

*Planning the Global City: Vancouver, Abu Dhabi and the World*

*University of Toronto – Urban Lecture Series*

*An Address by Larry Beasley, C.M. in Toronto, Ontario on November 16, 2011*

I look around this room at an extraordinary array of talent and experience in urbanism, knowing some of you quite well and knowing many of your achievements and stories, having worked with some of you, and it reminds me of two essential facts that really form the preamble of my remarks here this evening.

First, many of you know that we in Canada are pretty good at city building – probably more so than most Canadians would appreciate but definitely of a quality that people elsewhere in the world understand and gratefully acknowledge. Outside our country – even as close as the United States next door – making liveable, workable, lovely and responsible cities is seen as

something of a Canadian specialty and an important Canadian export.

But, second, we also know that the art and craft – the whole process – of urbanism is just being reinvented here in Canada, just like everywhere else in the world. After a 50 year hiatus, it was only a few decades ago that we again started thinking again of cities as human habitats, not just machines for living, and more recently as ecological instruments that must be in harmony with nature. We've not only had to relearn the old truths but we've had the harder job of throwing off the shackles of deeply entrenched bad practices and standards and attitudes, especially that were put in place after the war. And that struggle is not over - it pains me to say that tomorrow morning, in the span of time that I will speak tonight, we will approve more bad urbanism than good urbanism in this country, especially out in our suburbs. I

see us in an extended period of experimentation with lots of good ideas percolating all around us but many wrong-headed old ideas still lingering. So while we have a lot to contribute to the global conversation about urbanism, we also still have a lot to learn here at home and we always have to be mindful of that.

It is in this context that I want to talk about planning for a global city, using my experience in Vancouver, as then applied in Abu Dhabi, Dallas and elsewhere, as examples of where I think we are going and need to go as we move forward.

I have noticed that our first challenge has been rediscovering the urban templates that work and are fulfilling for people – that has been underway in Canadian inner cities for these last 20 years and is just starting to

happen in our suburbs – so tonight, I want to talk about these two essential templates, both here and offshore.

I have noticed that our second challenge has been finding the governance institutions and processes that work. No matter how compelling have been our new ideas, they seem to go nowhere until we can fix the system that is giving us the old models day-in-and-day-out – so I also want to talk tonight about governance.

And on both subjects, I will show what my practice has been about here in Canada and how our ideas have tended to morph offshore. Globalization is about the world realization of similarities but one of its biggest struggles is the maintenance of uniqueness and differentiation, so this has certainly been a priority for me and I will also talk about that.

Oh, and by the way, you will notice that I am using lots of slides – I’m not going to speak to these slides, they will just flow with the story, but they are like friends; keep an eye on them because sometimes they speak for themselves.

I will start by asking why the global city is even important and why this is relevant to most cities not just a few of the most famous mega-cities that form the apex of global life. Well, it’s because we live in a footloose world where people – our local people just as much as people elsewhere – can take their skills, capital and energy wherever they wish to go. They do not go to just a few world cities anymore, they go everywhere and anywhere – so the cities that very diligently make it their business to keep and entice these people, accommodate them with a comfortable and practical lifestyle and make them satisfied and happy, cities that don’t accept the negative

spinoffs of growth or out-dated standards or counter-productive government, these are the cities that are going to prevail over other places that just don't try hard enough.

This kind of intentionality has always been summed up in what for me is a universal framework that I use as a foundation for every individual assignment. I guess it represents the similarity of globalization. I'm talking about the simple and cohesive formula of "Smart Growth" that most people in this room know so well. Here it is in a nutshell – it covers both the structure and the infrastructure of cities. From a structural point of view, it is about the form and fabric and character of our cities. From an infrastructural point of view, it is about the circulation within our cities, the community and cultural facilities and services and how we handle utilities. And

we all know there are endless ways to achieve this formula – every city has to find its own DNA.

What also fascinates me about this formula is that it seems to fix many challenges we face in modern life. It's an environmental formula and an economic formula and a health formula and a social formula and a formula for quality of life – all of these issues come to focus under the same city lens. And when the formula is working, it creates a state of grace that I am constantly searching for in my work.

