Perspectives

The Journal of the
Ontario Association
of Architects
Volume 13, Number 1
Spring 2005 $5.00

OAA
Ontario Association of Architects

Architects + Politics

Introduction

by Gordon S. Grice OAA, FRAIC

> *Why architects have disengaged from discussion of public policy is appalling to me. . . . Architects are disappearing from civil discourse. . . . If you don't occupy a particular public space, it will be occupied by others; it will be consumed by others.*
>
> — Glen Murray, former mayor of Winnipeg, at the first annual TSA rant evening, Toronto Arts and Letters Club, December 8, 2004

Like many people, I always thought that getting involved in politics was a little unsavory and not the sort of thing that a professional person should consider. Besides, as an architect, what could I possibly know about the political process? Leave that to those shallow and insincere politicians.

The first thing to realize is that architects and politicians have more in common than either might like to admit. Both groups must exercise patience and creativity. Both deal with people, sometimes in large groups, listen to their concerns, address basic issues, establish a consensus and deliver a solution that may involve a lot of compromise. Both groups must also take on projects that might require years to develop, only to result in a watered-down or drastically altered version. They may be lucky indeed to salvage some small thing of value from a brutal process. But, most critical of all, both architects and politicians operate in an area that few people understand. As a result, although they claim only to champion the public good, both are sometimes characterized as secretive and self-serving. I am convinced that the same negative characteristics that we architects often ascribe to politicians, politicians (and the public) just as frequently ascribe to us.

The second thing is to understand that "politics" covers a broad area of ideas and activities — much more than politicians can ever hope to cover, without help. And politics includes areas about which architects know quite a lot and politicians know far too little.

Gordon Grice is Editor of Perspectives.

Why Get Involved?

Let Stig Harvor explain. Stig is a retired architect, who practised in Ottawa and now lives in the St. Lawrence Neighbourhood of downtown Toronto. It's an area that has a rich architectural history, some fine examples of progressive modern planning and design and, soon perhaps, some controversial large-scale development. By writing a regular column in the community newspaper and by attending as many public meetings as he can manage, Stig tries to ensure that humane design principles are preserved. To some degree, the St. Lawrence Neighbourhood is a bellwether for the city as a whole.

Stig agrees strongly that architects should be more politically aware and active. As a survivor of Nazi-occupied Norway during the Second World War, he is more acutely aware of the fragility of the civic order that we take for granted. He saw "civilization suddenly swept away by the war. To prevent the repetition of such a calamity, individuals must get involved as citizens in the political process."

Of course, there are many reasons not to. There is the lack of time; the lack of knowledge, skill and experience; the pressure of family and social obligations and often a lack of interest. One prevalent obstacle seems to be the fear of a backlash: if an architect speaks out publicly, he may lose prospective clients or upset colleagues. Stig tells an interesting story relating to this issue. During the sixties, he was an active participant in the Peace Movement. It was a public declaration that mightn't have pleased a conservative clientele, but may have contributed to a number of commissions designing head offices for labour unions.

But the reasons for getting involved are far more persuasive than those for staying away from public affairs. One big reason, Stig feels, is that architects are custodians of the built environment. He admires the architectural achievements of bygone generations. Today's architects must contribute to raising public awareness of architecture and urban issues. They must protect and build — not let others destroy through misguided policies. It's something that we can do and if we don't, who will? Stig is now in the privileged position of being a retired professional. He has lots of time, lots of patience, a lifetime of experience and he no longer needs to even consider whether his activities will affect his business prospects. Besides, why take your knowledge and experience to the grave, when you can easily pass it on to the next generation?

Political activity, Stig says, requires patience and endurance. He says it often takes around fifteen years for an important public issue to come to the forefront. Don't worry about slow results, or even being around to see the results. Lead by example, savour the process and don't try to work alone.

> *When you're through changing, learning, working to stay involved — only then are you through. "Never retire."*
>
> — William Safire, on the occasion of his partial retirement as Op. Ed. contributor to the *New York Times*, www.nytimes.com/todaysheadlines, Jan. 24, 2005

Political involvement has two main goals:
1. Helping to form public policy — seeing to it that voices are heard in high places.

2. Helping to form public opinion —making sure that those opinions are well informed.
Why should we be involved? Beyond the personal benefits, we have the continued relevance of our profession to consider. The operating theory behind professional organizations is this: by improving the lot of all of us, we improve the lot of each of us. Architects care about (and have experience with) matters that most people know little about and try to avoid, but that are important to everyone. If we don't look after these things, and are not seen to look after them, who will?

Urban Issues And Politics: A Discussion with Jack Diamond

from an interview by Inès Marchese OAA.

Toronto architect and planner Jack Diamond has, in addition to his degrees in architecture, a degree in politics, economics and philosophy from Oxford University. He has always been involved in urban issues, most recently as co-chair of David Miller's Toronto mayoral campaign.

Inès: When last we met, we touched on the importance of architects being connected to the community — actively engaged in the social and political life that affects the physical environment.

Jack: Yes, that's the key. Architecture is affected by political, economic and social circumstances just as we affect it. We should be engaged in giving shape to architecture by virtue of the forces that act on it, but we should also be active in shaping the forces that act on architecture. We can affect the environment by shaping policies that are directed to and have an impact on cities and buildings. If zoning by-laws, for example, are sterilizing the vital life of a city, then

Top: ***Jessie's Centre for Teenagers, Diamond and Schmitt Architects Incorporated****, Photo:* ***DSAI****.*
Jessie's is a resource centre for pregnant and parenting teens 18 years of age or younger, founded in 1982, and relocated into permanent quarters in 1991. The housing is intended to be permanent and all units are subsidized according to the tenant's income. The day-to-day operation is handled by a non-profit housing organization that practices a philosophy of tenant involvement in the management of their housing. It is situated between two of Toronto's largest public housing projects Moss Park and Regent Park but a larger number of teens come from the GTA. The building combines the Resource Centre and residential facilities for all and any family.

Left: ***York Square*** *Toronto, Ontario,* ***Diamond and Myers,*** *Photo:* ***Ian Samson****.*
It's hard to imagine, but not that long ago the Yorkville area of downtown Toronto was a run-down neighbourhood. York Square was the first major commercial renovation in what has since become one of the most prestigious and successful retail areas in the city. The project set an important precedent in the Toronto of 1968, where development generally started with the demolition of everything on the building site. In York Square, a retail/restaurant courtyard was created through renovation of the existing seven Victorian buildings and utilization of unused backyard space. Pedestrian movement was directed to the interior courtyard to capitalize on the protected space away from the heavy traffic on Avenue Road. York Square set a standard of design quality and retail success that led the way for subsequent development in the Yorkville area.

remove the by-laws. This is what happened in Toronto at King & Spadina and at King & Parliament where there is now no land use zoning. That's how cities worked before zoning was introduced.

