Affordable Housing: Another Crisis?

Expanding Battery Park City

What Makes Theater?

Discussing "Civic Lessons"

REVIVING LOWER MANHATTAN

Battery Park City Guard Booth by Alexander Gorlin, Architect
News

from the executive director, Carol Clark.

The Chapter’s Lower Manhattan Task Force and its Zoning and Urban Design Committee have been analyzing the proposed changes to New York City’s Zoning Resolution. Provisions to change current regulations governing public plazas created in conjunction with commercial building development are now in the public review process.

Long-awaited proposed zoning changes, which would allow megastores to be built in manufacturing areas without zoning restrictions, have recently emerged from the environmental review process. The big-box retail debate will be one of the more heated local regulatory controversies in memory. Ultimately, the Chapter’s position on this issue will be determined by the degree to which urban design guidelines are framed to ameliorate the incongruities of meshing retail facilities with the physical fabric of New York City’s diverse neighborhoods.

The Lower Manhattan Task Force has met regularly with the Manhattan Office of the Department of City Planning on proposed zoning changes in Lower Manhattan. The discussions have focused on the proposed height and setback regulations for new buildings, intended to define building envelopes for new development sites downtown. Because real estate development on the three vacant sites south of Chambers Street is unlikely to take place soon, the task force has focused on other urban design policies to ensure that alterations to the existing building fabric will enhance the area’s historic character and economic viability, and help create a 24-hour community. The task force applauds the general goals of the proposed rezoning effort: to encourage as-of-right and mixed-use development, to simplify the Zoning Resolution, and to facilitate conversion of outmoded buildings.

While the Chapter continues to refine and communicate its position on comprehensive reform of Lower Manhattan zoning, the Department of City Planning has launched a limited package of relatively noncontroversial initiatives into the public review process. Chief among them is a measure aimed at property owners of buildings constructed between 1961 and 1977 who would not otherwise qualify for the city and state incentives established last fall. Other initiatives include elimination of the Business Relocation Assistance Corporation (BRAC) provisions in Lower Manhattan and an allowance for accessory parking. The highly controversial proposed transfer of development rights from an area in the historic core of the financial district – first suggested late last fall to City Planning’s Advisory Committee for Lower Manhattan – is still under discussion, but it is not a part of the current zoning package.

Another topic of interest to the Zoning and Urban Design Committee is the proposed change for Eighth Avenue and the theater district. The Department of City Planning is soliciting comments from a wide range of organizations on a plan to create a Theater
Anxious to encourage tourism in Lower Manhattan, the Conservancy for Historic Battery Park and the Battery Park City Authority have engaged the team of Ken Smith, landscape architect, the Weiss & Warchol Studio, and Design/Writing/Research (Abbott Miller), graphic design, to design a temporary plaza and information kiosk for the old fire pier where visitors gather en route to Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty, Clinton Castle, Battery Park, or the parks in Battery Park City. (Meanwhile, long-term plans for Beyer Blinder Belle’s Pier A Plaza inch along incrementally.) The new project consists of a series of circular benches and a giant kiosk, also with circular seating. The image of a shell — projected in sweeping bands of black-and-brown asphalt paving that pull people through the plaza — symbolizes the maritime history of the site, the shape of the plaza, and the crowning pediment on the historic pier structure.

Descriptions of the Battery from Herman Melville’s Moby Dick appear in the concrete bands between the colored asphalt paths.

High-Tech Communicating

For a fast growing state-of-the-art communications company, Conners Communications, Lee Skolnick Architecture + Design Partnership has designed a new office by inserting workstations into an open loft space in a Flatiron district building. Low dividers made of translucent screens and wood-and-glass partitions differentiate the public and private spaces. Colored walls and stained woods delineate solid volumes for storage units and closets. A video viewing room has TV monitors and 1 comfortable seating area.

For the Scholastic Gallery in Soho, Skolnick designed an all-in-one, interactive product test space, showroom, offices, reception area, and art gallery. The space is divided into Scholastic’s product categories: home products, school products, and the classroom of the future. Mobile computer kiosks are networked to display programs on a 10-by-16-foot grid of monitors for group activities.

Accessible Health Care

Two opposite scales of new hospital facilities have recently been completed in New York. On the smaller end is the innovative conversion of a supermarket in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, into an ambulatory-care clinic as the Sister Thea Bowman Family Health Center, part of St. Mary’s Hospital.

The 10,000-square-foot supermarket had been abandoned when the firm Architecture for Health, Science & Commerce, of Tarrytown, New York, transformed it into a new center in April. Because of its vast open space, the store was ideal for conversion. Staff offices were easy to separate from public zones. Skylights bring natural light into the waiting areas. The simple, new, geometric masonry-and-glass-block facade is highlighted with an arched doorway that enhances the streetscape.

On the mammoth end is Bellevue Hospital Center’s newly expanded and modernized emergency department, completed on April 10 and designed by architects Albert Schenkewitz & Partners of New York. As the largest emergency department in the city (65,000 square feet), it must be transformed into a command center for city crises and also serve as a sanctuary from disaster. The second busiest in the country, it is prepared to handle over 110,000 patient visits this year.

The existing buildings were a maze of unplanned spaces, gradually added over time. In 1990, the architects began the first of two phases, which include remodeling the existing space and building a new 31,000-square-foot structure for the adult and pediatric sections. The old emergency area will be turned into psychiatric, radiology, and administrative areas.

A new component of the center is the separate monitored entrances for adults, children, and prisoners: A cheerful pediatric area lessens the confusion for children; the adult space has decontamination areas and isolation rooms for contagious diseases. Skylights and soothing colors help alleviate tension. Emergency-care patient areas are arranged in concentric spaces for easy staff surveillance.

Islamic Center

Construction began in April on the Islamic Cultural Center School on Third Avenue between 96th and 97th streets, adjacent to the mosque designed by SOM in 1991. The nonprofit cultural and religious organization’s building was designed by Rogers, Burgun, Shahine and Deschler, Inc.

Of interest is the architects’ use of the existing site, which drops 19 feet on the Second Avenue side. They stacked the three floors of the curved building into the side of the hill within a comparatively small footprint. This tactic freed up space to create a semicircular ceremonial plaza that mirrors the circle-on-square geometry of the mosque’s dome. The plaza, which separates and unifies the two buildings, will be used for recreation and as a gathering place for prayers on feast days.

The three-story, 35,000-square-foot building, which will be completed next year, includes

ON THE DRAWING BOARDS

Kiosk for Pier A, Ken Smith, Weiss & Warchol Studio, Design/Writing/Research

Pier A temporary plaza, Ken Smith, Weiss & Warchol Studio, Design/Writing/Research

Scholastic Gallery, Lee Skolnick Architecture + Design
a ground floor with a cafeteria, a library, offices, and mechanical systems that will later house an exhibit space and auditorium. Classrooms for 240 students occupy the second and third floors. The lobby is a three-story space capped with a skylight. The school the potential for future construction on the flat roof in Bangkok, Thailand, which was completed last year to appeal to a younger, less affluent family customer than other branches of the same store in the city. Walker Group/CNI designed the interiors with a lively graphic design program, bold colors and patterns, and inexpensive materials and fixtures, such as vinyl flooring rather than terrazzo, wallpapers, vinyl wood replicas, and laminates. Each floor has a different theme: “style” on the first floor, “youth” on the second floor, “lifestyle” on the third floor, and “marketplace” in the basement.

Clad in honed granite, the building echoes the adjacent mosque, but takes on its own character with clear volumes and geometric patterning based on Islamic decoration.

**East Village Libraries Restored**

The Department of General Services continues to restore New York’s historic libraries despite budget cutbacks. Rothko Center Thomson & Bee has begun designs to restore the New York City landmark Ottendorfer branch at 135 Second Avenue, built in 1884 by William Schickel for the Ottendorfer family. Later donated to the city, it is the oldest operating library in the New York public library system. Its landmarked interior features a cast-iron and glazed mezzanine, a spiral staircase, and glass floor panels. Making the building handicapped-accessible while retaining its historic elements will be a major challenge.

In May the architects completed the renovation of the 1904 Tompkins Square branch of a Carnegie library at 331 East Tenth Street, designed by McKim, Mead & White.

**Bangkok Store**

More commercial activity in the Far East for New York-based design firms includes a new department store for Robinson Ramintra in Bangkok, Thailand, which was completed last year. Walker Group/CNI designed the interiors with a lively graphic design program, bold colors and patterns, and inexpensive materials and fixtures, such as vinyl flooring rather than terrazzo, wallpapers, vinyl wood replicas, and laminates. Each floor has a different theme: “style” on the first floor, “youth” on the second floor, “lifestyle” on the third floor, and “marketplace” in the basement.

