

THE WAGNER PLANNER

Newsletter of the NYU Urban Planning Student Association

June 2009

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CHANGING TRANSPORTATION, CHANGING THE URBAN FABRIC

by Andrew Quinn (MUP '10)

The Obama administration promises to place a greater emphasis on urban policy throughout the United States. The soon to be established Office of Urban Policy will be tasked with coordinating the federal government's efforts to address the problems faced by America's cities. Drawing on his experience as a community organizer in the South Side of Chicago, Obama has promised to fund and coordinate several different poverty fighting initiatives, all aimed directly at urban poverty. However, he has revealed little beyond that on the broader emphasis of his urban policy, and several key decisions made by President Obama have been widely criticized by environmentalists and planners as notable missteps. These missteps reveal that Obama has yet to fully understand the linkages between urban planning, transportation, environmentalism, and livable, sustainable communities.

Ray LaHood was chosen by Obama as his nominee for Secretary of

Transportation, the director of the Department of Transportation (DOT). The nominating of Ray LaHood surprised and troubled many progressives. A former US Congressman, he served as a member of the House Appropriations Committee and as the presiding officer during the impeachment of Bill Clinton. He possesses little to no experience in transportation planning, and environmental groups

have rated his environmental record as poor. Although he has supported increased funding for AMTRAK, he has also directed millions of federal dollars in contracts through the earmarks process to highway builders



and Caterpillar Inc., the manufacturer of construction equipment.

Further concern is related to the importance of the DOT under the new administration. The DOT currently operates with a \$58 billion budget, but this is expected to expand greatly under Obama's \$775 billion stimulus package for the DOT.

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Urban Planning Anytime at: <http://www.nyu.edu/wagner/urbanplanning>



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[http://www.nyu.edu/wagner/
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The Wagner Planner is the independent student newsletter of the Urban Planning Student Association (UPSA) of the Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service at NYU.

All currently enrolled MUP students, alumni and faculty are encouraged to submit material to *The Wagner Planner*. Please email letters to the editors and any other contributions to: wagnerplanner@gmail.com

A LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Theresa B. Do and Ariana K. MacPherson

The development, decay and re-development of cities is an evolutionary and sometimes revolutionary process. This issue of the Wagner Planner explores these themes through a number of case studies, from current economic crisis, to redevelopment on Staten Island and the urban segregation of Cape Town, South Africa. Each of these case studies examines the realities urban areas face in their efforts to thwart decay, understand current development, and motivate sustainable and socially conscious redevelopment.

In Staten Island, the planning process for redevelopment has begun in a collective and comprehensive process through R/UDAT, while development in Cape Town, South Africa continues to be haunted by the segregating legacy of apartheid policies. While the issues of a failing security-backed mortgage market and the sub-prime mortgage crisis looms over financing new developments, Obama's new stimulus package and the election of Ray LaHood has the potential to unleash much needed transportation development and the general expansion of urban projects.

Whether done in a democratic process, a comprehensive community charter or if nothing is done at all...the process of building, maintaining and improving cities is vital to the continued social and economic development of urban areas around the world.

We hope that this issue of Wagner Planner can lend some insight into some of the most important issues effecting cities in our own country, and in countries whose history has, in some ways, mirrored our own.

Thank you for reading, and don't forget to offer your submissions for the Fall 2009 issue!

Sincerely,

Theresa B. Do & Ariana Karamallis MacPherson
Editors in Chief





June 2009

CAPE TOWN DIVIDED

by Ariana K. MacPherson (MUP '10)

The sea lies below us, beneath the green, calla lily dotted cliffs. Across the road and beyond the dunes lies Khayelitsha, "New Home." It is full of the thick smells of burnt tires and slow-roasting meat. Small shacks are connected to each other with illegal electricity, wires tangled into the sky, setting alight in hot summer evenings, taking shacks and lives and turning the whole place to darkness.

