



High Point, NC REALTORS® Take Leading Role in Cultivating Community Pride and Planning for City's Future – July 2013

The 20th century was very good to High Point, N.C., the capital of America's furniture industry. For decades, though, thanks largely to overseas competition, its population has been contracting and the city itself is stagnating.

Twice a year, however, the town that normally resembles Mayberry, USA, becomes a bustling metropolis for a week when it hosts the High Point Market, the world's largest home furnishings trade show. Its population of 104,000 doubles during these weeks, and High Point has always managed the logistical challenge of feeding, housing, and transporting its visitors with true Southern hospitality. "Although the pattern is predictable, it's actually an economist's nightmare," explains Nicole Arnold, Shared Local Government Affairs Director of the North Carolina Association of REALTORS®, including the 500-member High Point Regional Association of REALTORS® (HPRAR). "It's fortunate to have these spikes at all, but what they represent simply no longer drives the city's economic engines year-round."

But things are looking up. Early in May, High Point's blighted downtown areas were the subject of a series of planning charrettes, or concentrated strategy sessions, conducted by renowned architect and urban planner Andrés Duany, a specialist in revitalizing city centers. The week-long program was sponsored by The City Project, a grassroots public-private partnership established by the City of High Point in collaboration with the local business community and concerned citizens. Its mission is to develop High Point based on sound principles of smart growth, creating an urban area replete with economic health, local quality of life, and community pride.

Through a \$15,000 Smart Growth Grant from the NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS®, and a contribution of \$1,500 from the HPRAR REALTORS® Commercial Alliance, HPRAR joined several other business and educational enterprises in sponsoring the charrette; despite its small size, HPRAR is proud to have been one of the event's largest contributors.

"For the past several years," notes Ed Terry, HPRAR's Executive Vice President, "we have struggled to achieve identity with the economic impact our sales generate. Through the Smart Growth Grant and our co-sponsorship of the high-profile charrette process, we were able to parlay this economic status into believability, visibility and credibility."

As Terry observes, "It was important for us to have a place at the table. More than any other organization, HPRAR is in a position to provide insightful suggestions for incentivizing investors, corporations, and homeowners to



relocate to High Point. Since our members have daily practice in securing relocations to High Point, we felt it was of paramount importance for HPRAR's voice to be heard during the charrette process. What is it they say?" he asks, "If you're not at the table, you're probably on the menu!" But in all seriousness, Terry confides that the Smart Growth Grant has significantly helped to increase the prominence of the REALTOR® brand in the High Point region. "Now, people see the REALTORS® as folks who get things done, a cornerstone of the business community."

The charrette brought together all of the stakeholders in High Point's future for a week of meaningful, exciting, and often provocative, engagement. As Arnold explains, Duany and his team demonstrated very effectively that "we could claim our reputation and be proud of it, but that we can't continue to claim our heritage as our future." Exciting ideas came out of the interactive meetings, from using the vast downtown parking acreage (only fully utilized during the High Point Market) for temporary outdoor festivals – to a system of streetcars.

Duany's final plans for the city, including re-drafted municipal codes expected to make it easier for entrepreneurs to set up shop in the historic downtown areas, will be unveiled in October. In the meantime, the REALTORS® will be making sure the conversation stays alive, and that the ideas that have been fostered remain in the government's line of vision.

Terry says that HPRAR considers the plans, the process, and ongoing development as a long-term initiative that will help define and distinguish High Point and the surrounding areas for years to come. "We are ever vigilant in looking for opportunities to continue the momentum and community synergy this study has created. The REALTOR® Family sees this project as a vital element in our 'Quality of Life' Guiding Principle, which states that we want to partner with government (at all levels) for the betterment of the entire community."

To learn more about how the REALTORS® of High Point, NC are involved in turning their region's fortunes around, contact Nicole Arnold, Local Government Affairs Director of the High Point Regional Association of REALTORS® at 336-808-4237 / Nicole@hprar.com or Executive Vice President Ed Terry, at 336-889-8181 / eterry@hprar.com.



At the opening charrette, Linda and Mark Donnell of the North Carolina Shakespeare Festival flank Patrick Harman of the Hayden-Harman Foundation, as well as Matt Nowell, David Congdon and Chris Harrell, who are with Old Dominion Freight Line Inc.