

KID-FRIENDLY CITIES: OH THE PLACES YOU'LL GROW

March 10, 2011

Event Summary

Information and Discussion

The 2011 YLG Annual Program featured a robust dialogue centered on the question, "What makes a community great for kids and families?" Fueled by an enthusiastic panel and audience, *Kids in the City: Oh the Places You'll Grow* delved into the issues of housing, public spaces, schools, safety, diversity, land use planning, transportation and more.

The program's distinguished panel included the following regional experts:

- *Northrop Environmental School* Principal Reinaldo Aponte
- *Minnesota Safe Route to School* Network Organizer Jill Chamberlain
- *HKGi* Director of Design Jeff McMenimen
- *New Horizon Companies* Director of Business Development Jill Gilbertson
- *City of Chaska* Director of Community Development Kevin Ringwald

YLG member Brendan Slotterback kicked off the discussion by highlighting some key regional trends, including where metro-area families are moving and what factors appear to be motivating those changes. As one notable example, 88 percent of Generation Y (an age group larger than the baby boomers) has expressed a desire to live in smaller homes in a walkable, urban setting, which is a significant departure from the large lot, suburban model that was popular with parents in the past.

Led by moderator David Frank, the panelists discussed the changes they are seeing in their own sectors and communities. Jill Gilbertson noted that New Horizon child care facilities in urban centers used to cater primarily to lower-income families, but now 90% of those clients come from private paying, dual-income families. Jeff McMenimen noted that while many households are getting smaller, the population is becoming more racially and ethnically diverse, which adds complexity to the planning process.

The panel also discussed the importance of school quality and safety. Parents are looking for increased options, and many are selecting smaller schools for their children. School principal Reinaldo Aponte has seen a significant increase in parents selecting his environmental school as their first choice. However, many parents don't consider the safety of getting their kids to school when they locate to a new community. Jill Chamberlain believes there are a number of untapped opportunities to retrofit existing schools in Minnesota to improve safety, and reduce congestion and pollution.

Panelist Kevin Ringwald cited the benefits of bringing city and school staff together to work with developers to plan new schools. Such collaborations can break down regulatory barriers and bureaucracy to create communities where schools exist in harmony with adjacent development.

Other panelist recommendations for attracting and retaining families included:

- Creating a sense of community through the physical landscape
- Offering intergenerational educational opportunities ("lifelong learning")
- Identifying what parents and children *value* as a core element of the planning process
- Balancing children's safety with other uses that are vital to other age groups
- Breaking down racial and ethnic barriers in schools and community planning
- Actively engaging younger age groups in the planning process