In the winter the rains come. The sandy floors turn to mud and Mamas rush to herd their chickens and children out from the floods. Car parts and box springs float by in the grey winter water. Down the road, government has cleared a patch of land. It is spotted with small shacks, empty out-houses. They call it a "toilet town," waiting for homes. . But there are no homes. Government has a harder time providing those. These people have never had homes. Not since this land was their ancestors'.



Sunset over Khayelitsha township outside of Cape Town, South Africa.

In 1950, South Africa's apartheid government ratified the Group Areas Act, a national law which assigned racial groups to specific areas of the nation's cities. Under this act, systematic and often violent forced removals displaced non-white residents from the city's developed areas, relegating them to under-serviced townships on the urban periphery.

I first traveled to South Africa in February 2005. I spent three months living and studying in one of South

Africa's most beautiful and complex cities: Cape Town. The city is defined first and foremost by her relationship with Table Mountain, a massive plateau that stands as a backdrop to the city and a compass for its citizens. But the mountain also speaks to the policies of segregation that forced the city's people into racial enclaves during the years of apartheid.

Driving from the center of Cape Town towards its peripheral townships, the city's majestic backdrop is transformed from a postcard image to a wall of jagged rock with the windswept townships spanning for miles in its shadow. Having read a variety of articles by local activists and academics, I am reminded of the city's dual identity, framed by this imposing mountain: the privileged white identity cradled in the city center and the displaced and dispos-

sessed non-white communities living in its shadow.

Moving through Cape Town, I thought increasingly about the city's structure and found myself asking what role a city structure should play in the creation of the New South Africa. What steps have been taken to integrate Cape Town spatially? Are policies being implemented to redress

the violent social engineering of the apartheid government? It seemed that Table Mountain's place between Cape Town's social, economic and political realities was in fact a clear reflection of the city's urban policies, many of which have not been adequately re-examined in the roughly fifteen years since the fall of apartheid.

During my time there, I conducted a research project analyzing Cape Town's urban

structure with a specific focus on

District Six - a community declared a White Area in 1966 under the Group Areas Act. District Six was one of the most controversial cases in South Africa: by 1982, violent forced removals had displaced over 60,000 families to the townships, razing their homes to the ground and leaving little more than a barren tract of land.

Today, the land remains vacant. No

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AN INTERVIEW WITH MICHAEL MOYNIHAN

by Zayne Abdessalam (MUP '10)



Zayne Abdessalam: You are a Fellow and Director of Green Project at the progressive think tank and advocacy organization, NDN. Could you tell us a little bit about what NDN does and some of the work you are currently involved in?

NDN is a very interesting think tank, it is actually an outgrowth of the DLC, which was probably the preeminent

think tank during the Clinton years, founded by a guy named Simon Rosenberg. The DLC still exists, but it is very much identified with the 1990s, with the Clinton era and a sort of centrism. What NDN is identified with is just trying to be a little bit ahead of the curve, trying to look forward and think about the trends that are really going to be changing the present and shaping the future. So the organization has about four or five major initiatives. The first, the Hispanic initiative, which is about the rising importance of Hispanics in electoral politics. Secondly, there is an initiative on new political tools and NDN has been really out front in envisioning and also teaching and educating elected officials about how to use the tools that we saw become so important in the last presidential cycle. Barack Obama not only had a fantastic website and raised a lot of money over the internet, which I think everyone is pretty much aware, but also really use things like search, google search. A lot of new technologies, obviously instant messaging, texting and so forth, to win the election. NDN has been actually holding classes for elected officials using these new tools with technology gurus from places like facebook and so forth. We also have a globalization initiative which looks at the global economy. And finally the last large program, which I run, is the NDN Green Project. This project is a little over a year old and we are basically investigating and trying to lead the move of the US from a carbon economy to what we are calling a low-carbon economy, which we think is going to be key to the prosperity of the US in the future.

