

## Land Use and Climate Change

The link between land use and climate change makes the strongest case ever for building more efficiently throughout urban regions, particularly in developing areas on the edge of urbanized regions.

FOR MANY YEARS, the Urban Land Institute has showcased best practices in land development that accommodate population growth while preserving land and minimizing dependency on cars. This continues to be a fundamental part of the Institute's mission to provide leadership in the responsible use of land and in sustaining and building thriving communities worldwide.

Now, more than ever, the need for efficient land development has taken on greater significance because of growing concerns over climate change. As this issue increasingly affects many aspects of our lives, the dialogue has been elevated on both building responsibly and building for sustainability.

Last fall, ULI published a report, *Growing Cooler: The Evidence on Urban Development and Climate Change*, which makes a compelling argument for land use as a key tool in offsetting the detrimental impact of climate change. The report, which will be available as a book later this year, connects concentrated, walkable development directly to a reduction in the number of miles being driven. It underscores the major point that curbing car use through development that offers options to driving helps reduce carbon dioxide emissions that are contributing to climate change.

*Growing Cooler* contends that compact development is a strategy that can be even more powerful than improved auto-fuel efficiency in combating climate change. In fact, according to the report, the quantity of greenhouse gas that must be eliminated to make a dent in climate

change cannot be achieved only by manufacturing more fuel-efficient cars. Making a measurable difference in climate change can best be achieved through a combination of sustainable development and fuel-efficient vehicles.

The link between land use and climate change makes the strongest case ever for building more efficiently throughout urban regions, particularly in developing areas on the edge of urbanized regions. Indeed, if consumers continue to drive farther and farther distances between home and work, and home and errands, the extra time spent on the road will negate any benefit of getting more miles per gallon and saving on gas costs, due to the increase in carbon gas emissions.

At least two-thirds of the development expected to be in existence by 2050 is not yet built, and as much as 80 percent of that development likely will be at the edge of suburbanized areas. This development will provide the land use industry with a prime opportunity to apply better land use models that minimize the need to drive. Well-planned communities—those that give residents the option to walk, bike or take transit—have a key role to play in offsetting climate change.

*Growing Cooler* suggests that if 60 percent of new growth is compact, up to 85 million metric tons of carbon gas emissions could be prevented from reaching the atmosphere each year by 2030—just by getting more people out of cars. That is the equivalent of a 28 percent increase in federal vehicle efficiency standards—a good start in reversing a decades-long trend

of unsustainable, land-consumptive development. It is clear that continuing a pattern of sprawl is contributing to climate change, which is not an acceptable course. Giving people more choices in their communities will ultimately improve the environmental well-being of our urban areas and the overall quality of life for residents in those areas.

Climate change is an issue that is here to stay, and the development community has a huge stake in the search for solutions. Though reducing vehicle miles traveled is part of the answer, it is only one part. Another is cutting greenhouse gas released from buildings, which, by some estimates, emit as much as 60 percent of the carbon dioxide pollutants. Growing concern over this issue is spurring demand for the inclusion of sustainable practices in the planning, design, and development of buildings worldwide. While numerous programs rate energy efficiency and environmentally conscious building practices, what is missing are programs that focus on sustainable practices in the planning, design, and development of entire urban regions.

In this regard, a ULI advisory board on energy, land use, and climate change has been set up to offer guidance on the most effective role for the land use industry to take in dealing with climate change. The board, which convened in New York City in early December for its first formal meeting, is cochaired by Kenneth W. Hubbard, executive vice president of Hines in New York City, and Jonathan F.P. Rose, president of Jonathan Rose Companies, also in New York City. Its members



RICHARD M. ROSAN is ULI president, worldwide.

comprise 27 people representing a broad cross section of the real estate industry, as well as subject matter experts.

Those attending the meeting, which focused on defining a work agenda for the upcoming year, came to the consensus that the combined issues of energy and climate change are among the most important ULI has ever faced. They acknowledged that the entire real estate industry is in the midst of a dramatic transformation prompted by environmental and urban sustainability goals in cities around the world. The board also concurred that as a leader in sustainable development for many years, ULI is the right organization to play a leadership role in this transformation.

ULI's primary focus was identified as the intersection of urban land use, infrastructure, and the implementation of best development practices. The challenge of sustainability engages all sectors of the economy and all levels of government, as well as all property and project types, the board agreed. It noted that even though significant momentum has been made on setting building-design benchmarks, few criteria have been gathered to inform property owners, policy makers, or the capital markets of the measurable progress made on implementing sustainable practices. The board cited ULI's 2008 fall meeting in Miami as a prime opportunity to showcase emerging strategies and global best practices for sustainable urban development.

Over the next several months, the climate change advisory board will work toward a blueprint for land use models based on sustainable development. This blueprint will be based on planning and design methods that can be applied to outlying as well as inner-ring areas, that effectively serve the mobility needs of residents and workers within these areas, and that foster better connections between nodes of development.

As discussions about climate change further escalate, there

should be a shift in the public mindset about how and where people live, and how they get from one place to another. In fact, it is quite possible that globally, the population is headed for an evolution in living and working environments, an evolution catalyzed by common concerns about growing traffic congestion, gasoline costs, and the earth's carbon footprint.

**The correlation between land use and climate change comes down to building sustainable communities that withstand the test of time and change. It is about building for people, and building in harmony with our natural environment—not in spite of it.**

It is critical for ULI to be involved in all aspects of these discussions and to position the land use industry as a problem solver. This means going beyond showcasing best practices of sustainable development. This means supporting a land use blueprint for regional sustainability that emphasizes long-term economic and environmental well-being.

The correlation between land use and climate change comes down to building sustainable communities that withstand the test of time and change. It is about building for people, and building in harmony with our natural environment—not in spite of it. **UL**