

**EVENT RECAP**  
**Post-COVID Cities: Reinventing Global Cities;**

Overall **'working group'** framing categories for **Post-COVID Cities** program series:

- Transportation -- Streets -- Mobility
- Land Use -- Housing -- Zoning -- Economics
- Sustainability / Resilience -- Climate / Environment -- Environmental Justice -- Public Health

**Program Date:** Friday, 10 June 2021, 12:00-2:00pm

[See video](#)

**Event Description:**

“Reinventing Global Cities” is the second in a series of three high-profile events titled “Post-COVID Cities,” which focuses on the future of New York City following the pandemic. During this program, participants will learn how other global cities currently emerging from the pandemic are positioning themselves to reach aspirational social goals while implementing 21st-century zero-carbon policies.

**Speakers:**

**Hélène Chartier**, Head of Zero Carbon Development, C40 Cities (Paris)

**Lucy Bullivant, PhD, Hon. FRIBA**, Founder/Director, Lucy Bullivant Associates (London)

**Vicente Gualart**, Former Chief Architect, City of Barcelona; Founder, Institute of Advanced Architecture of Catalonia (IAAC); Author, *The Self-Sufficient City*; Competition winner to design post-COVID, self-sufficient city in Xiong'an (Barcelona and Xiong'an)

**Moderator:**

**Jeffrey Raven, FAIA, LEED AP BD+C**, Co-Chair, AIANY Planning and Urban Design Committee; Founder, RAVEN A+U – Architecture + Urban Design; Assoc. Professor, NYIT School of Architecture and Design

**Respondants:**

**Transportation: Margaret Newman, FAIA, LEED AP**, Practice Leader, Urban Places and Smart Mobility, Stantec

**Climate Justice:** Christian Braneon, PhD, Remote Sensing Specialist, NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies

**Housing: Mark Ginsberg, FAIA, LEED AP**, Principal, Curtis + Ginsberg Architects

**Planning and Development: James Lima**, President, JLP+D

**Resilience: Janice Barnes, PhD, AIA, LEED AP**, Managing Partner, Climate Adaptation Partners

**Economics: Carol Tan**, Assistant Vice President, New York City Economic Development Corporation

**Overview:** After presentations from city representatives, a discussion followed, featuring a group of local respondents.

## Presentation Summaries

### \\ 1 // PARIS: How COVID has Changed Climate Action

- Covid was a wake-up call: pressuring US to action on climate change; opportunity to rethink our approach to live, work, travel, shop
- 15-Minute City
  - Alternative approach to planning
    - Access and proximity
    - Equity and sustainability
    - Flexibility of organization, use of space
  - Quality of life – What makes city life agreeable?
    - Complete neighborhoods
      - Compactness and mixed-use
      - Decentralization
        - Reduces unnecessary travel
        - Opportunity to plan for equitable access to services and amenities
      - Support local economy
        - Encourages active ground-floor uses
    - People-centered streets and mobility
      - Promote active mobility
      - Reclaim city streets for public use
      - Tactical urbanism and temporary activation
      - Greening public spaces
    - A place for everyone
      - Inclusive neighborhoods
      - Active community engagement
      - Opportunities for social interaction
    - Connected neighborhoods
      - Physically and digitally connected
  - Not only reduce production-based emission but also consumption-based emissions
    - Not only build better, but build less
    - Leverage adaptive reuse
    - Convert underutilized commercial uses to housing
    - Foster flexible building design, adaptable to multiple-uses over time

