

CNU XV - Philadelphia
Access, Urbanism and the Future of Cities
May 19, 2007 – Summary

Facilitator:

Laura Hall
Fisher & Hall Urban Design
618 – 4th Street, Suite 203
Santa Rosa, CA 95404
(707) 544-1910

Participants

John Anderson
New Urban Builders
360 E. Sixth Street
Chico, CA 95928
(530) 893-8400

Andres Duany
Duany Plater-Zyberk & Company
1025 SW 25th Ave.
Miami, FL 33135
(305) 644-1023

Edward Steinfeld, Arch.D., AIA
Professor of Architecture and Director
Center for Inclusive Design and Environmental Access School of Architecture and Planning
University at Buffalo, State University of New York
(716) 829-3485 (x327)

Brewster Thackeray
Senior Project Manager, Livable Communities
AARP Office of Social Impact
601 E Street, NW, Room A5-146
Washington, DC 20049
(202) 434-2227

Session Description

Seventeen years after the ADA and Federal Fair Housing Act, there are still failures of compliance and a lack of accessibility for many who need it. Meanwhile, whole families of urban building types, such as the traditional rowhouse and the small apartment building, may be eliminated in the name of access for all. What is wrong with the process – and what are the solutions?

Question #1: What do you most appreciate about the Accessibility community?

John Anderson: "They're relentless."

Andres Duany: "The positing of an ideal against all evidence."

Question #2: What do you most appreciate about New Urbanists?

Ed Steinfeld: "Commitment to a quality livable environment."

Question #3: What do you most appreciate about the Accessibility community and New Urbanists?

Brewster Thackeray: "Planning for the future, looking for positive solutions."

Question #4: What would be a 'win' for you in terms of Accessibility?

Ed Steinfeld: "For the New Urbanists to make a real commitment to Accessibility, the concepts of Universal Design, and real choices for aging and use. Not all units have to be accessible."

Brewster Thackeray: "AARP values both New Urbanism and Accessibility and would like to see both groups working together and moving forward. Designers need to keep in mind what it would be like to be disabled, to put themselves in other's shoes."

John Anderson: "Recognition that enforcing a building code at the Federal level is unworkable. The scale of enforcement should be appropriate."

Andres Duany: "Visitability everywhere through any door, not just the front door. There should be some variability of the range of slopes for ramps. The single setting of 1:12 is so destructive to urbanism."

Common ground:

Compliance with the law

Diverse neighborhoods

Selection of building types

Social integration

Aging in place

No requirement for front door access to every house

Codes are too complex.

Suggestions/solutions from the panel:

John Anderson: Insurability. If the Department of Justice sues, you must defend yourself. If you are being sued, you lose your insurability till the case is cleared and this raises your cost to practice. Even if the issue is resolved, you have to repair your reputation. It's not a Federal issue, it's a local issue and it needs to be expressed as local building codes.

Ed Steinfeld: Pattern Book for 1-3 unit dwellings. An accessible entry does not have to be through the front door but it should be convenient. CNU should be voicing its views with the Justice Department and HUD. It should get involved with the ICC A117 Committee, HUD and the U. S. Access Board to help develop better standards, codes and guidelines. The Disability Rights Community should learn about NU so that they can be advocates for better urban design.

But, to do this, there needs to be a full commitment to accessible housing on the part of the NU movement.

Andres Duany: Limits on access. A single standard (no law should be this complex). Rationalize elevator sizes. Respect for the law, not rules. Current administration is via lawsuit and terror.

Brewster Thackeray: The AARP can host an accessibility conference with New Urbanists in approximately 9 months to work towards resolving some of these issues. New Orleans and Washington DC were suggested as possible venues.

Post-CNU follow-up:

CNU President John Norquist committed to a meeting with AARP in Washington DC to begin planning the conference.

Summary prepared by Laura Hall.