

Walk Bike Places

Melissa White, Senior Planner in SSFM's Strategic Services Group recently had the opportunity to organize and facilitate an "Urban Sustainability Super Session" at the bi-annual Walk Bike Places conference in New Orleans. Hosted by Project for Public Spaces (PPS), a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping people create and sustain public spaces that build strong communities, Walk Bike Places specifically focuses on how to re-imagine neighborhoods as bike-friendly, walkable places. Melissa spoke about her experience and the takeaways from this important facet of building and transforming communities that work for everyone.



The bikeable Vieux Carre of New Orleans.

Q: How is it that you found yourself with a key role in the conference?

MW: MW: I have been involved with PPS for a number of years. Their position at the forefront of the global placemaking movement closely aligns with the work we are doing at SSFM. When invited to lead an "Urban Sustainability Super Session," I jumped at the opportunity. The session highlighted best practices and case studies around many facets of what makes communities sustainable, including resilience, economic self-sufficiency, social equity, public health, mobility, placemaking, and environmental quality. It was a chance to help shape the current dialogue about how communities should be planning and implementing programs around each of these components.

Q: What is an "Urban Sustainability Super Session?"

MW: It's a new conference format that Walk Bike Places adopted for 2018, consisting of a three hour session with 8-10 presenters. My session featured eight speakers from the U.S., Canada, and Europe who came from a variety of disciplines and presented on wide-ranging topics including active transportation, parking, air quality, manufacturing, youth leadership, health care, and sustainable street design. To group these diverse speakers and topics, we created two themed segments: "Zoom Out" for those addressing big picture topics of sustainability, and "Zoom In" for those presenting case studies, tools, or methods. Each segment included a panel presentation followed by breakout discussions. The groups then reassembled to share their observations and conclusions.

Q: What were the specific issues addressed by the groups?

MW: We wanted current thinking on how infrastructure, planning, economic development, urban design and even health care delivery can change to meet the challenges posed by climate change, inequality, resource scarcity and heightened social friction, from the very local to the most global perspective.



A framework for community well-being, developed by Antonio Gomez Palacio (DIALOG).

Q: That's a lot to bite off. What were the results of the presentations and discussions?

MW: The “Zoom Out” panel focused on understanding and tackling what we called “Wicked Problems of Urban Sustainability.” Presentations included:



One of the dynamic breakout discussions that took place during the session.

- How Parking has Damaged our Cities, Why it Makes People Crazy and How We're Going to Fix It. Or, How I Learned to Love Parking presented by Martha Roskowski, Further Strategies
- From Air Quality Issues to New Cycling Policy presented by Rick Lindeman, Rijkswaterstaat
- The Urban Generation: How Emerging Leaders are Transforming Their Cities in One Year, presented by Ryan O'Connor, 8 80 Cities
- Drawing Parallels between Europe and North America: How to Build Innovative, Inclusive, and Self-Supporting Communities Leveraging Local DNA presented by Wilco van Bommel, Dunefield Consulting



Arthur Orsini of Vancouver Coastal Health presenting their “Nurses on Bikes” program.

Some of the takeaways had to do with how cities can creatively leverage their existing resources to meet sustainability challenges – there is no need to reinvent the wheel. Sometimes it just takes a different angle, such as looking to the past to identify economic infrastructure that can be updated for the future, or involving young people in devising innovative solutions and projects. Existing infrastructure such as bikeways and parking lots can also be creatively upgraded or repurposed to better meet objectives for sustainability, health, and quality of life.

The “Zoom In” panel explored Tools, Tricks, and Case Studies for Sustainable Communities with real world examples including:

- Nurses on Bikes: Health Care Outreach in Vancouver's Downtown Core presented by Arthur Orsini, Vancouver Coastal Health
- A New Paradigm in Sustainable Street Design: Jackson Street, Saint Paul Minnesota presented by Chris Lambka, Toole Design Group
- Reframing Tactical Urbanism Through Resilience, Dana Wall, The Street Plans Collaborative
- Community Wellbeing – A Framework for Sustainable Communities presented by Antonio Gomez-Palacio, DIALOG

Each of these presenters showcased how they overcame physical, regulatory, or institutional barriers to design innovative tools and projects to further health, sustainable street design, resilience, and community well-being. Each presentation described the tools in enough detail to provide attendees with guidance for implementing similar programs in their own community.

Q: How would you sum up the results from the conference?

MW: We wanted to connect the attendees to ideas, resources, expertise, and partners who see placemaking as the key to addressing some of the greatest sustainability challenges facing the cities and environmental we live in. I think everyone that attended the session came away with plenty of specific tools, examples, and ideas to think about and implement within their own communities. The breakout discussions following each panel were particularly lively, and enabled the speakers to interact with participants and discuss specific applications and ideas that could follow on from their work.



About Melissa White, AICP

Melissa White is a senior planner and associate at SSFM, specializing in placemaking, active transportation, community based economic development, renewable energy, and resilience, all key ingredients to creating thriving, sustainable communities. Ms. White's projects for both public and private sector clients include long-range community planning, resilience planning, economic development, renewable energy, watershed planning, and resource management.

Melissa received her BS in Environmental Biology from Southern Oregon University and her MA in Anthropology from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. She has over a decade of experience solving community and environmental planning challenges in Hawaii. She is exceptionally skilled at facilitating outreach programs that bring together community, government, and technical stakeholders to create shared visions and achieve broad community support, resulting in implementable plans for resilient and sustainable communities. Melissa's training in anthropology and environmental sciences inform cultural and environmental sensitivity in her work.