

“The City and its Institutions: Working to Work Together”

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On 03 August 2007, AIA Cleveland participated in the GCREO (Greater Cleveland Real Estate Organizations) Leadership Forum Retreat at the Glidden House in University Heights. The theme of this roundtable conversation was “Sustainability and Job Creation.” The keynote speaker was Brian A. Reilly, City of Cleveland Director for Economic Development.

Director Reilly sees himself as an advocate for sustainable development in Cleveland. He spoke frankly about challenges and fiscal limitations, and the need to work together for the betterment of Cleveland. The City of Cleveland wants to help create more and higher paying jobs and they are looking toward “innovation;” eco-industrial parks and the promotion of new green products are ways they are addressing both job creation and the environment. Cleveland wants its institutions and businesses to consider current opportunities in developing market-based products that are “green.”

Sustainability however is more than just going green. As the poorest and most segregated big city in America, sustainability needs to include social equality. For example, minority workers trained in “green” construction methods offer new skills to area contractors. The City is working on this, and suggests the same from its institutional and business partners.

The urban form is efficient and it works because of its proximity, density, diversity, and its on-going innovative spirit. The City is trying to understand how businesses see these assets. Cities are places to gather—the market, figuratively and literally: innovation usually doesn’t happen in a cornfield. Businesses need labor, capital to finance growth, a market for its goods, transportation, infrastructure, allied services and expertise. Rather than throwing money at companies to come, they feel it would be more sustainable to work on improving the basic City assets to entice companies. The City cannot do it alone; they need partners in this work.

Labor: Manufacturing is still 20% of our economy. As a city, we will always make things. We are good at it. Cleveland is known internationally for its product and industrial design expertise. Cleveland needs to grow what is good, and our labor quality is good. Toward the promotion of our design and labor, there is an opportunity to create Euclid Avenue as a line of consumer product showrooms. Director Reilly would like to see American Greetings move into the City where the talent is and wants to live.

Infrastructure: The fiber optics system, particularly along Euclid Avenue, is the largest west of New York City. This system attracts banks and high-tech companies. The City is paying attention to utilities and the needs of new businesses.

Land: With our Industrial Land Banking and Brownfield clean up, Cleveland is offering new opportunities on the limited resource: land.

Services: Cleveland has national prominence in manufacturing, design, healthcare, technology, as well as financial and legal services. The City likes the Medical-mart concept tied to the convention center and sees it attracting more than just tourists; the Medical-mart offers a diverse supply chain and makes Cleveland a center for such items. They are still modeling the possibilities. Area hospitals are also attracting holistic and aging-wellness healthcare to its empty facilities.

Current State House Bill 300 allows cities to bond for municipal upgrading of buildings for energy efficiency, creating construction jobs. Elyria is already doing this. Cleveland wants developers to consider conservation over new construction costs. Regionally, it is more sustainable to build in Cleveland than to build in a greenfield, especially when you factor in the increasing of taxes to support the infrastructure for these new buildings. It seems to matter more *where* you build than *how* you build; “green” Wal-Marts do not make sense. We can create new jobs by re-using our existing downtown land with new businesses.

What message can real estate organizations take to their clients? Respect and promote the benefits and strengths of being located in Cleveland. Building up Cleveland is also good for the suburbs.

Roundtable discussion . . . GCREO challenged Director Reilly as to why Mayor Jackson chose not to attend ICSC as Mayor Campbell had—we need the Mayor to create visibility and goodwill towards national businesses. Beyond goodwill, do we have the product (ready developable land) to offer these businesses? The Mayor needs to see the opportunities being done elsewhere in the country and to understand what these developers are looking for. We need the Mayor to help sell the City as a place of possibilities. We want to attract a greater number of creative people into the City, and have them take ownership. We want the Mayor to help create Global Centers in the City—medical, polymer, port, world trade—but the City does not yet understand its ties to international business. Attract immigrants. Create marketing brochures for the City. Identify the major businesses in the world and bring their leaders to Cleveland, to have them think about what is here.

GCREO wants the City of Cleveland to transition from being a passive business loan manager into being a proactive business development manager with sector expertise. If the City needs its institutions to participate, ask. Our institutions are recruiting all over the world to bring good people to Cleveland; the City has an opportunity to work with these institutions to do this. We need the City of Cleveland to be more sophisticated and strategic, and to partner with its businesses and institutions—ask, “What do you want or need to have your business grow?” The City needs to take a leadership role in its development. Was the City too accommodating to changes in the Flats? We need to make strategic choices.

There is a discussion around the table as to why people left Cleveland. It wasn't just about jobs. Many cities are attracting people because of their beauty. Cleveland needs to pay attention to this too. For Seattle, sustainability was a means and not an end to its success. Create beauty first. Don't let our industrial rust corrode our appreciation for aesthetic beauty. Beauty, in terms of image, goes a long way to selling the benefits of a city.

We used to be known as the “forest city” but now we have the poorest urban tree situation in the country. We can correct this. Can't we recreate the urban park system through the use of the urban land bank? Developing greenscaping is a quality of life infrastructure that Cleveland is currently missing. Can the City provide tax credits for following a “greenery” plan? Participants suggested the creation of a City tree initiative, starting with requests to institutions to manage their lands toward a developed goal.

Cleveland's industrial landscape is also important. Connect with this land and its use-authenticity by keeping the artifacts of industry—do not just create more “generica”—developments that look like they could be a place anywhere in the world. Cleveland has its own aesthetic; support it.

If politics are getting in the way, we need to be more urgent and more creative in creating good things in Cleveland. Plans seem to be made but not implemented. Who can lead these projects toward fruition? If City Council cannot, then the Mayor needs to lead. The City controls the land bank and funding; it should crack the whip; it should collaborate with the Cleveland Metroparks.

Do not force developers into a box; listen to their ideas, support their good ideas. Loosen the boundaries and look at the big picture. Change Cleveland's “NO!” attitude to a “How do we make this happen?” attitude. Include the organizations of GCREO in these initiatives. Consider placing a “Cleveland Store” in other cities to recruit people and businesses to Cleveland. Help make investment in the City a predictable investment by supporting leaders and getting things done in spite of the no-sayers. Have the Cleveland Urban Design Center bring stakeholders to the table and then utilize their credentials to get things done. Do more of the “Building Cleveland by Design” foundation-funded initiatives.

Institutions are fundamental to Cleveland. Like the work of University Circle, develop a process that has institutions relate to one another. Risk adversity. Focus them on a mission. What are the common issues that we all face and what are the parts to get a strategy done? Institutions can get the City's attention. It is time that the City gets the institutions' attention. With our freshwater resource, we should bring the Freshwater Institute to Cleveland, and put it on the lakefront rather than just condominiums. Seek out institutional knowledge that already exists in the City. Create around the global interests of the City rather than the personal interests of the City. Have an "education corridor." Have a "design corridor." Create catalysts for development. Do we have a form-base code? Create a plan or plans. Outside developers need to see a plan in order to see good risk. Develop initiatives by sitting down with private and public entities. Create round table to create the mission of Cleveland's future, and then find the political will to implement it.