

Report of the ULI/Joseph C. Canizaro Public Officials' Forum

Smart Growth on the Fringe

Prepared by
Victoria R. Wilbur

May 25, 2004



**Urban Land
Institute**

About ULI

ULI—the Urban Land Institute is a nonprofit education and research institute that is supported by its members. Its mission is to provide responsible leadership in the use of land to enhance the total environment. ULI sponsors education programs and forums to encourage an open, international exchange of ideas and sharing of experiences; initiates research that anticipates emerging land use trends and issues and documents best practices; proposes creative solutions based on that research; provides advisory services; and publishes a wide variety of materials to disseminate information on land use and development. Established in 1936, ULI has 22,000 members in 80 countries representing the entire spectrum of the land use and development disciplines.

Richard M. Rosan
President

ULI/Joseph C. Canizaro Public Officials' Forum Reports. The ULI/Joseph C. Canizaro Public Officials' Forums, formerly referred to as "Mayors' Forums" provide an arena for elected officials from across the country to discuss and learn about practical responses to development challenges in their communities. Moderated by ULI senior resident fellow Bill Hudnut, these forums focus on realistic solutions to land use and development problems in central cities and urban neighborhoods. The forums focus on innovations, success stories, and best practices and involve high-level public and private sector participants in a creative dialogue on groundbreaking concepts. The reports from these forums are available on the ULI Web site at www.policypapers.uli.org.

Acknowledgments

ULI gratefully acknowledges forum chair William H. Hudnut III, ULI senior resident fellow and Joseph C. Canizaro Chair for Public Policy. ULI also wishes to thank the panel presenters and discussion leaders, including Natalie Gouchnour, associate administrator at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency; Jim Heid, founder of Urban Green, LLC; R. Randolph Lyon, Jr., president of the Ginn Company; and Robert S. Weiner, county councilman, New Castle County, Delaware.

ULI Project Staff

Rachelle L. Levitt
Executive Vice President, Policy and Practice

William H. Hudnut III
Senior Resident Fellow
ULI/Joseph C. Canizaro Chair for Public Policy

Mary Beth Corrigan
Vice President, Advisory Services and Policy Programs

Michael Pawlukiewicz
Director, Environment and Policy Education

Victoria R. Wilbur
Senior Associate, Community Outreach

Clara Meesarapu
Administrative Manager

Nancy H. Stewart
Director, Book Program

Duke Johns
Manuscript Editor

Betsy VanBuskirk
Art Director

Anne Morgan
Graphic Designer

Diann Stanley-Austin
Director, Publishing Operations

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1025 Thomas Jefferson Street, N.W.
Suite 500 West
Washington, D.C. 20007-5201

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Introduction

In May 2004, ULI—the Urban Land Institute convened a group of 29 participants in Washington, D.C., to consider the implications of developing the suburban fringe in a manner more consistent with smart growth principles. ULI’s current chairman, Harry H. Frampton III, believes that the Institute must take a leading role in defining smart growth on the fringe. He has made this a top priority for the organization.

Toward that end, ULI top leaders, elected officials, and members of both private and nonprofit sectors were brought together to discuss the following questions:

- What does growth on the fringe look like today, and what can it become?
- What are the barriers to smart growth on the fringe?
- How can these barriers be overcome?
- What can ULI do to promote smart growth strategies in its research and outreach programs?

Forum Summary

The forum began with a welcome from the Honorable William H. Hudnut III, ULI senior resident fellow and Joseph C. Canizaro Chair for Public Policy. Immediately following, Natalie Gouchnour, associate administrator for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, provided opening remarks to stimulate the day’s conversation. A series of sessions followed, highlighting the perspectives of both the public and private sectors. Finally, the group separated into breakout sessions to discuss the questions posed at the beginning of the forum.

