

there are a lot of ways that we need to weigh in on housing. As Fannie and Freddie evolve they may eventually shrink way down, or they could grow. But right now they are over half mortgages. They have some really anti-urban criteria that have never been challenged. They were big and powerful and couldn't be challenged but I think now we can. The twenty percent or twenty-five percent non-residential rule has had a devastating effect. You cannot build urban streets and use Fannie May money for residential above shops unless you're in a place like New York where you have retail and then thirty stories where you can meet that twenty percent limit. For the Midwest, if you wanted to do a main street in Des Moines,

Iowa, you couldn't do it using Fannie or Freddie money. So that needs to change. There are just a number of programs that need to be redone. For instance, just the whole idea that home ownership is an unvarnished virtue. It isn't – it's a very varnished virtue. People who want to rent should be encouraged to do that. You shouldn't be encouraged to own an asset for a long period of time – you can rent it by the month. We need to get those kinds of ideas back in. There are a lot of things we need to do on housing and we're trying to do it. There are rules that are coming out now on the public housing money, the energy efficient money, and this new creativity grant that HUD will administer – we're trying to weigh in on those.

If there are other things you think we should be dealing with, let us know.

I also wanted to comment on the congestion issue. Congestion isn't that important. The whole pavement policy is built on defeating congestion. People say "you can't defeat congestion." That's not true. It is a very effective policy: if you built all those big roads and blown-out streets, it works. Congestion is not a problem in Detroit. They defeated it. It is the most successful city in the world at defeating congestion. And the next time people tell you that we need to defeat congestion, tell them: "You should get tickets right away and head to Detroit. Because there you can see what happens when you defeat congestion."

CNU 17

EXPERIENCING THE NEW URBANISM:
THE CONVENIENT REMEDY
JUNE 10-14, 2009
DENVER, COLORADO



After days of hard-work, planning, and stressful fundraising, CNU 17 arrived quickly and in a blink it was over. Yet, those five long days were full of information bombardment and motivation enhancement for us urbanists, and thus CNU 17's effects are still reverberating.

It is not possible to reflect fully on such a rich conference in a few pages. Here we just wanted to include two short pieces: a brief essay by Cheney Ferguson, one of our board members, and to show our gratitude to one of the earliest and fiercest advocates of urbanism, Leon Krier, a short interview with him.

HIGHLIGHTS OF CNU 17

Cheney Ferguson, LEED-AP
Board Member, CNU Colorado
Designer,
Van Meter Williams Pollack



After attending CNU 17 I have read reviews of the Congress online, some touting New Urbanists are going to save the world and some criticizing that we need to start talking in real terms that real people understand. Regardless, I think this Congress was full of a new kind of hope: a desperate one. These times are real, and they beg for real solutions, not imaginary ones.

On an experiential basis, I learned how proud I am to call Denver "home." The Mall was bustling with people, performers and impromptu gatherings. I even caught a lunchtime jazz concert in Republic Plaza. The sun shined, as usual, ninety percent of the time and the recent rain made the backdrop of the city very lush and green.

On a metaphysical basis, I learned that from an insider looking out, America has a lot to learn from other countries in terms of being able to experience a place with your heart and feelings. To put it bluntly, strip malls just don't bring about the most transcendental state of being like standing in the center of the Pantheon does. The Metaphysical Planning session discussed what a spiritual city today might look like. Instead of churches and civic space being at the center of a city, we now are driven (pun intended) by retail. I also learned that from an outsider looking in, America has a lot to teach other countries in terms of being able to live in peace with competing views of spirituality. Because our culture is not so religiously driven, "spiritual" may mean something completely different than an ancient temple with a giant oculus that allows sunshine to pour in and dance around. What would America's spiritual city look like?

On a practical basis, I learned that we must find ways to alleviate our long emergencies symbiotically. For example, street trees reduce CO2 and create more walkable places, which in turn spur economic development and reduce VMTs. I learned that by simply increasing talent and reducing poverty by a minuscule amount, we can reap the benefits

(economic and social) exponentially. I learned about the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act and how the grants might apply to projects I am currently working on.

Rob Krier made me question the validity of the Jeffersonian grid. Krier says that medieval cities were designed irregularly on purpose, that it should be an esthetical and social ambition to enrich a city with as much diversity as possible, and that streets are supposed to bend and weave to create multiple perspectives of a building. So, why has practicality become more important than evoking human emotion in a place? Leon Krier and Jim Kunstler made me question the validity of Vancouver's towers. Are

they really gated communities, just vertical? Will they be able to change uses and evolve after the days of cheap oil? Speaking of Kunstler, being about halfway through reading *The Long Emergency*, I went into his session a bit hesitant, worried that all the excitement the past sessions had brought me might be stopped dead in their tracks by a doomsday speech. I have to hand it to him though, because however depressing our current situation might be (and he did not hesitate to tell us), listening to his speech did not make me want to sit back and wait, it made me want to act, and act now!

A BRIEF INTERVIEW WITH LEON KRIER AFTER HIS TALK IN CNU 17

Leon Krier,
Architect
and Urban Planner



Korkut Onaran: In your session you made a comment about the building height in the cities, you do not want to see buildings higher than 4 or 5 stories. You asked CNU to take a position on this. In your book you are calling the skyscrapers vertical cul-de-sacs.

Leon Krier: Yes, network congestors or killers.

Korkut: I was wondering, given that this year CNU 17's theme is "experience," how do you see the difference between a fabric with vertical cul-de-sacs and a fabric with lower urban buildings, in terms of the social relations and experience on the street?

Leon: Well, vertical cul-de-sacs have the same characteristics as the horizontal cul-de-sacs, namely that they are gated communities. They are a mere address on a public network but do not enlarge or enrich it. People who live and work in vertical cul-de-sacs think that it is their holy right to use the network on which they are plugged but that their own circulation network is exclusively theirs. So it's not a reciprocal love story. A robust urban network can of course accommodate a number of cul-de-sacs, I mean, a monastery, a hotel or any large building is in a way a cul-de-sac. The problem is not the single type but it becoming a repetitive or exclusive phenomenon. The major question which is addressed here is the relative amount of public versus private space and at what point privatization of urban space menaces the constitution and maintenance of a civil society.

Korkut: In your talk you mentioned the "The Long Emergency" by Kunstler. Lately there are a lot discussions about how we will need to live more locally and produce food. How do you think that will change the urbanism, especially the way we build? What kind of future do you see there?

Leon: When you use local materials, there is not that much you can go wrong with architecture. Even an idiot cannot do the wrong arch because otherwise it will simply not stand up. Bad experience teaches you how to do it correctly. Whereas you can put a fake arch up-side-down and it will still stand. The Libeskind building here in Denver could be built up side down or laid side ways and it would still stand up . . .

Korkut: How about this building we are in now (the Sheraton Hotel in Downtown Denver)?

Leon: This building is a mega structure stretching under a public road. I had this extraordinary feeling of disorientation the other day. It will take some time even for a professional to realize that some of the main conference accommodations are located under a major public street. I have a good sense of spatial orientation but it took a real mental effort for me to intuit where I was and how it all worked. I imagine that normal users here just follow signs and never really understand how the beast is configured. But perception and use are not the only problems related with mega structures, there are other ones too. Just take the air-conditioning. In times of crisis when air-conditioning is not ensured, this place becomes a slum within days. It's a very risky conception and for what gain? Other than the view from your hotel room, from no place in the conference center do you have any view towards the hosting city. You could just be anywhere in the universe and one wonders what is the point of so many people travelling this far if for three days they are voluntary prisoners in a blind nowhere?