Historically, cities were vibrant centres without zoning controls. However anomalies arose with the dawn of the industrial revolution in the nineteenth century. There were circumstances that were neither attractive nor salubrious,

Cover of TSA Guide Map - Toronto Architecture 1953 – 2003. Image courtesy TSA. This guide map features 96 important contemporary buildings and urban spaces developed over a 50 year period in the Toronto area. Published as a volunteer effort by the TSA, the map has won both an OAA Design Award and a Toronto Heritage Award for Excellence and has sold out its first printing run.

such as living next to the gas works or the slaughter house.

Such problems are easily controlled compared to today's urban pollution. In urban centres we have a growth in pollution that is not primarily generated from within buildings. Much of it comes from city forms that are dependent on automobiles. Being engaged in shaping policy that brings vitality back to the city is a political act.

Getting involved in the way in which cities develop, whether in regard to urban sprawl, waterfront development, transit corridors, intensification in the suburbs—all these things are not achieved by the efforts of designing individual buildings: they're achieved in the collective sense via policy making.

As architects, we should bring our expertise, which is often absent in public policy fora, to those who shape policy. Our perspective and our insight about the ways in which the city can be made better are not brought forth by any other discipline nor represented by any other party. Our expertise is highly valued when it is brought to bear on urban issues. Who best to explain what we do? It's not simply about being a politician; it's about being expressly engaged in our area of expertise but directed to the public interest. It's a segue into the discussion of the distinction between professionals and business people. Professionals work in both the public interest and private interest — this is what architects are about. We can improve the public realm by influencing the larger picture of policy by intervening where power resides, be it municipal, provincial, federal, institutional or even think tanks that shape policy.

This does not diminish the importance of teaching by example. Breaking the by-laws for set-backs or infill sets an example. Such an act is done in concert with persuasion. Who better to carry out such acts in the physical environment than architects? If we don't like what we see, whether it is a development or project that is not a positive addition to the urban aggregate or, economically unfeasible, then we should intervene. Take single land-use residential development, for example: it segregates economic and social classes, as in many suburbs, which hardly leads to increased tolerance.

Inès: The spectrum of intervention is vast. It varies from amending a by-law for a particular lot to large-scale urban development such as the waterfront.

Jack: There was a plan for the waterfront. I thought it was a disaster and took a public stand. We were helped by the public vehicle of charrettes set up by the Planning and Urban Design Department of the City. In essence, there are always opportunities for offering an alternative position. It does not always occur in the course of our practice in the form of projects. In fact, it is sometimes more difficult in our daily practice because clients don't want to be delayed by challenging by-laws or, in high-profile projects, by causing trouble. It is often in the theoretical mode that alternatives can be posited that are contrary to conventional wisdom. We have an obligation to society to think beyond the horizons of a project's lot lines.

Inès: What of the projects where, at the onset, key decisions have been made without expert architectural advice?

Jack: I don't see the boundary. A professional acts on conscience. A corporation's prime interest is to its shareholders. Particular shareholders of that corporation profit regardless of the public consequence. That tobacco causes cancer is ignored by tobacco companies as long as tobacco sells. The obligation is to the shareholders. Professionals are responsible to society in a much larger sense. We must have a social conscience. We should never be party to any act that is not in the public interest.

Inès: It goes back to leading by example?

Jack: Absolutely. It validates our profession. It's a noble profession. I think it becomes more admirable when, as a

profession, we take stands in the public interest. How much more would architects be admired and how much more influence would we have if we were to act in a manner that is not self-interested? It's large-scale thinking. It's genuine altruism because we know better, because we have the expertise and because we can deliver. We lead by example when building fine projects that support the public policy realm.

Inès: Is public awareness of our profession tied to our role in policy making?

Jack: As far as I can see — because I don't know for certain what the public thinks — the architect as a celebrity is understood, and from that understanding the public looks for the novelty of iconic buildings. The public tends to think of an architect as an artist who sketches something and hands it to a builder. There is little understanding of the enormous task that lies between the conception of a project and delivering it as a product for construction. People are largely ignorant of the extent of such a process. They also don't well understand the pure utilitarian aspects and benefits of architecture in improving operations and efficiency. There is an understanding of how a better environment, particularly a better workplace, increases productivity and even some understanding of how a more congenial home contributes to well-being. However, I'm not sure that the public sees qualities of space as the product of architects. Often we're faced with sensational press that admires the eccentric. The amazing talent of architects in producing convenient, efficient, comfortable, attractive environments in which people live, work and play, I don't think is well understood.

Certainly, the role of architects in influencing policy in the public realm and in the public interest is even less understood. Justifiably so — there are too few architects that are prominent in that role. Our professional association should be proactive in such a role but it is not. Our professional association should take on investigations to initiate studies of sprawl, pollution, density, energy or whatever the current issues may be that need our attention. Our association has not taken a proactive role in research of this kind. It could potentially identify a deficiency in university research or public policy, or in the private sector, then set up mechanisms to address such issues. Wouldn't that be stunning?

Inès: Yes, it's viewing from the inside out to see beyond the lot lines of a project. Is there a particular project that has resulted in modifying public policy?

Jack: Infill housing is a good example; recycling of buildings that were slated for demolition; taking a stance on the maintenance of historic buildings; the GTA study on good governance and land use; identifying the costs of sprawl. Certainly, working on Crombie's campaign on urban issues, also working on Miller's campaign, and let's not forget John Sewell — it's all part and parcel of shaping a better environment from a policy perspective, either by shaping the policy or by leading by example.

Inès: What of your involvement with these politicians?

Jack: Those with whom I have worked have an active interest in the city, in urban design and architecture. They did not come from planning or architectural backgrounds but usually from policy or law. I became involved in order to assist them with policies that had some considered position in the fields of architecture or urban design. And because they were positively inclined, they sought expertise in shaping such policies.

Inès: It's the relationship of professionals — and their expertise — coming together as a team?

Jack: Precisely. Political campaigns are a chance to raise public consciousness about the importance of planning and architecture. It's about gaining expertise and setting out values to stake out the ground of the city's future direction. Win or lose, what those campaigns do is raise the public awareness of urban issues. I've dealt with certain urban issues for a long time. For thirty years, I've been talking about the problems of sprawl, single land use, auto-dependence and so on. With a confluence of concerns from more directions than one, people are taking notice of urban issues. It's become a current concern and I am optimistic about change for the better in the future.

Inès Marchese is a member of the Perspectives *Editorial Committee and an architect with Diamond and Schmitt Architects Inc*

Architects And The Ecology Of Our Collective Effort

by Joe Lobko OAA, MRAIC

History is past politics, and politics is present history.
— E. A. Freeman (1823-92, *Methods of Historical Study* (1866)

The city is not a concrete jungle, it is a human zoo.
— Desmond Morris (1928-), *The Human Zoo* (1969)

Architects are probably not unique in the way in which they participate in the political process. Like the rest of the population, most view it through the lens of cynical indifference or possibly even disdain. Nonetheless architects are having an influence on the direction of public policy in relation to the development of our cities and regions, sometimes for the better, sometimes not. While the accomplishments of many notable individual architects come to mind, both today and throughout history, it is a bit harder to recall collective efforts spearheaded within our profession that have had lasting impact. This may have something to do with our inherent individual competitiveness, all the more strange in a profession that relies so heavily on collective effort to create quality in our work. From my own perspective, living in a region experiencing unprecedented and sustained growth, the need to work together to support a vibrant

architectural culture and to influence decision makers could never be clearer or more timely.