Participants agreed that a significant portion of all new development will occur on the fringe and that alternatives such as infill development, while important and valid, will not absorb enough growth to lessen the pressure on outlying suburban areas. It was also agreed that the historical pattern of development in these areas, generally conforming to large lots and separated uses, does not need to be continued in the future. The smart growth alternative is a realistic and achievable goal.

Smart Growth on the Fringe: Envision Utah

Natalie Gouchnour, the keynote speaker, described Envision Utah, an example of overcoming the barriers to smart growth in the nation’s fourth fastest-growing state. Utah is considered a conservative state, and four out of every five acres of land are in public ownership. It is also a place where citizens expect a high quality of life, initially defined as family-oriented communities with private houses on large lots. The key to the success of Envision Utah was inviting the public to participate in the long-range development planning process while educating it on the benefits of managing future growth in a manner that will maintain the state’s highly valued quality of life. According to Gouchnour, “The core issue was the sense of loss of what the citizens had or could experience in the future if growth patterns did not change.” It was this perceived possible loss that inspired the public to become involved in the Envision Utah process.

In addition, it was vital that no one be excluded from the process. “Everyone is important and invited to the table. No one is excluded,” explained Gouchnour. And while the timing of the process was extended as a result, Envision Utah prides itself on the fact that participation was entirely voluntary. Gouchnour said that training local officials to evaluate the quality of development was also successful, resulting in more progressive planning.

But participants must also accept the fact that achieving quality takes time. In fact, just forming the partnership required a year of planning. This was followed by a year spent in developing a baseline against which to compare alternative growth scenarios. These scenarios took an additional year to develop. Several years later, the process is still underway.

John McIlwain, ULI senior resident fellow and J. Ronald Terwilliger Chair for Housing, responded that although he views Envision Utah as a model for the rest of the nation, it had an advantage that many communities lack: it was implemented in a state with a strong family culture and a dedication to preserving quality of life. Other communities, explained McIlwain, “need to view land as a precious, valuable community resource.”

McIlwain also commented on the changing suburban form. Starting in the 1950s, suburbs were built within a few miles of downtown areas. Today, however, the ten fastest-growing counties in the United States are located any-

where from 25 to 35 miles from the urban core. McIlwain recognizes the important role of the suburban fringe. “We can’t stop this growth, but there is a lot of land in the urban core and the inner suburbs. Even with the pace of infill development, you just can’t grow as fast as you want to.” And given the numerous barriers to infill—from fractured landownership to complicated governing bodies—there will continue to be rapid outward growth. “We need to learn to manage it,” he concluded. This can be accomplished using three layers of tools:

- agreement on a communitywide, regional vision;
- cooperation and collaboration at the community and regional levels; and
- understanding of the various tools that already exist, including transfer of development rights, inclusionary zoning, and tax incentives.

Jay Fisette, vice chairman of the Arlington County (Virginia) Board, noted that in many regions congestion can equate with a sense of loss, because it invokes a sense of anger and frustration. Gouchnour responded that Envision Utah’s participants feared congestion because of its negative impact on quality of life. She noted that journalist Joel Garreau suggested that citizens take an inventory of those attributes of their communities that they love. They then can speak to what people care about and systematically plan to protect these assets.

A discussion ensued regarding how Envision Utah was perceived. Gouchnour noted that the initial public reaction was apathy, followed by a general distrust for government. But over time, the people who had been the first to critique the process became its champions. Eventually, many people understood the importance of local control and local responsibility for their future and thus bought into the process.

Caren Dewar, president of Dewar & Associates, Inc., explained how the Envision Utah process failed in Minnesota. Although the model was closely followed, in Minnesota the process became closely identified with the political agenda of former state senator Ted Mondale and his followers. When there was a change in political leadership, the new legislators quickly distanced themselves from the process. Dewar suggested that other communities find means for making sure their growth management programs survive political change, perhaps by presenting their goals as business priorities rather than as political objectives.

