



**Proceedings of the American Planning Association,
New York Metro Chapter's 2007 Biennial Conference**

***Planning for a More Livable New York:
Regional Growth, Nature and the Ecological City***

October 12, 2007

NYU Kimmel Center for University Life, Rosenthal Pavilion
Washington Square South, New York City

In co-sponsorship with
NYU Wagner Rudin Center for Transportation Policy & Management

Increasing the livability of our cities and regions is a goal shared by all. But what are the best and most realistic ways to achieve that goal? How can planners and decision-makers work together to identify the salient issues, set priorities and develop plans that work? The conference provided an opportunity for critical and practical discussions of assumptions concerning growth, and the identification of new opportunities and constraints in planning effectively for a sustainable future for our city and region.

In the plenary sessions, panels and technical workshops, distinguished speakers and presenters from the planning profession, government, academia and the community highlighted new transportation initiatives, energy alternatives and resource management strategies. We explored tools, techniques and policies that planners may use to promote better design and placemaking, to foster social equity and sustainability, and to move decisively toward implementing a vision of livability in an age of limits.

Opening Keynote Speaker

Rutherford H. Platt,

*Ecological Cities Project and Professor Emeritus of Geography and Planning Law,
University of Massachusetts Amherst*

Rutherford Platt spoke about the concept of the ecological city (or the “humane metropolis”) by using his 2006 book, *The Humane Metropolis: People and Nature in the 21st Century City*, as a point of reference. He also spoke about the concept’s history and the figures that helped develop it. Mr. Platt argues that the American city has “exploded” in terms of sprawl and ecological degradation. Our society is faced with the challenge of creating something desirable from the explosion, which we can obtain by exemplifying the “Humane Metropolis.” The following is a general description of Mr. Platt’s inspiring speech that inaugurated the day’s event:

- I. ***The Humane Metropolis: People and Nature in the 21st Century City***
 - a. Dedication of the book to Mr. Platt's father — a devoted naturalist, photographer, and nature writer.
 - b. Credit to the many authors of the book.
 - c. Introduction of the “Ecological City”— a shared vision and conference series developed with the collaboration of the research community and numerous practitioners from across the country.

- II. **Origins of the “Humane Metropolis”**
 - a. William H. Whyte (1917-1999) – observer of cities, critic of suburbs, humorist, and proponent of how public spaces and downtown areas can be planned so as to contribute to, rather than detract from, the urban experience.
 - b. Concept has been developed in the writings of William H. Whyte including: *The Organization Man*, *Exploding Metropolis*, *The Last Landscape*, *City: Rediscovering the Center*.

- III. **The State of Cities Today**
 - a. Whyte on sprawl: In 1957, Whyte defined the concept of sprawl, and described how it is fostered and perpetuated by national policies such as subsidies for the interstate highway system and tax incentives for homeownership.
 - b. Review of statistics on sprawl
 - i. Suburbs have grown immensely from 1960 to present day.
 - ii. Physical land area of cities grew faster than the population of cities.
 - iii. Evolution of ten “mega-regions” in the U.S. caused by sprawl.
 - c. Effects of sprawl
 - i. Loss of sense of place and community.
 - ii. Worsening traffic congestion.
 - iii. Loss of farmland.
 - iv. Abandoned central city neighborhoods.
 - v. Development that defies natural hazards, exposing populations to natural disasters such as floods and earthquakes, and contributes to coastal erosion, etc.

- IV. **The Humane Metropolis Today**
 - a. [Paraphrasing] The metropolis has exploded and we cannot turn back. So we need a new way of thinking about what we can create out of this explosion. The challenge is turning what we created into something more livable—more humane.
 - b. Humane Metropolis strives for:
 - i. **greenness;**
 - ii. **a healthy and safe environment,**
 - iii. **efficiency,**
 - iv. **an equitable society, and**
 - v. **people-friendly urban design and development patterns.**

- c. To achieve those five goals, cities should focus on promoting:
 - i. *Urban Greenspaces*: such as redevelopment of Central Park following Frederick Law Olmsted's philosophies, NYC Greenway Park, and Chicago's Millennium Park.
 - ii. *Urban Ecology*: such as Chicago Wilderness Alliance, botanical gardens, macro- and micro-ecology plans, and ecology education.
 - iii. *Rehabilitation of Green Land*.
 - iv. *Urban Agriculture*: like Growing Power organization in Milwaukee, and community gardens.
 - v. *Green Buildings*.
 - vi. *Public Spaces*: such as Bryant Park, NYC.

