

Regional Council of Mayors

September 8, 2014

PRESENTATIONS

Accessibility First

What is the purpose of a city? Andrew Owen of the University of Minnesota's Accessibility Observatory said there is value in people being close together, both because it makes it easier to interact and it means that more of the goods and services people need are easy to reach. "Accessibility measures the ease of reaching valued destinations," he said. "Accessibility is about opportunities: From where I am now, what can I get to?"

The Accessibility Observatory has looked at accessibility in the Twin Cities region, based on how easy it is for people to get to jobs within a set period of time, using public transit and using automobiles.

Transit and accessibility are linked, Owen said. The more jobs available within a certain range, the more likely workers are to use transit. For example: If the number of jobs within 50 minutes of a location increases by 100,000, workers are almost twice as likely to commute using transit, rather than a car. Transit can increase the number of jobs that are within that 50-minute trip, even if the actual number of jobs in the region don't change.

Accessibility is about land use and transportation, Owen said. One affects the other, and each needs to be considered when cities and regions make decisions about how to grow.

Although access to jobs is important, Owen stressed that accessibility to a variety of destinations makes for resilient communities.

When the number of jobs people can reach within 30 minutes increases by 10 percent, there is a 2.3 percent increase in home values.

There can be a conflict in what people want from where they live, Owen said. "People want to be close to more jobs, but they also want space."

The METRO Green Line between Minneapolis and Saint Paul increased accessibility to jobs—and not just along the LRT line. With the new LRT service, Metro Transit realigned and retimed bus routes that feed into the LRT stops, improving accessibility along north-south routes.

The Accessibility Observatory is looking to research, develop and apply accessibility metrics so they can be used in land use and transportation planning. Laurie McGinnis, head of the Center for Transportation Studies, University of Minnesota, said the Minnesota Department of Transportation is trying to translate the findings of the Accessibility Observatory into “language the public can understand” as it brings proposals for transportation and transit forward. The Accessibility Observatory’s work builds on MnDOT’s Access to Destinations work <http://nexus.umn.edu/projects/Access/Access-FinalReport.pdf> and is funded through MnDOT, the Metropolitan Council, Hennepin County and the McKnight Foundation.

Edina Mayor Jim Hovland said one of his concerns is “making sure the rising tide lifts all boats”: in other words, making sure that the region is creating better accessibility to jobs in the places where people need it most. Owen said it will be possible to look at who lives in an area and who is impacted by the accessibility of the area.

He also pointed out that increasing accessibility by adding transit (more bus routes, or buses that run more frequently, for example) only matters if that transit takes people to places that are valuable.

For more information see [link to PowerPoint](#).

It’s Not How Dense You Make It, It’s How You Make It Dense

Density doesn’t have to mean crowding, and it doesn’t have to mean no green space, and it doesn’t have to mean ugly buildings, said Colleen Carey of The Cornerstone Group. Yet all of those are the impressions that sometimes come to mind when the word “density” comes up.

Carey followed up on the ULI/Regional Council of Mayors Housing Summit in June, at which author Julie Campoli <http://www.juliecampoli.com> discussed—and showed—just how attractive communities with greater density can be.

But density in and of itself is not the goal, Carey said. “We’re not interested in density just for the sake of density, but because it lets us do what we want. People want to be connected; that’s the point of our communities.”

For example: community amenities, whether it’s transit or a grocery store, only make sense when there is enough density to support them.

Density is important today because the market is changing, with the proportion of Gen Y and New Americans increasing and the Boomers moving into a different stage in their lives. Those changing demographics mean changing market preferences, including smaller spaces, connected spaces and certain amenities.

The benefits of density include:

- More open space.
- Consumer savings/lower infrastructure costs.
- Social cohesion.
- Better health.
- Less driving.

A national survey found that much of what people say they value in their neighborhoods includes attributes of more compact—denser—communities, such as shorter commutes; close to shops, restaurants and offices; and public transportation. Forty-two percent of those surveyed said they plan to move within the next five years—and 62 percent of them said they prefer to settle in mixed-use communities.

But some of the examples of density gone wrong can frighten communities. People think of row after row of the same kind of houses or massive buildings, or of a giant structure swamping the homes around it. They see concrete, not green. “But density doesn’t have to look like that,” Carey said, using photos of communities of comparable density to make the point.

Design is a key element in creating dense, but attractive, communities, she said. And the design isn’t always easy, for a variety of reasons.

Block size, for example, has a lot to do with creating walkability and a sense of community. Smaller blocks mean more intersections mean more places of connection. Portland, often cited as the example of a city that does things right, has blocks that are .9 acres; a Minneapolis block is about 4 acres.

Parking is also a complication in planning for more density. Carey said developers and cities are in a kind of transition right now; transit is being developed and use of transit is increasing, but most people in the Twin Cities region feel they need a car, so projects must include adequate parking, and that takes space and forces certain design decisions. “The way of getting around is changing,” she said.

Denser communities also need to incorporate green spaces. “People don’t just want to live in density, they want access to open space and nature,” Carey said.

