

The Architectural Foundation of Nebraska's Distinguished Commitment to Architecture Award – 2010 Recipient



Connie Spellman, Director of Omaha By Design, is the 2010 recipient of The Architectural Foundation of Nebraska's (AFN) Distinguished Commitment to Architecture Award. Connie, who has a long record of community service, was appointed in 2001, as the founding director of Omaha By Design, a civic planning organization dedicated to the development, implementation and monitoring of urban design and environmental public policy in Omaha's metro area.

This Architectural Foundation of Nebraska award is to be given to individuals outside the profession of architecture for their activities and accomplishments in the area of professional life, which have notably contributed to the advancement of architecture.

The idea that Omaha could make a quantum leap in improving its built environment was born in 2001, with a privately funded, 3-year initiative called Lively Omaha, later renamed Omaha By Design. Knowing that a lot of the legwork would be done by volunteers, the fledging organization sought out an individual who had a knack for organization and engaging volunteers to rally behind this enormous endeavor. Connie Spellman was selected, and with a small staff, and an army of local volunteers, she has administered large community planning initiatives that are transforming Omaha in many ways.

Connie administrated the development of Omaha's complete new City Master Plan; the Green Streets Master Plan; Omaha Streetscape Handbook; and is currently completing the Environmental Element to the City's Master Plan which includes specific requirements for building design and construction. Her initial 3-year financial commitment has now grown to nine years. When Connie and OBD took on Wal-Mart in an effort to make their stores more neighborhood-compatible, it opened the community's eyes to the potential that citizens and nonprofit organizations can truly make a difference in our community's built environment.

Larry Jacobsen, AIA, and board member of The Architectural Foundation of Nebraska, nominated Connie Spellman for this distinguished award and he cited that "through Connie's leadership, all these initiatives are having significant impact on Omaha's architecture, and in doing so, Connie has brought out the best in Omaha's citizens – the idea that volunteerism is not an honor, but a civic responsibility – that civic discourse and cooperation among private citizens, city government and businesses can result in community benefits beyond our wildest expectations – and that simple expressions of gratitude can move many people to do amazing things. That is Connie's legacy to Omaha, and our entire community is the beneficiary of her commitment and leadership."