Albuquerque in January — It’s Where The Action Is!: The 2009 New Partners for Smart Growth conference will be held January 22 to 24 in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The City of Albuquerque is currently adopting individual form-based codes for five of its neighborhoods and the city’s long-range plans call for mixed-use, pedestrian friendly and transit-oriented development. The new codes will assure that Albuquerque’s future will grow in concert with this vision.

The time seems riper than ever for a Smart Growth conference that will provide professionals from large and small communities throughout the United States with concrete ideas for how various professions can join together to assure a Smart Growth future.

In a year marked by a volatile economy with rising fuel and energy costs, the housing and mortgage crisis and increasing food costs, consumers are thinking more directly about how their decisions affect their quality of life. Some are driving less, others are moving to smaller homes, and many have turned to living green. While this dynamic has brought an air of uncertainty and desperation to many, it has also created a bright opportunity to demonstrate to our residents how more walkable, compact, transit-rich neighborhoods and cities can help revive the economy, create a stronger sense of community, and improve public health and the environment. Over 110 conference sessions will address various aspects of this theme.

This year’s event is our largest ever, with a record number of sessions, over 300 speakers, and 11 exciting tours of local model projects. The conference will also feature some interesting additional activities including tours of local tourist attractions, an entertaining film track, and coordinated networking opportunities for our multi-disciplinary audience of 1,500 people.

Online registration is now available for this premier smart growth event. Participants will be offered the opportunity to offset the carbon they generate in attending by adding a nominal $11 to their registration fee. For more details on the conference sessions and speakers, tours and special events, and to register, visit www.NewPartners.org.

Growing Cooler — One Year Later: At the 2008 New Partners for Smart Growth Conference in Washington DC, we heard from University of Maryland Professor Reid Ewing on a summary of research documenting exactly how much Smart Growth can be expected to reduce the amount that people drive. This groundbreaking information was published in an Urban Land Institute book titled Growing Cooler.

Professor Ewing’s work has led the way for new policy development in California and has become an issue in the State’s Greenhouse Gas Reduction plan. The results of a subsequent analysis undertaken by Ewing and Arthur C. Nelson of the University of Utah, completed just this month, reveal that greenhouse gas emissions in California could be reduced by 14.4 to 17.9 million metric tons of carbon dioxide by the year 2020. This has resulted in a full court press by environmental groups, public health professionals, transit officials, and many others to make sure that the California Air Resources Board’s greenhouse gas reduction plan places an emphasis on assisting local governments and regions in the implementation of Smart Growth policies. In their draft plan, released in June, the Air Board estimated that land use and regional planning could contribute to the reduction of a mere 2 million metric tons of carbon dioxide by 2020, a target six times lower than that projected by the researchers.

In January, New Partners for Smart Growth conference attendees will hear the latest from both California and the nation at a special session titled “Growing Cooler — One Year Later.”

Cities Become Home Buyers: The City of San Diego has joined other municipalities that are fighting neighborhood decay by facilitating the purchase of foreclosed houses, refurbishing them, then reselling them to developers. To finance their efforts, many of these communities are taking advantage of $4 billion in federal grants that were part of a housing bill approved by Congress in July.
Public Concerned About Global Warming, Wants Local Governments to Take Action: A statewide survey carried out in late July by the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) revealed that California’s residents are concerned that global warming is a threat to their state and want government at all levels to take more leadership in addressing the problem.

Fifty-two percent of all adults believe the threat of global warming to the economy and quality of life for California’s future is very serious and 27% think it’s somewhat serious. While concern is slightly higher in Los Angeles and the Bay Area, the number of concerned residents is high throughout the state.

Eighty percent of California’s population think we need to take immediate steps to counter the effects of global warming; 73% support AB 32, the California law that sets goals and a timeline for reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Approval ratings of local government activities to reduce greenhouse gas emissions are similar to the ratings given to state government: 52% think that neither state nor local government is taking enough action. However, local government action is ranked higher than federal action.

Improved land use and transportation planning, an increased emphasis on the use of renewable energy sources, and increased energy efficiency requirements for residential and commercial buildings are all measures that are supported by at least 80% of respondents.

Copies of the PPIC report, Californians and the Environment, may be ordered online at www.ppic.org or by calling 415-291-4400.

The Economic Advantages of Smart Growth: While there are clearly environmental advantages to smart growth that can impact the rate of global warming, estimates reveal that smart growth will also reduce infrastructure costs, reduce personal transportation expenses, and lower utility bills. These facts seem particularly compelling in light of the economic challenges being faced by government, business and individuals today.

- A 1991 study in California and Florida found that providing infrastructure and municipal services to sprawl developments costs $20,000 more per residential unit than smart growth developments. These results were supported by a Rutgers study that found sprawl developments in New Jersey cost local agencies $25,000 more per unit than smart growth developments.
- SACOG and SCAG have calculated the reduced infrastructure savings of implementing their individual regional growth plans. The Sacramento region would save $16 billion and in Southern California, the savings is calculated to be $48 billion.
- According to a Draft 2007 California Energy Commission Report on land use, residents of single-family detached housing typically consume 22% more energy than residents of multi-family housing and 9% more than single-family attached housing. Since the majority of household water use is for landscape maintenance, the expenses of water use are also reduced when private yards are smaller or nonexistent.

Stockton Takes a Lead in Addressing Global Warming: Working in response to a challenge put forth by California Attorney General Jerry Brown, the City of Stockton has responded with a cutting edge agreement to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. This month, the council voted 4 to 3 to approve the settlement with the Attorney General’s office. According to Brown, “This agreement is a critical part of California’s effort to address climate change.”

The City of Stockton has agreed to develop a Climate Action Plan inventory of current greenhouse gas emissions, establish a greenhouse gas reduction target, and establish a time schedule for meeting those reductions.

To reduce greenhouse gas emissions, the City has agreed to reduce sprawl and construct nearly 18,000 new housing units within the current city limits, including 4,400 units to be built in downtown Stockton. They will consider measures such as less restrictive building height requirements and reduced permit fees to spur the development of the downtown commercial and residential units. The City will also initiate a subsidy program to spark infill growth.

New development in the city will have to be transit-friendly. New commercial and residential development will be located near transit stops and be accessible for cars, bikes, and pedestrians.

The City will adopt several green building ordinances to assure that new residential housing and commercial buildings are resource efficient and are built with green materials.

“This is kind of the turning point for Stockton,” Vice Mayor Leslie Baranco Martin said. “It just kind of iterates where Stockton is going in terms of being more proactive in how this city grows.” Martin, Mayor Ed Chavez and Councilmembers Susan Eggman and Clem Lee said the deal would both allow for development and improve the environment, strengthening provisions already included in the General Plan. “This is about raising the bar, improving the quality of life,” Lee said.

Quote of the month: “It is fast becoming clear that smart growth is smart energy policy.” — New York Secretary of State Lorraine Cortes-Vasquez