

SMART GROWTH GRANT

Haywood REALTORS® Supports Smart Growth and Affordable Housing in Waynesville, NC

NOVEMBER 5, 2018

In some respects, the western North Carolina Town of Waynesville doesn't have much choice but to embrace Smart Growth: bounded by the Great Smoky and Blue Ridge Mountains, as well as a flood plain, sprawl isn't necessarily an option. Still, as it updates the regulatory twenty-year Comprehensive Land Use Plan that serves as its critical 'road map' for future land use and zoning decisions, Waynesville needed as much public input as possible as it tackles issues from insufficient affordable housing to the contemporary appeal of living close to the business core. With a REALTOR® Party Smart Growth Action Grant, the Haywood REALTOR® Association sponsored a Visioning Workshop on a weekday afternoon in June, to gather ideas and opinions from local stakeholders.

Lisa Brown, Association Executive of the 280-member board, says that when her Government Affairs Co-Chair, Ellen Sither, approached her with the idea of using a REALTOR® Party grant to fund the event, "My first thought was 'Yay!' And then, as a staff of one, I thought, 'Oh Lord. How am I going to do this?' It was our first major grant application, and had I known it would be as easy as it was, we would have started long ago!" She gives credit for the heavy lifting to Sither and Elizabeth Teague, the Town of Waynesville Development Services Director, who put together the application; they, in turn, note that the team at the National Association of REALTORS® was helpful and responsive every step of the way.

The Visioning Workshop, which was held in the town's Recreation Center, met a critical need for the planning process, says Teague. "With our consultants, we had accomplished a lot of technical work, but what was missing was public input. And while the town has a reasonable budget, we certainly couldn't have held such an event without the REALTORS®. They provided food, and marketing, and worked side-by-side with the professional consultants. It was wonderful!" The event drew just shy of 400 participants, and generated valuable responses and ideas for the steering committee. Through the workshops, local support was affirmed for exploring redevelopment opportunities for older properties, for smaller area planning, and for maximizing density through infill; it was also made abundantly clear that Waynesville residents don't want development to spread up their beloved mountainsides. Over the course of the day, notes Sither about 25 REALTORS® donated their time to the event, participating in a morning training session, then helping to bring in lunch for the team, and working in sessions with members of the public from 3-7pm. "For some, it meant closing a one-person office for the day. It was a lot to give!"

Although the Visioning Workshop was deliberately planned to coincide with pick-up time from the Recreation Center day camp, it didn't attract as many young people as the planners had hoped. "We had more higher-income retirees than younger residents providing input," remarks Sither, "but still, every bit was useful as we considered the big

picture.” Brown and Teague are also members of the Haywood County Affordable Housing Council, which focuses on making it possible for younger generations to return to live in the rural community. “This is a key issue for the well-being of the town,” says Brown, “and it dovetails neatly with the visioning process for the Comprehensive Plan. So, while the younger folks may not have been directly represented – and, of course, they’re busy! – there were others of us advocating for the housing needs of their generation and beyond.”

Teague expresses the town’s great appreciation for the leadership of the REALTORS®, not just in sponsoring the Visioning Workshop, but in volunteering their time and expertise to the Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee, and in communicating the town’s efforts to a larger audience. “We’ve created a truly productive partnership, which is not always the case between towns and the real estate industry. As we go forward, we know it’s critical for the REALTORS® to be our partners in Smart Growth planning: together, we can protect the town and create growth.”

To learn more about how the REALTORS® of Haywood County, North Carolina, are helping the Town of Waynesville plan for future land use and zoning decisions with an eye to Smart Growth and affordable housing, contact [Lisa M. Brown](#), Association Executive, at 828-452-5096; Government Affairs Co-Chair Ellen Sither, at 828-452-5809; or Elizabeth Teague, Development Services Director for the Town of Waynesville, at 828-476-9645.

