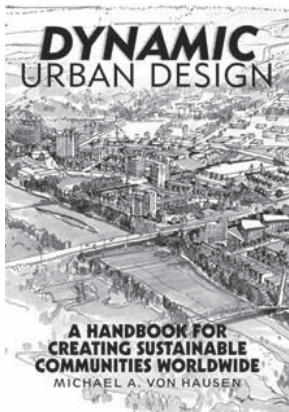**RECOMMENDED READING**

Dynamic Urban Design: A Handbook for Creating Sustainable Communities Worldwide

by Michael A. Von Hausen, (© 2013, iUniverse, 505 pages)

REVIEWED BY JOE W. PARKER, CRE

IT IS ALL IN THE TITLE: *Dynamic Urban Design.* Author Michael A. Von Hausen defines urban design as "the art and science of making places for people." So what makes urban design dynamic? The author believes that it is taking urban design to a more comprehensive level, essentially uniting urban design and sustainability "in a practical, measured way" and doing it on a global basis.

Von Hausen begins by presenting his case for more sustainable urban design, citing for support problems such as poor air quality in many of the world's largest cities, an increasing world population, increases in parking areas and roads at the expense of decreased agricultural acreage, debilitating traffic congestion, loss of tree cover and green areas, elevating health problems and increased use of personal automobiles. His proclaimed mission is *"to bring sustainable urban form to people around the world."*

The author believes that urban planners worldwide, empowered by significant government policy changes, are influencing ongoing shifts to more sustainable new communities. The result, he says, will be less waste, more jobs closer to home, more efficient buildings, and a better quality of life. He believes that a paradigm shift

in sociopolitical forces, economic accountability and environmental responsibility are taking place now, and they are driving the new transformation in urban form and sustainable development worldwide. The shift, he says, is to include more compact, mixed-use communities with more energy-efficient buildings designed for that community.

About the Reviewer

Joe W. Parker, CRE, MAI, FRICS *is president of Appraisal Research Company and senior vice president of Equity Solutions USA. He first entered the real estate profession in 1974 and established Appraisal Research Company in 1978. In 2003, he co-founded Equity Solutions USA, an appraisal management company that provides appraisal services to regional and national banks.*

Parker has appraised commercial real estate throughout the South and Lower Midwest with appraisal experience in environmentally-contaminated properties, fiber optic corridors, cemeteries, golf courses and country clubs, colleges and schools, hospitals, wetlands, conservation easements and historic properties. As well as regularly advising clients on a variety of real estate matters, Parker also oversees all appraiser credentialing and reviewing processes at Equity Solutions USA.

Parker also serves as an expert witness on such issues as construction defects, mortgage fraud, title defects, environmental contamination and stigma. He was trained as a Mediator at the University of Houston's Bauer College of Business and at Harvard Law School.

Dynamic Urban Design: A Handbook for Creating Sustainable Communities Worldwide

Von Hausen presents his Dynamic Urban Design Model early in the book. It is a three-part model, with each part having three sub-parts:

- Framework, consisting of Place, Process and Plans;

- Components, consisting of Social, Ecological and Economic; and

- Measurements, consisting of Elements, Principles and Targets.

He argues for the urban design process to include not only the designer, but also the architects, landscape architects, planners, engineers, developers and economists in the design process from start to finish. The result, he writes, would be a more sustainable design. Without that interaction, the design process fails to properly address social, cultural, economic and diversity issues.

The book has four component parts. Part 1 provides a history of urban design and the framework and elements of sustainable community development. Part 2 discusses the comprehensive plan-making processes; essentially it is an extensive checklist of tasks that urban designers typically go through in their design processes. In Part 3 the author discusses the process of urban design evaluation, pointing out the application of some of those elements in notable suburban development processes. Part 4 of the book characterizes the pitfalls of the implementation of urban design and details the conditions that are required to include sustainability in urban designs.