For example, this formula is giving us lots of good news in Canada's downtowns. I dare say the urban centres in Canada are in a revival. It's all about repopulating the core, as we see in Vancouver, Toronto, Calgary, Winnipeg and Montreal, just to name a few examples; and

it's about a real commitment to public realm improvements, such as are happening right across the country, from Halifax to Saskatoon. Renee Daoust's work in Montreal is a perfect illustration.

Let me use the example of our work in the inner city of Vancouver where I took a leadership role for many years. We got an early start on this way back in the late-1980's, just after Expo 86, when we developed a new plan to change the whole downtown and new urban design schemes for both our waterfronts and nearby transition areas. We called the whole thing our "living first" strategy and it really hit the mark – we went from 43,000 people downtown in 1986 to over 105,000 people today and this growth continues with a strong, diversified market that has remained robust even against the current economic slowdown.

Let me summarize the basic features.

We arranged new development into identifiable and functional neighbourhood units – a real “local” focus – with the right array of amenities and very nice retail places with local character. Here are the typical neighbourhood amenities that are absolute requirements; and here is the general scale and commercial infrastructure that we target. We made open space a vital requirement at a standard similar to established communities – including dedicating the water’s edge for the public – and we diversified open space into private courtyards and on to green roofs everywhere. We set special housing targets and guidelines for the less advantaged and for families. The return of families with children to the city centre, in my opinion, is the real bellwether of success and I am happy to say that this has been amazing to watch. We now have over 8000 children

downtown, more than meeting our target. We did a big push with senior governments for transit diversification and reinforced that locally with massive investment for cycling and walking. We coupled this with aggressive calming of traffic, cut backs on parking requirements, and caps on the growth of auto infrastructure. One non-negotiable rule has been not to support even one new lane of auto capacity into the inner city. For us, this was not about removing the car from the urban scene – we want to maximize transportation choices – but it was about limiting the car’s pervasiveness and impacts. The inner-city results are heartening: a drop in car ownership and use; less cars commuting in and out than 10 years ago; and, over 60% of trips in the core now done by non-motorized modes, mostly people walking. Then, we put priority and sustained attention to codifying and managing urban design – Vancouver’s inner city form is not accidental. It is jointly designed – building massing is

shaped across whole areas; open spaces are linked into a pervasive network with careful management of sun and shadows and with lots of public art; street cross-sections are carefully modulated across public and private domains; details and materials and landscape are choreographed among building projects. That's how we invented the tower/podium morphology and the townhouse frontage requirements and the view corridors and the thin tower form and the tower separations and the detailed landscape and use requirements at grade and the street-tree formats that have transformed the experience of the city, all of which, together, has become known as "Vancouverism". That's how, more recently, we have diversified that morphology in the Olympic Village to include lower-scaled streetwall forms and narrower streets. This is a new "Vancouverism" that most people have not yet seen. To go with the intensity and new lifestyle patterns, we've come to understand that quality

design and construction mean everything to the consumer. And, finally, we have increasingly been drawing in the green requirements for more fundamental sustainability. Again, the Olympic Village has set the pace. This new neighbourhood pushes the boundaries in regard to alternative energy, water conservation and management, urban agriculture and edible landscape, waste reuse and community-based disposal, and advanced green building requirements. I don't think we will ever be able to slide back from these new standards.

Now, I said at the beginning that our understanding of urbanism was evolving and the very success of what I have been describing has spun off its own problems and those have to be acknowledged. The biggest is the challenge to housing affordability. This is a seller's market so prices have continuously gone up – so now we are among the most expensive places to live in Canada.

