



## **President's message: The best of times, the worst of times**

December 29, 2008 - Spotlights

This is my last column as 2008 AIA New York president before my successor, Sherida Paulsen, FAIA, takes office. It is written at a time of extremes - the best of times and the worst of times for our country and New York City. I will begin with the good and conclude with a response to the bad.

The good news with the inauguration of President Obama, the country is anticipating a change we could only have dreamed of earlier: a national commitment to sustainable planning and new infrastructure, not unlike the goals of Mayor Bloomberg's PlaNYC or the scope of Thomas Jefferson's vision that formed the physical dimensions of a new democracy. The AIA New York Chapter is extremely pleased that the many positions we have advocated are being implemented. And we congratulate NYC commissioner Shaun Donovan, Hon AIA, who will be nominated for Secretary of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

Under our 2008 theme "Designs for Living," AIA New York organized conferences and events that focused on the larger issues of sustainable urban and regional design, infrastructure and smart growth that are essential in confronting the crises of population growth, diminishing resources, and global warming. The UN Forum on Sustainable Urbanization during Earth Week in April brought mayors and policy makers from 10 global cities to exchange their planning initiatives with the Mayor's Office of Operations for PlaNYC led by Rohit Aggarwala, Director of Long Term Planning and Sustainability. The Greening the Iron Ribbon Conference explored transit oriented development in the northeast region in which New York is a central part. The monthly public lecture series invited architects, policy makers and the public to explore current design directions that will form the "building blocks" for new growth envisioned by PlaNYC. Over 40 firms presented their work in panels with NYC Commissioners David Burney, FAIA, of DDC, Marty Horn of Corrections, Kate Levin of Cultural Affairs, Robert Tierney of Landmarks Preservation, and Martha Hirst of DCAS among others. In November Jonathan Rose gave the Ratensky lecture titled Green Urban Solutions, along with many other programs too numerous to describe here.

Since Donovan was appointed commissioner of the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) in March 2004, he has led HPD in implementing Mayor Bloomberg's ten-year \$7.5 billion New Housing Marketplace Plan, which will provide 165,000 affordable homes for 500,000 New Yorkers. The housing plan is the largest municipal housing plan in the nation's history, and is cultivating innovative partnerships and pioneering new tools in affordable housing. Commissioner Donovan also provided the leadership for a design competition in association with AIA New York and NYC agencies that led to Via Verde, a "green" state of the art affordable housing complex in the Bronx that constitutes our legacy project for the 150th anniversary of the founding of the AIA in New York City. He holds masters degrees in Architecture and Public Administration from Harvard University which explains his unique blend of vision and policy.

In recognition of his many accomplishments, AIA New York honored Commissioner Donovan with

the Center for Architecture Award at the Heritage Ball at Chelsea Piers; and conferred an Honorary AIA at our annual awards ceremony. During his Heritage Ball acceptance, in the spirit of Thomas Jefferson, he spoke of choosing a path of public service in order to more effectively promote the goals of affordable housing for all citizens. We can think of no one more qualified to take on the tasks confronting the nation's housing crisis.

That is the good news, now for the bad. How do we respond to the collapse of Wall Street and the growing global financial crisis that has brought a halt to the economy and layoffs of valued employees? We do not want to repeat the loss of qualified professionals that we experienced in earlier downturns that were so harmful when the economy revived. In my last column I spoke of "keeping eyes on the horizon." Today AIA New York and the Center for Architecture Foundation initiated a dialogue with over 100 participants that included architects, interior designers, engineers and journalists to address the impact of economic changes on the design professions. This unprecedented meeting drew many proposals on how to sustain our offices and workforce through public service and other activities during this recession, and will be expanded and implemented in the new year. The silver lining will be the opportunity for design professionals and recent graduates to work together and with others in the industry to learn new skills in preparation for the recovery that will take New York City onto the next level.

James McCullar, FAIA is the 2008 president of the New York Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, New York, N.Y.

New York Real Estate Journal - 17 Accord Park Drive #207, Norwell MA 02061 - (781) 878-4540