



US General Services
Administration

Public Buildings Service
1800 F Street NW
Washington DC 20405

tel: 202.501.1881
fax: 202.208.2996

web: goodneighbor.gsa.gov
email: goodneighbor@gsa.gov

Remarks by:
Shelley Poticha, Executive Director
Congress for the New Urbanism, San Francisco, CA

BUILDING LIVABLE COMMUNITIES
National Field Officers' Training Workshop
September 13 - 15, 1999

Washington Hilton Hotel
1919 Connecticut Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C.

Tuesday, September 14, 1999

What I wanted to do this morning was spend a few minutes talking about what is starting to become a national conversation about how our cities grow and what we really need to do to make sure that they remain livable over the long term.

A lot of people are calling this so-called movement "smart growth", or "livable communities." I think it's something that you all need to be aware of, if you are not aware of it already.

The second thing I want to talk a little bit about is the Congress for the New Urbanism and this movement that we call New Urbanism. It fits right into that whole discussion about the livability and vitality of our communities and also because we're here as partners with GSA on this program.

I thought it also might be useful to just make sure you understand what we're all about and what CNU does. With that brief introduction, why don't we have the lights out for more slides.

(1) The Congress for New Urbanism is a national non-profit advocacy organization. We're a membership organization of folks from around the country and we're dedicated to advancing the dialogue on reforming America's urban growth patterns.

As someone who has been involved in these issues for almost 20 years, it's really exciting to see this discussion maturing substantially in the last few years. What we're seeing is this amazing convergence of people's concerns, ideas, thoughts and hopes for their communities in ways that I think is really starting a healthy discussion.



(2) The Congress for the New Urbanism, or CNU, began as a very small group of architects, mainly folks who were outside of the usual conversation about architecture and design and really much more concerned about the vitality and livability of our communities. We have now grown into a very diverse organization of close to 2,000 members that include all kinds of perspectives.



2

CNU members are people who are related to all aspects of the development process, whether its transportation engineers, or real estate consultants, or financiers, or developers, designers, elected officials, citizen advocates, environmentalists.

We're concerned about a lot of issues facing cities today and I think they include many of the issues that you are probably engaged in your specific projects.



3

(3) It's about addressing disinvestment in central cities in ways that are really destructive to regional economies.

(4) It's about responding to the problems with low density single use development that are expanding the size of every region in the country two to four commute times



4



5

(5), and less time people have to spend with their families.



6

(6) It's about rethinking infrastructure funding that seems over and over again to really just support development at the periphery of regions instead of central cities and existing suburbs.

(7) It's about stemming the loss of vital agriculture lands, something that's really changing the face of many places in the country.



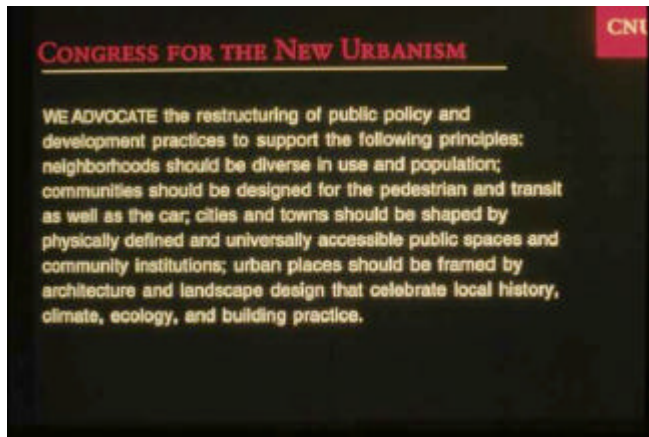
7

(8) And central to our concerns, New Urbanism is about the people in our communities and I'm particularly interested in children and youth and what we are leaving for them and how do they have a place in our communities? So new urbanism is really a strategy to begin to address some of these issues.



8

(9) This is a quote from what we call our charter, and there are copies of this one page sheet at the back of the room on the resource table. This is something that really came out of a dialogue internal to CNU, but guides everything we advocate for.



9

Our members came together and drafted this charter that has what we call a preamble which this is an excerpt from, and also includes a series of relatively detailed principles about how do we begin to address these issues.

The charter looks at three different scales: the region, the neighborhood, and the

block. But the thing that I think is really important about this charter is that it's interdisciplinary. And it says in a very clear way what we're concerned about.

