6/29/2012 Smart Growth Network “Call For Papers”

The Challenge: EQUITY IN ACCESS TO JOBS and QUALITY OF LIFE

Using a framework of sustainability and other initiatives to create jobs and expand walkable urbandy, the District of Columbia has started down the track in addressing equity and opportunity in a diverse community.

Most places across the country have been battered by the Great Recession. Yet, we are finding that compact, well-designed, transit-oriented cities are best weathering the economic downturn, and in some cases providing a model for revitalization. Washington DC in particular has proven successful in maintaining home values and attracting both new residents and new businesses in recent years. After a half century of population decline, we have seen a solid decade of population growth since 2000 and it is continuing. The city is evolving from its previous identity as a sleepy government town to a world class hub of culture, innovation, and information. The Census Bureau recently noted that Washington DC is among the top 15 cities with the largest population increases from April 1, 2010 and July 1, 2011.

Despite this recent progress, the District of Columbia also faces challenges which reflect national trends and problems we share with other urban jurisdictions. Disparities across the population have widened in education, income, housing affordability, health, and access to transportation. Perhaps most urgently, gaps in employment stand at historic levels. While the District’s unemployment rate, currently at 9.3%, has been falling, it is still greater than the national average. Closer analysis reveals that the unemployment rate varies dramatically across the city as one moves east. In Northwest DC unemployment is as low as 2% while neighborhoods east of the Anacostia River suffer from unemployment levels as high as 24%.

The problem in DC is not simply a lack of jobs. The District’s Department of Employment Services estimates 50,000 unfilled jobs in Washington DC, most of which require technical skills or professional qualifications. This situation reflects two basic challenges in the local economy (1) a limited supply of employment opportunities in diverse fields that require a range of skill levels, and (2) a workforce that is not properly prepared to fill and succeed in the jobs experiencing the greatest growth. In the context of these two core challenges, the District recognizes that it is at a crossroads. Continuing current development patterns runs the risk of further isolating vulnerable segments of the population from the growth in jobs and the amenities enjoyed in parts of the city. It threatens to displace people, dissolve communities, and increase reliance on social services.

The District instead envisions undertaking a different approach that builds upon its leadership in sustainability. Mayor Vincent C. Gray launched this effort, Sustainable DC, in September 2011, to make Washington, DC the greenest, healthiest and most livable city in the nation. Mayor Gray charged District agencies and other partners with developing a vision and actionable goals grounded not just on the environment but also on equity and job growth. The resulting Vision for a Sustainable DC, released in April 2012, explicitly calls for increasing the number of green jobs five-fold, and ensuring that citizens have access to meaningful work at various rungs on the educational ladder. Sustainable DC also seeks to leverage the District’s investments in human capital and infrastructure

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with the creation of walkable places that grow our local retail and our “experience” economy so that DC continues to not only be a magnet for new residents but also empowers existing communities.

**DC’s Sustainability Framework Supports Job Growth and Thriving Neighborhoods**

The Vision for a Sustainable DC is simple:

In just one generation—20 years—the District of Columbia will be the healthiest, greenest, and most livable city in the United States. An international destination for people and investment, the District will be a model of innovative policies and practices that improve quality of life and economic opportunity. We demonstrate how enhancing our natural and built environments, investing in a diverse clean economy, and reducing disparities among residents can create an educated, equitable and prosperous society. This model has been shaped by international best practices, input from local environmental leaders and stakeholders, and hundreds of community meetings.

This vision sets out an extremely ambitious but achievable framework to become a healthier, cleaner, greener city. It was developed over several months through collaboration with thousands of residents, community leaders, private sector interests, major institutions, Mayor Gray and District Government agencies. The Vision for a Sustainable DC is an opportunity to more strategically leverage the District’s investments to revitalize neighborhoods, expand transportation choices, improve residents’ health and restore rivers and parks. These ambitious goals for our built environment, climate, energy, food, nature, transportation, waste, water, and the green economy, strengthen the District’s commitment to the core values of quality of life, economic growth, and equal access to opportunity.

The following section is composed of detailed case studies that illustrate innovative efforts the District of Columbia has already taken that have realized real economic benefits for residents, and begun to address our city’s issues of joblessness and inequity.

