

Latino New Urbanism

“LNU: What does it look like and how do you build it?”

Friday, April 23, 2004

City of San Fernando, Council Chambers

Introduction:

Mayor Maribel De La Torre and City Administrator Jose Pulido of the City of San Fernando started the dialogue event on a very positive and encouraging note by providing an overview of some of the recent accomplishments within the City of San Fernando. City Administrator Pulido also emphasized the need to set aside agendas and collaborate in order to make things happen, and to stop thinking in terms of what we *cannot* do because of existing zoning codes and regulations. Mayor De La Torre emphasized the need to understand who lives in the area, to really listen to what people want, and to think outside the box. She concluded by saying that “great successes are those that had the greatest risk.”

Panel One: Emerging Markets, Building to the New Trend

Rich Lambros: Building Industry Association, Executive VP (Moderator)

Rich Lambros, Executive VP of a consortium of home builders in southern California (Business Industry Association) provided statistics to shed light on the current housing crisis—58% of the population in California owns a home, compared to the national average of 68%; in Los Angeles County, this share drops to 50.6%, with the Latino population falling in the mid-40% range. He also stated that more than of California’s demand for Latino housing is in Los Angeles County, and that we need to be creating more re-use and infill housing opportunities in order to meet our Latino homeownership goals.

Andreas Friedman, Forest City Development

Andreas Friedman of Forest City Development is a member of the Hispanic Retail Group, a group of local developers aimed at revitalizing retail in Latino communities. Mr. Friedman emphasized the need for developers and cities to be working together through joint developments, and noted that in his experience cities are too often not ready for new ideas and there needs to be stronger benefits to both sides (developers and cities). He views retail development as a key factor in revitalizing Latino communities.

Mark Alvarez, CityHome

Mark Alvarez of CityHome emphasized the need for creating public-private partnerships and noted that the appropriate question to be asking is not *whether* density should be created, but what it should look like and *how* it can be created. He suggested that we need policy changes in order to promote higher density infill urban communities.

Bea Stotzer, New Economics for Women

The goal of New Economics for Women (NEW) is to provide housing opportunities and reduce poverty among Latinas and their families. Bea emphasized that we need to move away from the “greatest cost-benefit ratio” approach to development in order to stop letting costs drive design. She noted that the only time in the U.S. when housing was built for women and children was during World War II. Recognizing this need, NEW has helped to create a number of innovative

recent projects, such as Casa Loma in Pico Union which provides on-site child care, access to social services, and housing units with 4 bedrooms and large kitchens, and Canoga Park which has recreational facilities, open space, social services, an on-site charter school and community center, and even some housing units with 5 bedrooms. Ms. Stotzer concluded that we (e.g. school districts, city agencies, NPOs) need to talk to each other and work together in order to create higher quality communities for all cultural groups.

Panel Two: What Does LNU Look Like?

Mayor Maribel De La Torre, City of San Fernando

Mayor De La Torre shared examples of how the City has incorporated many of its ideas regarding smart growth and new urbanism into its Master Plan. This includes plans for clustering development along corridors, procedures for “fast-tracking” housing development, and designs that incorporate local history and culture. The City is also working to create more walkable communities, enhanced civic pride, better transit connections (with the San Fernando Trolley), better access to recreation areas, parks and community centers, mixed-use and live/work spaces, and historically-sensitive new residential development in historic preservation areas. Each of these elements was portrayed visually. Mayor De La Torre concluded that Latino communities deserve and need to be asking for the best.

James Rojas, Latino Urban Forum

James Rojas from the Latino Urban Forum shared a number of images demonstrating the use of space in Latino communities. He shared, for instance, the important role of walking (and thus the need for safe pedestrian routes), the higher use of transit, the use of sidewalks for not just walking but also for finding work, street vendors, and bartering. Mr. Rojas encouraged the audience to explore ways that zoning regulations can accommodate and support, rather than restrict, all types of activity that are important to Latino communities. He also noted that housing cannot be developed in a vacuum—it needs to be related to the surrounding open space.

Ramon Palos Hernandez, Quatro Design Group

Ramon Palos Hernandez of the Quatro Design Group shared a number of successful development projects in Latino communities, such as the Pico Aliso Village housing and community center projects in Boyle Heights, and the Los Girasoles and Lorena Terrace affordable housing projects in East Los Angeles. He concluded by saying that the key to a successful project is asking “how do we give a project *meaning*” after it has made it through all the zoning codes and other development regulations.

Arnulfo Manriquez, MAAC Project

MAAC Project is a non-profit that provides a variety of services to communities, including housing, children’s services, and drug and alcohol rehabilitation. They recently worked on a 144-unit partnership-based housing project in San Diego (Barrio Logan). The project brought in surrounding residents and small business, and used three times the required amount of minority contractors. They are currently working on an adjacent commercial project. During the question and answer discussion, Mr. Manriquez also made the suggestion of involving the local community in construction and other efforts. He provided an example where MAAC had gang members working on construction as part of a youth development program. The project had lower rates of graffiti and vandalism, and more community ownership.