We're concerned about all those things I just mentioned and we're also very focused on providing strategies and solutions to beginning to address these issues.



10

I think one of the problems we have had in the past is that we have taken sort of the single issue approach to urban development, and that's obviously not really worked out too well.

(10) So new urbanism is really a strategy about looking at multiple issues as a means of creating communities where livability and quality of life are prized.



11

(11,12) It's about expanding the range of choices for where and how people live and by providing a diversity of options in communities. For example, neighborhood centers help create places where many daily tasks can be taken care of. This is my neighborhood center where I can go in the morning and grab a coffee and go into the city.



12

It's about providing a range of housing options in every community, something that may not be directly relevant to your specific job, but actually makes a big difference in the way a community functions.

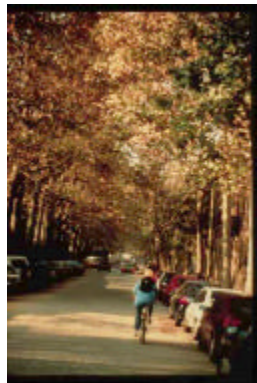


13

(13) It's about building neighborhoods that meet the needs of all ages, incomes, cultures. That's something we haven't really paid attention to too much in the past. (14) And it's about creating great public spaces that nurture a civic culture; something that Hillary Levitt Altman spoke about. I'm sure Fred Kent also talked about that last night.



14

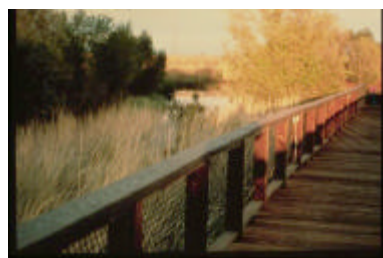


15



16

(15,16) It's about providing transportation options, such as bicycling or transit, and it's about using those transportation investments to help leverage strategic private investment in communities. I think that's something we'll really talk a lot about in these next couple of days.



17

(17) It's about establishing an environmental legacy for future generations, and that's something that is relevant to you because if we begin to focus public investments in existing communities, perhaps we can make a difference in growth patterns at the edge of our communities.

(18) It's about recognizing the interrelationships between issues and between places in our communities. So we recognize that what we do at the central city really does have an effect at the regional scale. And what we do out at the periphery of regions can make a difference in the livability and quality of life in the whole region.



18

A lot of people have talked about this sort of Smart Growth strategy as a "stop development" strategy. It's not. It's about trying to focus our development investments and it's about really thinking strategically about how we grow in our communities. You really do have a role in that.

I want to talk very quickly about the examples showing how these issues really can play out in the community.

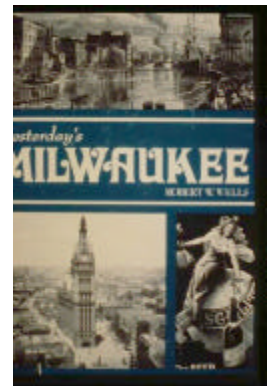
Downtown Revitalization

I want to use Milwaukee, Wisconsin as an example to talk about downtown revitalization. (19) We heard a lot about how with this robust national economy that a lot of downtowns are beginning to come back. It's mainly happening in communities where they have strategically



20

planned how and where investments should happen. Milwaukee, Wisconsin is a really great example of this. Here, they have a river that goes through the middle of their downtown, which a few years ago was



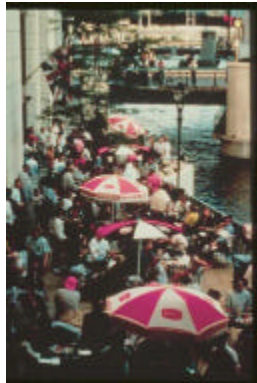
19

essentially dead, very disinvested. (20) With a partnership between the city, many of the local businesses, and a lot of the regional agencies that govern the Milwaukee River, they've created what they call the River Walk. This project has been a catalyst for revitalizing downtown.

The public investment to make a walkway and public spaces around the river has generated an enormous return in private investment in the community. (21) It cost about \$11.8 million. It was jointly funded between the city and the downtown property owners, and it's essentially, in three years, turned the downtown around.



