Are our streets complete?

EXCLUSIVE
A Hyperbolic paraboloid vault could be the future of wildlife crossings along Interstate 70 & throughout North America.
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LUNCH & LEARN SERIES: USING STONE IN THE LANDSCAPE

February 17 (11:30 am - 1:00 pm)
Denver Public Library Gates Conference Room

Bruce Davis, owner of Rock & Company, will present a class on the use of stone in the landscape. His topic will focus on stone walls but will include a broader survey of stone structures both current and historic in context. The class will feature projects that use stone to promote a feeling of quality, longevity, and unity including recent examples from Yellowstone and the Grand Canyon.

If you are interested in registering please visit the ASLA Colorado website (www.aslacolorado.org).

THE NEXT WEST: 20TH ANNIVERSARY LAND USE CONFERENCE

March 3-4 University of Denver Sturm College of Law

The Rocky Mountain Land Use Institute seeks to elevate the law, policy and practice of sustainable development in the West to promote nature-friendly, prosperous and equitable communities. Through innovative research, education and professional development programs and its renowned annual conference, the Institute trains and connects students and professionals across disciplines, sectors and regions to build the sustainable development field while creating new possibilities for the future of the West’s landscapes and livelihoods.

To view the program and to register visit law.du.edu/index.php/rmlui.

LIVING ROOF DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION FOR THE ARID WEST

March 4 (1:00-5:00 pm)
March 5 (8:30 am-5:00 pm)
UC Denver College of Architecture & Planning

This intensive one-and-a-half day seminar will give participants a general understanding of the basic elements of a green roofs and green infrastructure—especially for semi-arid and arid climates; the benefits associated with green roofs and green infrastructure; how to select the type of green roof for your project; technical issues necessary to address during design, implementation and maintenance; maintenance issues which ensure longevity of the green roof and green infrastructure; and detailed cost variables for green roofs and green infrastructure.

If you are interested in registering please contact Fran Baumgardner at 303-556-2458 or Francesca.baumgardner@ucdenver.edu. Cost is $699, or $629 for students.
Now that the new year is upon us, my wish is that it brings prosperity and health to all. The past two years have been very difficult for everyone and the hope was that we would be out of it by now. However, it feels like we are not quite there yet so we will continue to find creative ways to thrive in these tough times.

We are very excited about the upcoming year and numerous events we have planned. Our goal is to help you BE CONNECTED, BE INFORMED AND BE BETTER. Thank you to everyone who responded to our membership survey in October. We used this to develop our programming and budget for 2011. We have set up some exciting new programs and events that will give us all the opportunity to be connected, to be informed and to be better at what we do.

We are proud to announce that ASLA Colorado is now on Face Book, Twitter and Linked In. Please check us out on the web site and join our expanding network. A big thank you to Abe Medina, our Secretary, for setting this in motion. We look forward to starting monthly social gatherings around the state and the beginnings of a new Emerging Professional group. Please look for updates as they come available. With February comes ProGreen in Denver. Thursday and Friday are packed with exceptional design tracks so please attend if you can.

We were very excited to find out from the state licensing board in Colorado that licensure renewal fees for 2011 have been reduced from $350 down to $109. Please renew by the deadline to take advantage of this rate. We will do all we can to work with DORA and the board to try and make this a permanent reduction. We also received a $3,500 grant from national to assist with licensure compliance and awareness around the state so look for these materials in the months to come.

I look to working with everyone in 2011!

Thanks,

Kurt Munding, RLA, CID, CLIA, ASLA
Colorado Chapter President

NEW! ASLA Colorado’s Monthly Happy Hour

ASLA Colorado is pleased to announce a new opportunity to network with fellow members, designers, contractors, suppliers and friends. Starting Thursday, February 24th, and recurring every fourth Thursday, the Happiest Happy Hour is your chance to meet new people, share stories, ask for help or just have a drink (or three). If you’re in the Denver Metro Area, festivities will start at 5:30pm and we will meet at Brooklyn’s at the Pepsi Center. If you’re in one of our other regions, we will keep you posted about where and when the Happy Hour will be seen in your neighborhood. We hope that landscape architects and allied professionals will be getting together all over the state at the same time every month!

We hope this ongoing event is something that everyone will look forward to and that it will grow into something that we just can’t do without.
Executive Committee

The Executive Committee is the governing body of ASLA Colorado and is chaired by Kurt Munding, Chapter President. The committee meets monthly to provide guidance and direction relating to the activities and finances of the association. Meetings typically occur on the first Wednesday, beginning at 5:30 pm, and are held at member offices along the Front Range. Attendees typically include voting and non-voting board members. All chapter members are welcome to attend or to participate in person or by teleconference.

The December meeting was held at the office of Land Mark Design, Denver. Under the direction of Chapter President, Kurt Munding, the committee discussed on-going chapter activities and events, including Doors Open Denver and the 2011 Lunch and Learn program. Next year, plans are to secure continuing education credits, through ASLA’s LACES program, for lunch and learn seminars.

The committee continued work on the 2011 budget, prioritizing initiatives for the upcoming year and allocating funds to meet expected costs. Discussion centered on the Lunch and Learn program, and the committee agreed to provide additional funding to the program in order to improve quality and availability through the internet. The committee passed the 2011 budget unanimously.

Volunteer opportunities for interested members are always available. If you are interested in volunteering for a committee or an event that is hosted or supported by ASLA Colorado contact Judith Ward, Volunteer Coordinator, at jward@criticalhabitat.com. For more information on current ASLA Colorado events, be sure to visit www.aslacolorado.org and review the “Calendar” tab located on the website’s title bar. To be placed on an upcoming agenda contact Kurt Munding, Chapter President, at KurtM@dcla.net. Contact information relating to Executive Committee members can be found by clicking on the “About Us” tab on the main title bar.

