

MEMORANDUM

DATE: January 10, 2024

TO: CU Office of Creative Inquiry

FROM: Thomas Schurch, Professor of Landscape Architecture+Urban Design

SUBJECT: Overview and Summary of Creative Inquiry Project Proposed for LARC 2550 Community Design

The Significance of Community

The concept of “community” is deeply rooted in the human psyche with evolutionary origins traceable to the prehistoric period of hunting-gathering societies and early agricultural settlements dating to over 10,000 years ago. Hunting and gathering as well as early agricultural settlement required cooperation between people and application of multiple skills on individuals' parts. With the emergence of science and technology over a period of many centuries, specializations emerged, natural boundaries were “broken down,” and a transition from the communitarian existence of agricultural societies gave way to urbanization, and large-scale settlement. The Industrial Revolution, and consequently what can be loosely referred to as the “Modern Age,” are historical forces that have profoundly transformed the human condition relative to the adverse impacts of science and technology and, subsequently, peoples' experience of community. Nevertheless, what can be identified as an innate need for “community” within people persists as one of the most important facets of human existence.

Community Design and the Role of Landscape Architecture

“Community design” is an important facet of landscape architecture that dates to the earliest days of professional practice in the United States. The work of Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr., Warren Manning, John Nolen, Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., Elbert Peets, Henry Wright, Ian McHarg, John Lyle, and others is significant in this regard. In intervening years, many of the precepts of Smart Growth and New Urbanism emanating from planning and architecture have been based upon the accomplishments of these early community design pioneers.

A premise of the creative inquiry is that housing is essential to meaningful realization of community, i.e., that without shelter for experiencing “home” as consideration of community is to be regarded as inadequate. Housing gains further significance in the realm of community due to it being the single greatest land use in built environments, and ignorance of housing's significant relationship to human settlement is fraught possible outcomes that are detrimental to people's experience of “quality of life”.

There are many housing typologies that could be a topic of a Creative Inquiry in LARC 2550 Community Design. In contemporary terms two housing types stand out as related to affordability and or a rapidly growing aging population in South Carolina and the United States. The first of these – and therefore a topic of the CI undertaking is townhouses, a relatively affordable, energy efficient, and land use application that can fit a pursuit of community and quality of life therein.

As a studio course focused on community design, LARC2550 will cover historical precedents, methodology, and physical design and planning that typify the landscape architect's role in this important facet of the profession. Emphasis will be placed on “best practices” as related to ecology, sustainability, and “green” dimensions of the subject matter.