

# ARCHITECTURE & ENGINEERING

By Terri Smith, Environmental Liability Management Inc.

## Meaningful public participation can transform a redevelopment project

Many of today's redevelopment projects are being undertaken on previously developed land in densely populated areas where the opportunity exists for impacts of the project to be felt by the citizens of the area. Impacts are often related to traffic, additional burdens on public services, and more importantly, impacts on



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the quality of life of the people who live within the area of the redevelopment effort. These impacts can be more acutely felt in existing developed areas often due to the proximity of existing housing stock, and neighborhood service related amenities. All of these are considerations that are evaluated in all development efforts.

To address these redevelopment impacts many developers are now realizing that good community involvement processes help to generate public support and provide the community the opportunity

to provide input on a vision. Good community involvement processes allow for not only opportunities for the community to be heard but also provide real time feedback on their input and comments. It is not always about getting what you want but what the community collectively wants.

It can be said that public involvement in the decisions that are made regarding communities and their future redevelopment is a great American tradition. Regular town meetings were held in town squares at the time of the birth of the

colonies to allow for the dissemination of information to the citizens as well as provide opportunities for spirited debate. Over the years public participation has been, at times, reduced to a few minutes at a zoning and/or planning board meeting or the occasional public hearing that allows comments to be heard and taken under consideration but often does not provide a opportunity for feedback. Therefore, in many communities, citizens have developed a distrust of the current processes for public participation especially as they relate to

redevelopment projects.

In the last few years the term "charrette" has been making its way into the redevelopment vernacular. What is a charrette? The National Charrette Institute defines the charrette as a "creative, intense work session with public workshops and open houses...a collaborative planning process that harnesses the talents and energies of all interested parties to create and support a feasible plan that represents transformative community change."

Charrettes provide an opportunity for all stakeholders to be heard and does not allow for one person's ideas and/or opinions to dominate. A stakeholder is anyone that is impacted by the project or who has an interest in its outcome. Who uses charrettes? Architects, communities, public and private developers; non governmental organizations, public officials, public agencies. The charrette involves all stakeholders in an open and transparent process that identifies the ideas of the participants. Moreover, the charrette process encourages participants to "think outside of the box" but that being said it is conducted within the confines of existing zoning, environmental constraints or restrictions (i.e. wetlands, flood rules, etc). In addition, the process allows for divergent opinions to be expressed. Participants can agree to disagree. Participants should respect the process and realize the compromises may need to be made to enable the redevelopment to meet the needs of everyone.

Through the use of the charrette process the community can provide vision, input, and review at key moments of the process. Charrette teams include different professionals that can provide the expertise to create plans in real time that address the comments and input received during the process.

The charrette process includes the following steps:

- Development of an initial concept
  - Public review of the concept and the opportunity to provide comments
  - Alterations made to initial concept based on feedback and comments
  - Public review of concept and the opportunity to provide
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# ARCHITECTURE & ENGINEERING

## Underscores critical role additional research must play in advancing market transformation USGBC makes \$1 million commitment to support green building research

**W**ASHINGTON, DC — The U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) will commit \$1 million to green building research. These funds will be targeted at increasing research in areas such as energy and water security; global climate change prevention; indoor environmental quality; and passive survivability in the face of natu-



*Rick Fedrizzi*

ral and man-made disasters.

“Our pledge to invest \$1 million in research is a reflection of USGBC’s commitment to its vision of a sustainable built environment within a generation,” said Rick Fedrizzi, president, CEO and founding chair of USGBC.

“The industry needs to take giant steps forward in construction, renovation and operation practices if we want to see large scale improvements to health and environmental conditions in this generation,” said Fedrizzi. “Our board has identified research as a key strategy

to accomplish that, and has set aside a pool of research dollars so we can act now, even while encouraging others to increase their own research commitments.”

“Research will help us advance the practice of building science,” said USGBC board member Vivian Loftness, of Carnegie Mellon University. “It should also track and validate as quickly as possible the profound connection between green buildings and human health and productivity. We sense this connection intuitively, and we’re beginning to have some

astonishing data about fewer absences in schools, greater productivity and fewer injuries in business, even higher sales in retail environments. The kind of research we need is that which proves the business case so profoundly that an organization’s commitment to building green becomes the easiest and best operational decision they can make.”

USGBC’s commitment comes on the heels of its recently published Green Building Research Funding: An Assessment of Current Activity in the United States, which found that re-

search related to high-performance green building practices and technologies is woefully underfunded by all sectors. Using this work as its basis, the USGBC Research Committee will publish a national green building research agenda this fall that identifies key research areas for advancing building performance and market transformation.

“Building operation consumes 40% of energy and 71% of the electricity in the U.S., and accounts for 39% of the country’s carbon dioxide emissions, which is directly influencing global climate change,” said USGBC’s vice president of research and education Peter Templeton. “Given this impact, it’s critical that the building sector makes exponential performance improvements and research, development and deployment activities a top priority.”

Templeton said that catalyzing and disseminating fundamental and applied research is part of USGBC’s leadership role in the green building community. The new research dollars are intended to be matching commitments, putting in place a mechanism that can leverage even greater funding for priority studies. ■

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additional comments

- Alterations made to concept based on feedback and comments
- Public review of concept and the opportunity to provide additional comments
- Final decision on concept (development of alternative vision or plan)

Whether you use a charrette or an open public meeting forum, it is becoming increasingly necessary to include an opportunity for the community to participate in the process of a potential redevelopment effort. This participation will assist in creating an atmosphere of trust between the participants and often times leads to a better plan and shared vision. This plan and shared vision ultimately leads to the redevelopment of a more successful, sustainable project.

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