Clark D. Manus, FAIA, President, Board of Directors
American Institute of Architects
1735 New York Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20006-5292

Dear Clark:

For more than 150 years, the American Institute of Architects has engaged our profession and the public in issues of the civic realm, environmental sustainability, social equity and design excellence. You carry the flame of this tradition in your leadership and the theme you set forth at the 2011 AIA Convention, *Regional Design Revolution: Ecology Matters*. To support this theme, we propose that AIA sponsor a National Action Plan for the Built Environment with our colleagues in the design professions.

Your remarks and 2011 Convention keynoters, Thomas Friedman, Jeb Breugmann and Jeremy Harris, challenged us to address equally and simultaneously the global issues of climate change, energy, food and water security, economic and social vitality, natural hazard mitigation and resilience, equity and sustainability. We know how to respond to these challenges by:

- **Planning and designing communities and cities, from building to regional scale.** While each issue may appear to compound the difficulty, the opposite is the case when one looks at integrating solutions common to multiple challenges.

- **Combining the knowledge, skills and innovations of architecture, engineering, landscape architecture, urban and environmental design.** While our global issues are familiar to architects and design professionals, new knowledge and depth of expertise are emerging in the wake of unprecedented extreme weather and hazards.

- **Advancing our efforts both within the architectural community and with our colleagues in the design and construction professions with a strategic plan to address the built environment challenges of “Regional Design: Ecology Matters.”**

The AIA can do this by sponsoring a comprehensive and integrated “National Action Plan” with focus on contributions of architecture and the environmental design professions in practice, research and education. Suggested steps and references are attached.

Please accept our congratulations on the charge you have placed before the profession. We are each ready to assist in advancing *Regional Design/Ecology Matters* through a National Action Plan.

Respectfully,

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An Action Plan for the Built Environment
There is no one “right way” to advance a strategic plan of action. There are options by which to advance shared goals and to undertake phased endeavors with our colleague environmental design professional organizations, universities, government and private partners.

A significant number of national plans have been proposed that address climate change, hazard mitigation, and economic recovery (attached page).

The focus of any AIA-sponsored Action Plan is the design of the build environment, conceived broadly to include the scale-up from buildings, communities to regions, and including colleague design professions of planning, engineering, landscape architecture, and allied disciplines.

AIA and its colleagues in the U.S. building industry have many successes and unique skills in responding to such challenges. We know how to:
• Analyze projects in each context and in progressive scales to community and regional systems.
• Synthesize knowledge from disciplines of ecology, health, security, and economy.
• Innovate within a complex local, national and international construction industry.
• Empower diverse communities with tools to build and rebuild homes and neighborhoods.
• Inspire through transformative design vision and realizable solutions.

The following are small steps, but proven to be productive in similar undertakings.
• Convene a National Action Plan mini-summit
  Do it quick and don’t get caught up or delayed by formalities. An initial meeting may be limited to a focus on what AIA can/should do. But a simultaneous effort should invite and engage other organizations already well advanced on similar agendas and plans.

• Assign and support a National Action Plan task group
  A task group has to engage the separate “knowledge communities” within AIA and establish close working relations with colleague organizations, government agencies and sponsors.

• Assign and support Staff to the task group
  AIA staff should be assigned to provide close integration within AIA Headquarters operations, and especially to initiate and respond to opportunities for funding and other support.

• Connect the National Action Plan with partners and players
  Other plans (and funding efforts) are established. AIA efforts should not be competitive with these, but complementary, with unique AIA contributions defined in support of and in collaboration with peer efforts.

• Advocate for a government liaison and sponsoring Agency
  A barrier to integration of plans and projects exists in the different assignments of policies, funds and programs within different government agencies. A challenge of any “Action Plan” is to develop ways to establish coordination between public and private sector efforts.

• Create a plan for mentoring and capacity building
  Any National Action Plan can and must be shared with young professionals who can be present and future leaders. Senior members of any task group can sponsor a recent graduate and entering professional to shadow and build upon the agenda setting process.

• Establish a learning plan of feedback and correction
  The operational requirements of a successful strategic plan are well known. These include ways to establish “rapid feedback” to measure and correct plans as they go.
REFERENCES
A partial list of references that address climate change, sustainability, emergency preparedness and resilience, community development and regional ecological planning.

AIA MEMO nd. Architects and Climate Change Prepared in collaboration with Edward Mazria, AIA.
DHS NIPP 2009. National Infrastructure Protection Plan provides the unifying structure for integration of efforts for protection and resiliency of national critical infrastructure and key resources (CIKR).
EPA 2011. Strategic Agenda to Protect Waters and Build More Livable Communities Through Green Infrastructure.
FEMA Publications – www.fema.gov/library
Natural Hazards Training Center. University of Hawaii. National Domestic Preparedness Consortium, the NDPTC is a DHS/FEMA training partner for all-hazards training on natural hazards.
NOAA 2009. Coastal and Waterfront Smart Growth. <coastalsmartgrowth.noaa.gov/casestudies.html>

Books