Even though waiting lists remain long, we've started to make progress with the lowest income group and a recent Provincial initiative for housing thousands of homeless people is nailing that down even more. We've done a deplorable job securing affordability for these kind of people – modest and middle income working people. Rental incentive programs have helped at the margins but we've not stepped up to the plate with any kind of special initiative to assist these people and it is the biggest vulnerability we face. Also, the “living first” strategy has been so effective that now land price pressure has been put on all other uses needed for true mixed use – including offices and cultural facilities. This could actually bring the housing renaissance to a standstill because no one wants to forego diversity for even the most impressive housing market. And, finally, all the development energy unbridled has been just another pressure on established lower income communities that

are inherently vulnerable – the Downtown Eastside being the classic case in point. Of course, we've redone Woodward's, the biggest eyesore, and just last month, the City started a positive local area planning program in this community to address this contradiction – but it is years too late.

But having said this, there is no argument that the refreshed urbanism of Vancouver's inner city is working for the liveability and competitiveness of the city. And there is no question that this is equally true in many cities right across our country.

But everything I have been talking about over the last few minutes still leaves our biggest challenge untouched. Of course, I'm talking about the shape and nature of the suburbs. This is where the battle for everything we

believe in ultimately has to be fought and won. These pictures, which could be in Greater Vancouver or Greater Toronto or anywhere else in our country, are symbolic – they make my point. We are going to have to make the re-invention of our suburbs a grand national mission over the next generation – even though this is also the area where we have the least evident solutions at this point in time. In fact, except for a few somewhat elite “new urbanist” subdivisions and a few TOD’s, we have nothing in our urbanist repertoire to offer the suburbs even though over 60% of Canadians live here and only 13% of Canadians live in core cities, where we have been putting most of our attention.

But, having said this, we are also going to have to be very careful about how we do this. This cannot be a struggle to disavow the suburbs and suburban life. This cannot be about bad-mouthing the suburbs. But I am afraid this has

been the typical attitude of the planning and design professions in this country – and I include myself in this criticism. It was Joel Kotkin in New York that started me rethinking this situation. He declares in no uncertain terms that people live in suburbs because they *want* to, not because they *have* to – and he thinks they are pretty nice places from the perspective of an individual family. And that has made me realize that this has got to be a struggle about realizing a new potential of suburban life that remains acceptable for suburban consumers even as it becomes more consistent with “Smart Growth”.

I start by noticing that, contrary to the theories of the urban cognoscenti, most people have chosen the suburbs because the multi-family model and tall scale just don't work for them; they have fled “big city” life, even though it is hard to buy Kotkin's argument that their suburban destination has proven to be all that much more satisfying.

That's because we don't actually design these places – they are essentially laid out by rout, using totally outdated standards and regulations. They fulfill the basics of living and are very friendly to the car – but they wreak havoc with the environment and do very little for the soul. I think we have to disavow those retrogressive standards and throw out those useless engineering rule books and just start over through proactive urban design.

Whether we are talking greenfield sites or infill within existing suburbs, we have to tackle the basic template – and I have great hopes that the City of Regina, of all places, will set the pace here. Under the inspired leadership of Jennifer Keesmaat of Dialog here in Toronto and with the wise advice of Ken Greenberg, they are creating a new Official Community Plan for Regina. I am playing a very minor advisory role but, this is probably the most fascinating work I am involved in right

now in Canada because it faces our suburban growth contradiction straight on. In that process, I have recently made one little suggestion that I present tonight more to provoke discussion than to offer as an off-the-shelf solution. I have suggested that we use as a primary reference for future suburbs those wonderful pre-war, “streetcar” neighbourhoods from first third of the century that exist in every one of our cities, where all the standards were more humane. Taking our cue from these places, which most suburban consumers will tell you they would love to live in, I think we might be able to achieve that “Smart Growth” balance just as easily out in the suburbs as we are now starting to do in our core cities.