Creating affordable housing and increasing density are not the same thing, Carey said. Problems of affordability are not solved simply by creating greater density. In the Twin Cities, many of the new higher density places now being built are out of reach of many workers.

Mixed income housing with higher density can work, Carey said, but currently, cities and developers lack the tools they need to finance those projects. “Our capital markets are pushing what our buildings look like,” she said. Financing tends to push for either all-affordable units in a development or all market-rate, rather than some mix of the two.

What RCM can do

Carey proposed two possible actions for mayors:

- To “set the table” for development by helping educate their staff and their residents about the benefits of higher density and how projects of greater density can fit in their community.
- To push for the financial tools that can make mixed projects workable.

Stacy Becker of The MN Challenge <http://www.mnchallenge.com>, which aims to lower the cost of affordable housing, said the organization is working with a group of cities to create financial tools. For example, she said, they hope to develop the language for an ordinance that cities can use. Mayors who are interested in participating—Becker said it’s not a great time commitment—should contact her or Cathy Bennett at ULI MN.

Carey suggested a regional or state special fund that could be used to finance projects that demonstrate new ways of doing things, so they can “point the market a new way.”

Caren Dewar, ULI MN executive director, said that ULI MN/RCM is partnering with The MN Challenge to find ways to build affordable housing; the idea of a pool of money for creative projects will be discussed at the November RCM meeting.

For more information:

- [Take the density quiz.](#) See [link to PowerPoint.](#)
- Julie Campoli’s books, available online: *Made for Walking: Density and Neighborhood Form*, *Visualizing Density* and *Above and Beyond: Visualizing Change in Small Towns and Rural Areas*.
- [ULI MN/RCM \(Re\)Development-Ready Guide](#)

UPDATES

Gordon Hughes, ULI MN consultant, explained three of the xxx services offered by ULI MN:

- Navigating Your Competitive Future (previously Navigating the New Normal) ULI MN/RCM had done 31 Navigating Your Competitive Future workshops <http://minnesota.uli.org/advisory-services/navigating-the-new-normal/> with cities, as of September 9, with several more coming up. These two-hour free workshops allow city leaders and real estate professionals to better understand trends, economic forces—and each other. The workshops are funded by the Family Housing Fund and Minnesota Housing.
- Development Dialogues. These follow-up discussions for cities that have previously participated in a “Navigating” workshop can let a city dig deeper into development issues and explore the importance of collaborative approaches. The cost of these one- or two-hour sessions is \$1,000.
- Technical Advisory Panel (TAP). A TAP is available to cities that have a particular site or corridor they want to focus on. ULI MN pulls together a panel of experts, with no vested interest in the area looked at, to develop a set of recommendations for use of the site or corridor. Cities pay \$5,000 for a half-day TAP or \$15,000 for a two-day TAP.

COMING UP

The next meeting of the Regional Council of Mayors will be Monday, October 13, 11:30am–1:30pm, at Dorsey & Whitney.

ATTENDEES

The following individuals were in attendance on September 8, 2014:

Mayors

Jim Adams	City of Crystal
Jerry Faust	City of St. Anthony
Mary Giuliani Stephens	City of Woodbury
Debbie Goettel	City of Richfield
Shep Harris	City of Golden Valley
Ken Hedberg	City of Prior Lake
Kathi Hemken	City of New Hope
Betsy Hodges	City of Minneapolis
Jim Hovland	City of Edina
Marvin Johnson	City of Independence
Elizabeth Kautz	City of Burnsville
Sandra Krebsbach	City of Mendota Heights
Peter Lindstrom	City of Falcon Heights
Mike Maguire	City of Eagan
Judson Marshall	City of Mahtomedi
Sandy Martin	City of Shoreview
Lili McMillan	City of Orono
Tim McNeil	City of Dayton
Duane Poppe	City of Osseo
Terry Schneider	City of Minnetonka
Nora Slawik	City of Maplewood
Brad Tabke	City of Shakopee
Ken Willcox	City of Wayzata

Guests

Karen Barton, City of Richfield; Stacy Becker, Becker Consulting; Cecile Bedor, Greater MSP; Colleen Carey, The Cornerstone Group; Mark Casey, City of St. Anthony; Erick Garcia-Luna, City of Minneapolis; Emily Goellner, City of Golden Valley; Thad Hellman, Target; Michael Huber, Blue Cross Blue Shield; Larry Lee, City of Bloomington; Mike Logan, Comcast; Laurie McGinnis, Center for Transportation Studies, University of Minnesota; Marc Nevinski, City of Coon Rapids; Carolyn Olson, Greater Metropolitan Housing Corporation; Andrew Owen, Accessibility Observatory, University of Minnesota; Irene Quashie, Target; Schane Rudlang, City of Bloomington; Elizabeth Ryan, Family Housing Fund; Jamie Verbrugge, City of Brooklyn Park.

ULI Staff/Consultants

Caren Dewar, Aubrey Austin, Cathy Bennett, Gordon Hughes, Linda Picone.