



St. Louis Association Makes Great Strides Toward Walk-able Communities With Smart Growth Grant

It's been an unbearably hot summer in St. Louis, Missouri – not the kind of temperatures that encourage much walking around, let alone setting foot outside an air-conditioned environment. But, in the thick of it, the St. Louis Association of REALTORS® (SLAR) managed to produce a successful program on Walk-able Communities -- one that it hopes may serve as a national model.

Celeste Rueter, Government Affairs Director of the 7,000-plus-member association, credits Eric Friedman, a long-time Commercial Division member, with being the driving force behind the program's development and implementation. "The NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS® had sent Eric, along with our immediate past president, Nate Johnson, to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's New Partners for Smart Growth conference in Charlotte last year. It was there that they first encountered national walk-ability expert Dan Burden, and learned about the EPA's technical assistance award program. Eric made the most of the opportunity: using an EPA grant (one of only 35 grants made to 350 applicants!) he brought Dan Burden to St. Louis to consult on the 26th Ward – an area in transition, transportation-rich, and straddling the most affluent and very poorest parts of the city."

During that visit, Burden suggested to Friedman that they expand and capitalize on the work they had started by conducting a 'train the trainers' event. Friedman knew about NAR's Smart Growth grants – he had served on review panels – and so he urged SLAR to apply for one. "Between the two of us, Celeste and I put together the application. I'm no writer, but I'm a pretty good 'ideas guy,' and she's an excellent editor. It was a real team effort," Friedman said.

The NAR Smart Growth grant of \$15,000 brought Dan Burden back to St. Louis twice: first for the Innovation in Community Development event at the Federal Reserve in May of this year; then, with an assistant, for the two-day **Walk/Live St. Louis 2012** conference at the end of June. Both programs stressed the clear connection between walkability and property values, notes Rueter.

"There seems to be a perception out there that walkability is purely about personal or environmental health – which are both important – but Dan made it statistically clear that walkability has a direct link to increased property values, too," Rueter says.

"A clear next step for us will be finding a way to promote this concept with builders and developers, because their buy-in is essential to the success of the vision of walkable, bike-able and safe neighborhoods. Increased property values give the development community another real incentive to get involved, aside from the health and wellness issues," she adds.



The events involved an impressive group of community stakeholders, and also a number of additional sponsors attracted by the REALTORS[®]. These included the regional MLS company, a local title company, Washington University's School of Architecture and Office of Sustainability, the Regional Arts Commission, various city aldermen, and non-profits ranging from Liveable St. Louis to Citizens for Modern Transit.

The kick-off event of ***Walk/Live St. Louis 2012*** was the half-day public session (with breakfast) in the beautiful auditorium at the St. Louis Federal Reserve. More than 160 people attended the program featuring Burden's presentation, which was also cable-cast live, and is now viewable on-line, together with a video of the 26th Ward produced for the program, at Friedman's non-profit, www.HousingandCommunitySolutions.org.

The two-day public summit of ***Walk/Live St. Louis 2012*** drew some 280 participants for a packed program of walking audits and visits to metrolink stations (abbreviated because of extreme heat;) a stakeholders' luncheon; receptions; and a meeting of mayors and other elected officials, city managers and municipal staff. Friedman's team is still processing the results of a survey, and will be writing a formal report on the events' success.

"Dan is a great leader, and a great facilitator," says Friedman. "People were surprised to hear him open by saying 'You're here to learn about *your* personal health, and *your* personal financial situation, as well as the region's economy.' He really broke new ground in both breadth and depth of topics in walk-able communities, specifically here in St. Louis."

Rueter adds, "The program was so rich and diverse in participants and locations, that it exposed a lot of people to the REALTORS[®] in a whole new way. It showed us as a collaborative organization, one that is committed to making our communities more walk-able, bike-able – and safe."

"Our hope is to continue the work that we've started," says Friedman. "Ideally, we'd like to make the whole process replicable, and have been talking about taking it on the road." As of this writing, he is looking forward to discussing the next steps in that direction with SLAR.

Want to learn more about how they did it? Contact Celeste Rueter, GAD, St. Louis Association of REALTORS[®], crueter@stlrealtors.com / 314-590-2307



National Walk-ability Expert Dan Burden discusses mass transportation issues with conference attendees, including State Representative Rory Ellinger (D-University City, 72nd Dist).



SLAR's Eric Friedman; National Walk-ability Expert Dan Burden; SLAR members, and municipal staffers and planners from around the region.