

Communities By Design, a
nonprofit 501c(3) training and education
organization, in cooperation with the
City of Redwood City,
is pleased to present:

The Forum *at Redwood City*

A CONTINUING CONVERSATION ON CITY DESIGN



GROWING COOLER: Climate, Energy, the Economy, and Smart Growth

2008-009 SEASON; FORUM #3
Thursday, December 4, 2008
THE LITTLE FOX THEATER
2209 BROADWAY
REDWOOD CITY
6:00 P.M. – 7:45 P.M.

On December 4, 2008, the City of Redwood City and the nonprofit “Communities By Design” held the third presentation of the 2008-2009 Forum season. The Forum featured a presentation by David Goldberg, Communications Director for Smart Growth America in Washington, D.C. Mr. Goldberg’s presentation addressed smart growth in a changing environment.

Mr. Goldberg began by reminding the audience of the post-World War II prosperity that led to suburbanization in the U.S.. Public policies supportive of a new interstate highway system and other public infrastructure, car ownership, and cheap energy led to low-density outward sprawl from crowded cities. Suburbanization resulted in more people driving longer distances to their jobs and other daily destinations by car.

According to Mr. Goldberg, we are now at a pivotal moment, when the suburban lifestyle is being challenged for its negative environmental and economic impacts. A 2007 national survey shows that reducing U.S. dependency on foreign oil is the highest priority of Americans. Though it may level off somewhat, vehicle miles travelled (VMT) has been growing three times faster than the population.

Another story emerging from the research data is that about one-third of CO₂ emissions in the U.S. (the primary contributor greenhouse gases) are from transportation, and much of this is the result of the high level of driving caused by the low-density suburban land-use pattern. Trend data shows a projected growth in CO₂ emissions that won’t be slowed very much by more stringent vehicle and fuel standards.

Mr. Goldberg said that a solution to the greenhouse gas problem is suggested by the observation that people who live in the most compact metro areas drive an average of 25% fewer miles than those in the most sprawling areas. Where you live matters greatly when it comes to spending on gas, and now people are beginning to consider transportation cost when they make housing location choices.

"By living in a walkable neighborhood, you would be driving 30% less and emitting 30% less greenhouse gas emissions, and you would be doing better than if you were driving the most efficient hybrid vehicle. Of course, doing both would be even better!!"

-David Goldberg

He then asked the question "Is there a market for walkable neighborhoods?" Mr. Goldberg suggests that there is a latent demand that we haven't been addressing. A 2004 realtor survey showed that 6 in 10 prospective homebuyers preferred walkable neighborhoods with less time spent driving to the alternative. Consideration of location is becoming more important to homebuyers than housing amenities such as views or larger homes.

Another trend affecting housing needs is the decline in the number of households with children living at home and the rise in single-person households. A "senior tsunami" is also on its way. These groups have different housing and transportation needs than households with families. The next housing cycle is likely to look quite a bit different, and data shows that the share of building permits in core city and inner suburbs (where condos and apartments are more plentiful and necessities are closer by) is far higher in 2007 than it was in 1990-1995. According to Mr. Goldberg, we now have an over-supply of large-lot houses.

Mr. Goldberg stated that the challenge is to meet the growing demand for affordable, conveniently located homes in walkable neighborhoods, significantly reduce the growth in the miles Americans must drive, and shrink the nation's oil dependency and carbon footprint. This can be met not through draconian measures, or even through new technologies, but through real choices in vehicle types, fuels, transportation, and housing locations. Compact development is a climate and energy strategy that has a net economic benefit and multiple co-benefits, such as energy independence, enhanced living options, community revitalization, historic preservation and health. Best of all, we have the technology now to expand our options in this way (and we did it up until World War II).

"The built environment does change slowly. But it does change. Half of the buildings that will exist in 2030 don't exist today."

-David Goldberg

"Suburbia isn't necessarily so great for kids. They can be trapped in subdivisions by busy streets and the lack of sidewalks and public transit."

-David Goldberg

According to Mr. Goldberg, green and walkable requires "complete neighborhoods" that have daily needs close at hand, and "complete streets" that safely and conveniently accommodate all users. He then gave the example of Arlington, Virginia, where

the city has invested in redevelopment around the five metro stations while not disturbing existing neighborhoods. The keys to success were to take full advantage of the transit investment, plan ahead, engage the citizens and respond to them, respond to the market, and be flexible and adaptable. An important outcome is that 12% of residents living near these stations don't own cars (which is triple the regional average).

Mr. Goldberg illustrated the concept of reclaiming aging corridors through a series of visualizations of well-designed, denser development, and transit systems such as streetcars. He encouraged communities to take a “New Deal” type of approach to corridor development – meeting national goals for the economy and energy, while remaking corridors that work and are safe for all users.

He talked also about new LEED standards for neighborhood development (LEED ND). These standards are in pilot form, and will take into account location of development, affordable housing, playing areas, and more.

Finally, Mr. Goldberg shared information about Transportation for America, a coalition that supports incorporation of smart growth in the reauthorization of the federal transportation law, SAFETEA-LU (www.T4America.org).