

The Frontiers of Placemaking: Crafting Community in a Connected World

November 10, 2025

Participants' Bios

Keynote

Tom Fisher

Panel Assignments

- **Community-Led Placemaking**
 - Jake Levitas, City of Raleigh Urban Projects Group
 - Will Linville, Charlotte Urban Design Center
 - Charles Thomas, Knight Foundation
 - Cathy Morrison, Neighboring Concepts
- **Policy Tools for Placemaking**
 - Aaron Lubeck, SouthernUrbanism.org
 - Grant Meacci, Bolton & Menk
 - Craig Lewis, Arcadis Inc.
 - Erin Chantry, Charlotte Urban Design Center
- **Digital Layers of Public Life**
 - Ivan Toth Depeña, Depeña Studio
 - Lauren Patterson, Pond & Company
 - Ming-Chun Lee, School of Architecture, UNC Charlotte
- **Economic Development through Placemaking**
 - Kady Yellow, Downtown Vision Inc.
 - Tesho Akindele, Camp North End
 - Robert Krumbine, Charlotte Center City Partners
 - Liz Parham, NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center



Tom Fisher, Assoc. AIA

Tom Fisher is Professor and the Director of the Minnesota Design Center at the College of Design, University of Minnesota. Formerly Dean of the College of Design from 1996 to 2015, he has authored more than 12 books and over 450 articles on architecture, ethics, and systems design. Under his leadership, the Center has secured millions in funding for research into equity, climate resilience, and built-environment transformation. Fisher holds a B.Arch from Cornell University and an M.A. in Intellectual History from Case Western Reserve University. His work integrates urban design, infrastructure systems, and community engagement to envision more equitable and sustainable cities.



Jake Levitas, MPA / MCRP

Jake Levitas is Planning Supervisor with the City of Raleigh's Urban Projects Group, where he leads public-private partnerships and strategic urban design initiatives. With experience across local government, civic innovation, and consulting, he focuses on equitable redevelopment and community-driven processes. Holding dual master's degrees in Public Administration and City & Regional Planning from UNC Chapel Hill, Jake brings a multidisciplinary approach that bridges design, policy, and implementation. He has guided transformative projects such as Moore Square East and the Crabtree Greenway partnership, advancing inclusive and resilient urban development across Raleigh.



Will Linville, AICP CNU-A

Will Linville is the Program Manager at the Charlotte Urban Design Center, where he leads initiatives to enhance the city's public spaces through community-driven design, policy, and implementation. He holds a B.A. in Geography (2008) and an M.U.D. (2021) from UNC Charlotte. With experience in both public and private sectors, Will has advanced programs like Charlotte's Placemaking Grant and the "Urbies" Urban Design Awards. His work focuses on equitable redevelopment, transit-oriented growth, and inclusive placemaking that strengthens community identity while supporting Charlotte's rapid urban transformation.

**Charles Thomas**

Charles Thomas is the Director of the Charlotte Program at the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, where he leads investments that foster equitable, inclusive, and engaged communities. A Charlotte native, he previously founded Queen City Forward, a social-innovation accelerator, and served as Director of Education at the Light Factory Museum of Photography and Film. With a background in economics from Duke University, Thomas brings a civic-driven perspective to placemaking, emphasizing collaboration, cultural identity, and creative community development. His work reflects a deep commitment to building stronger, more connected urban neighborhoods through strategic design and public partnerships.



Cathy Morrison, FAIA, NCARB

Cathy Morrison is the Chief Executive Officer of Neighboring Concepts, a Charlotte-based firm specializing in architecture, planning, and urban design that emphasizes community-led revitalization and equity. Located in Charlotte, the firm was founded on the principle of empowering neighborhoods through thoughtful design. Cathy holds dual master's degrees in Architecture and Geography from University of North Carolina at Charlotte and a Bachelor of Science in Architecture from the University of Maryland. With nearly two decades of experience, she has led complex projects across healthcare, transit, education, and civic sectors while advancing professional excellence and diversity in practice. Intentionally grounding design in social impact, Cathy drives strategic partnerships, equitable project outcomes, and inclusive architecture that serves people and place.

**Aaron Lubeck**

Aaron Lubeck is a designer, builder, and urbanist based in Durham, North Carolina. He is the founder of Southern Urbanism, a digital magazine and action-tank focused on shaping better cities across the American South. With over two decades of experience in historic preservation, green building, and affordable housing, Lubeck champions human-scaled development and grassroots urbanism. A former instructor at Duke University's Nicholas School, he also hosts the podcast "Townbuilder's Podcast" and writes the widely followed "Jacobs Column" reflecting local development and zoning reform. He brings a thoughtful voice on incremental, community-driven change.



Grant Meacci, PLA, FASLA, LEED AP

Grant Meacci serves as Urban Design Group Leader and Principal at Bolton & Menk, Inc.. He began his professional career in 1992 and joined Bolton & Menk in 2021. Prior to his current role, Grant held leadership positions managing urban design and preservation divisions for both the City of Charlotte and the City of Raleigh Urban Design Center. His work bridges public and private sectors, focusing on design strategies that are both aspirational and implementable. Known for his commitment to creating vibrant, livable communities, Grant was honored as a Fellow of the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) in recognition of his leadership and contributions to the field.



