

**Kristin Larsen was interviewed by Dorothy Fue Wong on May 28, 2009 in New York City. This was after Cornell University's first seminar with the Stein communities. Kristin Larsen is assistant professor at the University of Florida's Department of Urban and Regional Planning.**

**Wong: I'm asking Kristin about a preservation plan for the Stein community based on Pamela Seager's components. What do you think of the history component?**

**Kristin Larsen:** My response is that I think it's a critical component. It is what provides the context for understanding the site and I also believe that the layers of history, understanding what the layer of history are that make up the site in its totality. It's a really important consideration.

One of the big debate that I have been reading about in historic preservation is that the debate on the period of significance. I do believe it's important to establish the period of significance. I also believe that it is very important to understand the totality of the site's history. I think that evaluation needs to be done in order to establish the period of significance. I think honing in too quickly on a period of significance, it doesn't do you any favors because it might detract you from really exploring aspects of the site's history that are really important to understand to get the whole picture of what this site is.

So the evaluation that's done needs to look at the totality of the site's history in order to better understand what is the most effective or most important period for that site.

**Wong: I want to ask you about the component that has to do with the long-range planning. What is your reaction to what Pamela Seager is doing?**

**Kristin Larsen:** My reaction to what Pamela Seager is doing – I think it is – all of the elements that are listed on the sheet are essential. A Master Plan is certainly essential and I think increasingly, as we have learned this past week, understanding the cultural landscape, understanding the landscape component. It's going to be a critical aspect because the open space is how it interacts, especially in the Stein communities, to form networks---the way the spaces are set aside, the more private spaces, the more public spaces. Those are critical aspects to understanding how these communities were intended to function and how they function, and also understanding how well they function today.

So Clarence Stein had his ideas – he and his colleagues who worked on these communities had their ideas for how they were supposed to function then. It is very interesting, I think, to understand how that relates to how they function today. Education and interpretive plan is the key because Stein is such a significant architect. People are going to want to visit these places and see his work, and so an education and interpretive plan is critical. I think also the education component from the perspective of residents is important so that the residents understand how important this place is in which they live, so that they can be better stewards, whether they're renters or owners, so that they can be better stewards of the place. And they can take a pride in their place.

I want to make a suggestion. I think a budget implementation plan is the only way one is going to go about to critically document, how are we going to protect these places, what are our maintenance consideration, and in planning we think of this as a strategic plan in a sense that we actually put into the document a key timeline that says, in these three months or in this year we are going to achieve the following. We're going to use this funding to make this happen. We're going to use these sources of funding, and it's going to be equal to this dollar amount so that it's all laid out.

I think this is an aspect of planning that is sometimes not addressed and it creates problems. What one needs to do is say if we're going to maintain this place, how do we decide what comes first. We want to make sure that we document what exactly we plan to do in what timeframe and what sources. And a lot of agencies really like to have that included. So all of these parts and elements are critical and I'm really pleased to see the preservation guidelines here as well. I think those are all essential components of the overall preservation plan.

**Wong: Kristin, do you have any thoughts about the right preservation professionals?**

**Kristin Larsen:** I think you're already found some amazing resources in your community and the LA Conservancy, the gentleman that you mentioned that is in a new position [Ken Bernstein] – these are really essential folks. I don't know what sort of non-profit resources are there. I know talked a little bit about the Getty Foundation the other night. But if there are other non-profit groups that could lend assistance that have the expertise. That would be excellent.

The resource that you have in Los Angeles is the universities that are there – the universities and colleges. Finding students that are – especially at the graduate level – students that want to do studies of these sites to contribute their expertise under direction from a professor who is an expert in these areas. I think it's a great resource for the students and I think it would be a wonderful resource for a local university or college. In many cases what we've done at the University of Florida is we've had – for instance, communities approach us. They don't have any funding. So it's not like they're funding us, but we are looking for projects for a class.

