

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.

National Smart Growth Conference Explores Parklets, Innovative Planning Technologies and Local Model Projects in Denver

Smart ideas and new technologies for designing the livable places of tomorrow are coming to America's heartland as many of the nation's experts and leaders with successes addressing the economic, environmental and social challenges of creating more livable, sustainable communities gather in Kansas City, MO, this week for the 13th annual conference to explore these critical issues. And they are bringing with them a bunch of exciting innovations to achieve these goals – here and around the country.

The largest and most comprehensive smart growth/sustainable communities conference held in the U.S. each year, the New Partners event will be held February 13-15, at the Hyatt Regency Denver Hotel.

The conference covers cutting-edge smart growth issues, the latest research, implementation tools and strategies, successful case studies and new policies. One of those new ideas is the emergence of "parklets."

"In recent years, a number of communities are putting the park back in parking by turning asphalt parking spaces into parklets, enhancing the streetscape experience and providing desirable green space and outdoor seating in downtowns," said Kate Meis, executive director of the Local Government Commission, which is organizing the conference.

To bring smart-growth innovations to Denver, the conference will showcase several **parklet model experiences** inside the hotel to demonstrate what a parklet is, and how it can transform a couple of under-utilized parking spaces into exciting opportunities for creating more vibrant (parking) spaces in your community.

"It's exciting to see a growing number of communities rethinking how to use public space. One of the great benefits of parklets is how easily they can be installed or modified with little capital expense to meet community needs," said Deborah Steinberg, Professional Practice Manager for the American Society of Landscape Architects.

The four parklets feature a mobile art gallery created by UC Denver landscape architecture students, a "get outdoors" theme that encourages healthy, outdoor fun, and an imaginative microcosm of a park playground. Meanwhile, at the "Gathering Place" parklet, you can learn about cool tools for scenario planning and civic engagement – amid a comfortable indoor streetscape.

On Friday (Feb. 14), the conference is hosting a **Technology Fair** with interactive demonstrations of cutting-edge technological tools for smart planning from more than a dozen providers. On exhibit will be mapping and alternative analysis tools; tools for understanding and communicating complexity; and online tools and mobile apps to engage typically underrepresented stakeholders. At the open house, conference attendees can try out the tools for scenario planning and public engagement and talk to leading tool users and developers about how to put these tools to work in their communities.

"Over the past few years, an impressive set of tools has emerged to address a number of planning needs, including mapping and alternative analysis tools, interactive and data-rich 3-D visualization tools, and online tools and mobile apps for stakeholder engagement. The Technology Fair is a great opportunity to get hands-on exposure to a number of these tools used in smart planning," said Ken Snyder, President and CEO of PlaceMatters, one of the companies putting together the exhibition of more than a dozen tool providers.

As another resource innovation, the U.S. EPA, along with a team of national smart growth experts, has created a **Building Blocks Toolbox** of smart growth-related concepts and strategies that can assist local communities in creating better public spaces, more vibrant, mixed-use districts and a healthier attitude toward what it means to be a sustainable community. During the conference, the EPA's Office of Sustainable Communities will be holding 20-minute "office hours" to match land use ailments in participants' communities with smart growth prescriptions from the toolbox (epa.gov/smartgrowth/buildingblocks.htm#tools).

LOCAL TOURS: The New Partners conference also offers 13 optional **tours of local model projects** on Thursday (Feb. 13) and Sunday (Feb. 16). The tours will explore Colorado's creative economy and the arts in River North and the Art District on Santa Fe, improved access to healthy food in North Denver, and the

redevelopment of Stapleton Airport into a complete community. The trips will also let conference participants take guided walks around Denver's Downtown and Jefferson Park, check out community reinvention from transit investments and transit-oriented development around the Denver region, and catch the cultural rhythms of the Rockies in the historic Welton Street district.

In addition, a pre-conference workshop on **"Advancing Healthy, Equitable Food Systems"** (Wednesday, 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 smart growth approaches to development create healthy, vibrant places that give people more economic opportunities and choices.

Public Coffee, a mobile coffee shop, pops up around Denver serving coffee to start meaningful conversations. Public Coffee activates spaces to build community and connections, helping strangers get to know the many faces of a community, and functions as an open center for thinkers and creators to bring together different perspectives. During "coffee break" conversations at the conference, attendees can dive into these larger ideas with someone they might never have connected with.

The conference will also initiate a Wednesday walkabout for a **"Denver Urban Sampler,"** where participants can engage in a tasty, social walking tour with Walk2Connect of the sights, history, art, flavors and brews of several of Denver's unique and thriving urban neighborhoods. Attendees can sample locally crafted beer and food, seek out world-class guerrilla art, and learn about Denver's history while enjoying the experience of "life at 3 mph."

Another Denver institution and one of the country's largest independent book retailers, **Tattered Cover Bookstore** will also be on-site during the conference, carrying a selection of smart-growth titles authored by many of the conference speakers.

Also pitching in are the Regional Transportation District (RTD), which is generously providing free transit passes for all conference attendees, and Denver B-Cycle, which is offering a \$5 rate for a 24-hour, unlimited ride pass. With stations located at many restaurants, stores and other destinations, these bikes are a great way to get around Denver during the conference.

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 and 80 sessions, the 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, 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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