



Thursday, May 04, 2006

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<http://www.sddt.com>

Source Code: 20060504tzc

The tipping point into the Green Revolution

By **Mary McLellan and Michael Stepner**

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"The mayor (public servant) who tends only to current necessities forfeits the City of Tomorrow while the mere visionary stumbles over the pot holes of the present. City chiefs must know how to balance two vital items, necessity and possibility."

-- *Jaime Lerner, former mayor of Curitiba, Brazil.*

Jaime Lerner is an architect and was appointed by the Brazilian junta as mayor of Curitiba because it believed that an architect would not "make waves." Instead, he made Curitiba one of the world's most sustainable cities and when the junta was overthrown, he was democratically elected mayor for a third term and went on to become governor of the state.

Lerner was the keynote speaker last month at a conference sponsored by the Urban Land Institute and the U.S. Green Building Conference titled "Developing Green: Sustainability Entering the Mainstream." The host city, Seattle, provided a perfect backdrop to showcase sustainable leadership at its finest and provided pertinent information regarding needs to happen in San Diego.

Lerner said, "Every problem has a co-responsibility" and that sustainability should be a true partnership between those elected to run the city and the people who choose to inhabit it. He insisted, "Every city has to find its own design for structure of growth and priority" and argued that "separating where you live from where you work leads to a disaster." Lerner's leadership is known around the world as practical and visionary, and he has been an innovator in planning for the past 35 years. He doesn't believe in experts because they only tell him why something can't possibly work. He surrounds himself with pragmatic designers and developers who have helped to build a city that was struggling in poverty to one that has one of the most efficient public transits systems in the world and is now seen as a leader in sustainability.

Another leader is Seattle Mayor Greg Nichols, who was greatly concerned when in 2005 the Kyoto Protocol took effect without the participation of the United States. Seattle is one of those experiencing first-hand the dramatic effects of global warming; for example, the snow packs of the Cascade Mountains have been reduced by 50 percent since 1950 and are projected to decline another 7 percent by 2012. Nichols challenged mayors across the country to join him in a commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to 7 percent below 1990 levels by 2012 and sign the U.S. Mayors Climate Protection agreement. To date, more than 220 mayors across the United States have signed this agreement -- San Diego has yet to sign.

Highlighting practical steps was conference chair Chris Glenn Sawyer, partner of Alston & Bird and a national leader in smart growth, green development and conservation finance issues, who kicked off the conference by stating, "Sustainability is not an esoteric issue." In the last five years, 300 million square feet of buildings have been LEED certified. Scot Horst, chair of USGBC LEED Certification Committee presented the big picture of how LEED fits into the next generation of community building. He stressed that LEED connects the land to the city and is about a relationship between the land and buildings, and people and nature. These relationships lead to strong connections, which lead to hope, love and a shared vision. This shared vision for our communities and our planet are bubbling up in all of us lately as we are evolving to a new way of "sustainably" existing in balance with the land and each other. The LEED system is a technical tool that pushes architects, engineers and building owners to rethink and create measurable standards for a system that resides symbiotically within its environment.

Bert Gregory, CEO of Mithun Architects, a leading firm in green building design, emphasized that quality of life issues are pushing developments to decrease energy and water consumption, and increase open space. The frontier for these sustainability strategies for the most part has come from private development, and our challenge now is to connect the private to the public. Gregory invites us to think of streets as open space and how to make them green; he also encourages us to make better use of them for walkability. Also, we need to think of neighborhoods as a system and be creative in how we connect them. In San Diego this would be an easy strategy to implement using our beloved canyons as the connectors.

With all these ideas and practitioners coming to the fore, the greatest barrier to implementing sustainability now is overcoming our reticence to change. We have the technology and the know-how. Investors are looking for

green projects to invest in, and leaders are stepping up to the plate around the world. Our greatest challenge, both in the United States and in San Diego, is allowing the transformation to occur. This will require sacrifice while the process morphs our economy, our cities and us from the chaos of change into the order of a new sustainable planet that provides a quality of life for the next seven generations. Write us and tell us what you, as a San Diegan, are doing to promote this change. We'll write about it in our next column. We feel a great excitement in the air, a tipping point, into a world where a forward economy incorporates ecology and social equity.

This is the Green Revolution and we know that San Diego won't want to miss this call.

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