Why should architects become more active in politics and particularly in the development of public policy that may profoundly affect the design of our cities and regions? What is the value of political engagement and how does it complement other aspects of practice?

To begin with, it just makes sense that the architectural community have a good working relationship with those making decisions — politicians or public employees — who share our desire to contribute towards the making of a better city and region. Whether at the level of broad conceptual thinking about the manner in which we might

Two images of early urban sprawl in Toronto:
Top: Children play in a new neighbourhood, ca. 1952. Photo: ***Toronto Sun Syndicate****.*
Right: Coxwell Avenue, April 29, 1912. Photo: ***City of Toronto Archives****.*

accommodate, stimulate, or sustain growth, or the design of a public review and approval process, it makes sense that decision makers have the benefit of any collective wisdom that our profession might bring to bear on a topic. We need to find more effective ways to keep lines of communication open and responsive in both directions, and we need to find ways to enhance our credibility in public debate.

It's a cliché perhaps, but the very act of volunteering brings its own rewards. Chief among these, in my experience, are the relationships that are forged with those who volunteer with you, particularly when placed in the context of having accomplished something of significance together, whether it be the publication of a guide map to contemporary local architecture or a lobbying effort which has been successful in influencing a particular piece of policy or legislation. It is perhaps self evident that a key characteristic of a successful organization, volunteer-based or otherwise, is the depth and breadth of commitment on the part of its members and the manner in which they support one another in their collective efforts. While leadership is critical, the ongoing support of a broad group of people determines the manner in which contributions are sustained over a longer period of time and, as we all know, in politics things often do take a bit of time. It's another cliché perhaps, but success does seem to breed more success. As we accomplish things together, we will be stimulated to go further and our credibility in the broader debate will be enhanced.

There are so many areas of current public debate in which we could collectively make significant contributions, if we were more effective in acting together. We need to continue to raise the bar on the general level of design of our buildings and our communities and contribute towards a collective appreciation of just what that might mean. We need to convince governments, particularly at a local and provincial level, to set a better example when commissioning public work and to re-examine their own conduct with regard to procurement and the objectives they set for their own projects, so that they come to appreciate quality and value over low price and bureaucratic process. We need to convince government that the adoption of sustainability standards in every one of their projects is in our collective, best, long-term interests. We need to explore the establishment of peer design review panels to assist approval agencies to improve the level of design while contributing to an increased efficiency of the public approval process. We need to bring some sanity to the seemingly uncontrollable sprawl, with its accompanying negative consequences, that continues to grow unabated at the edges of our cities. We need to encourage the *public* celebration and appreciation of our design success stories, which can help lead the way to more of the same in the future.

Politicians and the public employees that work for them are, generally speaking, committed and hard-working individuals who would appreciate a society of architects actively contributing towards the collective challenges of our cities and regions. At a minimum, we need to support their efforts by leading a vibrant public debate on the range of issues affecting the culture of architecture and urban design and we need to engage the broader public directly in that debate. It is essential that this gets beyond the internal, overly self-reflective, abstract and narrow perspective that all too often seems to hamstring our profession. For example, post-modernism can at least partially be seen as the reaction of a profession that realized that it had become almost completely disengaged from the broader public it seeks to serve, and with which it had lost so much credibility. We are prone to excessive navel-gazing as a profession, too often resistant to the influence of a broader public agenda. While concentration of interest is necessary and useful, it cannot prevail to the exclusion of the balancing of interests that is the aim of political discourse

There is also, in all of this, our blatant self-interest as a profession. I cannot help but conclude that a profession that had a very strong and active role in the ongoing development of our communities — our most important collective design project — would be far more effective and credible in influencing public policy relating to the conduct of our own profession (e.g. BRRAG). How would we prefer to spend our time: writing exams that, in a very limited and ineffective way, test our skill at using the index of the OBC, or contributing in some other way to the qualitative improvement of our communities? If we are not engaged in the major debates of the day, the substantial collective wisdom and experience that we have to share is not going to be reflected in the decision-making that ultimately affects us all. And that will affect the way we practise.

While the OAA, with its regulatory mandate, may have some inherent limitations as an effective lobbying body, local societies across this province could take on a more effective and active role in developing debate and, in many other ways, contributing to the evolving design of our communities. As architects, we clearly need to find better ways to make our own, unique, contributions in influencing the politics of our time collectively. It is in the interests of our communities and in our own self-interest that we do so.

Joe Lobko is the principal of a Toronto architectural practice engaged in both architecture and urban design. He is past chair of the Toronto Society of Architects (2001–2004) and currently a member of the City of Toronto Beautiful City Roundtable.

Urban Design And Issues: Acting Locally, Thinking Nationally

by Rick MacEwen OAA

The urban environment in which most Canadians live — streets, traffic signals, signs, buildings, monuments, and green spaces — is created by and for us. We control the quality of this environment and that in turn affects the quality of our lives. Many feel that the quality of our urban environments could be much richer, and I agree. But how do we make these improvements?

One approach is the introduction of urban design approvals. The City of Ottawa is in the final stages of implementing a pilot project that would require the review and approval by design peers of urban design elements, buildings and landscapes in certain areas of the city. The sole intent of this initiative is to improve the quality of the urban environment.

The details of the consultation process, design review procedures, and the bureaucratic mechanisms do not warrant a detailed explanation here. Suffice it to say, the city consulted with numerous stakeholders, including the Ottawa Regional Society of Architects (ORSA), devised a review process, identified evaluation criteria, determined the composition of the Peer Review Panel, and ensured they had the regulatory authority. After participating in the City of Ottawa's public focus sessions, working with ORSA in formulating positions and generally ruminating on the matter, there are several observations I would like to make.

(1) Awareness of our natural environment and the importance of protecting it must be a major priority in society, but it takes time to accomplish this. Profound improvements in the quality of our urban environments are possible and necessary, but it will take considerable efforts to shift basic attitudes. The importance of sustainable design and environmental responsibility are beginning to be recognized, but it has taken almost two generations of concerted effort for this to take root and it will probably need another generation to take full effect.

(2) A recognition of the value of a superior urban environment is fundamental to improvement. This goes beyond simply arguing that nice design improves lifestyles. By knowing how a well-designed street both increases business for storeowners and reduces crime and how a small well-considered green space can improve the local micro-environment as well as neighbouring property values, tangible and measurable benefits can be identified. With the clear intent to incorporate superior urban design, particularly by property owners, the necessary drive to achieve improvements can be generated. Recognition of value and the intent to achieve it are the underpinnings of any significant improvement. But it will take the concerted, coordinated, and prolonged effort of owners, architects, regulators and citizens — groups that are normally fragmented.

