Finally, a number of our authors have put forward innovative strategies for bridging competing constraints and interests when contending with the complexities of urban development at both ends of the social policy spectrum. This is perhaps best exemplified in the piece, “Dencity: Innovation in Practice,” where Angie Brooks describes how her firm, Brooks + Scarpa Architects, finds design opportunities in negotiating public policy and politics, developer interests, and community needs. Her observations point to a professional model that responds to the public interest much more nimbly and flexibly than laws and codes, and advocates for architects to take on a larger role in crafting policy decisions that allow for growth and affordability without compromising design quality.

Reflecting upon the symposium submissions, we are well aware of who is missing from our conversation. Without those voices, we cannot truly represent or speak for urban or rural communities of color or economically disadvantaged individuals; the very people who are the most vulnerable to the challenges we describe in the symposium call. We acknowledge this shortcoming and preface the work by noting that there are blind spots. However, we must begin somewhere, and be prepared, as architects and educators, to participate in difficult conversations about the “right way” to engage communities and the issues affecting them. It means asking critical questions and showing a willingness to be uncomfortable when working in an environment full of ambiguities—the “messy reality” Rick Mohler describes in the concluding piece for this publication.

Figure 1. Courtney Crosson makes a point, joined by Sergio Palladino (left) and moderator Bryan Bell (right) in their session on Community Connections. Photo: Timothy Niou / Portland Design Pup.