Government Affairs

The Government Affairs/Advocacy Committee is continuing with our compliance outreach efforts which include outreach to local government agencies, outreach to allied professions, self-enforcement, and preparing necessary records for the sunset review of the licensure act in 2017. Discussions with legislators and others during the 2010 legislative session underscored the importance of proactively approaching the sunset review process as early as possible. We have also invited representatives from the Department of Regulatory Agencies Board of Landscape Architects to future Executive Committee meetings in order to build an ongoing relationship and establish solid lines of communication between the members of the profession and our state regulators.

The “Landscape Architects Professional Licensing Act” was passed by the State in 2007. The law was passed at the State level, but, to be effective, it must also be administered at hundreds of the local government public works and planning agencies. We conducted a small survey of some of the larger municipalities in the state to learn what their current policies are with respect to the Landscape Architects Licensing Act. What we found was that recognition and implementation of the state law by city and county government agencies is inconsistent. While some have updated their codes and procedures, some jurisdictions have done nothing to implement provisions requiring landscape architects to sign and seal drawings. Many local planning and public works departments still require architects or engineers to stamp plans prepared by licensed landscape architects. As a result of these findings, we have begun an advocacy outreach program to promote our profession and educate local government agencies about the State law.

We have put together an “Advocacy Package” to be provided to key personnel at local government agencies. The package includes a letter from the president of ASLA Colorado, an 8 page promotional brochure, a copy of a letter from the Colorado State Board of Landscape Architects to local government officials encouraging compliance with the state law, and two different examples of how other communities have implemented the Licensing Act. ASLA Colorado was recently awarded a grant from ASLA National in the amount of $3,500 to cover printing and distribution expenses for the advocacy packages. ASLA Colorado will be required to provide matching funds which may be met in part through in-kind contributions. These advocacy packages will be a great tool to help us to encourage non-compliant agencies to update their codes and policies to reflect State law. Local compliance is important, not only for our profession, but also for the health safety and welfare of Colorado communities. This is a big project and our resources are limited so this is a great opportunity to get active in your own communities. Are your city and county government agencies in compliance with the state law? Let’s help them understand and implement the State Licensing Act. You can find a copy of the State Statute (C.R.S. 12-45) on the advocacy page of ASLA Colorado’s website.

ASLA Colorado meets regularly with the GreenCo Legislative Committee (and their lobbyists) to keep apprised of ongoing and upcoming issues of legislative and regulatory importance. When an urgent issue of importance arises it is conveyed to the membership as an advisory in the bi-monthly E-News Bulletin. ASLA Colorado is represented in the legislature and before state agencies by the Colorado Council of Landscape Architects. Gregory Williams of Redpoint Resources LLC, and Scott Meiklejohn of Meiklejohn Consulting LLC are under contract from December-May to monitor state legislative activity and regulatory developments. Scott Meiklejohn They also represent ASLA Colorado at meetings involving other allied organizations on new and ongoing issues of mutual concern. Neil McLane is Vice President of Government Affairs and chair of the ASLA Colorado Government Affairs committee. This committee also oversees the activities of the Colorado Council of Landscape Architects. Neil can be reached at neil@mclaneassoc.com.
You can now join ASLA Colorado on your social networks!

As part of ASLA Colorado’s commitment to connecting landscape architecture professionals, the chapter recently rolled out pages on three social media sites: Twitter, Facebook, and BlogSpot. If you are interested in following the organization, connecting with other professionals, and receiving up to the minute information on landscape architecture in the Centennial State, feel free follow the chapter via the links below.

Twitter: www.twitter.com/aslacolorado
Facebook: www.facebook.com/pages/ASLA-Colorado/139331522784018
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By Sarah Chase Shaw

She walked across the hyperbolic paraboloid vault, of course. (And she made the right choice because she was able to avoid four lanes of separated interstate highway, a high-speed rail line and a bicycle path.)

This could be the future of wildlife crossings along Interstate 70 and throughout North America if the winning entry of the first international design competition to create the next generation wildlife crossing ever gets built. The competition—officially dubbed the ARC International Wildlife Crossing Infrastructure Design Competition—attracted 36 team submissions from across nine countries, representing more than 100 firms worldwide. The five finalist teams were:

- **hntB** with Michael Van Valkenburgh & Associates (New York) with Applied Ecological Services, Inc.
- **Zwarts & Jansma Architects** (Amsterdam) with OKRA Landscape Architects, IV-infra and Planecologie.

The site of the design competition is MM 187 on West Vail Pass. It was chosen from among 25 candidates from 16 states across North America specifically because I-70, the only east-west interstate that crosses the state, poses a significant barrier to critical wildlife movement in the Southern Rocky Mountain region. The site itself is one of the toughest in the country, according to Rob Ament, the program manager for road ecology research at the Western Transportation Institute, one of the sponsors of the competition. “All of the teams had a novel approach to the solution of safety and efficiency, which is really what this project is about. The winning team looked at compression and tension using concrete. Their design has no pillars, the absence of which is a huge positive safety factor for drivers.”

**Improving Travel Safety and Reducing Road Kill**

In Banff National Park, a continuous series of 22 underpasses and two overpasses has resulted in an 80 percent reduction in total wildlife fatalities. Research on large mammals conducted here between 1996 and 2003 by Dr. Anthony Clevenger, a member of the ARC jury and a research wildlife biologist with the Western Transportation Institute, indicates that elk are the most frequent users, and prefer the overpass to the underpass. The lynx and the mountain lion prefer the underpasses, and the bears simply do not care. To date, there have been approximately 240,000 crossings (and counting) of 11 species of large mammals.
According to Rob Ament and Dr. Clevenger, there are an estimated 1-2 million collisions with large mammals in the U.S. each year. Even more staggering are the costs of these collisions. The average estimated cost of a deer-vehicle collision is $6,617, an elk-vehicle collision is $17,483, and a moose-vehicle collision is $30,760.

