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Fall Meeting Reflection

Last May, I threw my hat in the ring for consideration of participation in the ULI/Randall Lewis Health Mentorship Program. After spending the past decade in spaces and conversations around public health and the built environment, I found it prudent to step into the world of development in order to learn more about this important, but often absent perspective. I am grateful for the support of Randall Lewis, the Health Mentorship Program, and especially my mentor (Colleen Carey) for helping me take this step.

Upon my arrival to Los Angeles, I found myself surrounded by a good collection of industry leaders at the Building Healthy Places Interest Forum. To my surprise, there was a strong breadth of experts at the table beyond developers: philanthropists, venture capitalists, public health scholars, and more. It was a matter of seconds for me to connect attendees with names I have previously cited as a source throughout my own healthy communities work - an indicator to me that I was in the right space with the right people.

For the remainder of the conference, I attended the sessions mainly focused on equitable cities and communities. Though most of the content on equity delivered throughout these sessions was not new to me, the uniformed reactions in the room were. Most of this information was new to the crowd, which inspired me to pay close attention to the attendees rather than the panelists. What questions were attendees feeling compelled to ask? What facial expressions were they making when certain facts or words were mentioned publicly?

I was new to a space of unfamiliar faces, but the content itself provided a strong sense of comfort. I was then reminded that introductory conversations on social equity are passionate, complex and heavy for virtually anyone. The sessions at the ULI Fall Meeting were of no exception. Session after session, I sensed frustration from a significant number of attendees. To learn more about the developer perspective, I initiated dialogue with some of these individuals. To my surprise, the frustration had no tie to the overwhelming reality of the subject, but rather toward the lack of access to available “fingertip” tools and case-making logic for them to take incremental positive steps through their projects. It became evident to me that now is the time to break silos across industries and sectors because these challenges are too big for just any one player to take on. It is important and necessary for us to join well-rounded teams to learn our roles in intentionally creating thriving, healthy and equitable communities and cities for all across our country.