

NATIONAL CONVERSATION/LOCAL ACTION

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AIA New York Chapter

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OVERVIEW

At the request of Gordon Chong, FAIA, and Thom Penney, FAIA, the current president and president-elect of the National AIA, architects across the country have been participating in a “National Conversation” on the future of our profession. Paramount in the minds of many practicing architects is the changing nature of our profession, the expanding services that architects are providing and alternative delivery systems for the design and construction process. Many architects are concerned that the stature of our profession is being diminished by an erosion of the traditional leadership position of architects’ in directing large and complex teams through the design and construction process. The National AIA leadership intends to use the comments received from the National Conversation to shape an agenda for specific courses of action that can contribute to maintaining and enhancing the architect’s position in society.

In response to the request of National, the AIA New York Chapter hosted a series of discussions to address these issues of national concern. To take full advantage of the opportunity, the conversation also addressed local issues, including how we as architects can be more influential in our city and how we can strengthen the voice of architects and enhance the design leadership we provide. The Chapter’s goal was to turn the National Conversation into a blueprint for local action. To facilitate this discussion, six two-hour workshops were held over a six-week period to discuss these topics of concern. Attending these sessions were leaders of the local chapter (including board members and committee chairs), engineers, educators, students, and clients from both the public and private sector.

The expansion of the National Conversation beyond AIA members to include clients in the public and private sector, educators and students, and engineers was aimed at getting the broadest range of comments and to arrive at a “State of the Profession.”

The Chapter has determined that the many of the issues raised during the National Conversation/Local Action discussion should be the basis further discussions, including a symposium to be held in November 2002.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

National Conversation

1. Architects are highly regarded in our communities; however, within the building industry their leadership has been eroded by construction managers, program managers, project managers and others.
2. Architects are respected for their design skills and problem-solving capabilities and must regain their position of leadership by being responsible for all aspects of a project including, cost and schedule.
3. Many Owners do not have confidence in the profession because of the perceived lack of attention to cost and schedule issues. Many Owners feel architects are arrogant, isolated and irrelevant to their needs.
4. The disjunction between educators and professionals should be addressed. Many architectural graduates are not adequately taught during their education about the building process.
5. Architects should be more politically involved and should help set the public agenda. They must take strong, articulate positions and meet with political leaders to help them shape our built environment.
6. Architects must become involved in a broader scope of services, pre-design as well as post-construction. Planning and programming are critical to successful projects.

7. Better transfer of information among designers, fabricators, and contractors is to be reinforced. Drawings from engineers and architects should be used directly in the fabrication process.
8. Issues of sustainability are critical for our built environment.

Local Action

On a local level, a number of key action items were proposed:

1. Meet with the mayor and others to influence priorities and provide *pro bono* assistance to governmental leaders.
2. Engage in “Town Hall” meetings with members.
3. Use the Center for Architecture (the anticipated home of the AIA New York Chapter at 534 LaGuardia Place) to foster communications among design professionals including engineers.
4. Provide, through the Center for Architecture, opportunities for an organized continuing education and public outreach program.
5. Reach out to students, interns and younger members and assist with mentoring and intern development programs.
6. Take strong, articulate positions on public policy issues concerning the built environment.

CONVERSATION WITH AIA NEW YORK BOARD MEMBERS AND COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Introduction

The first of the six conversations with architects covered a broad spectrum of issues ranging from expanded services through quality of life, best practices and improved communications and dialogue. It was generally agreed that there has been an erosion of the architects’ responsibility and that many architects do not have the confidence of Owners. Clients are looking for leadership and architects willing to take “lifetime” responsibilities.

Design-Build is becoming a prominent delivery system that can work successfully if qualified builders are committed to maintaining design quality in addition to controlling price and schedule.

At the local level, communication among AIA members, consulting engineers and specialty consultants must be improved. It was also suggested that a “Town Hall” meeting among members would be useful in making recommendations for Chapter and Center for Architecture activities.

Outlines of other issues discussed included:

Detailed Comments

1. Issues
 - Expanded services are critical to the future of the profession.
 - Programming: Hire the architect first to provide feasibility studies and program evaluations.
 - Design/Build: gaining greater acceptance within the building community.
 - Architects must provide a lifetime responsibility to clients.
 - There has been an erosion of architects’ responsibility. Project Managers, Program Managers and Construction Managers are providing services formerly provided by architects.

