

LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION
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Smart Growth Seeks to Change “Climate Change”

Conference meets in nation’s capital to address global warming through smart growth, and community-design links to walkable places, better health and the environment

The discussion about climate change has reached a tipping point across the country. From reducing dependence on oil to using more efficient appliances, the need to curb global warming is being discussed throughout Congress and deep into the heartland. And in a presidential year where “change” is a central theme, climate change is also emerging as an important national issue in the campaign.

In fact, the need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions has emerged as one of the new century’s top planning challenges. As of late 2007, 28 states had adopted some sort of climate-change action plan, and more than 170 local governments had joined the Cities for Climate Protection campaign.

As the New Year began, more than 750 of the nation’s mayors, representing nearly 77 million citizens, had signed the Mayor’s Climate Protection Agreement – a pledge to cut emissions by at least the amount required by the Kyoto Protocol.

No matter the scientific arguments about climate change, it is clear that the built environment impacts the natural environment. Specifically, smart growth can contribute to achieving greenhouse gas reductions.

An explosion in public awareness of climate change is driving a quest for new public policies, but the challenge for policymakers and practitioners is how to integrate climate change, smart growth and sustainability into integrated and achievable policy frameworks.

Local leaders are emerging to help address the environmental and economic challenges of climate change, and many of them will be in Washington, DC, on February 7-9, at the nation’s premier smart growth conference. There, more than 1,200 participants from across the country will attend the 7th annual “New Partners for Smart Growth” conference. These community leaders will also hear from smart-growth advocates in the House and Senate who will share their accomplishments and outline their vision for the future.

Congress has taken a leading role in addressing issues that matter to preserving the environment and creating more livable communities. Spurred by the Senate’s Smart Growth Task Force and the House Livable Communities Task Force, a legislative forum now exists for best practices and innovative solutions to be heard on interconnected topics such as climate change, energy independence, affordable housing, transportation funding, preservation of natural resources, and investment in infrastructure.

“More efficient cars and cleaner fuels are important steps to curb global warming, but ultimately the enduring success of state and federal goals depends on what we do at the local level in energy, land use and transportation planning to grow our communities more wisely,” said Judy Corbett, executive director of the Local Government Commission, which is hosting the conference.

Recent studies have revealed that the neighborhood in which we live will influence the amount we drive, and the amount of CO₂ we emit into the atmosphere. Those living in an auto-oriented development may drive more than twice as many miles a year as those living in an urban environment where it is possible to walk and take transit to their destinations.

At the conference, University of Maryland scientist Reid Ewing and Steve Winkelman, Transportation Director for the Center for Clean Air Policy, will offer the latest research linking smart growth and global warming, and offer ideas for moving forward with climate-friendly growth.

According to a new “Growing Cooler” study released by the Center for Clean Air Policy this month, meeting the increasing demand for homes located in pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods with access to transportation options could significantly reduce the growth in the number of miles Americans drive, shrinking the nation’s carbon footprint.

Americans living in compact neighborhoods where cars are not the only transportation option, drive a third fewer miles than those in typical automobile-oriented suburbs. The study also cites real estate projections that two-thirds of development expected to be on the ground in 2050 is not yet built, meaning that the potential for change is profound. Shifting 60% of new growth to compact patterns would save 85 million metric tons of CO₂ annually by 2030. Such compact development would also cut national fuel expenditures by \$24 billion in 2030 or \$250 billion on a cumulative basis.

The conference’s Friday program begins with a dialogue on “Let’s Change the Climate: State Leadership for Achieving a Better Environment” that will focus on the elements of smart growth that can contribute to reducing greenhouse gases and their environmental impacts – featuring several governors who will share their insights on their state’s policies for accomplishing these changes.

Other sessions focusing specifically on climate change include:

- “Climate Change, Public Health and Smart Growth” highlights the public health threats posed by global warming.
- “Growing Cooler: The Evidence on Urban Development and Climate Change” illustrates that meeting the growing demand for conveniently located homes in walkable neighborhoods could significantly reduce the growth in the number of miles Americans drive, shrinking the nation’s carbon footprint while giving people more housing choices.
- “Urban Forests and Local Mitigation Measures: Essential Tools in Climate Change Strategies” examines recent studies that indicate local mitigation measures, such as urban forest and stormwater management, must play a critical role in climate-change strategies.
- “Smart Growth Strategies for Addressing Greenhouse Gases: The California Story,” with a panel of top-level energy, transportation and air-resources officials, will provide an overview of what’s going on in California to achieve the State’s climate-change goals.
- “Eco-City Action Planning: Linking Smart Growth, Climate Change and Sustainability” will discuss how communities can develop a comprehensive and sustainable energy strategy.
- “Climate Change: How Local Governments Can Leverage GIS Resources While Promoting Smart Growth” will illustrate how GIS and other location-based tools can be used to help cities and residents reduce their carbon footprint. Many communities are also starting to use GIS planning tools to document the impact of climate change in their communities, and to measure as well as reduce their carbon footprint.
- “Making It Green Where You Find It: Residential Rehabs that are Green and Energy-Efficient” will highlight how practitioners from around the country are tackling the greening of existing housing so that it reduces our carbon footprint, conserves energy and promotes healthy lifestyles.
- “Low Carbon Sustainable Future” will focus on successful public-private partnerships to help create projects that match the “right shade of green” given community goals and resources.

About the conference:

The New Partners for Smart Growth conference, hosted at the Marriott Wardman Park Hotel by the Local Government Commission, spans three days, covering cutting-edge smart growth issues, the latest research, implementation tools and strategies, successful case studies, new projects and new policies. The conference will feature 300 speakers, more than 100 sessions and 14 tours of local model projects. Conference sponsors include Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Kaiser Permanente, the National Association of REALTORS®, Smart Growth Network, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. For more details about the agenda, speakers, sponsors and tours: www.newpartners.org

The Local Government Commission is a 28-year-old nonprofit membership organization of locally elected officials, city and county staff, and other interested individuals. It helps local officials address the problems facing their communities and maximize their civic, environmental and economic resources. The Ahwahnee Principles for Livable Communities, developed by the LGC in 1991, helped pave the way for the smart growth movement.

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