V. Implementing the Humane Metropolis

- a. People are catalysts for change! You need leaders.
- b. Cooperation is key.
- c. Innovation is necessary, including public/private partnerships.
- d. Funding must be utilized from multiple public and private sources.

Morning Keynote Speaker

Bruce Schaller

*Deputy Commissioner for Planning and Sustainability
NYC Department of Transportation*

Deputy Commissioner Bruce Schaller began with a progress report on the aspects of New York City's recent PlaNYC 2030 initiative. He delivered a brief status report of the controversial congestion-pricing plan for lower Manhattan, and debunked common misconceptions about it. The speaker discussed additional NYCDOT initiatives that "re-imagine" the design of New York street spaces. Schaller discussed pilot programs such as painted bike lanes, dedicated bus rapid transit lanes, traffic calming initiatives, and the transformation of road space into pedestrian plazas. With such projects the NYCDOT intends to promote more diverse "public life" on the city's streets through safer, more attractive, and more balanced street design, marking a turning point from vehicle-centric transportation policy. Schaller noted the difficulties of planning regionally and implementing at the neighborhood level. He closed by emphasizing the importance of on-going cooperation and communication among sister agencies within the city.

Overview of the talk:

- 1. A progress report on the PlaNYC 2030.
 - 2. How these initiatives plug into a public framework.
 - 3. Observations about making New York more livable.
1. **PlaNYC 2030**: Mr. Schaller talked first about PlaNYC 2030, a set of long-term planning initiatives and changes in city government aimed at accommodating anticipated population growth and improving land use, water quality, air quality, and transportation. The anticipated population growth will lead to crowding,

worsening traffic congestion and air pollution unless action is taken now to expand transit infrastructure and initiate numerous capital projects. Focusing on transportation, Schaller noted that some of the initiatives in the new plan call for increasing capacity for people and goods while reducing environmental impact.

Congestion Pricing: The proposed three-year pilot would charge an \$8 fee per day to enter a congestion zone in lower Manhattan. The purpose of the program would be to reduce traffic, create a mode shift, and generate revenue for enhancing transit service. Implementation would require action by the State legislature.

2. **How these initiatives plug into a public framework:** Schaller went on to talk about other initiatives such as the transformation of road space to pedestrian plazas, and “green streets” landscaping. Other programs include painted bike lanes, traffic calming, safe routes to school, bicycle parkways, painted bus lanes, and expanded Bus Rapid Transit. In general, the NYCDOT is “re-imagining” the design and regulation of streets to promote an improved “public life.” The vision is for streets that are more attractive, space-efficient, safe, balanced and sustainable. He mentioned they are broadening the palate of standard materials and designs.
3. **Lessons on Planning for Livable Cities:**
 - a. People are motivated by goals that express values, not just gripes about things like traffic.
 - b. It is difficult to translate citywide values to the neighborhood scale. It is challenging to work through the local implications of citywide initiatives.
 - c. DOT regulates traffic flow, use and roadway design, but it does not operate the MTA nor does it enforce laws. It is crucial for other government agencies to cooperate.
 - d. Mayor Bloomberg’s leadership is not enough; DOT needs ongoing support from sister agencies and other planning agencies in the region.