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**Awards**

The American Academy in Rome announced the winners of the hundredth annual Rome Prize competition on Monday, April 29. The fellowships allow American artists, architects, and scholars to live and work at the Academy’s villa and facilities in Rome. The prizes in the field of architecture were awarded to Kimberley Ackert of New York City; Nichole Wiedemann of Gainesville, Florida; and Mark Robbins of Columbus, Ohio. Prizes in historic preservation and conservation were given to Anthony Robins and George Segan Wheeler, both of New York City.

Landscape architect Daniel Urban Kiley was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters this year, joining artists, writers, musicians, and architects who are honored every year for their outstanding achievements. Kiley combines a modernist sensibility with a respect for nature and the classical tradition (Onasis, April 1996, p. 16). The American Academy of Arts and Letters, founded in 1898, is chartered by Congress and grants awards of half a million dollars each year.

The Van Alen Institute Projects in Public Architecture announced the winning entries for its Governors Island competition at a ceremony on April 24. The first prize of $10,000 and designation as the inaugural Van Alen fellow in public architecture went to Peter Hau, a graduate student in landscape architecture at the University of Pennsylvania, for “Open Narratives.” A second prize of $2,500 was awarded to Kimberlee J. Douglas, another student at Penn in landscape architecture, for “Wired Island.” Dilip da Cunha and Anuradha Mathur, both of Philadelphia, shared the $1,000 third prize, and three honorable mentions ($250 each) went to Archi-tectonica of New York, James Corner of the Penn landscape faculty, and Kimberlee K. Yao, an architecture student at Princeton. The jury included Christine Boyer, Miriam Gusevich, Judith Heintz, Carlos Jimenez, and Enric Miralles. The over 200 entries will be on display at the Van Alen Institute, 30 West 22nd Street, until mid-June.

Drawings and models of ideas by community members to "Help Design Frederick Douglass Circle" are on exhibition at the Charles A. Dana Discovery Center in Central Park through June 23. The Central Park Conservancy and the National Museum of Design sponsored the competition to develop plans for the barren, paved traffic circle at the corner of 110th Street and Central Park West, which will contain a memorial to Frederick Douglass. One scheme turned the subway station at the circle into a metaphor for the Underground Railroad, for which Douglass was a conductor, and proposed a skylight to shed light on underground commuters.
NYCHA has had unusual success with even less funding. Federal funds allowed the renovation of city in rem properties and the construction of 300 new units a year from 1990 until 1995. But the city is now in desperate need of more units and subsides. Every NYCHA unit is rented, and over 130,000 families are on a waiting list. Next year there is only the potential for modernization work and the construction of 13 new units of transitional housing for families with AIDS by James McCullar & Associates on the Lower East Side. Burney calls these the “Last Houses,” in contrast to the First Houses of 1935.

Recent NYCHA projects are innovative high-density, low-rise housing projects: in East New York, Marcy Green, with 87-units, and Hoard Park, with 150 units, by Shelly Croopp; a 56-unit courtyard scheme on the Lower East Side by Becker and Becker Associates; 87 units of senior housing designed by James McCullar & Associates at 91st and Columbus; and the Dome site at 84th and Columbus by Castro-Blanco, Piscioneri and Associates. NYCHA is also renovating existing community centers and facilities, and runs social programs.

But now, Burney said, the buzzword is asset management. Congress feels that HUD should be run like a real estate company, selling off the smallest units and getting the government away from building housing.

Frank Braconi, executive director of the Citizens Housing and Planning Council, asked, when HUD takes away the incremental Section 8 to facilitate privatization, “Where can you put the homeless and impoverished people,...in public housing? There is no room.” The lack

of subsidies will bring abandonment again because landlords won’t be receiving rent and won’t be able to pay taxes or make repairs.

“The issue of housing doesn’t even appear in Giuliani’s framework,” said Jay Small, executive director of the Association for Neighborhood Housing Developers. “The city is now primarily trying to rid itself of its stocks in the portfolio of housing. They want to break the in rem cycle, but they are doing it in a dangerous way since they are not taking care of distressed properties.” The tax lien bill initiated by the Finance Department can foreclose even occupied properties.

David R. Jones, president of the Community Service Society, said he is concerned that the sales lists initially issued by the Department of Finance contain numerous errors, which HPD is trying to identify and remove. He said he worries that the loss of the incremental Section 8 will make it impossible for non-profits and community-based housing groups to improve or develop housing.

One solution to the homeless problem that has proven successful is the new trend toward developing supportive housing, a type of SRO with social services and community-oriented programs. Examples are now featured in a photography exhibition, “Almost Home,” sponsored by the Corporation for Supportive Housing, Common Ground, HPD, and the SRO Providers Group, at the Times Square Lobby Gallery at 255 West 43rd Street through June 7.
REVIVING LOWER MANHATTAN
by Jayne Merkel

We want to create an environment where it’s no longer safe to shoot a commercial with lions and bulls running through the streets,” City Planning Commissioner Joseph B. Rose told a standing-room-only audience at Columbia University’s symposium, “Reviving Lower Manhattan: Preserving the Past to Ensure the Future.” Nineteen different speakers at the six-hour marathon on March 29 agreed that Lower Manhattan needs to be converted to a nighttime, mixed-use neighborhood and that its historic building stock is one of its greatest assets. They parted ways on whether it should be protected as a single landmarked district, as students in the historic preservation program of the Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation proposed in the study that inspired the event, Reviving Lower Manhattan: Preserving the Past to Ensure the Future.

Before debate ensued at the end of the afternoon, the audience had learned about the architectural history of the area, and what is being proposed, planned, and carried out in Lower Manhattan from the people who are doing it.

The Plan for Lower Manhattan of 1993 presented quite a dif-

troubled icon of our time that we must both preserve and revitalize. It is the seat of our government, home to our major institutions of commerce....”

It wasn’t always. Stern was the first of several speakers to explain that the southern tip of Manhattan started out as a port and only later became “Wall Street.” After World War II, more change came with “a loss of faith in the past,” he said. “The general feeling was that new buildings were better than what they replaced.” The Chase Manhattan Bank Building (of 1960) “contradicted the street plan with its floor plate and the skyline with its profile.” The new preservation plan is, in part, a reaction to that disregard for precedent.

In a compact history of the plans for Lower Manhattan, Richard Plunz, the director of Columbia’s division of urban design, showed how “looking to a post-port city” had separated the area from its roots. “The Lower Manhattan Downtown Association, led by David Rockefeller in 1959, was intent on wiping out manufacturing and the port. The actual job-producing activities were held in great disdain. Anything but finance was said not to be the highest and best use,” he said.

Plunz showed a series of plans for Lower Manhattan, all with the West Side Highway in place for commuters. “Tribeca was seen as expendable,” he noted. A land-use map from the 1960s located finance in the center of the island and housing on the periphery, where it was eventually built. A plan for Battery Park City had harbor-view corridors cut through the old, irregular Dutch street plan.

“The Plan for Lower Manhattan of 1993 presented quite a dif-
Problems were acknowledged, declines in population and office rentals admitted. Even the Second Avenue subway was resurrected. The Peterson/Littenberg plan of 1995 "emphasized actual design, space-making. The whole history of planning up to this time had been land-use planning," he said, "but this was not a land-use plan."

The speakers at the symposium shared the assumptions of the recent plan that there were serious economic problems to solve in Lower Manhattan and that the old divisions of the area into separate uses had to go. Historians Andrew S. Dolkart and Carol Willis showed how recently those divisions were made. The first strictly commercial buildings were not built until the nineteenth century (on Schermerhorn Row between 1811 and 1830). "One thing that's interesting is the way Lower Manhattan has been able to reinvent itself" over the centuries, Dolkart said.

Comparing a map of 1660 to a recent one, he showed how much of the area was built on landfill.

Willis said, "I have reservations about broad historic designation downtown in favor of individual buildings," but acknowledged that many different types of buildings should be preserved because "a complete history of the skyscraper can be told within Lower Manhattan," where the skyscraper museum she is organizing will be located. "I would endorse legislation saying that the canyons of Broadway, Broad Street, and Wall Street should not be penetrated."

"One of the healthy debates between the students and the faculty was about whether designation puts too many restrictions on new construction," explained Françoise Bollack, AIA, an architect who taught in the studio that prepared the preservation plan. Her description of Lower Manhattan, informed by an architect's sensibility, showed how "the buildings respond to each other" and how architects adapted classical language to the irregular street patterns.

