CONVERSATIONS TOWARDS AN EQUITABLE PRACTICE
24 June 2019 / Engaging Communities

COMMON THEMES

- Engage early, know who is THE COMMUNITY, learn to communicate ideas in non-architectural language
- Ensure everyone is heard, not just loud voices
- Tools for community engagement process still in process of development in a lot of firms
- Integration of community engagement into design process, not considering it an additional step in the process
- Community engagement benefits the projects, as well as gives communities the sense of ownership

NOTES BY GROUP

Group 1:

- Different firm experiences, some offices wanting to do more
- Engagement through design review feels passive, feedback is coming too late
  - Public event for multiple design firms to work on design prompt while community members can observe and ask questions
  - Helps give public tools and open eyes to the design process
- Engagement can be a way to invest community in projects
- Public knowledge on design/architecture varies, but their knowledge of their community is their expertise and should be utilized
  - Personal resource vs. google
- Explaining vs. questioning (assume we are the experts)
  - Resources: surveys, personal questionnaires, tools from Pomegranate Center
  - Other tools: photo sharing to start a dialogue
• Make sure to ask the right questions to get the desired feedback

• Community Engagement as part of the office culture
  o Creates space for coworkers to share engagement outside of the office
  o Allows mutual learning from coworkers
  o Brings awareness of others’ skills/ limitations and creates a safe space to ask questions

• Need to be willing to invest in others’ perspectives and needs

• Having Community Engagement as a requirement is a helpful first step

• There is disconnect between engaging client group/ end user and engaging with surrounding community that is impacted by the project
  o Cultural appropriation

Group 2:

• Direct (ex. Reuse projects, housing) vs. mediated engagement (ex. Government work, retail)

• HOW projects happen is KEY
  o “Checking the box”- get some sign-in sheets, hold a panel, one & done
  o REAL- “Call and response” approach, continued engagement- not one time, iterative conversation
  o What projects should require community engagement
  o How do you find the community to engage? Figuring out WHO is the community is the key to success.
    o Many diverse communities can be engaged online (ex. Key Arena- neighbors, City, fans, artists, etc.)

• Managing scope/ schedule
  o Developers want to move quickly
  o Stakeholders may lack time
  o Language- development vs. vernacular
  o Perception- renderings & sales market vs. real use
  o More openness at start, more room for conversation

• Strategies:
  o Find events people will engage with
  o Have conceptual conversation (not site specific) to “open the door”
Come with open mind, not prepared; come to listen not to present
Come with humility
Imagery used should be of mood not the project
First impressions count- graphic clarity is key for clear communication
Design with community
Diverse design team comes with inherent cultural resources

Valve
- Mitigate risk of project being blocked or getting bad PR
- City of Seattle has community engagement requirements, so architect can manage the discussion
- Some clients engage on their own
- Make any mandated engagement work
- Find opportunities to give more than performa called for
- Ensure you hear from right/all/diverse community members at engagement meetings
  (some voices can be overpowering, so help others be heard)

Strategies for success
- Account for privilege in speaking priority

Group 4:
- How to draw positive aspects/feedback out of angry individuals
- Use of post-its and sticker dots helpful for obtaining useful information
- Provide various ways of engagement- visual, verbal, written
- Surveys- often result in low participation; there is an art to writing a good survey
- Use neutral moderator
- Bring food/raffle
- Create community forums
- Job shadow a worker- find out how they use a building
- Find interpreters if needed
- Can’t do design by committee- setting boundaries
- Emphasize and also explain
- Repeat back the words you hear from community
Group 5:

- Participating in community events:
  - Should the participation of the firm [members] be an organized event; billable time allocated for staff
  - Opportunities for staff to take time off and make it up later vs. get paid for community time
  - Firm efforts in communities:
    - Sawhorse Revolution
    - Block Project
    - Various school committees
- Type of project often dictates community engagement efforts; market rate housing project often skip or approach it as a “check box” item
- Consider the fact that community engagement contributes to better projects, community has a sense of ownership
- Architects should educate developers as well as integrate community engagement into their design process, so it is not an item that can be taken out of the scope
- Keep dialog with community going; learn to speak “non-architect” language to make your efforts more understandable
- How does community engagement benefit development of ones’ career; is it reflected in the careers of leaders within the firm?
  - The most successful examples were of leading efforts “top-down” and recognitions of staff efforts in front of the whole firm

Group 6:

- Engagement:
  - Door to door
  - Through neighborhood leaders
  - Community center meetings
  - P-patch (telephone, postcard, farmers market)
  - Flyers
- Need “A Dick” (designer) and “A Rick” (neighborhood program)
  - Designer (vision)- facilitator, resources, codes, vendors, leader
- Neighborhood interests- listener, diverse representation

  - Process- public/ private
    - RFP- goals/ stakeholders/ leaders/ responsible
    - Listening opportunities- allow everyone a voice, not just squeaky wheel

  - Tools
    - Firm can bring a bucket of tools
    - Time is tight for volunteers
    - Document/ keep record of work
    - Funding- Sparks Fund matching, City of Seattle $5k seed money (must have 50% volunteers in organization)

**Group 7:**

- Barriers and challenges faced:
  - Levels of bureaucracy (governmental, administrative)
  - Cultural distrust/ history (lack of) consultation and respect
  - How to actively build trust among users
  - Disparity; lack of empowerment of marginalized communities
  - Understanding of policies and who makes decisions
  - Scheduling events around availability of the community
  - City of Seattle red tape- being connected to the right policy makers in order to make change

- Office/ workplace attitude towards community engagement
  - Project dependent- sometimes client driven or citizen driven
  - Positive (that is a requirement by the city) and passionately driven by (typically younger) staff
  - Post occupancy surveys feel like “pat on the back” but there is value in feedback which is then inspiring to young designers
  - Pluses and minuses replaced by pluses and deltas- indicate possibilities for improvement (rather than negative aspects)

- Formal tools used by offices
  - Often “winging it”
  - There is a desire to be trained by outside consultants
  - Approach of “showing up to raise awareness”
THANK YOU FROM YOUR SESSION LEADERS

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