

DAGchair : June 7, 2012

JUNE 7 2012

This is an anecdotal account of the last meeting written by the chair, to be published each month. These notes are intended to update people who were not able to attend the meeting. They are not intended to be minutes. If anyone has items to add or correct, please contact me. It is also intended to be a heads up about current and upcoming DAG issues. As always, tips, gossip and ideas are welcome.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The History of Great Architecture in Philadelphia as Told Through Postcards will open at the Center for Architecture on July 30. Early glimpses of the postcards show great images that you will not want to miss. As part of the exhibit, we will celebrate the tenth anniversary of DAG during Design Philadelphia, October 10 – 14.

Feet First Philly is a pedestrian advocacy group sponsored by the Clean Air Council. Their first project is to work on traffic signal timing at dangerous intersections. The group welcomes new participants. It meets at 6 PM on the third Monday of the month at Suite 300, 135 South 19th Street, phone 215-567-4004.

Last summer's pop-up garden by the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society will be featured at the 2012 International Venice Architecture Biennale, a very prestigious gig indeed!

The Historical Commission voted in favor of demolition of two historically certified buildings on the site of the Episcopal Cathedral. David Brownlee sees this as a "slippery slope issue". In an unusual move, the developer's lawyer cited the "public good" section of the preservation ordinance, rather than using the usual hardship argument. Given the vagueness of the public good section, and the myriad cases where this argument could be applied, we have decided to do our August DAG meeting around the issue of the public good in preservation.

Look for DAGchair in Participate section of Plan Philly. Re the proposed land bank legislation in City Council - I'll keep you posted over the summer.

INGA SAFFRON

Before becoming the Inquirer's architecture critic in 2000, Inga spent several years as a foreign correspondent for the paper, based in Belgrade and Moscow. While abroad, she covered two wars and witnessed the destruction of Sarajevo and Grozny, two events that strongly influenced her thinking about cities. She has also written for Metropolis and Dwell magazines. As a Loeb Fellow at Harvard Graduate School of Design, Inga's work delved into how cities can retain their distinct identities in a globalized, interconnected world, while remaining viable places to work and live.

Since we always caution our guests from the press that our meetings are off the record, it would not be fair to report too specifically on Inga's presentation. I will just jot down a few of my impressions.

- Inga characterized her fellow Loeb Fellows as being all troublemakers. We should be honored to have a Philadelphian chosen, and we should foster future informed, insightful troublemakers in our midst and send them off to Cambridge to learn how to make even more trouble.
- We might take some lessons for Philadelphia from Vancouver, and value our density and our old buildings. They seem to have done everything right on the waterfront in Vancouver, but partly because so many apartments owned by foreign investors sit empty, the density doesn't match the infrastructure. They also wiped out all of the old buildings, and wiped out a lot of the vigor and excitement we expect from cities.
- Inga and I were in India at about the same time this winter. Inga visited Mumbai, an exciting and unruly city of 20 million in a space the size of New York City. She came back wondering how many rules are too many rules? I came back replaying in my mind a twenty minute scene of gridlock on a narrow street that involved a few cars, some bicycles, cows and pedestrians, and a parked Vespa. There was no road rage, no F words or guns drawn - just people working together to get the clearances right. Finally someone moved the Vespa six inches, and the traffic jam untangled.

• Back in Philadelphia, we're on the cusp of a building boom, but we're not there yet. In the meantime, it seems that the city is saying yes to everything because times are tough. • What do we do right in Philadelphia? We're out ahead on storm water management and bike lanes. Most importantly, it's just a great place to live.

JULY MEETING

Michael Ytterberg from BLT and his client from Aquinas Realty Partners will join us to talk about their building at 2021 Chestnut Street. We will also discuss further our plans for the August meeting about preservation and announce a couple of new DAG initiatives.

As always, thanks to you all for your interest, time and energy.

Kiki Bolender

DAG Chair

kiki@bolenderarchitects.com