It is important to understand how new growth influences the scale of development and what its implications are for diversity and public finance. In several states, including California, Florida, and Texas, explained Richard Gollis, principal of the Concord Group, LLC, migration is an important factor. In areas of high net migration, diverse language and culture can change how people relate to the land and the context in which development decisions are made.

Implementing smart growth must be viewed as a long-term investment, claimed Chris Miller, president of the Piedmont Environmental Council. Without an understanding of how land development occurs, people often have difficulty comprehending the benefits of smart growth, thereby creating political tension and inefficiency. Furthermore, Miller said, there are often significant incompatibilities between state and local planning goals. As an example, he noted how state and local infrastructure investments often are at odds.

Public Sector Perspectives

Even though the public and private sectors can have opposing views or competing interests regarding smart growth, they must learn to work together to find common ground and mutual goals. Hudnut introduced two discussion leaders, both from the public sector.

The Honorable Carol Marinovich, mayor of Kansas City, Kansas, initiated the conversation by outlining the barriers to smart growth in the Kansas City region. In this region, there is a prevailing lack of understanding of how to balance the needs of suburban and urban communities. Local planning often is undertaken in isolation and not guided by a broader metropolitan plan or vision. State planners are not always aware of what is being done at the local level, and sometimes state laws inadvertently diminish local officials’ ability to act. To complicate matters, there is a lack of understanding among the region’s citizens. “Within residential communities,” noted Marinovich, “residents want change, but they don’t want anything to change in the process of creating that change. You can’t have both new shops and amenities and keep the farm.”

Marinovich highlighted one example of positive change in the region. The city was presented with the opportunity to become the home of a major new speedway. While such a facility was not part of the land use plan, city leaders understood that it was a rare opportunity that should

not be missed. In the end, the Kansas International Speedway was built in one of the state's poorest urban communities, in an area lacking in amenities and suffering from an overreliance on property taxes. "The speedway was a spark to development along the western corridor," remarked Marinovich. "It created a destination, and after that, other development followed."

Robert Weiner, county councilman for New Castle County, Delaware, informed the group that of the three-quarters of a million people who live in the state, approximately half live in New Castle County. As a small state with only three counties, Delaware has a particular set of growth issues. But through a series of initiatives aimed at better guiding growth—from strict concurrency infrastructure rules to a growth zone with density bonuses and a no-growth zone with disincentives—significant advances toward smart growth have been made. Other tools being used in Delaware include planned open space, a farmland preservation program, a hometown overlay district, and a level-of-service waiver. An affordable housing requirement is in the works. Even with these tools, however, the state's efforts are not enforceable, which has led to problems when developers or municipalities choose to disregard smart growth standards.

Weiner described Claymont Renaissance, a public/private partnership to revitalize an industrial area that was a former steel mill. It is anticipated that 70 acres will be redeveloped into a mixed-use community.

Several participants questioned whether free parking was a hindrance to smart growth development. In the case of Claymont Renaissance, free parking is planned at the community's train station and in the residential areas. Bob Dunphy, ULI senior resident fellow for transportation, recommended that smart growth developments not only charge for parking but provide fewer parking spaces to encourage alternative modes of transportation. The Honorable James Brainard, mayor of the city of Carmel, Indiana, stated that officials in his city are requiring developers who wish to participate in the public/private partnerships for rebuilding downtown to plan for fewer parking spaces than is standard and for an increase in density. Sam Seskin, transportation planning director at CH2MHill, agreed that parking management can be an effective tool, but only if alternative transportation modes are provided. Seskin also suggested that planning land use for interchanges should be a part of any growth management toolkit.

