ARCH 4/584 – From Sub-urbanization to Citi-fication: Transforming the East 82nd Avenue Corridor

Overview

A city is a complex human-made organism, a continuously unfolding drama that, at its best, inspires the imagination and enriches the human prospect. Cities are the locus of social, cultural, economic, nutrient, material and ecological flows and interactions that animate vibrant community life. By the year 2030 it is estimated that about 60% of humanity will be urban residents while in the US the number will be closer to 90%. Will these urban dwellers be victims of rampant urbanization or inhabitants of sustainable communities and cities?

Urbanization is not the same as citification. This studio will explore the power of urban design to transform the merely urbanized into whole and beautiful neighborhoods, places and communities – a dynamic part of the city. Our goal is to repair the city by reimagining its fabric. We will concern ourselves with the intentional design of both physical places and the underlying resource flows that animate them, hard and soft system design, the place and the people and stuff that flow through it.

Studio Assignment

The laboratory for this exploration will be the 82nd Avenue Corridor in East Portland. 82nd Avenue is a major north-south corridor, which extends from Portland International Airport in the north 11 miles south into Clackamas County where it connects to I-205 just south of Clackamas Town Center, a major commercial shopping area. The corridor is a primary suburban-like arterial within a low-density, automobile-dominated landscape. As such it both anchors and divides several ethnically diverse neighborhoods and shopping districts.

Our assignment will be to create an urban design vision to guide re-development of the 82nd Avenue Corridor into a pedestrian friendly, vibrant and sustainable corridor over the next 20 years and beyond. The vision will consist of a development framework – design
principles, concepts, strategies and a development program -- and detailed designs for specific neighborhood and town centers to be identified during the course of the study. While we will consider the entire corridor as a regional facility, we will focus most of our efforts on the portion of 82<sup>nd</sup> Avenue between Sandy Boulevard in the north and Foster Avenue to the south. We will re-design portions of the Avenue itself, explore new forms of urban metabolism that integrate a Civic Ecology of energy, water, waste, food, economic and cultural flows, propose new means of transport, give shape and connectivity to the public environment and design building prototypes that afford rich and vibrant neighborhood life.

The studio will collaborate with representatives of the area’s neighborhoods, explore the possibilities of neighborhood and town centers as defined in the Portland Comprehensive Plan, integrate elements of the Powell-Division Transit Development Project and explore urban design from a variety of cultural perspectives. The arc of the studio will proceed through three phases: Discovery (analysis, opportunities and constraints through large team work), Exploration (framework planning and systems design in smaller teams) and Plan Development (center and neighborhood planning and design, street, park and plaza design and massing studies by small teams or individual efforts). Students will spend time in the field where they will perform field research, interact with community stakeholders and participate in workshops. Roughly half of the studio will be devoted to urban design analysis and the creation of a generative corridor framework while the latter half will focus on detailed placemaking and infrastructure design.

**Major issues/departure points**

In this studio we will explore:

*Urban design as a distinct activity:* This will be an urban design studio not an urban architecture studio. The distinction is important. Urban design is the art and science of designing cities – their physical fabric, underlying systems and places -- and guiding this change over time. This is often accomplished not by designing specific buildings but by creating visions, systems and policies that clearly and powerfully convey inspiration and intent. Urban design plans are implemented over time by a variety of change
agents: developers, planners, architects, landscape architects, engineers, citizens, artists, politicians and others. In this studio we will create urban community frameworks of places and systems. These frameworks will be comprised of building and spatial typologies, land use, movement and open space systems and resource flow patterns that we will describe in an urban design “kit of parts.” Students will draw upon a reading list of relevant and seminal texts that will inform the studio’s primary intellectual departure points.

**Placemaking:** The studio will create urban design concepts in the service of making whole and beautiful places that are culturally-supportive, legible, climate-appropriate, healthy and safe.

**Nature in the city:** The studio will explore the use of Biophilic design principles as a way of introducing nature into urban fabric and creating life-affirming environments for present and future inhabitants, human and otherwise.

**Systems Design:** We will integrate depth and richness into our placemaking by integrating Civic Ecology community-scaled systems of energy, nutrient, water, food, waste, money, information, materials and cultural flows into our planning and urban design concepts. These will complement land use, mobility and open space systems design.

**Organic change:** Great urban design has the power to drive change over time by leveraging strategically situated, catalytic projects. We will identify potentially transformative interventions and speculate on their impact over time.

**Presenting urban design arguments:** Effective urban design ideas must be inspiring and be presented clearly and logically. We will explore the power of the diagram and learn how to structure a logical urban design argument and effectively present it.
Studio Instruction

The studio will be led by Tim Smith, Principal at SERA Architects. Since it takes a village to make a village, Tim will draw upon the people and resources of SERA’s Urban Design and Planning (UDP) Studio as well as several subject matter experts in such areas as landscape architecture, civil engineering and transportation planning. He will also draw upon the Portland community’s rich array of urban design talent.

Timothy W. Smith, AIA, AICP

Tim Smith is Principal and founder of the Urban Design and Planning Studio at SERA Architects, a Portland firm that offers integrated services in architecture, urban design, planning, and sustainability consulting. He is a registered architect and a certified planner with over 35 years of professional experience. Tim is passionate about the art and science of placemaking and his work is aimed at creating whole and beautiful places that enrich the human experience and integrate nature at the aesthetic and systemic levels. His work spans a variety of scales, from the site, block and neighborhood to the community, campus, city and region.

His recent work includes the master plan and development guidelines for Liwa, a new capital city for the Western Region of Abu Dhabi, concept and development planning for several new communities in Oregon, numerous campus plans for many of the universities in the Oregon University System including the framework plan for Portland State University and award winning projects and research in sustainable urban design and city planning. Currently he is engaged in long-range framework planning
and urban design for both Google and Stanford University in Silicon Valley, California. Tim has served as urban design advisor to the San Francisco Mayor’s Office for the Redevelopment of Treasure Island in San Francisco Bay and to the Portland Development Commission for the Redevelopment of the South Waterfront in Portland. He was the lead urban designer for the Avenue of the Arts, the one-mile long, primary north-south streetscape that anchors Philadelphia’s downtown arts district and was the lead architectural designer for the High School for Creative and Performing Arts in Philadelphia.

Tim developed Civic Ecology, a citizen-driven, whole systems framework for community design and has helped implement the framework in numerous communities nationally and internationally. He co-authored Making EcoDistricts: Concepts and Methods for Advancing Sustainability in Neighborhoods, authored Civic Ecology: A Citizen-Driven Framework for Transforming Suburban Communities, delivered a TEDx talk on Civic Ecology and lectures widely on the topic.

Tim has served as Vice President of the Portland Planning Commission, on the Portland Chapter AIA Urban Design Committee, the Portland Mayor’s Central City Roundtable, as Chairman of the Portland Metro Construction Excise Tax/Community Planning and Development Grants Advisory Committee and as a member of the City of Portland EcoDistrict Technical Advisory Committee. Tim currently serves on the National Board of Sustainability Advisors for KB Home, a national homebuilder located in Los Angeles engaged in sustainable homebuilding practices.

Tim holds a B.S. and an M Arch. from the University of Michigan and an M. C. P. and M. Arch. in Urban Design from the University of Pennsylvania where he taught urban design studios in the School of Design.