
- **Poster Competition:**
 - Antonio noted that the Annual TSA Poster Competition was launched in late April and submissions are due next week.
 - The announcement of the winners will be made at the Toronto the Good Party.
- **Waterfront Discussion:**
 - Phil shared that the TSA is sponsoring **designmatters** a waterfront design excellence panel discussion between three architects from Denmark at the Spoke Club.
 - The discussion will take place on May 14th and will be moderated by Bruce Kuwabara.
- **Pecha Kucha:**
 - Antonio noted that Pecha Kucha will kick off Doors Open. The event will take place on May 23rd at the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM).
- **CUI Brownie Awards:**
 - Antonio shared that the Canadian Urban Institute (CUI) is currently accepting nominations for its Brownie Awards, which recognize excellence in brownfields policy, sustainable development, and urban design.
- **University of Toronto – Charrette:**
 - Antonio advised that the University of Toronto is hosting a two-part design charrette aimed at re-imagining the Huron and Willcocks intersection, located on its St. George campus. Anyone interested in participating are invited to attend a briefing session on May 9th at Wilson Hall.

3. Urban Affairs – City Transit | Transit City

- Phil introduced the concept of the Urban Affairs Forum. He noted that this was the eleventh session, and that they had been successfully attended. He noted that every month three to four panelists were invited to discuss a theme and then the discussed was opened up to anyone interested.
- Phil noted invited panelists for the meeting included:

- **Matthew Blackett**, Creative Director and Publisher of Spacing magazine, and moderator for the discussion.
- **Adam Giambrone**, City Councillor & Head of the Toronto Transit Commission (TTC), City of Toronto;
- **Alex Spiegel**, President, One Development Corporation; and,
- **Roger du Toit**, Principal, DTAH.
- Phil encouraged anyone who was interested in discussing a certain theme or who has ideas for future themes to contact him. He noted that next month's Urban Affairs Forum would discuss the topic of 'Food in the City'.
- **Transit City:**
 - Matthew advised that transit and the city would be discussed with a focus on how transit shapes built form. He noted that the proposed Transit City Plan is to be completed over the next twelve years and it has the potential to reshape the way we move in and experience the city.
 - Adam shared that the TTC is looking to introduce a network of 120 km of light rail transit (LRT). He noted that they are defining what LRT means through an Environment Assessment (EA) within the next six months.
 - Adam noted that he likes the six month EA process as projects would lose momentum with a longer process, we would end up with something in between, waiting another 15 to 20 years to start projects would cause more problems, and there are not enough consultants in the city for the EA process.
 - Adam noted that on May 23rd, a detailed report on the proposed subway improvements will be released. The report will detail which lines will be built first.
 - Adam noted that new streetcars will be purchased. The TTC is in the process of ordering 3,000 streetcars that are similar to those in use in Houston, the Netherlands, Amsterdam, and Paris.
 - Adam advised that the new LRT system would have its own designated right-of-way and therefore would be separated from roads.
 - Adam noted that streetscaping constitutes a third of the budget for the project.
 - Adam noted that the Transit City proposal deals with eight of the ten busiest streets in the City.
 - Alex shared that he had discovered a map of the Old Belt Line railway at the Eglinton Station. He noted that the plan was medieval in nature and that there were only remnants of the lines left. The plan considered Spadina Circle to be

- the centre of the city. Alex noted that the current subway empties out at Downsview.
- Roger advised that Toronto is trying to build a semi-subway system using the funding for a streetcar system.
 - Roger questioned whether the LRT will run as frequent as the streetcar if it replaces buses. He noted that the Transit City plan seems a little one-dimensional as the LRT is being introduced over existing streets.
 - ***Density, Land Use and Neighbourhoods:***
 - Matthew noted that the proposed LRT systems will add seven (7) lines that predominantly have an inner city focus. He questioned where development and density is expected to occur along the lines as it is not currently occurring along streetcar routes and subway lines.
 - Alex noted that there had been a mismatch in the past in terms of the locations of subway lines and density; as density is not located where subway lines are located.
 - Roger questioned where the density could go. He noted that the City's regime has been to protect existing neighbourhoods.
 - Roger suggested brownfield sites would be appropriate for locating density as these sites are typically located in proximity to railway lines.
 - Alex advised that the major transit nodes are not close to established neighbourhoods; consequently these areas may be appropriate locations for density. However, this is different along main streets. Here a mid-rise format is more suitable.
 - Alex noted that building along main streets is a challenge as there is much fragmented land ownership making it difficult to build higher than two to three storeys.
 - Susan questioned whether the TTC has considered developing over subway lines to achieve higher density.
 - Adam noted that the TTC is investigating building over the Davisville subway. The idea is being discussed with the community. The subway will have to remain in operation during construction.
 - It was questioned how Transit City will encourage changes in use in the postwar neighbourhoods.
 - It was advised that almost all of Transit City falls outside of the city belt in auto conscious parts of the city that were never designed to accommodate transit.

