

Report (June 7, 2009) on “Implementing Sustainable Development in Your Community”
Peggy Cole, Council Member at Large

A Workshop for Local Public Officials

Sponsored by the ULI Daniel Rose Center for Public Leadership in Land Use in Partnership with ULI Colorado
& the Denver Regional Council of Governments
June 4-5, 2009, Denver, CO

Attending allowed me to learn about additional ways that Littleton might conserve energy, reduce carbon emissions, protect natural resources, & balance economic & social opportunities, while addressing the needs & values of citizens in Littleton.

Although some of the presenters seemed to support high-density in-fill, the focus of the presenters – & most of the attendees – was more on energy efficiency, conserving natural resources, & saving taxpayers money.

The workshop discussed tools and strategies used by others in Denver, Boulder, & Fort Collins, CO; Portland, OR; Atlanta, Georgia; St. Louis, MO; & elsewhere for leveraging more sustainable development practices in their communities, & included definitions, measurements, case studies, & group exercises that focused on best practices and the most effective role that public officials can play in creating more sustainable communities while enhancing quality of life (e.g., improve water quality & reduce needs for stormwater mitigation) & reducing City operating costs (e.g., for maintenance & utilities). It also gave examples of how private sector sustainable development can create public economic benefits (e.g., by improving the quality of life in an area & thereby attracting business). Some of the examples *reduced* population density.

Of particular interest to many participants were immediate strategies that might help residents & business owners finance energy-efficiency projects & encourage more walking & bicycling. Employers might give an employee credit for each day he/she bicycled to work, with a free bicycle tune-up for each 30 days; & because of the health benefits, they might also reduce health-insurance premiums for employees who regularly bicycle or walk to work. The sub-group I was in also discussed ways to use Stimulus funds to help provide front-end financing for such projects (Littleton is currently exploring the possibility of doing this).

The Facilitator, Kathy Blaha, shared the following definition of “sustainability” from the United Nations “Bruntland Commission Report” but noted that there is no universally accepted definition:

Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

She said that local governments’ top issues concern energy, water, land use, transportation, waste, carbon emissions & economic vitality – all of which affect quality of life. While no one championed “urban sprawl,” several attendees (including a Native American) challenged the notion that sustainability necessarily requires high-density infill. Ms. Blaha presented research indicating that customers are ahead of builders. Builders thought that less than 50% of the buyers would pay more for “green features” and that only 44% of those would pay \$5,000 or more; however, 90% of the customers said they would pay more for “green features,” with 66% willing to pay \$5,000 or more – they appreciate green technologies that reduce operating costs.

All of the examples provided during the conference included significant greenspace (parks, open space, & greenways connecting these, much like Littleton has been creating). She also emphasized the importance of regional collaboration, the creation of public-private partnerships, &, at the city level, the importance of cross-departmental approaches to “sustainability” to ensure collective thinking, problem-solving & operating efficiencies. (Note: Littleton’s Sustainability Committee has a representative from each department.)

There was generally common agreement that sustainability efforts should include clearly stated goals & “before” & “after” measurements (e.g., the amount of electricity used before & after the strategy for reducing use; the amount of stormwater run-off into streams/rivers & stream/water quality before & after acquisition of more open space; etc.). Several participants also emphasized the importance of quality of life (e.g., reducing

automobile emissions improves health; open space filters rain water, reduces run-off, & helps preserve the quality of streams for fishermen, kayakers, & others).

Given the values that many people in Littleton have expressed in the past few years, I was intrigued by 2 points made between the relationships between “Quality of Place & Sustainability”:

- When we safeguard & strengthen our quality places, we increase the likelihood of attracting the investment & the people we need to maintain a vital economy.
- When we get place making right, we create places where people want to be & we empower citizens to realize their aspirations & hopes for a better life.

Also of particular interest to me was a presentation by Mayor Tauer on the way Aurora dealt with its shortage of water, by changing land-use policies & significantly increasing the amount users pay for water.

Cost	\$ 86.50	
Registration *	\$79.50	(included free breakfast & free lunch each day)
Travel	\$7.00	(I took the Light Rail & walked.)

* I was able to take advantage of a 2 for the price of 1 offer by the Governor's Energy Office.