

Submitted (*Separately*) to Councilmember Bry & Representative Gloria

On behalf of the American Institute of Architects, a professional body of architects, designers, and industry leaders, one of our goals is to serve as ‘citizen architects’ by helping to address the City’s needs for thoughtful design, neighborhood vitality, sustainability, and equitability. To this end, we are reaching out to you.

You, the new Mayor, have a unique opportunity to reset the agenda in light of the Coronavirus epidemic; to reassess San Diego’s priorities and reframe old assumptions in a new reality.

What follows is not a policy paper or a brief, it is far better - it is an open invitation to embark upon a dialogue between you and us, your local citizen architects.

We have identified seven topics herein to facilitate what we hope will be productive conversations:

1. Innovative Approaches to Comprehensive Planning
2. An Assessment of Community Planning
3. Facing Housing Challenges
4. Planning for Equity, Diversity and Inclusion
5. Design for Sustainability
6. Lessons Learned from a Pandemic
7. A City Think Tank for Workable Solutions

We would like to start by scheduling a meeting with you to discuss how we can help you make San Diego an even finer city. Please contact me at your earliest convenience.

Very sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Sandra Gramley'.

Sandra Gramley, AIA
President, AIA San Diego

PURPOSE

On behalf of the American Institute of Architects, a professional body of architects and designers and leaders in the community, our Agenda is to:

- *Identify a broad set of best practices for policy, planning, and design to influence the priorities of the incoming administration with the ultimate goal of addressing the City's needs for housing, neighborhood vitality, sustainability, equitability, and quality design.*

ABOUT US

Strength in Numbers

The American Institute of Architects (AIA) in San Diego County - AIA San Diego and AIA Palomar, representing North County San Diego - together represent 1,000 professionals in the region. We are part of a greater network of AIA California architect members, representing more than 11,000 professionals, and an even broader national network of the American Institute of Architects comprising more than 95,000 members.

A Well-established Institution

Since its founding in 1928, AIA San Diego has been a leading voice and advocate for design excellence, effective planning, sustainability, design-education, professional development, civic leadership, and public engagement.

Passionate Professionals Committed to Communities

AIA San Diego's Urban Design Committee serves as an advocacy group, evaluating legislative initiatives and public and private investments with the goals of promoting livability, spatial equity, and environmental stewardship.

Citizen Architects

As Citizen Architects, we are committed to using our skills, training, and experience to contribute meaningfully to the improvement of the community and human condition. We seek to stay informed on local, state, and federal issues, and make time for service to

the community. We advocate for higher living standards, the creation of a sustainable environment, and greater quality of life. We also seek to advocate for the broader purposes of architecture through civic activism, by gaining appointment to boards and commissions, and through elective office at all levels of government.

THE CONVERSATION

Now more than ever, AIA San Diego is here to serve as a resource to YOU and your campaign as you seek office during these unprecedented times. To this end, the Urban Design Committee of the San Diego Chapter of the American Institute of Architects hosted a series of conversations through the course of 2019 and 2020 with mayoral candidates Gloria, Bry and Sherman to discuss how each might address the needs and priorities for housing, neighborhoods, and sustainability.

AIA San Diego has identified the following focus areas, most of which were identified at the previous mayoral candidate forums and will continue to be pressing issues in the years to come.

1. Innovative Approaches to Comprehensive Planning

Q. What new (or ‘upcycled’) approaches might be implemented to enact a more holistic and robust approach to urban design and planning?

Planning for the future of the City is a critical responsibility of the Mayor, yet the planning function is not as robust as it once was, or could be. The City has adopted plans and policies that provide guidance for how we will grow as a city, all of which are directed toward maintaining and improving the quality of life for city residents. Too often, implementation has occurred on a project-by-project basis when a holistic, comprehensive approach would be more effective.

Several “new,” innovative approaches come to mind, particularly the position of **the City Architect** and the role of the **civic innovation lab** (see also **A City Think Tank** at the end of this document); both of which were previously official functions of the City of San Diego, albeit short-lived. These approaches are undergoing a renaissance and being (re)implemented now in cities across the nation such as Santa Monica, San Antonio, and Austin.

The importance of quality design, especially the design of the public realm, cannot be undervalued. Architects are problem solvers, and cities which place design professionals in leadership positions across various departments are rewarded with a more vibrant and compelling built environment time and time again.

The City's **Planning Director** also serves an integral role in implementing new approaches and strategies within the confines of City Hall and beyond. If and when a new planning director is hired, he or she should espouse the virtues of comprehensive, sustainable planning in order to shape a great city' He or she should approach the job as a pragmatic visionary, empowered to implement the big ideas that must be done as single projects to be effective. This recruitment is an important decision in the path toward a vibrant future for our fair city.

