

THE CONSERVATION FUND
REAL ESTATE ROUND TABLE
Merging Development and Conservation



Lied Institute for Real Estate Studies
College of Business
Department of Finance
University of Nevada Las Vegas
And the Howard Hughes Corporation

THE CONSERVATION FUND

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THE CONSERVATION FUND REAL ESTATE ROUNDTABLE

MERGING DEVELOPMENT AND CONSERVATION

The Conservation Fund Real Estate Roundtable established through partnership between the Lied Institute for Real Estate Studies and The Conservation Fund, addressed the subject “Merging Development and Conservation.” The real estate roundtables are hosted annually, addressing current real estate issues of the day. This year’s sixth annual roundtable was sponsored by The Conservation Fund with the five prior events underwritten by The Howard Hughes Corporation.

The Conservation Fund is a national nonprofit organization based in Arlington, Virginia. The mission of The Conservation Fund is to forge partnerships with communities across the United States in order to conserve land and water, integrate economic and environmental goals, help provide sustainable development solutions and facilitate community planning and leadership training.

The Conservation Fund, which is funded in large part by private donations and grants, buys 500 acres of American land a day for conservation. Since 1985, the Fund has conserved more than 3.4 million acres across the country, including 1 million acres of working farms, forests, and ranches. With a one-percent fundraising cost, the lowest of all environmental groups in the country, and a program allocation of 96 percent, the Fund is superior in efficiency and effectiveness. It plays a lead role in building the capacity of conservation professionals and organizations to improve the way land is conserved and developed in the United States.

The Conservation Fund provides public, private, and nonprofit organizations with practical solutions for balancing environmental integrity with economic development. In 2002, the Fund was once again named the nation’s top-rated environmental nonprofit organization by the American Institute of Philanthropy. The Fund was also recognized by both Worth and Forbes magazines as one of the nation’s best charities.

The 2003 roundtable, which was concerned with issues related to merging conservation with real estate development in Clark County, was coordinated by a sub-committee of the Lied Institute Advisory Committee. The sub-committee was comprised of individuals who represent various professional and real estate organizations and companies in southern Nevada. Several months of planning and research were involved in the preparation of the roundtables, which were held on August 12th and 13th at the offices of Piercy, Bowler, Taylor and Kern. More than fifty professionals from both the public and private sectors met in four sessions to discuss this key topic.

The Lied Institute is grateful to the Conservation Fund and to the Resource sub-committee for their commitment to this endeavor.

THE CONSERVATION FUND

Lied Institute for Real Estate Studies, UNLV

The extraordinary population growth currently taking place in the Las Vegas Valley presents an ongoing challenge to the real estate development industry, local governments, environmentalists and educators. The Institute for Real Estate Studies was formed by the University of Nevada, Las Vegas College of Business in 1989 to help meet the educational and research demands generated by this unprecedented growth. The Institute was endowed in 1991 through a generous gift and challenge grant from the Ernst F. Lied Foundation Trust.

Local industry leaders have supported this innovative blend of education, research and community outreach from its inception. They solidly endorse a program devoted to area real estate studies.

Today, the Lied Institute for Real Estate Studies, as an element of the College of Business at UNLV, offers a comprehensive four-year Bachelor of Science degree in Real Estate Studies. The Institute also supports professional research, scholarships, internships, executive and continuing education, the Certified Graduate Builders Institute, the Commercial Real Estate Certification Program, the Real Estate Roundtables, and other extension activities. Through these and related projects, the Institute continues to respond to the growing needs of the southern Nevada real estate industry while maintaining a premier educational program at the University.



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I. Preface: The Issues Behind the Roundtable Discussions

Our future actions in the area of conservation and real estate development have the potential to significantly impact the quality of life throughout the Las Vegas Valley. Because both conservation and real estate development are such important issues to elected officials, the real estate industry and private citizens, the Lied Institute for Real Estate Studies at UNLV hosted a series of roundtable discussions designed to examine the issue in greater detail. Four roundtables, held over a two-day period, were sponsored by The Conservation Fund.