21



22



23



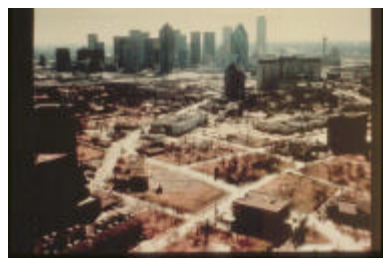
24

(22) We had our annual meeting in Milwaukee there last spring, and it was remarkable to me how much life there was in the areas around the downtown River Walk. (23) So, it really shows the benefit of public investment in a community and using public space specifically to revitalize the downtown. This is really considered a huge success story. (24)

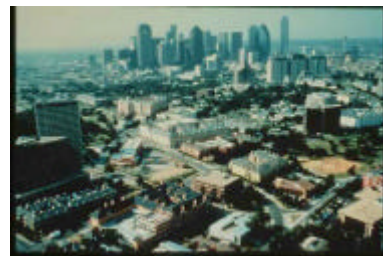
Urban Neighborhoods

Urban Neighborhoods are something that I think are also important for you to be paying attention to. I notice it came up a number of times in case studies that were identified or sent in.

CNU has really always touted the importance of mixed income urban neighborhoods and that's because good urban neighborhoods really bolster the vitality of a working downtown. If you don't have these great neighborhoods around the downtown, chances are you probably don't really have a vital downtown.



25



26

One case study is in Dallas, Texas. It's an interesting case study. (25) This photo shows the Uptown District about ten years ago. You can just see the number of block here that are completely obliterated. And in ten years, this has become an urban neighborhood. (26) And what they have done here is really remarkable because they've stuck to just basic good principles of urbanism. They retained the block pattern of the historic streets in the area. They built buildings that were really human scale. They're not high rises, they're low to mid-rise buildings.



27



28

(27) There are a mix of housing opportunities in this district, from modest income to high income, and they've made great public spaces in this area. This is really a pedestrian-oriented neighborhood with an incredible attention to design detail and quality

and great public spaces. (28) Their retail space is scattered throughout the district, providing places for residents and visitors to gather. This area has had an amazing turnaround because it's only about five miles from downtown Dallas and it's now a place where people who work downtown can live.

The Uptown District was revitalized done mainly through private investment. (29) Post Properties, a Real Estate Investment Trust (REIT), based in Atlanta and Dallas came into this area. And with \$6 million public investment in street improvements, they were able to generate \$500 million in private investment. (30) So really a small investment on the public side generated this huge private investment. I think it was successful because it was very well thought out with very strategically decisions. (31)



29



30



31



32

Affordable Neighborhoods/HOPE VI

Now, I want to talk a little bit about what I call "affordable neighborhoods." The CNU has been involved in the Hope VI program, which Eleanor will talk about in more detail today.

(32)

But this, to me, is a great model, and a great model for GSA, because what they've done is really turn around their thinking about the way a federal agency works in communities. HUD is tearing down public housing that's really distressed and awful and they're rebuilding it as great neighborhoods.



33



34



35

Two examples here, one the Diggstown Project in Norfolk, Virginia, which was really awful, barrack-style housing, an incredible place of crime, and with some very small changes, made a real neighborhood. (33) Essentially what they did here was they built streets so that each unit had a front door and they put porches on the front of the houses. (34) That may sound really trite and simplistic, but in this case it was a way to start building community, create a sense of ownership and sense of pride, and really began to turn around this area. (35)

(36) Another example is in Pittsburgh where through the Hope VI Program it has made a blighted area into a mixed income neighborhood. The project has reconnected housing into the downtown area, a lot like the neighborhood in Dallas. It's a mix of rental and ownership housing, low-income public housing residents and moderate-income market rate housing. (37) (38) It's designed in ways that fits in with the fabric of the surrounding housing in Pittsburgh, so the neighborhood is a part of the fabric of the community, and it's become a true success story. So that's the beginning of the Hope VI Program and you'll hear more about that today. (39)



36



37



38



39

Suburban Retrofit

The fourth example I want to talk about is suburban retrofit. This also may be something of specific use to you as well. But we see suburban areas as really the next frontier. Areas that were developed from the 1960s on are now being recognized as an incredible resource we need to be paying attention to.



40

This is one example in the Bay Area, the site of a former shopping center. (40) This is the mall before it was torn down and now it's rebuilt as an urban neighborhood. These older shopping centers are incredible resources because they are some of the largest land holdings in developed suburban areas.



41

In many cases, these malls that were built in the '60s and 70's are economically dead and now can be rebuilt as integral parts of the community.

