

Better neighborhoods, same neighbors

The pursuit for justice is also a pursuit for prosperity. The decades-long rise in demand for living and working in walkable places—especially with good access to transit—is good news, for our health, our economy, and the fight against climate change. However, too often current residents of these neighborhoods are left behind or pushed out

When new development comes to an established neighborhood, how do we ensure that the impacts of growth—both benefits and challenges—are distributed equitably? We have to confront the very real concern that “new investment” in neglected areas doesn’t necessarily bring new opportunity, new income, or new wealth to existing residents and workers of those areas. For future growth and development decisions, how can these mistakes be avoided and instead support economic mobility, wealth-building, and shared prosperity? How can we ensure that they are beneficiaries of change?

Key discussion points



There must be a deliberate implementation strategy to develop places without displacing faces. To achieve this, equitable community engagement must be embedded in each component of the process. In many cases, it involves bringing the room to them. As Marla Bilonick said during the panel, you must “meet them where they are and when they are there.” When there is rapid change of any kind, community members are often unaware or under-informed about development—including the direct impacts on them. In order to ensure that long-time community members are able to benefit from investments in their neighborhood, they must be empowered to provide input in every step of the decision-making process. When development projects are community-driven, neighborhood revitalization has the potential to strengthen the authenticity of places by reflecting the history and values of the community, the cultural elements that are important to preserve, and the gaps that need to be filled to support their housing and economic stability.

Discussion guides



Day One: Equity Summit keynote



Day One: Land use and development



Day Two: Transportation and thriving communities



Day Three: Economic development



“It is important that we not only grow as a community, but that we become a community. That the benefits of this growth are inclusive.”

- Mayor Keith James,
West Palm Beach, Florida

What to do next



Policymakers

As communities pursue development, they should place a high priority on retaining existing residents and make a long-term commitment to protect the socioeconomic security of current and future generations. Focus on updating or eliminating policies that may have been created with fair intentions but resulted in skewed, inequitable outcomes over time.





Intentionally prevent economic and cultural displacement of those who have been historically excluded from the benefits of growth. A large portion of the increased value should be directed to targeted interventions that ensure that existing residents and businesses—particularly those most at risk—can afford to remain in their neighborhood, benefit from improvements, and provide input on how these benefits are distributed.



Centering equity in development can help counteract the harmful impacts of gentrification and socioeconomic segregation. There is a lingering misconception about urban growth suggesting that all development results in displacement. At Smart Growth America, we believe that development can be enormously beneficial for long-time residents of any community as long as it is accompanied by supportive policies that not only help prevent displacement, but also facilitate the flow of new capital to build wealth for existing community members. That is the difference between gentrification and equitable development.

Questions to ask



How can we create the kind of places that have “15-minute neighborhoods” and Complete Streets without displacing existing communities (with households of generally lower income and wealth)?



Some people feel like “this neighborhood isn’t for us anymore.” How do we make sure that when we invest in neighborhoods, that the cultural value of a place stays intact?



Capitalism has created a lot of the tension that exists today, primarily around income and racial inequality. Can you use free enterprise and capitalism and some of the unique attributes of the American economy to create social change?

What to do next



Developers

Stay bold, stand, and deliver. Encourage practitioners, planners, investors to simply be bold. Coming out of what we thought was the peak of COVID-19, we all have that heaviness of dealing with yet another mountain to climb. There is general skepticism around the private sector’s ability to generate social impact at the same time as collecting high returns on investment. Developers can support equity by walking the walk and pushing their capital into the community in scalable ways and move the community forward.

Community coalitions

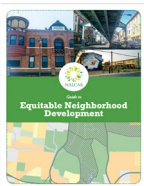
Preventing displacement takes a lot of time and effort. There’s often a mismatch between the challenge and the solution—planners have to constantly play catch up to help folks keep their homes and businesses.



“Our model is doing well by doing good, not doing well and doing good.”

- Martin Muoto, principal and co-founder of SoLa Impact

Recommended reading



[Promising Practices for Equitable Neighborhood Development by the NALCAB](#)

The National Association of Latino Community Asset Builders developed a methodology for analyzing neighborhood change to anticipate gentrification in established communities.



[Gowanus Neighborhood Plan: Racial Equity Report on Housing and Opportunity](#)

This report by Lance Freeman at Columbia University outlines the potential impacts on the Gowanus neighborhood’s racial diversity and the availability of below-market housing units.



[Zoned In: Economic Benefits & Shared Prosperity with Form-Based Codes by Smart Growth America](#)

This report compares conventional zoning codes versus form-based codes to assess whether form-based codes have a significant, positive impact on their communities’ economic performance.