Luncheon Keynote Speech

Elliot Sander

*Executive Director and Chief Executive Officer
Metropolitan Transportation Authority*

Mr. Sander outlined the strategic planning vision of the MTA. First, the MTA is focusing on finance by proposing two possible new toll structures. The MTA is highly supportive of the Mayor’s congestion pricing plan. Second, it is improving workforce development. Third, the MTA is working on institutional reform by integrating some of the functions of their seven semi-autonomous agencies. Fourth, it is trying to become more customer oriented. Fifth, the MTA is vigilantly working to protect the security of their systems. Sixth, it is starting a strategic planning process for their future projects, and seventh, it has created a panel charged with outlining a sustainability plan by Earth Day 2008. The Q&A session included discussion of MTA internal priorities, alternative modes the MTA would consider if the city implemented congestion pricing, and the MTA’s role in land use planning.

Plenary Panel Regional Perspectives: Livability in an Age of Limits

Moderator:

Allison L.C. De Cerreño, Ph.D., Director; NYU Wagner Rudin Center for Transportation Policy & Management

Panelists:

David Church, AICP, Orange County Planning Commissioner; New York

Joel P. Ettinger, Executive Director; New York Metropolitan Transportation Council

Steve Weber, Assistant Commissioner for Strategic Planning; NYCDOT

Michael E. White, Executive Director; Long Island Regional Planning Board

A panel of key transportation decisionmakers exchanged ideas, discussed the opportunities and constraints of regional collaborations and partnerships, and compared examples of innovative programs in the New York metropolitan area. Panelists discussed joint transportation planning initiatives and the connection between housing affordability and wise transportation policies. The panelists concluded their dialogue with a consensus that transportation demand, especially of freight transportation, will continue to increase and strain existing infrastructure.

Brownfields: New Funding, New Planning Opportunities

Moderator:

Jody Kass, Co-Director, New Partners for Community Revitalization

Panelists:

Rohit T. Aggarwala, Director, NYC Office of Sustainability and Long-term Planning

Curtis Cravens, NYS Department of State, Brownfields Cleanup Program

Sarah Lansdale, Executive Director, Sustainable Long Island

Senator Carl L. Marcellino, Chairman, Environmental Conservation Committee, New York State Senate

This lively panel was moderated by Jody Kass, Executive Director of New Partners for Community Revitalization, an organization that helps communities plan for and finance brownfield projects. The discussion highlighted the high priority placed on brownfield redevelopment by the city and the state. PlaNYC 2030 includes a dozen goals aimed at developing the city's 7,000+ acres of brownfield sites. The State's 2003 Brownfield Cleanup Program (BCP) legislation offers new resources, most notably the Brownfield Opportunity Areas (BOA) grant program that has already dedicated \$75 million to community planning related to reclamation of brownfield sites.

State Senator Carl L. Marcellino, long-time chairman of the Environmental Conservation Committee and a principal author of BCP and BOA legislation, provided attendees with historical perspective and a vision of refinements being crafted in Albany to improve these programs and realize their full potential to spark private sector investment. Panelist Rohit (Rit) Aggarwala, Director of the City's Office of Long-Term Planning and Sustainability, placed redevelopment of brownfields among the highest priorities in

PlaNYC 2030; these underutilized acres are needed to accommodate growth. He expressed frustration with the pace of BOA program implementation, but optimism regarding partnership with the State and progress toward brownfield redevelopment goals.

An update on BOA grant applications, funding status and upcoming funding cycles was provided by Curtis Cravens, Regional Representative of the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation for the BOA program. Sarah Lansdale, Executive Director of Sustainable Long Island, an organization that provides leadership, coordination and training on brownfield strategies, offered a perspective “from the trenches,” where communities struggle with delays and complexity, and against myriad obstacles, in crafting cleanup plans. The panel’s articulate discussion, along with program details provided in their handouts, brought the attendees to a new level of understanding and awareness regarding “Brownfields: New Funding, New Planning Opportunities.”

Water, Water Everywhere

Moderator:

Janice Jijina, Associate, Cameron Engineering & Associates, LLP

Panelists:

Edward A. Clerico, President, Alliance Environmental LLC

Stephen M. Jones, CEO, Suffolk County Water Authority

Dr. Franco Montalto, President, eDesign Dynamics

The provision of usable water (potable and non-potable) and the disposal of wastewater are essential to human existence and to the functioning of modern cities. However, in many regards, the current systems of providing water and disposing of wastewater are not sustainable. The panelists posited new ways of thinking about water resources as well as challenges that need to be overcome in order to create sustainable water systems. They also discussed emerging technologies that can be used to reduce water consumption and waste production. Finally, the panelists discussed issues surrounding securing water systems to safeguard the population that they serve.

