

New Partners for Smart Growth Conference 2010 Takeaways

The Local Government Commission convened many of the nation's leading advocates, planners and researchers at the 9th Annual New Partners for Smart Growth Conference on February 3 through 6th in Seattle, Washington. Kendra Bridges and Constance Slider of CORE were lucky enough to attend this powerful event. The summary below is provided as a synopsis of select sessions during the conference. If you have any questions, please contact Kendra Bridges at Kendra@sachousingalliance.org.

Advances in Research on the Built Environment and Public Health

Advances in public health research allow the tracking of physical activity in real time and across space. Researchers use GPS units and accelerometers to record bicycle and pedestrian routes, real physical activity in children, and other measures of real physical movement that used to be measurable only through self-reporting. This advance in research method is helping to build the case for the increased need for walkable, bikeable environments, and safe routes to schools, as well as quantify the impacts of the built environment on health.

Key research in this field is coming from many sources, including the Active Living Research center of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (www.activelivingresearch.org), University of Washington Urban Form Lab (<http://depts.washington.edu/ufl/>), and Portland State University (<http://www.ibpi.usp.pdx.edu/bikegps.php>).

Transportation Equity Advocacy Requires Strategic Partnerships

Several examples from across the country have demonstrated the necessity of strategic and coordinated partnerships to win transportation equity for low-income communities and communities of color. When light rail lines are proposed, advocates in several cities have come together to argue the case for service to low-income communities usually left without service, despite these expensive lines bisecting their communities. In many cases, making the case to federal authorities in charge of funding is necessary to bring the funding in line with the community need for access to transit.

Key examples of successful transportation funding equity campaigns may be found in the Phoenix (http://www.lisc.org/phoenix/programs/policy_10528/transportation_10551.shtml), Twin Cities (<http://www.corridordevelopment.org/>), and Oakland (<http://transformca.org/campaign/oac>).



Civil Rights and the Smart Growth Movement

The civil rights and smart growth movements are inextricably linked, and are working together in many areas of the country. The history of uneven investment in America's regions, often resulting in sprawling suburbs and the need for smart growth, is also the cause of concentration of poverty and lack of opportunity in many urban communities of color. Though smart growth strategies are often framed as beneficial to newcomers to urban areas, they have the potential to benefit existing residents, especially low-income communities and communities of color. Framing smart growth plans in a way that addresses the concerns and the needs of communities of color is key to the successful collaboration of these two powerful movements.

Key work linking civil rights to smart growth and the built environment can be found at the Kirwan Institute (<http://kirwaninstitute.org/>), and the National Urban League (<http://www.nul.org/>).

Federal-Level Commitment to Sustainable Communities

At the New Partners for Smart Growth Conference, HUD Secretary Donovan, DOT Secretary La Hood, and EPA Deputy Administrator Stanislaus spoke passionately about the Obama administration's commitment to coordinated planning for sustainable communities. These three federal agencies have formed a Partnership for Sustainable Communities, and are actively collaborating on project and funding decision-making. Each agency also has formed a new office of Sustainable Communities to implement the recommendations of the partnership and provide support. These three key leaders all committed to making sure federal spending does not go to cross purposes any longer, and to ensuring that spending is done to help make America's communities more sustainable and healthy.

The HUD Office of Sustainable Housing and Communities announced a \$100million grant program for regional integrated planning initiatives. Information on this grant program may be found on the Office's website (http://portal.hud.gov/portal/page/portal/HUD/program_offices/sustainable_housing_communities/grant_program).

Green Jobs Hold Promise Towards Environmental Justice

The smart growth agenda has been gaining momentum, but in this time of economic downturn, the need for programs and policies that lift up all communities is increasingly apparent. Ensuring that programs to address climate change and improve the health and access to transit include the needs of low-income communities and communities of color must be a top priority. It is apparent that to move the economy forward, new avenues to education and training must be created that



address the need for greening aging infrastructure and demographic shifts in many regions. Angela Glover Blackwell, founder and CEO of Policy Link, stated it well when she said that “perhaps equity is the superior growth model” and may be the only way to achieve smart growth goals as well as the need to lift up all communities. One way toward these goals is shifting investment in low-income communities away from incarceration and mitigation of negative health externalities, and toward education and training programs for green jobs as well as a proactive health-promoting redesign of existing neighborhoods.

More information on the momentum toward equitable investment and green jobs may be found on Policy Link’s website (www.policylink.org). Information on existing, successful green jobs training and retraining programs may be found on the websites of The Apollo Alliance (<http://apolloalliance.org/>), the Center on Wisconsin Strategy (http://cows.org/hr_economic_dev.asp), and Sustainable Works (<http://www.sustainableworks.org/>).

Linkage Between Sustainability and the Food System Increasingly Important

The food system, from production, to processing, to transportation and sale, is central to our economy, is a source of jobs, and a source of health or ill-health. Ensuring the sustainability of production, sustainability of jobs and the health benefits of fresh local produce is a key way to help build a strong regional economy. Many local jurisdictions have written interventions concerning the food system into municipal plans, including provisions supporting local food production and sale, urban farming, outreach and education in the community, and other strategies to improve access to fresh, healthy and affordable food options. This is a key area for community involvement in shaping a healthy future. Engaging youth in food planning programs is also a great way to help youth educated themselves and their peers on nutrition and ways of living a healthy lifestyle.

Examples of municipal plans and programs including strong food system interventions may be found in Marin County (<http://www.co.marin.ca.us/depts/CD/main/fm/TOC.cfm>), Vancouver (<http://vancouver.ca/COMMSVCS/SOCIALPLANNING/initiatives/foodpolicy/policy charter.htm>), and Seattle/King County (<http://your.kingcounty.gov/aimshigh/search2.asp?HEHePmHealthyEat>), Examples of youth-involved food access projects include Seattle/King County FEEST (<http://your.kingcounty.gov/aimshigh/search2.asp?HEHePmHealthyEat>).