

Session 3: Innovating the Built Environment (ITBE) Student Project Presentations and Panel Discussion

Summary of Proceedings by Jeffrey Thomson

I. Dana Carlisle

Ms. Carlisle, who is currently the Principal Environmental Engineer at GeoEngineers in Redmond, Washington, focused her project on evaluating the policy, implementation, and potential economic and social equity performance of Transit Oriented Development (TOD), specifically using the Sound Transit TOD as a case study. Ms. Carlisle began her presentation with the Washington state legislature's directive to Sound Transit: "Implement a regional equitable TOD strategy during design, construction and operation of high capacity transit." The state statute requires that at least 80 percent of Sound Transit's surplus property that is suitable for housing development be offered first to entities that agree to develop affordable housing. Accordingly, Ms. Carlisle's project will focus on researching and characterizing TOD implementation by looking at specific parcels of land currently identified for TOD. Throughout this process, Ms. Carlisle hopes to analyze proposals for the TOD parcels, evaluate the partnerships and incentives offered, and reviewing the proposed metrics for measuring performance and success. As part of this process, Ms. Carlisle also hopes to interview Sound Transit TOD staff to gain a better understanding of the process altogether. Finally, Ms. Carlisle hopes to propose how economic and social equity performance metrics might be used to evaluate the results of the Sound Transit TOD program.

II. Amber Cratsenberg

Ms. Cratsenberg's project will focus on the feasibility of a Seattle Greenway and whether modeling the greenway off of Atlanta's Belt Line is the best approach. Her project will specifically look at where funding would come from for such an endeavor. To do so, Ms. Cratsenberg proposes looking at case studies from across the United States—specifically, the Chicago 606 Trail as well as the Link Light Rail system in greater Seattle—and if similar sources of funding could be implemented in Seattle. Ultimately, after her research, Ms. Cratsenberg hopes to have a completed funding proposal for a theoretical Seattle Greenway project.

III. Abby Hogan

Ms. Hogan, who works for the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB), has decided to use her project to evaluate and challenge the conventional wisdom surrounding affordable housing development—namely, the rezoning of single-family housing to make room for multi-family affordable housing projects. During her presentation, she challenged the existing model and pointed to the development of housing in Rainier Valley as an example of how single-family housing communities can coexist with, and provide, affordable housing. Conversely, she identifies that the recent development in the South Lake Union neighborhood has been almost entirely multi-family development but without any affordable housing. Furthermore, in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, she will explore and consider the effects of housing density on minority, low-income, disabled, and other vulnerable populations who may be more reliant on affordable housing than other groups. The panel implored Ms. Hogan to look at the effect that building height restrictions have on affordable housing development in areas outside of the Downtown core.

IV. Jessica Kros

Ms. Kros works for the Snohomish Housing Authority and is focusing her project on evaluating multiple case studies of municipalities that have changed, or have proposed changing, their Single-Family Dwelling zoning laws to Multi-Family Dwelling zoning laws. Specifically, she wants to focus on the municipalities that have adopted zoning variances compared with those who have considered doing so but decided against such zoning changes. Ultimately, she wants to study both the reasoning and impacts of these changes and whether there is a quantifiable difference in the municipalities that changed or updated their zoning laws against those municipalities which refused to update their ordinances. At the present time, she was unsure about which case studies she would look at, but she pointed to some examples such as the Pacific Northwest versus the East Coast and large cities versus small cities.

V. Devin Pearsall

Ms. Pearsall's project will concentrate on how the law and regulatory landscape can help incentivize modular building through zoning, permitting, building codes, etc., in order to promote social justice through accessible apprenticeship programs. Moreover, she wants to investigate whether the production of more affordable housing may be fostered by more wide-scale acceptance and adoption of modular construction. Because of the nature of modular housing, it lends itself more-readily to apprenticeship programs than does stick-framing construction. As such, her proposal will favor modular building over stick-framed construction. Consequently, she contends that, in addition to the benefits more-generally of modular construction—lowering both overall construction costs and time frames, including mitigating on-site construction delays—modular construction might also serve the purposes of community development by promoting skills training as well as providing actual jobs in modular construction manufacturing facilities. She hopes that the boost in business from any government incentive would also provide more resources for apprenticeship programs and continuing education, which would be a boon to young adults who have chosen a career path that does not require a college education. Specifically, Ms. Pearsall would like to investigate the breakdown of Black people, indigenous people, and people of color at the start of a such a program and upon completion of the program. The social and racial justice lens of this project resonated with the panel.