### \\ 2 // LONDON: Realignment of Development / Macro to Micro Economics

- UK to host UN COP-26 climate change negotiations in November 2021
  - Systemic change through policy, procurement, and regulation
  - Align with broader concepts of regeneration (i.e. sustainable development goals)
  - Capacity building beyond traditional silos; youth councils
  - Challenge will be to retain an experimental approach to achieving highest good
- London's response to climate crisis
  - Traffic / Streets
    - Sadiq Khan's goal of net carbon zero London by 2030
    - Ultra-low vehicle emission zone (ULEZ) in Central London congestion pricing zone (2019) to expand in October 2021
    - Active low-traffic neighborhoods: school streets, Bloomsbury superblock
    - Experimental traffic order (ETO) – 50% car journey's under 30 kilometers
    - Car-free Street Act – Increase walking and cycling, increase life expectancy and economic gains (retail activity, lower vacancy); reduce vehicles; more static street use
    - London Plan – 200 town centres with pedestrianized high streets

- Retrofit revolution
  - Existing buildings for reuse – preserve embodied carbon
  - New pipeline of jobs with neighborhood academies
  - Outer London – deindustrialization / mixed-used districts of ‘maker spaces’
  - Challenge to “Take-Make-Consume-Dispose” status quo
    - Policy funding to support initiatives to combat throwaway culture
    - Policy to incentivize and mandate circular building practices
- Encourage Circular Economy principles – Kate Raworth
  - Balance environmental with social-economic challenges
  - Beyond net zero to regenerative economy
  - Preserve natural assets
- How can residents live near where they work with affordable housing?
  - Adaptive reuse
  - Prefab construction
  - Participatory placemaking

### \\ 3 // Barcelona – Distributed City

- Three ideas for Self-Sufficient Cities
  - Distributed
    - Evolution of city structure from centralized → decentralized → distributed model
    - Since 2012, Barcelona moving from decentralized city to distributed city
    - Diverse neighborhood centers modeled on distributed internet network
    - Public spaces and social spaces create identity of neighborhood
    - Inter-connected via mobility networks less reliant on private vehicles
  - Self-Sufficient City
    - Sustainable, renewable consumption aligned with natural resources
    - Local production / global connection (food, energy, products, natural resources, manufacturing)
    - Circular energy / water loops
      - Mixed-use buildings
      - Urban metabolism
      - Low-carbon construction
  - Informational City
    - Design the process of sustainable production and its physical environment
    - Design has responsibility for not only the object, but the process
    - Calling for more accountability of tracing materials and systems measurement; not going deep enough in ecological tracking
    - Moving from “Bauhaus” to Bio-City

### \\ 4 // Questions and Dialog

JR: **E. B. White’s three New Yorks – Are these distinctions still relevant?**

NYC of the person born here – Accepts size and turbulence as natural and inevitable; solidity and continuity

NYC of the commuter – Comes and leaves each day; tidal restlessness

NYC of the settler – Born elsewhere but drawn in search of something; passion for transformation

JR: **How do you capitalize on existing dense city CBD structure with hub/spoke transit system?**

95% of NYC is not concentrated in Manhattan CBD...

HC: No fight between 15-Minute City concept and CBD; neighborhoods need to be connected but you don't need to travel between districts if neighborhood resources are locally based; must make sure that amenities in neighborhoods are equitable

LB: Psychological image of city is important; NYC residents want access to entire city

JR: **What is the district government overlay that empowers local initiatives?**

LB: **Adapt tools of governance; Covid emergency directives allowed adaptation for innovation with permissive and flexible regulations**, relaxation of operational restrictions; local authorities need to assess which innovations to hold onto; hybrid in-person/work-from-home work model will radically change commuting patterns; compact, mixed-use neighborhoods provide the answer; need to allow for creativity in exploring city

VG: More diverse model of NYC reinventing itself includes Brooklyn Grange and New Lab

HC: **Urban center has capacity to foster new community-based models**; leaders need to share vision and values with public

JR: **How best to harness resources for getting things done?**

CT: **Big ideas** are compelling. How to transform the city? **Need to communicate big ideas at the community level with community context**. What does community engagement look like?

Impact of planning and design on community wealth? What are models for wealth sharing? **Value proposition very different in each neighborhood**.

