Urbanism for the Next 25 Years: New Techniques for New Challenges

As we mark twenty-five consecutive annual congresses, CNU can celebrate a host of achievements, from detailed technical changes in many of the disciplines that contribute to our built environment, to having fundamentally changed the conversation about good development and redevelopment. But, when we look at the reality of our built environment and ask, “Are we there yet?” the answer is clearly, “Not yet.”

The principles of the New Urbanism establish a physical framework that is inherently flexible and accommodating of change. However, these principles will likely be put to severe tests over the next 25 years with the rapid and dramatic changes in economics, demographics and particularly technology. Will the principles still stand? What new barriers and challenges confront the quest for rational, inclusive, human-scale neighborhoods? Experts from a range of disciplines—some of which did not exist 25 years ago—will present a glimpse of the future.

**Todd Zimmerman / Demographic Challenges to Urbanism /**The adult residents of walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods over the next 25 years have already been born. By 2042, the oldest Boomers will be 96; Gen Xers, 77; Millennials 65; Gen Zed, 45; and the Alpha Generation, 25. What opportunities and challenges to urbanism are presented by the current make-up of American households, and what, if anything, can we forecast about long-term household behaviors affecting urban settlement patterns.

[**Dhiru Thadani / Successional Urbanism**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vVQZnMkcaRY&list=PL8GKDNzoOfimdxUDiP7ftsrK6u_EZsI_4&index=3) **/**Successional Urbanism recognizes that places that have withstood the test of time, which are upheld as precedents to emulate, where built incrementally, financed prudently, reflected the cultural norms, and were lightly administered. They started small in the inaugural phase, the germinating idea was tested and improved, and the climax condition that we experience today may have taken many years or decades to achieve.

In recent times developers and designers have strived to compress the timeline and sought to achieve the climax condition, bypassing the inaugural condition and successional stages of urban molting. The results in most cases have been unsatisfactory and financially precarious.

Successional Urbanism endeavors to develop protocols for every level—design, financial, administrative, and cultural—that will allow incremental growth to occur again.

[**June Williamson / The Future of Suburban Retrofit**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xKWgtF36iIQ&list=PL8GKDNzoOfimdxUDiP7ftsrK6u_EZsI_4&index=4) **/**June Williamson, co-author of Retrofitting Suburbia, will share her insights on how new technologies, demographics and climates will impact Suburban Retrofit projects over the next 25 years. Will emerging disruptions to private retailers and public agencies lead to new approaches to finance, zoning and economic development? Which property types will fail next and will they be more suited for reinhabitation, redevelopment or regreening? How might all of these changes accelerate the quantity and quality of suburban retrofits?

[**Elizabeth Christoforetti / Big Data for Small Places**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SaawtYyMbeU&list=PL8GKDNzoOfimdxUDiP7ftsrK6u_EZsI_4&index=5) **/**There are reams of urban data in the world, but the realms of urban design and development aren't doing the best job taking advantage of this data to make places better. Elizabeth helped found Supernormal to change this. Supernormal bridges the disciplines of architecture, urban design, and planning with the goal of bringing increased sensitivity and systematization to urban development through the use of improved quantitative methods. New Urbanists are well-suited to learn from this approach. Christoforetti will explain how this new approach can improve the design, development and management of cities.

[**Lisa Picard**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s4auB328ews&list=PL8GKDNzoOfimdxUDiP7ftsrK6u_EZsI_4&index=7) **&** [**Boaz Ashkenazy**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zz1I_psENCg&list=PL8GKDNzoOfimdxUDiP7ftsrK6u_EZsI_4&index=6) **/ Visualizing Place With VR, AR, & Mixed-Reality /**Virtual, Augmented, and Mixed-Reality is at the forefront of innovation in the architecture and real estate development realm. West Coast cities in the Bay Area and Seattle are home to a number of innovative minds employing virtual and augmented reality platforms like the Oculus Rift and HoloLense to the design of physical spaces.

Boaz Ashkenazy, co-founder of Studio 216, outlines ways in which real estate professionals can experience unbuilt environment using virtual reality, architectural visualization, and mobile applications. Lisa Picard, real estate developer and former VP at Skanska, takes it one step further, positing ways in which these new technologies will change how we engage the public and clients about new developments and changes to our cities.

[**Karen Minkel / Making the Ripples Go Farther**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WJMHai7fEnY&list=PL8GKDNzoOfimdxUDiP7ftsrK6u_EZsI_4&index=8) **/**Philanthropy can help jumpstart the transformation of communities, especially in parts of the country that could benefit most from public-private collaboration. In Northwest Arkansas, a region of 32 municipalities, the Walton Family Foundation has played a catalytic role in forging regional partnerships that are challenging assumptions about trail networks and human transit. Learn how a diverse coalition of local government, businesses, and a foundation are helping a region get out in front of rapid growth and into vibrant future.

[**Jarrett Walker / Planning Transit: Can We Live Without Predictions?**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZEYzGBXLBak&list=PL8GKDNzoOfimdxUDiP7ftsrK6u_EZsI_4&index=9&t=18s) **/** Transportation planning seems, at times, to be all about prediction. Consultants vie to do the best models. Journalists do gotcha stories about whether predictions were right. Competing predictions confuse local elected officials and activists. Jarrett Walker explores how much prediction we really need, and how our longing to know the future may interfere with our ability to have clear conversations. While the focus here in on transit, the insights may be useful to people in all aspects of planning.

[**Jonathan F.P. Rose / Our Collective Future**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I905DTo7dZM&list=PL8GKDNzoOfimdxUDiP7ftsrK6u_EZsI_4&index=10) **/**Today’s cities are technical marvels, reflecting civilization’s enormous scientific strides. Human creativity has produced unimagined power and prosperity, although that prosperity has come at a price: it is poorly distributed, and it is fostering the next great extinction. By the end of the 21st century, 80% of the world’s human population will live in cities. If we are to address these problems, cities must be part of the solution. We must knit these threads—our technical, cognitive, and social potential and the generative power of nature—back together, toward a higher purpose for cities. And we can only achieve this if we recognize that we are all in it together. The issues of climate change and income inequality will touch every one of us in different ways, but we can only solve them as a civilization focused on collective goals. And the best place to start is with our cities.

[**Larry Frank / Predicting the Health Impact of Built, Natural & Social Environments**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J7HSygaKZOg&list=PL8GKDNzoOfimdxUDiP7ftsrK6u_EZsI_4&index=11) **/**There has been an avalanche of data and information confirming the strong connection between public health and the built environment, yet the use of that information by practitioners advancing the principles of New Urbanism has been episodic at best. In his talk, Frank will explore how this can and will change in the coming years.

[**Jeff Risom / Design for Inclusive Public Life**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h5u7GuMRw_Q&list=PL8GKDNzoOfimdxUDiP7ftsrK6u_EZsI_4&index=12) **/**As urbanists, we understand that urban design can either perpetuate inequality or promote social justice. But design of public space is only part of the equation. Creating a thriving public life that invites people from different places and different walks of life can provide exposure to people who are different—socially, ethnically, politically. Can exposure and contact with people who are different from us help address major urban challenges—inequality, public health, and access to opportunity? Can these micro-moments, small glimpses into the lives of people taking place in streets and public spaces, become an equalizing force in our polarized society? Jeff Risom, Partner and Managing Director of Gehl US, lays out his vision for the future of inclusive public life.