

Livable Places Update

Emerging Trends in Community Planning and Design

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www.lgc.org

Treasure Trove of PDF Images Now On Line: The Local Government Commission (LGC) is pleased to announce that complimentary pdf files of most of the PowerPoint presentations given at the 11th Annual New Partners for Smart Growth Conference in San Diego are now available online. This resource provides access to visual images contributed by some of the country's most inspirational leaders representing the many aspects of Smart Growth. Take a look! It's a rich collection of information worth its weight in gold!

For those who missed the very highly rated closing presentation of the conference and for those lucky enough to see it, you will enjoy the images shared by urban planner Michael Freedman. He documents the way that urban planning has responded to the economic base of the time, then demonstrates that smart growth is the urban form most appropriate to today's emerging knowledge-based economy. Look for the pdf, *Community Design and Urban Innovation for a Knowledge Economy*.



One of the rich images you will find in Michael Freedman's closing presentation at the New Partners Conference in San Diego, now available online.

Archive photo courtesy of Michael Freedman.

A top-rated breakout session was offered Friday morning by a group of leading elected officials titled, *Leveraging Smart Growth Brand to Build a Political Base and Vice Versa*. Each mayor and councilmember demonstrated visually how he/she used their own leadership in smart growth to win election to office using images worth a thousand words.

These two sessions provide just a taste of the richness of the information now online. You can access them at <http://www.newpartners.org/program.html>.

Lessons from the LGC's 21st Annual Conference in Yosemite: It was apparent at this year's annual Ahwahnee conference that cities and counties have reached a time of change. Many speakers repeated the view that local governments will never again have the financial resources that we

have had in the past. The key to success in the future will be maximizing efficiency and creating partnerships among local governments in the region, the private sector, and nonprofits. Demonstrating this concept in action, Winters Councilmember Cecilia Aquiar-Curry summarized the significant financial benefits gained from her community's multiple partnerships with local governments in the Yolo/Solano County region where adjacent local governments have shared everything from facilities to staff.

Developer Randall Lewis, Principal of Lewis Homes and a long-time advisor to the Local Government Commission, summed up many of the important messages of the conference. Below are a few of his observations:

- *The best way to predict the future is to create it.* Peter Drucker said it and it's still very true.
- *Cities should look at investments of resource as investments that need a return on equity.* This could be land, personnel time, or financial resources. Governments should apply a Multiple Benefit Analysis technique to everything — A good development can help the environment, help with placemaking, be done cost-effectively, result in higher property tax revenues, attract those seeking better retail, housing, and business opportunities and help the region circulate money in the local economy.
- *Demographics will drive our destiny.* Seniors are the fastest growing segment of the population and many will need to live within walking distance of services, such as shopping, medical offices, and so on. The next most rapidly growing segment of the population is 18 to 35 year olds and they say they also want to live in walkable neighborhoods.

• *Compact development may be the best way to be energy and resource efficient.* It saves land, water, construction materials, streets, walls, etc. It costs nothing, has enormous benefits and also happens to meet the demands of today's market.

Several speakers provided hints for reducing the future cost of housing. Lewis suggested simplified, well-proportioned architecture (often more attractive than complicated designs.) Architect Tom Low's presentation shared simple ways to save money on neighborhood design that are also better for the environment. These included employing a natural drainage system (while eliminating duplicative engineered solutions), using smaller lots, and narrower streets but providing more paths and alleys. For more info: www.lightimprint.org.

Streamlining the entitlement process by bringing together all the stakeholders and relevant departments to the same table early in the process was also stressed by several as critical.

