

The Sustainable Places Regional Forum for Cities and Counties

Presented by the

Capital Area Texas Sustainability Consortium

UT Thompson Conference Center

June 3, 2011

9:30 – 11 a.m.

The Sustainable Places Regional Forum for Cities and Counties, presented by the Capital Area Texas Sustainability Consortium, commenced at 9:30 am, Friday, June 3, at the UT Thompson Conference Center. About 90 representatives of local governments and other interested parties attended. Guest speakers were: Travis County Judge Samuel Biscoe; Maureen McCoy, executive director, CAMPO; Betty Voights, executive director, CAPCOG; Jim Walker, director of sustainability, UT Austin; and Round Rock Mayor Alan McGraw.

Brief summary of discussions:

Regionalism and the Sustainable Places Project grant

The ideas of regional collaboration are beginning to take root. The Sustainable Places Project is a tool to transition from talking-the-talk to walking-the-walk of regionalism. The ability to live and work close to home, services and places of higher education as well as the effective movement of freight, public transit, are all interconnected at the regional level. The growing population presents several opportunities and challenges for our region to work together.

The Capital Area Texas Sustainability (CATS) Consortium is a broad-based collaborative initiative involving stakeholders throughout the Central Texas region (Austin-Round Rock-San Marcos MSA) formed under the HUD Sustainable Communities Program to help communities undertake *integrated planning, emphasizing* a three-dimensional approach by considering where people work and live when considering future transportation infrastructure. The goal of the project is to help the communities sustain and maximize investments made in roads and transit, utilities, educational facilities, neighborhoods, and economic development initiatives which will have long term benefits for the region as a whole.

The HUD grant funding will allow the Consortium to provide direct assistance to several communities to develop integrated plans that will maintain the character and unique attributes of each community while taking into consideration mobility options, a wide range of housing choices, and future businesses that will allow more citizens to work closer to where they live. The Consortium will select these communities from the jurisdictions that host the CAMPO 2035 Plan Activity Centers – the areas of the region most likely to carry the burden of future regional growth. These Activity Center communities will serve as Demonstration Sites and will receive the services of a consulting team and an analytic tools being developed for this Project.

Activity Centers

The population in Central Texas will more than double by 2035. If we do nothing, 40 percent of our road will be congested by that time. The CAMPO 2035 Plan seeks to utilize the activity center concept, as first

articulated by Envision Central Texas, to improve the efficiency of the existing road network while expanding the regional bus system and rail. This is a major paradigm shift for our region, especially since, with few exceptions, we have no land use authority in Texas. The plan identifies 37 centers ideally situated for concentrated growth, from housing and parks to economic development. A main goal of the CAMPO 2035 Plan is to increase the percentage of the region living in a center from the current 16% to 31% by 2035. This doesn't mean everyone needs to live in an activity center, and the grant project doesn't have a goal of every city looking like an urban downtown, but several negative trends could be reversed if activity center communities were an option for more people. CAMPO Executive Director Maureen McCoy's presentation may be viewed [here](#).

Trends

The federal \$3.7 million Sustainable Communities Partnership Planning grant awarded to Central Texas is designed to assist planning activities in the 5-county region of Bastrop, Caldwell, Hays, Travis, and Williamson. Data shows that a large number of commuters travel significant distances to reach employment, and the projected growth patterns (a doubling of the population by 2035) suggests severe traffic congestion and other related problems without a paradigm shift. The Sustainable Places Project will be seeking applications in July to become a demonstration site from any of the jurisdictions identified as potential centers in the CAMPO 2035 Plan. Those who are selected will receive free planning assistance for 18 months from a team of consultants to be selected by the consortium, as well as assistance in outreach activities to ensure input from the entire community and collaboration between all the communities and the sharing of lessons learned. It is hoped that there will be at least one demonstration site selected in each of the five Central Texas counties. CAPCOG Executive Director Betty Voights' presentation may be viewed [here](#).

Analytics Tool

The grant project intends to design a comprehensive modeling tool with the help of consortium partners IBM, UT, the City of Austin, and others. The tool will be specifically designed for Central Texas and assumptions will be carefully selected to best represent the communities in the region. UT is currently gathering sustainability indicators and relating them to our region to fuel the functionality of the tool. Indicators are amalgamations of different data sets. UT is assisting IBM with methods to create useful computer applications of these indicators. The applications will be available to use from a desktop and will identify cost-effective solutions that advance local planning goals and sustainable solutions for growth. Local governments will be able to use the tool to evaluate different development options and prioritize capital improvement projects. A presentation about the Sustainable Place Analytic Tool may be viewed [here](#).

Project Implementation Timeline

July 2011	Call for applications to become a demonstration site
October 2011	Demonstration Site Selection
November 2011	Consultant Services RFP
January 2012	Demonstration Site Engagement
February 2012	Planning Consultant Team selected
November 2012	Analytics to Support Planning

Topics in the question and answer session:

- Air quality, and how different trends and growth scenarios factor into it – should be one of the indicators.
- Long-term use of the plans – we want buy-in from elected officials so that the plan has been crafted in a way that the localities can and will use in the future. Participation by the elected officials is also critical to developing an analytic tool that can be used years after the grant.
- Questions about the demonstration site selection process: The work group has met several times, and we expect to introduce the application process at the next regional forum on June 24.
- No grant money is available for demo site local government staff time during the planning phase, however, the local governments awarded a demo site will receive assistance from a team of grant-funded planning consultants, in addition to the IBM analytics tool. In addition, even cities that are not awarded a demo site will be able share in the lessons learned and have access to the analytic tool.
- Public input is encouraged on a regional scale as the tool and demo site selection processes evolve, but the most robust engagement will occur during the plan development phase. All stakeholders will be engaged at the local level, and the HUD livability principles must be integrated.
- The analytics tool will not be a panacea; it will only be as good as the data we use and how well the local governments learn it. There are always skeptics on either end of a development issue, but the model is intended to provide a more thorough assessment of development options and how sustainable they might be.

Next Steps:

The Sustainable Places Regional Forum – Application Workshop is **Friday, June 24 from 9:30 to 11 a.m.** in the Thompson Conference Center at the University of Texas at Austin. All jurisdictions interested in applying to be a demonstration site for the Sustainable Places Project should attend this meeting. Detailed instructions about how to complete your application in the most complete and compelling way will be covered. Elected officials as well as planning and other interested city and county staff are encouraged to attend. Although, the forum is free, reservations are requested. You may make reservations by registering online at www.envisioncentraltexas.org , emailing scampbell@envisioncentraltexas.org or by calling Sally Campbell at 512-916-6037.