

GVMC's 15th-Annual Growing Communities Conference



Speeches and Breakout Sessions

Rohwer and Gilmartin: Morning Keynote Speeches

Dan Gilmartin, the Executive Director of the Michigan Municipal League, said that traditional rules of thumb for attracting college graduates and young entrepreneurs to a region no longer apply: young people still care about finding work and being entertained, but they choose to live in locales with a unique sense of place and energy. He pointed to London as an example, a city with many negatives by traditional criteria but which was awarded Global City of the Year by Fast Company magazine due to its thriving creative class. Gilmartin said that the key was for a city to be able to provide “1000 nights” of entertainment to this young creative class in the form of bars, galleries, clubs, and other public events.

Milt Rohwer, President of the Frey Foundation covered the history of GVMC's Blueprint development plan. He explained that the purpose of the plan was to encourage development to be better designed, higher density, and more walkable. He gave a pictorial tour of Grand Rapids, highlighting the Blueprint plan's tangible results with a series of walkable, compelling destinations in Grand Rapids that have sprung up in the past decade.

Rohwer and Gilmartin's speeches were rated 'excellent' by 10 respondents and 'good' by 7.

Douglas Kelbaugh: Lunch Keynote Speech

Douglas Kelbaugh, outgoing Dean of Architecture and Urban Planning at the University of Michigan, gave his keynote speech, in which he reaffirmed the case for new urbanism and smart growth. Kelbaugh joked that those present who had seen him speak before would find some of it familiar, but he praised Grand Rapids for having adopted and applied smart growth planning techniques since it adopted the Blueprint plan in 1994. His presentation included images that showed the varying land footprints of different patterns of development. Kelbaugh also discussed the economic future of Detroit and the efforts of urban planning students at the University of Michigan to help Detroit revitalize itself.

Peter Allen: Successful New Urban Development

Peter Allen, a real estate developer and University of Michigan professor, discussed how Ann Arbor's development is changing with form-based zoning and new incentives like the federal LEED rating system, drawing on his own experience as a downtown developer. He discussed in-progress building projects, detailing his standard steps in taking development from idea to fruition. He also discussed the effect of the current credit crunch and changing lifestyle expectations on urban development.

Allen was rated 'excellent' by 7 respondents and 'good' by 3.

Doug Christensen: Grand Vision for Grand Traverse

Doug Christensen, Project Manager at Mead & Hunt, presented the progress that has been made in the use of scenarios in the regional planning of the Grand Traverse region, its 'Grand Vision.' Christensen discussed how funds were raised, and how scenario planning allowed the input and feedback of local stakeholders, including citizens and area students in a series of workshops. He emphasized the importance of understanding what the physical outcome of each planning scenario will be, and educating citizens on the tradeoffs of each development model.

Christensen was rated 'excellent' by 3 respondents.

Reid Ewing: Cities as Energy and Climate Solutions

Reid Ewing, a Research Professor at the National Center for Smart Growth, associate editor of the Journal of the American Planning Association, columnist for Planning magazine, and Fellow of the Urban Land Institute, talked about the science behind the consensus for the seriousness and anthropogenic nature of global warming and its implications. He discussed how important land use and development style has been in determining America's carbon footprint, and how changes in city planning and development practices will aid or abet America's attempts to meet carbon dioxide reduction goals in the future.

Ewing's presentation was rated 'excellent' by 1 respondent and 'good' by 1.

Barb Fails: Creating Entrepreneurial Towns

Barbara Fails, the Assistant Director of the MSU Product Center, talked about who entrepreneurs are and what they need to be successful. She covered the important effect entrepreneurs have on a region's economy and the variety of ways communities can encourage entrepreneurship. Fails emphasized the diversity of entrepreneurs, and the various roles they play in communities. She finished by talking about her experience with MSU Extension's Entrepreneur Club.

Fails's presentation was rated 'excellent' by 4 respondents and 'good' by 3.

Dr. George Fulton: For Whom the Town Plans

Fulton was rated 'excellent' by 6 respondents, 'good' by 4, and 'fair' by 1.

Alden Raine: Transit Oriented Development

Alden Raine, Vice President of DMJM Harris, talked about how planning development around mass transit creates a win-win for communities and developers. He showed how by using a range of tools, including form-based codes, mixed-use zoning, jurisdictional collaboration, and development incentives to create walkable, dense development along transit routes. Raine drew on examples of applied TOD from around the world, and showed how it can be applied in Grand Rapids.

Raine was rated 'excellent' by 6 respondents and 'good' by 3.