- Owners are looking for leadership. Owners don't have confidence in architects.
2. Certification and Education
 - Educators are interested in expanding the scope of the architectural school curriculum.
 - The quality of continuing education programs must improve.
 - There is a need for interdisciplinary interaction in architectural schools.
 3. Quality of Life
 - Set priorities for citywide issues.
 - Neighborhood outreach.
 - Take it political.
 4. Best Practices
 - Our New York New Visions report was important and influential.
 - Volunteerism and *pro bono* work.
 - Professional Interest Area links to local AIA committees.
 - Open dialogue among members.
 5. Local AIA Issues
 - Membership should set direction and not be "top down."
 - Better communication is required among members.
 - A town hall meeting of architects to address such issues would be of great benefit.

CONVERSATION WITH MEMBERS AND ENGINEERING CONSULTANTS

Introduction

This group also focused on the erosion of architects' leadership as a key issue facing the profession. Expanded services, including strategic planning, are being provided by many architects, who are also becoming more involved with Design-Build. The group was concerned about maintaining the quality of the architectural design and detailing in the Design-Build process. The Design-Build process was seen as beneficial to clients who do not have a facilities group and want a guarantee that their projects will be delivered on time and within established cost parameters. Sustainability is of great concern to clients as are operating costs. Clients in the public sector are interested in achieving LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) ratings for their buildings. Greater interaction and involvement of engineers at the project outset was recommended.

The new Center for Architecture was seen as providing the opportunity for dialogue among all members of the building team and has the capability of sending a strong message about what architects and engineers are doing in the built environment to positively influence the natural environment.

Detailed issues discussed included:

1. Expanded Services:
 - Alternative project delivery
 - Strategic planning
 - Design-Build
2. A proposed new model is Design-Build:
 - Led by architects with enlightened clients;
 - The importance of the right team with the necessary level of expertise and enthusiasm is critical.
 - Contractors must have a heightened level of quality.

Project Leadership

- Unless architects regain their position of leadership, the services they provide will be reduced, fees will be diminished and more Owners' representatives and construction managers will fill the void created by architects.
 - Architects and engineers must reassert their control of the design process.
1. Education/Mentoring
 - Recent architectural graduates are, in general, not familiar with how buildings are built.
 - Architects need to better understand engineering systems.
 - While the IDP program has been improving, it is disheartening to mentor interns for three years, only to see them leave the firm.
 - Many clients think architects are arrogant, isolated and irrelevant to their needs.
 - Architects need to be better educated and must reassert their value to clients and the public.
 - Architects must further educate their clients and the community about the services they provide and the benefits they bring to the building process.
 2. Sustainability
 - Clients are concerned about the operating costs associated with their new buildings. They need assistance in measuring the performance of alternative systems and evaluating added value.
 - Added quality and value must become an economic issue, and how these issues can be reflected on a real estate balance sheet needs to be addressed.
 3. Construction Engineering/Fabrication Interface
 - Advances in technology are leading through computer modeling to great advances in building performance, particularly on the building envelope.
 - The fabrication of steel is assisted by three-dimensional computer modeling. These drawings are approved by the architect and engineer and are then sent by the computer directly for fabrication.

4. Certification/Specialization
 - Creativity and specialization are inversely proportional. The more one specializes, the greater the risk there is to relate to benchmarks and procedures and therefore to think less creatively.
5. Worst Practices
 - Not having engineers involved from the outset in every project
 - Not having engineers involved with scheduling, and product selection
6. Best Practices
 - Integration of architects and engineers
 - Quality-based selection rather than selection driven by fees
 - Center for Architecture

CONVERSATION WITH STUDENTS, EDUCATORS AND MENTORS

Introduction

This roundtable discussion focused principally on the issues facing students and their curricula, the debate on teaching design to the exclusion of practical training, the IDP program and opportunities for mentoring. Preparation for the Architectural Registration Examination and the opportunities to link continuing education and intern development were also discussed. Topics of discussion included:

Detailed Comments

1. Architectural Education
 - There is a disconnect between the academic community and professionals.
 - Presently, there are too many types of degrees, often with vastly different terms of study, which lead to questions of proficiency.
 - Architectural schools are working toward making a master's degree the standard.
2. Architectural Registration Examination (ARE)
 - New York State currently requires three years of experience prior to sitting for the exam and requires the successful completion of an intern development program, which requires 700 IDP units. One unit equals approximately eight hours of work.
 - Some portions of the examination could be taken directly after graduation, e.g., General Structures, Mechanical and Electrical.
 - Interns in small firms are working directly with their teachers in an apprenticeship. Smaller offices often provide a greater exposure to the many complex facets of design and building.
3. Internship Development Program (IDP)
 - The key to the profession is mentorship.
 - A list of mentors should be developed and maintained locally.

