

LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION

A national, nonprofit, membership organization
1303 J St., Suite 250 | Sacramento, CA 95814
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Michele Warren, mkwarren@lgc.org, 916-448-1198 x308

Note for reporters: During the event, please check in at the conference registration desk outside the Centennial Ballroom of the Hyatt Regency Denver Hotel to obtain a media credential.

Making Smart Growth Work for Everyone

National conference explores the role of smart growth, equitable development and environmental justice in economic growth and community revitalization

Smart growth and environmental justice both strive for development that creates healthy, vibrant places that give people greater opportunity and choice. Given this common goal, how can smart growth and environmental justice supporters work together on equitable development to ensure that lower-income communities, communities of color and indigenous communities are central participants in and beneficiaries of the decisions that shape their neighborhoods and regions?

In Denver this week (Feb. 13-15), the 13th annual New Partners for Smart Growth Conference – the largest and most comprehensive smart growth/sustainable communities conference held in the U.S. – will explore these critical issues and showcase strategies for greater collaboration among smart growth, equitable development and environmental justice advocates. [For agenda: NewPartners.org]

“Communities have been at the forefront of implementing solutions for advancing environmental justice through equitable development and sustainable practices at the local level. Environmental justice advocates are achieving extraordinary outcomes in their communities everyday and we will continue to support their efforts,” said Matthew Tejada, Director of the U.S. EPA’s Office of Environmental Justice.

The conference’s Equitable Development track of sessions will highlight equity and environmental issues, including advancing regional equity through collaboration to address transportation, housing and other growth-related priorities; increasing transit access for youth and low-income families; building successful, scalable social networks to provide common ground and more inclusiveness; building a participatory vision for equitable transit-oriented development in low-income, communities of color; and measuring our ability to affect regional equity, affordability and access outcomes amid rapidly changing demographics.

The track also features a session about “New Perspectives on the Regeneration of America’s Legacy Cities.” Some of America’s older industrial cities like St. Louis and Pittsburgh are showing renewed life and vitality after decades of decline, with new economic engines, transformed downtowns and revitalized neighborhoods. Yet the revival is uneven. Many neighborhoods and their residents are being left behind, while some cities, like Flint and Detroit, continue to lose ground. This session will offer lessons for American cities and their community leaders from both the successes and failures of recent years, proposing an integrated approach to regeneration that links the development of new export-oriented economic sectors with the physical revitalization of the city, while ensuring that all segments of the population benefit from redevelopment and change.

In addition, a pre-conference workshop on “**Advancing Healthy, Equitable Food Systems**” (Feb. 12) will explore local and regional food systems through the lens of smart growth. Across the country, how and where food is produced, processed, distributed and accessed has implications for the health and livelihood of residents, regardless of where they live. Accordingly, food systems have become increasingly important to the smart growth movement, as rural to urban communities and regions reflect on development and plan for their future.

On Thursday (Feb. 13), a second half-day workshop on “**Equitable Development: Smarter Growth through Environmental Justice**” will examine how the creation of healthy, vibrant places that give people more economic opportunities and choices requires being attentive to environmental justice, equitable development, and smart growth approaches.

“Smart growth can be a strong driver for equitable development,” said John Frece, Director of the U.S. EPA’s Office of Sustainable Communities. “Time and again, we see smart growth strategies creating vibrant communities that protect our health and the environment, strengthen the economy, and encourage equality, especially for underserved populations and vulnerable groups.”

Robert García, Founding Director and Counsel of The City Project in Los Angeles will deliver the workshop keynote on “A Vision for Sustainable and Healthy Communities through Executive Order 12898.” Twenty years have lapsed since the signing of Executive Order 12898 on Environmental Justice. García will celebrate this

landmark in environmental policy while linking it to the current and expanding conversation about smart growth and equitable development.

In a workshop conversation about “Audacious Planning, Bold Designing and Compelling Results,” leading design and community development professionals will discuss how they balance stewardship of the built environment with social responsibility through smart-growth projects that meet the needs of physical, social and human capital. Practitioners are becoming more proficient in addressing environmental justice, encouraging public interest design, and achieving successful outcomes through collaborative problem-solving.

Award-winning developers from urban and tribal communities will discuss how to successfully strike a balance between economic development and the sustainable management of cultural assets. More than just “being green,” the panelists will explain a broader notion of sustainability that can conserve resources, respect local culture and heritage, and focus on quality balanced with economic opportunity for residents.

Communities across the country are aligning environmental justice and smart growth as complementary quality of life goals. The big challenge is how to get “equitable development” into our cities’ planning processes and blueprints for the future. Many creative communities are finding innovative ways to alter planning codes and policies that hinder the needs of underserved populations as well as how to avoid getting ensnared in institutional inertia.

Beyond the Equitable Development track, the entire conference program is infused with many sessions that include a focus on equity and environmental justice, including “Transportation Pollution, Neighborhood Health and Smart Growth,” “Increasing Healthy Access and Local Food Systems,” “New Funding and Engagement Tools for Equitable Development,” “Anchor Institutions and Inclusive Economic Development,” “Connecting Smart Growth Principles with Hmong, Mixtec and African-American Community Desires,” “Filling the Financing Gap for Equitable Transit-Oriented Development,” and “Land-use Innovations to Address Industrial Impacts in Neighborhoods.”

LOCAL TOURS: Several of the conference’s 13 optional tours will also focus on equitable development themes. Participants will explore improved access to healthy food in North Denver and “healthy living by design” in the largely Latino and working-class Westwood neighborhood; examine transit-oriented development and neighborhood organizing in Southwest Adams County; and catch the cultural rhythms of the Rockies in the historic Welton Street district. They can also witness how Stapleton Airport was redeveloped into a complete community, Skid Row became LoDo, and award-winning equitable development was created around a light-rail station in Mariposa.

A group of foundations are providing support for a diversity scholarship fund to allow more participants from lower-income and underrepresented communities to attend the conference.

About the conference: With a dynamic mix of over 300 speakers and 80 sessions, the New Partners for Smart Growth conference will draw a national audience of more than 1,200 elected officials and government agency leaders as well as developers, builders, bankers, realtors, and advocates and professionals in planning, transportation, public health, landscape architecture, architecture, housing, parks and recreation, public works, crime prevention, education and the environment. For a full list of sponsors and more details about the conference agenda and special features: NewPartners.org

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