A discussion of highways, road networks, and mass transit ensued. Frank Moretti, director of research at the Road Improvement Program, suggested that a fundamental obstacle was suburban street patterns that lack connectivity and do not lead to destinations. "You need suburbs with understandable road patterns that connect," he explained. Stewart Schwartz, executive director of the Coalition for Smarter Growth, agreed, adding that with so many trips being non-work related, a grid pattern of street development could significantly reduce dependency on the automobile. He further noted that a problem in the Washington, D.C., region is the growth of multiple regional centers with relatively few housing units at each. This jobs/housing imbalance reinforces the reliance on driving to various destinations. Prince George's County, Maryland, for instance, offers so few jobs that its residents now have the sixth longest commute in the nation.

Chris Forinash, a transportation analyst with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, noted that although urban development principles can be applied in the fringe areas, it is also important to consider how communities on the fringe differ from one another: "There is a need to consider what type of fringe area you're looking at before you try to apply principles to it." Jean Jacobson, chairman of the board for Sustainable Racine, agreed that some of the issues and potential solutions discussed at the forum would not apply to communities in Wisconsin.

The use of existing infrastructure is an important consideration. In the Washington, D.C., region, land surrounding subway stations is used. Chris Miller suggested that corridor preservation should be a critical factor when considering how to build on the fringe. System failure occurs when development along corridors increases congestion. "Local and regional governments have to commit to corridor preservation to preserve open space and prevent congestion," he said. In all fringe areas, there is a need to examine existing infrastructure and analyze how transportation systems can be made to function better.

Bob Harris, executive partner at Holland & Knight LLP, agrees that the bulk of future development is likely to occur on the fringe, particularly, in his experience, because it is often easier and less expensive to build in an undeveloped area than it is in infill areas. Infrastructure incompatibilities in existing communities often are more expensive to remedy than constructing new systems in greenfield areas. School sites are also problematic, given the size and

condition of land needed to support a new school. “We need to do as much as we can for infill development, but we also need to do more on the fringe in terms of figuring out how to get things done,” said Harris.

Participants agreed that smart growth solutions will differ given the varying circumstances of communities across the nation, but that the public sector maintains a critical role in implementing successful strategies.

Private Sector Perspectives

Jim Heid, founder of Urban Green, LLC, initiated discussion on how the private sector regards the encouragement of smart growth in fringe areas. Heid characterized high-quality development as connected, containing a mix of uses, contextually appropriate, and following a conscious policy regarding how open space is incorporated. He made five major points about smart growth on the fringe:

- Better growth patterns can be achieved, but along the suburban fringe they will be more complex and at a larger scale.
- Managing suburban fringe development should focus less on regulation and more on education. “Even good regulations in the hands of a bad developer will result in bad development,” he stated. “We need to educate public policy makers on the importance of good smart growth, green infrastructure, and good land conservation.”
- Timing and certainty are key. If a developer can be assured of a smooth entitlement process, then more energy and time can be devoted to the design of a project.
- The trend for development on the fringe has moved away from large-scale, visionary master-planned communities.
- In the 1990s, much development followed new urbanism and green development patterns. The results show that great benefits can be accomplished by these types of developments. People are willing to pay a premium for top-quality development.

“The fringe is a snapshot in time,” claimed Randy Lyon, Jr., president of the Ginn Company. “What is fringe today will likely be infill tomorrow.” And because the fringe is a moving target, it is hard to preserve. The Honorable Max Bacon, mayor of the city of Smyrna, Georgia, and Jo Anne Stubblefield, president of Hyatt & Stubblefield, commented that the Atlanta region’s fringe is mobile and continues to move farther from the city.

Participants agreed, however, that with the right tools and incentives, developers can create vibrant, contextually appropriate communities that meet today’s demands for suburban growth.

Roundtable Discussions

The participants divided into five groups to discuss in more detail the three questions posed at the beginning of the forum. After the group discussions, the participants synthesized the ideas that emerged in the roundtables and considered ways in which ULI could promote successful suburban smart growth strategies.

What Does Smart Growth on the Fringe Look Like?

