

Mayors Confront Climate Change

A California Planner's Report from the Sundance Summit

by Tad Stearn

Walking the pathway down the hill from my cabin, an early winter snow tinting the forest a crystalline white. It's morning, and the frozen air is almost as stimulating as the caffeine I am seeking. Then somewhere between the screening room and the rehearsal studio, standing over a black reflecting pool, I stop and say to myself: Wow, what a beautiful place to learn about the end of the world as we know it.

I am at Sundance, Robert Redford's tastefully understated ranch-turned-resort outside of Provo, Utah, about to begin a second full day of the Sundance Summit, a Mayors' Gathering on Climate Protection. Forty mayors from around the country have convened here to attend an invitation-only crash course in the realities of global climate change, and what to do about it at the local level within the cities they govern. The Sundance Summit, organized by ICLEI (the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives), Salt Lake City Mayor Rocky Anderson, and with the full support (and participation) of Robert Redford and his Sundance Preserve, is in its second year of what organizers and attendees are confident will be an annual gathering and working session.

California is well represented here by the mayors of San Francisco (Gavin Newsom), Galt (Darryl Clare), Moraga (Vice Mayor Lynda Deschambault), Sacramento (Heather Fargo), and West Sacramento (Christopher Cabaldon). Energized in part by Governor Schwarzenegger's recognition of the long term consequences of climate change on California's environment and economy, and recent legislation designed to shrink California's carbon shadow, the California representatives are eager to take it all in.

Hearing them speak in this relaxed setting,

it's clear they are here not just for the scenery (majestic), the food (healthy and delicious) or to rub elbows with "Bob" and other dignitaries such as former Secretary of State Madeline Albright (something you simply don't get to do every day). No, they are here because they understand that California is positioning itself as a national leader within an even larger effort to combat climate change and reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions around the globe. And they see an opportunity to be on the leading edge of that effort.

The strategies that seem to be generating the most excitement are those that result in measurable local changes within the shortest period of time. Time, after all, appears to be our largest foe in the climate change battle. As a result, alternative fuel fleet vehicles, renewable energy technology, and the construction of green municipal buildings are very attractive near-term strategies with a high "bang to buck" ratio. Citizens understand the logic of such investment at the city level, and more importantly, are beginning to demand green projects.

The immediate gratification that comes with buying a shiny new eco-tool should not be un-

derestimated and can go a long way toward generating public excitement. But we need to look at other tools in our collective toolbox, some of which are rather blunt. Although not as sexy as a new energy technology (such as San Francisco's planned tidal turbines below the Golden Gate that convert the movement of the Pacific Ocean flowing in and out of San Francisco Bay into kilowatts), we may find that it is day to day development regulations that will, slowly and with little fanfare, have the greatest long-term impact toward making our cities more sustainable. In the end, it is the policies, zoning codes, density requirements, and the resulting efficiency of land use and movement of people and goods that will serve as the yardstick for measuring a city's sustainability.

A combination of tools, shiny and blunt, will yield the best results. The mayors need to be visionary, but they also need their city planners to make the vision a reality.

As I speak to different mayors about these issues and about their towns, I am reminded that some of these basic concepts, such as energy conservation and confronting "pollution" are anything but new. We were taught these concepts in the 1970s because of a growing awareness that they were important — even critical — but perhaps they lost their traction because we didn't grasp the scope of why they were important. Now we know that these issues are not only important, but for a slew of new reasons and foreboding crises related to climate change that we could barely imagine in the 1970s.

Fortunately, a massive paradigm shift is taking place regarding climate change. One cannot pick up a newspaper or magazine without reading about the subject. The train is cresting the hill, and momentum is building with a common theme of "do something, and do it now."

I wish all the mayors from California and elsewhere good luck, and urge them good planning. The clock is ticking.

Tad Stearn is a professional land use planner from Monterey, CA and principal with PMC, a municipal consulting firm. tsteam@pacificmunicipal.com

For more information on the Sundance Summit, go to www.sundancesummit.com

