

BY-RIGHT/BY-DESIGN: Los Angeles Housing Designed & Developed

Questions + Answers from the December 3, 2012 Webinar

Q: Is the one bedroom unit like Mackey apartment saleable as to compare with other housing types in real estate perspective?

A: My sense is yes, due to the built-in furniture, large size and extreme amount of open space. The Mackey Apartments is not currently for rent so actual rent levels cannot be known. The building is owned by the MAK Center, an Austrian organization that promotes the arts. And the building currently houses visiting artists from Austria. Further research might include looking at the current rents being achieved by various well-known Los Angeles Housing Precedents in comparison to similar unit types and sizes in the same market area. But LA's rent control laws compound this analysis somewhat. [Liz Falletta]

Q: Do you have cost data for the projects you showed? Particularly, the Cullen Street Apartments. [Rosmal Seneviratne]

A: This is another arena of research that I hope to pursue so that I can recreate the proformas that might have been operative when each building was built. The Cullen Arts District units were listed in the high \$600,000s to low \$700,000s, but they sold in under a month so the actual sales prices might have exceeded list price. I plan to look into this further. [Liz Falletta]

Q: What is the most common complaint of architects by Real Estate Developers? [Berry Jones]

A: Excellent question! When architects treat real estate developers as patrons rather than as intelligent and informed clients. [Liz Falletta]

Q: What do you determine as being 'interdisciplinary metrics'? [Chad Conrad] Q: Have you developed any of the multidisciplinary metrics that you mentioned? [Kate Svoboda-Spanbock]

A: So, this is definitely still in development, but will certainly involve the idea of Trade-Offs. As you make a design decision in housing, what are you trading off from one discipline to another? With that decision do you make it harder or easier for the other housing disciplines to meet their goals? What do you preclude and what do you facilitate? So, for example, decisions about parking, which is still very important from a market standpoint often compromise pedestrian access and definition of the public realm, which urban planners really care about, and also can determine decisions about building massing, which architects value. [Liz Falletta]

Q: Can you talk more about the perceived value of public common space at the sidewalk? [Kurt Raymond]

A: I don't think this space has to be actually public, but it is visually accessible to the public occupying the street and the sidewalk and it does therefore act as part of the public realm. So urban planners, neighbors concerned about property values, etc., care that this space is attractive, consistent and engages community even though parts of it are private. Residents of a specific project might also value the opportunity to interact with their neighbors at the front of their homes in a semi-public space. It is the transition from the public realm to the private realm and therefore should be designed in ways that address both. [Liz Falletta]

C: (RE: Stephen's Question on getting involved in advocacy.) We can get involved, for example, by serving on Planning Commissions. [Jonathan Siegel]

A: Definitely participating in local lobbying events organized by the AIA and other organizations, participating in events organized by the ULI and the APA, taking the time to educate your clients about these issues, etc. [Liz Falletta]

Q: SoCal is so vehicular-focused. Are there tradeoffs for alternates? Does bike storage vs. cars give way to open space?
[Bruce Hampton]

A: This is going to be a really interesting issue to follow over the next ten to twenty years as LA becomes less dependent on automobiles and boosts its transit, bike and pedestrian networks. Absolutely, using less site area and building area for parking will open up other opportunities for open space and articulation of the public realm. Showing how these tradeoffs might work will be essential as architects and others argue for changes in parking standards and codes. [Liz Falletta]

Q: I find your research incredibly fascinating but have concerns for its applicability to specific locations throughout the country. The examples you show are good for LA, but where I'm at (Utah), the conservative nature of the clientele (developer driven mostly) and the colder winter environments, I would be interested in your thoughts of how to break through the barriers regarding by design and the climatic differences. [Bruce Fallon]

A: This is a very good point. The actual data being analyzed here is about and will be most applicable to Los Angeles and cities with related development patterns and climate. And at some point I could imagine applying this method of analysis to other housing types in other cities. But I think more applicable to your situation is the methodology rather than the specific results. You could likely find similar BY-RIGHT and BY-DESIGN project examples in Utah and use the marginal differences to educate your clients. [Liz Falletta]

Q: Can you expand on what you mean changing codes to enable better design? [Stephanie Reich]

A: First, a clarification. The research involves the zoning code and not the building code. An example might be the prescription by the LA Planning Department that the front unit of a Small Lot Subdivision have an entry that faces the street. This is in general a good idea, but I could imagine that it's intention, to activate and occupy the setback space in front of the building by ensuring that at least one person has to traverse it, and using the door to create "legibility" as housing, could be achieved in ways that don't place the front door on what it effectively the side of the building. In the hands of a good designer, this space could be articulated differently and still meet planning goals. But, as it stands, the door placement requirement ensures that in the hands of a bad designer, this space doesn't become a total afterthought. [Liz Falletta]

Q: The City of LA is currently going through the process of revising/updating our decades-old Zoning Code. I understand that one of the main goals is to update the code to today's standards in a way such that discretionary design/planning is kept to a minimum, but more emphasis is given to as-of-right. This gives more certainty to developers and architects, but also reduces costs for the city to engage in lengthy entitlement processes. In doing so, do you think this well-intention act may end up actually hurting or compromising new developments in LA? [Catherine Tang]

A: There are certain to be both positive and negative externalities with the zoning code update, as with all things. Involving stakeholders in a serious way to both propose and test changes will certainly reveal many potential unintended consequences. But since we don't have a perfect vision of the future, there will undoubtedly be winners and losers given the new code. [Liz Falletta]