



AIA New York's advocacy efforts are ramping up

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By Lance Jay Brown, FAIA

April for the AIA New York chapter involved lobbying in Albany and some exciting meetings with new appointments in the de Blasio administration. Our advocacy efforts are definitely ramping up as the new administration coalesces.

On May 1st, AIANY wrote to Harry Rich, chief executive of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA). In the letter, AIANY requests that the RIBA Board overrule its advisory council's recent proposal to the International Union of Architects (UIA) that would seek to suspend the Israeli Association of United Architects' membership from the UIA. AIANY believes that RIBA's decision, which was based on disagreements over local Israeli policies, is antithetical to the UIA's mission to unite all architects.

AIANY members took to the capitol for AIA NYS 2014 Albany Lobby Day on April 29th. This critical annual event allows us to engage our counterparts around the state and meet with critical lawmakers about issues important to architects in New York. The legislative agenda this year consisted of many important bills, but our primary concern was the Good Samaritan Act, which would provide protection for architects who voluntarily provide services to the public during disasters and emergencies. Following Sandy, the need for this legislation was apparent when willing architects hesitated to respond without proper protections. After over a decade of consideration, the Good Samaritan Act needs a final push to get through the Assembly Higher Education Committee.

Back in the city, on April 30th, representatives of AIANY, along with our peers from the Design Trust for Public Space, met with commissioner Polly Trottenberg of the NYC Department of Transportation (DOT). The commissioner confirmed that the DOT's priority is to create walkable, livable streets in NYC. Vision Zero is a holistic approach to safety and will involve collaboration with architects and designers, community groups, and other NYC agencies. The commissioner was even interested in the possibility of doing an exhibition on Vision Zero at the Center for Architecture. The commissioner also reiterated that the mayor's office has pledged to improve transit to underserved communities, which will include expanding Select Bus Service. The next route that they plan to roll out is along 125th St. to LaGuardia Airport. Mayor de Blasio hopes to implement 20 new routes in his first year.

Prior to meeting with commissioner Trottenberg, we had the opportunity to have breakfast with commissioner Carl Weisbrod of the NYC Department of City Planning on April 22nd. During the meal, we discussed our Platform for the Future of the City and various partnership possibilities between AIANY and the Department for City Planning.

After the de Blasio administration asked us to comment on the 'Housing New York' 10-year plan, announced on May 5th, we hope to continue to be part of the conversation with other city agencies on how to expand affordable housing in NYC.

On April 23rd, AIANY welcomed 736 guests to Cipriani Wall St.'s grand beaux arts hall for this year's Honors and Awards Luncheon. The crowd honored the 35 Deign Awards winners, Metropolis Magazine editor-in-chief and publisher Susan Szenasy, Hon. AIANY, winner of the Stephen A. Kliment Oculus Award; Award of Merit winner David Burney, FAIA; and Medal of Honor honorees Denise Scott Brown, RIBA, Int. FRIBA, and Robert Venturi, FAIA, Int. FRIBA. Due to last-minute circumstances, Scott Brown was unable to attend the luncheon, but spoke remotely via video about the petition from 2013 calling on the Pritzker Prize jury to retroactively include her in the prize won by Robert Venturi in 1991. 20,000 people from all over the world signed on in support to no avail. This award from AIANY recognizes the collaborative work of the Venturi and Scott Brown team.

Shaun Donovan, Hon. AIANY, secretary of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, delivered a special keynote address in which he applauded the AIANY Post-Sandy Initiative. "The time has come to build a culture of resilience in America," said Donovan. He emphasized the need to use federal money to encourage resilience and rebuild communities destroyed by Sandy. I gifted the secretary a signed copy of recently released The Legacy Project on Via Verde in the Bronx, a project he helped to advance.

In this upcoming month, we invite you to join us at FitCity 9, our annual conference organized in partnership with the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. This year, the conference will take place at The New School University Center on May 19th. Speakers and participants will examine how design of the built environment can create opportunities for increasing physical access to healthier food and help to improve health equity across neighborhoods.

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