New Partners for Smart Growth Conference Comes To LA: We feel very fortunate to be hosting the 2007 National Smart Growth Conference in our home state of California — in Los Angeles. The event will begin on Thursday morning, February 8 at The Westin Bonaventure Hotel in downtown LA, and continue through the afternoon of February 10. The program includes special sessions and tours of local model projects immediately before and after the conference.

The 2007 event agenda is our largest ever, with over 95 diverse sessions spanning three full days. This year’s program features some new topics, such as the ways in which health professionals and planners are now working together to support the health of their residents through smart growth development patterns. We’ll also, for the first time, focus on the relationship between smart growth and global warming and will hear the innovative ways that city officials are taking leadership in this issue.

There have recently been some highly successful regional planning efforts in several parts of the country. Some of the best will be highlighted in an interactive workshop setting.

We will also update participants on continuing key issues and efforts including planning for water sustainability, making development "equitable" in the face of gentrification, and linking smart growth and schools.

During a series of sessions on form-based codes, we will hear from communities that now have extended experience in using this important and rapidly expanding new planning tool.

Updates on transit oriented development are back on the agenda, as is retrofitting strip development. Participants will also be able to learn ways to provide for the car in a smart growth setting through sessions that examine parking, street design, and emergency response.

Our friends from Gulf Coast Communities will share their progress and lessons learned in recovering from Hurricane Katrina. Participants can also hear an outline of funding opportunities available to communities through the new SAFETEA-LU legislation.

Addressing the other side of smart growth — land that is rural and largely undeveloped — we will hear farmland protection strategies and learn more about rural smart growth. And in terms of open space within the urban area, we’ll learn about urban forests and creating green, public spaces.

Local and state policy makers and advocacy groups will be interested in sessions that address how to communicate in a way that increases audience understanding and receptivity to smart growth and the latest in visioning tools and processes.

Our invited speakers include numerous public and private sector leaders including US EPA Administrator Steve Johnson; Los Angeles’ popular new Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa; new urbanist architects Andres Duany and Michael Freedman; CA State Assemblymember Fabian Nunez; activist-academics Dr. Richard Jackson from UC Berkeley, professor Donald Shoup from UCLA, and Reid Ewing from Rutgers University. Dr. Robert Ross, CEO of The California Endowment is among those who have agreed to serve as a keynote speaker.

In addition to the dynamic plenaries, breakouts and workshops, the program also includes 15 optional mobile tours taking place on both Thursday and Sunday. These tours showcase some of the exciting revitalization taking place in downtown Los Angeles; successful affordable housing projects from around the region; the latest in Southern California Transit-oriented Development; the Los Angeles River; Latino New Urbanism; inspiring South Los Angeles and Central City neighborhood "turnaround" stories; a look at Playa Vista (a 2007 update of LA’s first New Urbanist development); Santa Monica’s highly successful and sustainable downtown; and the new and improved Hollywood. We expect the tours to sell out, so sign up now to reserve your space!

To register, or get more details on the sessions, speakers, tours and other conference special features, visit www.NewPartners.org

Growing Opportunities for Land Conservation: In the face of California’s growing population, there is increasing concern that our valuable watersheds, agricultural land, recreational areas and natural habitats will be paved over. However, the news is not all bad! According to the national Land Trust Alliance, land trusts that protect these areas are enjoying increasing popularity, with the number of trusts doubling in the last five years. In California, about 3.3% of our land is now protected by a trust.

The passage in California of $10 billion in conservation funds and additional federal tax incentives has been responsible for the growth of land trusts. In addition, the public seems more aware of the need to preserve open space as development pushes into new areas.
Trusts typically operate in three ways: They directly buy land and manage it; they acquire land and then sell it to a government agency to manage; or they purchase conservation easements that leave the land in private hands but prevent future development.

In California, the most popular approach is the conservation easement, a trend that is expected to continue. Purchasing easements gives more bang for the buck — typically, buying an easement will cost 60 to 70% less than purchasing the land outright.

Conservation easements also have the benefit of being more politically palatable to the population of conservation-oriented rural areas. The California Rangeland Trust reports that while they have placed 176,000 acres of rangeland under easements since 1998, there is still a waiting list of 50 applicants who want to move forward.

The November passage of Proposition 84 has made about $900 million more available for the protection of watersheds, wildlife habitat, coastal areas, forests, ranches, farms and oak woodlands. To explore these opportunities, get in touch with a land trust! To identify which trusts operate in your county, visit: www.ltanet.org/findlandtrust.

**Conserving Open Space in the Face of a Growing Population:** Local elected officials are continually faced with this dilemma — "grow" to provide housing for an increase in population but "don't grow" because we need to conserve our open lands. What’s a conscientious local official to do?

The private sector seems to have hit upon the solution. Emerging Trends in Real Estate, an industry trends and forecast publication of PriceWaterhouseCoopers, continues to advise investors to put their money into urban alternatives including 24-hour downtowns and mixed-use districts. They advocate putting supermarket and restaurant components in residential high rises, converting obsolete office buildings into residential space, and turning old warehouse space into lots. In the Emerging Trends 2006 publication, new mixed-use town centers in the suburbs were called one of the hottest development trends going today.

The 2006 publication also predicted, "Transit-oriented development near subway or light-rail lines almost can't miss." In the 2007 issue, they report, "developers are salivating over prime pieces of property located near transit." While investments in the projects noted above will reduce the need to develop more open space, the authors are not motivated by altruism. Their recommendations are meant to help investors make money. They note that buyers are looking for "greater convenience and reduced car dependence." These publications can be ordered by visiting the Urban Land Institute's bookstore at www.uli.org.

**Research Studies Cost of Sprawl:** In 2002, two researchers from Virginia Tech University looked at the public water and sewer costs associated with alternative housing patterns. Their results show that more spread out housing patterns are more costly to supply with water and sewer services. While shorter distances between existing centers, and less leapfrog development will reduce water and sewer costs, smaller lot sizes have the most impact.

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The report concludes, "Park-n-ride lots at rail transit stations, when developed consistent to Transit Oriented Development (TOD) principles, whether that be commercial, residential or mixed-use can support greater densities without the same increase in auto traffic that an auto-oriented development would require. They also have the potential to generate greater sales, property, and utility tax revenues per square foot. And demand for housing near transit is growing, making the development and investment community increasingly interested in building and capitalizing on transit oriented projects and communities."