(3) We should have a focused national leadership. Recent initiatives in the United Kingdom may serve as a model. The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) is an "Executive Non-Departmental Public Body" that is funded by both the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. CABE's stated purpose is to

> *demonstrate the ability of great architecture and urban design to transform people's quality of life. Through practical advice and public campaigns, [they] seek to raise the aspirations, capacity, and performance of everyone involved in creating and maintaining buildings and public space across England.*

CABE was established in 1999 and runs seven main programs: Design Review, Project Enabling, Policy, Research, Regions, Skills Education, and CABE Space. A wealth of information on CABE can be found at www.cabe.org.uk.

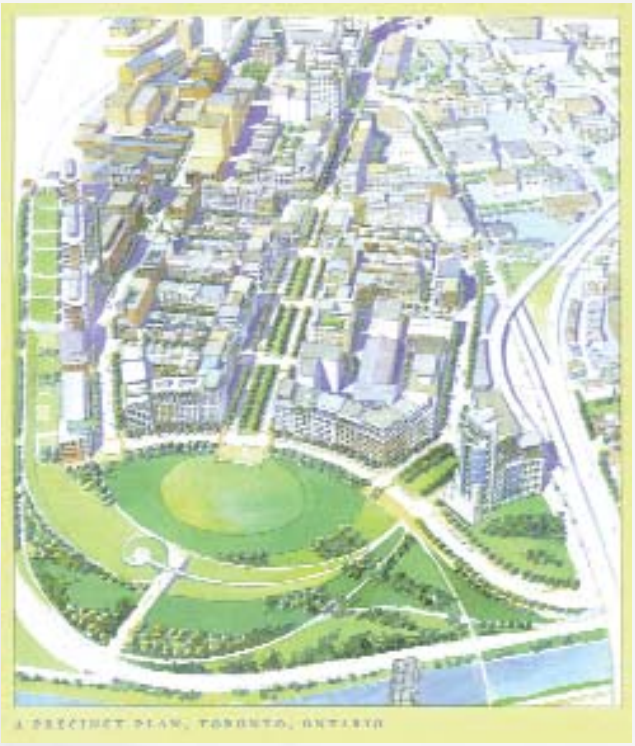
The value of CABE is that it addresses the root problem on a national level through coordinated efforts. It actively communicates the real benefits of high quality design to a wide audience and fosters a design-literate culture, promoting increased demands for quality urban environments.

Canada would be well served by a similar initiative sponsored by the federal government and supported by provincial and municipal governments as well as professional organizations such as the RAIC and OAA. Given Prime Minister Martin's desire to address urban issues, an opportunity may now exist to move forward. Our national

leaders must have a greater appreciation for the issues of urban design.

The City of Ottawa's new Urban Design Review is a manifestation of the public's growing concern about the urban environment and reflects a sincere desire to do something. The initiative will place a greater focus on urban design and enable a wider dialogue. However, unless there is a widespread and meaningful national program, these local efforts may be little more than a rear-guard action. Shifting attitudes within society will foster a culture that deserves, demands and develops superior urban environments.
As architects, we occupy a middle ground between owner and contractor, developer and regulators. We as act as advisers, agents, and spokespersons. We are ideally placed to serve our citizens as advocates for an improved urban environment. While members of ORSA will continue to work locally with the City of Ottawa, all architects should consider how we might proactively engage the federal and provincial governments in order to improve the urban environment.

Rick MacEwen is a partner in Watson MacEwen Architects, in Ottawa.



East Bayfront Proposal, City of Toronto. *Image courtesy* ***TWRC.***
Images prepared by the ***TWRC precinct planning consultant team:***
Koetter Kim and Associates *(Urban Design)*
Phillips Farevaag Smallenberg *(Parks and Public Space Design)*
Sustainable Edge *(Sustainable Design)*
GHK International *(Urban Planning and Revitalization)*
BA Consulting Group *(Transportation Planning)*
LEA Consulting *(Municipal Services Engineering)*

The Architect As Facilitator/ Integrator — A Sacred Duty? A conversation with Michael Kirkland

by Ian Ellingham OAA, MRAIC

Michael Kirkland is a Toronto planner and architect known for his outspoken views on the relationship between architecture and the rest of society. His opinions were sought with respect to how architects might be more involved in the political arena.

Ian: We are doing an issue on urban issues and politics, so are interested in your opinions about the role of architects in the political arena.

Michael: Architects, at least in North America, have got themselves into a situation in which they are virtually voiceless. There are many reasons for this, but architects have to accept the fact that they can be two persons: the public person and the practitioner. It is a terrible reality, but architects often marginalize themselves by inaction. If architects take their profession seriously, it becomes somewhat of a sacred duty, because when architects don't talk, the public thinks they have nothing to say.

This doesn't mean that there is no involvement; a good number of architects were involved in David Miller's campaign for mayor of Toronto, but that is not true for many other campaigns, particularly those of right-wing politicians. Also I find that when I work in different places, retired British architects, and some from Ontario, will stand up and talk at planning meetings; they feel at liberty to talk for the first time. It is nice, but too little too late.

A lack of involvement would not be a problem if not for the fact that the world becomes more dis-cordial and dysfunctional annually, because the historical sense of the city every year gets more and more fractured. Historically, what constitutes a good city was never well verbalized, but was commonly understood. Architects are perhaps the only profession in which synthesis is the fundamental activity, so we should be able to do things in a balanced, integrated way, balancing trade-offs and priorities. If you go to any public meeting, you can see discourse undertaken on a special interest basis by individual citizens and groups; you can see how poorly the notion of synthesis is understood and implemented, and what architects could bring to the table

Politics has also the misfortune to be often seen in the worst light — having more to do with reciprocal arrangements than with policy. I am assuming that this interview is about politics in the abstract, not the politics of trying to get jobs and project approvals.

Ian: Why do you think architects don't get involved more often?

Michael: One big reason that architects don't get involved is that many seem to feel they cannot be both a practitioner and a public person — that there is some sort of conflict between the two, probably a fear of offending clients and potential clients. We also have an anxiety about peers: it seems architects don't criticize for fear of being criticized. Then there is the *sectoral* nature of practice: architects tend to see themselves as a hospital architect, a school architect,

a housing architect, and if they feel they are neutered in their own field they are unlikely to attempt to act outside of it. Of course, architecture is a small profession; there are many more lawyers and doctors than architects.

Something should also be said about a general outlook, perhaps an anti-government pathos — a belief that the world is ungovernable, so architects are forced to make autonomous objects. We have fallen heavily under the influence of the Americans — and their attitudes. This creates a belief that the world of politics and public space is complicated and messy, and involvement in it is not likely to lead to anything, because there is a sort of permanent dysfunction. In fact, you could say that view has produced the dystopian nihilistic architecture you can see in our cities. The Europeans have been more successful at avoiding this, thanks to the accumulated gravity of European cities and a more acute public discourse. North America remains a place of feeble discourse; a wild game preserve.

From this sense that the urban environment is essentially non-repairable, comes a focus on the building as object — a small-scale object where you can fetishize materiality and small-scale syntax. This is not totally new; the traditional first exercise in schools of architecture has been to design a house, often without reference to any external influences. The schools of architecture see themselves as creating people who are very craft-capable, meaning that they can do small things very well, and there is a hope that they will matriculate upwards. There is no evidence for this, but that is their view.