A wildlife overpass along the Trans-Canadian Highway in Banff National Park.

**The Competition**

Teams were tasked with providing an innovative solution that would include new and emerging uses of lightweight plastics, resins, acrylics or tensile and sculptural materials, along with contemporary wood, concrete and steel. Other important considerations include:

- Motorist Safety and maintaining an open line of sight;
- Load-bearing accommodation of high amounts of rain and snow;
- A six-lane interstate;
- An elevated commuter rail with a 34’ right-of-way;
- A minimum width of 165’ to mitigate highway noise, light, and other potential disturbances;
- Vegetative cover and surfaces that are highly attentive to animal foraging, daily and seasonal movements, breeding and dispersal;
- Detailed vegetation and microhabitat plans for the structural surface and ramps specific to, and suitable for, target species;
- Mitigation, through barriers or massing, of traffic noise, light, vibration, and visual disturbance from moving vehicles;
- Educational outreach in the form of view platforms and other interactive activities.

**The Winning Design**

HNTB with Michael Van Valkenburgh & Associates’ winning design proposes to span the highway with precast concrete panels, called a hyper-vaults. The span is devoid of a center support or pier, relying solely on tension strength. At 336’ in width, the single-span bridge is four times wider than the structures in Banff, presumably to simulate the meadows and woods of the surrounding national forest. The designers also claim that it can be built without closing the highway in both directions. One of their main ideas, as stated on the submission boards, is that outreach and education about vehicle/wildlife collisions is just as important as the actual wildlife crossing. Rather than relying on a single, physical observation point for any one bridge, the development of a digital observation platform would enable the public to observe a series of overpasses in real-time, as well as access information on particular species, habitats, and changes in migration behavior. By allowing the public to engage with the science of ecosystem adaptive management, the design would work toward a shift in society’s approach to operating in wild lands.

Robert Rock, Senior Associate for MVVA admits that his team was abit naïve about the broad implications of the issue. “Our team visited the site and honestly, we were shocked and embarrassed about how little we knew about the enormity of this issue of vehicle/animal collisions. As we delved into a solution, we took a pragmatic approach that delivers a cost-effective and economical solution. Its brute simplicity defies an iconic design solution because for us, the larger issue is outreach and education about the extent of this issue. If we can solve an $8 billion problem with a $10 million bridge, we feel like we’ve done our part to educate a large part of our population about the hazards inherent in vehicle/wildlife collisions.

The winning entry from HNTB and MVVA is made of lightweight precast concrete panels that are snapped into place.

**Other Design Solutions**

The team of Balmori Associates took a carbon-neutral approach, using locally available beetle-kill trees to create an easily modifiable shape. Valerie Yaw, principle of the Aspen-based landscape architecture firm Bluegreen says, “We wanted to create a template that is transferable, but gets improved after each installation. We chose wood because it is available everywhere, and any tradesperson can work with it.” The crossing itself is a structure derived from the abstraction of the topographical layers in the surrounding landscape. The final result is an expression that resembles a single block of wood.
Using a series of curves as the main organizing element, the Dutch architecture firm of Zwarts & Jansma looked to the surrounding landscape in the creation of a ‘Landshape’ form that contains its users, while simultaneously embracing the highway landscape.

Finally, in a radical departure from the other submissions, the Toronto-based team of Janet Rosenberg & Associates proposed a structure with multiple landings that build variation into the single crossing. In this case, there are eighteen different ways to cross the bridge which is lined by a series of red laminated wood core fiberglass composite modular decking panels. Dr. Temple Grandin, a professor of animal science at Colorado State University, proposed the multiple crossing options because animals are creatures of habit. “They are sensory-based thinkers and very aware of contrast and rapid movement. The high panels (proposed in this option) shield the lights and movement from the vehicles below. If their first experience crossing a bridge is good, they are likely to do it again.”

While the state has no immediate plans to build a crossing structure, the competition has succeeded in inspiring local and national conversations about the issues of road safety and animal welfare. In addition, the varying solutions presented suggest that there are plenty of ways to combine science, engineering and design into a workable and aesthetically intriguing bit of transportation design.

Sarah Chase Shaw is a landscape architect and free-lance writer. After receiving a master’s degree in landscape architecture from Cornell University, she began her career as a landscape architect at Design Workshop in Aspen. She is the author of New Gardens of the American West: Residential Landscapes of Design Workshop (2003) and Garden Legacy (2010), a second compendium of residential landscapes by Design Workshop. Other recent work by Sarah can be seen in Urban Land, Garden Design, and Western Art & Architecture. She lives in Aspen and can be reached at sarahshaw@sopris.net.
By Susan McCabe

The momentum is building for COMPLETE STREETS. Hundreds of national and international organizations and public interest groups seem to be converging with one common goal, making streets safe and useable by everyone. Advocate groups representing all sectors (children, people with disabilities, elderly) and societal concerns (health, public transportation, environment, climate change, economic revitalization, gas prices, safety, transportation costs, congestion, livable communities, sustainable development, and green streets) are speaking out about Complete Streets. (Resources documenting the needs of these groups and issues as they pertain to safe, accessible streets can be found at www.completestreets.org under the heading of Complete Streets Fundamentals and Fact Sheet).

Information is plentiful. In fact, the amount of information on why we need Complete Streets and what they should look like and include is almost overwhelming. From Indiana’s, www.healthybydesignonline.org to www.worldstreets.com, one website leads to another and then to another. But all this information buries the mostly unanswered question of how? How do Complete Streets and the goals of a healthier, more sustainable, walkable, bikeable, friendlier, pedestrian oriented and more attractive city or community become reality? What are the forces behind making Complete Streets more than just pie in the sky wishful thinking? Especially in existing areas that have been planned and developed for automobile convenience?