Von Hausen provides a history of the evolution of the urban design process, beginning with early cities like ancient Rome and Mexico City. He explains the design components and logic that made those cities great, and even argues that the sustainable footprint of each is superior to that of many modern cities because each was based on walking distances, thus negating at least some of the requirement for personal automobiles, an element he strives to minimize in his urban design plans.

Von Hausen defines the four conceptual models of urban design (Organic, Cosmic, Practical and Car-oriented) and then incorporates illustrations of each, weighing in on their strengths and weaknesses. Nice, France, The Chicago Plan, L'Enfant's plan of Washington, D.C., and Frank Lloyd Wright's conceptual Broadacre City are among the many he analyzes.

In a section on "The Neighborhood Unit," the author examines how the invention of the automobile was a dominant factor in the development of neighborhoods,

and how it solved what at that time was becoming a significant waste problem since horses were the primary unit of transportation. For many years thereafter, development in the U.S. and across the globe was automobile-oriented. Urban sprawl took place; its by-products in many cases included deterioration of the inner-cities, often followed by urban renewal. The author includes extensive commentary on each, then discusses downtown revitalization and what he terms "pedestrianization." It is essentially a return to the inner city, but without the horses and, preferably, without the cars. He includes several successful examples, all of which are accompanied by commentary on how those individual revitalizations were completed and accepted. He also discusses small town renewal, Smart Growth, New Urbanism and Transit-Oriented Development, along with the author's "Lessons for the Future," which is essentially his list of do's and don'ts for urban designers.

One section of the book discusses the elements that comprise "successful places." It describes the importance of the people who will live there, the heritage of those people and the community, other important design factors, and his opinion on how to integrate all of them into the final design plan.

Included in the author's comprehensive plan-making processes is an extensive checklist of tasks that urban designers typically go through in their design processes. The difference in *dynamic* urban design is that social, ecological and economic considerations (the SEE considerations) are incorporated into a logical and practical strategy, which the author labels "The Process Tree." Best Practices are also discussed, with emphasis on their relationship to sustainable design.

In this section, the author discusses and analyzes how various process thinking and problem-solving approaches from different designers can result in resoundingly different design plans, even though each designer goes through the same processes. The author includes a number of diagrams and illustrations as examples, along with discussion and explanation pertaining to each individual design. Those visuals are excellent aids to enable the reader to better understand the dialogue, and to envision what the designer "sees."

Von Hausen also includes details of the specific methods and procedures he uses in his practice, along with a case study of a design plan for the redevelopment of Lower Twelfth Street in New Westminster, British Columbia. The case study essentially enables the reader to follow

the author's line of thinking, step by step, throughout the process. For a reader who is not an urban designer, the case study is both informative and important to help the reader understand and "see" the various elements as the author saw them, and to follow the author's reasoning through every one of the design steps.

Von Hausen cites several examples of successful *dynamic* urban design: Curitiba, Brazil; Seaside near Pensacola, Florida; Beacon Hill in Boston; and Mount Pleasant in Vancouver, Canada. Each has its own "signature," those significant things by which it is known or defined and that collectively shape what the author calls its "place." He includes an abundance of examples of various projects in which he has been involved, talks about the problems each presented, summarizes his analysis and decision processes, and then provides the reader with illustrations of the end design that was adopted. Many of these are written in textbook-like language, although I do not envision that the book was written with the intent of being a text.

Von Hausen concludes with a challenge: are we willing and ready to link sustainable urban design theory with practice? If so, hard choices have to be made and tradeoffs will have to take place, and according to the author, if those choices are made properly, they will result in communities that "will stand the test of time in terms of social, economic and ecological integrity."

This should be a must-read for urban planners, if only to assess whether the author's points of view are relevant and credible. It would be an interesting read for those practitioners who are involved in development projects and processes: architects, landscape architects, planners, engineers, developers and economists. For real estate professionals who are either involved in or curious about sustainability and the urban design process, I would recommend at a minimum a thorough reading of chapters one through nine, and 17, a familiarization with the "Case Studies" that follow in the subsequent chapters, and keeping it handy for future reference. After all, "sustainability" is here to stay. ■