Participants exchanged insights and opinions on merging conservation with real estate development in the Las Vegas Valley. Much of the discussion was centered around the challenges of conservation in an area in which many individuals must be willing to work together in order to develop Clark County in ways that will be beneficial for those who are seeking profit as business people (for example, developers, the real estate industry, and architects) as well as for the large community of people who have settled here desiring a high quality of life. Topics addressed by the roundtables included, but were not limited to: the limited land capacity of the Las Vegas Valley considering the large amount of federal lands surrounding the valley, the current drought situation, air quality, transportation and roads, issues pertaining to new vs. infill development, the importance of open space to quality of life, the issues of developing a cultural identity and preserving the history of the greater Las Vegas Valley, and reeducating the business sector as well as private citizens in order to develop the standard of a sustainable community.

The Resource Committee believes, based on the success of similar sessions in the past, that the best

product results from the participation of a diverse group of individuals who represent a broad spectrum of the real estate community and its related entities. This report attempts to capture the essence of the group's thought processes, as well as individual, and occasionally opposing viewpoints of the developers, architects, real estate professionals, local government representatives, federal officials, and the other interested parties who participated in the discussions.

The goal of this report is to provide a resource that presents the varied positions of the participants in a fair and unbiased manner. No individual panelist, therefore, would be likely to agree with all the statements which follow. Some of the opinions presented may be based on perceptions that may or may not be supported by empirical evidence; to maintain the integrity of the process and to present as accurate an account of the roundtable as possible, all statements and opinions are left largely intact. Hopefully, the inclusion of such statements will serve to reveal new opportunities for increased communication and information sharing.

While the singular blend of personalities made each of the roundtable discussions unique, participation was always open and enthusiastic. There was universal agreement that the roundtables were a valuable experience well worth the time and effort invested by those who attended, and furthermore, a general consensus that the idea of merging conservation with real estate development is an essential goal for the future health of the community of Clark County. Participants readily acknowledged the benefits of a project that draws professionals from both the private and public sectors to participate in discussing a topic that has such significant implications for the community as a whole.

II. Overview:

Merging Conservation and Real Estate Development

Ed McMahon, Vice President of The Conservation Fund, opened each of the four roundtables with a presentation on conservation and real estate trends in America. He stated that even though in most places in the United States, the economy is slow, consumption and fragmentation of open land have accelerated. This is because communities have been building on larger and larger lots and using more land for retail space. At the same time, communities are also beginning to put a premium on preserving open space with the goal of better development and smarter conservation.

According to McMahon, the problem is not development per se, but rather the patterns of development:

- Where do you put development?
- How do you arrange development? and
- What does new development look like?

The first principle of better development is deciding where development should NOT take place. Some areas, for example, steep slopes and flood plains, are not environmentally appropriate for new development. According to McMahon, smart conservation includes not only long-range transportation plans, economic development plans and land use plans, but also long-range conservation plans. Planning for conservation tends to reduce opposition to development. This is because long-range conservation plans provide predictability and certainty to everyone: developers, environmentalists and local government.

The goal for everyone should be sustainable development. This is development that produces a vigorous economy, a healthy environment and



Walking is the most popular form of outdoor recreation in America.

a vibrant community. Conservation and development are not incompatible. In fact, the two can be mutually supportive. McMahon provided numerous examples, including residential street standards — he said that reducing the width of streets in residential neighborhoods can be good for business, good for the environment and good for the community. This is because less pavement means more affordable housing. It also means less soil erosion, less stormwater runoff, less non-point source pollution, and it means that the streets are safer for children. Another example would be a trails system connecting the various communities of Las Vegas. Walking is the most popular form of outdoor recreation in America, but trails have other benefits as

well. For example, when trails are available, traffic fatalities are reduced (an issue of particular importance to Las Vegas), air quality improves, and citizens can enjoy greater levels of physical fitness and more opportunities for outdoor recreation.

Building “greener” neighborhoods in general enhances quality of life and economic vitality for a community. Houses with trees and landscaping sell for more (boosting the profit for builders and developers). Trees also help drive down utility bills, and are good for the environment. Parks, natural areas and protected open spaces (areas in which people can walk and participate in other recreational activities) are not just an amenity, they are an economic asset. Surveys show that they are a highly desirable feature in new home communities, more desirable to homeowners than golf courses and cheaper to build and maintain. In fact, studies show that the surrounding environment is the single most important factor affecting the market value of a home. A mountain vista, or proximity to water or green space affects the price of a house more than the size of the house, the number of rooms or the presence of amenities such as a swimming pool. Development is about more than numbers. It is about building houses that make the most of

a site’s natural beauty and resources, thereby increasing marketability as well as enhancing the environment.