Questions & Answers:

The question-and-answer session was brief, owing to time constraints. The session focused almost exclusively on water reuse issues. All of the panelists contributed substantively to the discussion.

- Quality of water that is reused – if it’s not potable, why is it okay for laundry and dishwashing? – There are sometimes higher levels of some contaminants in reused water than in dishwater – but it really depends on the nature of the water being reused at a specific site. This individuality also allows the systems to be customized to specific settings. However, the level of contaminants in reused water in all cases is still very low and occasional ingestion is absolutely fine.
- Centralized vs. decentralized technology – To be most effective and practical, implementation of reuse really needs to be somewhere in between the two extremes. There are some technologies that are appropriate for more centralized installations,

while others function best in a decentralized manor. Wide-scale implementation of reuse technologies in a city like New York, for example, would probably consist of building wide systems as well as neighborhood systems. Finally, the most effective reuse systems would also include stormwater and water production as well. These would necessarily have more centralized components.

On the Sunny Side of the Street: Planning for the Eco-neighborhood

Moderator:

Alex Marshall, Author, Senior Fellow, Regional Plan Association

Panelists:

Molly Norton, Food Justice Coordinator, Just Food

Aaron Naparstek, Editor-in-Chief, Street Blog.org

Louis G. Marquet, Executive Vice President, Leyland Alliance LLC

Joan Byron, Director, Sustainability and Environmental Justice Initiative, Pratt Center for Community Development

Panel moderator, Alex Marshall, introduced the panel as a conversation about what an eco-neighborhood is and what it can do. Panelists agreed that an “eco-neighborhood” was a neighborhood that utilized mass transport, had close living quarters, and an efficient waste removal system. Eco-neighborhoods might have bus lanes, bike paths, wide sidewalks, and more narrow streets than the traditional American neighborhood. Panelists also determined that residents of “eco-neighborhoods” would be healthy and have access to fresh food. “Eco-neighborhoods” might also be reminiscent of European communities. The group concluded that eco-neighborhoods can, through access to open spaces, fresh food, and less exposure to pollution, potentially lower the carbon footprints of many Americans.

Challenges of Building Green: Sustainability and Equity in the Housing Market

Moderator:

Ernest Hutton, Principal, Hutton Associates

Panelists:

Mark Ginsberg, FAIA, Principal, Curtis + Ginsberg Architects LLP

Adam Weinstein, President and CEO, The Phipps Houses Group; Chair, Phipps Community Development Corporation

Holly Leicht, Associate Commissioner, New Construction, Office of Development, NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development

Anthony Borelli, Director of Land Use, Planning and Development, Manhattan Borough President's Office

Ginsberg's main point was that density is the single most effective factor in energy efficiency. Density, he said, lowers energy consumption per capita; one of the reasons being that it allows for walking, biking, and using mass transit.

Weinstein discussed equity and sustainability in the field from a developer's perspective. First of all, Weinstein said, affordable housing just doesn't pay for itself. That being said, it takes a specific kind of developer to take on such projects. Weinstein discussed a few of his company's projects, some of which were in collaboration with HPD. The main one was Via Verde in the Bronx. Weinstein discussed characteristics of the project – making use of outdoor opportunities, harvesting rainwater, and the green roof garden. Similar to what Leicht said, Weinstein pointed out that green design features are largely experimental at this point, and thus incur unforeseen problems and costs. Still, he agrees that maximizing the use of green space and taking more into account the health of future residents is crucial in every design.

