



Illinois Association Advances Smart Growth Newsletter With Game Changer Grant

The Illinois Association of REALTORS® (IAR) was already working on a new newsletter covering various topics in growth and real estate – geared specifically toward local officials –when the NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS® launched its Game Changer grant program last fall. “I thought, ‘Hey – *this* is a game-changer!’” recalls Mike Scobey, IAR’s Government Affairs Director.

On Common Ground in Illinois falls under the umbrella of RVOICE, the advocacy program of the 41,000-member association. RVOICE is dedicated to ensuring that the “Voice for Real Estate is heard throughout Illinois.”

Confident that the newsletter it was developing was “Game Changer material,” an innovative model that could be replicated on a national scale, IAR applied for and received a \$19,000 grant in support of the next two issues of the bi-annual publication.

The newsletter is loosely modeled on NAR’s *On Common Ground* Smart Growth magazine, but specifically addresses issues of interest to Illinois residents. By producing and distributing the newsletter to officials in more than 1,300 Illinois municipalities, IAR hopes to be viewed as the trusted source of information on important real estate issues like impact fees, foreclosure data, and market information, helping to advance the REALTOR® position and private property rights at the local level.

Each semi-annual issue contains a “mini-yearbook” of the local Government Affairs Directors for all the respective regions of the state. “It’s important that the elected officials and municipal leaders have our contact information,” says Scobey, “but we are also sending the message that we’re local, and we’re watching them, when they present issues that affect real estate.”

The newsletter also serves as a key advocacy piece. “It must often seem to municipal officials,” Scobey notes, “that the REALTORS® only appear when an ordinance is proposed, and then, as adversaries in an atmosphere of conflict.” By producing *On Common Ground in Illinois*, he explains, the REALTORS® not only become a helpful resource, but they have the chance make their position on issues like vacant property ordinances, transfer taxes, and municipal point-of-sale home inspections perfectly clear – outside of a conflict setting. Scobey sees the helpful, informative newsletter as something that could – and should! – be published by all states for their elected officials and municipal staffs.

The grant from NAR covers all of the printing and mailing costs associated with the newsletter, as well as its design. The bulk of the writing responsibility falls to Scobey, but his local GADs help out with some of it, and he always looks to them for story ideas. Out “in the trenches,” they are ideally positioned to see trends and commonalities, and they’re always the first ones aware that a position on a given issue needs to be sharpened or clarified. So far, there’s been no shortage of ideas.

The April 2012 issue features stories on timely issues such as Governor Quinn’s announcement of a Foreclosure Prevention Network; a reconsideration of land use policies in the aftermath of the economic downturn; and a highlight on WhyIBuy.org,



IAR's new website harnessing valuable data collected from homeowners who have bought houses within the last year.

"The local Illinois GADs are especially pleased to have NAR's support for their efforts. This is really their newsletter, their tool, and their outreach" says Scobey, who is hard at work on the next issue.

To learn more about this Game-Changing project, contact Mike Scobey, Government Affairs Director, Illinois Association of REALTORS®, mjscobey@iar.org, 773.271.4059.

April 2012

A NEWSLETTER OF THE

on common ground

IN ILLINOIS

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Dear Illinois Elected Officials:

We had you—the local government official—in mind when we designed this new newsletter providing research, local ordinance and state law updates, and economic data related to the Illinois real estate industry.

The Illinois Association of REALTORS® (IAR) is "The Voice of Real Estate in Illinois." In this role, the Association works to protect the rights of private property owners and advocate for a healthy business environment.

We want to be a resource for you regarding real estate issues and look forward to an ongoing dialogue among Illinois REALTORS®, our elected officials, the IAR Governmental Affairs staff and interested citizens.

For more information on our role as the Voice of Real Estate in Illinois, see page 4 to learn who the Local Government Affairs Director is in your area.



What's the Use?

Reconsideration of Land Use Policy in the Aftermath of the Housing Downturn

In the struggle to revitalize downtown areas, deal with vacant or abandoned properties, and search for waning revenues, many public officials are understandably frustrated. When considering whether to deal with these vexing issues and whether to continue their own public service, they may ask, "What's the use?"

There have been countless frustrations for public policy-makers in the Great Recession. However, that question—what's the use?—may be the most important question to ask when re-examining public policy (incentives, zoning, housing policy). What is the **land use** that is currently permitted throughout a municipality and does it still serve the needs of the municipality in terms of future economic development and growth?

What's the use? In the real world of leading a city or village, that question may be easily answered by looking at your zoning maps. Some zoning classifications and approval processes have become both rigid and complicated; as a result, municipalities are somewhat constrained in their ability to capitalize on shifts in the market. Many properties are stuck with a use that no longer may be relevant or match what is truly the highest and best use of the land. Some worthwhile proposed projects may get stalled because of outdated zoning and permitted land uses. This can increase the costs for both the developer and the municipality.

As cities and villages contemplate their future economic development strategies, an option that should be considered is increased multifamily use. In areas where commercial uses such as manufacturing or offices have only been permitted, multifamily residential should now be on the list of options. Currently, rental units are in short supply. In a December 2011 analysis report, Kim Betancourt, Director of Multifamily Economics and Market Research for Fannie Mae, states, "Despite the slowdown in job growth, we expect multifamily demand to remain solid in 2012 as well, thanks to limited new rental supply coming online during the near-term."¹ Also, in a recent *Wall Street Journal* article, Haendel St. Juste, an analyst with Keefe, Bruyette & Woods, states, "Each 1% drop in the homeownership rate brings more than a million new renters."² St. Juste also suggests that the rental supply hasn't kept pace with the impending demand. He also identifies that "20- to 34-year-olds, a key renting demographic, is swelling."³ Additionally, real estate investment trusts that historically have been heavy in other sectors, such as office, are jumping into the multifamily

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