Participants agreed that smart growth on the fringe has the same characteristics as smart growth anywhere—including connectivity, walkability, a mix of uses in proximity, housing and transportation choices, a deemphasized use of the automobile, a mix of income and age groups, and access to recreation and green space. The differences lie in how these features are applied and at what scale.

Because the fringe is connected to a metropolitan region, smart growth practices aim to allow a balanced rate of growth between communities in a region. Furthermore, new growth is planned in accordance with existing or planned infrastructure and transportation availability. Multimodal transportation systems should be integrated where feasible, and road networks should be logical and interconnected. Transportation corridors should be well maintained in terms of design and capacity.

Suburban growth can create and maintain a sense of place, enhanced by architecture and design in which density is a natural and acceptable outcome. Design solutions should be flexible in form and plans, allowing communities to evolve on their own. The preservation of recreation and environmentally sensitive resources, rural heritage, wildlife, and open space should be encouraged; interconnected green spaces and trails will provide communitywide benefits. Individual communities on the fringe that are socially and economically integrated will encourage a mixture of housing types within the community as well as within neighborhoods. Finally, any smart growth development must be economically viable for developers and fiscally sustainable for the community.

What Are the Barriers?

Although the participants agreed that smart growth barriers differ significantly because of a wide range of variables, they devised a list of the most common hindrances to building more sustainable communities in outlying areas. These included the following:

Local politics. Many local officials lack the experience or open-mindedness to deal with growth issues. Furthermore, short terms in office and unsuccessful attempts at reelection often result in revolving leadership, and a succession of leaders may impede a sustainable focus on smart growth when political priorities change.

Difficulty in controlling factors external to the community. Rapid population migration into the fringe fosters poor development patterns. In many cases, local jurisdictions' planning policies are affected by decisions and programs from higher levels of government.

Uncoordinated, disjointed, and conflicting planning. The disconnect between regional and local planning at various scales and with arbitrary boundaries results in disjointed, incomplete, or conflicting decisions. For example, local jurisdictional boundaries and political boundaries do not match ecological boundaries; thus, coordination across these arbitrary boundaries is difficult to achieve. A lack of regional cooperation, awareness, and planning, particularly for the planning and timing of infrastructure projects, can lead to uncontrolled, unmanaged growth.

Risk-averse capital markets. Banks and investment firms tend to pressure developers to undertake projects they believe to be without risk. Furthermore, high land values in rural and resource lands encourage leapfrog development as developers accommodate demand for housing by using cheap land farther out on the edges.

Conflicting community perceptions. Several kinds of barriers may develop within a community itself. One of the major divides is between long-term residents and those who are new to the community, resulting in the lack of a shared vision. Such conflicts often make it difficult to understand and visualize growth and its impacts and to create shared goals for the future. In addition, a lack of citizen awareness and public education, compounded by NIMBYism, can prevent good development from being approved.

Land fragmentation. High cost and fragmented ownership of property impede land assembly for large-scale development projects and hinder the preservation of open space.

Sprawl-inducing local development regulations. As one participant termed it, "bad zoning," which includes premature zoning, excessive zoning, single-use zoning, and large-lot zoning, hampers high-quality growth. Other hindrances include the creation of private streets, misplaced priorities of regulators, and public and private sector inexperience with innovative development and smart growth strategies.

Local jurisdictions' fiscal structure. Competition among jurisdictions to capture ratable development is a major obstacle to regional planning. This is due in part to a reliance on property and sales tax revenue; there may also be a range of different tax bases among jurisdictions within a region.

What Are the Potential Solutions?

Even with such diverse challenges, it is highly possible to achieve smart growth on the fringe. The participants suggested several strategies to help overcome these barriers and guide decision makers toward a new vision for growth on the edge.

Sustained education and community involvement.

Long-term education programs should involve citizens not only in the visioning process but also throughout the implementation of a community plan. Leadership training, especially of public officials, is a major component of a strong education program.