Leicht spoke about the city's role in housing supply and the policies and programs to promote sustainability. The city, she said, "tiptoed around green for a long time." But with PlaNYC, green came front and center. Building rehabilitation, she said, is more expensive than building new, but the city has favored rehabilitation lately because of the green factor. Leicht said that green projects are particularly expensive at this time because they are in the early stages and that once green building happens more frequently, costs will come down. She noted that LEED is not well-tailored for affordable multifamily housing, and that certifying a building comes at a high price, which could otherwise have added to the value of the building.

Borelli focused on effective public participation in relation to housing equity constraints and opportunities in Manhattan. He said that community goals can only be achieved through effective public participation and that it is necessary to provide training and support for community boards so that they can maximize their effectiveness. He gave an example of East Harlem where an RFP for commercial/retail space was launched and asked for no community input. In response, the community board organized a task force and opposed the project, which led to a new RFP altogether that would integrate affordable housing, job/business opportunities, environmental/green building, and cultural space.

Question and Answer: Discussion during the question-and-answer session was geared towards better understanding the examples of green affordable housing presented as well as how the payback period on green features comes into account. One notable question was: Is it better to have more units and less green features or more green features and fewer units? Ginsberg answered by saying that it's a win-win situation either way because denser is greener. Another panelist said that building rehabilitation is by nature green. Leicht said that the priorities in situations are different.

Summary: A notable conclusion from the panel discussion was that people who live in affordable housing care about their health and the environment just as much as anyone else. Another focus was the issue of green design in already tight-budget affordable housing projects. Consensus was that not all green features are more costly than less green counterparts, and the features that are more expensive will become more reasonably priced once they become more mainstream. It was discussed that it is an interesting paradox that the city's building projects, mostly affordable housing, fall under the city's obligation to build green but are the least financially capable of doing so; and

yet they prevail. In other words, if the city can build green affordable housing, private developers should be able to as well.

Planning Tech: Tools for Today and Technology on the Horizon

Session 1: Environmental Simulation Center Presentation

Presenters:

George M. Janes, AICP, Executive director, Environmental Simulation Center
Kiyoshi Yamazaki, Junior Research Associate, Environmental Simulation Center
Dr. Juliana A. Maantay, Associate Professor of Urban Environmental Geography, Dir., Geographic Information Science Program, Lehman College, CUNY, and co-author of "GIS for the Urban Environment," ESRI Press

In this session, George Janes of the Environmental Simulation Center (ESC) and Dr. Juliana Maantay of Lehman College took the audience through a survey of current and cutting-edge planning, mapping, GIS and visualization technology. The ESC presentation illustrated the rapid evolution in the power of computers married with geographic data and visualization tools, culminating in a real-time demonstration of the ease with which a planner may now build site data into a realistic depiction of actual conditions and alternative development scenarios – all in fly-through 3-D splendor – with realistic topography, landscaping and building surfaces.

The audience also got a glimpse of the future. The ESC team demonstrated new powerful sunlight-energy modeling software recently released by the labs associated with the U.S. Department of Energy, and Dr. Maantay presented an example of leading-edge, "expert-system" urban GIS mapping technology she has developed that provides significantly increased accuracy to demographic mapping of urban populations. These technologies hold out the promise of a new generation of planning tools to model, map and analyze a host of geographically related factors that planners must understand in order to create a sustainable, humane metropolis.

Session 2: "Perfecting the Denominator: Developing a Cadastral-based Expert Dasymetric System (CEDS) for Population Mapping in the Urban Environment"

Presenter:

Dr. Juliana A. Maantay, Associate Professor of Urban Environmental Geography, Dir., Geographic Information Science Program, Lehman College, CUNY, and co-author of "GIS for the Urban Environment," ESRI Press

In this brief session, Dr. Maantay intrudes CEDS as a new tool that gives a detailed view of population density. Dasymetric Mapping is a way to disaggregate special data using additional data to help refine locations of populations. It uses tax-lot level data in New York City and removes information to better estimate populations. She presented a study of asthma and hospitalization in the Bronx as an example proving the accuracy of CEDS. Dr. Maantay encourages people to visit www.lehman.cuny.edu/deannss/geography to learn more about the CEDS method.