VI. Maria Rios-Martinez

Ms. Rios-Martinez's project examines and evaluates whether Portland's extensive trail system can offer any guidance—both best practices and lessons learned—for the proposed Seattle Greenway project. The first part of Ms. Martinez's presentation focused on the history, development, and current use of Portland's trail system which is operated by Oregon Metro and includes twenty-four cities, three counties, and 1,000 miles of planned trails. In order to better understand the development of such projects, Ms. Martinez will ground her project in several principles: land use constraints, takings issues, local governance, capital and operating expenditures, maintenance responsibilities, and potential liability issues. First, Ms. Martinez highlighted the issue with land use constraints, whereby she wants to develop a better understanding of how Oregon Metro deals with these constraints so as to better inform Seattle in its development of the Seattle Greenway. Panel member Dean Bender suggested that Ms. Martinez should look at the case of *Dolan v. City of Tigard*. Moreover, the panel suggested that she look

into the development and maintenance of the Burke-Gilman Trail, here in Seattle, and whether to expand on that with either private land acquisitions or development incentives.

Importantly, Ms. Martinez also wants to learn how the multitude of local and county governments were able to work together and coordinate on such a wide-scale project. She will also look at both the initial and continual funding for the trail project and whether such funding schemes can or already are implemented in Seattle. Finally, Ms. Martinez will investigate the liability issue and who is ultimately responsible for injuries that occur on the trails. The answers to all of these questions, she hopes, will help her better advise the city of Seattle in its efforts to develop the Seattle Greenway.

VII. Annie Szvetcz

Ms. Szvetcz's project will look at whether accessory dwelling unit (ADU) ordinances that distinguish between owner-occupied properties and non-owner-occupied properties make an operational difference in affordable housing. As an alternative to either single or multi-family units, Ms. Szvetcz proposes that cities consider promoting ADUs as a "gentler" method of encouraging residential infill development. As Ms. Szvetcz explained, ADUs, or separate small dwellings embedded within single-family residential properties, are embraced as an effective option to maintain affordability and accommodate future growth due to their low cost and immediate feasibility. By easing restrictions to allow for growth in owner occupation of units a city receives an increase in rental units which helps maintain affordability. As an example, Seattle has recently created financial incentives for the development of ADUs. Ms. Szvetcz will evaluate these ADU regulations and determine whether they undermine affordable housing goals by allowing non-owner occupied ADU's in former single-family dwelling zoning areas.

Specifically, RCW 43.63A.215 requires local governments to incorporate accessory apartment provisions to "be part of the local government's development regulation, zoning regulation, or official control." Ms. Szvetcz points out that if these regulations allow absentee landlords for both the ADU and the primary dwelling, then there could be concerns related to the general rental management, maintenance and upkeep of the property. Accordingly, property values would likely increase but the communities would continue to degrade from an increase in rental properties that are not maintained because of increased expense. Finally, Ms. Szvetcz also considers the effect—either temporary or long term—that the COVID-19 pandemic will have on such incentives. Because physical distancing is becoming the norm, individuals may feel increased pressure to live in ADU style housing as opposed to multi-family dwellings. Conversely, it could also disincentivize homeowners from adding ADUs when they otherwise would consider it. The panel was mainly concerned with the financial viability of such development and whether we need additional incentives to help drive the development. Also, while touching on the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic, the panel proposed that Ms. Szvetcz evaluate the dichotomy between inside and outside ADUs and how the pandemic might affect each categorically.