

Minutes

**Toronto Society of Architects
November Meeting**
6 November, 2007 – 6:30pm to 8:30 pm
Arts and Letters Club, 14 Elm Street

Present:

Alun Lloyd
Antonio Gómez-Palacio
Baruch Zone
Bindya Lad
Bruce Semple
Carlo Milessa
Chris Wanless
Christopher McCormack
Ed Weinberg

Elyse Parker
Gary Welsh
Heather Dubbeldam
Ho Sung
Ivan Martinovic
Jeff Atchison
John Hillier
Mar Mar Cho
Martin Baron

Medhat Soliman Rofael
Nancy Smith
Owen Peat
Rafid Kustou
Richard Gilbert
Rob Wanless
Valerie Or

1. Introduction

- Antonio welcomed everyone to the meeting, noting that it was a general TSA meeting that was held on a monthly basis. He went through the evening's agenda.
- 'Around the room' introductions followed.

2. TSA Initiatives

- An updated list of the TSA Initiatives had been prepared. Antonio provided highlights of the following initiatives:
 - **TSA 120th Anniversary Celebration and party with OALA:**
 - Antonio shared that the TSA in conjunction with the OALA and others, have sponsored an exhibit on architecture at the City of Toronto Archives.
 - Everyone was invited to an opening reception on November 15. More information would be shared in an emailed invitation.
 - **OAA Visit:**
 - Antonio noted that the OAA visited the Society on October 17. Recent initiatives and proposed changes to regulations were discussed. Those that were not in attendance were encouraged to consult the OAA website (www.oaa.on.ca).

- ***Evening of Rants:***

- Antonio shared that the next meeting on December 13 will be the annual 'Evening of Rants.' Anyone wishing to compile a rant about will be given five minutes at the microphone; those interested were encouraged to contact the TSA.

3. Approval of Meeting Minutes

- Antonio requested that the meeting move forward by approving the minutes from previous meetings.
- Heather motioned to approve the minutes from September's meeting, Bindya seconded the motion, and the minutes were approved.
- Bindya motioned to approve the minutes from the OAA Visit, Ivan seconded the motion, and the minutes were approved.
- Bindya motioned to approve the minutes from October's meeting, Antonio seconded the motion, and the minutes were approved.

4. Current Affairs – Sustainable Transportation: Engineer as City Builder

- Antonio shared that the aim of Current Affairs portion of the monthly meetings was to debate an issue of date. Though Phil was unable to attend the meeting, he organized this month's discussion around transportation. The City recently issued a Sustainable Transport Plan, and there is a growing interest in how architecture engages the engineering and transport world; consequently the transport engineering discipline was attracting much debate.
- Antonio introduced Alun Lloyd, an associate at the BA Group who would act as the moderator for the discussion. Alun introduced other invited guests:
 - Gary Welsh, General Manager of Transportation Services for the City of Toronto;
 - John Hillier, Landscape Architect, Urban Designer and Principal at DTAH, working extensively across the waterfront which is embroiled in transportation issues; and,
 - Richard Gilbert, former City Councillor, now a consultant practicing in the transport field, and author of Transportation Revolutions and other titles.

- **Sustainable Transport Plan**

- Elements of the recently issued City of Toronto Sustainable Transport Plan were presented by Gary. He shared that Toronto is trying to create a better environment for streets, which entails getting people out of their cars. Some of the goals and implementation strategies that the Plan anticipates to undertake include:
 - Encouraging more bicyclists by adding 1,000 km of bicycle lanes by 2012 and introducing a bicycle station at Union Station next year;
 - Making roads more comfortable by changing the engineering criteria and parking standards; and
 - Increasing pedestrian traffic by introducing pedestrian friendly designs, such as 'pedestrian scrambles' where traffic stops to allow pedestrians to cross in every direction, and increasing pedestrian crossing time.
- Gary noted that a shift toward sustainable transport marks a cultural change for the city, one that will have a significant impact by linking transportation matters to the quality and character of the built environment.

- **City Transport and Image**

- The discussion commenced by revealing that the way we transport within the City plays a role in the City's image.
- John suggested that movement within a City has significant implications to City Building; as how we mesh transport elements with the look and feel of the City can create friction and/or tension.
- He noted that with this interest in movement, there has been significant emphasis on the public realm where streetscapes become avenues for moving people rather than vehicles. As a result streetscape elements such as trees, benches, and lighting play more significant roles, and need to be given more prominence.
- The image of the TTC was discussed noting that there are issues of safety and security associated with it, and these issues discourage ridership. Richard noted that his daughter used to ride the TTC by herself when she was eleven; however, today most parents would not let their children ride the TTC alone.
- Valerie, a University of Toronto student and resident of Hong Kong, agreed that she regarded the TTC as unsafe and unsecure at times, whereas she was comfortable to start using the Hong Kong subway at age 7. She also noted that it was more costly to ride the subway in Toronto

than in Hong Kong, as there is a single fare in Toronto whereas the fares in Hong Kong are based on trip length.

- **Transport's Future**

- Richard provided a glimpse of future transport implications by revealing that oil prices will fundamentally rearrange the way we do transport. He noted that oil prices have risen significantly the cost per barrel is now \$97 compared to \$58 last year. In addition, as oil is a non-renewable resource and there is a drive for consumption (i.e. increased urbanization in India and China) a shortfall will occur.
- He noted there is great potential for electrified renewable land transport, and bio/fuel cells will not be as successful as perceived.
- In Toronto, people already travel electrically in personal rapid transport systems such as the streetcars and subways.
- From his research, Richard concluded that it is not difficult to build subways. He eluded that they can be built without imposing tax burdens when development produces densities that allow for 40,000 jobs and residents per sq. km. However, in most cases such densities are not tolerated.
- The need for large capital investment in transit was commented as creating long-term value for the city, and a long-term value on our quality of life. Hong Kong's subway system was given as an ideal example, as it is able to return profit.

- **Automobile Ownership**

- It was noted that moving to a more sustainable system for transport would involve educating the public; in order to change our transport, we need to change ourselves.
- From his research, Richard shared that increased gas prices do not discourage car usage.
- He suggested that it was more important to reduce the ownership of cars on a per household basis. Toronto is a unique city in that it has a large amount of single family homes in the downtown core. Generally there is a relationship between single family home ownership and car ownership. However, though people who live in the suburbs own two (2) to nine (9) cars, there is a minority of people in Downtown Toronto who own cars.
- It was suggested that we should construct more complete environments where people choose not to own cars. In such environments, people would be able to live, work, and play within walking distances of each

other and their ever-day activities; reducing the reliance on automobile transport.

- Gary stated that it is possible for people to give up their cars. He provided the changes to smoking, and garbage regulations as examples, noting that ten (10) years ago who would have thought you would not be able to smoke in a bar.

A Long Term Vision

- From all the talk of transport within the City, it was concluded that it is one of the most transformative aspects for any place.
- It was noted that transit is only part of the solution to a more sustainable approach.
- The Sustainable Transport Plan provides short term goals for the Toronto, and needs to be supported by a long term plan (i.e., 50 year span) that speaks about complete environments. And, in a long term plan, the role of architecture can become essential in engaging transport and the built form.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:35 pm.

The next TSA General Meeting will take place on Thursday December 13th, 2007, at 6:30 pm, location to be announced.