



Delaware Association Uses Smart Growth Grant to Launch “Complete Communities” Summit – March 2013

Delaware, the second-smallest – but sixth most-densely populated – state in the nation, has a vested interest in the concept of smart growth. About 18 months ago, three of its citizens with an enlightened professional concern about concentrating growth and controlling sprawl began brainstorming about creating a master ‘planning book’ for the state. Then they decided to take a step back and look at an even bigger picture.

“We all agreed that the problem with smart growth planning programs – like so many other well-intentioned efforts – is an overall lack of communication,” says Phil McGinnis, Past President of the 3,000-member Delaware Association of REALTORS® (DAR) and a veteran commercial REALTOR®. The group -- Ralph Reeb, Planning Director of the Delaware Department of Transportation; Connie Holland, the state’s Planning Director; and McGinnis -- began to envision a way to bring together interested parties, including members of the local, municipal, and county governments, to help them understand and explore the issues of smart growth. “We wanted to teach them how thoughtful development works: how development patterns coalesce; how both stakeholders and regulators look at it; and how governments process it,” McGinnis explains. “We also wanted to help people contribute to the process by involvement.” The result was the Complete Communities: Delaware Summit 2012, held Nov. 13 in Dover.

DAR co-sponsored the event with the state’s Department of Transportation and the Office of State Planning Coordination, and the University of Delaware’s Institute for Public Administration. Thanks to a Smart Growth Grant from the NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS®, DAR was able to sponsor the two featured speakers.

The University handled publicity for the event, setting up a website, www.completecommunitiesde.org, and getting the word out to the League of Local Governments, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Home Builders and Homeowners Associations. McGinnis mobilized his fellow REALTORS®. About 130 people attended the all-day conference, representing all three counties and 57 towns in Delaware.

According to Maria Evans, DAR’s Government Affairs Director, the speakers McGinnis invited were both inspired choices. “Jim Tischler, Community Development Director of the Michigan State Housing Authority, made a compelling case for making communities more people-friendly. Delaware is already focused on this for its student population in Dover, and there are one or two progressive new communities here that conform to smart growth principles, but we need to keep going in that direction. The second speaker, Linda Pruitt, President of The Cottage Company, which designs intimate groupings of small-scale, neighborhood-oriented houses, made a compelling case for compact living. I was ready to move right in to one of her cottages!” McGinnis adds, “Here in Delaware, we tend to like one unit per acre. But the fact is, we just can’t sustain that kind of sprawl, so highlighting densely developed, yet beautiful, projects made a lot of sense. There was a great response to it all.”

McGinnis would like to see the Complete Communities summit become a regular event, occurring two-to-three times each year. Critiques of the first summit are being used to design the next one, which he hopes will focus on government regulation of development. “And we’ll keep reaching out to NAR for support!” he notes. “As long as they’re happy to be involved,



we're happy to have their involvement. More than just the funding, their support is really invaluable."

To learn more about the Delaware Association of REALTORS®' smart growth efforts, contact Government Affairs Director Maria Evans at 302-734-4444 or maria@delawarerealtor.com; or Phil McGinnis, Past President, at 302-736-2710 or pjm@mcginnisrealty.com.



Jim Tischler,
Director, Community
Development Division,
Michigan State Housing
Development Authority

Dave Edgell,
Kent County
Circuit-Rider
Planner



Preston Schell, Co-Founder and President, The Ocean Atlantic
Companies; Jeff Lang, President/Owner, Lang Development Group;
Greg Moore, Principal, Becker Morgan Group, Inc.

Joe Molinaro,
Managing Director,
Community & Political
Affairs, NAR



Linda Pruitt,
Co-Founder & President, The
Cottage Company

