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Housing &
Community
Development

an **AIA** Knowledge
Community

Housing and Community Development Knowledge Community

August 14, 2019

Mr. William J. Bates, FAIA
President
American Institute of Architects
1735 New York Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20006

Dear Bill:

Thank you for your leadership efforts on behalf of the Institute this year. Members are excited and engaged. We want to share thoughts with you on the important issues surrounding housing and homelessness.

First, we want to acknowledge Sarah Dodge, Senior Vice-President for Advocacy & Government Relations for taking the time during A'19 to meet with members of the groups who submitted the 2017 Housing Humanity Resolution 17-3 (AIA California, Chicago and Illinois) and the Housing and Community Development Knowledge Community (HCDKC) to discuss the Institute's efforts to fulfill the actions in the Resolution adopted by members at A'17.

There are tremendous hopes for the Institute to lead an engagement strategy on the issues of housing and homelessness. The A'19 Business Meeting Report provided a listing of on-going activities related to housing, but more work is still needed through an organized, coordinated and concerted effort to develop a formal plan of action as was called for in Resolution 17-3.

It was very helpful to share thoughts about opportunities for communication and collaboration between the Institute, HCDKC, Resolution Authors, the Building Capacity Advisory Group and other concerned, members who will be engaged by Staff. Clearly there is a strong interest to develop shared goals and expectations, a locally focused nationwide engagement strategy, and a communications plan to support component and member action. Moreover, coalition building with public agencies, decision makers, construction industry stakeholders and like-minded allies that the Resolution mentioned will be fundamental for architects to achieve success in driving positive change.

Sarah also shared information about the 'Big Move' discussion recently undertaken at the national level. It was good to hear the Board is focusing on better organizing and prioritizing the Institute's initiatives for the next 2-3 years. Achieving safe, quality, well-performing housing opportunities for all falls squarely under all three of the Big Move priorities - Design for Economy, Design for Energy and Design for Equitable Communities. Well designed, durable, operationally and energy efficient buildings are more financially viable, address economic inequity, support resident health and stronger more diverse communities.

The complexity surrounding housing attainability is far-reaching, diverse from region to region, and driven by complicated and often localized forces. We understand that developing the plan of action will take a concentrated effort. The 'Housing & Homelessness - Framework for Action' ("Framework") document that the Large States Network drafted is included with this letter. It was developed for information purposes to help the Institute start the conversation recognizing the magnitude of the issues and offering insights into

how architects and the profession might fit in through a formal plan of action. Please share this letter and the attached Framework with the Board and staff involved in the Big Move discussion and planning.

We look forward to working closely with the Board and staff to craft a comprehensive vision with respect to the issues of housing and homelessness. It is essential for this vision to be action-driven and focused on positioning architects to effect positive outcomes. As the AIA National Board of Directors organizes, plans, prioritizes, and budgets for the Big Move next year, it is our expectation that this Framework document will facilitate the discussions needed so that the Board will provide the resources needed to complete the actions called for by our membership under A'17 Resolution 17-3.

The undersigned stand ready to help.

Respectfully Submitted,

Large States Network Members

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Housing and Community Development Knowledge Community

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Housing & Homelessness

FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION

"Architects Leading Housing Solutions"

Spring 2019

ABSTRACT

The nation faces a widespread housing shortage and homelessness crisis. Those in the workforce struggle to find equitable access alongside energy efficient and economically attainable options. And few countries if any have adequate affordable housing for all.² Tragically, every night over 600,000 people in the United States are homeless¹. In order to truly effect much needed change, design thinking must be a part of the conversation and drive solutions. This Framework for Action ("Framework") seeks to guide the American Institute of Architects in developing a cohesive, strategic approach to providing architect-led solutions in an arena within which architects are uniquely and strongly qualified to lead.

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HISTORY AND BACKGROUND:

At its 2017 annual business meeting in Orlando, FL, the AIA membership adopted Resolution 17-3 that reasserted its belief that "access to good design is a fundamental right," and that members, firms, and components require the vision, tools, and guidance on potential methodologies to mitigate the problem of the nation's homelessness and housing affordability crisis. The members called on the Institute "to implement a nationwide engagement strategy that shall include a sustained public outreach and aggressive communications plan..." and prepare "a report and plan of action [that] will be presented no later than at the 2019 AIA Conference on Architecture...to include measurable goals, recommendations, ongoing progress reports, and member engagement opportunities that accomplish together what cannot be achieved alone."