- The AIA should reach out to the architectural schools to provide introductory seminars on the IDP process.
 - Interns should be treated like professionals and should be remunerated, including paid overtime.
 - An AIA IDP award should be created.
 - Local firms with successful IDP programs should share their best practices with others in the city.
4. Continuing Education
- A catalogue of regularly scheduled events with coordinators should be provided.
 - The AIA should sponsor weekly AIA breakfast/lunch education presentations.
 - Large and small firms should partner to provide continuing education.

CONVERSATION WITH PUBLIC CLIENTS

Introduction

The conversations discussed in detail the opportunities that the AIA has to influence and impact key discussions being made in New York. The New York New Visions report was heralded as an important tool for establishing principles for development in Lower Manhattan. However, the AIA has previously been known for a lack of outspokenness and has been perceived as a professional society with members interested largely in commissions. The AIA needs to be more articulate and should object to projects where appropriate. The public clients felt that architects generally, and the AIA specifically, should be more engaged politically and involved in setting priorities and pushing for design excellence.

This discussion led to specific issues in which the AIA should be involved, including utilizing the Center for Architecture as a forum for city agencies to meet and discuss opportunities for greater collaboration.

Detailed Comments

1. Communication and Outreach
 - Meet with the mayor, deputy mayors and agency commissioners to discuss projects. The new mayor has charged the agencies to work together more collegially.
 - Communicate planning concerns with the new chair of the City Planning Commission where design excellence is on the agenda.
 - Follow up on the New York New Visions document to all agencies concerned.
2. Architect's Roles
 - Architects must be involved in the front end of projects, participate in determining the City's priorities and push for design excellence.
 - Take strong, articulate position on issues. The design community should speak with one voice. The AIA and the Regional Plan Association should speak together.
 - The AIA should not be perceived as just a professional society.
 - The AIA can be a positive force in agencies for off-the record discussions.
3. Issues/Projects

- Lower Manhattan
- Governors Island
- Far West Side
- Tweed Courthouse
- Rezoning around transit centers
- Affordable housing

CONVERSATION WITH PRIVATE CLIENTS

Introduction

The clients in this discussion urged the architects to continue this focus on design because “great design solves all problems.” The control of schedules and budgets remains paramount because of the owners need to know that some “creative architect will not run them out of money.” Architects were urged to address the areas of services that have been given away to other sectors and to “seize the day.”

Detailed Comments

1. Project Delivery
 - Many people do not know or understand the full level of management services that the architect is capable of providing.
 - Architects are best qualified to do pre-planning. The architect is the best manager of the engineers and the project start up process.
 - The AIA should educate the public on how good design adds value
 - Setting the design vision is important and architects must let their ideas develop outside of a line item budget.
2. Role of the Architect
 - Architects have been reticent about taking on anything except design and to some degree have pigeon holed themselves. They have often abdicated responsibility for budgets.
 - The role of the on-site architect must be enhanced. Someone must be in the field that respects design and can be decisive when it matters.
 - Architectural schools should be very design-oriented. The opposite opinion was also expressed: “architectural education is too design-oriented.”
 - Architects need to get beyond being design esthetician and worry more about the Owner’s money.
 - It is much harder to be an architect than a lawyer.
3. The Future
 - With the constant change of facility use, as-builts, which are “done last and done worst” are critical.

- A searchable database of all project related information is important to every project and should be developed.
- Educate clients by describing benefits of design. Use case studies to describe how well designed buildings operate better.
- Utilize the Center for Architecture to provide a forum for owners to come together to discuss issues in the best environment.

On behalf of the AIA, I would like to thank the many participants listed below who offered their important commentary on the current status of our profession and their insightful visions about the future. A special thank you also to Rick Bell and Patty West and other AIA staff who assisted in the National Conversation/Local Action.

Participants:

Dick Anderson, President, NY Building Congress
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