

Livable Places Update

Emerging Trends in Community Planning and Design

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Ahwahnee Presenters Share Models for Success in Today's Changing World:

Participants found the scenery was as spectacular as ever at this year's Ahwahnee Conference and the 22-year-old Ahwahnee Principles as relevant as ever. However our speakers noted a different environment from the one in which we functioned 22 years ago, now one of rapid technological change and serious resource constraints. Speakers were also optimistic, as they shared creative new strategies for meeting the challenges of the day.

Speakers came from different perspectives, but their models for success fell into common themes: making the most of public, private and nonprofit partnerships; building on the resources we already have; making land use decisions that increase jobs and bring more money into the local and regional economy; and updating government policies and procedures. These strategies don't stand alone, but work best when they are employed as two-fers and three-fers, reinforcing one another.

Awaking Community Capacity by Building Partnerships:

Kim Walesh, Director of Economic Development and Chief Strategist for the City of San Jose, Councilmember Sam Liccardo, and Public Works Director, Kerrie Romanow demonstrated how they are "awakening community capacity" using partnerships to move their city from the verge of bankruptcy to more engaged residents and a stronger economy. They noted that constraints have fueled their creativity, with activities that run the gamut from partnerships with businesses and nonprofits, to engaging neighborhood organizations.

Inarguably the sweetest smelling example was provided by the City of San Jose's decision to get out of the way and let neighbors take responsibility for a city-owned rose garden. Cuts in staffing had turned this once-beautiful garden into an eyesore. Three times, neighbors approached the City asking for permission to take on maintenance of the area; and the first two times, the city said "no", citing liability issues and labor union resistance to residents using "dangerous" pruning shears on city-owned property. Finally, the city let the neighbors proceed. The result: An enhanced sense of community and a spectacular rose garden that went on to win a national award.

San Jose also partnered with the downtown business association willing to take over sidewalk maintenance when city employees could no longer do the job. They also partnered with a nonprofit organization established by Connie Martinez, who raised money to bring art to the downtown, improve the streetscape, and organize events that continue to draw residents and others to the heart of the city.

Other speakers also shared partnership models. San Francisco City Planner, Ilaria Salvadori, described the popular parklet program offering permits to businesses and residents who wish to turn parking spaces into places for people. Claremont Councilmember Joe Lyons described his city's partnership with a nonprofit organization focused on weatherizing homes – saving dollars for homeowners and keeping more money circulating in the local economy. The effort's success has been achieved by involving multiple segments of the community from business associations to community-based organizations.

And former Mayor of Lodi, Phil Pennino, demonstrated how he revived a dead downtown without the assistance of a redevelopment agency, employing a partnership with downtown businesses that resulted in the redesign and revitalization of the city center, turning it into an economic engine, a tourist destination and a new home to 235 businesses.

At the preconference session on climate change adaptation, Brendan Reed with the City of Chula Vista noted that their groundbreaking Climate Adaptation Plan was created by volunteers from the community, at no cost to the city. He encouraged other local leaders in the audience – "You can do this!!"

Using and Enhancing the Resources You Already Have:

It's easy to overlook the amenities that are right in front of our faces – but a strategic investment in an existing asset can bring about major returns.

Glenda Humiston, Director of California's Office of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, helped us grasp the enormous economic potential of California's "working landscapes," landscapes that vary in scale from a small park to a vast river, to a multi-acre forest. Working landscapes can create jobs in enterprises like agriculture, recreation, fishing, and water management, while providing ecosystem services such as CO2 sequestration and water purification.

Humiston calculates the total economic value of California's agriculture, forestry, coastal lands and parks to be in the neighborhood of *two trillion dollars of economic activity each year*, when one counts both the direct economic activity and the multiplier effect (spin off jobs created by the needs of those whose employment comes from a working landscape.) She noted that the economic potential of the working landscape is currently underutilized, leaving much room for growth.

