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Statement on the Occasion of the “Preserving the American Dream Conference”

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Washington, DC – Smart Growth America’s many coalition members and supporters today would like to welcome the conference organizers to the ongoing conversation about how to manage growth while improving the quality of life for Americans of all races and classes.

If the conference lives up to the tone of the questions posed on the agenda, it will be a refreshing change, indeed. For the last several years, these same professional nay-sayers have been denying the need for any new ideas about managing growth, providing transportation choices, addressing concentrated poverty, expanding housing choices, conserving important lands and protecting our air and water – much less offering their own.

Not only that, they have gone to often extreme lengths to smear the people and organizations who have been making earnest efforts to offer ideas to improve our cities and towns while continuing to accommodate economic growth. (For a recent example of this extremism, please see Wendell Cox’s essay proclaiming Nicolae Ceausescu as the father of smart growth.)

Today, their conference brochure (604kb PDF) asks some important questions (though not necessarily all that should be asked):

• How do we provide families with the opportunity for the type of home of their choice, in the area of their choosing and in the price range they can afford?
• Is there a link between land use and transportation?
• What are the most beneficial housing policies to provide the economically disadvantaged with a shot at the American Dream?

That these questions are being asked at this time, by these individuals, would seem to represent a significant victory for the smart growth movement, which has been raising these questions for quite some time. For a sampling of just some of the work being done in these areas is covered on our web site.

We must note, however, that it seems a bit presumptuous of the men behind this conference to set themselves up as defenders of ‘the’ American Dream, as if they have a special right to prescribe the one-size-fits-all dream the rest of us should live by. In this country what people want most is the freedom to follow
their own dreams - and even to change their aspirations as they progress through various stages of life.

Our coalition members believe that sprawl-as-usual is failing to provide a full range of options for families, the elderly, low-wage workers and the poor, even as it is closing off options for future generations, who deserve to inherit a sound environment, beautiful vistas and vibrant cities and towns. We strive to change that.

Working with partners in commerce and real estate ñ from local business organizations like the Silicon Valley Manufacturers Groups to the professional developers in the Urban Land Institute, to the National Association of Realtors and Fannie Mae – our coalition members are committed to finding solutions that are truly market-oriented.

In fact, it has always been mystifying that some self-described defenders of a free market have been such vociferous defenders of a status quo that is anything but that. The truth is that today’s system relies heavily on government subsidies for sprawl-style development, while over-regulation prohibits the building of walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods for which there is a clear, unmet demand.

If the organizers of today’s meeting are indeed sincere about finding solutions that expand our choices in affordable homes in a variety of convenient neighborhoods; if they really believe in giving people the freedom of mobility by means of their choosing, whether by car, bus, train, bike or walking; if they are honest about wanting a free and fair market, we welcome them to the discussion. We believe that an intellectually honest evaluation will lead them to similar conclusions, and that perhaps they will even stop raising false, ad hominem arguments in defense of a sprawl system that is an affront to their own purported values.

**Smart Growth America** is the only national organization dedicated to researching, advocating for and leading coalitions to bring smart growth practices to more communities nationwide. From providing more sidewalks to ensuring more homes are built near public transit or that productive farms remain a part of our communities, smart growth helps make sure people across the nation can live in great neighborhoods. For additional information, please visit [www.smartgrowthamerica.org](http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org).

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