(41) What this developer did on this 16-acre site was to first rebuild the street network so that it connects to surrounding areas. (42) They then provided a mix of different housing types, small lot single-family housing, town houses, apartments and mixed-use buildings. (43) Small parks then became a focus of every group of houses. (44) And they just opened a new commuter transit station at the terminus of one of these streets. (45) So, this site is connected to the region via transit.



42

In your case as advocates for rebuilding communities, you can begin to ask communities to make sure that your employees have places to



43



44

live that are linked up to the regional transportation system and have great neighborhoods that are walkable and well designed.



45

Regional Planning

The last example I want to talk about is about the regional scale. That's something I hope some of our conversation can begin to focus on as well. The regional scale is very important because it's where a lot of the big dollars are spent in transportation and infrastructure improvements. It's where sort of the big structural decisions about a place are made and its long-term vitality can begin to play out.



46

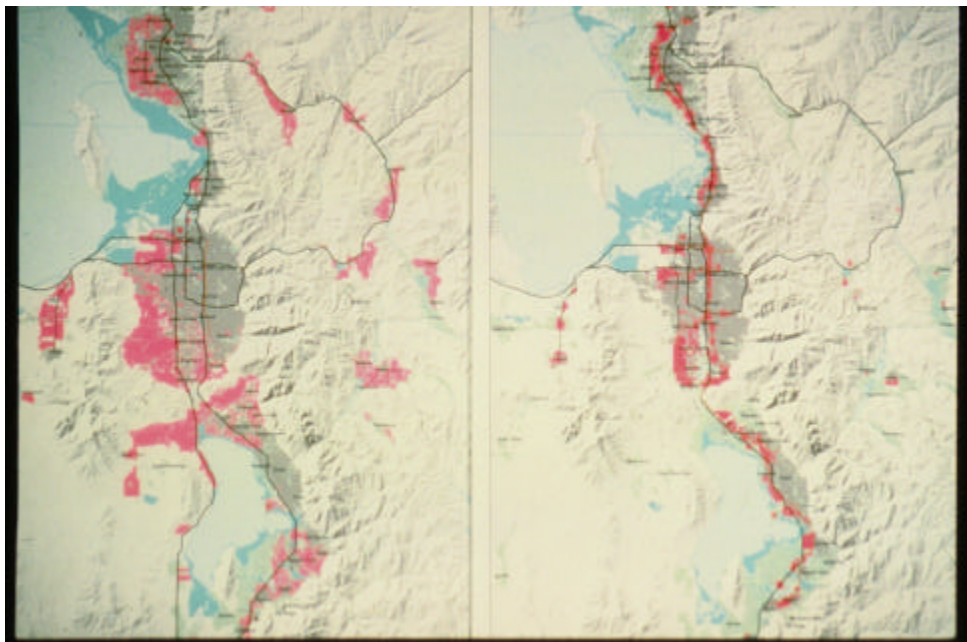
(46) Salt Lake City is a region that's begun a very interesting discussion along these lines. A local activist group called The Coalition for Utah's Future sparked a very interesting dialogue about the long-term livability and vitality of their region.

What they were concerned about, essentially, was whether their children can afford to continue to live in Salt Lake City over the long term.