For example, in 1893 James Brown Lord located the colonnaded entrance of Delmonico's on the pointed corner of Beaver and South William streets, establishing a classical symmetry on a most unclassical site. The famous old restaurant building, recently converted to apartments, formed part of a five-pointed star created by five different Flatiron-shaped buildings converging where the corner intersects with William Street. (Later the Corn Exchange building on the northwest corner was destroyed for a modern tower that was never built.)

Sites such as the one at five corners that absolutely require sensitive, moderately-scaled infill are one reason the students consider landmarking essential.

The Preservation Plan and the Players

The AIA's Carol Clark, another faculty member who directed the study, pointed out that before making their recommendations, the students considered "planning, zoning, and real estate perspectives. They studied the 1916 zoning code and the 1961 revisions." She noted that the buildings there now "were built at a bulk and density far in excess of — double — the 15 FAR allowable today [a fact that makes it unlikely anyone would want to tear a building down]. A large percentage were built before 1935, and of the 603 buildings, 181 of which are significant structures, only 40 are individually landmarked. And there are three small historic districts." She explained that the students wondered why so little was designated and concluded that it was because of opposition from real estate interests and the absence of a large, vocal residential constituency downtown. They recommended National Register listing largely for the tax credit.

The executive director of the Landmarks Commission, Anne G. Seel, said a lack of staff was responsible for the small number of designations, but that ten buildings had been designated during the last year along with the Stone Street historic district, where the commission has its offices. She is convinced that if they had tried to designate the whole district, "We'd still be talking with the owners." But, she said, "the mayor's tax incentive plan has done wonders."

The lone realtor on the podium, Charles Reiss of the Trump Organization, said its "purchase of 40 Wall Street was predicated on the assumption of designation. We want what's around it to survive. Developers don't always respond to cold, hard facts. They sometimes respond to emotions, and there is a great deal of emotion in Lower Manhattan...[but] it's still very difficult. The area raises some significant questions about adapting residential. The ability to connect to transportation is essential."

Tony Goldman, a developer who prefers to call himself "a restorer, a reviver, or a facilitator," thinks the area offers "the opportunity to create the perfect urban neighborhood of the twenty-first century without any crack cocaine or the usual social problems." He is...
already converting buildings there, as he did earlier in Soho, Tribeca, and Miami Beach. "I think what we're going to see in the future is the development of flexible space that can be used for living or working," Goldman praised the students' coherent vision, but said, "We have to be realistic about how you get there. We'll get there, but we'll get there in stages."

What's Going on Down There?

City officials look at downtown buildings differently than historians and preservationists — or even developers. Deputy Mayor Fran Reiter explained that, in designing the incentive program to abate the loss of jobs and tax revenues from office vacancies, "we split buildings into three categories: those that were no longer viable as commercial space but could become so with major investment by owners, those that were not upgradable but could be converted to residential or mixed uses, and those that were not viable in any case but might become development sites. At the same time, we wanted to preserve the district and to create a 24-hour community." She talked mostly about the successes downtown: Tourism is up; the Heritage Trails program is in place; downtown hotels are booming. High-tech businesses are moving in. Public buildings are being cleaned and renovated. "Transportation is the most difficult problem," she said. There is still no direct commuter access from Long Island or the northern suburbs, though the plan to improve automobile access on the West Side is under way and the downtown loop is up and running. "We think we'll see 1,000 new units of housing this year," she said. "Wall Street is coming back in all the ways we had hoped."

The city's director of planning, Joseph B. Rose, was also optimistic: "Much of what we have to do is get out of the way." He explained that the Planning Commission has liberalized home occupancy rules to make more living units in former office buildings legal. It has removed the density requirement, cutting the minimum size of an apartment in half (to 900 square feet), and allowed accessory parking in basement garages, even though that only will be feasible in a few locations. It is eliminating the conversion tax and creating a special zoning district for Lower Manhattan with new height and setback rules. But "there is not going to be an area-wide historic district," he said, partly because blanket regulatory controls have proved excessively restrictive and unenforceable elsewhere, and partly because "once the economy improves, there will be a need for large floor plate office buildings." Existing buildings in Lower Manhattan are not in danger now, though they may be one day.

The head of the Alliance for Downtown New York, Carl Weisbrod, said, "Although there is a sense [in the audience] that property owners and real estate interests have opposed designation, there has not been a single opposition, at least since I've been there [fall 1994]. Still, the reasons I am opposed to district designation are that it would make investment more difficult, especially with public funds for transportation, it would require an affirmative vote from all property owners, redevelopment would lie in a never-never-land while the effort was being made, and there is no building that is threatened today."

Although he, too, admitted that transportation is a vexing problem, Weisbrod touted the good news. Wall Street is still the third largest business district in the country (after Midtown Manhattan and the Chicago Loop), with 300,000 workers and 15,000 residents, 80 percent of whom walk to work, an unprecedented percentage in this country. It is one of the safest parts of the city. Most business improvement districts have to allocate almost all their resources to security and sanitation. Lower Manhattan is so clean and safe that only 40 percent of the Alliance's money has to be spent on those services. The rest can be used to focus on longer-term issues such as construction of the Staten Island Ferry Terminal, Route 9 (the substitute for the West Side Highway), and the open space and schools that will become necessary as more residential units are created. One hundred new units already exist; 5,000 are expected in the next few years. "The abatement program is probably worth $300 to $400 a month, enough to make it attractive to the middle class," Weisbrod said. He noted that the commercial vacancy rate has stabilized, and New York Life has moved into One Liberty Plaza. The Alliance is trying to establish an arts complex and more artists' housing. It is working with Richard Kaplan, an architect and director of the J. M. Kaplan Fund, on the Heritage Trails project for tourists.

Kaplan is also involved with the Environmental Simulation Center's computer-mapping program to aid the rezoning process.

Expert Opinions

Mitchell Moss, who directs NYU's Taub Urban Research Center, said he thinks "Lower Manhattan is fabulously well-situated in terms of transportation," despite the lack of commuter connections, because all
the subway lines converge there. He agreed that it needs more places for people to eat, shop, and exercise, but he said, "We have to shrink the supply of space. Demolition isn't a dirty word." He believes the mixed-use conversions for living and working will be successful because "self-employment is the fastest growing segment of the economy" and "Manhattan has a one percent residential vacancy rate."

Political economist Saskia Sassen said, "Nobody denies the value of the historic building stock," but she also said she was "glad to see this consensus on economic value rather than just historic values. I think Lower Manhattan is a place where you can experiment rather economically." She said she believes space in historic skyscrapers will appeal to the high-tech and design industries forming a nexus in Manhattan now. "Obviously Lower Manhattan has to have a mixed economy, and residential uses shouldn't be confined to the periphery. Financial services will remain crucial, but it's very different than it was in the 1980s." International companies will be establishing small offices in global cities such as London and New York.

"I think there's a real problem with the landmarking of an entire district," economic development director Charles Millard said. "The one word I haven't heard anyone talk about is 'money.' I care about jobs."

City Councilman Kenneth Fisher's main concern was with "maximizing the profit motive" so the government would have more tax revenue. He said he thinks the way to do that is to make the area a 24-hour neighborhood. "I don't think the government folks have received enough credit. You don't realize how unusual the lack of controversy here is." He told the students that if they wanted to take the next step, they had to get broad public and political support.

Richard Shaffer, the former director of city planning, said he believes the same goals could be accomplished with zoning. "It should be as-of-right, with clear guidelines, and new building should be sympathetic to the existing environment." But he said he believes that "substantial investment in public infrastructure" is crucial to the area's long-term success.

Questions from the audience revealed that many people had a deep-seated skepticism, but a strong confidence in preservation, presuming that it would automatically lead to economic gain as it had in Soho and Tribeca. Everyone, however, seemed to care passionately about the fate of Lower Manhattan.

The Columbia Preservation Plan
by Amy Lamberti

The student preservation plan, Reviving Lower Manhattan: Preserving the Past to Ensure the Future (New York: Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation of Columbia University, 1996, 48 pages, 63 black-and-white illustrations, 9 x 9, $15.00 paper) is a compact book full of detailed information about Lower Manhattan, from its history to its current conditions. Columbia students spent a year studying the area below Fulton Street, surveying every building and identifying 181 possible individual landmark buildings and 49 potential interior landmarks. They concluded that Lower Manhattan represents an architectural, cultural, and historic treasure that must be preserved.

The study calls for increased regulation to achieve economic benefits and to preserve historic resources. A common misconception is that preservationists fail to consider economic realities. But these students advocate the creation of a National Register historic district to offer a 20 percent tax investment credit for building owners who rehabilitate and reuse contributing buildings.

