

LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION

A national, nonprofit, membership organization
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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.

Smart Growth Leaders Look for Common Ground in the Rockies

National conference examines connections between smart growth and stronger communities

The call to action ringing from the Capitol halls in Washington to council chambers and cafes across the nation is for more bipartisanship and common ground in solving our daunting economic and social challenges along the road to recovery.

Many of the nation's experts and leaders with successes addressing these challenges of creating more livable communities will gather in Denver this week for the 13th annual New Partners for Smart Growth Conference to chart the course of this journey. More than 1,200 participants are expected for the multidisciplinary event – the largest and most comprehensive smart growth/sustainable communities forum in the U.S. – that runs February 13-15 at the Hyatt Regency Denver Hotel.

On Thursday evening (Feb. 13), the conference kicks off with a presentation by U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Regional Administrator Shaun McGrath, followed by a panel of local elected officials on **"Extreme Weather, Smart-Growth Forecasts: Finding Opportunities for Implementing Silver Linings."**

From coast to coast over the last few years, America's weather has been bad – extremely bad. In fact, 2012 was the nation's second-worst year on record for heat, drought, wildfires and floods. Last year wasn't very encouraging either, with record storms and snowfall in the Northeast and Midwest, drought and destructive wildfires in the West, the massive, deadly tornado in Oklahoma, and extensive flooding in Colorado. In 2012 alone, extreme weather and natural disasters cost the American economy more than \$100 billion.

"The way we build our communities – from where we locate our homes, schools, stores and workplaces to how we get from one place to another – affects our level of resiliency in the face of extreme weather events. Our health and economic well-being will be impacted by how we design and prepare our communities," said Kate Meis, Executive Director of the Local Government Commission, which is organizing the conference.

Panelists include Denver Mayor Michael Hancock; Mayor Bob Dixson of Greensburg, KS; and Moscow, Idaho, Mayor Nancy Chaney.

These leaders will share their perspectives and offer practical examples and planning "forecasts" about how implementing smart-growth approaches have made their communities and residents more resilient in minimizing, preparing for and surviving the impacts of natural disasters – and reducing their effects on local economies, jobs and quality of life.

These themes will be picked up on Friday morning (Feb. 14) with **"Successful Transportation Networks: A Driving Force in Smart Growth"** Friday gets rolling with an engaging and thought-provoking conversation with some of our country's leaders who have guided large, successful transportation networks. Gabe Klein, Chicago's former top transportation official, tells the story from the Windy City perspective, covering bike sharing, bike lanes and their connections to economic development and competitiveness. Get a glimpse of other street-level improvements in Chicago – including the new Green Alleys program, stormwater management measures, and a variety of innovative public/private partnerships – all part of the city's effort to invigorate life in the Second City. Danny Pleasant, the transportation director for Charlotte, NC, will talk about the Queen City's experience implementing its nationally recognized Urban Street Design Guidelines, which foster smart growth and sustainable streets instead of acting as an obstacle to them.

Adding a local Colorado flavor to the mix, Denver RTD General Manager Phillip Washington will talk about Denver's FasTracks – how this exciting transportation project is progressing and overcoming financial challenges with innovative partnerships and creative financing. Learn more about the benefits of a strong transportation network, including improved access and local amenities for previously underserved communities and opportunities for job training, youth and small businesses.

At the core of smart growth lies the desire to make people and their communities healthier and more prosperous. The Saturday agenda begins with **"Smart Growth: A Prescription for Healthy Communities**

and Vibrant Economies” (Feb. 15), which will explore practical, integrated strategies and complementary benefits that can improve public health, while creating social and economic opportunity within a community.

Healthier food and more physical exercise – and building communities for people, not cars – are among the best long-term prescriptions to ensure good health. By creating more walkable communities, good transportation networks and better access to healthy food, we can also generate new business, job opportunities and a healthier quality of life.

We make it easier to walk and ride transit when we spend money on repairing roads and bridges. When access to healthy and locally grown food is improved, we amplify the impact of our spending and protect the environment.

The plenary speakers include Denver City Councilmember Deborah Ortega; Mickki Langston, the Mile High Business Alliance’s Executive Director; Khanh Nguyen, the Colorado Health Foundation’s Healthy Living Portfolio Director; and Ismael Guerrero, Executive Director at the Denver Housing Authority.

Everybody wants to be healthy, wealthy – and wise. That last part is where “smart” growth comes into play, as cities across the country chart their courses for a future aimed toward health, wealth and happiness. Smart growth strategies can be wise investments in both human and financial capital. And smart growth tools – walkable neighborhoods, convenient transportation choices and a vibrant mix of land uses – can accelerate serendipity by bringing us closer together to inspire each other.

The conference will close on Saturday afternoon with a rousing plenary on **“Health, Wealth and Happiness – The Inspiration of a City.”** Project 100 Founder and CEO Zach Ware will deliver the conference’s closing keynote. Culture is to a company as community is to a city: it’s about values, innovation, serendipity, participation, upward mobility, and attraction of smart startups and the creative class.

Ware will share his perspective on the power of investing in hundreds of small ideas to create the most connected large city in the world, in the city you’d least expect it, Las Vegas. With his work at Zappos.com, Downtown Project, VegasTechFund and Project 100, Ware is focused on making smart investments that create a sustainable, smart path for the city to continue to grow.

Connectivity, mobility and infrastructure help a community become healthier, more prosperous and more equitable. A city can spark the talents and dreams of young workers and foster civic engagement in all of its residents.

About the conference: The New Partners for Smart Growth conference spans three days and covers cutting-edge smart growth issues, the latest research, implementation tools and strategies, successful case studies and new policies. Perhaps most importantly, the event also offers attendees the opportunity to network and coordinate with their peers as well as practitioners from many different disciplines. This year marks the 13th annual event in this national, multi-disciplinary conference series.

With a dynamic mix of over 300 speakers, 80 sessions and 13 optional tours of local model projects, the conference will draw a national audience of 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, social and environmental justice, parks and recreation, public works, education and the environment. Each year, the forum showcases strategies and opportunities for greater collaboration among smart growth, equitable development and environmental justice advocates.

The conference has more than 200 sponsors and cosponsors, including the U.S. EPA, the National Association of REALTORS®, the Federal Highway Administration, the U.S. Forest Service, Kaiser Permanente, HDR, AARP, and leading foundations, advocacy groups and professional organizations. For a full list of supporters and more details about the conference agenda: NewPartners.org

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