



Summary:
Town Hall Meeting: Civic Engagement and Advocacy
Monday, February 13, 2017

Thanks to everyone who attended the Town Hall Meeting on public advocacy and civic engagement. The meeting gave members of the Boston Society of Architects/AIA (BSA) community— architects, affiliates, students, and allies— a chance to talk freely about their hopes, fears, and ambitions regarding public and civic issues that affect architects and citizens. The participants shared valuable suggestions about concrete actions that could be taken to advance the BSA's core values and engage and advocate in civic life at all scales— local, state, and national— through the BSA, in association with other groups, or individually.

This document summarizes comments and suggestions made at the meeting. As a companion document, the BSA is providing a resource guide: "How You Can Get Involved."

There was a wonderful energy and spirit of hope expressed at the meeting— let's keep it up! Please tell BSA staff and leadership what you think the BSA and its members should be doing to serve the public, through advocacy and civic engagement, at membership@architects.org.

National Advocacy / relations with the American Institute of Architects (AIA)

- Tamara Roy AIA: We disagree with the position that Robert Ivy FAIA took; BSA board developed its own policy agenda.
- Mike Davis FAIA: AIA National Committee on the Environment (COTE) is focused on sustainable design issues, and has been more effective than AIA National. Their URL: network.aia.org/committeeontheenvironment/advocacy.
- Tom Sieniewicz AIA: Described recent lobbying in Washington DC, through the AIA Large Firm Round Table (LFRT) (his firm, NBBJ, is a member).
- Mike Davis FAIA: We pay dues to AIA National. They listen to the Large Firm Round Table. Carole Wedge FAIA (a BSA member) is the chair. We have a lot of firms on that table. AIA National also pays attention to the Big Sibs chapters, of which the BSA is one.
- Antonio Furgieule: Have individual chapters tried to organize amongst themselves, and then put pressure onto AIA National from that position of relative power?
- Eric White and Jay Wickersham FAIA (moderator): The BSA has circulated its policy agenda to other Big Sibs chapters; got good response from a few, but most have been silent so far. AIA New York has been doing this process as well, of re-stating its values.
- Keihly Moore Assoc. AIA: How do you feel like you're being listened to?

Foreign architects / immigration / refugees

- Nathalie Beauvais: Described the Syrian refugees initiative, in which she is involved, and in which the BSA and the BSA Foundation have been partnering with other organizations.



- Debbie Bentley: The BSA is incredibly inclusive and welcoming, but it's a terrifying time to be a foreign architect. Can the BSA provide resources for foreign architects, make them feel welcome?
- Jay Wickersham FAIA: The Boston Bar Association has assembled a network of lawyers who can provide immigration law assistance.
- Kathryn Grady: We have employees in varying stages of visa applications, green cards, etc. Reached out to the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) to see if they would do a "Know Your Rights" event for the AEC community at the BSA.

Building broader coalitions / fostering activism

- Ron Mallis: We need to have these conversations out in the city.
- Elizabeth Stifel AIA: I'm a member of COTE and didn't know about the AIA National COTE letter. Can we create a permanent home for these links and actions, so that people can find them in the future? Such as architects.org/activism?
- David Eisen FAIA: Donald Trump met with the heads of the building trade unions—we need to be reaching out to the building trades community. How do we create coalitions that are larger than just the architectural community?
- Nathalie Beauvais: The BSA is incredibly effective at mobilizing people.
- Tom Sieniewicz AIA: Who are we? We're architects. What can we bring to this conversation? How do we change the rhetoric and find common ground with Republican politicians? Where is there space for civic discourse, how do we make it happen, and where and how do we model it? Construction is the fastest way to create jobs, to get people into the middle class and then out of the middle class— we have a direct line to the construction industry
- Mike Davis FAIA: If we want to go into communities, we need to take positions that we don't usually take. If we want to talk to labor unions, we need to talk about "right to work" laws. These aren't positions that the BSA normally takes. Social cohesion is the key.
- Antonio Furgieule: The BSA can provide a set of relationships outward: academia, unions, firms, etc. How do we build a platform looking outward and galvanize initiatives together? And looking inward, how does the BSA provide key points for members to rally around? Those points can become actionable sub-groups within the BSA.
- Ron Mallis: What if BSA firm principals got together with Massachusetts community development corporations (CDCs) or the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC)?
- Jay Wickersham FAIA: The BSA is already collaborating with Massachusetts Association of PAs (MAPA) and the Massachusetts Association of Community Development Corporations (MACDC) on zoning reform— we can work to broaden our collaborations.
- Mike Tyrrell: It's inventory time. Many nonprofits are in our community that we already collaborate with, but it may be time to re-engage with them.



- Dani Garber-Letitia Assoc. AIA: We are in a bubble of liberalism here in Boston. There is a large population in the country and also in the state that voted for the exact person we are trying to resist against.
- Todd Lee FAIA: We don't have cred in many of these critical areas— environment, policy, immigration.
- Question from a Boston Architectural College student: Do we have a list of firms that focus on community engagement? Social justice? This would help students identify firms where they would like to work. Answer: You can search the member firm database on architects.org and create a filter to sort out those firms.

Diversity within the profession

- Emily Grandstaff-Rice FAIA: Where do the women go? Architecture schools graduate 48-50 percent women, but only 19-20 percent of AIA members are women. This is about diversity in general. "Until our profession reflects the society we serve, we will not have fulfilled our potential."

State and local advocacy in Massachusetts

- John Gravelin: Imagine Boston 2030 and Climate Ready Boston are completely contradictory. We need to work on coordinating.
- Mike Tyrrell: How can the BSA reach out to Lawrence, Lowell, Brockton, Worcester to get representation in those satellite cities? We can bolster the national agenda by having direct relationships with these communities.
- Sam Lasky AIA: We need to think about the roles of architects and designers in rural contexts. Outside of Interstate 495, people don't feel listened to or represented in Boston.

Ideas for Next Steps:

- Continue to gather member comments (membership@architects.org).
- Build stronger partnerships with organizations that share common policy goals (building trade unions, other professional organizations like ULI, Boston Chamber, and NAIOP)
- Work with other AIA chapters, Large Firm Roundtable, to influence policy positions of national AIA
- Leverage BSA committees to craft policy positions
- Continue to improve on the communication of advocacy efforts:
 - More visible website presence
 - Centralized place on BSA website to organize advocacy action items, position statements, resources
 - Daily email idea: one thing you can do today to make a difference
 - Continue to leverage BSA *Currents*