The plan outlines many conservation problems facing the area's historic resources. The buildings have deteriorating masonry curtain walls; the parks and subway stations suffer from years of deferred maintenance; and piers of all types are severely deteriorating. After identifying five key areas for conservation focus, it suggests that a preservation advocacy group based in Lower Manhattan could advise property owners and managers about the day-to-day maintenance of the buildings.

The students explain why a comprehensive approach is needed to make preservation the cornerstone of a revitalized Lower Manhattan. Many of their recommendations could be implemented through the structure already in place at the Alliance for Downtown New York, which could also help with the holding of easements and the establishment of a revolving fund. Certainly the goals of both groups are in line with improving business and creating a 24-hour community. This publication deserves consideration by the players involved in the revitalization of downtown New York.

Amy Lamberti is a graduate of the preservation program at Columbia.
Retooling Lower Manhattan

A walk through the Wall Street canyons these days proves the speakers at the Columbia symposium were not just whistling “New York, New York.” Ten old commercial buildings are about to be converted to apartments, as the buildings at 3 Hanover Square, 26 Beaver Street, 125 Cedar Street, and 55 Liberty Street were earlier. Unfortunately, too few follow the model of the latter, where architect Joseph Pell Lombardi sold 89 apartments as raw space, beginning in 1980. He created a spectacular home for himself in the old Sinclair Oil offices at 127 Liberty Street. And Rockrose Development is creating residential units in a 538,000-square-foot building at 127 John Street.

Crescent Heights is also converting a building at 75 West Street, across from Battery Park City, to studios and one-bedroom apartments. West Street Equities Group is creating nine units in two phases at 47 West Street. And Rockrose Development is creating residential units in a 538,000-square-foot building at 127 John Street.

Developer Tony Goldman has been assembling a collection of small buildings in and around the proposed Stone Street historic district, where Francis Greenburger’s Time Equities is about to offer 40 apartments at 56 Beaver Street (in the grand Flatiron-shaped structure built by the Delmonico Brothers, who owned the famous restaurant on the ground floor).

Architect Mark Kemeny completed conversions begun in the early 1980s by Henry George Greene for another developer.

Goldman is creating loft-like apartments in nineteenth-century buildings at 15–17 South William Street, 85 Pearl Street, 70 Broad Street, and with Joseph Pell Lombardi at 11 Hanover Square and 33 Rector Place.

These projects, however, are just a beginning. CK Architect is also doing feasibility studies for another 500 units of housing in a 350,000-square-foot building at 21 West Street, 15 floors of the tower at 45 Wall Street, 213 apartments in the 21-story building at 60 Broad Street, 173 apartments in the 20-story one at 67 Broad Street, 120 apartments on eleven floors at One Broadway, 134 apartments on 22 floors at 90 John Street, and 754 apartments on 57 of the 72 stories in an office building Der Scutt, FAIA, the architect of the Trump Tower, is renovating at 40 Wall Street for the Trump Organization.

Donald Trump recently bought the building, according to rumor, for less than $8 million. Once the tallest building in the world, the landmarked 1.3 million-square-foot tower, designed by Severance, Matsui and Shreve & Lamb in 1929, is intended to become once again “one of the premier addresses on Wall Street.” Scutt’s plans for the facade and expansion of the 5,500-square-foot lobby with finely detailed marble work, a patterned marble floor, a coffered ceiling with new lighting, a new centrally located concierge desk with a computerized building directory, and a new secondary entrance on Pine Street received approval from the Landmarks Commission in March.

Hellmuth, Obata & Kassabaum is responsible for the infrastructure improvements and new telecommunications facilities.

Even the idea of turning the area into Silicon Alley is no longer a pipe dream. Rudin Management spent $15 million converting 55 Broad Street into the New York Information Technology Center with Fox & Fowle Architects, which helped the owners develop a conversion strategy for the boxy modern building designed by Emery Roth & Sons in 1967. Its no-nonsense functionalism was maintained in the renovation, when a big digitized screen was installed in the lobby, but most of the work went on behind the walls. The building, which has a lot of small offices, opened in late March and is already half leased. According to the brochure, it
offers “unrivaled telecom access: single- and multi-mode fiber optic service, high-speed Category 5 copper wire with turnkey maximum bandwidth (up to 100 mbits), very low-cost DS-3, 10 megabit, T1, fractional T1 and ISDN, an in-building Internet switch and ethernet connectivity; LAN and WAN connectivity, state-of-the-art telecom and data security, clean reliable electric supply, and space suits.” Actually, it doesn’t say anything about space suits. We added that. But they would probably make more sense there than navy blue suits and club ties.

One reason New York is a natural location for this kind of facility is that a wealth of connections exist here, and Con Edison offers the world’s most reliable electric service, twice as good as the next most reliable U.S. utility and about nine times the national average. In Manhattan, where electric service is delivered underground from multiple-feeder distribution networks, reliability is even better — an average of two minutes outage time per customer in 1995. The proximity to numerous potential customers for new high-tech companies in the financial community nearby is another incentive, as is the accessibility of lending sources for investment.

Expanding Battery Park City
by Jayne Merkel

Across West Street, renovations and building conversions proceed apace, but in Battery Park City there are cranes on the horizon, a site that has been all too rare in New York for a long time. Construction trailers flank the waterside site where Skidmore, Owings & Merrill’s Mercantile Exchange is rising east of the World Financial Center. In Robert F. Wagner Jr. Park on the south end, the stepped hexagonal Museum of Jewish Heritage by Kevin Roche John Dinkeloo and Associates is rising towards its 85-foot height, near the spot where New York’s first Jewish settlers arrived in 1654. Planned as a living memorial to the Holocaust, the 30,000-square-foot structure overlooks Ellis Island, where millions more arrived. The park itself, designed by Machado and Silvetti Associates of Boston, is composed of a pair of allees extending from the sidewalks of Battery Place and Battery Park to the pavilions that frame the Statue of Liberty.

At the other end, just south and west of Stuyvesant High School, three new apartment buildings and a school will soon be under way. According to an article in Global Architecture last year, “The idea in the new [North] neighborhood is...to replicate a city of gradual growth...without recourse to the picturesque strategies of post-modernism.” So each building has been awarded to a different developer and architectural firm — or firms — to guarantee variety. A set of design guidelines developed by Princeton dean Ralph Lerner, Alexander Gorlin, architect, of New York, and Machado and Silvetti is intended to ensure a certain cohesiveness, but judging from the architects’ drawings and models, the cluster will not have anything like the integrity of Gorlin’s mass model that illustrated the G4 story — or of Pelli’s World Financial Center in the middle of the BPC.

Ironically, the building that adheres most closely to Gorlin’s scheme is also the most postmodern — Robert A. M. Stern and Costas Kondylis’s River Terrace Apartments, with a facade curving along the water and a water tower on top. The 27-story, U-shaped brick structure at River Terrace and Chambers Street frames an open court with a one-story pool house to the south. Each wing is a different height and has a slightly different facade. The trick for the architects was to make the 529-unit complex look enough like separate buildings to break down its scale and enough like a single project to satisfy the owners, Related Management. River Terrace will have ground-floor stores with metal awnings, similar to those across West Street in Tribeca, and a mixture of studio, one-, two-, and three-bedroom apartments, including convertible units.

Just north, also on the waterfront, Gruzen Samton is building a more modern 42-story, 400-foot-tall, brick-and-glass residential tower abutting its Stuyvesant High School. The base, which has shops along Chambers Street and is aligned with the city grid across West Street, will reflect Tribeca’s imagery and scale. The tower, rotated to the BPC grid, will resemble the World Financial Center. Like its neighbors, this 340-unit project of the Rockrose Development Corporation will contain an 80/20 mix of market rate and affordable apartments.

A third building — 245,000 square feet with 151 large apartments on 27 floors and a school at its base — is being built by the Battery Park City Authority across the esplanade of North End Avenue, where the residential entrance will be located. John R. Menz & Richard Cook Architects is designing the facades; Anabelle Seldorf is doing the lobby; CK Architect is planning the apartments. Pasanella + Klein Stolzman + Berg is responsible for the school.
with views of the harbor. Gridded birch plywood panels, stained steel gray, open to accommodate large crowds or separate the lobby from the conference room, where reddish brown reconstituted wood cabinets with black reveals maintain the horizontal grid of the panels and interior window walls.

