

Journey to Excellence: Excellence in Land Use Planning

A Report on the Rocky Mountain Land Use Institute Conference

Last week, 450 planners, attorneys and real estate developers gathered in Denver for the Rocky Mountain Land Use Institute (RMLUI) conference. The conference upheld its reputation for presenting thought provoking speakers and cutting edge information.

A few of my favorites from the conference:

Opening keynote speaker Joel Kotkin discussed **the future of American cities**. Kotkin is a Distinguished Presidential Fellow in Urban Futures at Chapman University. Kotkin's presentation was based on his recently published book, [The Next 100 Million—America in 2050](#). According to Kotkin:

- The United States has healthier demographics than most of our competitors. The US birth rate is growing while the world growth rate is slowing. Our population growth will inherently lead to economic growth over the long term.
- It will be interesting to watch the growth rate in China, which slowed drastically due to the one child per household policy. That policy led to an overwhelming preference for male offspring. China is approaching a time when there will be 23 million more men of marriageable age than women. What are all those guys going to do?
- The most recent Pew survey showed that suburbanites are most satisfied with where they live. Their reasons? Safety, security, quiet, privacy, resale value, curb appeal and shared values of home ownership.
- Here's an interesting tidbit that might surprise parents with kids ages 13-24 years old. When asked about their sources of happiness, 76% of those 13-24 year olds said their relationship with their family was their main source of happiness. Remember that on the days when your teenager is driving you crazy!

"You can't have your renewable desert until you eat your transmission lines vegetables" was a memorable line delivered by Alex Daue in the keynote session, **Renewables Scale Up: Large Solar & Wind Installations and Transmission Corridors**. The panel at this session provided the latest information on renewable energy, presented recent case law and legislation and offered tips on how to manage renewable energy at the local level. Panelists included John Anderson from Clean Energy Solutions, Alex Daue with the Wilderness Society, Erica Heller of Clarion Associates and yours truly, Mary Kay Peck of MKPeck Associates. Here's a tip from John Anderson -wear your boots if you are touring a solar installation - rattlesnakes love the shade provided by solar panels!

Do environmental regulations drive up the cost of housing? Dr. Arthur "Chris" Nelson's fascinating presentation was based on research of two counties in suburban Washington, DC; one in Virginia and one in Maryland conducted for the US Department of Housing and Urban Development. Here's the bottom line: the cost of environmental regulations have remained substantially constant over the last thirty years, despite the increase in regulations. You can read the entire study, results and recommendations in [Environmental Regulations and Housing Costs](#), a book that Nelson co-authored with his fellow researchers.

Turn the traditional zoning ordinance inside out and upside down to achieve real sustainability, according to Lane Kendig, Strategic Advisor, Kendig Keast Collaborative. Make cluster developments, planned unit developments and increased density easily approved, permitted uses. Quit subjecting sustainable development to more scrutiny and extra processing; make it easier to do than the typical single family home. In fact, Kendig suggests that it is the traditional single family home subdivision that should be subject to more review and should be a conditional use. Kendig's comments made me wonder just how many communities are committed strongly enough to sustainability to adopt his philosophy and turn their zoning ordinance upside down.

The little town that could become energy independent—the dream of Fowler, CO. Located in southeastern Colorado and home to 1,200, Fowler has obvious wind and solar development potential. A ranching and farming center, it is within easy reach of feedlots...and manure. What many would see as a negative, Fowler sees as a positive and the fuel for an anaerobic digestive facility that would produce enough energy to power the entire community. Wayne Snider, Town Administrator, clearly conveyed Fowler's vision to be "Community Powered."

Why should your community develop an energy conservation strategy? There are two major reasons, according to Chris Duerksen, Managing Director of Clarion Associates. First, follow the money. For the first time in decades, there are federal dollars available for energy and planning strategies. Second, get out ahead of state and federal regulations. The USEPA will be regulating greenhouse gas emissions and there is pending federal clean energy and climate change legislation. More than half the states have either passed legislation or issued executive orders regarding energy conservation. To learn more about the planner's role in energy planning, attend the session at the national American Planning Association conference that Duerksen, Sue Schwartz and I will be presenting on Tuesday, April 13 at 9:00 a.m.

So far I have attended 17 out of 19 Rocky Mountain Land Use Institute conferences. The conferences never fail to exceed my expectations. Will I be in Denver next spring for the 20th annual conference? You can count on it! I'll be there to learn and to celebrate twenty years of success.