These first suburbs suggest to me four things. First, we could very carefully and incrementally intensify and diversify contemporary suburbs. I’m thinking of the quiet things such as legalizing secondary suites and rear yard or

laneway housing and zero-lot-line schemes and infill row houses and live/work spaces – planners who are thinking about these things now talk about this as “invisible density”, “hidden density” and “gentle density”; it’s the game of moving from the 6-to-10 units-per-acre to the 40 units-per-acre that Jack Diamond, our guru here in Toronto, has said should be our target threshold. The pre-war neighbourhoods show us how to do this - they have organically evolved to become typically that dense. Second, we can stay with the modest scale that most people prefer. The tower is not a sweet answer for most suburbanites and they certainly don’t want to see them right next door. But in those pre-war neighbourhoods we see the three-to five storey buildings that fit in nicely and work like a charm for both density and diversity. Thirdly, we can re-establish the localized retail pattern – a cluster of local shops, at walkable locations, lined proudly along a sidewalk in a way that can really make a memorable

place. We've just got to ban the mini-mall. Lastly, we have to fold in the connective tissue in the form of pedestrian upgrades and bike ways and back lanes and linking up the cul-de-sacs and better bus links to rapid transit. The old neighbourhoods show us that with narrower streets and a truer street grid, *proximity* and *connectivity* go hand in hand for safety and to quite naturally get us out of our cars. And none of this requires big demolition or displacement or neighbourhood destabilization.

Well, that's the thought and I will enjoy hearing your reaction.

Now I want to turn to how we have exported all these Canadian ideas in work outside of Canada, particularly by looking at one big case that has consumed most of my

time over the last five years – Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates.

It was this man – His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nayhan – the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, who pulled me out of Vancouver back in 2006 and got me started on my overseas work. Probably reacting to the over building of Dubai, his next door neighbour, he made a profound – and far reaching – decision. He decided to explicitly shape his capital city, Abu Dhabi City, and all the settlements in his Emirate. He decided to go the opposite way of Dubai by putting in place a unique model in Abu Dhabi of a responsible and deliberate urbanism, in an Arab, Muslim form.

This seemed like the perfect opportunity for me to see just how relevant “Vancouverism” might be outside its

founding context. So I signed on as the Chief Urban Planning Advisor in Abu Dhabi, a five-year assignment I have just completed a few months ago.

I will tell you about the organizational work in a moment, but for the planning and urban design side, I put together a crack Canadian team – Joe Hruda, of Civitas Urban Design and Planning and Peter Busby of what is now called Perkins and Will Canada, were my equal partners and together we've enjoyed a phenomenal partnership.

It was only about 3 years before we arrived that, with the handoff of leadership to the younger generation, Abu Dhabi opened up their country for limited private ownership of property by non-nationals. They immediately saw a barrage of new development proposals of massive scale and they started asking some essential

questions. Would their environment be ruined through this explosive urbanizing process? Would their culture be able to survive? What would happen to the joys of their Bedouin way of life – the intimate engagement with the desert and the sea? Would their children be as happy and safe and healthy as they were hoping for and expecting because of their newfound oil wealth? And so they were predisposed to try to shape what was going on to meet a wider set of public and cultural objectives – yes, they were direct about the economic objectives – but they were also clear about wanting a lot more.

Now, just because they were asking basic questions does not mean that they were not in a hurry. In fact, they felt a great urgency, not just because of the natural competition with Dubai, but also because they have deficiencies everywhere and did not want their anxiety to turn away the schemes that would be good for their growth. So we

undertook a planning process that met their need for both quality and speed.

We used conceptual framework plans that could be created quickly but would tie together clear policy with detailed illustrative directions. We targeted a 25-year time horizon for these framework plans and have now completed plans for the capital, Abu Dhabi City, and the romantic royal oasis city of Al Ain and for the oilfields, called the Western Region or Al Gharbia, and for the agriculture district, called the Eastern Region. In each case, we came at all this from the demand side, not the supply side, with rigorous economic demand projections as a “reality check”. Then, as soon as the plans have even come to draft form, we have put them immediately to work for the Emirate. They have been used to evaluate all pending major developments to bring them in line with the realistic economic potential and the future image of