Legislation and policy changes are one piece of the puzzle. In the US, the National Complete Streets Coalition is monitoring this and currently 203 jurisdictions across the country have adopted Complete Streets legislation or policies. At the Federal Level, the Complete Streets Act of 2009 is still being considered and if passed, will require that every State and Department of Transportation have a law to accommodate the safety and convenience of all users and follow Complete Streets principles for federally funded projects. In Colorado, the State (2010) and Department of Transportation (2009) have already added the following language to State Statute 43-1-120 and the DOT-Bicycle and Pedestrian Policy:

“The needs of bicyclists and pedestrians shall be included in the planning, design, and operation of transportation facilities, as a matter of routine.”

Though public policy and legislation will help the effort to make streets safer and accommodate all users, it might be only part of the answer. If we look closely at various cities and communities, we find that some have had a “complete streets” mentality, with planning and development that reflect it, long before the words “Complete Streets” became so prominent in the planning vocabulary. Is there something special at work in these communities that needs to be examined and encouraged as we move forward? To begin answering this question, I investigated and interviewed people from a planning department in a city that is considered a
forerunner in transportation planning and encouraging/accommodating all modes of travel: Boulder, Colorado. In fact, during the past twenty years Boulder has won over two dozen awards and is one of three cities honored by the League of American Bicyclists at the platinum level for bicycle friendliness.

In Boulder, rethinking their transportation system began in the mid 1980’s when “community leaders recognized that the City’s overall transportation approach was out of sync with other City goals” (Transportation to Sustain a Community, a progress report by the Boulder Transportation Department). With community input, a Transportation Master Plan was developed and adopted in 1989 guided by the goal of “preserving what makes Boulder a good place to live by minimizing auto congestion, air pollution, and noise.” Over the years, changes have occurred to the plan but the initial goal of encouraging other modes of transportation to accommodate increased travel while not increasing road widths has worked. Today the people of Boulder “ride the bus three times the national average, walk twice as much, and bicycle twenty times the national average.” (Transportation to Sustain a Community…). And I wouldn’t be surprised if they were much healthier than the national average too.

This original Transportation Master Plan has evolved. Instead of separating modes of transportation, Boulder began developing the streets for multi-modal travel to accommodate all users, especially the major corridors through town. Boulder’s 28th street, US Highway 36, is a good example. What used to be a seven lane highway designed for moving cars is now a multi-modal and aesthetically pleasing street, designed for pedestrians, bicyclists, buses, automobiles, and people gathering. The cost to do this is substantial, but Boulder has worked with partners leveraging funds from federal and state sources, and because of the wide range of benefits to the people of Boulder, the community supports and continues to support these types of projects as well. It seems, at least in Boulder’s transportation history, that once the momentum started for developing and encouraging alternate modes of transportation, the ball just kept on rolling. Planners, however, are quick to point out that (fortunately) Boulder really had few choices. Being a mature community, the cost of widening streets to accommodate increased traffic and the unwillingness to sacrifice valuable trees, historic buildings, and quality neighborhoods, led Boulder down the path to alternative transportation modes. A path chosen by the community long before it became the enlightened choice of most transportation plans today.

As streets are transformed from transportation corridors to life-lines through the community, they are providing places for people to gather and connect. Through the Sustainable Streets and Centers (SS+C) project, a planning project initiated last year to better integrate transportation and land use, Boulder is investigating innovative design concepts to insure buildings are sited to create street frontage in mixed land use environments where streets are complete,
One of the objectives behind the SS+C project is to recognize streets as significant public spaces and the focal point of community life, in addition to providing mobility. And this concept is the impetus behind a new street prototype project being developed in Boulder Junction, a future mixed-use, transit rich redevelopment area.

Concepts being explored include designs taken from development practices in the Netherlands (woonerf, street concept). A woonerf, (or woonerven) is a Dutch street design developed in the 1970s for mostly residential areas in which pedestrians and cyclists have priority over cars. It is intended to create safe streets for all modes while also serving as gathering places and play areas for children. In the proposed design for new streets like Junction Place and existing streets like Pearl Parkway, to the extent possible, streets will be shared by all modes of transportation with few signs, traffic signals or delineation of territory. A planted median will separate two center lanes providing access for through traffic while planted medians on either side separate the local streets from the through lanes. The local lanes are proposed as a woonerf where the street is shared by all and the building entrances step up from the lane. Planting areas run along the fronts of the buildings, surrounding the steps. The street becomes a public place, defined by the “quality of the space and the variety of functions.”

The philosophy behind a woonerf design is “cars look out for cyclists, cyclists look out for pedestrians, and everyone looks out for each other” (Hans Moderman). Of course, the success of the woonerf street concept, and complete streets for that matter, depends on people being willing to share the street. In other areas of Boulder, past innovative efforts have supported the perception of roadways being for people and not just for vehicles, including; working with community neighbors and partners to convert parking spaces into bike racks, conducting “paint the pavement” art projects on neighborhood streets, and holding car-free events in the street.

