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UW Smart-Growth Study Offers Real-World Solutions to Urban Sprawl

Independent research examines barriers to transit-oriented growth in Washington cities, outlines time-tested practices for creating sustainable urban communities

SEATTLE (Oct. 13, 2009) --- A recently completed independent-research report provides a broad range of recommendations for cities seeking to spur sustainable growth. The report outlines several critical barriers that governmental- and private-sector leaders face as the central Puget Sound region works to implement a vision of robust urban centers connected by transit. Findings of the study can be found at the home page for the Quality Growth Alliance (qualitygrowthalliance.org) which commissioned the recently completed study from the Runstad Center in Real Estate Studies in the College of Built Environments at the University of Washington.

The report — titled *Barriers to Solutions and Best Practices: Urban Centers and Transit-Oriented Development in Washington* — offers practical solutions based on the implementation of successful local and national initiatives. “The work provides the community with a significant point of reference for inspiring best practices that have resulted in attractive, vibrant, sustainable communities. Cities that successfully tackle today’s urban challenges will be best positioned to compete for future investment by businesses and individuals,” stated Daniel Friedman, Dean of the College of Built Environments. Four broad categories of barriers emerged in the research --- Design, Land Use and Regulatory Challenges; Fiscal Barriers and Challenges; Political Challenges; and Organizational Barriers.

“We thank the Runstad Center and the College for this valuable undertaking. We believe their findings will inform the dialogue surrounding land-use and infrastructure decision-making for years to come,” said Quality Growth Alliance Chair Patrick Callahan and CEO of Urban Renaissance Group, a local commercial real estate firm.

A companion report done by the Runstad Center for the Quality Growth Alliance provides an annotated bibliography of TOD resources and preceded the recently completed report.

Land use attorney, lead author and Senior Research Fellow at the Runstad Center, Chuck Wolfe, emphasized the timeliness of the work. “These report findings come at a critical juncture — with the recent opening of Sound Transit’s new light-rail line and approval of funding to expand the transit system regionally, many key land use issues are taking shape,” Wolfe said. “The report serves as a critical resource for the development of compact, pedestrian-friendly urban communities, especially in transit station areas.”

To that end, the following “Top Ten Barriers, Challenges, Solutions, and Best Practices for Affecting Change” are offered as a precursor to a more in-depth discussion of city, town, and transit center issues:

- **Accommodate pedestrians**
- **Improve access from transit to jobs and residences**
- **Move “planning for nodes” to “planning for place making”**
- **Resolve fiscal challenges and barriers**
- **Depoliticize transit service**
- **Integrate diverse views and perspectives**
- **Enhance leadership and vision**
- **Enhance transportation demand management and related tools**
- **Implement proactive zoning and land-use regulations**
- **Acknowledge political opposition to growth and density**

The findings are no surprise to the 250 key regional leaders who attended ULI Seattle’s Reality Check workshop a year and a half ago. That visioning exercise produced broad agreement that significant growth should take place in urban centers and that these centers should become “great places to live, work, and play.” Following the exercise, the Quality Growth Alliance was formed, a partnership of eight diverse land use, transportation, environmental and climate change interests committed to providing the leadership and action to overcome barriers facing sustainable, quality growth in the Puget Sound region.

The multi-faceted alliance recognized the need for a third-party report that would engage stakeholders “in a rational discussion about how we can help residents live closer to work and amenities, reduce our reliance on automobiles, and strengthens our neighborhoods,” added Callahan.

About the Quality Growth Alliance

The Quality Growth Alliance www.qualitygrowthalliance.org is committed to building upon shared principles and fostering creative approaches not only to manage growth, but also to leverage it as a regional opportunity. Alliance members are the Urban Land Institute Seattle District Council, Puget Sound Regional Council,

University of Washington College of Built Environments, Enterprise Community Partners, Cascade Land Conservancy, Master Builders Association of King and Snohomish Counties, Futurewise, and NAIOP – Commercial Real Estate Development Association Washington State Chapter.

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