"Urban Design: Redshaping Our Cities" and the First Congress of the New Urbanism took place within a week of each other. I attended only one day of "Redshaping Our Cities," and was one of the organizers of the Congress so I am hardly an informed or objective reporter. I have only impressions. "Redshaping Our Cities" was polite and upright, like a faculty meeting, while the Congress was high spirited and intense. "Redshaping Our Cities" was pluralistic to the point of confusion, while the Congress was focused to the point of evangelism.

For me, the "Redshaping Our Cities" gathering demonstrated precisely why the Congress on the New Urbanism is necessary. It is important for a group that is not too small or too big to come together to articulate principles based upon common experience and common purpose.

The Congress was a meeting of the company commanders at Guantanamo, the ones who have seen the blood close up and have no idea how to win the next battle. Speakers reminded us of what the American city is up against — smart roads, smart cars, an information superhighway, a crumbling economic foundation feeling ever more dispersed, privatization, polarization and fear. Project after project was presented, showing that there are more than a few skilled and savvy makes of urban plates whose works have common technique and convictions.

Some of the argument at the Congress came from predictable quarters, other from surprising ones. Vincent Scully opened with a passionate address about the fragile legacy of American urbanism and the destruc-
tiveness of the 1960s and 1970s. He eulogized Robert Venturi as the per-
son who unlocked the forbidden treasures of history for our use and plea-
sure. James Kuntsler, author of Geogaphy of Nowhere, debunked
Venturi's role (causing Scully to stomp out briefly) but he reminded us vividly, bitterly, hilariously why we had con-
victed — to help one another fight the beast of urban collapse.

Elizabeth Moule, Elizabeth Pater-
zyberk and Peter Calthorpe made statements about design principles extending from the scale of individual buildings to blocks, areas, districts, towns and regions. While these state-
ments may have seemed like truisms, it is probably the first time since CIAM at Oberloos in 1959 that several hun-
dred top practitioners and academics have seemed willing to stand behind such a large, specific and embracing statement.

One evening, five remarkable traffic and transportation engineers indicted their own profession for its myopia and social irresponsibility in contributing to the collapse of American towns. They showed in detail how traffic design can accentuate pedestrian townscapes, urban space and connectivi-
ty. They reaffirmed the usefulness of the classic American grid as a basis of town structure and they established a clear, statistically documented correlation between the configuration of towns and automobile usage.

The next evening there was a very odd and controversial event. Marketing consultants who have been involved with the few "New Urbanism" projects that have built — the Kentlands (in Gaithersburg, Md.), Harbortown, Seaside, FL, and Laguna West (south of Sacramento) — presented the princi-
pies of "New Urbanism" in their own language, like a rag carnival on the late show. Soine (Calthorpe, Andres Dunay) thought of these hard-sell spiels as necessary and useful propa-
ganda. Others (Kent Greenberg, Norros, Polywoda) argued that if "New Urbanism" stands for anything, it is a better physical structure for American society, not the selling of a new brand of suburban real estate.

Significantly, this debate was about tacti-
cies, politics and packaging — not about the shape of the world.

One left the Congress with the feel-
ing that the road ahead is very treach-
orous, full of danger and possible catas-
trophe. But none of us need venture alone, and the travelling company is amusing, good spirited and very smart.