On the topic of commercial development, McMahon encouraged more mixed use and town center development, which he said are more profitable than strip development and affect the environment in positive ways. Consumers want to shop in places that have a sense of place, and many people, particularly young people, empty nesters and retirees, want to live in mixed use neighborhoods where they can walk, bicycle or use public transportation, rather than having to drive everywhere for everything. McMahon cited Davis, California, a city whose school district does not use any buses because every child can walk or bike to school on an extensive network of bike paths and trails. He also noted that 20% of the commuting population in Davis use bicycles, which reduces air pollution and fuel consumption and lowers transportation costs (thereby allowing residents to spend more on housing). Mixed use developments, which are generally more compact, provide communities with more choices, including the options of walking and biking, as well as reducing sprawl.

He concluded by urging more collaboration between developers, environmentalists and local government leaders. To effectively merge conservation with real estate development, real estate professionals, private citizens, and professional planners should consider the place-making dividends of development that reflects a greater concern for the environment.



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III. Terms/Concept: Merging Conservation and Development

The participants in the roundtable discussions seemed in agreement about the necessity of merging conservation and development. “Things don’t need to pull against each other,” stated one participant. “Conservation means balance, harmony and sustainability. Conservation and development should reflect the values of a community.”



“Conservation means balance, harmony and sustainability. Conservation and development should reflect the values of a community.”

Conservation, as defined by the roundtable discussion participants, means using resources efficiently—using as little as possible of available resources and wasting nothing. “Development can coexist with nature,” suggested one participant. When the question, “what are we trying to conserve?” was posed, participants pointed to three major areas: natural resources (water, clean air, endangered species, and scenic views); social aspects (good quality of life, history and historical places, and image); and economic interests (opportunity,

business, affordable housing). To most, conservation seemed to mean enhancing and sustaining all of the above, including energy resources. To others, the term “conservation” seemed too big a concept to be dealt with in one discussion and suggested that it needed to be broken down into smaller elements, each which could be dealt with separately.

Participants also agreed that development is going to continue as long as people continue to move to Las Vegas, which right now is occurring at the rate of approximately 5,000 new residents a month. They also agreed that the consequences of development are more important than the rate of development and population growth. According to the dictionary, “development” has a positive connotation: to realize the potentialities of, to aid in the growth of, to make more available or effective. “Qualitative development is what we would like to see,” said one participant.

Some participants mentioned the idea of “selective development.” Sustained population growth is not necessarily ideal if it does not help Las Vegas grow in the areas that would improve the quality of life. “We should diversify to bring in opportunities (businesses) that create jobs that pay more, technical and professional jobs,” said one participant.

One aspect that concerns conservation and development in Las Vegas is the desert terrain that makes up a great deal of the landscape. In some areas of the United States, conservation

may mean preserving the raw land as it is. In the Las Vegas Valley, however, it was noted that in some areas, a landscape worth preserving must be created. “A vast portion of the land is flat and beauty must be shaped,” stated a participant. Others commented that the desert landscape itself is something that the community needs to learn to appreciate. Washes, in particular, were mentioned. “When left natural, with small green areas (such as in Pueblo Park), washes provide natural drainage, and are amenities,” a participant noted. “The government should initiate this sort of preservation.”

“Land development and gaming are the two major industries in Las Vegas,” one participant commented. Development will continue to be a major source of revenue for many community members and a necessary function of this growing city. Combined with smart conservation, the two forces can feed each other’s strengths and help bring about a high quality of life in Las Vegas.



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IV. Why: Benefits and Necessities

The major reasons conservation and real estate development need to merge in the Las Vegas Valley are as follows: limited land availability, drought, worsening air quality, and transportation problems, resulting from the lack of efficient public transportation and overwhelming usage of cars. Soil conditions are yet another problem.

A. Limited Land Capacity

Most of the hillside surrounding the Las Vegas Valley is federally owned. The population of southern Nevada is enclosed by boundaries that are not likely to change, so residents need to learn to live with what they have and use their land resources efficiently. One participant stated that residents of Clark County have approximately seven to ten years of time in which undeveloped land will be available for use and new development, and after that, the only choice would be to develop in nearby valleys. The lack of available land is reflected in rapidly rising costs: in 2000, raw land, with no infrastructure, cost approximately \$25,000 per acre. It has now increased to ten times that amount—\$ 250,000 per acre, reflecting its value as a commodity which is rare and

rapidly diminishing.