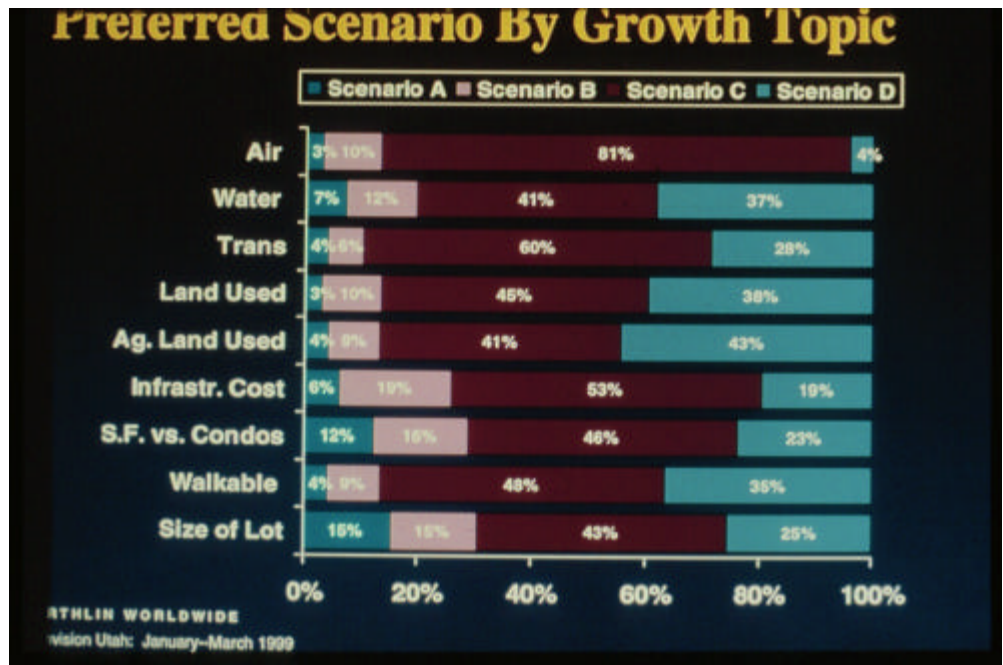


47

(47) What they did was host a series of community workshops to begin to talk about what they wanted for their community. (48) They then modeled a series of growth strategies that looked at, on the left, where growth would happen if they continued to grow under their current plans, and, on the right, what their region would look like if they focused the new development in more compact, mixed use, walkable neighborhoods that are connected to a regional transit system. They called this project Envision Utah. This was a pretty radical concept. Salt Lake City is not well-known for big new planning ideas like Portland, for instance.



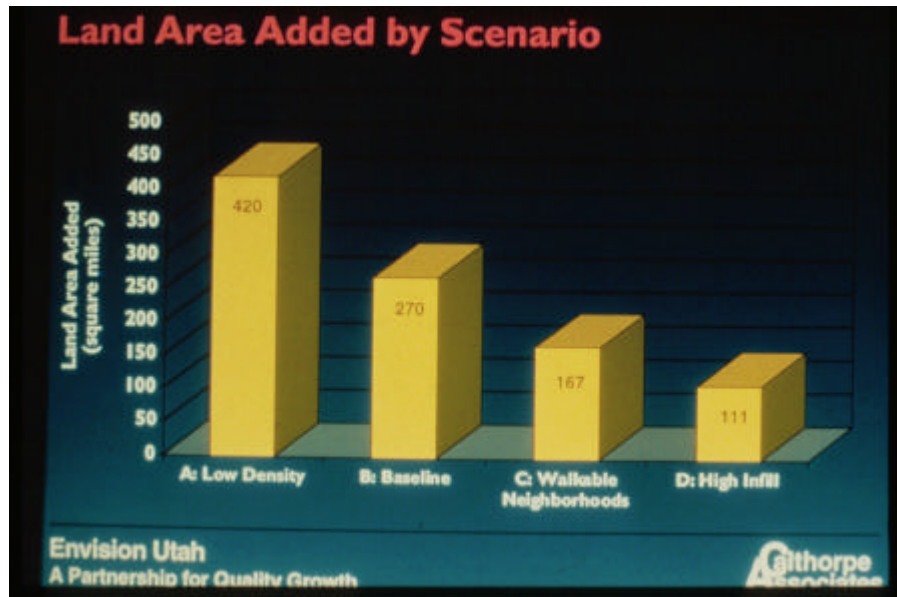
48



49

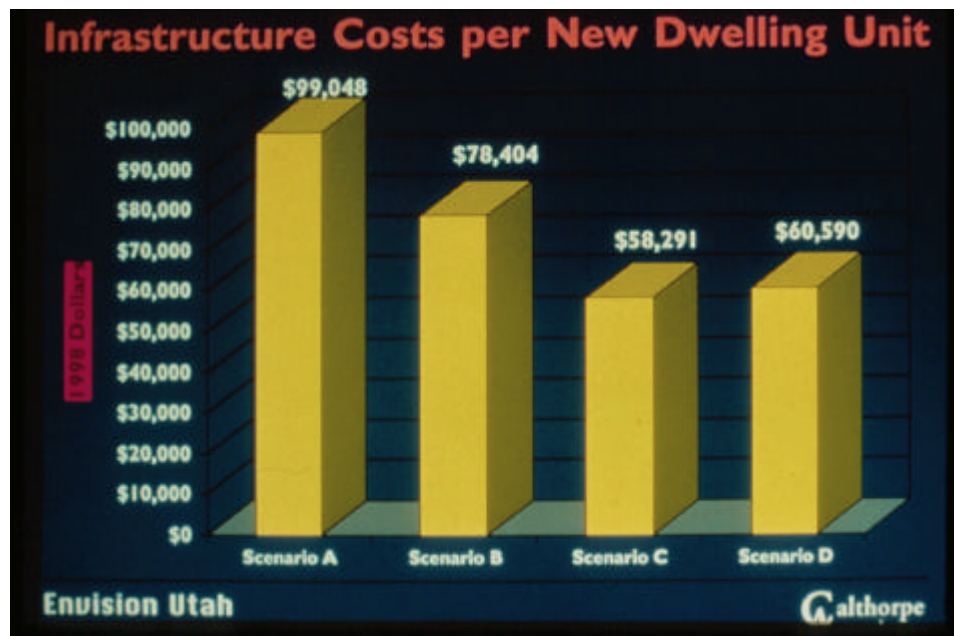
They then asked the community what they thought about these various growth scenarios. Eighteen thousand people responded to a questionnaire asking what kind of growth scenario they would approve. (49) On the left, in blue and light purple, the status quo. On the right, the more compact patterns. Under every indicator, residents of the region preferred the more compact growth patterns.