Abu Dhabi as it has gelled. In fact, many people in Abu Dhabi have said that this process warded off the worst aspects of the global downturn of 2008 because in almost all cases we scaled down development schemes to be in line with true end-user needs, which is a novelty in the Middle East. Secondly, these plans have set the agenda for ongoing planning work. In the case of Abu Dhabi City, the framework plan resulted in the design for a new national capital district for the city that will accommodate about 300,000 people and just as many government and private-sector workers. In Al Ain City we have completed a new downtown urban design plan, with Andres Duany, which features limited heights and heritage. In the case of Al Gharbia, different teams have designed 3 completely new cities to serve growth in the oil fields in a way that is sensitive to the local ecology and industrial impacts. All these urban initiatives motivated the formation of a pervasive green building certification

initiative, called Estidama, which is slowly getting off the ground. And now a whole process is underway of regulatory development to bring predictability to the development approval process and of area planning to put shape and detail to growth patterns at the community level. For example, a completely new and more responsible approach is now being implemented for the design of Emirati neighbourhoods, moving away from totally inappropriate “Minnesota style subdivisions”, as I call them, which had been stretching out at the urban fringe. This has also included a comprehensive zoning code, a street design manual, a public realm design manual and totally reformed utility design parameters.

Now, I want to be upfront, the process has not been without its conflicts and confusions – and there are still contradictions in the pattern of development and the unfolding of processes. Some problematic development

proposals are still moving forward because they were too far along and some big initiatives, with powerful sponsors, are still not yet reshaped to what I would call their optimum form. But, to some degree, these are growth pains as the transition occurs from a random to a deliberate approach. There is no question that we have evolved there in 5 years what most Canadian cities took about 25 years to accomplish.

So what are the substantive themes upon which all this is being shaped for the future? Let me go back to the pre-eminent of all the plans, the Abu Dhabi 2030 Plan, as a case in point to show you the general direction that the Emirate wishes to go everywhere.

The Plan shapes everything to reflect some profound principles rooted in Abu Dhabi's unique way of life – that

it will be an Arab city, have measured growth, be sensitive to the natural environment, manifest a capital destiny and reflect the unique community values of local people.

This starts with an aggressive environmental protection agenda - we call it the “green gradient” of protected places: channelling development to less sensitive locales; preserving most of the offshore islands and wide desert fingers; and establishing “national parks” to make this all a serious reality.

Then new development is shaped for major growth, up to a projected population of 3.5 million inhabitants (now pulled back to about 2.5 million), into two intensive and mixed use focal points that are the big shapers of the whole city: an expanded and revived inner-city

Downtown; and that new Capital District that I have already mentioned. And this Capital District is surrounded by lower-scaled neighbourhoods and around the whole city is a constellation of smaller, widely separated, outbound settlements that the Plan calls “eco villages” on suitable islands and at carefully selected locations within the desert. These eco villages, in particular, will accommodate the unending rhythm of migration from coast to deep desert that has shaped Abu Dhabi life from time immemorial. Locals are no longer driven by the economic imperative of this but the climatic advantages and the related traditions are still meaningful. Neighbourhoods and villages are shaped for an Arab culture with what is called the “fareej” or clustering of housing for extended families and tribes and a focus on the mosque. And the Plan features many more densities and use mixes to respond to the various urban preferences of the majority population of foreigners. For low income

workers, there are new and better standards for their housing and communities, with more integration close to where they work. In the absence of an indigenous urban building tradition, our inspirations here are the fascinating ancient communities of North Africa that share common cultural roots with Abu Dhabi – places like Marrakesh and Beirut.

The Plan pulls Abu Dhabi away from a formerly massive program of freeway expansion and construction; instead, creating a dense network of human-scaled boulevards and streets that widely distributes auto traffic. It insinuates a major network of new transit, with special provisions for Arab women. It emphasizes walking and the idea of a street culture that, generally, does not currently exist – remembering that for at least half the year it is very pleasant to be outside, even though the climate can be brutal at other times. And I have to say, stopping one

major freeway link that would have crashed through the historic city, which was within days of letting contracts, has been one of the high points of my time in Abu Dhabi.

The Plan supports a whole suite of initiatives for high culture – such as the amazing set of proposals for museums and galleries in a new island district, by the world’s greatest architects: Frank Gehry; Jean Nouvel; Zada Hadid; Tadao Ando that were already in the conceptual design stage when we arrived.