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE:

Communities throughout the country are facing increasing housing challenges. Addressing housing affordability and ending homelessness have been on-going topics of discussion for decades. In addition to discussions focused on insufficient new construction counts, the majority of housing and homelessness conversations have centered on income and special needs, looking to address how to better reach or enhance services to those who require assistance. These conversations have remained at more single-issue conceptual levels and have yet to focus on the specific challenges and driving forces associated with these issues. Expanding outside income or special needs, opportunities for the "missing middle" continue to wane as well. Creating equitable access to housing while avoiding gentrification; diversifying opportunities for wealth building at all economic scales; expanding access to land ownership for more people; identifying misguided regulatory policies in need of reform; advancing effective zoning policies; addressing challenges associated with accessing decision makers; developing and nurturing key partnerships or alliances; understanding the underlying economics of housing production; linking housing more directly with greater stewardship of the built environment; promoting the importance of design in holistic housing solutions; nurturing design thinking and typological innovation – these are merely some of the underlying opportunities. Despite the complexity of housing and homelessness issues, architects must play a substantive role in fashioning solutions through innovative design and efficient, economically feasible housing production and construction methodologies. *Because of our familiarity with planning policies and local political environments, expertise in design and building performance, and knowledge of construction materials and methodologies, architects are uniquely equipped and experienced to address this glaring need.*

HOUSING ISSUES AND CHALLENGES:

Natural and built environment conditions are changing at an unprecedented rate. Mineral and freshwater resources are being tapped and temperature fluctuations are occurring at historic levels. Micro-climates across the country are witnessing unusual transformations. Within this context, housing production and the crafting of environmentally-responsive footprints will become essential to ensure positive change. The complexities involved in achieving successful housing outcomes for all and the challenges inherent in combatting far-ranging homeless conditions necessitate a more comprehensive approach to identifying cause-and-effect relationships. Design professionals working in collaborative settings have the expertise and capacity to address these relationships in a meaningful and relevant manner.

Amongst the issues and challenges are:

NEIGHBORHOOD & BUILT ENVIRONMENT IMPACTS:

- Gentrification associated with new housing
- Impacts on community character, diversity, and vibrancy
- Conversations about housing (that do not include architects) are not considering design-based solutions to enhance the built environment for all
- Access to a diversity of scale, types, affordability, and lifestyle options available in housing options for “all”
- Short-term rentals changing sense of place and functioning of and care for local neighborhoods
- Loss of wildlife habitats in expanding urbanized areas where new housing is constructed
- Efficient use of water resources and conservation in new housing falling short
- Displaced tenants lack relocation support

LEGISLATIVE AND REGULATORY BARRIERS:

- Code challenges: complex and contradictory state and local code regulations and approval processes
- Contradictory or uncoordinated local land use policies
- Housing issues oversimplified absent political, cultural, socio-economic, and financial contexts
- Statewide laws fostering economic segregation
- Inability to track, monitor and identify driving forces behind vacancies
- Housing policies skewed toward increasing unit counts versus quality livable places within walkable environments
- Disconnect between a desire for environmentally responsive designs and antiquated regulatory models that rely on minimum development standards and “one-size-fits-all” policies, regardless of scale or context
- Density bonus zoning incentives that lead to economic imbalances and instability by promoting only high- and low-income levels of housing, ignoring and even disincentivizing middle class solutions altogether
- Workforce housing options and housing units for entry level professionals under-addressed by policy and legislation

DESIGN FOR EQUITABLE COMMUNITIES: OBSTACLES TO HOUSING FOR ALL

- Housing options should be walkable and in close proximity to needed goods and service with easy access to transit
- Transit-oriented units not occupied by individuals willing to use transit as primary means of local travel
- Housing solutions must be explored in conjunction with access to jobs and job training
- Need for both short-term (temporary or transitional) and permanently supportive housing solutions
- Income gaps exacerbated by emphasis on developers to provide most of the new housing
- “One-size-fits-all housing solutions fail to engage and address local socio-economic and community needs
- Market-rate housing projects often leave out middle-income units in favor of low-income units
- Community support and opposition (YIMBY v. NIMBYs, special needs advocacy, special interests, etc.) have to be engaged thoughtfully
- Qualitative size, location, proximity, and configuration of housing far more important than quantitative unit counts.
- Prioritization of place-making and health and wellness aspects