Ian: You mentioned earlier the notion of individual interest rather than synthesis. How do you avoid the piling up of individual interests, particularly from a vast array of government bodies? It sometimes seems that you cannot do anything but that which has been done before.

Michael: All of these vertical interest organizations have a vested interest in the status quo. They each have a certain budget and amount of autonomy. Parks departments, traffic departments, municipal services — they all behave the same way. If you add up all the requirements you get a terrible outcome. And fundamentally that is why the streets are so horrible. In Europe they have something called the city architect, who works towards compromise and synthesis, who develops an idea as to what a street might be. Compromise between equals is virtually impossible. What the architect can do is point to other precedents, and argue for the general outcome. Many architects are well travelled, and you can always look up precedents in books or on the internet. Other balances can be struck.

This is particularly important, because even in North America we can no longer subscribe to the Celto-Germanic myth that there is always more land you can go and mess up. We are in a zero-sum game and have to work within a given space.

Ian: How can an individual architect act to influence the political system?

Michael: In Toronto we are blessed or cursed by an extreme but largely bogus public consultation apparatus. We have a lot of public consultation which does not get past the smell test, because people simply go and ask other people what they want — people representing a suspect consensus. Planning departments have little ability to implement inventive and appropriate ideas. None of the economic imperatives of the situations are made clear, so what is returned from the exercise is often wholly without the possibility of implementation and there is no live financial mechanism present. The planners and politicians feel they have done their job, but they have polled an untutored public.

There are lots of possibilities: one can participate in deputations on projects and design charrettes, and be willing to assist planning departments. But one must not underestimate the ability that architects have to be facilitators — that is, putting things together — to synthesize, and an ability to put citizen thoughts into a language. This alone could radically change the quality of discussion.

One cannot forget writing: architects don't seem to write. Perhaps the profession has to behave proactively to encourage architects to become architectural journalists. Perhaps we need some scholarship money. Have you noticed that although three large Toronto newspapers have architectural critics, none of them is an architect? I would like to see a big project, by a big firm, criticized by a small practitioner, in a sort of pseudo-academic way. This might be somewhat frightening: to have architects actually writing critically on each others' buildings, and then offering the debate to the public. Perhaps increasing the amount of architectural writing in popular venues would be the greatest thing to do to change the level of discourse about architecture in North America.

A new development, Winston Churchill Boulevard, Erin Mills, Mississauga, 1997. Photo: ***Vid Ingelevics, CTA***

Ian: What incentives might there be for an architect to be involved in politics at the level we have been discussing?

Michael: Given current initiatives in the profession, one might speculate about a third set of professional development points — those for public involvement.

It is in the public benefit to hire more architects and pay them more. There is possibly a nice convergence between self-interest and the public good. So, by architects accepting some notion of the duty of a citizen, there can be tributary benefits to the profession and to the individual.

Ian Ellingham is chairman of the Perspectives *Editorial Committee.*

The Long View — West Toronto Railpath

by Debbie Friesen OAA

For me it all started when I was lying in bed at 8:30 one Sunday morning last April, listening to CBC's Jeff Goods interview Thomas Timmins on the radio. Tom was talking about a proposal to turn a stretch of abandoned rail corridor in West Toronto — six kilometers running diagonally from the Junction to Strachan Avenue — into a walking/ cycling/ roller-blading trail and linear park. I would be able to cycle automobile-free almost all the way to downtown Toronto. My husband could cycle to work without the worry of maneuvering through rush hour traffic. It would be a short jaunt from the end of the Railpath to the Martin Goodman Trail where we could cycle along the waterfront. The path would infuse a breath of fresh green air into the neighbourhoods along its route and provide a form of alternate, sustainable transportation so badly needed in this city. I was hooked.

I knew right then and there that I had to get involved with this initiative. It made so much sense. The problem with trying to do something — anything — to improve life in one's community, country or planet, is that there are so many things wrong, so many causes, that it seems futile. How do you pick a cause that will actually make a difference? What can you do that will really help? Obviously, some kind of personal connection makes this easier. With the West Toronto Railpath, everything just seemed to fall into place. We had recently bought a yet-to-be-built townhouse just north of the Junction, to end our present long commute from north of the City. Just the day before the radio interview my husband and I had been discussing possible routes for him to cycle to his job at Bay and Queen. The fact that I was awake and listening to the radio at 8:30 a.m. on that Sunday was serendipitous indeed.

So, I leapt out of bed (that's an exaggeration — I have never leapt out of bed) and rushed to my computer to Google "West Toronto Railpath." What I found was a comprehensive website (railpath.ca) which described the proposal, its history and supporters, and provided an opportunity to subscribe to an email list, which, of course, I did. Not long after, I received an email notice of a Railpath volunteers meeting, to which I went. Since then, I have mostly been learning about the volunteer group and the project, but I have been able to help with the planning of Bike Week activities and communications strategies and more recently, the development of the Railpath group's response to the City's initial design parameters and the planning of a possible public charrette. What was most encouraging was to find out that the City of Toronto had already purchased the land from CP for the northern 2.6 kilometers of the path and that it had been identified as a priority project in the Toronto Bike Plan. This was not just some community group's pipe dream; this was a real possibility, wholeheartedly supported by all of the West Toronto City Councillors.

The idea of this railpath had been discussed among West Toronto residents' associations for years and in 2001, Bay Street lawyer Tom Timmins and the Roncesvalles Macdonell Residents' Association spearheaded the formation of a partnership between Toronto's Community Bicycle Network (CBN) and the environmental group Evergreen with a mandate to lobby actively and assist the City toward the realization of the Railpath.

Evergreen (evergreen.ca) is a national non-profit organization, founded in 1991, whose goal is to bring nature to cities through naturalization projects. The Community Bicycle Network (communitybicyclenetwork.org) was established in 1993 to stimulate and support community-based bicycle initiatives, including repair and skills workshops, a speaker series and the innovative yellow bike BikeShare program. My initial interest in the Railpath project quickly expanded to the other work of these organizations and I have become a member of both.

The people who supported and worked for this coalition became known as the Friends of West Toronto Railpath (FOTWR). Their work has involved working in partnership with City staff to promote the idea, meeting with Federal MPs and cabinet staff to explain the project, attending community meetings, responding to media enquiries, establishing the website and producing other promotional materials to inform the public, organizing special events such as bike rides to points along the path during Bike Week, generating ideas for the physical form of the path and raising funds to provide enhancements to the path design that are beyond the City's budget. Tom Timmins has, of course, been able to contribute his legal expertise and has been a tireless spokesperson for the FOTWR. Stewart Chisholm of Evergreen brings his substantial experience in community development and project stewardship to the group. Michael

Foderick, executive assistant to City Councillor Cesar Palacio, has provided much needed political insight and vital City Hall leg work. There are two architects that I know of who have been involved with the group since the beginning: Baruch Zone, who lives near the trail and Peter Duckworth-Pilkington who, according to Tom Timmins, can take credit for much of the progress our city has made in cycling issues over the past ten years. I was surprised that there were not more, although the design community is also represented by Netami Stewart, a recent graduate in landscape architecture from the University of Toronto whose master's thesis was a "musical" score of the railpath, and offbeat kitchen designer Bruce Ward, who has a great vision of the design of this path as a significant community resource. When I became involved, the groundwork had already been done by these and other dedicated volunteers and I have hitched onto their coat-tails to contribute what I can to the rest of the ride.