Some participants stated that the seven million acres of federal land that surround the Las Vegas Valley provide residents with an opportunity for recreation that is unparalleled in other areas of the country, but stated that a comprehensive strategy or plan is needed for the entire area in order to utilize it efficiently.

B. Drought

According to the Las Vegas Valley Water District website, “drought occurs when existing water supplies cannot meet water demands for a period of time. It is a natural occurrence caused by a complex variety of environmental factors, but communities can induce or aggravate drought conditions through high water consumption and inefficient usage. Southern Nevada is experiencing the worst drought in the region’s recorded history. Lake Mead is now about three trillion gallons lower than normal. It would take years of above-average snowfall in the Rockies to bring the lake level back to non-drought levels.”



Nevada is experiencing the worst drought in the region’s recorded history.

To maintain the quality of life residents are accustomed to in Las Vegas, water must be used more efficiently. One participant stated that Las Vegas is not anywhere near the levels it needs to be with water conservation and that Clark County needs to plan around worst case scenarios so that Las Vegas doesn't become a ghost town because of lack of water. Other participants noted that water prices will continue to go up in accordance with the diminishing supply and that higher water bills are probably the sort of disincentive that is required to force residents to use less water and use it more efficiently. Another participant mentioned that developers and builders should be required to use plants and trees that can flourish in dry conditions as part of their landscaping designs in order to save water, but noted that this conservation technique is difficult to regulate.

C. Air quality and Transportation

The rapid growth of the population of Las Vegas has led to the creation of new and complex problems in the air quality caused mainly by exhaust from vehicles and dust from the many construction sites. Air quality monitoring and compliance, atmospheric haze, and visibility have become serious issues.

According to an article by Launce Rake in the Las Vegas Sun (30 January 2003), "in the last decade, Nevada was one of the worst states in the nation in spending federal dollars for air quality... Nevada spent only about 58 percent of federal 'congestion mitigation and air quality' funds available between 1992 and 2001—the second-worst rate nationally. That left more than \$32 million unspent." The article goes on to suggest that this indicates that Nevada can do a better job of spending on alternative transportation and mass transit to clean up the air.

The participants agreed that air quality is a complex issue. Residents of Las Vegas must use their cars less in order to improve air quality, but, as one participant noted, "It's not safe for kids to walk to school here." The Sun article corroborates this view: "Nevada was eighth-worst in the nation in 2000 and 2001 for pedestrian and bicyclist fatalities, with an average of 2.45 deaths per 100,000 residents."

Furthermore, a participant stated, "Most places have a single core business district. We have multiple business districts. We need major mass transportation to link all the different communities." More efficient mass transit, such as a light rail system, would help improve air quality by decreasing the number of cars on the road. A citywide trails system, as well as safer roads, also would encourage residents to walk or bicycle, again reducing the number of vehicles being driven.

D. Soil Conditions

Building construction in Las Vegas disturbs many acres of soil. Historically, in southern Nevada, land has been considered a commodity rather than as a limited resource. The use of smaller lots, mixed use developments, town centers and two story department stores could all have an effect on maintaining and preserving the land.

There seemed to be a consensus among participants that changes occurring within the Las Vegas Valley are creating a series of cascading environmental effects that ultimately affect everyone. The alternatives to sprawl (such as mixed use development, narrower streets, and a trails system) are more attractive, more efficient, more environmentally sensitive and more profitable than strip malls, wide streets and exclusive use of cars for transportation.

V. How: Principles and Guidelines

One participant stated that real estate development (and the merging of development with conservation) in the Las Vegas Valley is not, in general, well-planned. Others seemed to be in agreement, suggesting the need for a valley-wide open space plan, a regional trails plan that would connect communities, and a plan to develop wash areas in ways that keep them as natural as possible. Putting trail systems near wash areas seemed desirable to several participants. Comments were also made about the value of the federally protected land surrounding Las Vegas and the necessity to make and keep firm boundaries, while utilizing this area to attract tourists and for other recreational purposes. One participant noted that Las Vegas is currently known outside Nevada only for the entertainment provided by the Strip and several felt that while many people relocate to Las Vegas in order to take advantage of working in casinos, it would be worthwhile considering efforts to publicize the spectacular, world-class scenery that surrounds the Las Vegas Valley.

