

CONGRESS FOR THE NEW URBANISM

Charter Awards

2016



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Mixed-use, walkable neighborhood development, as defined by the Charter of the New Urbanism, promotes healthier people, places, and economies. The members of CNU and their allies create positive change in communities all over the world. They design and build places people love.

The Charter Awards, administered annually by CNU since 2001, celebrate the best work in this new era of placemaking. The winners not only embody and advance the principles of the Charter—they also make a difference in people's lives.

The Charter identifies three major scales of geography for design and policy purposes. The largest scale is composed of regions. The middle scale is made up of neighborhoods, districts, and corridors. The smallest scale is composed of blocks, streets, and buildings.

Charter Awards are given to projects at each scale, and special recognition is reserved for the best projects at the professional and student levels. Honored by the world's preeminent award for urban design, winners set new standards for placemaking and community building.

THE JURY

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LETTER FROM THE JURY CHAIR

Hank Dittmar

The Congress for the New Urbanism promotes good design, and our Charter Awards are our main way of doing that. Unlike most design awards, which reflect the taste of the jury or the fashion of the moment, we stand for principles embodied in the Charter of the New Urbanism, and they provide cogent guidance to each jury. I was blessed to Chair a great jury this year—diverse in background and profession, but unfailingly collegial and insightful.

Early in our deliberations, one juror remarked that no single project this year stood out as being exceptional. This led us to the realization that projects today, which might have merited a grand prize award in past years, simply represent good practice. The high standard of the honorees this year proves this point, and in turn reflects the maturity of the New Urbanism.

One goal I set for this year's awards was to reward implementation and completion, as great design means little if it is not

built well. This also led to the creation of a special Chairman's Test of Time Award, for projects that have proved themselves over many years. The Test of Time Award winner was the Rosslyn-Ballston Corridor, a successful decades-long effort to urbanize a suburban Metrorail corridor in Arlington County, Virginia.

As usual, urban infill and mixed income housing dominated the entries, and this year's Grand Prize Award winner is a hugely significant infill project along the M1 transit corridor in Detroit, Michigan. Under construction during this year's Congress in Detroit, Brush Park is not only an ambitious effort in a challenging environment, but also a sensitive blend of historic preservation, new housing typologies, and a design approach that moves tradition forward.

The jurors were also very taken with Nanhu New Country Village Master Plan, which sought to define a sustainable future for rural life and agriculture in China. The jury hoped that this excellent

plan could be influential nationally, as there are signs that China's approach to urbanisation is changing for the better, under the influence of the New Urbanism.

Our Student Grand Prize winner is the Master Plan for Revitalization of the Canal System in Lowell, Massachusetts, a comprehensive reimagining of the public realm in the city which hosts the first urban national park. Using the canal system to open up new squares, parks, and sites, the project creates an entirely new way of experiencing Lowell, and does so with exquisite detail.

This year's winners demonstrate that excellence in New Urbanist design is becoming standard. In my opinion, this is happening in a way that reflects our Charter: contextual, reflecting local traditions, climate, and setting, while moving tradition forward to reflect contemporary demands. To reframe a recent critique of the Congress, in design terms, CNU is on fire. And that is a good thing!





CHARTER AWARD

Playhouse Plaza

An Architectural Triumph Adds to a City's Legacy

BLOCK, STREET, AND BUILDING — PASADENA, CA
MOULE & POLYZOIDES, ARCHITECTS AND URBANISTS

In Pasadena, California, the Playhouse Plaza has replaced a single-story furniture store with “an architectural triumph that has added to Pasadena’s legacy of well-designed, beautiful buildings,” says Susan Mossman, Executive Director of Pasadena Heritage.

Located in the city’s revitalizing 32-block Playhouse District, the 155,000-square foot mixed-use development includes office space with ground floor shops and restaurants organized around courtyards and paseos and fronting two important commercial thoroughfares. The building’s open spaces and architecture celebrate the Pasadena Playhouse, an early 20th Century theater with a unique and unusual history that stands across the street.

Because of the historical importance of the playhouse, the development of the site was embroiled in a multiyear battle. The dispute was settled by a series of charrettes that led to the current design. The developer wanted a building that met 21st Century functional and constructional requirements. The community wanted a building that would relate seamlessly to its historic setting and sit comfortably with the scale of existing buildings.

“The final project is a lesson in listening to the concerns of the community up front, so that stakeholder consensus, including community perspectives, can be achieved and successfully implemented early on,” notes Nina Chomsky, Community Activist.

The site fronts Colorado Boulevard, famous for the Rose Bowl Parade, a formerly automobile-dominated thoroughfare that is transitioning to an urban place. The six-story Art Deco-style façade, inspired by the rich Deco traditions of Los Angeles, reflects the scale of commercial structures on that street.

To the west, along El Molino Avenue, the building faces the historic two-story playhouse with its courtyard opening on to the street. Playhouse Plaza echoes this gesture on the opposite side of the street, forming a joint mid-block quad framed by two-story buildings. The retail buildings facing the historic Playhouse reuse the historic brick of the former demolished retail building on the site—using material to express memory.

Resolving the new building’s relationship with the historic playhouse was instrumental in reaching political consensus, demonstrating the power of New Urbanism to bring communities together.



CHARTER AWARD

Nanhu New Country Village

Breaking the Mold of Chinese Development

REGION, CITY, AND TOWN — NANHU, NEAR SHANGHAI, CHINA
SKIDMORE, OWINGS & MERRILL

All over China, scarce farmland is being developed as rural families flee their farms for better-paying jobs in cities. The farms that remain are inefficient and fragmented. Nanhu New Country Village breaks the mold by retaining the connection to farmland and nature, restoring a polluted water network, and creating a new village that is large enough to survive economically. The plan applies the urban to rural transect to China.

The project boldly restores a stagnant, fragmented, historic canal system that extends throughout the site. The canals are re-dug and reconnected so that polluted water can flow cleanly again, creating an urban amenity for the new town and forming a clean water network throughout the district—enabling the surrounding farmland to be certified organic.

The new town of 40,000 people will be surrounded by 1,350 acres of organic farms, 250 acres of eco-tourist farms, and more than 100 acres of restored wetlands. It will be connected by high-speed rail to

Shanghai, providing a way for residents not employed in agriculture to get jobs in the city, and offer a way for city residents to vacation in the town. Most of the new village will be a 5 or 10 minute walk from the center.

“A compact, transit-served village will serve as a benchmark for ecological, agricultural development throughout China,” according to the planners. “At the heart of the village, a mixed-use commercial core is wrapped around 450 meters of revitalized canals, with waterways ranging from 10-40 meters in width, creating a unique network and modern identity from the area’s historic regional culture.”

The system allows for larger farms, using new technology, all within walking distance of homes. The entire village is connected by modern transportation to one of the world’s great 21st Century metropolises. A large and growing emitter of greenhouse gas emissions, China desperately needs new and sustainable models like Nanhu New Country Village.

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Charter Award

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PROJECT

Playhouse Plaza

CONGRESS FOR THE NEW URBANISM