DESIGN FOR ECONOMY: MARKET FORCES AND FINANCIAL FACTORS

- Over-reliance on developers to build new housing
- High cost of consultants and third parties needed to obtain permits and construct new housing
- Corporate structures (i.e. LLCs) that emphasize and require maximizing return on investment versus housing people
- Diminishing access to land ownership for all, trending towards land in the hands of selected few (i.e. "neo-fuedalism")
- Numerous funding sources required for a non-profit housing development driving skyrocket costs per unit
- Lending platforms antiquated and out-of-step with new living patterns (i.e. home studio, live-work, work-live, co-working, co-living, etc.)
- Dwindling access to capital for work force, underwriting guidelines impede opportunities for middle class to develop infill housing

DESIGN FOR ENERGY: BEYOND MERE SHELTER

- Generalized policies based on minimum performance standards hamper design excellence
- Broad, one-size-fits-all regional approaches to housing solutions fail to address micro-climate conditions
- More research and development needed on carbon reduction strategies for new housing
- Opportunities for greater education on passive design approaches to high- and moderate-density housing development
- Lack of measures that communicate the value of energy efficient design to the public

FRAMING AN ACTION PLAN:

Looking with greater acuity and focus at the roles architects might play as "architects" and "through architecture" will reposition experienced design professionals within an expanded, influential role as civic ideators and solution generators. With our foundation rooted in design thinking, collaboration and nurturing key relationships, how can architects implement strategic housing frameworks and relevant action plans? Historically, society's greatest paradigm shifts have come from questioning long-standing conventions, exposing embedded myths, breaking normative cycles, opening new paths and thus truly thinking different. Architects as generative thinkers and creative, yet pragmatic problem solvers possess a rare capacity and skill set to address housing affordability and homelessness. Therefore, it is incumbent upon us to proactively engage existing power structures, effectively communicate ideas and opportunities, promote the value of architecture, and seek out public education-related activities such as:

I. ISSUE ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

- A. Establishing a working group (i.e. Housing Think Tank) to identify, craft and develop strategic design-based housing policy for urbanized environments (Infill Development Zoning "IDZ" – San Antonio TX)
- B. Using member expertise and advocacy to influence better local housing policy through architect-led, design-inspired zoning reform that emphasizes holistic design thinking and results in more flexible, performance-based development standards
- C. Lobbying for appearances and solution-driven presentations at League of Cities, U.S. Council of Mayors, National City Manager, US Dept of Housing and Urban Development Conferences
- D. Looking to develop key, meaningful coalition partners (who recognize value of architect's role in housing) and celebrate successful partnerships (i.e. Structures for Inclusion, Alliance for Innovation, Enterprise Foundation, Housing Institute, Economic Policy Institute, Luskin Center/UCLA, Terner Center for Housing Innovation/UC Berkeley, UCLA/CityLab, Bloomberg Philanthropies, etc.)
- E. Advocating for more effective financing and lending platforms that support creative forms of housing (i.e. muni bonds for affordable housing, specific funding for temporary or transitional housing, live/work and work/live housing loan programs that promote workforce housing, etc.)

- F. Understanding the developer mindset and collecting case studies on the economics of equitable and quality housing. Tying design solutions better into developers' mindsets and business financing models (Look at MRED programs led by architects such as Woodbury University/San Diego)

II. COMMUNICATIONS PLANNING: Equitable Housing for All and Addressing Homelessness as Architects

Central to any communications planning should be advancing conversations about housing away from "housing affordability" towards "housing attainability" for all. Selected ideas include:

- A. Nurturing "storytelling" techniques and methods about successful design thinking that demonstrate the value of architects when addressing housing issues; (i.e. story cards, ad campaigns, press releases, etc.)
- B. Rebranding the nation's housing "crisis" as a design issue in addition to a socio-economic one (i.e. "Housing Opportunities by Design" or "Designing for Housing Attainability" or ...)
- C. Developing an AIA Speakers Bureau available to outside organizations on topic of housing design and innovation
- D. Publishing topical "white papers" on homeless issues with architecture-driven metrics and solutions
- E. Communicating more case studies and data that tie community life and success, to diversity in land use policies, building types, and socioeconomic conditions.
- F. Preparing a joint AIA National/ Large States scan of local components' activities related to housing and homelessness