Helfand’s 7,500 square feet of BPC satellite offices at 21 South End Avenue will soon contain a 1,500-square-foot community room, administrative workstations, and a precinct-like area for the park police. The three spaces are linked by a long central corridor with shifting vertical planes and views of the Hudson River through a virtual map depicting the area’s geographic history.

Across South End Avenue facing the South Cove, Berke and her associates have packed 18,000 square feet of programmatic requirements into 10,000 square feet of space on two levels, visually connected by glass-block floors, open staircases, and two-story spaces. These offices, workshops, and conference spaces for administrative, recreational, maintenance, and horticultural departments occupy the ground floor and lower level of an apartment building in unoccupied commercial space, filled with natural light. With blond wood pierced by circular openings for decorative effect and exposed steel trusses and details, the architects managed to provide dignified meeting and work space and interior access for maintenance vehicles.

BPC officials are reviewing proposals for hotels on two sites, with entertainment facilities such as theaters and cinemas to bring nightlife to the area.

J. B. Jackson and Lauretta Vinciarelli at the Urban Center (Separately)
by Jayne Merkel

Serendipity may have placed J. B. Jackson’s drawings next to Lauretta Vinciarelli’s watercolors in adjacent Urban Center galleries in March and April. Together, however, the two shows (the first organized by the Municipal Art Society, and the second by the Architectural League) defined perimeters of architectural experience in ways that shed light on the relationship between architecture and culture — and each artist’s unique contribution. Both Jackson and Vinciarelli depart from the traditional concept of architecture as built form — Jackson by making landscape his subject, whether the landscape is rural or urban, and Vinciarelli by creating interiors that exist only on paper and in the mind’s eye. Both depict architectural space without figures, but in neither case is the space empty, and in both cases the place of man in landscape is implicit in the imagery.

The similarities end there. Jackson’s are an observer’s drawings, Vinciarelli’s an architect’s. Jackson studies the landscape “to learn what man has done — or tried to do — on the face of the earth,” as he does in his books and essays and did in Landscape, the magazine he founded and edited from 1951 to 1968. Vinciarelli invents spaces, describes them, and makes them available, if not habitable, for the viewer.

Although both were born in Europe (Jackson in France, Vinciarelli in Italy), lived their adult lives in America (Jackson in La Cienega, New Mexico, Vinciarelli in New
Our earliest European drawings manifest this imagery in a landscape that is filled with energy - more and more as the years go on. Landscape dominates the American drawings not only because the American landscape is so vast or because Americans prefer the countryside, but because the landscape (and the way it was divided) represents what is unique and important about America in Jackson’s view.

In a videotape accompanying the show, Jackson explained that American lands were divided into square-mile parcels. “The square means honest, commonplace, a good citizen. It is a landscape that is devoted to equality. The notion is that everyone should have a square or a part of a square and be involved in square values. The national grid represents a very radical shift in social philosophy. It is a way of recognizing a very different idea of the individual’s right to make his own decisions, but it deprived him of the support of community and of the presence of social space.”

Lauretta Vinciarelli’s “Spatial Reverberations”

Nothing could be further from the concerns of Vinciarelli’s exquisitely rendered, subtly colored interiors than social organization. For her, function follows form. Although she has lived in New York for almost 20 years and the drawings in this exhibition grew out of her experience in southwest Texas, the experience they portray is profoundly Italian.

Vinciarelli’s broad, vaulted chambers open to a wide Texas landscape with purple mountains and barren plains. Glimpses of this landscape appear through slits in walls and arched openings that are not quite windows or doorways but admit light and provide vistas in the same way.

The spaces inside could not be entered if they were built, for they are filled to the brim with still water. The water creates an uncertain depth, but offers a field for the play of light and reflections that gives the spaces bilateral symmetry — and intensifies the mystery of their purpose. They resemble rooms at Pompeii or abandoned Roman baths, filled with a sense of lost human presence but devoid of specific connotations, intriguing because they elude characterization or definition by use.

These are spaces that only an architect could create. And even though they are not exactly unbuildable, they are interesting because they are not designed for habitation. They are purely architectonic and much more like the neoplastic spaces in Italian Renaissance paintings than the real vernacular landscapes Jackson analyzes. Even his loosest sketches illustrate, whereas Vinciarelli’s watercolors, though much more detailed and defined (every shadow is described precisely), are primarily works of art. The translucency of the paint and the mottled texture of the handmade paper she uses counter the sense of illusion.
IN CONFERENCE

On Skyscrapers and New York’s Uniqueness
by Jayne Merkel

Inspired by the thesis of Carol Willis’s recent book, *Form Follows Finance*, the Buell Center’s colloquium, “Who Builds the City?,” on March 4 examined the roles of the architect, the real estate market, and other cultural forces. As its subtitle, “Form, Finance, and the Urban Skyline from the Past to the Future,” promised, the discussion updated Willis’s analysis of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century skyscrapers by including authors of books on the skyscraper’s later phases.


Willis explained how law and economics shaped the skyscraper; Abalos talked about the role of the architect; Herreros emphasized the importance of technology; and Barna discussed the influence of corporate philosophy. Only Willis said she believes the skyscraper is alive and well.

Abalos said he thinks “the technologies are completely different today and need to be redescribed,” a role he envisions specifically for architects. “If it is true that skyscrapers were not invented by architects,” he said, “they as artists uniquely understood their significance” and created “the idea of centrality” in the city. “Architects,” his coauthor said, “participated in the construction of the city by inhabiting that territory between the market and the culture.”

Herreros also explained how the original theoretical premises of the skyscraper were turned inside out because of technological changes during the postwar period: “The aim of enhancing wind resistance led to...moving the structure to the enclosure, contradicting the modern ideal of the independence of the skin.” Similarly, the post-and-lintel grid gave way to “concentrating the structural mass in a few points,” he said, making the free plan even freer. He showed how “the rise of climate control...detached man from the plane of the facade,” and how the early “thin, de-materialized, single, and inert glass skin” turned into “a thick, subjective conception, doubled and active in its energy mode.”

Barna concentrated more on economic history, noting that when “rentable office space is commodified, the imperative of the real estate business is to create perceptible differences, which is what people demand from architects,” as Gerald Hines, the developer, realized early on. Barna explained how the Allied Bank developed visibility (and respectability) when it expanded into Dallas from Houston by hiring I. M. Pei & Partners, a firm that had done several important buildings in Houston, including the Museum of Fine Arts. He said Johnson/Burgee’s Republic Bank Building, a high-rise taken on traditional Dutch architecture, made “another kind of statement about banking” with an image of “money as a Republican virtue” that “gave the bankers of Houston a link to Europe and the Dutch.”

But like a lot of Texan investors, Barna said he thinks skyscrapers’ days are numbered, because corporate executives believe low-rise suburban office buildings, where people walk by their colleagues on the way to their desks, foster “the human-relations style” of management in vogue today “with bottom-up communication.” Skyscrapers project “a positive image of power,” he said, more suitable to “Taylor-style management with a central concentration.” He predicted that the sprawl typical of Texas — with low-rise office parks clustered at thruway interchanges, where land is as valuable as it is downtown — will prevail everywhere but in New York (and maybe Chicago).

Willis, whose book is subtitled *Skyscrapers and Skylines in New York and Chicago*, is placing her bets on old-fashioned cities. Her research revealed that development takes place in cycles, and it showed why New York became New York and Chicago, Chicago. New York’s colonial street pattern with its tiny, irregular lots prevented the big square blocks with interior courts and the uniform cornice lines typical of Chicago, where a restriction on height after 1892 capped buildings at 130 feet. In New York, height was unlimited, even after the first zoning law was passed in 1916. Willis explained how legislation and economics affected building form over time and shaped “the great unintentional masterpiece, the city [of skyscrapers] itself.” Answering Barna, she said she is convinced that you cannot predict the future merely by projecting current trends forward.
What Makes Theater?
by Jayne Merkel

At the first symposium where every panel appeared in front of a different colored backdrop, a star-studded cast of architects and theater people discussed prospects and problems in one of New York’s most important industries. Hugh Hardy, Barton Myers, Gerald Schoenfeld, and Jonathan Barnett were among the speakers at the three-day event on April 25–27, cosponsored by the AIA New York Chapter’s Art and Architecture Committee, the Cooper-Hewitt National Museum of Design, and the Municipal Art Society. “What Makes Theater? The Next Hundred Years” was organized by Robert Goldberg, AIA, Linda Herd, and Francesco Russo, AIA, of the committee, and Egle Zypas of the Cooper-Hewitt.

