

SUPER SATURDAY: Building Pros Come Together

UN SAMEDI FABULEUX ! Rapprochement des pros

by/par Judy Lord

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In mid-June this year, landscape architects, architects and planners descended on Vancouver en masse. For over a week, they met in conference rooms and convened in remarkable city environments, gathering in professional and organizational groups.

Some 355 LAs attended CSLA/CELA's 2006 congress, *Shifting Ground — Landscape Architecture in the Age of the New Normal*. The Canadian Institute of Planners (CIP) was in town, too, and many planners and landscape architects opted to stay for the Urban Design Awards, presented by the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada (RAIC) Saturday night.

For the three organizations, it was too good an opportunity to miss. Why not bring the city-building pros together for a day, for interdisciplinary sessions, tours, workshops, round tables. . . a stimulating range of highly practical and inspirational networking? Why not plan a Super Saturday?

By any standard, Super Saturday was a mammoth undertaking. The day offered so

many events it was almost impossible to sort through the players without a program. "It went phenomenally well," said landscape architect Mark Vaughan, who was instrumental to the planning from the outset. About 1,000 delegates attended, and the day of joint activity led to a truly grand finale at the gala banquet celebrating the Urban Design Awards.

Following a keynote address by the Right Honourable Adrienne Clarkson, the CSLA, CIP and RAIC signed an historic agreement. The Urban Design Awards, until then sponsored solely by the RAIC, would henceforward be a shared award presented by all three groups. In the same agreement, the three groups committed to finding concrete ways to work together.

The City Building Professionals Group

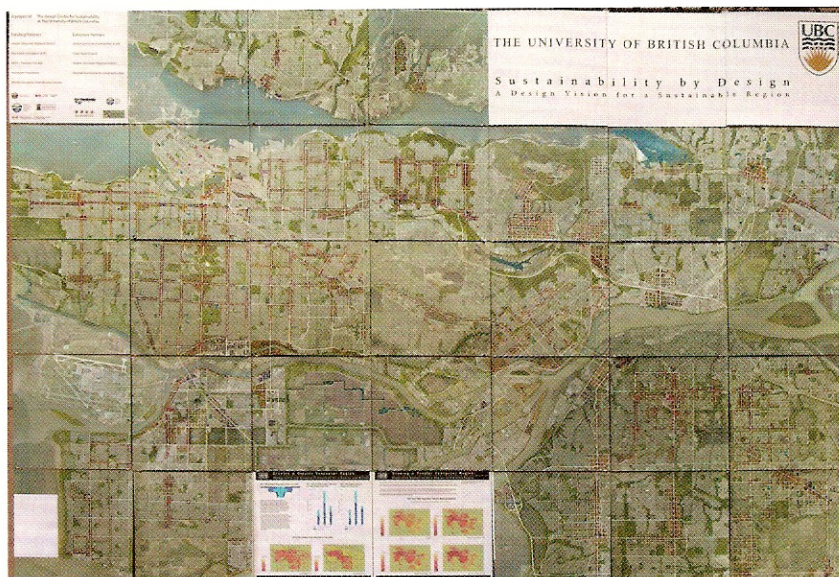
The agreement points the way to increased collaboration among the design professions — an idea whose time has surely come. More than two years ago, at the joint conference of the Ontario Association of Landscape

Architects and the Ontario Provincial Planners Institute in Huntsville, Executive Director Fran Pauzé and then-President Jim Paterson met with CIP President Ron Shishido and Executive Director Steve Brasier, to discuss just such a meeting of minds.

In 2005, the organizations came together to form the City Building Professionals Group. Mark Vaughan, who is a past president of the British Columbia Society of Landscape Architects (BCSLA), chaired the group. It brought together an impressive cast of national players: the CSLA, the CIP and the RAIC. British Columbia affiliates were very much part of the equation: the BCSLA, the Architectural Institute of British Columbia, and the Planning Institute of British Columbia. And it was this group that engineered Super Saturday.