We have to do studio courses, and we're looking for projects and we're able to do the work. We have the people to do the work, and we're just wanting to find a project to work on. So that's the case. Most often, if it's done as a class study, the students are not paid. For instance, there was a district in St. Augustine that is very historic, very important to that city's history, and our students put together a plan for the neighborhood, and when we came to do the plan we weren't paid a dime for that. The only exception was one of the leaders in the community, the night we made our presentation, had a spaghetti supper for us which was very kind of him. We then went and did our presentation and the students were marvelous. They produced a document for the community, and there were about 80 people that came to hear their presentation.

So I think these are the resources, and I think it's wonderful to have a landscape architect included in this because I think that's going to be an essential component.

**Wong: Kristin, going back to the component of a long-term presentation plan, if you had Stein community that had no plans at all, where would you start?**

**Kristin Larsen:** That's a really good question. The good news is that there's something written at least about every Stein community that I'm familiar with, well the major ones that I'm familiar with. I would start with re-reviewing his book. I would start with reviewing any thesis and Cornell is the location where the most of the students who have been funded--their thesis were good. I would review any relevant thesis, and then I would begin by doing the background research to get a better sense, an overview of what the history is. After that I think the next step would be to do the history, so that would provide a lot of the context, and then to really do the historic resources report.

Once again it may be, for instance at our university there are classes taught in putting together a historic resources report where students learn about how to that. It may be that there's students or a professor who is looking for a site on which they can do the historic resources report. So I think that would be the next step in the process. And that would be a really good starting point. I think there are aspects of this that can be running parallel to each other. For instance, as one is moving forward with these studies beginning with the thinking strategically about the education component. What I really enjoyed about what our students did in St. Augustine was this public meeting that we had with the community where the students came and spoke with the community. Now when they're putting together a historic resources report, the students could certainly already be meeting with members of the community but having that presentation – I think it's such a crucial factor of the education component.

**Wong: The problems is that the leadership and the rest of the community do not understand their history. So in my estimation I think an educational interpretative plan is a beginning. What are your thoughts on that before starting the inventory of the landscape and the buildings.**

**Kristin Larsen:** I think they can run parallel with each other. I just think that with the historic resources report you can enlist the community in helping with the historic resources report. I mean, one of things that could happen is that community members could be working with the students. I'm aware of an example from East St. Louis of a community there where the students and the community worked very closely together. It was a learning process for both the students and for the community, and the community eventually wanted to become more educated about planning so that they could be in a role in determining what would happen in their own community. And I think that was a key component of what happened there.

**Wong: That's excellent, Kristin. Do you have any thoughts about the role of the Board?**

**Kristin Larsen:** I think the Board is going to be a key component for the marketing plan. They're going to be a key component for continuing the education and

interpretative plan as it moves along because one wants that energy to remain in place so that there can be continuing opportunities for education. I think the Board is going to play a significant role with the preservation and the maintenance guidelines, the implementation of those guidelines, being aggressive about seeking out funding and really maintaining a strategic plan for the community.

**Wong: Do you have any thoughts about establishing a system of oversights?**

**Kristin Larsen:** Well, I think it's important for whatever the Board – the Board should have an annual report. The Board's records should be available to the community so that anyone in the community that wants to see the budget, that wants to know about when the meetings are – the meetings should all be posted and they should be posted in plenty of time so that the members know they're occurring and where they're occurring and when they're occurring. The meeting time shouldn't change after they're posted. So these are all ways to make sure there is oversight. We have a law in Florida called the Sunshine Law, and it's all about the importance of having open meetings and properly posting notice of meetings, and accommodating folks that want to have input at the meetings so that they can speak and be heard, and making recordings available to people so that when they ask for those records, they're not given the runaround.

So I think it's the Board – and also having an elections process for the Board so that it's not just the same core group of people again and again. There should be, maybe even the consideration of term limits so that you can't be on the Board more than – you know you have maybe two-year periods that people can be on the Board and they can only be reelected three times consecutively. I don't know; something like that that would ensure an open process that would ensure participation from those who want to participate. I think that's a critical way to have oversight.

**Wong: Thank you, Kristin, for an excellent evaluation.**

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Fellowship Project for Cornell University's Clarence Stein Institute