

AIA Kansas City: River Crown Plaza Forum Series

Contributed by AIA Kansas City. Excerpted and adapted from a 2006 Component Excellence Award-winning entry.

January 2007

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SUMMARY

AIA Kansas City won an AIA 2006 Component Excellence Award for a series of public forums it hosted. The public forums drew large crowds and increased public awareness on topics critical to quality urban planning.

BACKGROUND

In 2004 the mayor of Kansas City, Kay Waldo Barnes, asked AIA Kansas City to help her identify the key issues at stake to create a unified vision for Kansas City's urban core. She wanted architects to lead the discussion about which characteristics create a healthy, vibrant public realm.

In Kansas City the urban core, especially an area referred to as River Crown Plaza, was experiencing a revitalization period that continues to gain momentum. River Crown Plaza stretches over 5.5 miles and includes seven distinct urban neighborhoods.

PROCESS

Component leadership followed Mayor Barnes's request and identified six focus areas for public address: transportation, public art, sustainable design, affordable housing, the role of the public in public architecture, and proposed redevelopment projects. They created a panel of allied professionals to present each topic at a public forum.

The sessions facilitated discussion on the future of Kansas City between professionals and interested citizens. The panels featured architects, public officials, developers, and other experts. Each forum began with introductory comments by the panel experts followed by attendee questions. To keep the forum energetic, informative, and on track AIA Kansas City invited a reporter from its local paper, the *Kansas City Star*, to moderate.

AIA Kansas City hosted its first public forum in December 2004 and continued to offer them over 18 months, the last one was held in July 2006.

THE FORUMS

A Walk Down 14th Street was the title of the first public forum. The forum discussed the potential for new large-scale urban projects downtown and which elements citizens would like to see incorporated in the new projects. The outcome was a set of guiding principles for good design for the mayor's office and the City Design Center to use. The guiding principles are being incorporated into the zoning ordinance as well.

Democracy in Design explored the role public input should play in the development of large public projects. This venue provided citizens a chance to voice their opinions about projects that were on the boards. The result was three written position statements: two in opposition and one in support of potential projects.

Moving Kansas City: Planes, Trains, and Automobiles focused on the introduction of a bus rapid transit system and the future of Kansas City's transportation. The result was a position statement against a proposed highway/bridge expansion project. It was also decided AIA Kansas City will host a series of bridge design competitions.

Sticks and Stones: The Price We Pay to Live Affordably in Kansas City was the November 2005 forum which focused on affordable housing at all levels. The outcome was a tour of three infill houses in Kansas City and an AIA member, at the mayor's request, provided their perspective on appropriate affordable housing at the first ever housing retreat for city officials.

Art and the City, the April 2006 forum, discussed the roles public art and architecture have in Kansas City. The outcome was a position statement for 1 Percent for Art, a virtual forum on the AIA Kansas City Web site, and inclusion of the component's executive director on the 1 Percent for Art panel.

Kansas City, Earth: Where We Live, How We Build, Why It Matters, held in July 2006, focused on sustainability and educated citizens and created in them a sense of hunger to learn more about the topic after the session ended. The outcomes of the

forum were an increased interest that led to AIA Kansas City offering an additional public lecture by Ed Mazria, AIA, about the 2030 challenge and, from there, a sustainable design house tour was created. The house tour included only two homes but drew more than 1,400 participants.

As a follow-up to the forum, AIA Kansas City's Committee on the Environment has been working on new educational programs to take to high schools and universities to help change the way youth view environmental responsibility. As well, local public radio asked AIA Kansas City to recommend panelists for an on-air discussion about sustainable home design. This platform introduced the local AIA presence to households throughout the region.

After such interest and support AIA Kansas City has now decided to offer a section of resources on sustainable design on its Web site as well as a blog spot for citizens to voice questions and concerns on sustainable home design. Both of these Web site enhancements will further open the communication between community members and local architecture professionals.

RESULTS

If the number of attendants was directly related to impact, then it seems the sessions proved worthwhile as they generated more than 1,000 attendees. AIA Kansas City's forums prove that when offered the chance to engage in a public discussion on topics that affect a citizen's quality of life, citizens notice. AIA Kansas City increased the level of public awareness as to what architects do and how architects can improve communities through good design.

RESOURCES

More Best Practices

The following AIA Best Practices provide additional information related to this topic:

- 22.02.02 BSA ARE Success Teams
- 21.03.12 One New York State
- 21.01.05 Communication Plan of AIA Louisiana

Feedback

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Keywords

- Leadership
- Associations
- Design associations
- Architectural associations
- The American Institute of Architects
- AIA components