LAs lead the pack

Vaughan points out that landscape architects took to the Super Saturday idea immediately and forcefully. Already LAs had shown a keen interest in collaborating with other professionals. The 2006 event marked



Photos courtesy of the Design Centre for Sustainability, UBC, and Mark Vaughan

the first time that CSLA co-hosted their annual Congress with the international Council of Educators in Landscape Architecture (CELA).

And as a profession, LAs were extremely well represented at Saturday events. Although LAs are not as numerous as architects and planners, the proportion of LA delegates at Super Saturday was higher than any other profession.

As a testament to the day's success, some 200 people participated in the Regional Design Charrette hosted by the UBC — a six-hour session where groups of three or four prepared a 9 x 13-metre map at 1:5,000 scale — a compelling visual representation of what Greater Vancouver might be like in 2050, as its population doubles.

Organizers hung the map at the conference site of the United Nations World Urban Forum (WUF) where it attracted considerable attention. Initially few WUF delegates were aware of Super Saturday, but the map was an excellent eye-opener. "It's a phenomenal tool. This is integrated planning in its rawest form," said Vaughan, "and proof that the professions mean business."

Sharing recipes

"So many groups give pep talks but don't provide the working tools: it's the opposite of what we're trying to achieve," says Vaughan. "Stop the rhetoric. Stop the talk. Find ways to do it: ways that are transferable, ways that are describable, ways that we can put what we do on paper and show what our results were. Provide recipes for what we did."

Again and again, the Super Saturday sessions provided concrete illustration and advice. The San Diego Council of Design Professionals, for example, was peppered with questions when it told a capacity crowd how its 3,000 design professionals have become a powerful voice for smart growth over the last two decades. And the PLUS Network (www.plusnetwork.org) brought panelists from Australia, Mexico, South Africa, Brazil, Romania and the US together with Canadians to discuss 100-Year Planning for Cities of the World.

"The Network has huge value," said Vaughan. "Because every city is different, the Network allows a blending and matching. Cities can act as mentors for each other.

"We can access a knowledge base. Then, rather than recreating the wheel and relearning the first steps, we can put our resources into building for the future instead."

Street smarts

Outside of the meeting rooms, Super Saturday featured a collection of tours, which profiled a city that is infinitely varied. Some focused on the challenges Vancouver continues to face — "not only what we do well, but what we *need* to do well," said Vaughan. *The Spaces Between* tours, for example, explored forgotten places, asking participants to consider how Vancouver and other cities can make better use of the spaces that are left over after development has taken place.

A dozen other tours offered delegates firsthand looks at green building technology and green streets, bike tours of greenways and University Town, in-depth visits to Stanley Park and False Creek, a farm tour, a public art walk, and more.

The long-term legacy

According to Vaughan, the collaboration exhibited at Super Saturday is the beginning of stronger working relationships. CSLA and RAIC also signed a Legacy agreement — a long-term memorandum to work as a team in cities in developing nations to assist in their long-term urban sustainable planning.

The Legacy agreement promises huge benefits both to developing nations and Canadians. Working in Canada, Vaughan says, "our roles are very rigid and it's not easy to explore new roles. Although the public is very supportive of sustainability, we're limited very much by our clients' desires: there's only so much you can justify."

Working in foreign countries as volunteers, design professionals can insist that their objectives be met. And at the same time, they can make a huge difference to the cities that don't have the professionals they need. "Many of us have done work for the PLUS Network," he says, "and many cities in countries like Mexico are already doing long-term sustainable planning. We can massively increase their capacity."

Vaughan's forward thinking is echoed by CSLA President Sara Jane Gruetzner, who was newly elected at the 2006 Congress. "I believe the CSLA and RAIC are ready to get our members involved right now," she says, "and we hope to get the CIP on board over time.

"The creative energy spilling out of the Bayshore Inn on Saturday, June 17 was a testimony to what can happen when we all work together. Super Saturday was Super!"