Ken Kay of KenKay Associates provided an impressive example, describing his experience working with Milwaukee Mayor John Norquist to turn an abandoned waterfront

into a socially vibrant heart of the city and a polluted river into a healthy environment for people and fish. Today the waterfront is the site of many community activities - home to multiple businesses and over 3,000 residents. The Milwaukee River Walk District BID and the City spent about \$12 million in 1994 to construct a simple but attractive and inviting walk along the river's edge. Today the value is over \$350 million.

Growing Local Economic Activity: Speakers offered varying perspectives, from accommodating the creative class and helping business start ups market their products to focusing on spinoff jobs that provide employment for the larger population.

Supporting the Creative Class: Michael Freedman described the ways that our economic base is changing and illustrated that community land use patterns must evolve from the current model built for the age of mass production to a pattern appropriate to the new economy. He focused on accommodating the creative class by supporting communication among people from varying backgrounds and expertise, facilitating the interaction that leads to innovation. He noted that members of the creative class prefer highly compact, mixed use, transit-oriented environments where they can live, work and play and where they can get around with ease, sans the automobile.

Kim Welsh shared San Jose's efforts to provide emerging entrepreneurs the opportunity to work together by providing affordable, shared office space in currently vacant, downtown office buildings.

At the same time, San Jose Public Works Director Kerrie Romanow's department is assisting the growth of new, entrepreneurial businesses, by offering product demonstration opportunities such as the installation of dimmable street lights at no cost to the city. This initiative has given local businesses a boost by allowing them to showcase their products and jump-start sales.

Facilitating Jobs That Have Economic and Environmental Benefits: The Thursday pre-conference session at the Ahwahnee focused on adapting to climate change – a critical challenge that every level of government must address in the future. It became clear that the new economy will be based on jobs that provide both economic and environmental benefits. Friday through Sunday we heard some thoughts about what those jobs might be.

The City of Claremont has partnered with a nonprofit organization (CHERP), headed by Devon Hartman. Their goal is to reduce energy use in 10% of the city's residential properties. They are off to a great start, having already retrofitted 1% of the homes in the community with energy efficient and renewable energy measures. This win/win/win program is providing dozens of local construction jobs,

saving homeowners up to 50% on their energy bills, and massively reducing green house gas emissions.

One of Humiston's passions has been to support the development of value-added agriculture in California. Currently, much of our produce is traveling long distances to countries that use California's agricultural bounty to make new products, then ship them back to our consumers. Keeping those business opportunities here could provide very financially rewarding occupations for the entrepreneurs who develop new, value-added business enterprises. It could also provide additional jobs for those who will be carrying out the associated manufacturing, packaging, and sales tasks. Humiston has pointed out that almost 182,000 jobs paying about \$24 per hour could be brought to California over the next 5 years if more value-added manufacturing business were located here.

Updating Local Government Procedures, Policies And Codes: It turns out that responding to the needs of the new economy is going to require local governments to update long-established procedures, policies and zoning codes. Almost every speaker mentioned this necessity.

San Jose is encouraging downtown development by gathering all relevant department heads at the table at once – from planners, to public works, fire and police - in order to eliminate the expensive delays and conflicts that can happen when each department acts independently.

The City of Livermore, led by City Manager Marc Roberts, is spurring downtown redevelopment with a specific plan, a master EIR, and a more efficient approval process.

Seeing that permit requirements are getting in the way of the conservation retrofit program, the City of Claremont is looking to change their codes and processes as a way to make energy upgrades easier for both the homeowner and the contractor.

What Is Your Legacy? This year's conference presenters taught us that rapid technological change and resource constraints have the potential to jump-start any number of innovative local government policies. The weekend concluded with our strategic plan consultant, Cleve Justis, reminding the audience of the achievements of LGC member and friend, Marin County Supervisor Charles McGlashan (who died at the age of 49). Cleve asked, "What is the legacy you are seeking to create?"

We can become more efficient, enhance the sense of community and realize the multiple beneficial, economic, social and environmental benefits of doing so. Effective leadership at the local level is where it all begins.

To download the conference PowerPoint presentations go to: http://www.lgc.org/events/ahwahnee/2013_agenda.html.