We do a lot of events on Capitol Hill with lawmakers with both the Senate and House side on specific issues. We have done it on clean infrastructure, which is an idea we pioneered; green stimulus. I originally pitched the idea of a green stimulus to the Obama campaign last summer and at the time when people were talking about a \$20-30 billion stimulus—a continuation of unemployment benefits, aid to the states, and aid to housing—I pitched them on the idea, well let's also take on some of these green issues. And of course that idea has really taken off. I don't think anyone expected an \$ 800 billion stimulus package. But there is tons of stuff for green stimulus, many of which are proposals that originated with NDN. This is a sort of home run that we have had with this project. Basically what we are trying to do is to serve as a bridge between Silicon Valley and the Washington policy world.

ZA: What are some of the key ideas of the new progressive agenda for the 21st century?

I think that if look at what happened over the last eight years there was initially a recession, but in turn there was a recovery but it was a recovery unlike previous recoveries did almost nothing for the middle class. If you look at what happened to median income, which is probably the best measure of income, for the lower 4/5, i.e. the lower 80%, it actually declined and only the top 20% benefited. Our argument is that before the current recession that we are in one can argue that a large part of the country were already experiencing recession, because they were not able to make ends meet on their incomes that were falling. This is the root of the problem that has not erupted into this global crisis. Basically people were stretched too thin and because their incomes were not rising they were resorting to all sorts of structured finance if you will, using their own houses where they were trying to get money to continue the spending pattern that saw during that period. If incomes had been rising people would have been able to support the kind of consumption we saw, but because the incomes were not rising the consumption was funded by debt and of course we're now living with the consequences of that.

ZA: So where do we go from here?

We see clean technology as a potentially transformative catalytic that can power a whole new wave of prosperity that you might compare to the Internet. There are many differences between clean tech and green energy, and creating a low carbon economy with the Internet. I will just mention a few of them. It is much more intensive. There are large incumbent players, principally the existing energy players. So it is not like you are building something from scratch, which is what happened during the Internet days. Nonetheless, it is a potentially transformative technology, and certainly Silicon Valley feels that way, it is now the second largest area of spending in Silicon Valley. There is a real potential for this to create tons of new jobs and also a ton of new wealth. I believe, and this is something that NDN is associated with as well, that the US can't try to compete with the developing countries of the world, in places like China, on wages. We are not going to win that battle, and it is a battle that we don't want to win. What we want to do is basically to be generating the new ideas, and historically that's what we've had to do over the last 40-50 years. There may have been a time when we made the cheapest goods in the world because we were a young country and our currency was undervalued relative to the European currencies and so forth. But in the modern world, for us to continue to increase our standard of living we need to be innovating. So it is really all about innovation and it is about enabling everyone in the US to benefit and share in the gains from the innovation.

ZA: You worked with Larry Sum-

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mers in the Clinton administration. In 1998 Summers was one of the principal sponsors, many argue, of our current financial debacle, I don't know if you agree with that, but he facilitated the repeal of the Glass-Steagall Act.

I don't agree that the current financial debacle is traceable to the Glass-Steagall. I think that it may well be that the reform of Glass-Steagall that took place in 1998 was not the best policy reform that could have been done. It may very well be that we would have been better off with the original system. However, I do have a problem with saying that something that happened in 2007 was caused in 1998. Because during the interim, we certainly had a long period when we did not have this crisis. So one can argue that the reforms of Glass-Steagall that took place at the end of the nineties may not have been the best way to set up a framework for financial services but I don't think that you can say, well that caused the current crisis. The current crisis is a result of many factors. As I mentioned, I think that a key one is the fact that middle class incomes and certainly lower class incomes did not rise during this period. Obviously there was a tremendous lack of enforcement and oversight across financial services which can't be linked to what the Clinton administration did because the Clinton administration was not conducting the oversight for the last eight years. So I think that the problems we are facing now are fairly complex, I actually think the crisis could have been avoided but I wouldn't link it as a direct chain of events from the 1998 reforms. There was a spirited debate at the time between different people about how to undertake those changes and I think, I was not involved in it at all personally, but I think that, like most things done in Washington it was a compromise. I don't think you can attribute it to any one person. Now certainly the major push for it was not coming from the Treasury Department. But the Treasury Department had to take a position on it. The position was worked out in conjunction with other people, including Alan Greenspan, who supported reform at that time. ■