2. An Assessment of Community Planning

Q. What elements of community planning might be changed or improved in 2021?

In the mid-1960s, responding to the defeat of the City's General Plan at the polls, Ted (*Dr. Seuss*) Geisel submitted a cartoon which asked the question "*Onward to Where?*". The historic ramification was a greater emphasis on public participation, including the newly formed community planning groups. It's been more than half a century since the early days of community planning/engagement and the process has experienced victories, along with bureaucratic pitfalls, begging the question - *where are we now...what's working and what's not?*

While we recognize that community input continues to be essential to local land use and transportation decisions, many groups across the spectrum agree that it is time for a reform of our system. Now is the time to review and refine the policies and processes which govern San Diego's community planning groups, to make them both more representative of the areas they serve, more diverse, accountable and also more efficient by **incorporating planning and design expertise into the process.**

San Diego remains one of the few major metropolitan areas without a formal design review process. We propose that a re-examination of the existing planning and permitting process consider the incorporation of design professionals - either in the form of a review board or otherwise. For further analysis of potential modifications to the Community Planning Group structure and implementation of **a Design Review Board** in the City of San Diego, AIA San Diego encourages candidates to refer to a white paper entitled, '*Design Review in San Diego,*' published by AIA architects, Megan Groth and Heather Ruszczyk - **Attachment A.** The primary intent of this paper is to facilitate further conversation on the community planning process, to highlight why this

topic is relevant and important to San Diego and to leave room for dialogue regarding the ‘how’ for implementation.

3. Facing Housing Challenges

Q. Arguably, one of the biggest issues facing California today, how can we address housing affordability in our region, city, and communities?

Housing is a fundamental human need, yet the process of designing and producing new housing seems a bit backwards. Policymakers first establish minimal standards and then set city- or county-wide ratios or unit counts based on arbitrary round numbers, without considering actual site context and conditions. Then, design professionals are thought of as merely the implementers and expected to somehow make generalized standards and abstractions fit into reality. Instead, because of their expertise and capacity for visioning, **architects and urban designers should be front and center**, studying land use options and advising on policy that involves all aspects of city making. Situational thinking makes great cities, especially when architects can craft creative typological and lifestyle-based solutions to make densely urbanized areas more livable. If architects can be positioned as partners with policy makers and generate novel situation- and performance-based housing solutions up front, economic models can be tested against real contexts, and the requisite environmentally responsive policies can be meaningfully integrated. New design, production, and construction strategies might start to emerge through leadership by architects.¹

4. Planning for Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

Q. Can urban design be an ally in the fight for equity, diversity, and inclusion?

The pandemic has highlighted institutional inequities through its devastating effects in minority and lower income populations and communities. The protests following the murder of George Floyd, which followed many other instances of unjustified treatment against people of color, have forced many to recognize our/their own implicit biases and micro-aggressions.

What if we were to evaluate all urban planning decisions through the prism of how they would affect the least advantaged residents, “providing more choices to those who have

¹ Ric Abramson, FAIA <http://arccadigest.org/housing-what-to-look-for-an-arcca-digest-digest/>

few, if any choices.”² The philosophy of ‘**equity planning**’ represented a major shift in a profession that had long been focused on technical problems like zoning and road design. Equity planning can also be a path to stimulate economic growth.

The Just City Lab, a project out of Harvard’s Graduate School of Design, prompts us to envision a scenario in which the issues of race, income, education and unemployment inequality, and the resulting segregation, isolation and fear, could be addressed by planning and designing for greater access, agency, ownership, beauty, diversity or empowerment. Our cities, neighborhoods and public spaces could thrive using a value-based approach to urban stabilization, revitalization and transformation. If we were to take a more intentional, scientific approach to assigning metrics to **measure design’s impact on justice**, could we use those findings to deploy interventions that minimize conditions of injustice?

5. Design for Sustainability

Q. How can we design for sustainability while advancing equity?

Sustainable development has become the mantra of the environmental movement, but it also can help spur development that meets the economic, health, and transportation needs of low-income communities. San Diego should harness sustainability to meet the needs of all of its neighborhoods, including low-income neighborhoods, while promoting new development.

Planning for sustainability should incorporate **the framework for design excellence** to organize our thinking, facilitate conversations and set meaningful goals and targets for climate action. The Framework provides high impact strategies and resources for each of ten measures including integration, community, ecology, water, economy energy, wellness, resources, change, and discovery. More information can be found in **Attachment B**.

6. Lessons Learned from a Pandemic

Q. How might the new COVID reality affect development patterns; what will the city look and feel like in the next ten years?