Although most of the panels took place on stage at the Westside Theater, the event began, appropriately, upstairs at Sardi’s with a discussion on the economics of the business that generates 25,000 jobs and has an impact of more than $2.3 billion annually on the city’s economy. Moderator George Wachtel, a principal of Audience Research and Analysis, said polls show that theater is the number one reason visitors come to New York. Last year attendance exceeded nine million — the highest in ten years.

But all is not necessarily well for the Broadway theaters themselves. Broadway productions are increasingly costly ($8 million is not unusual) and spectacular, requiring spacious backstage facilities and a large seating capacity not available in the historic houses. So while Broadway booms, restored historic theaters are often dark. “All producers care about is a reasonably clean house with good sightlines,” and the architecture really doesn’t matter, said Ralph Roseman, general manager of State Fair and many other productions — as the assembled architects gasped. Today the more intimate plays that old Broadway theaters were built for usually take place Off Broadway, where they can be produced for $350,000 to $400,000 instead of the $1.1 million Broadway union contracts and theatrical production standards cost.

Other trends mentioned were a decrease in the number of Broadway shows, with most playing longer and making more money, and a decrease in subscriptions at institutions such as Lincoln Center, with symphonies and ballet companies suffering and opera thriving. Broadway shows now play to more tourists (70 percent) than New Yorkers, though for Off Broadway the reverse is true. Touring companies of Broadway shows make even more money than those here. They often play in the multipurpose art centers that are springing up throughout the United States. Those centers create work for architects, but many are built without homegrown companies or audiences to fill them. Light, sound, and other electronic technology play an increasing role in both performances and theater design.

Historic, small-scale, single-use theaters are still preferred in New York, at least by architects. The New York architects who spoke about their work, Hugh Hardy, FAIA, and Francesco Russo, AIA, both discussed restorations, Hardy of the New Victory and New Amsterdam theaters, Russo of the Virginia, Eugene O’Neill, and Shubert theaters. Barton Myers of Los Angeles talked about new multipurpose buildings for Portland, Oregon, Cerritos, California, and Newark, New Jersey. The session on architecture, chaired by architectural historian Carol Krinsky, featured a talk by Anthony Robins of the New York Landmarks Commission, in which he described how impresarios such as Oscar Hammerstein and David Belasco created elaborate theaters in their own images, whereas the theatrical companies that flourished after World War I usually had more modest goals. He also explained, “America changed the theater. In Europe if you pay more, you go in a different entrance. Here theaters were built by immigrant families who resented that, so in America everyone comes in the same entrance and boxes are de-emphasized.”

Theater historian Brooks McNamara of New York University and the Shubert Archive pointed out that the idea of an historic theater district is relatively new. Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the theater district moved steadily northward — to Union Square, then to Madison Square, to Herald Square, and finally to Times Square, where it stayed largely because of the Depression and then competition from movies and television. Now New York has the biggest and most glamorous theater district in the world, Myers noted, saying he tried to create that atmosphere wherever he could.

Jonathan Barnett, FAIA, who was the city’s director of design in the late 1960s, said it was inconceivable then that the historic theaters would be preserved. “Thirty years ago, the question was whether the theater district should continue to be a district,” he said, as Midtown office development edged west. “A study by the...
CUNY Graduate Center said it wasn’t necessary to have all the theaters in one place.

“We proposed a special zoning bonus if developers would build a theater while building an office building,” he said. The Minskoff, Uris, and Circle-in-the-Square theaters were all built under that provision. “They still give bonuses for theaters, but now only for rehab. City planning is going to propose air rights transfer for theater owners, but what threatened them in the first place was the upzoning that made building office buildings possible.”

Rebecca Robertson, the president of the 42nd Street Redevelopment Project, also talked about the history of the street, as well as plans for its future that build on its past but give it a new family-oriented twist. Hardy explained how he has been dealing with this history in the renovations there, where he is sometimes trapped in “a preservation battle between people who want to stop time” and show only what is original, even if it is all flaking and broken, and those who want to “turn back the clock and think it should be taken back to opening day. The problem usually is which period of history do you preserve?” At the New Amsterdam, his clients have opted for the earlier period in some instances, such as the murals of goddesses, because when Ziegfield took over “the goddesses were turned into babes.”

He closed by comparing a slide of the restored 42nd Street with a 1984 New York magazine cover of postmodern Johnson/Burgee skyscrapers slated for the area: “People always complain that things take too long in New York. Sometimes that’s a good thing.”

Grand Public Architecture
by Jayne Merkel

With almost uncanny timeliness, as “Civics Lessons” was preparing to open, showing the numerous but relatively modest recent public projects in New York, the French government sent over Emile Biasini, the former French Secretary of State in charge of Les Grands Travaux, to lecture. He shared the podium at the Alliance Française on March 13 with the architect of the first and foremost of the projects, I. M. Pei, FAIA, who was responsible for the renovation and reorganization of the Louvre.

Most sobering was the price tag for the collection of enormous projects by world-famous architects — 35 billion francs or about $7 billion, about the price of an aircraft carrier. It soon became clear that the French were able to undertake a public cultural building program on this scale not only because they had in François Mitterand a leader committed to the cause, but also because they don’t consider those expenditures excessive and because they value their cultural heritage in a way most Americans don’t.

“This is a name I don’t like,” Biasini said, referring to the phrase Les Grands Travaux. “I’m not exactly talking about the Great Wall of China. My goals were much more modest.

“Artistic creation — paintings, books, architecture — all those things that are witness to our past and that will be our future...and the fact that it has become accessible to us today, to so many people, is one of the hallmarks of a democracy,” he said wistfully. But even in France, “maintaining all these treasures is a very difficult thing to do, and by the end of the century we were ending up with facilities that had fallen behind because, as you know, budgets usually go to take care of immediate things.”

The Louvre came first because the problems there — inaccessibility, crowding, and deferred maintenance — were the most vexing, and expansion room was nonexistent. Even I. M. Pei was intimidated.

“At first I thought he was joking,” Pei said. “It’s probably the greatest urban composition in the world, but there was no room for support space, and there was nowhere to expand. I didn’t say I would do it. I said I would try.”

Obviously he did — by placing most of the new facilities underground, moving the Ministry of Finance to another site, and bringing light into the underground space with a gigantic version of the crystal pyramid he had used at the East Wing of the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.

After the Louvre, the other nine projects in Paris — and a few in other cities — were almost easy. The Bibliothèque Nationale, discussed by the architect, Dominique Perrault, at Columbia University on April 22, was necessary to preserve the collection of twelve million works, a third of which were “falling into dust.”

Biasini managed to get all the projects practically to completion in seven years. “I learned how to set up a plan that would not be turnaroundable. I managed to get involved with entrepreneurs who accepted fixed contracts, never used before in France, with fines of up to 700,000 francs a day if there were any delays on the part of the contractor or the government.”
Civics Lessons Symposium

AM: Have We Learned Our Lesson?

by Kira Gould

After a welcome by Fran Reiter, Deputy Mayor for economic development, and a review of the legacy of public architecture in New York by Marilyn Jordan Taylor, AIA, a partner at Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, the morning session of the "Civics Lessons" symposium on April 18 got off to a very political start with a look at the condition of the city’s public schools. Mitchell Moss, director of New York University’s Taub Urban Research Center, moderated. Peter Vallone, speaker and majority leader of the New York City Council, began the discussion by saying, “We are supposed to be educating kids, but they’re sitting in schools with asbestos sitting down and roofs falling in. In 343 schools, the heat is provided by coal.” Manhattan Borough President Ruth Messinger dramatized the situation: “Imagine the lesson we are teaching to hundreds of thousands of kids — what they must be learning is that the adults who sent them there do not care about them, their futures, or what they can produce.” As the city adds some 23,000 students a year to the more than a million that are in the system now, these problems escalate, she noted.

Alan Hevesi, New York City Comptroller, blasted the mayor and others for the budget gap and warned the audience not to believe that the money from the sale of the water system that he had blocked would have gone to pay for schools: “Selling that system would have been like selling the house to pay off the credit cards.” He warned the audience not to expect money for school repairs for at least three years.

All three elected officials departed immediately after their presentations for other commitments, staying neither to hear the other officials nor to respond to questions from the audience. The remaining panelists offered a sober and more accountable look at the issues. Anthony Shorris, a member of the Commission on School Facilities and Maintenance Reform, summed up its findings. “The commissioners aren’t people who are big on government spending,” he said, “but they were shocked at the calamitous conditions in the schools and the fact that the city spends $1,000 less per child than the state average. We’ve added 1.5 million square feet of space in the last few years and provided no additional maintenance funds.” Shorris acknowledged the need for a new revenue source. “This group of property holders signed a report recommending a new property tax,” he said. “It is our responsibility.”