**DC Case Studies: Vision to Results**

**Case Study: Temporary Urbanism Initiative to Support Entrepreneurs and Fill Retail Gaps**

The DC Office of Planning’s (OP) Temporary Urbanism Initiative seeks to temporarily transform vacant spaces and sites into vibrant destinations and animated showcases with unique uses based around creative economy, retail service and urban agriculture. Locations are selected based on revitalization strategies and Small Area Plans, and focus on neighborhoods that will benefit greatly from changed perceptions, an increase in sales to existing businesses, and the attraction of new services. In 2007 creative jobs generated an impressive $5 billion in earnings in the District, an indication that creative industries are at the heart of the small business economy in the city. This initiative strives to expand that economic sector, cultivating a culture of innovation in an effort to diversify job offerings while reversing negative perceptions associated with vacant sites or spaces.

*Temporiums—pop-up retail shops*—have been highly successful initiatives under the Temporary Urbanism umbrella. The temporary retail space is aimed at local entrepreneurs, including designers,
producers and artists, to exhibit and sell their work or products. OP has or is sponsoring a total of seven Temporiums. The first Temporium, in 2010, was on H Street NE, with two more following in 2011, each held for three to four weeks and altogether attracted approximately 10,000 visitors with total sales of approximately $50,000. OP is currently sponsoring four Arts and Culture Temporiums with support of a grant from ArtPlace America. These are longer in duration, a minimum of three months for each. The first of these, LUMEN8Anacostia, held in the historic neighborhood of Anacostia, was hugely successfully—spurring neighborhood pride and interest from residents throughout the city. In addition to supporting participating artists and entrepreneurs, temporiums have boosted foot traffic and revenue for nearby businesses. The Office of Planning tracks the percentage of artists and designers who find permanent space and the percentage of property owners who find permanent tenants as a result of the Temporiums.

Case Study: Green Area Ratio (GAR) Environmental Performance Standards in Zoning Ordinance

The Green Area Ratio (GAR) is an environmental performance metric that sets requirements for development projects that meet storm water run-off, air quality and urban heat island goals. While many urban plans have nimbly shifted towards sustainable objectives, regulatory tools have been clumsy and slow to follow. Zoning regulations have often impeded developers and citizens in making sustainability-driven improvements to their projects, but the GAR turns that around in DC. Examples of green infrastructure techniques that will satisfy this new requirement include vegetated permeable pavement, green roofs, natural ground cover, native plant species, rain gardens, trees and shrubs, and vegetated walls. A GAR score will be able to be achieved from a menu of strategies, providing flexibility to developers. Enforcement of the regulation is scheduled to begin in 2013 in concert with updated storm water regulations.

The application of GAR and other federal storm-water regulations are expected to dramatically increase the use of Low Impact Development technologies – from rain gardens and green roofs to bio-swales and cisterns – on both private property and within public rights-of-way. These systems will create a demand for a spectrum of jobs, including some in entirely new technical fields, including green roof plant growers, maintenance specialists to keep these new facilities functioning, landscape services, construction workers, and engineers and designers to develop and review plans.

Case Study: Investment in Multi-Modal Transportation to Create Value and Connect People

Washington D.C. has emerged as a transit-oriented development success story based solidly on its rapidly diversifying transportation choices. Blessed with a regional commuter system—Metrorail—investment in complimentary transportation choices over the last ten years has created far greater redundancy in the entire system and improved access to underserved areas, dramatically increasing ridership and connecting people to jobs and other amenities. Improvements in the bus system, the creation of the largest bike share system in the country, the introduction of premium bus service for tourists and residents, the implementation of Zipcar and Car2Go, and greatly increased walkability through improved connections, public safety, street-related retail and improvements to public space...
are all part of this ensemble of service options. As a result, transportation has become one of the defining drivers of development in the District and an energizing component of the economy, helping to transform blighted areas into neighborhoods buzzing with culture and commerce.

In a 2010 WMATA technical report, Metrorail is credited with significantly boosting property values—adding 6.8% more value to residential, 9.4% to multi-family, and 8.9% to commercial office properties within a half-mile of a rail station. The demand for locations near Metrorail stations produces approximately $133 million (¼ mile) to $224 million (½ mile) in additional revenues from property taxes due to the premium associated with properties located near transit. This value coupled with density and affordability has caused “a culture of mobility” to flourish while reducing dependence on car ownership. The city’s array of transit options has made a lifestyle choice possible for its residents and freed up disposable income to spend on other things.