Cape Town Divided

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development took place during apartheid due to unprecedented levels of controversy surrounding the forced removals. Since then, new controversies abound concerning redevelopment, particularly: How should District Six be redeveloped and, more specifically, for whom? Presently the plans fall under larger plans for the redevelopment of the entire central business district, an area that suffered from massive de-peopling and decentralization of office space during apartheid. But this push for massive redevelopment of District Six would likely mean high real estate prices, and the blocking of originally displaced communities from ever returning home. In an interview in 2005, former head of the District Six Land Claims Unit Rhoda Kadalie expressed that she would rather see the land remain vacant, as a memorial to the past,

than for it to be re-developed in such a manner.

Much of Cape Town's population has suffered grave injustices. People were torn from their homes and scattered about the periphery of the city. Now, nearly fifteen years after the dismantling of apartheid, Cape Town's city council is still faced with critical institutional and policy challenges. Little has been done at these levels to democratize peoples' access to much of the great Mother City and many of the boundaries created to segregate and racially compartmentalize Cape Town's citizens continue to exist without question. Going forward it is precisely these policies, and the institutions regulating them, which must be reevaluated in an effort to cross the great plateau of Table Mountain. ■



"Don't Give Up..." in Crossroads township, Cape Town, South Africa.

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Transportation

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The Department oversees highway funding and development, aviation regulation and expansion, financial and technical assistance to public transit, regulation of surface rail, and still other forms of transportation. With such widespread responsibilities, and with incredible potential given the promised stimulus package, the DOT could possibly shape the direction that housing and urban development takes in the next few decades.

Because of this potential, the decision to nominate LaHood as his Secretary of Transportation raised the question of how Obama viewed the transportation network and the urban fabric of the US. Under the former administration, perhaps somewhat surprisingly, significant funding opportunities were developed for public transit and initiatives aimed at reducing congestion. The most recent effort included nearly \$1 billion in funding for the expansion of Metrorail services in the Washington, DC metropolitan area. Coupled with this effort was the promise of massive infill development in towns such as Tysons Corner, which would raise their downtown population from 17,000 to 100,000; other areas and towns to receive new rail services have similar plans on the drawing board. Such development can only occur following the successful expansion of the region's public transportation, while highway building will only spur suburban development.

Yet it remains to be seen if the Obama administration supports such efforts, or instead will continue the massive highway construction program of DOT's past. With \$800 billion on the line, and the future of America's cities, the promise is immense, and the administration needs the foresight to ensure that that money is spent wisely. ■

PLANNER POLL:

What is your favorite space in your hometown?

Compiled by Andrea Perkins (MUP '10)



"The courtyard in the Boston Public Library & the banks of the Charles River."

Galina Brooks, Boston, MA (MUP '10)



"La Salle Street 'canyon' featured prominently in The Dark Knight."

Maria Pedroza, Chicago, IL (MUP '10)



"Central Park and the Boat Basin."

Reena Agarwal, New York, NY (MUP '10)



SUSTAINING HOMEOWNERSHIP

by Theresa B. Do (MUP '09)

When I was growing up, homeownership was always viewed and impressed upon me as the core of American life and the key to socio-economic mobility...you worked really hard in high school to get into a good college, you did well in college so you could get a good job, and you secured a good job so you could save up enough money to buy a home and to raise a stable family and over time your home would appreciate in value and you would have something of value to help support your own children through college so they could attain the same thing or perhaps something better. But now, in 2009, after the great sub-prime fiasco and the collapse of the mortgage market, many are questioning, "has *that* all changed? And is homeownership no longer the defining attainment of American culture with so much financial risk?"

Facing the greatest financial crisis since the great depression, spurred by the collapse of the mortgage market, greedy lenders, depreciating home values, and the failure of private lenders and local, state and federal government to efficiently refinance many homeowners facing foreclosure, it is easy to see where the great American Dream has failed us and in fact hurt us more than it seemed to ever help.

