

Living and Sustainability: An Environmental Critique of Design and Building Practices, Locally and Globally

1. Paper / Proposal Title: The Concept of Character for Urban Landscapes in the 21st Century

2. Format: verbal presentation

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4. University or Company Affiliation: The University of Texas at Austin

5. Abstract (300 words): The notion of "landscape character" is commonly used to engage and help understand the visually distinctive features of a place. Toward the goal of critical discourse that can advance sustainability goals, this presentation reconsiders the mid-18th century origins of the concept to reestablish connections between appearance and performance. It is argued that doing so opens lines of inquiry that can be used to investigate relationships between how a landscape looks and what a landscape does. This topic becomes increasingly important as communities ask for sites that both appeal to the senses and provide ecosystem services. The relationships between appearance and performance are often complex and, moreover, can be contested in urbanized areas that result in novel ecosystems. The expanded concept of landscape character will be examined through a study of the Waller Creek project in Austin, Texas, site of an ongoing redevelopment effort. The lower two-kilometer stretch of the creek bounds the eastern edge of the downtown district. In some locations, the creek is only a few meters wide, but major storm events

in the past have produced significant physical damage and loss of life. In the previous century, it would have been capped like so many other small urban streams to allow for new construction. Instead, a recently completed flood diversion tunnel has mitigated the risk and opened eleven percent of the downtown area for new housing, commercial space, and parkland. It has also created the possibility to create a restored riparian corridor, albeit one with specific management demands. An international design competition received entries from across the Americas, Europe, and Asia. It helped citizens imagine ways that gray and green infrastructure could be hybridized through design and governance to bring a new kind of nature into the city and challenge expectations with regard to form and function.

6. Author(s) Biography (200 words each): Allan W. Shearer, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor and Co-Director of the Center for Sustainable Development in the School of Architecture at The University of Texas at Austin. Much of his work centers how individuals, communities, and societies create scenarios of the future and how these descriptions of possible tomorrows are used to inform present day decisions. Focusing on issues relating to the built environment, his work engages the expansion of the conceptual frameworks of scenario-based studies and also the methodology by which they are developed. He has been a visiting scholar at the Pell Center for International Relations and Public Policy at Salve Regina University and Fellow of the James Marston Fitch Foundation. At The University of Texas at Austin, he was a Donald D. Harrington Faculty Fellow and a Fellow of the Humanities Institute. Among his publications, he is co-author of the books *Land Use Scenarios: Environmental Consequences of Change* and *Gaia's Revenge: Climate Change and Humanity's Loss*. His most recent article, "Abduction to Argument: A Framework for Design Thinking" was published in *Landscape Journal* and offers a constructivist approach to envision purposeful change. He is currently a contributing subject matter expert for the NATO Urbanisation Project.