The proposed Union/Pearson Air Rail link will utilize the same corridor as the Railpath and CN will not finalize the sale to the City of the land for the southern segment of the railpath until studies of infrastructure and land requirements for the Air Rail link and GO Transit improvements are completed. Lobbying of CN and GO will likely be the thrust of political activity by Railpath supporters for the next while, in addition to influencing the design of the 2.6 kilometers of trail that the City already owns.

I was fortunate to be able to attend a stakeholders' meeting at the City organized by Alex Shevchuk, project coordinator for the City of Toronto Parks and Recreation Planning, in December 2004, to view a presentation of preliminary plans by Harrington and Hoyle Ltd. Landscape Architects and to offer input, prior to a public presentation of the proposal early in 2005. Perhaps the most significant outcome of the meeting was the demonstration of willingness by both the City and Rich McAvan of Harrington and Hoyle to involve the FOWTR in the design process, including holding a design meeting with us before the planned public meeting. We wanted to ensure that even at this preliminary stage of design the path would be conceived of as not just a strip of asphalt, but as an opportunity for community development and city beautification. It was encouraging not only to see the Railpath moving closer to reality, but to also have the opportunity to affect its development in a way that takes full advantage of its potential.

It may seem trite to say that one of the best things about my involvement in the West Toronto Railpath is the people I have met, but it is true. After all, what is a city but the gathering of a group of people for their mutual economic and social benefit? The Railpath has also been a means and a reason for me to learn more about the infrastructure and politics of this city where I spent a good part of my childhood, moved away from as a young adult and am now returning to.

As architects, we play a large role in shaping the form of cities, but usually in a piecemeal way, one building at a time. We need to occasionally step back and take the long view of the community of people for whom we are building and see what we can do to make it better.

Debbie Friesen is a member of the Perspectives *Editorial Committee*

Left and above: At a Railpath stakeholders' meeting in December 2004, ***Richard McAvan*** *of* ***Harrington and Hoyle Ltd****. presented a series of drawings intended to establish the required budget for the future phases of the project. Among the drawings were ideas for creating focal points along the thin, linear site.*

Various alternatives were discussed for establishing connection points to Dupont Street, Bloor Street and Dundas Street West, where drastic grade separations make access to the path difficult.

Urban Issues And Politics

by Ralph Wiesbrock OAA

When you're a hammer everything looks like a nail, so I declare my biases at the start: I am an architect and urbanist and I believe that the voice of our profession is important to society but is all too often ignored or overlooked. I think that we have to change that. We have to make our presence felt and the significance of our role and contributions in the urban environment known. We have a unique, balanced, and integrated perspective that no other group or profession can provide.

Here in the nation's capital the municipal landscape, in terms of urban issues and politics, has been in a process of change over the last number of years, involving the local architectural community more than it has been involved in quite some time. Some of it is simply a natural extension of the general resurgence of interest in urban design and community planning due to increased global environmental awareness and the rise of inclusionary politics. Some of it is a function of the local personalities. And some is the product of the provincially mandated city amalgamation of 1999 and the subsequent series of planning initiatives and consolidation work that has necessarily flowed from it.

These factors led to the Ottawa Regional Society of Architects' (ORSA) putting together a consultation committee a few years ago to provide structured, constructive feedback to the city during the preparation of its new Official Plan. The committee worked hard to review each draft and provide thoughtful commentary that the city

apparently took quite seriously. Much of our work received a direct response in the final version approved by council.

As a result of that new official plan the City has begun a more concerted effort to introduce urban design planning into the way it does business. Its first major project in this regard has been the preparation of a new *Downtown Ottawa Urban Design Strategy* prepared by the Toronto-based firm Urban Strategies, and many local architects participated in the public consultation sessions that led to the final product. The new plan lays down a coherent framework for increasing the quality of the downtown urban environment.

The City has since sought to expand its repertoire of implementation tools to help make their dream a reality. The biggest and most controversial of these has been the proposal to resurrect a design review component in the development approval process. Its previous incarnation was almost universally despised so its possible reintroduction raised more than a few eyebrows.

That meant that ORSA had a challenge on its hands. The proposal had far-reaching implications for architects and their clients as well as the quality of urban development that might result from such a process. It was imperative that the voices of architects — by no means unanimous — be heard, but first they needed a seat at the table. Surprisingly, the architectural community had not been identified as a key stakeholder in the City's proposed consultation process,

Starting young: Architects' children get into the act

Above: ***Zosia Gontarz*** *7 1/2 yrs old and* ***Alexander Gontarz*** *11yrs old are the children of architect* ***Mariusz Gontarz*** *and students of* ***Forrest Hill Public School****. Their posters were a part of school projects called* ***IT KIT****, focused on good deeds. Mariusz says: "Architects should make kids aware of the world we live in, a world created by adults, some of them architects. To clean up the mess we've made (up to 49% of the waste stream comes from the building trade according to* Metropolis *magazine), we must help foster awareness in future generations. They will be stuck with cleaning up after us." Image:* ***Zosia Gontarz.*** *Below: The photo was taken during the last UK parliamentary election. The ribbons are Liberal Democrat logos. This is Amanda Taylor, the parliamentary candidate and Cambridge city councillor, and Charles Ellingham, loyal supporter, canvassing in a community shopping district. Says Ian Ellingham: "Charles could stuff campaign brochures through mail slots almost as soon as he could walk. One can get involved in the political process at a very young age. Charles really liked it." Photo:* ***Ian Ellingham.***

even after our substantial efforts and input during the official plan process. So we decided to identify ourselves as one.

Our first step was to make representations to the Planning and Environment Committee, where we were granted a seat at the consultation table. We got the word out to ORSA members and we made sure that everyone who had an interest had a seat at the City-led sessions. Then we formed an ad hoc task force to compile and organize feedback from the professional community and kept them up to date on what was happening. We prepared surveys, collated, and interpreted the results, and we asked some tough questions — questions that were on everybody's minds, not just those of disaffected architects.

Through it all though, we kept our focus on constructive engagement recognizing that our basic goals are shared ones. Our briefs to the City (which can be found at www.orsa.ca) provided specific comments and recommendations that responded directly to the City proposal as well as to parallel initiatives that would be required to meet its goals. We pointed out that the urban design review process would have to be objective and predictable in order for it to work. We also pointed out that the City is the major landholder through its ownership of the streets, infrastructure, public buildings and parks and therefore has a responsibility to lead by

example — something that it hasn't done very convincingly. It is patently unrealistic to expect the private sector to do what the public sector doesn't have the will to do in its own domain.