Development regulations that encourage smart growth on the fringe. Tools communities can use to encourage smart growth in suburban areas include agricultural zoning designations, conservation easement programs, transfer of development rights or purchase of development rights systems, context-sensitive tools, form-based zoning codes, and new transportation standards and rules.

Comprehensive local planning. Transportation planning should precede development. Road plans should focus on publicly designed street grids and the encouragement of private owners to preplat and plan fringe areas. Land use developers and planners should consider the long-term impacts from development projects and aim to preserve the broader ecological system for greenfield projects. Their plans should protect historic sites and the character of rural areas and create a strong public framework for the transportation and infrastructure system, with which development must conform.

Regional planning and coordination. Communities should work together to develop a regional plan, identifying growth and nongrowth areas on a regional basis. This regional visioning process should include scenario development, hands-on charrettes, and a visual display of alternatives such as those used in Envision Utah. In addition, local planning must be consistent with regional planning, and there should be consideration for intra-regional revenue and tax-base sharing.

Incentives for smart growth development. Governments can provide incentives to develop in high-priority growth areas and to preserve no-growth areas. Tools successfully used include density bonus systems, transferable development rights programs, conservation easements, and land banking programs. Local governments can also provide money for infrastructure development in growth areas.

Improved development and planning processes. Where possible, land use leaders should establish public/private partnerships to initiate, guide, and encourage smart growth through the use of public powers and private resources. Local governments can streamline the approvals process, and developers can focus on the outcomes of smart growth rather than the process.

Agglomerating land. Participants also discussed the establishment of land banks through which communities could allow ground leasing and appropriate development.

Conclusion: Themes Shaping ULI's Agenda

This forum marked ULI's first step toward addressing what the Institute can do to promote higher-quality growth specifically in suburban fringe areas. As its next step, ULI held its fifth Smart Growth Solutions workshop in June 2004, aiming to define principles for suburban smart growth development on the fringe. Upon the conclusion of this workshop, ULI evaluated what it had learned from the forum and the workshop and outlined a potential strategy to develop further public and professional awareness.

From this forum, five major themes were developed.

Smart Growth on the Fringe Begins with Education at All Levels

As a basic premise, forum participants concluded that smart growth principles are the same whether they are applied to urban infill or fringe areas. It is, therefore, important to establish such principles in light of future growth, so that smart growth principles become de facto and are not perceived as being forced on new development. The education required to meet this goal will enlighten all stakeholders, including public officials, environmental groups, the private sector, the financial community, and the general public.

Strong Partnerships Are Required

In many of the examples raised during the forum, participants noted the importance of partnerships in advancing smart growth. By working together to find mutual needs and goals, the public and private sectors can determine what result they want and develop a process around it. Such relationships should be ongoing.

Transportation Infrastructure Is a Critical Factor

Most objections to sprawl, participants believed, are associated with transportation difficulties, traffic congestion, and reduced air quality. In planning for new communities on the fringe, planners and developers must shape transportation plans that are understandable and connected, and they must provide multiple transportation options, including sidewalks that will promote pedestrian use.

Regionalism and Regional Vision Are Key

In an earlier discussion, one participant warned that the fringe of today may become the infill of tomorrow. Establishing a vision for an entire region and working from that vision will reduce the risk of that happening. It will enable stakeholders to articulate how development should occur, and it will ensure that growth happens at an appropriate scale and pace.

The Role of the Private Sector Is to Implement the Vision

The private sector needs to take the lead in implementing the vision, realizing that this is actually harder than the planning itself. At the same time, however, the public sector needs to provide incentives for smart growth.

