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Concurrent panel session 1: Sustainability in community development and architecture in Las Vegas

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Presenters

Alfredo Fernandez-Gonzalez, Craig Galati, Mary Kay Peck, Jeff Roberts, Suzanne Sanders, and Richard Serfas

***Shaping the Future of Southern Nevada:
Economic, Environment, and Social Sustainability***

**Sustainability in Community Development and Architecture
October 24, 2007**

Moderator: David Frommer, UNLV Planning and Construction

Panelists:

Alfredo Fernandez-Gonzalez, UNLV School of Architecture

Craig Galati, Lucchesi-Galati Architects

Mary Kay Peck, City of Henderson

Jeff Roberts, Lucchesi-Galati Architects

Suzanne Sanders, Molasky Group of Companies

Richard Serfas, American Nevada Company

Session Scribe: Michael Spurr, UNLV Department of History

The session began with moderator David Frommer suggesting that the idea of sustainability is still being defined, with an important dialogue being initiated at the conference. The focus would not center upon specific solutions, but rather the development of social applications for ecological systems and architecture. Ultimately the panel would concentrate on three questions. What key points are necessary when broadly defining sustainability in Urban Southern Nevada? What are the major questions that need to be asked in order to achieve effective sustainability within the region? How can the community interact with the educational agenda of UNLV to produce and continue sustainability? After an introduction of the panelists, each member shared their views on the current state of architecture and how they felt greater sustainability could be promoted within the southern Nevada region.

Suzanne Sanders (Molasky Group of Companies) began by observing that the Las Vegas region is in constant need of vital resources such as water, energy, and land. Through her involvement with the Molasky Corporate Center, she recently developed an office center that was built with attention to sustainability. Water usage, air quality, and low energy output became major goals during construction. By the end of the month, the Molasky Corporate Center will be LEED™ Gold certified. Sanders said that tax initiatives put forth by the state government are helping to promote sustainable development. In order for Las Vegas to

succeed and become sustainable, the younger generation needs to be educated on these issues and made aware of the importance of sustainability.

Craig Galati (Lucchesi-Galati Architects) expressed concern over the current attention to water and energy within the growing city. He suggests that the idea of community becomes extremely important if the current population is to serve as generational stewards for future generations. People want to live in a community that feels safe and promotes a healthy lifestyle. The community needs to become a place where people can work and live, as well as develop bonds with neighbors and friends. Moreover, the time between work and sleep should be one of pride, enjoyment, and comfort. He is not sure that current developments are producing this mentality. The current system of structural development cannot create community, but it can inhibit it. He stresses the need for ideals and values so that the community of Las Vegas can begin to benefit as a region.

Alfredo Fernandez-Gonzalez (UNLV School of Architecture) focused upon the academic study of the changes being produced by cities. In the nineteenth century, homes and buildings had a very low carbon footprint, with little energy consumption. It is only in the twentieth century that energy-consuming systems began to emerge. Bathrooms and running water systems did not come into use until the 1880s. Air conditioning, largely responsible for the growth of Las Vegas, was not implemented until the 1930s. Cars were not used by the public in large numbers until the 1940s. He combined these factors with the observation that before the twentieth century few American cities had over one million residents. The country is still learning how to produce metropolitan areas that are efficient with energy and water resources.

To combat the rise in energy consumption, he suggested several steps that would place an important role in the future of sustainable development. Initially, the energy consumption and emissions must be baselined to an appropriate level. Next, there need to be definite and realistic goals that provide measures of achievement. After goals have been created, an action plan should be implemented based upon ambitious participants. For this to happen, it is vital

that partnerships between the community and academic departments be established. Finally, there need to be follow-up studies and research to determine the effectiveness of the plan and how it can be improved. This would provide vital data that is often absent from the current designing and planning of buildings. He concluded by suggesting that individuals within the community and the university need to become proactive over the actions that are being implemented.

Mary Kay Peck (City of Henderson, Nevada) provided a macro view of sustainability that built upon the ideas of the changing metropolitan areas, community, and conservation. Many methods can be learned from cities around the world, including Chicago and others in Europe. Las Vegas, however, is in a unique situation that is dependant upon its atmosphere and environment. The overall condition of Las Vegas needs to be assessed, with attention to North Las Vegas, Las Vegas, Henderson, and all of Clark County. Public transit, design standards, and other systems can be improved by observing all areas of the city.

Change is occurring in the form of environmental considerations by the public. The perception of the desert itself has changed from being viewed as a dumping ground for garbage to that of a living ecosystem with trails and affordable natural areas for people and families. She suggests that Las Vegas needs to be smarter than anyone else in the world in terms of water usage and energy consumption. These lessons can be learned through respect for the city's heritage and ambitious planning.

Richard Serfas (American Nevada Company) discussed his experiences with designing and planning The District at Green Valley. He says that the success of The District is found in its ability to provide homes, entertainment, and employment within a small area. He had been hired by the American Nevada Company to design commercial lands and had encountered studies on mixed land uses. The District currently contains 88 condominiums, 11 restaurants, as well as 120,000 square feet of retail space. Although it is very dense, he believes that people will enjoy living within a mixed land area if there are enough amenities available. It is

important to note that developers need to be aware of the benefits of redesigning the urban core of Las Vegas rather than constantly seeking expansion. For the future, developers need to engage the use of communities in order to create sustainable areas for Las Vegas.

Jeff Roberts (Lucchesi Galati Architects) stressed the idea of being a community of the desert rather than a community in the desert. The methods of the past have to be observed for their successes, as well as failures in producing today's community. Groundwater was over-pumped in the 1940s and 1950s. The use of cars led to a development of urban sprawl. He questioned how this city would be today if air conditioning had not been developed. All of these structural and technological factors contribute to how architecture and sustainability have to be approached in the future. Las Vegas will continue to be a community of transit and gaming, yet the idea of community and conservation can begin to form a stronger sense of sustainability.

In conclusion, moderator David Frommer provided several important points addressed by the panel. First, a forum needs to be developed to determine a community-wide vision of Southern Nevada. By incorporating the concerns and goals of everyone, the community can improve its appeal and sustainability. Second, community outreach and education need to be emphasized. Everyone needs to be aware of the various aspects involved in developing a sustainable community. The public should understand what it means to be sustainable, the costs associated with such a goal, proper individual methods and practices, as well as the technical and financial programs needed to assist the community in its goal to becoming sustainable. Education needs to be extended to the consumer, development, and regulatory sectors in order to establish an effective plan of action. Finally, UNLV can work with developers, consumers, and municipalities to create policy and incentive programs. This could extend into visioning programs, outreach developments, community engagement, or other specific programs such as government incentives, financial rebates, and conservation. UNLV should serve as a research unit and aid in the development of programs and policies. The municipalities, utilities, and other financial entities could fund the programs and become actively

involved in various forms of incentives such as rebates, cost reductions, zoning, and cash back initiatives. Ultimately, the community and UNLV must coincide to produce an effective plan for the future sustainability of Southern Nevada.