Ultimately, we achieved a great deal. Staff and council responded positively to our input and crafted a peer review process, with documented feedback requirements and structured evaluation criteria, that goes a long way towards removing the subjectivity and unpredictability of the previous incarnation. Whether or not the additional bureaucracy yields tangible results is an open question that a yet-to-be-established monitoring process will have to answer. The City sees this as a pilot project for possible expansion throughout the city. There will be more than a few eyes watching to make sure that this added time and expense is worth the effort.

We learned a few things in the process. About how much work is involved in lobbying and how to do it. And about how much vigilance is still needed — there is currently no architect on the Committee of Adjustment even though the benefit would seem to be self-evident. Nor have we been approached to participate in the city-wide zoning update project. But the Mayor has agreed to meet with our new City-ORSA Liaison Committee to discuss contracting and approvals issues as well as urban design advocacy. At least we're back on the radar screen.

Ralph Wiesbrock is a partner in KWC Architects in Ottawa

The Delights Of Politics

by Ian Ellingham OAA, MRAIC

It might be necessary to dispel the notion that participating in the political arena is work. A contrary point of view is that involvement can be fun — an alternative to other recreational activities, or even television.

Probably people find amusement in different aspects of political involvement. I find election-time canvassing particularly fun. When else can you go down a street or through an apartment building and find so many people willing to talk to you about so many issues? As an architect, this is a wonderful opportunity: depending on where you are, you can select different types of neighbourhoods, and hear what people think — and people will often talk about things relating to the built environment. You might even find neighbourhoods you never knew existed. It can be a pleasant form of physical exercise, tramping around the city for a few hours. Fortunately, in Canada, elections tend to be called during nice weather; when it is twenty below few people want to canvas, and even fewer people want to stand at the door listening.

Areas with many new immigrants are particularly exciting. Landed immigrants cannot vote, but many come from places with limited freedoms, so tend to be highly appreciative of a process that allows them to express opinions and participate. Not much apathy exists in those areas, and one often hears very perceptive comments and questions.

Participation also brings understanding: why it is that politicians act as they do? Those elected have to try to interpret the complex and contradictory expressed will of the electorate, and work within its constraints.

You can also gain sympathy for that lonely person from some Trotskyite party manning a table outside some university building — possibly enough to go and talk to him. You chat away about the need for worldwide revolution; you might be the first person to talk to him in an hour, all the time thankful that your own candidate will at least get enough votes not to lose the deposit.

Perhaps it is possible to get too far into canvassing. One of my partners once asked me what I thought of a house on a particular corner. To his amusement, I responded without reference to the rather interesting design of the house. Instead, I told him about the family living in it: two parents, three daughters, two of whom were old enough to vote, and the party each supported — not the architectural critique my partner expected.

Conclusion: I Don't Know Anything About Politics. What Can I Do?

by Gordon S. Grice OAA, FRAIC

This may be a critical time in the history of architecture in this province. Our federal government has promised to put the health of cities at the top of the agenda. To this end, a Cities Agenda has been adopted and a dialogue has begun between the government and the design community. Our provincial government, perhaps embarrassed by its failure to live up to certain campaign promises, has vowed anew to stem urban sprawl. In our largest city, we have elected a mayor who had the wisdom to invite an architect to be his campaign co-chair

In its First Annual Rant Evening, last December, the Toronto Society of Architects invited architects and others to blow off a little steam about how we can improve our built environment. A roster of eight speakers tackled such issues as "pedestrian landscapes" (Lisa Rapoport), "tall buildings" (Stig Harvor), "conciliatory urbanism" (James Brown and Kim Story), and "green condos" (Alex Spiegel). It was really an invitation to political action, climaxed by Glen Murray's call-to-arms quoted at the beginning of this feature.

There is currently a wave of interest in architecture and urban design. Architects should pick up on this. We can be more engaged. We can develop relationships with the media and articulate our visions. We can at least talk to people and be able to explain the difference between good and bad design. We can also acknowledge that the practice of architecture is not solely about money. Like many other professions, there is a service component that is often downplayed or overlooked. (By *service*, I mean *public service*, not the provision of services to immediate clients — this word has become so overworked and hollow that it scarcely means anything anymore.)

Can architects make a difference? Isn't that why we are in this profession in the first place?

En Charrette

Peterborough Community Assist for an Urban Study Effort (CAUSE) *in 1983. The CAUSE program was a volunteer program run by the OAA from 1980 to 2001 that assisted Ontario communities in coping with urban design problems. CAUSE was a charrette in both the older and the newer sense: It relied on an intensive round-the-clock weekend architectural design blitz, in the Beaux-Arts tradition, but invited public participation during and after the final presentation. Photo:* **OAA**

This International column is not about a person or even a building. It's about a word — a word that's done a lot of travelling and continues to travel. In fact, although it's an architectural word, it's really a word about travel.

Charette: A recent Ontario history

Charrette's current travel adventure began innocently enough in a Perspectives Environment column by architect Catherine Tafler in the summer of 2000. In the following issue, we printed a letter from frequent writer Frank Pope of Ottawa:

> *By the way, I gathered from the context what a 'charette' [sic] is (see Environment column) but it looks like jargon to me. As a general reader I am sensitive to jargon.*

Well, we try to be sensitive to jargon too, so we offered an ed. note to Frank's letter, containing a reasonable and appropriate dictionary definition of the word:

> *Char-rette, n., a final intensive effort to finish a project, esp. an architectural design project, before a deadline. . . . [1965-70; < F: cart, . . . from the idea of speed of wheels]*
>
> — *Random House Unabridged Dictionary, 1967*

That really should have settled the matter, but trouble was already brewing. It was becoming increasingly apparent that the word, like many other attractive jargon words, had somehow passed into more general use, and it had begun to appear in the popular press, but with a new twist. Now, the word was being used to describe

> *"a collaborative process involving many parties, including architects, clients, community groups and specialists. The idea of last minute rush has been replaced by the idea of informality or openness in the design process"*
>
> — *Perspectives*, Winter '03.

Even architects had begun to use it this way. The word was changing before our eyes and we were powerless to stop it. The *charrette* was out of control.

In its current popular use, *charrette* still involves architects, but no longer exclusively, and the sense of last-minute desperation has been removed entirely. This can be seen generally as a pretty good thing: architects are striving to polish their reputation as collaborators and the eleventh-hour nature of some of our work is not something that we should necessarily advertise. So, if a simple word like *charrette* can help polish up our image, where's the harm, even if some of the richness of its history is lost?

Ancient History — The International Connection

Charrette is an old word, almost as old as wheeled transportation. A diminutive of the Old French word "char", it entered the French language from Latin carrus, a wheeled vehicle. The Latin root is preserved in English in words like *car*, *chariot*, and *carriage*, Originally a charrette was a two-wheeled cart, but has been used to describe many forms of small, wheeled vehicles.

Neither the word *charrette* nor the object it signified changed very much for thousands of years, but the word began to take on a sinister connotation when charrettes became the preferred method of transport of prisoners to the guillotine. During the French Revolution, especially, a *charrette* was an object to be feared. A trip in a *charrette* was probably your last.

