

LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION

1303 J St., Suite 250 Sacramento, CA 95814

www.lgc.org | www.newpartners.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: February 1, 2008

Michele Warren, (916) 448-1198 x308, mkwarren@lgc.org

Nancy Mathison (916) 448-1198 x327, nmathison@lgc.org

Smart Growth Comes to Washington: What's Next for 'Smart Growth'?

National conference reflects smart growth solutions to economic and environmental problems, looks forward to next steps and new opportunities

Ten or fifteen years ago, smart growth was just an emerging concept – one that had gained footing in only a few progressive places around the country. These days, smart growth plays an important role in communities across the nation.

The political scene has changed considerably. Cities are no longer trying to stop growth; instead they are taking a more sophisticated approach to determine where and how they should grow. And with “change” the political watchword of the year, smart growth strategies are increasingly taking center-stage as practical solutions to a wide range of thorny environmental and economic problems.

The emergence of smart growth – and its future – will get a closer look in Washington, DC, this month at the nation’s premier smart growth conference, when over 1,200 participants will attend the 7th annual “New Partners for Smart Growth” conference on February 7-9.

The conference reflects how the smart growth movement has evolved from its first seeds in the “sustainability” movement of the 1970’s through the “stop growth” agenda of the 1980’s to its current iteration of implemented smart growth principles and sustainability policies adopted by many communities around the country.

Conference speakers from diverse professions will assess threats and opportunities, and offer action items for implementers who seek to move smart growth from “cutting-edge” to “business-as-usual.”

“Smart growth has demonstrated its staying power; it’s not a fad,” said Judy Corbett, executive director of the Local Government Commission, which is hosting the conference. “Smart growth may have originated among planners and architects, but today a truly diverse range of interests – from doctors concerned about health to police officers focused on public safety – are finding new applications for smart growth concepts. Together, they understand the critical role smart growth must play in addressing everything from global climate change to the economic health of individual communities.

Taking Smart Growth to Capitol Hill

In conjunction with this year’s conference, smart growth advocates from around the country will take their message to Capitol Hill. On the conference’s Advocacy Day, set for Wednesday, February 6 (1:30-5:30 p.m. ET), advocates will visit with their representatives to talk about key smart growth issues facing the 110th Congress.

“It’s a great chance for local leaders to support a smart growth agenda in Congress,” said Corbett. “These visits will underscore the connection between public health and the built environment, and encourage further support for current legislation that helps develop healthier living environments that promote physical activity, pedestrian and neighborhood safety, economic health and clean air and water.”

Bankers and Developers Get on Board

In overcoming perhaps the biggest hurdle to smart growth, an increasing number of developers are now building it, and banks are financing it. With the mortgage meltdown last year, and what looks like the early signs of a recession, the business side of smart growth is getting an even closer look.

Building new communities according to smart growth principles, developers and local governments are working in partnership to modify existing development – including downtown areas and abandoned properties – to fill in the blanks needed to create smart growth neighborhoods.

“Financial underwriting and land pricing is becoming easier as project standardization is becoming more familiar to the capital markets,” said Lee Sobel, with the U.S. EPA.

One study by a progressive national group of primary lenders, tracked 6,000 properties over a 10-year period, and proved what mixed-use developers had known for years: the diversity of mixed-use, smart growth properties helped them weather the downturns that sometimes causes single-use properties to fail. Developers report that even with the current housing crisis, infill housing in or near active downtowns continues to sell well.

Some banks now offer lower interest rates for several building types when they are in a mixed-use rather than a single-use development.

“Developers are creating smart, walkable, mixed-use, transit-oriented communities and making a lot of money doing it,” said Michael Pawlukiewicz with the Urban Land Institute.

Smart Growth and the Economy

Downtowns have staged a huge economic comeback: In booming cities such as Chicago, Seattle and Portland, downtown growth has far outpaced growth in the city and metropolitan area. Meanwhile, downtowns have re-emerged in industrial cities such as Detroit, Philadelphia, Baltimore and Cleveland, cities which lost population in the 1990’s.

Continuing progress on economic development will depend upon the continued availability of funds to rebuild our crumbling infrastructure. During the “Smart Growth on Capitol Hill” session, writer Neal Pierce will moderate a plenary panel featuring Congressman Earl Blumenauer, Senator Mary Landrieu and others. They will respond to a new initiative put forth by California Governor Schwarzenegger, Pennsylvania Governor Rendell, and Mayor Bloomberg of New York to devote more infrastructure investment dollars to projects that rebuild the economy, create a sustainable environment, and improve the quality of life.

Smart Growth Gets Greener – The Green in Growing Green

The interest in green design and smart growth is growing as more folks recognize the energy and cost savings and the economic development potential associated with green building and living in smart growth communities. Sessions will discuss issues such as how green projects can be promoted as part of a climate change strategy and the business development opportunities related to green design.

Presidential Campaign Meets Smart Growth: Oil, Global Warming and Water

Dependence on foreign oil: Dependence on foreign oil has emerged as a major issue in the U.S. today. Smart growth may be the best way to reduce auto use, and thereby reduce the amount of oil we use for transportation. University of Maryland Professor Reid Ewing has compared the 10 most sprawling regions in the country with the 10 that are the most compact. He found that compact development reduced vehicle miles traveled by an average of 25%. This is consistent with studies supported by Research for Active Living, associated with San Diego State University, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and others.

Growing concern about global warming: Our use of fossil fuels is the major cause of global warming. An explosion in public awareness of climate change is driving a quest for new public policies, but the challenge for policymakers and practitioners is how to integrate climate change, smart growth and sustainability into an achievable policy framework. Numerous conference sessions will address this question, including one that features top level staff from California Governor Schwarzenegger's administration working to implement the State's stringent global greenhouse gas reduction goals.

Water resources: Water and land use are intricately connected – communities need water to grow, but the way we grow can have serious impacts on the water we need. With numerous threats to the nation's water supplies and growing uncertainty about the impacts of climate change on local flooding, the connections between local land use decisions and water has come to the forefront. For example, polluted urban runoff tops the list of threats to our nation's water supplies. While conventional growth patterns create more pavement and lead to greater amounts of runoff and water quality degradation, smart growth serves to reduce runoff and protect lands that are important to protecting water supplies. Conference participants will hear about innovative approaches to aligning water and land use policies, methods for evaluating the water impacts of local development decisions, and planning strategies for accommodating growth while protecting precious water supplies.

The conference will feature 300 speakers, more than 100 sessions and 14 tours of local model projects. Conference sponsors include Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Kaiser Permanente, the National Association of REALTORS®, Smart Growth Network, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. For more details about the agenda, speakers, sponsors and tours: www.newpartners.org

The Local Government Commission is a 28-year-old nonprofit membership organization of locally elected officials, city and county staff, and other interested individuals. It helps local officials address the problems facing their communities and maximize their civic, environmental and economic resources. The Ahwahnee Principles for Livable Communities, developed by the LGC in 1991, helped pave the way for the smart growth movement.

#