

Commissioner LiMandri Address at the Not-Business-As-Usual Event at the AIANY Center for Architecture on 19 August 2009

The urbanSHED International Design Competition is a really exciting project. The AIA NY and its Executive Director, Rick Bell have been gracious enough to come together with us on a project that many people probably think we are crazy in actually tackling. I don't know if you've seen the recent *New York Times* article, but it basically talks about how old sidewalk sheds are. I think some of the points the author of this article made as to how innovation has changed our lives, mentioning such things as; if the internet didn't change it would still be a bunch of huge computers in California, and quoting a long time sidewalk shed supplier about about how his father was once standing in front of the Astor Hotel in front of a sidewalk shed and how he himself was brought into the business and really, nothing has changed in the design of sidewalk sheds since the 1960s.

The urbanShed International Design Competition is a tremendous collaboration with many different parts of our stakeholder groups. One of the reasons why you probably want to be here in New York City is that we have this great architecture, we have beautiful buildings. One of the other things that you realize as professionals is that you have to protect the public and one of the principle pieces of public safety is this thing called the sidewalk shed. It's called other things in the other parts of the world. If you've traveled, and many of you have, you realize that other countries and other cities protect their public in different ways, and what we'd like to do is to tap into the great talent, not just in New York City, but also across the globe. Not just with engineers and architects, but with students, and we want to get the best and the brightest to come together to give us a sense of how we can transform the landscape in this urban environment during construction - or, when we're in a holding pattern. One of the principle reasons why some sidewalk sheds stay up so long is that property owners of buildings that are in disrepair don't actually have the funds to repair their buildings. So those sheds can be up for quite some time.

Everybody's got a story about a shed. I'm sure if I went around the room, all of you could tell a story about varied shed use. Sidewalk sheds offer the perfect opportunity in the rain. I myself sometimes navigate from one sidewalk shed to another in the rain when out without an umbrella. I've seen them used for bike racks. I also know that they are used for planters and actually as an exercise gym. In fact, we have a guy who actually sits outside our office building now around lunchtime and does chin-ups on the sidewalk shed. So when you think about it, it would be great if we could take this piece of temporary construction equipment, as I like to call it, and make it look better and either keep the standards or actually raise the standards and make it safer. It's got to be sustainable, and guess what, it can't cost more, right? The idea is to get early adoption, and to get better adoption, and we think that people will want to use a new design if the cost which if higher would be a barrier to making a change won't be there. The public benefits will be greatly enhanced.

For example, if you're a store owner you pay the landlord money, if he puts up sidewalk sheds to do work and you are concerned that your business will get hampered because your store's presence on the sidewalk is changed because of this hulking sidewalk shed structure. What if the shed were lighter, brighter? What if we used less electricity or better types of lighting opportunities? There are lots of opportunities here; I just think we haven't really focused on it. Of course, many of you in the room have some time - you have time on your hands because work has slowed. And I do think it's a perfect time to look back and focus on things we really haven't had time to look at before. That is why we are doing the urbanSHED international design competition.

Let me give you some standard information. If you've gone to [urbanshed.org](http://urbanshed.org), you'll see that it's a two-phase program. The first phase will select three candidates to be a finalist, and each of them will get a \$5000. stipend, and that stipend is there for them to further their design with a licensed architect or engineer so that we can actually have drawings to them filed and built. One of the great things about this competition is that it's not just a design competition where we'll all come here in six months and we'll see some really great renderings. I want to see it built, and I want the public to see what it looks like, because that's the only way. If you as an architect or engineer, the last thing you want to do is put something on a piece of paper and for it to never be built. The idea is that the end, in the second round, it will have to pass a Technical Advisory Group which will be headed by

Fatma Amer, First deputy Commissioner, NYC DOB, Rick Bell and Carl Galioto, Senior Principal at HOK. They will make sure it's buildable and meets all the codes. The Downtown Alliance has agreed to help us find a location and facilitate the erection of a mock-up of the grand prize winning design. So it's really a great opportunity and when you look at the members of the jury - pretty impressive people.

We have, of course, NYC Department of City Planning Commissioner Amanda Burden and Department of Transportation Commissioner Janette Sadik-Khan. We also have well-known architects including David Childs, Craig Dykers, Jean Oei, Ada Tolla. and the engineer Craig Schwitter, and construction leader Frank Sciame, You know, all these people bring a different perspective - we're looking for the best and the brightest. That's our shtick and we're really excited about it. We're trying to create a buzz. We would like to get students involved, we are encouraging schools to create this as a project during their fall semester. We've reached out internationally, and we have gotten quite a bit of press so far. In October we are going to see the first set of designs.

We wanted to push people in the first phase to think really broadly, really big. Well, what we want to do is get the best and the brightest ideas. and because of this we are encouraging teams to work together. We're saying, go ahead and team up, but if you don't want to team up, or can't we certainly want to see your design because if you come up with something that we think, in the first round, could actually work, we're going to select that as jury. And, you know, its funny, when Rick and I were talking about doing this competition, most people in the industry would say, "Well you know Bob, it's going to cost more money, no one is going to do it, so why bother." Well I'm sure someone said that to other people in the modern age, and you could point to anything, and usually what ends up happening is that someone in the universe of people that you talk to can actually figure it out. I don't see any reason why any one of you can't be that guy.

Someone said to me a long time ago, you could be or do what you do anywhere, but if you do it in New York people pay attention to things differently. At the urbanSHED launch party, in conjunction with the Downtown Alliance, which is a perfect fit, as they have a whole program about reconstruction art. They're funded by the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council and a bunch of other areas where because of all this building in downtown, they want to change the landscape in their neighborhood. So they have partnered with us. We've gotten quite a bit of press through the AP and through the *New York Times*, and we expect to get a global response. Frankly, if you're one of the finalists, even if your design doesn't get picked, I think it says a lot about you and your design and what you wanted to do, and in this market and in this economy it just a another thing to be able to talk about.

In addition, I want to explain that there is a process that the NYC Department of Buildings uses to certify materials and equipment to be used in New York City. The idea is that through this process the sidewalk shed design that makes sense for New York City will actually go through this approval process, and will become a new standard, so that there will be choice. Today, we call up for a shed; we get what you see, higher or lower painted pink or blue. There is just that one color choice, and we think with a new prize-winning design, the choice will be clear.

Thanks very much.