

## ASLA 2017: Participating in Politics: Leveraging Landscape Architecture Skills to Influence Policy

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Feeling motivated to participate in politics? Don't know where to start? How can landscape architects leverage their skills to make political and regulatory change? Panelists will discuss historical precedents for effective political involvement by designers and discuss things you can do right now to make a difference.

### Learning Objectives:

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- Walk away with three things you can do tomorrow to influence the policies and regulations you care about (whether you lean left or right).
- Understand how designers can help decision makers envision greener, more productive cities, and review strategic ways to engage with mayors of cities.
- Learn ways to get involved in shaping local regulations and review historical precedents for effective political involvement by designers.
- Learn how to engage community groups to enable change.

### Resources:

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- Mayor's Institute on City Design: [www.micd.org](http://www.micd.org)
- The Indivisible Guide: [www.indivisible.org](http://www.indivisible.org)
  - <https://dirt.asla.org/2016/07/06/its-time-to-get-political/>
  - <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/aug/31/real-villains-harvey-flood-urban-sprawl>
- Data Refuge: [www.datarefuge.org](http://www.datarefuge.org)
- DLANDstudio: [www.dlandstudio.com](http://www.dlandstudio.com)
- The American City: What Works, What Doesn't by Alex Garvin
- The Nature of Urban Design, by Alex Washburn
- Nature and Cities' (2016), edited by Frederick Steiner, published by the Lincoln Land Institute.
- Well Tempered City, by Jonathan Rose
- Merchants of Doubt, by Naomi Oreskes

### Presenter Bios:

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**Susannah Drake, FASLA** is the founding principal of DLANDstudio architecture + landscape architecture. Winner of national and international awards from the AIA, ASLA, and Chicago Athenaeum, the Firm's 'Rising Currents, New Urban Ground' project for Lower Manhattan is in the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art. Susannah received a BA from Dartmouth College and MArch and MLA degrees from Harvard GSD. Her essay 'WPA 2.0: Beauty, Economics, and Politics in the Creation of Public Infrastructure' appears in 'Nature and Cities' (2016), edited by Frederick Steiner, published by the Lincoln Land Institute.'

**Kate Kennen**, is principal of Offshoots, Inc. ([www.offshootsinc.com](http://www.offshootsinc.com)), a hybrid landscape architecture, installation and phytoremediation consulting firm in Boston. Kate coauthored the award-winning book "PHYTO: A Resource for Site Remediation and Landscape Design" which reviews strategies for remediation using plant-based systems. Kate obtained degrees in Landscape Architecture from Cornell and Harvard and has become interested in ways she can become politically active in an era when scientific research is trumped by #alternativefacts.



**Billy Fleming** is research director for the Ian L. McHarg Center at PennDesign. Most recently, he co-authored *The Indivisible Guide*—a progressive, grassroots organization with more than 6,000 groups—and co-created Data Refuge, an international consortium of scientists, librarians, and programmers working to preserve vital the environmental data at risk of erasure during the Trump Administration. Before coming to Penn, Fleming worked on urban policy development in the White House Domestic Policy Council during the Obama Administration. There, he worked on a variety of urban initiatives, including the inter-agency Sustainable Communities Initiative, the Promise Zones program, and the landmark Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing rule.

**Trinity Simons** is Executive Director of the Mayors' Institute on City Design. As such, she works with mayors across the country on their most pressing city design challenges. She currently serves as on the Board of Directors of Association for Community Design and has previously served on the Board of Directors of the NAAB, ACSA, AIAS, and the DC chapter of the AIA. She has a Bachelor of Architecture from the University of Arkansas and a Master of City Planning from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

## **Presentation Outline:**

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### **I. Introduction to Political Engagement for Landscape Architects - Moderator (10 min)**

A. Plea for LAs to get involved- Let's think big. Let's not just leave regulatory decisions in our cities up to planners and politicians.

