

NEWS - POLITICS

October 05, 2011

Look/Move/Grow

by Rachel Hollingsworth



A still frame from Hustwit's "Urbanized," a documentary on urban design.

On Oct. 7, the [IMA](#) will host the [Urbanized Summit](#), where local and international urbanization experts will deliberate the challenges of development, environment and transit in Indianapolis. At the half-day forum, a panel of civil planners, architects and grassroots project leaders will address the city's most pressing revitalization issues. The public is welcome to attend.

The summit was largely the brainchild of ecologist Tim Carter, director of [Butler University's Center for Urban Ecology](#). Carter hopes that Friday's event will encourage Indy citizens to become more involved in the shaping of their city.

"We want the Summit to be both something people will learn from, but also something they will contribute to, and ultimately carry on past the event through new projects," said Carter.

The day's activities will be separated into three areas of discussion, all designed to stimulate new ideas for city improvement.

Looking for change

"In the first session of 'Look,' the speakers will be communicating big urban themes that underlie how cities operate," Carter said, who will emcee the event. Carter recognizes that successful urban change requires citizens to understand the importance of preserving the city's ecosystems.

"We need to abandon this idea that the ecosystem is someplace outside the city," said Carter. "Until we pay attention to what's happening out our front door, in our backyards, and in other places where we spend most of our time, we'll be unable to see how improving the urban ecosystem can change the city not only environmentally, but culturally and economically as well."

Joining the "Look" lineup is former Australian environmental planning officer Miriam Fathalla. Since moving to Chicago, Fathalla has been keeping a [blog on her observations of Midwestern lifestyle](#). She too acknowledges that sustainable mannerisms don't happen overnight.

"I don't believe in an overwhelming tidal wave of a tipping point that will usher in a 'mainstreamed' form of sustainable," Fathalla said. "I believe that small pockets of sustainable behaviors and projects are increasing in number. ... This will continue until they dominate our social, economic and environmental practices and policies."

Urban architects Dan Hellmuth and [Vop Osili](#) will speak about the technical aspects of well-planned city expansion. As

specialists in sustainable architecture, Hellmuth and Osili have made green design a priority for their respective firms. In Indy, Osili's current projects include the restoration of the Fall Creek Place and Saint Clair Place neighborhoods.

Moving forward

The afternoon's second portion, "Move," will focus on transit.

"We didn't think you could have a summit on urbanism in Indianapolis and not discuss transit," Carter said.

And with good reason. Indianapolis remains one of the nation's largest cities without a rail system. Poor road conditions make travel difficult for the bus system. And, as far as improvements go, funding is slipping. [IndyGo](#) recently made its budget plans public in an open hearing on Sept. 20, the results of which were not promising.

"2012 will be a hard year for public transit in Indianapolis," [admitted the IndyGo website](#). "The projected IndyGo budget shows revenues \$6.4 million short of operating costs."

At the Summit, IndyGo director of business development Samantha Cross will address the transit system's future, as part of a moderated panel discussion. Other speakers will include Ron Gifford of the Central Indiana Transit Task Force and Bruce Race of Ball State's Urban Design Program.

Growing the future

The "Grow" section will encourage attendees to contribute their own ideas for urban change. Participants will be invited to take the stage for a sticky-note brainstorming session, which organizers hope will result in some doable new projects for Indianapolis.

Jim Walker, director of [Big Car Gallery](#), will facilitate the open forum. He'll be joined by David Forsell, president of [Keep Indianapolis Beautiful](#), whose recent tree-planting initiative "2012 Trees by 2012" hopes to green up the city in time for next year's Super Bowl.

Urbanized

Topping off the afternoon is a screening of filmmaker Gary Hustwit's newest film, "Urbanized," a documentary on urban design. The viewing is part of Hustwit's nationwide tour with the film, which premiered in Toronto several weeks ago. Hustwit, who's based in New York and London, got his start producing films for the indy music world, but has since turned to directing. "Urbanized" is the final chapter of Hustwit's trilogy on design. The film is a global tour, exploring how cities are facing the challenge of housing the world's ballooning population.

"It's inevitable that more and more people will live in large cities," Hustwit said in a phone interview. "In terms of sustainability and the use of natural resources, we're not going to have a choice ... It's not optional. The sooner we embrace the solutions to the challenges, the better off the species and the planet will be."

Over several years of filming, Hustwit followed some of the world's leading planners, designers, and policymakers on their journey to address livability and growth in their respective cities. From Copenhagen to Cape Town, Hustwit saw city planners tackle the dilemmas of transportation and overcrowding from countless different angles. He hopes that "Urbanized" can jump-start an inter-city sharing of these solutions and ideas.

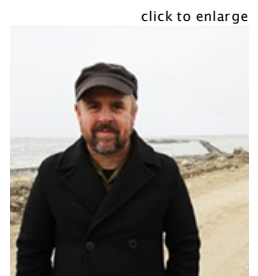
"I want people to be more aware of the design of their cities and who shapes their cities, and be more involved," Hustwit said. "By showing what other cities are doing around the world, I'm hoping to get these ideas to be more a part of public discussion."

But urban change isn't the duty of the public alone. In a world where private-funded civil-improvement projects often prioritize profitability over functionality, Hustwit said it's the government's responsibility to initiate changes in the people's best interest.

"The job of government is figuring out how to take the pulse of the citizens and see what their needs are," Hustwit said. "[Get] the citizens to really think about what would make the city better and use that as a direction for projects."

That is easier said than done. In many of the cities Hustwit visited, local governments are struggling just to stay afloat – essentials like new transit systems are sometimes out of the question. For Summit-goers on Friday, Hustwit's insight on transportation could prove useful.

"Mobility is one of the key issues I see," he said. "I think we'll look back and won't be able to imagine why so much energy was wasted on bad mobility infrastructure and outdated technologies."



A screening of filmmaker Gary Hustwit's newest film "Urbanized" will end the Urbanized Summit.

Reshaping our city to better serve its citizens is a monumental challenge, but from all he has seen, Hustwit remains optimistic.

"In the end it's about ideas, thinking of ways that the city can be used to make our lives better. It shouldn't be an obstacle, it should be an opportunity."

Tags: Politics, Urbanized Summit, development, Tim Carter, ecology, Sustainability, Public transit, Jim Walker, Gary Hustwit, Urbanized, Vop Osili, transportation, Central Indiana Transit Task Force, Feature

RELATED EVENTS

Urbanized Summit @ Tobias (Toby) Theatre at the IMA
Fri., Oct. 7, 1–7 p.m.

AUTHOR ARCHIVES

Scenes from Playing for Change Day

Musicians busked up and down Mass Ave Saturday on Playing for Change Day, helping raise money for education while playing with new and old friends.

by Rachel Hollingsworth

Art Center announces McKinney Fellowship winner

The Indianapolis Art Center presented Sofiya Inger with the first–annual Skip McKinney Faculty Fellowship for excellence in art, teaching and community–building.

by Rachel Hollingsworth

More »