Perhaps the rest of the “how” in developing complete streets ultimately resides in the ability to share, as Boulder has so perfectly modeled. First sharing ideas, knowledge, and concepts; then sharing solutions based on many people’s input; next, sharing or leveraging funding and resources to implement the solutions; after this sharing public spaces, streets, and centers; and finally sharing the responsibility for becoming a truly livable, healthy, community. (Through efforts like GO Boulder—which started when the TMP was adopted and now has 450 volunteer employee transportation coordinators at 230 businesses. Maybe Boulder has just mastered the art of sharing better than most. The editor of the online journal, World Streets—“the planet’s only independent sustainable transport weekly”, discusses sharing in an interview conducted by the editor of Mobility magazine, “Sharing is not an option: it is critical for sustainable development. In a world of seven billion people, we have no choice but to get better at sharing. It’s a survival strategy…

Although car sharing, bike sharing, ride sharing, and taxi sharing are all very much in the air, street sharing is probably the best example of the concept….To understand street sharing, we need to recognize that public space has many different users— from pedestrians, roller blades and cyclists, to people chatting, peddlers, and children playing…it all depends on the politics of town and city councils: whether their goal is to channel cars through a city as fast as possible, or perhaps something else.” (Mobility, January 20, 2011)

Boulder has, and hopefully one day all communities will, discover the value of “something else.” Maybe the concept of Complete Streets is the catalyst needed to encourage all sectors of society and multiple interest groups to work together for a common cause. Take a moment and imagine your neighborhood street as a place. An enjoyable place full of movement and activity, as children, adults, the elderly, the physically challenged, bicyclists, and autos move towards a nearby center, open space, transit station, or neighboring community. Everyone safe, all modes accommodated, and all streets interconnected—a true lifeline pulsing through the community.

Susan McCabe is a licensed landscape architect with over 30 years of experience. She has been self-employed for 18 years and has a BLA from the University of Illinois and an MA in Urban Design from the University of Colorado. Susan is also a Master Gardener and fitness instructor. Her sweetest and most challenging “projects” are her three children: Conor, Grant, and Megan.
Despite a lax economy and ailing state budget, Colorado continues to attract hordes of newcomers. In the past 10 years, nearly 730,000 more people called Colorado home, according to preliminary U.S. census data. With more than half of the population concentrated in the Denver metro area, the region’s high quality of life is threatened as more people compete for limited resources.

Fortunately, the Denver area and the state have a solid foundation in regional planning efforts. For decades, state and local government agencies, public utilities, and non-profits have reached across geographic boundaries and political jurisdictions to ensure predictable and equitable access to our basic needs—transportation, shelter, and clean energy, air and water, as well as whole foods.

Here’s a summary of regional planning activities in the Denver metro area and the state that contribute to making Colorado an attractive place to natives and transplants.

**Affordable Transportation & Housing**

FasTracks is the best example of regional planning in Colorado. Led by the Regional Transportation District, the country’s largest transit expansion program promises 122 miles of new light rail and commuter rail radiating from downtown Denver to the suburbs. When complete the program will provide increased mobility to those who rely on mass transit while giving an alternative to others who simply don’t want to drive.

Unfortunately, inflation has pushed project costs from an expected $4.7 billion to $6.7 billion, and declining sales tax revenues fail to cover the gap. Despite budget woes, the program is progressing. Construction has begun on the West Corridor to Golden and financing has been secured for the East Corridor to DIA. The transformation of Union Station is also well under way. But if the entire project is to be completed before the end of the decade, RTD needs to renew the strong political support the project garnered when voters approved it in 2004. At the time, the Metro Mayors Caucus, which represents 32 Denver area municipalities, unanimously supported FasTracks. Recently, however, the Caucus failed to advise RTD of its support for another tax increase for the project, proposed to be put to voters in 2011 or 2012.

Regardless of FasTracks progression, demand for affordable housing near transit stations is expected to soar. To this end, the Metro Mayor’s Caucus has partnered with the Colorado Housing and Finance Authority to help build multi-family rental units near transit stations. The Caucus has been working since 1996 to secure low-interest mortgages and down-payment assistance to first-time homebuyers with low and moderate incomes and uses a revolving loan fund to preserve, rehabilitate, and build affordable housing.
Clean Air & Energy

The Denver metro area has long struggled to reduce its ground level ozone air pollution to comply with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s air quality standards, which will tighten this year. Cleaning up our air requires a three-pronged approach that addresses emissions from vehicles, industry, and energy generation.

The Colorado Air Pollution Control Division, the Regional Air Quality Council and the North Front Range Metropolitan Planning Organization jointly completed an Ozone Action Plan in 2008. Per that plan’s recommendations, the state is expanding vehicle emissions testing, begun in 1995, from Adams, Arapahoe, Boulder, Broomfield, Denver, Douglas, and Jefferson counties to Larimer and Weld counties. Besides being a boon to residents’ lungs, the measure is good news for Rocky Mountain National Park, more than half of which is located in Larimer County. The park has been plagued for years with elevated ozone levels, poor visibility, and nitrogen deposition caused by metro area air pollution, potentially harming the park’s ecosystem.

The brown cloud looming over the region may further dissipate with Governor Ritter’s push for a new energy economy that stresses conservation and efficiency alongside clean energy expansion. Last spring Ritter signed a clean-air bill requiring Xcel Energy, the state’s largest provider of electricity, to convert several Front Range power plants from coal to natural gas. The switch will cost the coal industry jobs while increasing energy bills, but the long-term benefits likely outweigh such costs.

Xcel Energy couldn’t say the same about its Smart Grid pilot project in Boulder. Launched two years ago, the Smart Grid showed promise as a means to save energy via digital technology that allows the energy provider and its customers to remotely monitor and alter usage. Unfortunately, the system won’t be expanded or repeated as project costs have nearly tripled to $44.8 million.

Water & Food

Regional water planning is a monumental task in our semi-arid climate, where we depend mostly on snowmelt to meet the needs of residents, businesses, and farms. While 85 percent of the water used in Colorado goes to agriculture, the rest is meted out to more than five million people by myriad water utilities, of which Denver Water is the largest.