- Adam noted that Transit City is about transforming neighbourhoods, and it deals with corridors that are bursting with capacity. Toronto has a history of streetcar suburbs.
- Alex noted we should not replicate our existing neighbourhoods, with successful qualities such as a compact, the fine grain built form, enabling residents to walk to commercial areas.
- Adam advised that priority neighbourhoods are being assessed.
- **Modal Choice:**
 - Alex noted that rising oil prices are favourable to changing transportation modes, especially active modes.
 - Roger suggested that we should encourage more cycling. He noted that opportunities to make cycling more pleasant in winter (i.e., covered bike lanes, etc) should be pursued.
 - Antonio suggested that Transit City be put in context of the City's Sustainable Plan.
 - Adam advised that the Transit City is being considered in conjunction with other alternative transit models. He noted that there are a large amount of individuals who walk and cycle, which are forms of active transportation. Adam advised that opportunities to cross-pollinate active transportation with transit (i.e., equipping streetcars to carry bicycles) are being pursued.
- **Streetscape and Urban Design:**
 - Matthew questioned the types of changes anticipated in Transit City at the street level. He further questioned how Transit City could change intersection corners where people gather.
 - Roger advised that major changes from transit systems can be seen along the waterfront. Here built form is designed in conjunction with streetscape.
 - Adam noted that the waterfront lines are among the busiest. He shared that there is an ongoing debate about where to site the lines within the right-of-way in order to make them more pedestrian friendly (i.e., should the line be centred or align to a side of the street).
 - Roger noted that it was a struggle to match intentions of high speed transit and urban design. He noted that it is a dilemma to match competing policies and perhaps it is not possible to match them to the extent that is needed.
 - Roger shared that a typical LRT runs at a speed of 20 km/h and has stations spaced a kilometre apart. He advised if pedestrians are not able to cross every 400 metres, the system is not pedestrian friendly. Roger noted that the Eglinton line had been submerged to allow for more pedestrian crossings.

- Adam advised every time pedestrians cross a transit line a signalized crossing is required, which would slow the line down.
- Roger noted that at the St. Clair intersection, the right hand turn lane has taken away pedestrian space.
- Matthew commented that Transit City should be conscious of streetscaping materials. In Europe, LRT and streetcar lines operate over grassed lanes. He noted that in Houston the LRT runs through water.
- Roger noted that right-of-way width should also be studied. He advised that we should determine how many automobiles need to be accommodated, if landscaped strips can be added, etc. Roger advised that the number of lanes needs to be reduced.
- It was noted that the TTC sees transit as an engineering problem rather than a city building problem. It was questioned whether the Transit City proposal had been reviewed by the Design Review Panel.
- It was noted that if an engineer had to design a sidewalk it would only be three metres wide which was insufficient when one would want to plant a tree on the sidewalk.
- It was suggested that we should work backwards, in that the minimum width for the pedestrian realm should be determined first, and other spaces should be designed around that.
- Alex encouraged the City to undertake streetscape studies before development occurs for spaces along LRT lines.
- ***Toronto Compared to other Cities:***
 - Roger shared that in Amsterdam automobiles must travel at the same slow speed as public transit. Roger advised that the TTC prefers faster movement, which limits pedestrian crossings.
 - Roger noted that Toronto needs a better interface between automobiles and transit. He shared that Ottawa has mode centric transportation, which has fantastic vehicle based arteries that are used for transit.
 - Adam advised that Transit City looks at building transit systems that could lead to the expansion to the subway. Unlike Ottawa, Toronto has subway spines, which are built into a grid.
 - Adam noted that Toronto's transit system is comparable to that of New York City as it carries a similar amount of people and provides reliable adequate service.
 - Robert Freedman, Director of Urban Design, City of Toronto, agreed with the subway comparison to New York. Robert advised that 75 per cent of New

York is comprised of stable neighbourhoods. He noted that the buildings are as high as they main streets are wide.

- ***The Experience:***

- Phil noted that the future of the LRT is related to the experience of the City. He shared that riding the subway is mundane between stops, but the streetcar offers a better experience. He questioned whether the TTC will extend the streetcar experience with Transit City.
- Roger questioned where break points are placed within the animated streetcar experience. He noted that along Spadina the experience is stretched.
- Roger noted that in European cities, transit travels at faster speeds in the outer city, and slows down in the city centre.
- Antonio noted that the VIVA transit line has focused on improving the passenger's experience, with ideas such as offering wireless internet while they ride.
- It was suggested that passengers should be able to use cell phones while riding the subway.

- ***Accessibility:***

- It was noted that by 2025, transit has to become more accessible. Adam noted that the streetcar network will be accessible by 2018.

4. Other:

- Phil noted Spacing Magazine is launching an urban ideas competition 'thinktoronto' open to those 35 years of age or younger.
- Antonio thanked all the guests for attending and encouraged those in attendance to take fAd calendars that were available so that they could enjoy the month of May.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:35 pm.

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