Our city, our county, state, and nation are facing a crisis in housing, social services, infrastructure and climate change. The coronavirus pandemic exacerbates these issues by the shortfall in health services, social needs fulfillment and the elemental need for

² Norman Krumholz is credited with bringing a new agenda of equity planning to City Hall in Cleveland in 1969 (<https://www.shareable.net/bringing-equity-to-the-forefront-of-urban-planning/>)

human contact. If and when the pandemic is under control and we return to “normal” routines, the current issues will still be with us, along with new lessons learned and new issues to tackle. The pandemic has raised new questions about future development patterns - *Will there be a reactionary rethinking of density? Will desire for greater separation lead to less compact development? Will working remotely remain the norm and who/what will fill the empty commercial office space? Will the demise of brick-and-mortar retail continue and who/what will fill empty ground floor spaces? Will there be opportunities for redevelopment of a significant portion of commercial spaces?*

7. A City Think Tank for Workable Solutions

Q. How might a new administration address the many vexing questions posed herein?

An interdepartmental think tank could be established to explore key issues with a **strategic approach**. "*Temporary Paradise?*" - the 1974 document funded by the Marston family to look at the "special landscape" of the San Diego region - offered a four-point approach for examining San Diego's future. Nearly fifty years later, it still offers a useful roadmap for the decade ahead: *1. Assess the region's environmental quality; 2. Analyze the process by which the region has been shaped over time; 3. Imagine how the region might look in the middle range (50-year) future; 4. Prepare task-oriented studies to deal with urgent city and regional necessities.*

CONCLUSION

Connecting the Threads

These efforts should be integrated with other initiatives to produce a comprehensive action plan for the next decade. They include such things as homelessness and affordable housing, transportation, habitat protection, social equity, economic growth, binational cooperation, historic preservation, cultural enrichment and sports and recreational opportunities.

Kevin Lynch, co-author with Donald Appleyard of '*Temporary Paradise?*,' described how we should be thinking as 'City Design,' that is, the standards or ideals that urban form should achieve and the reasons for doing so. City Design is not just about the physical arrangement of things to satisfy today's needs but it also has to do with fundamental human values and rights: justice, freedom, control, learning, access, dignity, and creativity. "*City Design is not the reproduction of environments in the*

image of the present order but it really is about what should be and what could be.”

Architects have the creativity, technical skills and insight to help San Diego become the most compelling vision of the future city.

*Special thanks to **Michael Stepner**, FAIA and **Roger Showley** for their input and involvement in drafting this document.*



ATTACHMENT A

Design Review in San Diego

Position Paper

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Executive Summary

Good design matters. It solves problems from the micro to the macro and has a proven net-positive effect on our environment, economy, communities, livelihood and happiness. Design is recognized as an important component of creating an equitable, diverse, resilient and thriving city, and as such most major cities in the United States review the design of building projects and urban design scale planning through an institutionalized design review process administered through local governments. This paper proposes that San Diego, a city that despite being the 8th largest in the United States does not have a design review process, would benefit from integrating a formal design review process within the current planning and permitting process.

We propose that San Diego utilize the existing local built environment talent to establish volunteer professional design review boards to assist the city in reviewing projects against the visions and goals set out by the city and its neighborhoods in documents such as the General Plan, Community Plans and design guidelines, and Climate Action Plan. This may be implemented in two different ways: at a district level, a San Diego Design Review Board would review private projects of a certain size and scale that are currently being reviewed (or not) by the Community Planning Groups; while at a city level, a San Diego Design Commission would be charged with reviewing Capital Improvement Projects, alley vacations and public realm and right-of-way projects. Both of these avenues are intended to leverage opportunities to improve the existing process for development permitting and to create no more roadblocks within the process, but rather to re-envision how reviews at the Community Planning Group level and at the centralized Commission level can be more transparent, accountable and accessible. Both paths strive to improve the efficiency in which projects are reviewed, public feedback is heard and incorporated, decisions are made and permits are issued.

Given the current housing crisis, real threat of climate change and the political moment in San Diego, there is now an opportunity to enact the long term change that will define our path for generations to come. Design Review is one mechanism to safeguard the future that we want and uphold the spirit and vision of this great city and of the people who call San Diego home.




ATTACHMENT B

AIA Framework for Design Excellence


In September 2019, the AIA formally adopted the AIA Framework for Design Excellence, formerly known as the COTE Top Ten Measures. Climate action is a critically urgent topic for our society and architects are well positioned for influence and impactful change. The Framework will help us organize our thinking, facilitate conversations with our clients and the communities we serve, and set meaningful goals and targeted outcomes.

The AIA Committee on the Environment (COTE) was founded in 1990 with the belief that architects can lead and facilitate the green building movement through a systemic and holistic approach to design. In 1997, COTE launched the Top Ten Awards to celebrate beautiful projects with exceptional performance. In 2002, the award criteria were refined through the creation of the Top Ten Measures. Over time, these have been updated, most recently in 2016.