III. SUSTAINABLE PUBLIC OUTREACH CONCEPTS

- A. Crafting a tri-annual National housing advocacy platform including specific position statements and/or an AIA-sponsored "Housing Manifesto" (i.e. Housing for Humanity: A Call-to-Action)
- B. Starting an "Out There Doing It" public outreach campaign, updated annually, that highlights creative housing ideas and innovations by AIA members
- C. Developing a component-targeted toolkit that assists with establishing "Community Chats: Trusted Advisor Kitchen Cabinets" with elected officials and/or local decision makers
- D. Establishing a permanent communications link between the Housing Knowledge Community and local component activities related to housing and homelessness
- E. Tie into developer's mindsets and business financing models, sharing case studies of economic and community success
- F. Publishing a "Housing Design Matters" Catalog that moves away from income-based policy and instead focuses on architect-led typological innovation based on emerging, diverse lifestyle needs of local populations. Establishing an urban housing design assist program (i.e. UH/DAP) modelled after AIA's R/UDATs that can be offered to towns and municipalities
- G. Working with LSN to chronicle architect-involved homeless intervention programs (i.e. in Dallas and San Antonio)
- H. Creating a shared database of successful city planning and zoning policies that help streamline project approvals, engaging community input while not stalling or preventing much needed, city-code-compliant housing solutions
- I. Creating a central, shared database of national housing grants and tax credits available to state and local governments and developers, to aid in the economics of designing holistic, quality housing solutions at the local level

Committing to an Agenda for the Future: "AIA Cares: Housing Solutions by Architects "through Architecture"

Blueprint for Better efforts undertaken by the Institute will certainly include housing and homelessness issues. With its new emphasis on Design for Energy, Design for Economy and Design for Equitable Communities there is no better time for the

Institute to engage in a thoughtful way why design thinking matters and how architect led-solutions and collaborative efforts can change the conversation and truly effect directly-responsive, relevant change.

For the Institute to engage in the housing and homelessness conversation meaningfully, leadership at the national level must encourage ideas to develop at the local level. The capacity for meaningful change rests with the local experts, knowledgeable in local climate issues, familiar with local resources and capable of advocating effectively with local decision makers. While the need spans the country, the problem is broad, diverse and unique to each town. AIA National policy assistance, especially with respect to advancing housing policy, lending reform, and access to capital or monetary assistance will be essential.

Institute inter-departmental facilitation at the national level can be focused on developing resource materials, providing research and economic analyses support, chronicling component efforts and helping to frame the larger stories about architects making a difference in housing. Individual components can then concentrate on housing ideas, innovation and implementation-driven solutions at the local level. Examples of housing solutions could include:

- Seasonal "Situational" Transforming Architecture: Why do buildings have to be occupied in the same way 24/7 and 365 days/year? Structures designed to transform seasonally or situationally with respect to uses, spaces and places (i.e. Open-air Market booths become cold weather shelter pods)
 - Zero-parking housing solutions for infill housing projects that serve targeted resident profiles and lifestyles
 - Aging-in-place (and universal design) design and development prototypes for our expanding senior population
 - IDZ (Infill Development Zoning) (i.e. new housing development models being tested in San Antonio, TX)
 - "Neo-Homestead Act" using land subdivision strategies to allow for more affordable homes through small lot ownership
 - Live/work, Work-live and Home Occupation typologies to achieve greater affordability and efficiency
 - Co-Living housing configurations with integrated work spaces
- Case Studies from Individual Architects that show how design solutions and economics can work

Resolution 17-3 made clear the imperative. Membership wants to see the Institute engage and influence the conversation about housing and homelessness in a meaningful and strategic way. The Large States Network looks forward to continuing the conversation and supporting all levels of the Institute's purposeful, strategic actions, to work together to impactfully address the nation's housing and homelessness challenges.

This "Framework for Action" reflects ideas and efforts that emerged from a housing working group formed at the 2018 AIA Large States Network meeting in Princeton NJ. Initial brainstorming exercises were followed up with calls and in-person meetings to develop the content further. Special thanks to the following:

Housing Working Group Participants *(Listed Alphabetically)*

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1 Source: <http://home.one/what-is-the-crisis/>

2 Source: <https://www.citylab.com/equity/2015/06/every-single-county-in-america-is-facing-an-affordable-housing-crisis/396284/>