The Plan gets right down to the level of the details to show what the emerging city should look and feel like. For example, it outlines a strategy to revitalize inner city blocks that are now overrun by traffic and parking and offer few opportunities for pedestrian life, even though a great majority of the people are pre-disposed from their

home cultures to outdoor living. By decanting the pervasive on-street parking into strategically located parking structures, it will be possible to insinuate a delicate pattern of local streets and walkways, called in Arabic “mushtaraks” and “sikkas”, add finely scaled open spaces, maximize shading and cool areas, mix in desperately needed local services, focus on the mosque and local shopping opportunities and therefore build an attractive nearby streetlife that will cut the trips people now take by car. In other detailed expositions, the Plan sketches new cross-sections for streets, new ideas for weather protection, and new policies for low water-use landscape and green architecture that have now found their way into detailed policy documents.

And that brings us to “politics”. With all of our work, whether domestic or offshore, where we are truly trying to move a community into a different form from its past

history, we always find that plans are not enough. In every project I have worked on, institutional and systems change has been as important as the new dream.

This was certainly true in Vancouver, starting way back in the 1970's with fundamental systems reforms under the inspired leadership of Ray Spaxman. More recently we further re-invented City Hall for the big inner-city transformation and we call the result the “cooperative planning approach”. This has several characteristics.

As you have seen, we had to articulate a strong vision and couple it with municipal proaction and planning prowess, sustained year-in-and-year-out. This included new formats for cross-departmental cooperation within the civic bureaucracy and new efficiencies in processing development applications. This also included a division

of labour between politicians and bureaucrats – Council of course makes the policy decisions but appointed staff within the administration do the negotiations and make the final decisions on specific developments, with no involvement by elected officials. And there is almost no appeal.

This needed different kinds of laws. Zoning and all the other laws had to change from the conventional approach that specifies everything and separates everything. That's the policeman's approach and it doesn't help you very much in the complexity of the modern city. This includes the oppressive street standards and building codes and even health and fire and other supposed safety requirements. These laws and regulations were forcing us into less and less humane environments and the trade-off just wasn't worth it any more. For example, we had to make our new zoning able to manage complex mixed

uses; it had to be discretionary to foster innovation; and it had to be heavy with incentives and bonuses for genuine wealth creation, so that we could share part of that wealth for public goods.

We found that the intimate act of urban design had to be a joint venture. Developers, architects and planning officials cannot be in confrontation all the time – they must be allies to achieve a city by design, positively motivated by separate and shared interests. This has allowed us to carefully broker hundreds of public/private trade-offs at a very great level of subtlety, to find the best balance in each scheme.

Our whole system is driven by strong and sustained public involvement. We do this in iterations, from the conceptual to the specific, in many formats and even

including formal neighbourhood agreements on the nature of change. Balancing public involvement we have equal involvement and advice by professional peers, separate from the general public input. We do this with an advisory Urban Design Panel.

And, lastly, we had to make sure that capital investment is coordinated with the urban design vision and plans. Most importantly, almost all public goods are leveraged through the development approval process – otherwise the City could never have afforded to sponsor such intensive development – taxpayers would have rebelled. But there is also a sustained level of public capital investment that is equally important. To manage all that, the municipal bureaucracy has had to learn about development economics and proformas and these are an integral part of all negotiations to insure that public objectives do not compromise profitability.

In Abu Dhabi, the situation was much more rudimentary from the outset. Because there was no planning going on, no agency for planning and no contemporary plans, we had to start from scratch. Within our first year there, we designed and founded a proper planning authority and gave it the position and power so it would be instantly influential in a culture that is driven by a subtle ebb and flow of influence. The “Urban Planning Council”, as it has come to be called, directed by a smart, young, well-placed Emirati leader, His Excellency Falah Al Ahbabi, and chaired personally by the Crown Prince, now has over 200 staff, hard at work on planning for Abu Dhabi’s future. This has included imported professionals from all over the world but also more and more young Emiratis. We have put a big emphasis and priority on Emirati training to build up capacity as well as a sophisticated perspective of cities. This is now being tested – with my departure, they started shifting to a predominance of local

professional work and leadership within the organization and we have our fingers crossed that the bedrock of Emirati knowledge and urban connoisseurship that we have engendered will keep the agenda strong and the quality high.

