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editor@sddt.com

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When we awoke, everything was green

By MARY LYDON AND TONY PAUKER

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Like it or not, our real estate market is taking a pause. While the lack of liquidity and fear has frozen much financial activity, it should not freeze thought and planning. When we emerge from this downturn it will be much like Snow White who awakened after 100 years to find a much changed world. No projects passing through development services these days will be immune from smart growth, sustainable and green components. Simultaneously the market is demanding it.

When we wake up from the big sleep, San Diego will largely not be a city with growth patterns familiar to those in the development and planning business over the past 30 years. It may look more like San Diego pre-1940 or downtown of the post-2000 period. That means more compact development, more walkable communities, and a mix of land uses in closer proximity to each other and public transit. This is a function of limited greenfield land as well as a shifting demographic demanding different types and forms of land use and development.

We have another new wrinkle, the "green" movement. To some this means overregulation, to others it means critical changes we must make in how we use energy, water and other resources. It does not matter where your personal beliefs are, the fact is that the younger your target audience is the more it will demand "green," and we will find many more governmental mandates for being green as well.

As we are taking a pause, it is an opportune time to evaluate what sustainable design and smart growth mean. For five years the San Diego/Tijuana Urban Land Institute (ULI) has been conducting a Smart Growth Awards program that is designed to showcase to the public at large great examples of just that. Clearly the past 12 months have not been a robust time for significant amounts of new development, but many examples of smart growth may, in fact, be older concepts. Anyone is invited to submit a nomination by simply filling out the online form at ulisd.org.

This year ULI will be partnering with the San Diego Architectural Foundation (SDAF) and the San Diego Chapter of U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC).

The SDAF will present a single award called the Community Vision Award (CVA) which comes with a \$25,000 beautification grant to the community in which the project is recognized in. The intent of the program is to encourage the construction of projects that will serve as examples for future urbanization throughout the region. Hamilton Row, a 16-unit row house project in North Park, won the first community vision award in 2008. The award is underwritten by the county government to encourage well-designed infill projects that neighborhoods support. To nominate your community for a CVA go to sdarchitecture.org.

The San Diego Chapter of the U.S. Green Building Council will be coordinating a Green Expo to showcase new and emerging green building technology at the event.

Past ULI Smart Growth Award recipients celebrated by ULI include Market Creek Plaza, a mixed income, mixed use community located in southeast San Diego. Market Creek proved that established urban neighborhoods were viable retail locations. The Sprinter line won an award for efforts to connect the Highway 78 corridor with the Coaster for efficient rail transit. The Coastal Training Program at the Tijuana River National Estuarine Research Reserve, received an award for a program that influenced decision makers by providing alternative solutions to address the environmental degradation caused from excess accumulation of sediment and erosion pollutants that flow into the Tijuana River Estuary.

In 2008 Hines' new Platinum LEED Certified office building, the La Jolla Commons in UTC was awarded a smart growth award for Hines' commitment to LEED design principals (which coincidentally reduced Common Area Maintenance costs). A more unusual award was given to the Tierra Miguel Organic Farm and Education Center in 2007 for providing an example of how organic, sustainable, cooperative farming can serve a nearby metropolis. Since then this has become the hallmark of many emerging new restaurants in San Diego. The Update to the General Plan for the city of San Diego was awarded for incorporating the City of Villages strategy. The City of Villages strategy is to focus growth into mixed-use villages that are pedestrian-friendly districts of different scales, linked to the transit system. A "village" is a place where a mix of residential, commercial, employment and civic uses are present and integrated.

The Smart Growth Awards will take place this year on May 14 at Wonderhaus located at 14th and L in downtown San Diego -- a great example of an adaptive reuse building. The event begins at 5:30 p.m. Anyone who plans on taking advantage of the real estate upswing cannot afford to sleep through this event where you'll see first-hand examples of how the future of San Diego will be built.

Lydon is executive director and Pauker is chair of Urban Land Institute San Diego/Tijuana.