The chief operations officer for the Board of Education, Harold Spence, asked the audience to consider that during the decade beginning in about 1915, the city fathers responded to a school crisis with a round of building. “Those city fathers had aspirations for those kids...The single thing that the government can do to raise property values is send money on schools; it’s been proven again and again.”

The second panel was designed to reveal varying perspectives on what public architecture means to the city; Richard Kahan, president of the Urban Assembly, began the discussion with a stern reminder that the human agenda is more important than the built one. The architect Richard Dattner, FAIA, likened working in the public realm to being in an emergency atmosphere, and cited a recent success, P.S. 234. “That project was long and hard, but it worked because we were commissioned by the community.”

Robert Yaro, executive director of the Regional Plan Association, said that the Yankee stadium debate was a stellar example of how not to achieve good design or good public policy. “Subjects such as the stadium have to be used as catalysts for regional efforts, or our crisis will continue.” Saskia Sassen, professor of urban planning at Columbia University, said, “We have to invest in the public landscape of the city to maximize and sell the city’s urbanity. That’s the only way that New York can compete with global regions, such as Lille, that are really way ahead in terms of understanding regional transport and cooperation.”

Civics Lessons Symposium

PM: The Public Potential

by Jayne Merkel

Frustration dominated the afternoon sessions of the “Civics Lessons” symposium. First, keynote speaker Richard Leone, president of the Twentieth-Century Fund and former chairman of the Port Authority asked, “Why is it so difficult to create public architecture?” Then he suggested, “I think there are some things missing today that used to be there.” One, obviously, is money, which he attributed to the lack of public and private savings and to “libertarian modern economics that says anything public is bad.”

Leone said he thinks “the notion that we owe nothing to each other is killing this region. It’s already responsible for places around the country that are virtually gone,” such as Camden and Newark. He said he believes examples from the past provide some clues...
for ways out of the contemporary dilemma, noting that Bob Moses could get things done because he could put together alliances with powerful people in the region to influence the public. But he also said he finds hope in the large generation of aging baby boomers who will soon be thinking about retirement. When they do, he said, “The savings rate in this country is going to increase dramatically.”

Asked whether we should develop a common agenda around something large and bold, he said, “I think you need a few big symbols.” And with that statement, he paved the way for the afternoon’s panel discussion on “New York and Grand Projects: Yes or No?”

All the participants assembled by AIA New York Chapter President-elect Robert Geddes, FAIA, agreed that grand projects are not all that is needed. Peter Eisenman, FAIA, began by appealing to civic pride. “The Venice Biennale this year is giving a new award to cities that they feel have excelled in architecture and urban design. When asked about New York, the director, Hans Hollein, said, ‘It’s not even on our list.’” Eisenman said he sees the lack of excellence and social progress as a matter of policy. “In Berlin, the projects I’ve been involved with are at least 50 percent housing, because the developer is not allowed to come in without it — or without showing the kind of architecture he’s presenting,” he said.

“I’m not here as a defender of signature architecture or of grand projects, but because I think architects who have been involved all their lives with education and urban design should be involved. [Eisenman is Irwin S. Chanin professor of architecture at Cooper Union.] There was a time when architects like this were. Today we’re involved in Bangladesh and San Francisco, Turkey, Beirut, and Jerusalem. It’s very sad for me. Like Palladio, who could build only on the Guidecca, I’ve never been allowed to build in Manhattan,” he said.

Dean Bernard Tschumi, AIA, of Columbia University, who won the competition to design the Parc de la Villette, explained, “The grand projects were only the tip of the iceberg in Paris. Hundreds and hundreds of competitions take place there for schools and housing and everything. It’s the principal of democracy that everything goes through competitions.

“The grand projects were all located in slightly derelict parts of the city, with an urban strategy to have a strong economic effect,” he said. “The purpose also was to revitalize and energize the construction industry. New York should ask the construction industry if we can’t be on the forefront rather than sticking to the way we always do it.

“The profession has been reluctant to encourage competitions, when you know it is how the younger generation gets to work. You constantly hear talk about the crisis in the profession,” Tschumi continued. “I wonder if it’s not something we have brought on ourselves.”

“A completely unique experience that we went through in Tokyo shows that it is not just different, it’s Mars,” said Rafael Vinoly, FAIA, who is completing the enormous Tokyo International Forum. “These people think there is not much of a difference between what we think of as art and what we think of as commerce. There is this incredible realism that the Japanese culture has in equating development forces — and not just real estate development forces — in one major engine. Here, the idea of public investment is somehow magically charged with the idea that every public investment is a loss,” he said, reiterating Leone’s point.

“If we didn’t invent the grand projects, we came up with something very close with the Brooklyn Bridge, Central Park, Park Avenue, and Riverside Drive. Even the Rockefeller family projects — Rockefeller Center, the United Nations, Lincoln Center — are similar,” said Jonathan Barnett, FAIA, who has spent most of his career influencing public policy on urban design.

Geddes mused, “It may just be that with the fall of the Wall and the fall of communism, what we ought to do is pay attention to the civic realm.”

“The western form of capital is not working for cities,” Eisenman said.

Tschumi suggested “a new tax, mainly on construction companies and developers — one percent — that they would have to pay for every piece of housing, every police station, whatever they build.” He also noted, “England has started a lottery to fund grand projects in the twenty-first century.”

Barnett said, “The problem for a designer who is interested in the city is that you have to invent not only what should happen but also how to make it happen.”

“We have 2,500 members,” Geddes recalled. “If we marched on City Hall it would be one of the largest marches ever.”
AIA Weighs in on Plaza Regulation Reform
by Kira Gould

The AIA New York Chapter’s Zoning and Urban Design committee participated in the debate about proposed changes to the plaza zoning regulations at a city commission meeting early this spring. Plaza Task Force chair Linda Herd spoke at the meeting, first applauding the City Planning Department for its effort to simplify what she called the hieroglyphics of the present zoning code. The 1961 plaza bonus that is available in certain commercial zones does not, in fact, provide the kind of public amenity that its authors intended. “We must spare the city from poorly planned, eleventh-hour design created solely for the benefit of the developer,” Herd said. “Open space is an integral part of urban life. Sometimes it happens naturally, as a function of geography, but more often these days it is planned.” However, under the revised resolution, certification of new urban plazas by the City Planning chairman would not be required, allowing plazas to be built as-of-right everywhere except Midtown. “Without someone designated to oversee the proposed plaza development, we are concerned that design considerations might be overlooked,” she said. “Relocation of a plaza on a lot, for instance, must be carefully reviewed on a case-by-case basis.”

To maintain safety for passersby, many of these plazas are closed at night. Herd

DEADLINES

June 26
Submission deadline for the Municipal Art Society’s seventh annual New York City preservation awards. Eligible projects must have been completed in the last year and must be located within the five boroughs of New York. Contact Vanessa Gruen at 935-3960 for an application form.

July 1
Programs available for the Greenport Waterfront Park design competition, sponsored by the Village of Greenport. Jurors include Nicholas Quennell, James Stewart Polshek, FAIA, and Billie Tsien, AIA. (Registration deadline is October 19, and submission deadline is November 15.) Contact Greenport Waterfront Park Competition, 400 Front St., P.O. Box 463, Greenport, New York, 516-477-3000.

September 18
Submission deadline for the AIA New York Chapter 1996 Design Awards. Three categories of awards — architecture, interior architecture, and projects — will be evaluated by three separate jurors on September 25. The next day, jurors will discuss their decisions in a public forum. A more detailed call for entries will be mailed out during the summer when jurors are announced.

Around the Chapter

There’s a Better Way to Know the Code

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AIA New York Chapter’s Zoning and Urban Design committee participated in the debate about proposed changes to the plaza zoning regulations at a city commission meeting early this spring. Plaza Task Force chair Linda Herd spoke at the meeting, first applauding the City Planning Department for its effort to simplify what she called the hieroglyphics of the present zoning code. The 1961 plaza bonus that is available in certain commercial zones does not, in fact, provide the kind of public amenity that its authors intended. “We must spare the city from poorly planned, eleventh-hour design created solely for the benefit of the developer,” Herd said. “Open space is an integral part of urban life. Sometimes it happens naturally, as a function of geography, but more often these days it is planned.” However, under the revised resolution, certification of new urban plazas by the City Planning chairman would not be required, allowing plazas to be built as-of-right everywhere except Midtown. “Without someone designated to oversee the proposed plaza development, we are concerned that design considerations might be overlooked,” she said. “Relocation of a plaza on a lot, for instance, must be carefully reviewed on a case-by-case basis.”

