

A Virginia Accord

ReVisioning Virginia for the next 100 years

Summary

Architects are leaders in the built-environment and as such can take an advocacy position in environmental preservation and creation. In commemoration of the Virginia Society of the American Institute of Architects (VSAIA) 100th anniversary, professionals integral to the built-environment have an opportunity to affirm a commitment to the environment, economy and quality of life of all Virginians. This Accord is for architects, landscape architects, designers, constructors, engineers, legislators, economists, educators, mayors, ecologists, urbanists, planners, public health professionals and real estate developers to set forth an environmentally sustainable, common commitment to the public good for the citizens of the State of Virginia. This might involve but not be limited to, the; AIA, ASLA, ASID, USGBC, AGC, NAED, Universities and colleges in VA, Virginia Center for Architecture, engineering associations, State Legislators and the Virginia Municipal League.

Proposition

At this 100th anniversary, **priority themes of job creation and environmental sustainability** appear politically and operationally in direct conflict. However, sustainability of the Commonwealth is only achievable through the confluence of these sets of concerns. We cannot have a viable job centric economy with polluted air, water and devastated natural habitats. Our natural environment cannot be sustained if the population is economically disadvantaged. A balance is critical for the longevity of the quality of life in the State and region. This requires commitment and compliance by a wide range of professionals, but none more important than those engaged in the built-environment. Institutions of higher education in Virginia provide a knowledge base that is invaluable to the success of this integration of disciplines and positive achievement of these priority themes.

The architecture community can bring together professionals to address the two primary priority themes of Job Creation and Environmental Sustainability, around five key sectors. These can be integrally dependent where they support each other for the betterment of society.

If we consider **job creation** as a priority theme, State Legislators play a central role, however, Mayors contribute in a more pivotal and influential context. Why Mayors? Jim Clifton, Chairman and CEO of Gallup, makes it clear that job creation is far more related to the leadership of our cities and towns, than the national government. In comparing Austin, Texas and Albany, NY he states; *“The difference, in my view, is that Austin has deeply caring, highly engaged business, political, and philanthropic leaders with principles, policies, beliefs, and values about human nature that work. They understand how to build a thriving, growing economy -- one that welcomes business and entrepreneurship. Albany has the opposite, as I see it: Leaders with principles, policies, values, and beliefs that discourage business and entrepreneurship, if not outright scaring them away. Cities across the country with great leadership are filled with booming startup companies, and those cities have thriving economies that create authentic,*

organically grown good jobs. These cities are saving America, while the others are letting the country down.”

Constructed Environment that includes residential, commercial and industrial accounts for 31% of all energy consumed in the USA¹. Architects and other building professionals must commit to educate, plan, design and construct energy efficient and environmentally sustainable structures that contribute to the well being of life, not its erosion. Adopting LEED based principles is a beginning, not an end. Disagreements over these principles do not mean abandonment of them, but rather the engagement in their redesign for better performance.

It is critical that those engaged in creating our constructed landscape not ignore the negative **public health** trends becoming increasingly evident in our State. Obesity is rising and becoming a primary public health crisis. Obesity has many causes, however one of its greatest remedies is an active and safe, environmentally healthy, walk able lifestyle. High quality buildings standing in isolation are not compatible with this approach. Micro-urban and urban landscapes that provide opportunities for people to experience the environment from a perspective other than the automobile can only occur with the support of multiple discipline professionals. Just as we seemingly stopped overnight, littering on our public properties and smoking in public spaces, we can transform our exterior environments to be pleasant, engaging opportunities for outdoor living. Virginia is blessed with opportunities for year around outdoor living and recreation that is currently not supported in the built-environment as it could be.

Transportation accounts for 27% of all energy consumed in the USA². Its issues are not irrelevant to our natural and built environment concerns. Our professionals know that forms of mass transit can save Virginia cities and landscapes, but unfortunately don't assist in the prioritizing and education of lawmakers and governance officials to see the value. The value is immense to both priority themes, job creation and environmental sustainability. Expansion of paved surfaces while avoiding the more energy and environmentally viable alternatives of light and heavy rail for passenger and bulk goods, is contributing to irreconcilable damage to our landscapes, cities and neighborhoods. Infrastructure design needs to support the State for the next 100 years. The past 100 years were marked by the industrial revolution. The next 100 years will be marked by what can only be described as a *Transportation Revolution*. This will require infrastructure, public space design and accommodation and protection of our natural environment. The current approaches are counter to all three.

Transportation is closely aligned with the physical design of the State through **Land Development and Urban Infill**. This is where people live, work and recreate. Our city cores can be viable centers of energy that combine mixed-use opportunities for sustainable walk able foci of work, living and playing. Existing suburbs can develop new commercial, office and institutional cores linked by public greenways to reduce mandatory automotive commutes. Development of brownfields will be encouraged and greenfield developments become more expensive and require requisite public land replacement. The alternative is to continue to eliminate the natural environment, increase transportation energy waste and continue the high production of carbon dioxide.

¹ http://www.eia.gov/totalenergy/data/annual/pecss_diagram.cfm

² *ibid*

Methodology

The Virginia Accord could be the outcome of a State-wide Symposium, held in Richmond, Virginia over a 2-day period. Hosted by the VSAIA, this symposium will feature key speakers on the 5 sectors, breakout sessions of mixed disciplines, discussion opportunities and methodologies to overcome current roadblocks. Other break out sessions will address how our disciplines can work together integrating the two priority themes, to achieve maximum impact for the betterment of society. Individuals and organizations could be signatory participants and through advertisement or other means indicate that they are proud signers of the 2014 Virginia Accord. Clients will come to expect their design work to recognize and include the principles in the production of their services.