M1 Design for Integration

 What is the big idea behind this project and how did the approach towards sustainability inform the design concept? Describe the project, program, and any unique challenges and opportunities. Specifically explain how the design is shaped around the project's goals and performance criteria, providing utility, beauty, and delight. How does the project engage all the senses for all its users, and connect people to place? What makes this building one that people will fight to preserve? Give examples of how individual design strategies provide multiple benefits across the full triple bottom line of social, economic, and environmental value.


M2 Design for Equitable Community

 Sustainability is inextricably tied to the wellness of communities. Describe specifically how community members, inside and outside the building, benefit from the project. How does this project contribute to creating a walkable, human-scaled community inside and outside the property lines? How were community members engaged during the design and development process? How does the project promote social equity at local, regional, and global scales? Because transportation-related emissions negatively affect public health, and because CO₂ emissions associated with how these reach a building are frequently comparable to the CO₂ emissions associated with operating the building.


M3 Design for Ecology

 Sustainable design protects and benefits natural ecosystems and habitat in the presence of human development. Describe the larger or regional ecosystem (climate, soils, plant and animal systems) in which the project is sited. In what ways does the design respond to the ecology of this place? How does the design help users become more aware or connected with this place and their regional ecosystems? How does the design minimize negative impacts on birds or other animals (e.g., design to prevent bird collisions, dark-sky complaint lighting)? How does the project contribute to biodiversity and the preservation or restoration of habitats and ecosystem services?


M4 Design for Water

 Sustainable design conserves and improves the quality of water as a precious resource. Illustrate how various water streams flow through the building and site, including major water conservation and stormwater management strategies. How does the project relate to the regional watershed? Describe strategies to reduce reliance on municipal water sources. Does the project recapture or re-use water?


M5 Design for Economy

 Providing abundance while living within our means is a fundamental challenge of sustainability. How does the project provide "more with less"? Possibilities include "right sizing" the program, cost-effective design decisions, economic performance analysis, economic equity strategies, notable return-on-investment outcomes, contributing to local and disadvantaged economies, etc. Provide examples of how first cost and lifecycle cost information influenced design choices. Identify any additional first-cost investments and how they are anticipated to improve life-cycle costs and longer-term economic performance.


M6 Design for Energy

 The burning of fossil fuels to provide energy for buildings is a major component of global greenhouse gas emissions, driving climate change. Sustainable design conserves energy while improving building performance, function, comfort, and enjoyment. How did analysis of local climate inform the design challenges and opportunities? Describe any energy challenges associated with the building type, intensity of use, or hours of operation, and how the design responds to these challenges. Describe energy-efficient design intent, including passive design strategies and active systems and technologies. How are these strategies evident in the design, not just the systems?


M7 Design for Wellness

 Sustainable design supports comfort, health, and wellness for the people who inhabit or visit buildings. Describe strategies for optimizing daylight, indoor air quality, connections to the outdoors, and thermal, visual, and acoustical comfort for occupants and others inside and outside the building. How does the design promote the health of the occupants? Describe design elements intended to promote activity or exercise, access to healthy food choices, etc. Outline any material health strategies, including any materials selection criteria based on third-party frameworks such as Health Product Declarations (HPDs), Living Building Challenge Red List, EPA chemicals of concern, etc. Include key results on occupant comfort from occupant satisfaction surveys.


M8 Design for Resources

 Sustainable design includes the informed selection of materials and products to reduce product-cycle environmental impacts while enhancing building performance. Describe efforts to optimize the amount of material used on the project. Outline materials selection criteria and considerations, such as enhancing durability and maintenance and reducing the environmental impacts of extraction, manufacturing, and transportation. Identify any special steps taken during design to make disassembly or re-use easier at the building's end of life. What other factors helped drive decision-making around material selection on this project?

M9 Design for Change

 Reuse, adaptability, and resilience are essential to sustainable design, which seeks to maintain and enhance usability, functionality, and value over time. Describe how the project is designed to facilitate adaptation for other uses and/or how an existing building was repurposed. What other uses could this building easily accommodate in 50-100 years? In what ways did the design process take into account climate change over the life of the building? Describe the project's resilience measures: How does the design anticipate restoring or adapting function in the face of stress or shock, such as natural disasters, blackouts, etc.? How does the project address passive survivability (providing habitable conditions in case of loss of utility power)?

M10 Design for Discovery

 Sustainable design strategies and best practices evolve over time through documented performance and shared knowledge of lessons learned. What lessons for better design have been learned through the process of project design, construction, and occupancy, and how have these been incorporated in subsequent projects? Describe ways the lessons have been shared with a larger audience (publications, lectures, etc.) and any ways the project may have influenced industry practices. Describe the processes used to maintain a long-term relationship between the design team and those occupying and operating the building and identify how both the users and designers benefited.