Established in 1918, Denver Water collects, stores, treats, and distributes water to 1.3 million people and cooperates with 76 suburban water distributors who supply residents outside of Denver. Today’s metro water supply depends on diversions of streamflow into an intricate network of tunnels, canals, ditches, and reservoirs, many on U.S. Forest Service lands. In an innovative partnership, Denver Water recently forged with the U.S. Forest Service to remove trees killed by the mountain pine beetle, thus reducing risks of wildfire and soil erosion that threaten the health of watersheds.

As more water is diverted to cities, many non-profit organizations like Colorado Open Lands and the Colorado Cattlemen Agricultural Land Trust strive to protect agricultural land from residential and commercial development. In addition, a growing awareness of food deserts in urban areas is contributing to an increase in community gardens. The non-profit Denver Urban Gardens has helped establish over 90 community gardens in neighborhoods and at schools throughout the metropolitan area, most of which are located in low-income areas with poor access to whole foods.

Libby Kaiser is a planner and writer in Denver with several years of experience working on TOD plans and the revitalization of downtowns and commercial corridors. She is currently collaborating with planning and design firm Entelechy and the City of Wheat Ridge to develop a “complete street” approach for 38th Avenue.
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A lack of political commitment and a shortage of green skills are pushing urban landscaping down the pecking order despite the potential benefits it offers for improving local quality of life. Every so often, a profession with links to planning feels that it gets insufficient attention and campaigns for more recognition of the benefits it can bring. Last year was the turn of landscape architecture, a normally low-profile field. November saw the launch of CABE’s Grey to Green landscape campaign, which calls for a switch in spending from asphalt and concrete to green infrastructure. The government’s design adviser recognises that an overall increase in infrastructure spending is unlikely in the present climate. Earlier in the year, a separate CABE report called for action on an emerging skills shortage in landscaping. Meanwhile, the Landscape Institute published a policy statement on “connected and multifunctional landscapes” while the Horticultural Trades Association (HTA) weighed in with a view on local authorities’ commitment to planting in urban areas. Plenty of people think that landscape architects need to shout louder to secure a larger share of reduced infrastructure and regeneration budgets. But another big motivation is that landscape architects feel their work is not well understood among planners, never mind anyone else.

“Landscape architects and planners work together well and there is a natural affinity between us, but the main problem is that some people see us as gardeners,” says Landscape Institute president Neil Williamson, head of environmental design at New Forest District Council. “This is a common misconception.

“I have only done one garden in my career. We are more like urban designers. What we do is part of the work of creating places.”

CABE’s green infrastructure campaign is based on the assumption that investment in the environment pays for itself many times over. It points to cities in Europe and North America that “are taking the idea of green infrastructure from something that is nice to have to something that is fundamental to the way we prosper.”

CABE argues that in many towns and cities, green infrastructure is often neglected and poorly connected and says green spaces are “more often seen as a liability and burden on the public purse than the way to deliver critical environmental services.”

Well-planned green infrastructure can deliver not just more pleasant environments but also ones in which people may be readier to shun their cars, it insists. But CABE also recognises that it needs to make a stronger case than simply saying landscaping is attractive. It points to the possibility of a working landscape with living roofs, large trees and soft landscape areas to absorb heavy rainfall, unculverted rivers that can safely manage large volumes of water and green spaces that can offer flood protection.

“Local authority planners need to join up the planning, design and management of open spaces. Landscape architects are the people who can pull it all together in a strategic way, so there is an open space plan in the local development framework written by people who understand the local landscape,” says CABE head of public space management and best practice Nicole Collomb.

Collomb argues that landscape architects directly employed by councils are best placed to accomplish this. “There are a lot in the public sector but they may not be doing a landscape architect’s job. They may be part of the general management or are not used as we would like to see them used,” she argues. “The privatisation of local authority services in the 1980s meant that a lot of professionals
were lost to the public sector.” She recognises that councils can buy in expertise from the private sector, but points out that consultants may lack a detailed knowledge of the place. “You can get a landscape architect from a big city who doesn’t know the local context.

“The best solution is locally employed landscape architects,” she advises. But where can they be found? With just 5,000 to 6,000 qualified personnel in the UK, the need to fill current and future skill gaps in the profession is pressing.

CABE’s survey of 54 councils last year found that more than two-thirds feel that a lack of horticultural skills is affecting overall service delivery. It also cites a Homes and Communities Agency survey - admittedly conducted before the recession—which found labour shortages of more than 90 per cent in some places in landscape architecture and urban design.

Even where professionals are in place, the position is not ideal. “In reality, green space managers are rarely in sufficiently senior positions to provide the comprehensive management needed to deliver an integrated network of green infrastructure across an area. In essence, we don’t have the practical or leadership skills to deliver our ambitions for green infrastructure or to maximise its potential,” says CABE.

Like planning, landscape architecture has never really recovered from the 1990s recession. People left the profession or chose not to enter it, leaving a gap in experience. CABE fears a repeat in this recession and say a minimum of 550 new entrants a year are needed on landscape courses. The Landscape Institute has put a lot of effort into marketing the profession to students. According to Williamson, the sector attracts a good number of adults changing career to something that “offers a satisfying mix of art and science”.

Collomb concludes: “Green infrastructure is the lifeblood of cities, yet it gets overlooked in strategic plans and there is a lack of skills. Our campaign will focus on these skills to get chief executives and councillors to respond to the need to invest in them.”

There is plenty of need. A survey conducted for CABE by PricewaterhouseCoopers in a sample of councils shows that green spending accounted at best for 4.3 per cent of budgets. Yet climate change, health, waste disposal and local distinctiveness would all benefit from an increase in investment in green infrastructure, the Landscape Institute argues. Its policy statement calls for a fundamental shift in land-use planning that would see “the embedding of green infrastructure policy at the national, regional, sub-regional and local level”. If this happens, it insists, councils might be more ready to take action where developers ignore planning conditions related to landscaping.