Local Energy Programs Reducing Energy Use, Saving Money, and Building Local Economies: While working for the City of Berkeley, Cisco Devries came up with a way to help consumers pay for energy upgrades to their homes without increasing monthly expenditures. His brain child, the PACE (Property Assessed Clean Energy) program allows customers to pay for the cost of energy upgrades of their homes over a period of years through a property tax assessment. The decrease in monthly energy bills will likely be less than an increase in the annual property tax assessment, thus the customer begins saving money right away. And if the owner sells the home before the energy improvements are paid for, the cost of the upgrades, as well as the reduced energy bills, transfer to the new owner. Unfortunately, the FHFA has opposed this program bringing the rapid spread of PACE to a halt. This action does not impact commercial uses, however.

The **Sonoma County** Energy Independence Program was the first to offer a PACE financing system (March 2009) prior to the FHFA dispute. It is the leading program in the nation, funding both energy upgrades and water conservation measures through property tax assessments. The Sonoma County Board of Supervisors voted to ignore the FHFA action and continue to use the PACE program to pay for both residential and commercial upgrades.

So far, the Sonoma County program has upgraded 1,600 properties, disbursing \$55 million dollars into the local economy and providing at least 70 local jobs per year.

Tools for doing energy audits and upgrades can be very expensive. To offset high industry entry costs, the County provides new contractors access to a tool lending library. They also provide contractors with trainings, bi-monthly contractor meetings, newsletters, and information useful to both contractors and their customers.

Liz Yager, Energy and Sustainability Manager for the County of Sonoma, reported that the loan defaults feared by FHFA have not emerged as a problem. Of the 1,459 assessments placed, 16 properties completed the default process, an average of 1.1%. During the same timeframe, the average mortgage default rate in Sonoma County varied from 8% to over 10%. For more info: www.sonomacountyenergy.org.

The **City of Fresno** is using funds from the federal government to provide free energy audits to homeowners from Fresno, Tulare, Kings and Kern Counties, a practice that is having a positive impact on the local economy. Joseph Oldman, Sustainability Manager for the City, calculates that a one-time investment of \$1.7

million in federal funds is keeping an estimated \$1 million in annual energy cost savings for residents and \$3 million in increased local business activity, as of January 2012. Through his program, trusted city employees are offering "Home Tune Up" audits. When the information comes from the city rather than a contractor, more homeowners seem to follow through with action — 70% of those who get the city audit hire a contractor to install suggested improvements. This has meant more work for electricians, plumbers, HVAC insulation contractors, and others. Federal tax credits and PG&E rebates provide needed financial incentives.

Each year, residents of Fresno on electricity and natural gas spend \$860 million. That's 30% higher than the state average, and nearly half of the energy is used by residences. If every Fresno resident reduced their home energy consumption to the state average, over \$286 million would be left to circulate in the local economy every year. Oldham observed, "For homeowners looking to survive today in these tough economic times, you don't want to waste money on energy." For more info: www.fresno.gov/Government/DepartmentDirectory/PlanningandDevelopment/HomeEnergy/Default.htm.

Los Angeles County has employed our statewide program, "Energy Upgrade CA" as the basis for their local energy conservation efforts. Energy Upgrade CA, administered by the LGC, is a web-based offering that allows the homeowner to type their zip code into a computer to immediately locate local businesses providing energy conservation services. The site also provides the visitor information about all the federal, state, and regional rebates and loans that will help finance the cost of making their home more energy efficient.

According to Howard Choy of LA County, the program has been giving consumers added incentives to retrofit using federal Recovery Act money to double the utilities' \$1,000 to \$4,000 customer rebates. They have also worked with a credit union to provide 2% loans to homeowners who need financing assistance.

The county has offered extensive contractor support, workforce development, market research, and targeted outreach, and has successfully leveraged a number of other local programs to expand the breadth of their Energy Upgrade program.

On a statewide level, the Energy Upgrade California program has, in just one year, accomplished 3,605 whole-house energy upgrades throughout state with an average savings of 30%. The Energy Upgrade CA contractor training program has doubled the number of building professionals qualified to perform the upgrades and \$431 million has been reinvested in California's communities — a pretty impressive accomplishment for an effort that is barely 12 months old! For more info: www.energyupgradeca.org.