B. Doesn't matter if you lean left or right

1. Involvement is important
2. What can we each do right now?

C. Introduce the panelists

### **II. How regulations shape our cities- Why to get involved & some ideas in how– Susannah (20 min)**

A. A short history of how regulations define the places we live from larger scale to urban

- 1) Larger scale sharing of the American landscape
- 2) Public Health and Safety as the primary reason for regulation
  - a. Fire
  - b. Sanitation
  - c. Light and air
- 3) Quality of life
- 4) Development

B. Role of community organizations in shaping how projects are developed.

C. Understanding the mind and culture of agencies to enable innovation

D. Discussion of new idea of 'Breakthrough Zones' in New York City.

### **II. Political Activism by landscape Architects: what works, how to work -- Trinity (20 min)**

A. As government becomes more removed, trust goes down

- 1) 19% people say they trust federal government "some or all of the time."
- 2) 71% people say they trust local government "some or all of the time." (Gallup 2016 study)

B. Landscape architects have the skills -- some would say the moral obligation -- to address the critical issues of our time: global climate change, ecological degradation, etc. But the scale of those problems can often feel too daunting, the coalitions needed too complex, and the timeline required too long. What can we do now?

C. Brief introduction to the Mayors' Institute on City Design (MICD): educating mayors to be the chief urban designers of their cities

- 1) Bring together groups of mayors with those from the design/development community including architects, landscape architects, urban designers, urban planners, real estate developers, historic preservationists, transportation planners.
- 2) case study method, hybrid technical assistance/leadership development program for mayors
- 3) landscape architects always shine in this environment: consistently are the ones that are looking out for the public realm. They're the ones who consider how one decision impacts another, and how decisions contribute to or detract from an overall vision

D) Infiltration: landscape architects as activists

- 1) Activism through practice
  - a) How we design reflects how we feel about the people we serve
  - b) Quick example: design firms choosing to only work in democracies
  - c) Example: Former Charleston, SC Mayor Joseph P. Riley Jr.'s and Sasaki's waterfront park
- 2) Activism through (grassroots) organization
  - a) LA's natural ability to help others to visualize possibilities, collaborate with varied stakeholders, build consensus
  - b) Quick examples: signature projects that began as grassroots efforts (NYC's Highline, Houston's Buffalo Bayou Watershed and Promenade, many others)
- 3) Activism through personal engagement
  - a) Landscape architects involved in MICD often become "mentors" to mayors and local elected
  - b) Tactical urbanism -- now a well worn strategy, but starting to see systemic change coming out of these pilot projects
    - i) Quick Examples: NYC, Raleigh, others
    - c) Run for office
- 4) Bottom line: LA's have a unique ability to uncover stories about place; dovetails nicely with why people love where they live. Can increase the value of citizenship by illuminating.

### III. **Tools for engagement** Billy (20 min)

1. Introduction to Indivisible
  - a. Living through the rise of the Tea Party and a renewed focus on local, direct action.
  - b. From a Google Doc to 6,000+ groups all across the U.S.—at least 2 in every Congressional District, an average of 18.
  - c. Fights we've picked and won—Sessions/Russia, Methane CSR, ACA, and Harvey Relief.
  - d. Coalition-building—MoCs (Warren), organizations (MoveOn, WFP, Color of Change, NILC, etc.), and public figures (DiCaprio, Legend, Clinton, etc.).
2. Our Organizing Model + Design Thinking
  - a. Content and grassroots-driven—there are no prescriptive actions from us. We build tools and let our groups do the heavy lifting.
  - b. Systems thinking and movement building—how/why we opted for a distributed, loosely managed organization as opposed to the carefully curated systems used by our peers.
3. Tools for Everyday Activism
  - a. Demystifying Congress + Issue-Driven Activism
  - b. Hubdialer—revolutionizing mobilization and persuasion.

- c. Other Resources—explainers, scripts, and curating a call to action.
- 4. Indivisible's Future
  - a. Elections.
  - b. Issues.
  - c. State Legislatures.
- 5. Other Outlets
  - a. Data Refuge

**IV: Panel Discussion lead by Moderator with Q&A from Audience (30 min)**

- A. What can someone in this room do tomorrow? How about if I only have 5 minutes to devote?
- B. What organizations have the most effect on regulations and policies that are important to LAs? What are some things I can do to support these organizations?