In the Fall of 2008, I embarked on a yearlong capstone team project that would evaluate the New York State Housing Agency's refinance program and try to pinpoint the causes for the program's lower than anticipated success rate...not surprisingly, the task wasn't so simple. With a consistently changing market and a very

daunting outlook for other state refinance programs the answers seemed more complex than before we launched our capstone and more questions seemed to arise than answers that appeared. From the re-



Photo courtesy of: realestatenews360.com

view of a vast array of literature, countless meetings, interviews and discussions and a lot of public commentary, there seemed to be large blame on the decreased value of housing so dramatic and unexpected, that it caused homeowners to take a great loss in their investments and thus in the face of major financial crunches, an inability to refinance (because their homes were worth

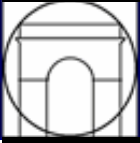
less than what the mortgage was for) and thus default on their mortgages. Further academic articles claimed the depreciation in housing prices was the eminent cause for the failure of refinance programs nationwide because most of the programs only allowed for, at maximum 105% of the home's value to be refinanced - hence if you were home was underwater more than 105% of your original mortgage, you wouldn't qualify for refinancing. Most homeowners were far beyond 105% by the time they sought refinancing help and in places hardest hit by the drop in housing prices like Sacramento, California, the average underwater mortgage was at 135%.

As persuasive as the arguments were and are, my take is a little different. From my perspective, underwater mortgages have always existed, not necessarily in the abundance that we have seen in the past 5 years, but they have always existed. And generally no one bailed out on their mortgage because of the loss in value to their home - they could care less as long as the home was affordable and served its purpose of utility of shelter and protection for them and their families. Even if my parents' home didn't appreciate

in value, it was still valuable because it was a place of shelter for my sibling and me. I doubt my parents would have ever abandoned their home because it wasn't appreciating in value.

As Warren Buffet put it best in his March 2009 *Newsweek* article, *most foreclosures do not occur because a*

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PLANNING ON STATEN ISLAND: DO THAT WITH A R/UDAT

by Patricia Bertuccio (MUP '11)

With \$50,000, thousands of community members, 11 volunteers, a handful of elected officials and local groups, Staten Islanders took planning the future of their beloved borough into their own hands. In September, a group of volunteer experts from the national American Institute of Architects (AIA) traveled to Staten Island to study the borough's waterfront, gather input from residents and businesses as to what they would like to see developed, and create a Regional/Urban Design Assistance Team report, or R/UDAT (pronounced ROO-dat).

The study was coordinated by efforts from both the Staten Island Chapter of the AIA and the SI Chamber of Commerce. Marcus Marino, the chairman of the SI AIA, said that his organization attempted to get the study going for several years, but was unsuccessful until now.

"It was a challenge to raise money to fly people in and put them in hotels. [The SI AIA] got money by working in conjunction with the Staten Island Chamber of Commerce, the Borough President and local councilmen," Marino said. "It came to fruition because of a number studies done by city by City Planning and EDC."

The AIA pulls together nationally recognized professionals who volunteer their time to identify ways of encouraging desirable change in a community and to work with the community to study and identify ways to address the social, economic, political and physical issues in an area.

Since 1967, the AIA has operated the R/UDAT program, a results-driven

community design program based on the principles of interdisciplinary solutions, objectivity and public participation.

During a four day visit to the community, the AIA team studies the selected locale, in this case Staten Island's waterfront and meets with local officials, residents and leaders of local organizations to obtain information about local issues from transportation to the political process to community desires for the future of their neighborhood.

For this project, R/UDAT volunteers included professionals from maritime experts to architects to planners. The group was the largest team in the AIA's history.

They invited a wide variety of Staten Islanders to provide input. For this project, R/UDAT volunteers included professionals from maritime experts to architects to planners. The group was the largest team in the AIA's history.

They invited a wide variety of Staten Islanders to provide input, from teachers to architects to religious leaders. Participants were given the option to go to sessions on topics of their choice, including land and maritime uses, transportation, infrastructure and housing. Officials from government agencies, including the state Department of Environmental Conservation, also attended the meetings.

