



“CanU5 Leadership Summit Shines in Halifax”

September 27-29, 2013, Halifax, NS

The Canadian Council of Urbanism’s fifth annual summit, CanU5, took place in Halifax, Nova Scotia and was jointly hosted by the Dalhousie University and the Lord Nelson Hotel. Delegates heard from city building leaders with a variety of experience and backgrounds. As with previous summits, the majority of delegates represented planning, urban design or architectural backgrounds, making for lively debates and challenging questions.

Mike Savage, mayor of Halifax, welcomed guests at City Hall for the opening reception. Mayor Savage also provided the opening remarks for Saturday afternoon’s Leaders in City Building keynote. Following the opening reception at City Hall, delegates were treated to a lovely evening cruise aboard the Harbour Queen. The staff at Murphy’s served lobster, mussels, chowder, salmon, and cocktails during the sunset cruise up Halifax’s Harbor’s north arm.

Saturday was kicked off by Luc Oulette, senior planner at Halifax Regional Municipality. Mr.Oulette presented Halifax’s vision for their harbourfront, including a brief outline of the ‘Rampart Plane’ building height restriction and density bonusing system. Accompanying Mr.Oulette was Andy Fillmore, who presented the HRM By Design Plan: development, tribulations, process and eventual adoption.

The following session, aptly entitled Tactical Urbanism, gave grassroots organizations a chance to present their work while challenging delegates to think about how exactly it is we integrate and interact with our community on a day to day scale. Paul H of Halifax told the story of a dozen or so picnic tables, inexpensively purchased and brightly painted, that quickly became beacons of community activity and summertime fun. Jamie Melrose endearingly presented a Halifax area high school’s field, no longer in use, turned urban farm. Flash Park demonstrated alternate uses for parking spaces, such as a Friday afternoon gathering on AstroTurf, complete with lawn chairs, umbrellas and conversation. Sarah Craig, founder of the recent Halifax startup, **i ♥ bikes**, proved that the market exists for a great community-oriented bike shop, even in cities that have little to no official bike infrastructure.

Joyce Drohan of P+W looked at turning large malls inside out during her presentation of some of the most well known destination malls in the country. Several case studies acknowledged the significant role these major malls can play in anchoring new higher density communities and suggested ways to renegotiate how we move around and through these spaces.

The keynote event, entitled “City Building Leaders’ Panel” brought together the expertise of three of the country’s top city builders: Nancy Shoiry, Montreal’s Planning Director, Brent Toderian, former Chief Planner of the City of Vancouver, and Jennifer Keesmaat, current Chief Planner of Toronto. All touched upon the importance of vision to good leadership and the conviction required to really pursue one’s goals. They were unanimous in their view that citizens need to be listened to and understood, but not necessarily obeyed; part of being an expert is knowing when to intervene and steer. They debated leadership within the workplace, as all three lead large teams in large cities. Brent stated his belief that a good leader supports their team and cares about their growth and development, even when (or especially when) they have to over-rule them, and Jennifer stressed that chief planners are there to lead and require a team that follows the vision put forth. Having a strong sense of community came across as a necessary part of leadership. Knowing your values and sticking to them was another point that all three brought.

Saturday evening closed out with a reception at the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia. Chief Curator Sarah Fillmore led guests through the work of five artists up for this year’s Sobey Art Award. The tour was followed by a pecha kucha format roster of presentations on varying themes: Daniel ___ presented a dive motel turned affordable community housing in Abbotsford, BC; Mark Guslits gave a brief bio of moving to and from snowy Winnipeg, MB and the ‘best job ever’ as part of the architecture department at the Guinness Brewery, and Alex Taranu focused on the integration of built heritage into the development of contemporary urbanism.

Sunday morning saw delegates back at Dalhousie University for “Canadian Urbanism Coast to Coast” presented by the CanU Board – an ever popular overview of the best examples of urbanism across the country. Ken Greenberg preceded local architect and professor Brian MacKay-Lyons, both providing their thoughts on the summit’s theme of leadership and urbanism. Brian’s summation of values as “place, craft and community” struck a chord with many audience members. Rounding out the morning’s presentations was a panel of equally distinguished urbanists, anchored by Lesley Beale. Mark Guslits, Ian Chodikoff and Gary Andrishak posited some food for thought during a working lunch. Ian looked at risk and uncertainty and the handling of either in professional practice, complementing Gary’s recommendation that generation Y’s preferences are a good bet on the future. Prominent Toronto-based architect Jack Diamond was the closing keynote speaker. He wove together a few core ideas not usually presented within the same framework. Given the complexity of issues involved in urbanism his talk proved to be very timely and relevant to the Summit theme. Opening with economics from a federal right down to by-house scale, Jack looked at tax structure, mall tenure, development subsidies and condo construction costs. Infrastructure, social housing and social mobility were analyzed for causes and consequences, and a strong case was made for Canada’s need for immigrants. Summed up by the metaphor of needing to advance all of your chess pieces (not just one) across the board in order to succeed, Jack created a thorough cross section of many issues to consider when building cities.

Andy Fillmore encouraged everyone in the room to participate in an open-based conversation. Whether continuing on with dialogues begun earlier in the summit or pursuing new ideas tangent to or inspired by another's comments, the room quickly turned into an urbanism think tank.

With the same energy and vigor, the long awaited signing of the Charter for Canadian Urbanism took place. All participants took turns to sign what is a landmark document in CanU's advocacy work. A group photo on the steps of the school shows the many people who chose to sign the Charter, a declaration of our dedication to improving life through built form across the country. To wrap-up the event several members of Halifax Regional Municipality's planning department lead a large group on a walking tour of downtown Halifax.

CanU5 Summit was a landmark event not just for the Council and the participants but also in support of working for a sustainable and authentic Canadian Urbanism. Top keynote speakers, dynamic presentations, animated debate, broad participation culminated in the adoption and signing of the Charter and crowned the best ever CanU Summit!

Halifax showed its best in the beautiful East Coast sunshine.... and it didn't rain once, all weekend – a good omen for Canadian Urbanism!

For more information about CanU and its Charter see www.canu.ca



CanU5 participants and CanU Charter



Bryan MacKay-Lyons and Andy Fillmore lead the discussion



CanU Charter waits to be signed



Pecha Kucha presentations at the Art Museum (?)