In Dallas, we have taken what I might call a more “acupunctural” approach. In 2009, I was appointed the Chief Urban Design Advisor in Dallas with responsibility to raise the bar on urban design in the city and help them reform the way they do planning and manage development. I’m not going to talk about our substantive work there tonight but I do want to bring Dallas into the story in regard to institutional change because that is where our biggest challenge began. You can imagine that Dallas has a well-established, complex and entrenched municipal bureaucracy, like most large North American cities. But it gets pretty low performance in the quality of

its private development (with a few notable exceptions, such as with their cultural institutions where money is no object) and the City has been pretty confused for years about the reshaping that is necessary in the public realm to bring together smart places. So in Dallas, we took advantage of one thing they do extraordinarily well – that is philanthropy. A private donor gave us several million dollars of financial support so we could found a new urban design centre within the civic organization. It's called the Dallas CityDesign Studio, located within City Hall, and it is now bringing into the Dallas community many of the governance principles that I talked about in Vancouver. It tackles community problems through design intervention, working with a huge array of local people and groups. It insinuates new neighbourhood models. It is bringing peer review into the development approval process. It has begun the process to transform the regulatory framework into a discretionary system,

facilitating new ideas and leveraging of amenities. And it has started an educational program to raise the level of appreciation and commitment to urban design. Like an acupuncture needle, our strategy was to intervene in one key format, through an agency with one foot in government and one foot in the private sector, funded and acting semi-independently, as a vehicle to set off change at many levels. It's too early to gage the results but we are hearing new attitudes and seeing new initiatives flowing from those attitudes, both linked to and separate from the studio – so I am optimistic.

Well, I am sure you might well be asking yourself right now what my experience in Vancouver has to do with the unique circumstances of Abu Dhabi or Dallas. You might well be worrying as I always do about the effects of globalization in delivering one packaged solution everywhere – I think you can see that we aggressively

avoid that – I let the place and the people generate indigenous solutions.

But, at the same time, I feel that there is, indeed, a common set of dependable urban principles that usually make sense – these are about “Smart Growth” and cooperative, inclusive processes. And then we have to make sure that the way we handle these principles is vividly different in each application. I think there also needs to be a common ethos about planning – for a community to move forward with a simple and clear vision and a sense of direction; we talk a lot about deliberate choices rather than the randomness of most world cities. And then, there needs to be a kind of planning practice that reflects a re-integration of land use policy making and urban design – I call it “experiential planning” – which involves creating the real, direct experiences within any setting that people tell us they

want, and making sure our places are accessible to and are fulfilling for people on their own terms. This means getting beyond the broad patterns and systems of the city; getting down to what people see and smell and hear and feel, at the level of the street, and shaping things to deliver the emotional side for people, not just efficiency or fiscal prudence or even environmental sustainability. And this is how we stay absolutely grounded wherever we are working.

So having a global perspective and aspiration is very important but the definition of that seems to be shifting dramatically from an old image to a new one. We can learn from the contrast of Dubai and Abu Dhabi. Dubai is the old approach – it wants to be the biggest, the most hip, the richest and the most provocative. Abu Dhabi has a much more gentle intentionality. These cities are truly metaphorical of the counter currents of globalization.

Vancouver and most Canadian cities – and now Abu Dhabi as well – are singing a different song than Dubai. For us, the essence of global glamour is to be the most humane, the most sustainable, the most unique, the most stable, the most beautiful, the most efficient and the most grounded in place. Our kind of great urbanism wants to be the greenest and the most liveable – we even announce it proudly when it's recognized.

As we continue to learn and as we continue to teach, I hope we can make that shift a universal one, putting fine and delicate city building back into the high arts of world culture.

Thank you.