This was an amazing response and a big turnaround from what the public decision makers were really looking at. Envision Utah has spurred a look into how growth patterns affect the livability of their community.



50

You can see here land areas used up by these various scenarios. (50) At the left, status quo. At the right, more compact patterns. But the other thing that comes out of the analysis of growth alternatives was that they could save a huge amount of money by growing smarter.



51

(51) The infrastructure cost to the citizens of the region is substantially lower under the compact growth scenario than under the status quo. That's actually becoming an important selling point for doing something different.

So these are all really great stories. But your job now is to really become important players in the regional discussions in each of your regions, the federal regions. These examples show some very important lessons that, I believe, translate to your role inside GSA.

(52) One, use public funds wisely and use them to leverage strategic private investment in the areas surrounding your facilities.



52

(53) Two, you can help level the playing field and encourage urban-based development. (54) Bring attention to the issue of reinvesting in existing communities, like the Dallas Project and like the Hope VI program.



53



54



55

(55) Three, it's also about creating economic opportunity and that's something that also should be a mandate, I think, for your efforts. (56) We think that an important part of this effort should improve the neighborhoods where people live, and the choices they have for living, (57) and to make the downtown districts that are vital in their communities.



56



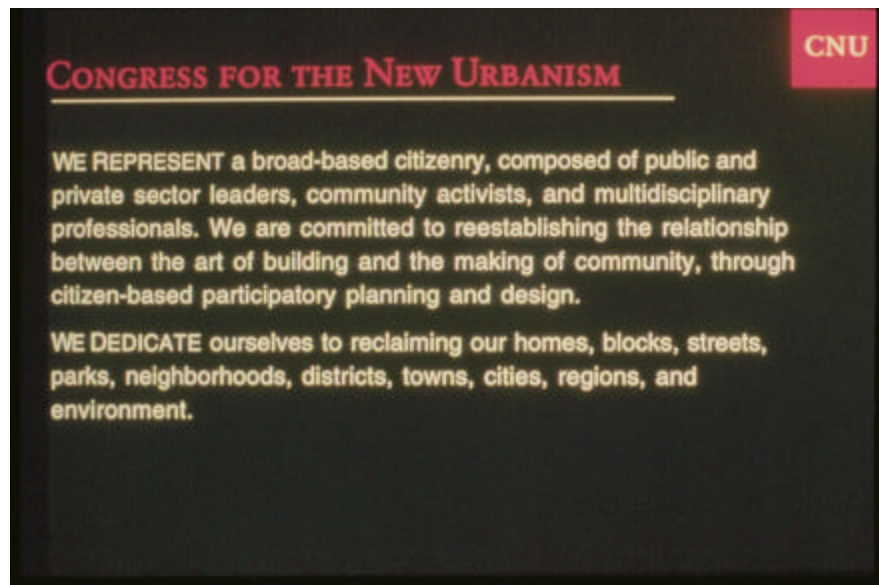
57

(58) And last, it's about creating opportunities to involve people in the decisions. So we should be spending some time talking about how to engage the community in making decisions and have that process lead to productive discussion.



58

(59) So, in closing, these ideas represent a movement that is beginning to take hold in many communities. I think it has a lot of hope and I hope it can spark a discussion here that is useful. So thank you.



59