Policy Forum Agenda

TUESDAY, MAY 25

- 8:30 a.m. **Welcome, Introductions, and Forum Overview**
William H. Hudnut III, Senior Resident Fellow and ULI/Joseph C. Canizaro Chair for Public Policy, ULI—the Urban Land Institute, Washington, D.C.
- 9:00 a.m. **Smart Growth on the Fringe**
Natalie Gochnour, Associate Administrator, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Washington, D.C.
- 10:00 a.m. **A Public Sector Perspective**
The Honorable Carol S. Marinovich, Mayor/CEO, United Government of Wyandotte County/KCK, Kansas City, Kansas
Robert S. Weiner, City Councilman, New Castle County Council, Wilmington, Delaware
- 11:15 a.m. **A Private Sector Point of View**
Jim Heid, Founder, Urban Green, LLC, San Francisco, California
R. Randolph Lyon, Jr., President, The Ginn Company, Celebration, Florida
- 12:00 noon **Lunch and Roundtable Discussions**
- 2:30 p.m. **Roundtable Reports**
- 3:00 p.m. **Shaping ULI's Agenda**

Policy Forum Participants

Forum Chair

William H. Hudnut III
*Senior Resident Fellow and
ULI/Joseph C. Canizaro Chair for Public Policy
ULI—the Urban Land Institute
Washington, D.C.*

Participants

Geoffrey Anderson
*Director, Urban and Economic Development Division
Office of Policy and Innovation
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Washington, D.C.*

The Honorable Max Bacon
*Mayor, City of Smyrna
Smyrna, Georgia*

F. Kaid Benfield
*Director, Smart Growth Program
Natural Resources Defense Council
Washington, D.C.*

Scott Bowers
*Corporate Director of Governmental and
Community Affairs
C.P. Morgan Company, Inc.
Indianapolis, Indiana*

The Honorable James Brainard
*Mayor, City of Carmel
Carmel, Indiana*

Mary Beth Corrigan
*Vice President, Advisory Services and Policy Programs
ULI—the Urban Land Institute
Washington, D.C.*

Caren Dewar
*President
Dewar & Associates, Inc.
Minneapolis, Minnesota*

Robert Dunphy
*Senior Resident Fellow for Transportation
ULI—the Urban Land Institute
Washington, D.C.*

Jay Fiset
*Vice Chairman
Arlington County Board
Arlington, Virginia*

Christopher Forinash
*Transportation Analyst
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Washington, D.C.*

Natalie Gochnour
*Associate Administrator
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Washington, D.C.*

Marta Goldsmith
*Senior Vice President, Community Outreach
ULI—the Urban Land Institute
Washington, D.C.*

Richard M. Gollis
*Principal
The Concord Group, LLC
Newport Beach, California*

Robert R. Harris
*Executive Partner
Holland & Knight, LLP
Bethesda, Maryland*

Policy Forum Participants *(continued)*

Jim Heid

Founder

Urban Green, LLC

San Francisco, California

Jean M. Jacobson

Board Chairperson

Sustainable Racine

Racine, Wisconsin

Rachelle Levitt

Executive Vice President

Policy and Practice

ULI—the Urban Land Institute

Washington, D.C.

R. Randolph Lyon, Jr.

President

The Ginn Company

Celebration, Florida

William P. Macht

Professor

Portland State University

Vancouver, Washington

The Honorable Carol S. Marinovich

Mayor/CEO

Unified Government of Wyandotte County/KCK

Kansas City, Kansas

John McIlwain

Senior Resident Fellow, Affordable Housing

ULI—the Urban Land Institute

Washington, D.C.

Chris Miller

President

Piedmont Environmental Council

Warrenton, Virginia

Frank Moretti

Director of Research

The Road Improvement Program

Washington, D.C.

Michael Pawlukiewicz

Director, Environment and Policy Education

ULI—the Urban Land Institute

Washington, D.C.

Stewart Schwartz

Executive Director

Coalition for Smarter Growth

Washington, D.C.

Sam Seskin

Transportation Planning Director

CH2MHILL

Portland, Oregon

Jo Anne P. Stubblefield

President

Hyatt & Stubblefield, P.C.

Atlanta, Georgia

Robert S. Weiner

County Councilman

New Castle County Council

Wilmington, Delaware