Landscape architects Whitelaw Turkington director Lindsey Whitelaw notes that projects have often fallen foul of CABE’s design reviews because of deficiencies in the appearance of public realm space. “There is a tradition in this country dating back to Capability Brown in which we associate landscapes with gardens. But it is more about designing the environment in which a building or buildings will sit,” she says.

As the recession has hit property development, landscape architecture has acquired a new role. “If a group of buildings is built, but only some have been completed and the others cannot be started, we can go in and for quite a low cost create a landscape that will make the area look good and not leave the completed buildings isolated. Once development starts again that can be incorporated into the project,” Whitelaw explains.

Latz & Partners senior landscape architect Mischa Ickstadt is working for the London Development Agency on a park that will run the length of the River Lee from the 2012 Olympics site to the Thames. “The idea is that the park goes in first as a spur to regeneration of the area,” he says. “But on most projects, the landscape budget is the first thing to go.”

It’s obvious that the landscaping industry has its own interests at heart in pressing for a switch in funding from grey infrastructure to green. Yet this is in line with the drift of public policy on climate change and could get more of a political wind behind it than it currently enjoys. Planners who want high-quality landscaping will have to hope that the industry can overcome its skills shortage to help them with this task.

Mark Smulian is a freelance journalist in London, UK, writing about planning, housing, the environment, local government, regeneration, construction, retail, business travel, law and transport, among other things. He also edits material into publishable English for various UK public and private sector bodies.

PlanningResource.co.uk is the most authoritative and up-to-date website in the United Kingdom for planning professionals. A dedicated team writes about the very latest in housing and regeneration, energy and environment, economic development and business. Planning has been a resource for almost 40 years and is the place to go to for all the latest news, analysis, changes in policy and legislation affecting the UK.
It’s been two and a half years since the financial crisis crippled the global economy. During the long slump that’s followed, the architecture, design, and construction sectors have threatened to hit bottom over and over, but a real recovery, which would signal a final flattening out, never seems to materialize. While some firms show signs of stabilization—but only after massive job shedding in 2008 and 2009, and largely thanks to projects in China and the Middle East—most practitioners are just eking by.

In the spring of 2009, I interviewed AIA chief economist Kermit Baker for a piece in Architect magazine, on the likely prospects for young architects graduating into a recession. Based on figures from previous recessions, Baker painted a grim picture, and I wrote:

“Baker cites figures from the U.S. Department of Labor website: from the peak of employment in July 1990 to the lowest point in January 1993, 14.6 percent of positions at architecture firms were eliminated. The 30-month trough outlasted the overall national recession, which ended in late 1992. Baker notes that the downturn early in this decade is recorded as lasting from March through December 2001, but there was no upturn in design activity until 2004 and construction picked up only in late 2004 and 2005—a chilling four years down to generate four subsequent years of growth.”

The sluggish return we’re now experiencing seems discouragingly consistent with Baker’s models. If we follow his timeline, there’s still another couple of years left before we can expect any recovery within the design professions; and once we do, the profession will look like nothing we’ve ever seen before. So, what to do in the interim? Wringing hands over the misdirected funding and lost opportunities of the stimulus package is simply depressing.

In which case, here’s the question: what’s the operational mode of the bust? Previous economic crises have offered up examples: paper architecture, the growth of theoretical and artistic practice, in the 1970s and ’80s; the lost generation, young designers leaving the architecture for virtual realms, in the ’90s; and paperless architecture, the rise of formal digital experimentation, in the early ’00s.

Our current recession is inspiring its own strategies and tactics: it’s increasingly a catch-all for a host of urban interventions. This is a trend that I like to describe with a mouthful of a title: Provisional, Opportunistic, Ubiquitous, and Odd Tactics in Guerilla and DIY Practice and Urbanism. With this verbaciousness, I hope to capture the tactical multiplicity and inventive thinking that have cropped up in the vacuum of more conventional commissions. These days vacant lots offer sites for urban farming, mini-golf, and dumpster pools. Trash recycles into a speculative housing prototype (see the Tiny Pallet House). Whether it’s The Living’s Amphibious Architecture or Mark Shepard’s Serendipitor, the built environment speaks through mobile devices. Retail spaces hit by the recession are fodder for reinvention, as the art organization No Longer Empty transforms leased storefronts into temporary galleries. Even the street itself is reclaimed. REBAR’s annual initiative, Park(ing) Day, urges global participants to use a pranksters wit to turn parking spaces into pocket parks, one quarter at a time.

Driven by local and community issues and intended as polemics that question conventional practice, these projects reflect an ad hoc way of working; they are motivated more by grassroots activism than by the kind of home-ec craft projects (think pickling, IKEA-hacking and knitting) sponsored by mainstream shelter media, usually under the Do-It-Yourself rubric. (Although they do slot nicely into the imperative-heavy pages of Good and Make magazines.) They are often produced by emerging architects, artists and urbanists working outside professional boundaries but nonetheless engaging questions of the built environment and architecture culture. And the works reference edge-condition practitioners of earlier generations who also faced shifts within the profession and recessionary outlooks: Gordon Matta-Clark, Archigram, Ant Farm, the early Diller + Scofidio, among others.

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It’s a sentiment that brings to mind some countercultural activities of previous eras, such as The Real Estate Show, a 1980 exhibition staged inside an abandoned building in the Lower East Side, which addressed local housing and land use issues and led to the founding of the punk rock space ABC No Rio. In The Real Estate Show’s manifesto, the artist-populated committee laid out the mission:

This is a short-term occupation of vacant city-managed property. The action is extralegal—it illuminates no legal issues, calls for no “rights.” It is pre-emptive and insurrectionary…

The intention of this action is to show that artists are willing and able to place themselves and their work squarely in a context which shows solidarity with oppressed people, a recognition that mercantile and institutional structures oppress and distort artists’ lives and works, and a recognition that artists, living and working in depressed communities, are compradors in the revaluation of property and the “whitening” of neighborhoods.

