



Traverse (MI) REALTORS® Put Three Smart Growth Grants to Work – Sept. 2013

With just 625 members, the Traverse Area Association of REALTORS® (TAAR) is a small but mighty force in northwest lower Michigan, representing a city included on *U.S. News'* 2012 list of the country's 10 best places to retire.

TAAR has always been a progressive group. Decades ago, it helped develop the database system that is now the heart of the electronic Multiple Listing System. Now, with no fewer than three Smart Growth Grants from the NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS® in play, TAAR is establishing itself as a team of well-informed local citizens, with access to real information and resources where community planning is concerned.

Kim Pontius, TAAR's Executive Vice President, is also the chair of the CORE Team of the comprehensive regional land-use plan known as The Grand Vision -- a position so vital, yet time-consuming, that his board has authorized him to hold it for two years. "The role of The Grand Vision is to elevate thinking and conversations about the impact of good planning – or the lack thereof," says Pontius. Covering transportation, the economy, the environment, food systems, energy, and, of course, housing, the project secured a Smart Growth Action Grant last year of \$15,000 from NAR to develop and sustain its public outreach.

Another Smart Growth Grant, this year for \$5,000, is being used to help fund a smart growth poll being conducted by the local Elmwood Township Planning Commission, of which Pontius is also a member. The survey has gone out to every household in the township, and the information collected will be used to create a new master plan and zoning ordinances for the area. Pontius notes that, "It's great to see some of our younger, dynamic REALTOR® members on these commissions, getting involved and using their expertise to inform sensible, cohesive growth." He plans to help bring together all four planning commissions at the base of the Grand Traverse Bay to share big ideas, best practices, and develop a uniform vision for the region.

TAAR is making use of yet a third Smart Growth Action Grant for \$15,000 that it received last year, to help build capacity for implementation of the Boardman River Watershed Prosperity Plan. The Boardman River, a blue ribbon trout stream, is being returned to its natural glory following one of the nation's largest dam removal projects. The Prosperity Plan is a groundbreaking public effort, recognizing the link between the region's natural resources, its economy, and its quality of life. Accounting for its future from a global perspective, the plan considers aspects like social justice and psychological impact, in addition to the obvious elements of sport and bio-habitat.

"Too often, in regions like this with high-profile second and third homes, real estate professionals are seen as a self-serving bunch that comes in, brings development, and makes money, then leaves," says Pontius, "But now, in Traverse City and the surrounding rural community, TAAR has gained a great deal of traction and respect through its participation in these projects, and real prestige, which comes with this level

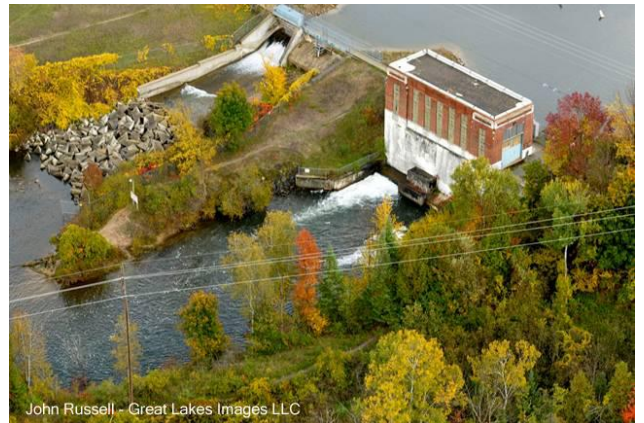


of funding from NAR. REALTORS® are becoming known as ‘subject experts,’” he adds, “a group of trusted advisors with valuable expertise that goes far beyond selling houses.” That’s a perception that’s good for the REALTORS®, and a reality that’s good for Traverse City.

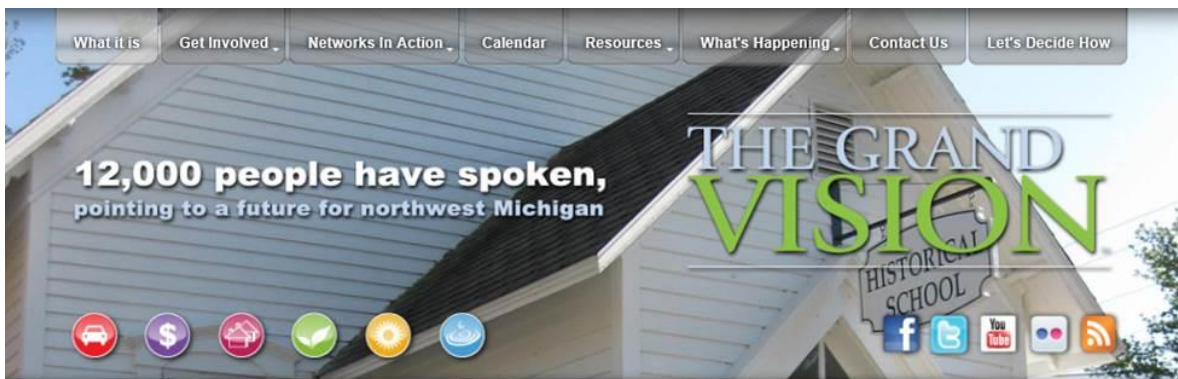
To learn more about how the REALTORS® of Traverse, Michigan are helping their region grow smartly, contact Kimberly R. Pontius, Traverse Area Association of REALTORS® Executive Vice President, at kim@taar.com or 231.947.2050 x104.



The Grand Vision is a regional land-use plan for which TAAR is a major player



TAAR is helping to implement the Boardman River Watershed Prosperity Plan



The Grand Vision Web Site at www.thegrandvision.org contains information on its many projects and encourages citizen involvement.