

Rocky Mountain West Convening on Habitat III

Denver, Colorado

May 20, 2016

Attended by about 125 participants, the *Rocky Mountain West Convening on Habitat III* took place on May 20, 2016 at the University Colorado at Denver campus. A collaboration of HUD's Denver Regional Office and University of Colorado, along with other regional partners, this event brought together a diverse cadre of speakers from throughout the Rocky Mountain West whose policy practices have demonstrated successful outcomes addressing climate change, environmental challenges and the pressures of rapid population growth.

Session Highlights

- In the *Securing Housing Options for All* panel, speakers and participants examined the challenges that urban growth brings to cities in providing housing options, such as increased rental housing costs, high transportation costs, and the lack of affordability that often force families and individuals to live on the streets. Addressing these challenges begins with effective participation among all levels of government and civil society to create policies that enable people to connect to opportunities that can lead to a better quality of life.
- Panelists addressed how these challenges require us to think differently about addressing homelessness, affordable housing, and opportunities for jobs, quality schools, and places that promote activity and health. Housing is a right, and should be top priority for government leaders. Policy needs to take into consideration resident needs and must involve networks of governments, community organizations, foundations, businesses, and education institutions. Although often appearing antithetical, western cities have learned that transportation and housing are linked - this is a factor in every place around the world and examining housing and transportation issues together can be transformative and lead to more economic opportunity.
- *Economic Mobility and Social Equity* speakers defined these opportunities through neighborhood-specific lenses to analyze the importance of community participation in decision-making and planning processes to address poverty, management of local resources, economic inequality, and health. The focus was on the need to foster vibrant, people-centered communities that promote development, innovation, and cultural diversity. Speakers talked about ways to best approach economic growth, education, and health on a local level, including the different challenges facing communities on Tribal lands. The discussion included examples of both urban and rural settings where active living and healthy eating do not evolve naturally. Live Well Colorado has enabled locally driven food growing, processing and selling strategies to eradicate former "food deserts" and with investment and innovation in culturally, economically, and socially diverse environments.
- Best policy practices emphasized groups coming together to allow the community to organize and decide how they want to be helped. Ask them what they want for their community and what they want for themselves. Very often, it is necessary to solve bigger

community issues to get to specific factors that can improve individuals' and families' quality of life. Successful outcomes are to support community efforts and engage the citizenry in projects large and small, from infrastructure, housing, and education, to community agriculture and healthy living.

- Keynote Speaker Tjada D'Oyen McKenna from Habitat for Humanity International spoke about her experience and expertise in program implementation, strategy development and ways in which Habitat For Humanity is exploring innovative ways to alleviate poverty around the world. Habitat for Humanity is adjusting policy to improve the scale, quality and impact of their work around the world to better serve vulnerable urban communities, increase access to adequate and affordable shelter, and integrate efforts with other sectors. To date, 75 percent of land worldwide is not legally documented, leaving millions of people in developing countries vulnerable to eviction or displacement after a natural or man-made disaster or by gentrification. The New Urban Agenda will need to address land access and promote community-led development with sections that include development of policy environments that harness and enhance public, private and civil society participation. What is needed from here on out is accountability. If the New Urban Agenda is to live up to its full potential, it must provide detailed benchmarks and increased accountability that allow for advances in technology.
- The *Sustainable and Resilient Urban & Rural Development* panel speakers highlighted how significant social, economic, environmental, and technological factors have emerged that have left our cities and towns vulnerable to natural and man-made disasters. Panelists discussed ways communities are responding to disasters and the importance of working with neighborhoods to develop frameworks for effective planning and management that will take into account information, research, insight and analysis to build stronger, more resilient cities and economies. Panelists reinforced the importance of participatory planning for disasters which enables both urban and rural communities to resist, absorb, accommodate, and recover from the effects of a disaster in a timely and efficient manner, focusing on protecting the most vulnerable of our communities. To begin, we must understand the shocks, stresses, vulnerabilities, and risks that exist in our communities, including familiarity with the population demographics, culture, and geographic distribution. Using this community participation model, help develop process and performance standards that empower equitable, resilient, sustainable neighborhoods, districts, towns, cities for all.

Break-out Discussions

The day ended with three moderated group discussions focusing on policy and development activities. Each group emphasized the need for different approaches for different places, but many challenges in housing, transportation, equity, and sustainability are shared throughout the region and the world. In the future, we will need to focus on embracing different types of housing near transit, and making sure both housing and transportation are available, sustainable, affordable, and do not bisect communities. Change and development starts with communities; it has to come from the people. Efforts on the ground enable cities and rural towns to blend expertise – everyone is an expert at something and everyone has something to offer. We need

effective governance and effective institutions, which means building local capacity to be empowered to make good decisions.

Rocky Mountain Habitat III Executive Committee

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Rick Garcia, Regional Administrator, Region VIII, U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development

Heather Lafferty, CEO, Habitat for Humanity of Metro Denver

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Michael Lecesse, Executive Director, Urban Land Institute Colorado

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