Capitol Bikeshare debuted in 2008 and is a membership, fee-based service of 1,500 short term use bicycles, located at 165 stations in Washington DC and Arlington, Virginia. It allows people to move independently and quickly for short distances without relying on Metrorail and it has contributed to a dramatic increase in overall bike ridership in lieu of car use. A recent survey reported on average each Capitol Bikeshare member saves $819 per year on personal travel cost. Individual respondents reported an average savings of $15.75 per week as a result of Bikeshare use. Across all 18,000 members of Capital Bikeshare, the savings was estimated of almost $15 million a year.

Zipcar has allowed residents to eliminate the cost of owning a vehicle from their household or business budgets. Car2Go, new to the District’s car share market, operates on a “free floating” system, meaning there are no standard return times for the vehicle. This means a member can be just about anywhere in the city -- including lower density areas off the beaten path where it may have been previously impossible to dispense with the costs associated with owning a car -- and still locate a vehicle using a phone application. Car2Go contracted with The District Government, paying one lump sum, for the freedom to park at meters throughout the city.

The DC Streetcar system is planned to have 37 miles, with 2.2 miles of tracks already laid along the H Street Corridor NE and 1.36 miles in Anacostia SE. While Metrorail connected the region, the street car will connect neighborhoods, providing access to jobs, supporting economic development, employment and population growth in areas that are currently not well served by transit.

DC is becoming a place where multiple forms of transit will be available across the city thorough the linkage of various modes of transit to walking and biking facilities and through the development of transit corridors like H Street/Benning Road NE and Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue/Good Hope Road SE in Anacostia. Within the next 15 years all residents should be within a 5-10 minute walk of transit service, bringing them within better reach of employment opportunity and essential services.

**Looking Forward**

With the release of *A Vision for a Sustainable DC* in April 2012 Mayor Gray also introduced a package of legislation, the Sustainable DC Act of 2012 that will help move the District forward on many of
the goals highlighted in the Vision. While final action on this bill is still pending, the DC Council has allocated $4.5 million dollars in capital fund for the Sustainable DC initiative in fiscal year 2013 to focus on immediate action and project feasibility testing. The Sustainable DC Act of 2012 includes seven provisions (two were already passed with FY 13 budget) that address a range of impactful issues in sustainability:

Restoring the Environment

- *Anacostia River Clean Up and Protection Fertilizer Act* – preventing fertilizer pollution in our streams and rivers
- *Sustainable Urban Agriculture Act* – promoting urban agriculture through beekeeping

Leading the Way for Green Business

- *Energy Efficiency Financing Amendment Act* – accessing private financial capital to create energy efficient buildings
- *Renewable Energy Incentive Program Amendment Act* – promoting renewable energy generation systems
- *Conservation and Protection of Natural Resources Incentive Clarification Amendment Act* – ensuring District environmental incentives are not taxed as income
- *Clean and Affordable Energy Benchmarking Amendment Act* – fully funding the ENERGY STAR building benchmarking program

Protecting our Vulnerable Populations

- *Child-occupied Facility Healthy Air Amendment Act* – protecting children from toxic exposure
- *Heating System Repair, Replacement, or Tune-up Program Amendment Act* – energy system retrofits for low-income and elderly households – Passed in FY 2013 Budget
- *Low-Income Weatherization Plus Program Amendment Act* – weatherization for low-income and elderly households – Passed in FY 2013 Budget

**Sustainable DC Becomes Reality**

Through investments in the green economy and walkable places, we can translate efficiencies into savings that can be re-invested into local communities. Initiatives as varied as creative temporiums, new zoning tools like GAR, and investments in transportation choices are already making notable in-roads to underserved communities and yielding healthier, more livable neighborhoods throughout the District. Sustainable DC legislation and related actions will take the next steps in driving toward an economy that has meaningful work at various rungs on the skill ladder. This approach to community and economic development offers one of our society’s best strategies for a prosperous and more equitable society. Some aspects cost little to implement, yet produce enormous economic, environmental, and social benefits, and have the best prospect of creating lasting solutions to our recurring employment problems.