Besides stating the above opinions, questions were raised by participants several times throughout the discussions about how conservation should be merged with real estate development. One area of particular concern seemed to be in the area of governmental regulations vs. incentives. “How far do we go with interfering with private decision-making?” asked one participant. “We could regulate things more, but in a way, that goes against Las Vegas’s pro-business approach.” “Las Vegas has a market-driven economy,” another stated. “Who

is responsible for drawing the line concerning the development of raw land and the building of new homes when the market won’t provide for it?” Another participant stated, “traditionally, drawing the lines is the political or governmental obligation.” Another participant went on to say that developers don’t need any regulations, but most seemed to disagree with this statement.

The best solution, one participant said, is to make it easy to get what we really want by making smart and flexible regulations. Simplify the process of approval for environmentally-sensitive projects. Others seemed to agree with this. “Sometimes standards that are too high can stop a project all together,” stated one participant. “Businesses will take their development to another city, or another part of the city, if the standards are too high.”

Most seemed to agree that convincing the county to buy into creative developing is difficult. Others stated that the bureaucracy of Public Works also slows down conservation-smart development because of requirements which at times seem inapplicable to a particular project. “Conflicting requirements from many different departments, which cost money, make changes more difficult,” stated another participant. Also mentioned in roundtable discussions was the conflict with the fire department over the issue of narrower roads. The fire department wants roads wide enough to accommodate large trucks, but several participants suggested that the logical and more resource-efficient plan

would be to invest in smaller trucks. Statistics were cited to emphasize the fact that there are far fewer fire fatalities than traffic fatalities—and narrower roads tends to result in slower driving, which in turn, helps reduce fatalities. Therefore, narrow roads and smaller fire trucks would be the wisest choice, in order to handle fires as well as decrease the number of traffic accidents and fatalities.

One participant stated that just improving regulations to support the merging of conservation and development is not enough. “People need incentives or consequences or else they won’t make changes. Just information and education won’t do the job.”



Narrow roads and smaller fire trucks would be the wisest choice, in order to handle fires as well as decrease the number of traffic accidents and fatalities.

VI. Issues and Challenges: Who Pays, Profitability and Affordability

❖ The developers' first concern is 'can we make money?' one participant stated. The government could give grants and credits as incentives for building projects that merge conservation with development, but the solution is ultimately more complex than that. "Twenty percent of developers are lazy," stated a participant. "They'd rather just do what they've done in the past than make changes." "And, the market isn't calling for it. It's hard to change when people are buying the houses developers are building right now," said another. It's difficult to enact change when the strategies developers are currently using are bringing them financial success.

Another difficulty stated by one participant was that at the present time, people don't want two-story houses, even if they do make sense, environmentally. Many homeowners seem to want everything flat, which translates into land-wasting single story homes. Attitudes on the part of the developers and the consumers must change, but that takes time, and many developers don't have the interest and don't want to take the time (and neither do many consumers). Sometimes building "green," and learning to use alternative energy sources costs more at the outset, so many developers aren't interested in it, even though the costs are paid back in the long haul, to the consumer, the environment and the community as a whole.

Another challenge is that there isn't a lot of trust between lenders and developers and between buyers and their neighbors. "Everyone is fighting for themselves," stated one participant.

Land in southern Nevada is divided up so that there are many different property owners and it is therefore difficult to convince a large number of people to agree on how to do things. Independence is partly what characterizes the people in the Las Vegas Valley. "Everyone wants to own his or her own car and house," said another participant. "It's the American Dream."

Furthermore, landlords don't want to take the risk of renting to tenants who haven't proven themselves, and lenders don't want to take the risk of providing funds for untested projects. "Traditional lenders don't want to fund mixed use developments right now," commented one participant.

What is needed is strong political will and courageous lenders and developers who are willing to try something different. Developers must be shown that they can make more money with projects that create a sustainable community than with projects that do not take the environment and health of its citizens into consideration.



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VII. How Do We Know When We've Arrived?

