

Profile | Nan Ellin, Ph.D.



A distinguished scholar and urban designer, Nan Ellin has much planned during her tenure as dean at the University of Texas at Arlington. Prior to the much-anticipated launch of the new integrated College of Architecture, Planning, and Public Affairs (CAPPA), *Columns* contributing writer Andrew Moon, AIA sat down with the woman at the helm to find out more.

TELL US WHAT BROUGHT YOU TO UT ARLINGTON.

I had visited UTA previously and was super impressed with the faculty, students, and quality of work. Also the opportunity to participate in creating a new college that would partner with one of the most dynamic urban regions of the world was one I could not pass up.

SINCE YOUR MOVE FROM UTAH, HOW HAS LIVING IN THE DFW METROPLEX INFLUENCED OR SHAPED YOUR PERCEPTIONS ABOUT THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT?

In Utah, the land is curvy and the streets are straight, while in DFW the land is straight and the streets curvy. After living in valleys for 17 years (Phoenix and Salt Lake City), the expansive horizon in DFW is emblematic for me of the BIG thinking

and generosity of spirit here. No longer hemmed in by mountains, I love being able to stretch my eyes as well as my understanding about the best way to grow as cities, communities, and individuals. What I'm discovering in DFW is a unique blend of humility, pride, and goodwill as manifest in large gestures, solid teamwork and team spirit, healthy competition, and a shared enthusiasm for achieving goals.

SUMMARIZE THE BREADTH OF YOUR ACADEMIC AND PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE. HOW DO THESE MAKE YOU UNIQUELY QUALIFIED TO LEAD THE INTEGRATION OF THE SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE AND THE SCHOOL OF URBAN AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS?

Odd but true, I've held leadership positions in a school of architecture, schools of urban planning, and a school of

public affairs. At Arizona State University, I had the good fortune to work with President Michael Crow on creating a brand-new downtown Phoenix campus for 10,000 students. In the process, I was asked to move from directing the Ph.D. program in the College of Design to founding a new Urban and Metropolitan Studies Program (in the School of Public Affairs) on the downtown Phoenix campus, and then directing the Urban Planning Program before moving to the University of Utah to chair its Planning Department and start a new Urban Design Program. In addition, my own work in placemaking, community-building, and university-community partnerships has been helpful in co-creating the new college at UTA.



UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT ARLINGTON

WHEN MOST ARCHITECTS OR URBAN PLANNERS THINK OF GREAT AMERICAN CITIES, NEW YORK, CHICAGO, AND BOSTON MAY READILY COME TO MIND. HOW DOES DALLAS-FORT WORTH BECOME A SIMILARLY GREAT CITY?

When I told people I was moving here, most said, “But there’s no nature there!” So, I googled Dallas nature, Dallas trails, Dallas parks, Dallas forests and streams, etc. And sadly, I found that their preconceptions seemed justified. Once I arrived, however, I discovered the Great Trinity Forest, the Trinity River, River Legacy Park, tons of trails, lakes, streams, and much more.

DFW is full of both wild and tamed nature, but urban growth and development have not typically

showcased it, much less allowed nature to inform them. At the recent Urban Summit [sponsored by AIA Dallas, DCFA, the Greater Dallas Planning Council, The Real Estate Council, ULI North Texas, and UTA’s College of Architecture, Planning and Public Affairs (CAPPA)], I invited Kevin Sloan and Jessie Zarazaga to share their inspired visions for building in harmony with nature [see Columns’ landscape issue, Fall 2015].

In addition, the region could benefit from coordinating the profusion of good ideas. There is tremendous talent and energy here, but sometimes initiatives seem to work at cross purposes and cancel one another out. I’ve been suggesting we “zoom out to zoom in” and craft a synthetic vision for the region that

ABOVE: The audience listens to Dr. Ellin at the celebratory launch of CAPPA at UTA in October.

integrates existing proposals. By painting this big picture for the region—even naming it—we can work together to realize it. ■

Interview by Andrew Moon, AIA with Raymond Harris & Associates Architects

A review of her new book is also available on the Critique page.

This interview with Nan Ellin continues online to reveal her goals as dean, her definition of “Good Urbanism,” and her unique perspective in writing five books. www.aiadallas.org/columns/nan-ellin A review of her book, *Good Urbanism*, is on the next page.