It is important to focus attention on the way artists get used as pawns by greedy white developers...

The alphabet city occupation took place at time when downtown Manhattan was a clearly a different, rougher and edgier place; yet the artists’ actions do set a precedent for the more conventional, commercial pop-ups that we’re seeing a lot of these days, where fashion brands and trendy retailers temporarily lease a commercial storefront. [A] 1980 video captures artists who are taking risks to exhibit art (the building was shut down by the police as a result of the show) and taking a stand for social justice (the older exhibition argued that given a housing crisis derelict buildings should be reused).

More recently, these kind of interventionist practices were collected in smaller shows on the West Coast: Unplanned, shown at Superfront LA, and DIY Urbanism: Testing the Grounds for Social Change, presented at the San Francisco Planning + Urban Research Association, or SPUR. Superfront founder Mitch McEwen considers the exhibition catalogue for Unplanned a kind of textbook for new interventionist practice. In describing the show, she evokes the language of counterculture (utopian and dystopian) sourcebooks such as The Whole Earth Catalog and The Anarchist’s Cookbook. This how-to immediacy is echoed in the introductory text that curator Ruth Keffer wrote for DIY Urbanism:

who: you
what: change
where: the city
when: now
how: do it yourself

Part invitation, part journalistic checklist, Keffer’s text sounds a revolutionary note with that now—as in response to the ‘60s chant, When do we want it? Her call to action is an inescapable and essential tactic of the recessionary condition. "The current economic crisis has proven to be more than a challenge to our wallets: it has tested our faith in personal agency and our optimism in the future," Keffer writes. Challenging the global downturn with fierce localism and references to the history of social activism, she continues, “But this malaise has met its match in the Bay Area, where a spirit of fierce independence has always thrived. Here the bad economy has a silver lining: it has reinvigorated and mobilized the community of do-it-yourself urbanists.”

Clearly, a down market requires a hustler’s skill and a grassroots dedication to practice. To cite an example from DIY Urbanism: the unsanctioned, temporary street furniture, placed on West Oakland and Los Angeles sidewalks to form the project “Outdoor Living Rooms,” was, according to Keffer, routinely hauled off by city officials who cited the need for permits and insurance. Designed by The West Oakland Greening Project and Steve Rasmussen-Cancian, of Shared Spaces Landscape Architecture, these pocket parks were located in urban neighborhoods generally seen as hotbeds of crime and drug use; as such they offer frontline resistance to charges of loitering, drawing instead on the tradition of neighbors gathering on stoops and at street corners. In a 2007 story in Designer Builder magazine, Rasmussen-Cancian posited street furniture as a defense against West Oakland’s gentrification. 
“Gentrifiers and the diverse longtime residents they displace have very different ideas about what makes an inviting, attractive neighborhood,” he says. “Experience and studies show that working-class urban residents view the street as the center of the neighborhood, the place to hang out, to socialize, and to watch the passing scene. In contrast, most middle- and upper-class gentrifiers are looking for a quiet street as a gateway to their homes.”

Although city codes prohibited placing the semi-permanent furniture on the sidewalk, the persistence of neighborhood activists and designers eventually won over the municipal watchdogs.

Still, there’s a tendency to dismiss these kinds of projects as simply whimsical—to smile at their authenticity or their expression of clever détournement, but at the same time to suppress any uncomfortable restive rumblings. But these projects hold at their heart a belief that change is possible despite economic or political obstacles, or disciplinary or institutional inertia. And the prospect for real change builds as more and more works accumulate in exhibition catalogues and digital venues. Broadcast via Facebook, Tumblr, Twitter and design blogs, these new temporary or provisional projects can be read relationally to each other without explicit contextual concerns.

Notes

Mimi Zeiger is editor and publisher of Loud Paper, a zine and blog dedicated to increasing the volume of architectural discourse. She is a former senior editor of Architecture magazine and author of New Museums: Contemporary Museum Architecture Around the World.
DENVER, Colorado – On November 23, 2010, studioINSITE celebrated with the Downtown Denver Partnership, Denver Public Works, Denver City Council and the District Advisory Board as they broke ground on the 14th Street streetscape improvement effort. The project includes twelve blocks of 14th Street, from Market Street to Colfax Avenue. A monumental improvement for Downtown Denver, 14th Street is being heralded by Tami Door, President and CEO of the Downtown Denver Partnership, as “the most significant groundbreaking since the 16th Street Mall was created in 1982.”

This endeavor marks the birth of a new cultural district for downtown Denver: The Ambassador Street. Located in the center of the Denver Theatre District, along major hotels, in front of the Denver Convention Center and along the lightrail corridor, 14th Street has already become a gateway for downtown visitors. This identity will be solidified with the help of public and private capital investments and the tremendous work of the 14th Street design team.

studioINSITE is honored to be a part of this collaborative process as urban designer/landscape architects, joining PB Americas, CRL & Associates, Arthouse Design, Clanton Associates and HydroSystems-KDI, Inc. and Concrete Works of Colorado, the project’s general contractor.

The project is being funded as a public-private partnership with a $10 million voter-approved Better Denver Bond program along with $4 million in contributions from property-owners. The 14th Street improvements will be extensive and will significantly improve the overall ambience of this critical gateway. They include a dedicated bike lane, sidewalks and intersection enhancements and at least 150 trees along with raised granite planters and planting. 14th Street will also be lined with improved signage and lighting, bicycle racks, combination trash/recycling bins and monuments and pedestrian kiosks.
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