Tom Scarangelo, the chairman of the Staten Island Chamber of Commerce, said the study was an opportunity to explore the borough's potential opportunities for expanding businesses and improving Staten Island communities in a holistic way.

"[Staten Islanders] get bombarded with studies by City Planning and local groups that just collect dust," said Tom Scarangelo, "The problem is that the plans are always piece meal so they don't make a lot of sense as a whole."

Scarangelo said the report provided a vision for Staten Island the borough by offering ideas to alleviate some of the borough's major issues, such as traffic, with high speed ferries and water taxi services.

"Staten Island has one ferry and 33 miles of waterfront," Scarangelo said. "It's doesn't make sense from a common sense perspective that our transportation modes are mostly cars and buses. We're an island!"

The R/UDAT report also suggested rezoning current manufacturing areas on the waterfront that are limited to water-dependent activities and providing better public transportation to get tourists off the ferry boat and into Staten Island.

Scarangelo said that a steering committee will meet in November to assign responsibilities and move forward the implementation of the R/UDAT report's suggestions. He believes the toughest challenges will be getting changes that require government approval and he hopes the support will trickle up from the borough.

"We hope [the R/UDAT] will lead to a master plan for our community," Scarangelo said. "Staten Island only has three City Council members [in a 51 member congregation] so we always have to fight for our piece of the pie. We need to develop a plan and get

(Continued on pg. 9)



Staten Island

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the local community involved to get this going."

R/UDAT team members will return within a year to advise implementation strategies and plan development goals for the next three to five years. The AIA has used this grassroots approach across the nation to help create healthy, safe, livable, and more sustainable communities. Staten Island's AIA Chapter will begin writing zoning resolutions for town centers and downtown areas for submission to City Council to facilitate redevelopment of focus areas in the R/UDAT.

"If you get willing and able participants in a meeting to review and discuss the issues—that's the hope of progress," Marino said.

For more information or to see the report, visit www.aia.org/liv_rudat_list. ■

Homeownership

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house is worth less than its mortgage (so-called "upside-down" loans). Rather, foreclosures take place because borrowers can't pay the monthly payment. Homeowners who have made a meaningful down payment—derived from savings and not from other borrowing—seldom walk away from a primary residence simply because its value today is less than the mortgage. Instead, they walk when they can't make the monthly payments. Which brings me to the more pressing question for urban planners today - is the question we currently face really about the viability of homeownership or is it an issue of sustainable homeownership created through affordability?

■

WAGNER PLANNERS AT PLAY!



Elis Wooton, Greg Holisko & Sally Smith (all MUP '10) take time off from finals to enjoy Dysorientation



Eric Steiner & Nikki Georges-Clapp (both MUP '09) enjoy Election Night 2008 at Puck.



Planners brave the rain for a field trip to Coney Island.



WAGNER FIELD TRIP TO ATLANTIC AVENUE TUNNEL

By Maulin Mehta (MUP '10)

Noah Levine (MUP '10) organized an exciting trip to the Atlantic Avenue tunnel, an old subway tunnel running along Atlantic Avenue in Downtown Brooklyn. Roughly twenty urban planners made it out for the trip, touring the underground.



Students view in the inside of the now abandoned tunnel.



Alyse Erman (MUP '10) heads into the tunnel!

INTRODUCTION TO URBAN DESIGN PROJECT PRESENTATIONS

Compiled by Ariana K. MacPherson (MUP '10) and Theresa B. Do (MUP '09), (Photos courtesy of Fedor Novikov)



Students present posters in Steve Stainbrook's Urban Design class.

"In a short period, students produced incredible concepts that were elegant and thoughtful. What makes Wagner students so great is that they can combine design and policy matters, resulting in efficient real-world changes."

- John Fontillas

"Students showed why New York City is such an invaluable urban lab to work and learn in, but it was astonishing the extent to which they demonstrated a rather robust physical planning and urban design toolkit for approaching the challenges posed by (re)developing Seward Park."

-Steve Stainbrook



Students take a moment to relax after final presentations.