JR: **Interaction between the character of mature cities with dynamism that results from disruptions (climate, economics, equity, public health)**

CB: How to implement green infrastructure innovations without triggering gentrification?

MG: NYC is outlier in US cities regarding climate awareness; disparity in social equity has resulted in social, economic and racial segregations; **need to incentivize mixed-income neighborhoods**; NYC suburbs have 2x carbon footprint of NYC boroughs; conversion of office/hotels to mixed use residential use was successful in Lower Manhattan but less so elsewhere; Covid exposed lack of equitable broadband access; **easier to convince developers to invest in savings from operational carbon than addressing embodied carbon footprint**

JR: **How to reconcile the fluidity of NY regional labor market with localized, self-sufficient neighborhoods?**

VG: Need strong city administrative structure to ensure that public investments are distributed equitably

HC: Need political will to make social transformations

JR: **Impact of mobility and infrastructure disruptions due to Covid considering alternative city models?**

MN: **Transportation systems are rigid infrastructure – how to maintain but innovate?**

Neighborhood structure model needs more emphasis

JR: **NYC redevelopment strategies?** Is waterfront redevelopment resilient? How to counter urban heat island effect?

JL: Connect urban places to natural systems to be more resilient and economically viable; institutional racism embedded in NYC's economic and land use policies; **need to diversify NYC economy**. NYC too dependent on visitor/tourist industry; governments must learn how to adapt to disruption; how to create adaptable economies? Upscale innovations; more equitable access to economic opportunity; NYC government needs more capacity and ability to get things done; CEQRA / SEQRA environmental review process should address heat impacts from development

JB: **Ways to motivate transformational change?** Need to focus on public health at center of policy decisions; locally-led adaptations to climate change encourage more equitable approaches and deepen awareness of local knowledge to allow locally-relevant actions; **need to rebalance public investment from over-reliance on climate mitigation to adaptation including managed retreat; Need more holistic view of city – change dialogue from unit of ‘they’ to unit of ‘me’ or ‘we’**

**JR: How to harness real estate development sector to become allies of transformative change?**

CT: Reform land-use policies to address inequities in community impacts and benefits

HC: Business community wants to adapt to climate change – **positive alignment of politics/business; need to project value of innovation for public good;** start small/experimental to demonstrate that progress is possible

MN: Demand shared responsibility by private developers for community improvements

JW: How to balance sustainable development, equitable outcomes and legacy infrastructure with the impetus for innovation in NYC’s future? Can density be redistributed?

HC: Create stable economies – avoid peaks and lows; **Covid crisis demonstrated that behavioral change needs to supplement technological change**

LB: Impact of green infrastructure development on gentrification; Displacement from gentrification is a pernicious force in urban development – need to create mixed-income neighborhoods; Need common understanding that development must be for the public good; **Social values can be built into the procurement process**

## \\ 5 // **Take-Aways and Themes**

- Is a re-defined structure of the "sustainable city" achievable through reconciling post-COVID destructions?
- Can that re-definition better support public health and equitable opportunity/wealth-building?
- The global/local set of relationships in a city must be further understood as factors in CBD/neighborhood identities and functions.
- Neighborhood as a key unit of city structure for living, working, recreating, and point of service provision.
  - How to create:
    - Viable, healthy neighborhoods?
    - More mixed-use neighborhoods?
    - Neighborhoods that relate to each other and the city as a whole in an equitable and balanced way?
- Requires definition of a process for community-led, community-informed, community-involved planning and self-determination.
- How is equity measured in that process and its outcomes?
  - Can the responsibility of the real-estate sector be re-aligned to support the communities it impacts?
  - How do we manage investment in legacy infrastructure while advancing changing models of neighborhood-focused urban sustainable economic development? i.e. relationship of hub-spoke to 15 Min Neighborhoods.
  - What processes or re-alignments will foster innovation and produce equitable economic growth?

**END (draft 7/5/21)**