A number of participants felt that the Las Vegas community is already doing many things well:

- Summerlin, one of the largest master-planned communities in the United States, is known for its sensitivity to the environment.
 - Leaders in the Las Vegas community bring together forums to discuss problems and issues and try to keep ahead of crisis situations.
 - Clark County has many biking and walking trails already in place and have the funds for more.
 - A town center project at Green Valley Ranch is about to be completed and others are planned for Centennial Hills and Summerlin.
 - The density of the area is quite reasonable compared to other sprawling communities.
 - Las Vegas has prevented development in Red Rock Canyon, and in Henderson, has created and enforced the Hillside Protection Ordinance.
 - Henderson has achieved a sense of place as a historic, World War II community.
 - In Las Vegas, the historic neighborhood on Alta Drive has been preserved and renovated.
- Nearby Boulder City contains many desirable elements (mixed use, town center, sense of history and place) and shows potential for developing into a profitable community.

Most participants agreed, however, that regardless of these steps that have already been taken, Las Vegas is greatly in need of further improvement in the area of merging conservation and land development. One issue that came up repeatedly in the roundtables was identity. Las Vegas was described by participants as a “can do” community, capable of fulfilling the visions its residents create for it, but also as “a city in search of its soul.”



The Las Vegas community is already doing many things well.

Las Vegas has been too driven by individuals, suggested some. “What are we going to be as a community?” was a question asked by participants several times during the discussions.

The next generation is demanding a sense of place, and the participants seemed to feel that Clark County residents would like to recreate the image of this area as more than just a vehicle that supports gaming and the Strip. The idea of emphasizing the beauty of the desert landscape (particularly Red Rock and The Valley of Fire) was suggested, but this answer did not seem wholly satisfactory.

Along with multiple business districts in the Las Vegas Valley are residents who come from all over the United States and various parts of the world. Furthermore, the Strip is a conglomeration of entertainment centers which imitate and showcase other geographic areas and their history and culture, and many of the residents here seem to want to “pretend they’re somewhere else,” rather than celebrating the desert heritage or working to create a unique identity for this city (apart from the Strip.) “We need to quit trying to make it look like Virginia here,” said one participant. “But it takes a change in what we think of as being beautiful.” The beauty of the Western landscape is in its large vistas, feeling of space, and wide sky, participants agreed. “The challenge is to enhance what we have and create value in our own communities of distinction,” said another participant.

A sense of history was mentioned as being a necessary component of Las Vegas’s still-forming identity. Although Las Vegas is a young city (not quite 100 years old), it has not done well at preserving historic neighborhoods and buildings; it has, in fact, almost taken pride in its ever-changing state, its ability to recreate itself every five years. “Our big farmlands have been turned into golf courses and Gilcrest Ranch

is being developed around it,” noted one participant. Farmland embodies the value of land as well as history, and history and a sense of place are intimately related. The residents of Clark County need to continue to work to preserve its land and its history for the generations to come and for the present community. Las Vegas began as a speculative place; now it needs to develop solid roots.

A more vibrant and well-developed downtown would also add positively to the city’s identity. Some see downtown redevelopment as key to merging conservation and real estate development. “We don’t have a sense of city,” a participant commented. A walkable, mixed use downtown area which is attractive and safe would appeal to the senior population as well as to many other residents. Main Street in particular needs to be developed. One participant mentioned that other communities have turned their downtowns around in small increments, but other participants felt that in Las Vegas, big things have to happen in order to be noticed. “We need a paradigm shift,” said another participant, “to make these things happen.”



“The challenge is to enhance what we have and create value in our own communities of distinction.”

VIII. What Information/Actions Would Help Move Us In the Right Direction?

Las Vegas is a dynamic city that provides amazing economic opportunities, commented one participant. When the leaders of the community start endorsing the merging of conservation with real estate development, the rest of the community will follow. Some suggested that what the Las Vegas Valley needs most is a plan—and tools to implement the plan over a long period of time. Another participant commented that Las Vegas already has the tools, but that the elected officials have chosen not to use them.



What the Las Vegas Valley needs most is a plan—and tools to implement the plan over a long period of time.

“What we don’t want is to be like southern California,” noted one participant. Many builders and planners come to southern Nevada because of the current demand for new housing and some seem to be trying to recreate California. However, among participants, there seemed a consensus that this is undesirable. “I’ve lived in the People’s Republic of California,” quipped on participant. “We don’t want to regulate developers that much.”