Craig Lewis FAICP CNU-A

Craig Lewis is Placemaking Practice Group Manager at Arcadis, overseeing planning, landscape architecture, mobility, and urban design studios across the U.S. and Mexico. With more than 30 years of experience, he has led interdisciplinary projects focused on equitable, sustainable urban regeneration—from major mixed-use districts to pedestrian-friendly main streets. His team's work has been recognized by the Congress for the New Urbanism and the International Downtown Association for excellence in placemaking and smart mobility. Based in the Charlotte region, Craig brings a global perspective rooted in local impact, making him a leading voice in shaping vibrant, human-centered cities.



Erin Chantry, LEED AP ND, CNU-A

Erin Chantry is the Division Manager of Design & Preservation at the City of Charlotte's Planning, Design & Development Department. With over 16 years of experience, she has been instrumental in advancing the quality of Charlotte's built environment through urban design and planning initiatives. Erin holds a BA in Architecture, an MA in Urban Design, and an MS in Urban Planning. She co-established the City's Placemaking Program and has led efforts to integrate public space design into infrastructure projects. Erin is passionate about designing cities that celebrate their history, identity, and meaning for their residents.



Ivan Toth Depeña is a Cuban-American artist and designer based in Charlotte, NC, whose interdisciplinary practice merges art, architecture, and technology. With degrees in architecture from the University of Miami and Harvard GSD, he creates large-scale interactive public artworks that transform urban spaces through light, movement, and digital media. His works, such as *Reflect* in Miami and *Photon/s* in Charlotte, engage communities through immersive technology, including AR and responsive installations. Founder of Depeña Studio, his projects have been recognized by the Knight Foundation and Americans for the Arts for advancing the dialogue between design, technology, and public life.



Lauren Patterson, PLA, ASLA

Lauren Patterson is a landscape architect and planner with **Pond & Company** in Charlotte, North Carolina, with over a decade of experience leading both large-scale regional planning initiatives and detailed, immersive design projects. She is actively involved in the American Society of Landscape Architects and serves as Urban Design PPN Co-Chair in the North Carolina Chapter. Lauren brings passion for smart development, transportation-oriented design, and community engagement through her work. Based in Charlotte, she draws on both national project experience and a deep commitment to equitable and inclusive placemaking.



Ming-Chun Lee, Ph.D.

Ming-Chun Lee is an Associate Professor and Graduate Program Director of the Master of Urban Design at the David R. Rahn School of Architecture, University of North Carolina at Charlotte. With a B.S. and M.S. from National Cheng Kung University (Taiwan) followed by an M.Arch and Ph.D. from the University of Washington, Lee's research focuses on integrating GIS, immersive visualization (AR/VR), and spatial analytics into urban design pedagogy and practice. He led one of the inaugural Knight Foundation–Niantic Labs AR Fellows programs, exploring how extended reality platforms can enhance community engagement. At UNC Charlotte, Lee has advanced the urban design curriculum by developing toolkits for 3D GIS, scenario modeling, and data-driven public participation. His work positions emerging technology as a bridge between rigorous spatial data and inclusive urban futures.

**Kady Yellow**

Kady Yellow is the Senior Director of Placemaking and Events at Downtown Vision Inc. in Jacksonville, Florida, where she leads transformative public-space strategies, arts-driven activation, and downtown revitalization programs. She earned dual bachelor's degrees in Graphic Design and Mathematical Sciences from Binghamton University and a master's in Arts Administration from University of New Orleans. Over a decade of international experience—from Alaska to Portugal—underscores her global perspective on placemaking and community-led design. Her work focuses on creating vibrant, inclusive downtowns by empowering residents and leveraging creative partnerships to re-imagine public spaces.

**Tesho Akindele**

Tesho Akindele is a Development Analyst with Camp North End in Charlotte, where he applies his passion for urbanism and community-driven development to repurposing a former industrial site into a vibrant, mixed-use hub. After a nine-year professional soccer career with FC Dallas, Orlando City SC and the Canadian national team, Akindele transitioned into real-estate development to build walkable, equitable neighborhoods. He holds a master's degree in finance from Southern New Hampshire University and is a founding member of the Black Players for Change initiative. His work centers on sustainable placemaking and leveraging innovative design to strengthen communities.

**Robert Krumbine**

Robert Krumbine is the Chief Creative Officer and Senior Vice President of Events at Charlotte Center City Partners (CCCP), where he leads the year-round programming and activation of Charlotte's urban core. Since joining CCCP in 2001, Krumbine has overseen iconic initiatives including the Charlotte SHOUT! arts festival, the Novant Health Thanksgiving Eve Parade, and the Rail Trail Fest, among others. Earlier in his career he produced large-scale events such as the 1994 NCAA Final Four "Street of Champions" and opening ceremonies for major venues. A graduate of the University of Miami with a Bachelor of Music Merchandising, Krumbine brings decades of experience in creative visioning and event production to his work in urban placemaking.



Liz Parham, CMSM

Liz Parham serves as the Director of the NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center within the North Carolina Department of Commerce, where she leads statewide efforts in downtown and rural revitalization. With over 38 years of experience in strategic economic development, she oversees major grant programs, capacity-building initiatives, and technical assistance for communities across all 100 counties of North Carolina. Liz holds a B.S. in Interior Design with a focus on historic preservation from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and is recognized nationally for her leadership in the Main Street movement. Her work drives measurable investment, job growth, and community renewal through asset-based placemaking and public-private partnerships.