In French language and culture, the *charrette* carries a lot of baggage, so to speak. Its importance can be seen in the story of *Pélagie-la-Charrette*, by Acadian author Antonine Maillet. In her historical novel, Maillet describes the journey of the Le Blanc family, exiled from Nova Scotia during the clearances of the 1750s and struggling to return to their home in *Acadie*. The *charrette* of the title carries all of the family's worldly belongings, but it also serves as a metaphor for life's journey. During the trip, a second charrette follows. This other charrette is the wagon of death, visible and audible only to those whose worldly struggle is nearing an end. In the 2004 CanStage musical adaptation of the novel, the death wagon was a brightly-painted cart, drawn by Death herself, in a red ball gown.

The Architectural Connection

To understand how charrette assumed its more recent architectural meaning it's necessary to know a little bit about architectural instruction at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris. At the Ecole, design education relied on a system of "ateliers" — independent studios where students, under the direction of a "patron" would strive to complete semi-annual competitions or *concours* to advance their architectural education. The atelier system was strongly communal: more advanced students helped younger students by offering criticism and direction; younger students in turn provided energy and physical assistance to their more experienced colleagues. The competition would frequently result in a final, evening-before-deadline all-night intensive attack on the presentation of a project, culminating in the loading of the project onto a cart or "charrette" for transport to the Ecole.

In his essay "The Teaching of Architecture at the *Ecole des Beaux-Arts*" from *The Architecture of the* Ecole des Beaux-Arts" (Arthur Drexler, ed. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1977), Richard Chaffee recounts:

> *Whenever the drawings were due [for the concours], people on the Left Bank could see the last steps in these shared efforts. Outside the ateliers, students would load their designs onto little handcarts that they would drag through the streets to the courtyard of the Ecole. This kind of cart, commonly used for all sorts of light haulage in Paris, was called a charrette; thus, being "en charrette" came to mean not only the rush to the Ecole, but also before that, the long hours of last-minute work in the atelier.*

A more colourful description is offered by Emile Zola in his 1886 novel *L'Oeuvre*. Zola provides a man-on-the-street perspective of what seemed even then to be an extremely bizarre event. In Zola's description, the ateliers provided the scene for a raucous evening of work and revelry that included drinking and debauchery. In Zola's account, the *charrette* was rented by the students for the purpose of delivering the submissions to l'Ecole. It was drawn by two "gaillards très barbus" (bearded galoots?) who negotiated the narrow alleys, collecting the submissions.

> *On arrive hurlant dans la grand cour de l'Ecole à neuf heures du matin. Tout l'atelier suit, même ceux qui n'avait pas de projet. La nuit qui précède s'appelle la nuit de charrette.*
> — *L'Oeuvre*. Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1983, p. 464

Interestingly, in his notes to the first edition of the book, Zola reveals that he had also wondered about the etymology of the phrase "en charrette". So even in Zola's day, there was some curiosity regarding *charrette*.

The charrette of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts preserved the sense of desperation, finality, inevitability, and grave importance that is evident in the word's history. In the last half of the nineteenth century, the system was brought to North America by illustrious graduates such as Richard Morris Hunt and William Robert Ware, who built the first formal school of architecture at MIT in 1865, The actual wheeled charrettes stayed in France, but the idea of "en charrette" still basic to the system of study, was imported intact.

During the twentieth century, The Ecole educational system was mostly supplanted by the Bauhaus model but some vestige of the charrette remained, such that two Boston entrepreneurs Lionel Spiro and Blair Brown, were motivated to name their drafting supply house Charrette, encouraging students to rely on them for last-minute supplies and services.

It's interesting to draw a comparison between the meaning of *charrette* as it entered the twentieth century and again as it entered the twenty-first. Next time you read the word in a newspaper, or are tempted to use it yourself (especially with reference to a polite public process), think about a malodorous studio crammed with rowdy drunken, desperate students and assorted hangers-on, including "trois dames d'une maison voisine" with wine spilled all over the floor, paper and pencils strewn everywhere and at least one wide-eyed young novelist scribbling frantic notes, while a wooden-wheeled cart drawn by two large and hirsute goons clatters on the street below.

Where language is concerned, we architects are victims of our own success. We sometimes complain about how little respect we seem to have, but look at how frequently the word *architect* is used to describe a world leader or important innovator (alas, for good or evil). But the popular use of the word is completely beyond our control. When it comes to words like charrette, we can only stand by and watch, and hope that it doesn't end up doing us harm as it continues to rumble along its unpredictable path.

Ed. Note: As you read through the feature article in this magazine, count how many times, and in what sense, charrette *is used.*

The Bentley-Gibson House

by Jim Eaton

Top: An ink drawing of the Bentley-Gibson House by Jane Buckles, dated 1972
Bottom: Architectural drawings from the files of the Ontario Provincial Archives, Toronto, made by students of the faculty of Architecture, University of Toronto, as part of a province-wide project to permanently preserve a record of Ontario's architectural heritage. The drawings were completed in 1960.

The Bentley-Gibson House in Brougham looks today much as it did in 1854, when it was completed. The elaborate wooden fence that enclosed the property is long gone, as is the imposing coach house that was near the back of the property. But the Bentley-Gibson House was built to impress and it still does that today.

The Village of Brougham is located at the corner of Brock Road and Highway 7, a few minutes drive north of Pickering. The first "town meeting" took place in March, 1811 at a local tavern and thus began the community that became socially and politically active for almost 200 years. By the mid-1850s, Brougham boasted a distillery and a temperance hall, three hotels, a brick school house, a brick church, several mills and a patent medicine factory. There were weavers, blacksmiths, shoemakers, carpenters, stonemasons, and a photographer with a studio. One of the most affluent members of this by now well-established and prosperous community was William Bentley who, along with his brother James Bentley, prospered in the "pill manufacturing business". His brother-in-law Nelson Woodruff came into the business several years later and the business became known as Woodruff, Bentley and Co., patent medicine manufacturers of Brougham, Canada West.

William Bentley had emigrated to this area from upstate New York in 1829 and had brought with him visions of grand houses he had seen in his boyhood. His dream of building one for himself was realized beginning in 1853 with the laying of a foundation of thirty-six-inch-square white pine timbers in a rectangle forty-four feet by thirty-two feet, deep in the soil. The stone for the foundation was quarried near Kingston and was formed by a convict contracted for this purpose. The brick was then laid upon this foundation. These walls have remained as true today as they were in 1853.

In 1959, The house was purchased by Don Gibson, a founding member of the Toronto Historical Society, for $29,000. Gibson began a series of restoration projects to return the building to its original appearance, but another event caused the restoration to be suspended. In 1972 the Bentley-Gibson House and all the other houses in Brougham were expropriated for the Pickering Airport project. The house is now used as the Pickering offices of the Greater Toronto Airports Authority. In light of current proposals to proceed with the development of the airport, the future of the Bentley-Gibson House is uncertain.

The Bentley-Gibson House remains a large imposing residence, topped by a belvedere that performs no function except as a decorative element. It still impresses passers-by, just as it did in the 1850s.

Jim Eaton is Publisher of Perspectives