To maintain safety for passersby, many of these plazas are closed at night. Herd

DEADLINES

June 26
Submission deadline for the Municipal Art Society’s seventh annual New York City preservation awards. Eligible projects must have been completed in the last year and must be located within the five boroughs of New York. Contact Vanessa Gruen at 935-3960 for an application form.

July 1
Programs available for the Greenport Waterfront Park design competition, sponsored by the Village of Greenport. Jurors include Nicholas Quennell, James Stewart Polshek, FAIA, and Billie Tsien, AIA. (Registration deadline is October 19, and submission deadline is November 15.) Contact Greenport Waterfront Park Competition, 400 Front St., P.O. Box 463, Greenport, New York, 516-477-3000.

September 18
Submission deadline for the AIA New York Chapter 1996 Design Awards. Three categories of awards — architecture, interior architecture, and projects — will be evaluated by three separate jurors on September 25. The next day, jurors will discuss their decisions in a public forum. A more detailed call for entries will be mailed out during the summer when jurors are announced.

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Professional Practice
Panel Offers Financial Management Tips
by Kira Gould

Getting jobs is tough enough, but converting a successful proposal into a contract can be a nightmare. A recent panel organized by the Professional Practice Committee of the AIA New York Chapter took these issues head on. Joseph Roher, a consultant to architecture firms, urged the architects in the audience to track projects meticulously and use the information to inform the company business plan. The process that most affects a firm’s business balance, he said, is the job contract. “Use the contract as a vehicle of communication with the client,” Roher said. “Make it a bilateral agreement.”

The panel participants agreed that in most cases firms should use the standard AIA contract, but that firms must not be afraid to customize the contract to make it fit their needs. “The contract is the vehicle for talking to the client,” Roher said. “Make it a bilateral agreement.”

Firms should consider doing so, Roher said. Joseph Fleischer, FAIA, a partner at Polshek and Partners Architects, called a contract a nightmare. “The client removes the risk,” he said. “The more the fee can be broken down, the better the contract will fare.”

In response to comments about Sheffield Plaza at Ninth Avenue and 57th Street, which is often infested with rodents, filled with trash, and has a low grade and walls that make it a generally unsafe environment, Commissioner Amanda Burden reminded the panel that “under the new regulations, Sheffield Plaza could be built again.” The department acknowledges that the design standards need additional attention and plans further study in the near future.

Please confirm meeting times and locations by calling AIA New York Chapter headquarters at 683-0023, ext. 17.

The role of the bank, of course, is important for any firm’s business plan to be successful. Glen Celentano, vice president for new business development at Citibank, reminded the architects that the bank is essentially a part of the external management team. “Many small businesses don’t ask enough of their banks,” he said. “We can be a part of the creative problem-solving process, help firms find lending sources, and guarantee that they are able to hang on to key employees in lean times.”

Chapter Notes

The 1996 Annual Meeting will be held on Thursday, June 27, at Caspary Hall, Rockefeller University, 1230 York Avenue at 6:00 pm. This annual event honors Chapter members and others who have contributed to the architectural profession through their work in communities, education, and other areas. The Chapter’s Medal of Honor, the Public Architect Awards, and other important honors will be presented at 6:00 pm, followed by a reception for all Chapter members.

The Chapter is pleased to welcome two new staff members. Johnathan Sandler, executive assistant, comes on staff after several months of outstanding service on a part-time basis, working mainly on government affairs and AIA public voice matters. Amy D. Lamberti, the consultant who did such a remarkable job managing the “Civics Lessons: Recent New York Public Architecture” exhibition and symposium, is now a project manager. She will be responsible for managing the Chapter’s executive committees, assisting with program committees and

“then as the client asks for an expansion of the architect’s role, the fee will have to be adjusted to reflect that.”

Committee Meetings

Around the Chapter

Chapter Notes

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On the national front, a ground swell of support for housing policies resulted from a resolution prepared by the AIA New York Chapter’s Housing Committee for discussion at the recent AIA annual convention in Minneapolis. The prescience of the Chapter’s Housing Committee in articulating the housing policy goals of architects around the country is impressive. More daunting still will be the task of defining the steps to implement policies and creative design solutions for affordable housing production, addressing what some term the shelter crisis in America. We will keep you posted on this and on other committees’ progress.

Although Oculus is not published in July and August, the Chapter will keep members informed about upcoming events through mailings. Important dates to keep in mind are September 18, when submissions for the 1996 Design Awards program are due, the September 26 Design Awards jury presentation, when jury members discuss their decisions, and the Carnegie Library Forum cosponsored by the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum in early October. Also, those in practice less than ten years should begin thinking about projects to be considered by the Chapter’s Honors Committee in October for nomination for National’s Young Architects Citation.

REQUEST FOR GRAPHIC STANDARDS

Charles Scalera, AIA, a retired architect who is teaching architectural design at the High School of Art and Design, needs copies of Graphic Standards for his students. He would appreciate contributions of new or used copies. If you have one—or some—please contact him at 60 Sutton Place South, New York, NY 10022-4168. Thank you.
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CONTINUING EXHIBITIONS

Help Design Frederick Douglass Circle. Charles A. Dana Discovery Center, Central Park North at Fifth Ave. 860-6321. Closes June 23.


80 Years of Design Education. New York School of Interior Design, 170 E. 70 St. 472-1500. Closes August 23.


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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Fee</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>JUNE</strong></td>
<td><strong>11 Wednesday</strong> AIA NEW YORK CHAPTER EVENT Lecture: Cultural Institutions Planning for the Next Century</td>
<td>200 Lexington Ave., sixth floor.</td>
<td>Free</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>12 Wednesday</strong></td>
<td>Symposium: Transportation and Urban Design</td>
<td>457 Madison Ave.</td>
<td>$5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>13 Thursday</strong></td>
<td>Lecture: Writing on Graphic Design</td>
<td>NYU, 11 W. 42 St., room 421.</td>
<td>Free</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>14 Saturday</strong></td>
<td>Tour: Day One on the IRT</td>
<td>New York Transit Museum.</td>
<td>Free</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>15 Saturday</strong></td>
<td>Task: Reclaiming Gardens.</td>
<td>New York Botanical Garden.</td>
<td>$5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>16 Sunday</strong></td>
<td>Lecture: Irish Gardens</td>
<td>Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum.</td>
<td>Free</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>17 Thursday</strong></td>
<td>AIA NEW YORK CHAPTER EVENT Lecture: Cultural Institutions Preservation Challenges of Transparency</td>
<td>2 E. 91 St.</td>
<td>$10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>18 Thursday</strong></td>
<td>Symposium: Public Art and Memorialization</td>
<td>NYU, 11 W. 42 St., room 421.</td>
<td>Free</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>19 Wednesday</strong></td>
<td>AIA NEW YORK CHAPTER EVENT Committee Meeting: How Are Architects Performing?</td>
<td>2 E. 91 St., room 421.</td>
<td>Free</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>20 Thursday</strong></td>
<td>Tour: Manhattan Modernism</td>
<td>2 E. 91 St.</td>
<td>Free</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>21 Saturday</strong></td>
<td>Tour: Art on Display</td>
<td>New York City Transit Museum.</td>
<td>$9</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>22 Saturday</strong></td>
<td>Tour: Community Gardens of the Bronx</td>
<td>New York Botanical Garden.</td>
<td>$30</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>23 Sunday</strong></td>
<td>Lecture: Irish Gardens</td>
<td>Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum.</td>
<td>Free</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>25 Wednesday</strong></td>
<td>AIA NEW YORK CHAPTER EVENT Lecture: Irish Gardens</td>
<td>Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum.</td>
<td>Free</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>26 Thursday</strong></td>
<td>AIA NEW YORK CHAPTER EVENT Annual Meeting</td>
<td>Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum.</td>
<td>Free</td>
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<td><strong>27 Saturday</strong></td>
<td>Tour: Community Gardens of the Bronx</td>
<td>New York Botanical Garden.</td>
<td>$30</td>
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<td><strong>28 Sunday</strong></td>
<td>Lecture: Irish Gardens</td>
<td>Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum.</td>
<td>Free</td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>29 Tuesday</strong></td>
<td>Lecture: Irish Gardens</td>
<td>Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum.</td>
<td>Free</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>30 Wednesday</strong></td>
<td>AIA NEW YORK CHAPTER EVENT Lecture: Irish Gardens</td>
<td>Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum.</td>
<td>Free</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>31 Tuesday</strong></td>
<td>Lecture: Irish Gardens</td>
<td>Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum.</td>
<td>Free</td>
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