“This city is still in its nascency stage and we all have a chance to influence its trajectory,” said a participant. Ideas that participants suggested to help merge conservation and real estate development include the following:

Land Use

- Redevelop existing (non-planned) urban areas. Focus on these instead of usurping undeveloped land.
- Work on narrowing street widths, since costs for everyone involved go up corresponding to the width.
- Say no to bad development and it will have to be replaced with good development.
- Build fewer (or no) strip malls and more town centers. People shop at strip malls because there’s nowhere else to go.
- Build two-story department stores; they use half as much land and look more attractive.

- Reject sprawl or the boundaries will continue to be pushed back.
- Follow Henderson’s example; redevelopment started there with multi-family housing.
- Reduce transportation costs so more can be spent on housing.
- Provide zoning incentives to help provide affordable housing, including state and local tax incentives.

Transportation/Trails

- Create more pedestrian-oriented communities.
- Make roads safer for pedestrians and bicyclists.
- Create a master plan for trails that connect the different communities of the Las Vegas Valley.
- Provide viable transportation choices that connect communities, including a light rail system, so that the number of cars on the road can be reduced. This would reduce the number of cars that need to park, as well, and help improve air quality.
- Make a regional plan for all the trails, open spaces, and transportation corridors.
- Carpool.
- Streets are too hard to cross. Pedestrian-friendly areas need to be developed.
- Create a walkable downtown.
- Community vision is needed. The argument must be presented to the taxpayer that in the long run, it is cheaper (and more profitable for everyone) to build sustainable communities.
- All parts of the Las Vegas Valley need to be involved in the plan to make it work.
- Clark County needs specific plans—right now, the goals are too generic.
- Plan and put into effect more efficient and alternative uses of energy.

Need for Public/Private Alliances and Regulations

- The public and private business owners all need more understanding of economic factors and how decisions get made.
- It’s too easy to change Clark County’s master plan. More enforcement of zoning is needed.
- Two types of development standards are needed—some that won’t budge and some that are more flexible, to encourage environmentally-sensitive projects.
- There is no silver bullet. The situation cannot be controlled just by government interference or incentives. It will take a lot of smaller changes to make things happen.
- Private/public partnerships are needed.

Incentives and Vision/Plans

- Better conservation incentives should be implemented. The ones in place now are weak or flawed.
- Make a list of the county’s assets and work around that to create a shared vision for our community, then use education and incentives to encourage people to do it.
- Make building code changes so that it is easier to add accessory units.

Leadership

- Smart Growth Alliance—if the public can see a group of people supporting the issue of merging conservation with development, that would help convince them to back the plan as well.
- Once someone takes risk, and others see that it's working, more landlords, lenders and developers will join in.
- Leadership from courageous politicians, lenders and developers is a necessity.

Education

- Children should go to the desert and experience it for themselves. Education is key to helping preserve our land and history.
- Appreciation of the desert beauty should be included in school curriculums and agendas.
- Children need to learn at a young age to protect what we have here in southern Nevada.
- Smaller school districts and smaller neighborhood schools to which children can walk would enhance the quality of life in the Las Vegas Valley.

Change needs to occur in the private and public sector. The leaders of Las Vegas need to continue to initiate forums and then provide ongoing communication and education. The community needs an integrated system; change will not occur by choosing just one area to examine. Transportation, open space, quality of life—all these areas are important. Do individual, easiest tasks first. Create small pods of success and these will lead to bigger successes. Get people living and working closer together to create synergy.

A sense of place is vital. One participant quoted Wallace Stegner as saying, “If you don’t know where you are, you don’t know who you are.” If the Las Vegas community keeps doing things the same way they’ve always done, things will always be the same. However, commented one participant, “Las Vegas is home to some of the smartest and most creative people in the United States. We can get things going in the right direction.” “This community tries hard to get things done,” said one participant. “Las Vegas is a unique environment. There’s nothing else like it in the world.”



“Las Vegas is a unique environment. There’s nothing else like it in the world.”

Credits

The Conservation Fund Real Estate Roundtable

Balancing Conservation and Development

**Held August 12 and 13, 2003
At Piercy Bowler Taylor & Kern**

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Michael Ford, Great Basin Director

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Bret Birdsong, UNLV School of Law

Jennifer Sandoval, UNLV School of Law

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Bruce Tripp, KB Home

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