SMART GROWTH AND HOUSING OPPORTUNITY GRANTS Is Smart Growth the Key to Preserving Montana's 'Big Sky?' Gallatin REALTORS® Funds Study to Find Answers.

September 2018

In a land known as 'Big Sky,' it should come as no surprise that there's a certain cultural resistance to development density. Yet in Gallatin County, Montana, which has been topping best-places-to-live and best-places-to-retire lists in recent years, tremendous growth is forcing a closer look at the best ways to accommodate the burgeoning population. A Smart Growth Action Grant recently funded a comparative analysis study that will inform the ongoing development debates by clearly quantifying the fiscal implications of dense development versus sprawl.

In fact, the 1,100-member Gallatin Association of REALTORS® (GAR) received two grants to contribute to the complex process of developing a growth plan for the greater Bozeman region: a \$15,000 Smart Growth Action Grant supported the study by an Asheville, NC-based urban planning consulting firm called Urban3; and a \$1,500 Housing Opportunity Grant helped to fund an Affordable Housing Summit that brought stakeholders together to begin discussing goals for Bozeman.

"I have a handwritten note of thanks from the mayor on my desk right now," says Ellen Beck, GAR's Government Affairs Director. Between the in-depth analysis that was provided by the Urban3 study and the data collected at the Housing Summit, she says, the REALTORS® have earned not only the gratitude of City Hall, but also recognition as a serious partner in discussions about the region's future growth.

The comparative analysis study, which was completed in July, highlighted the significant return of property tax per acre that would be realized by reinvesting in urban centers and historic commercial corridors; the findings were illustrated by a series of colorful 3-D images that convey relative land value, tax value, and value-per-acre at a glance. On July 11, Joe Minicozzi, principal of Urban3, presented the study results to three different Bozeman audiences: at a breakfast for the REALTORS®; at a City Hall luncheon for city staff, the local homebuilders association, and developers; and once more in the evening for the general public. Beck, who attended all three sessions, says "The primary goal was to educate the public with this very clearly reasoned analysis. I think a lot of minds that had been skeptical were opened, when presented with the tax implications of building up the urban core, as opposed to on the outskirts, or way out in the country. The graphics made a very compelling argument for Smart Growth."

Two weeks later, GAR joined the city in hosting an Affordable Housing Summit that gathered representatives from the university and the local hospital, the region's largest housing consumers; AARP; the Department of Transportation; the school district; the local land trust; and, of course, REALTORS®. A facilitator from the university had small groups work together to answer a series of questions ultimately seeking to determine an acceptable definition of 'affordable housing' beyond the HUD standard. "It was a fascinating and highly effective exercise," says Beck, "and by having teams from such

different sectors working together, it really made us all think in broader terms.” City Hall was so thrilled with the results, she says, that it asked the REALTORS® to follow up with an even more comprehensive summit.

“We could not have achieved all this without the support of the National Association of REALTORS®,” notes Beck. “Our goal, going in to these programs, was to inform the growth policy planning process, which will promote Smart Growth development standards and spur an uptick in compact, walkable neighborhoods,” she says. “Another really positive outcome is that the city is looking to us as partners with valuable resources, expertise, and information.”

To learn more about how the Gallatin Association of REALTORS® is working as a valued partner of City Hall to plan the region’s Smart Growth, contact Government Affairs Director Ellen Beck at 406-585-0033.

SMART GROWTH GRANT

Southern Minnesota REALTORS® Jump-start Walkability in Mankato

August 2018

As the concept of walkability becomes more prominent in municipal planning throughout the country, and in greater demand in real estate markets, REALTORS® are on it. In Mankato, Minn., the local REALTORS® sponsored a WalkShop event in Old Town, a district with lots of old charm and a new public amphitheater, but lacking a pedestrian-friendly infrastructure to link the two. A Smart Growth Action Grant helped them make it happen.

Deb Hansen, Chief Executive Officer of the 350-member REALTOR® Association of Southern Minnesota (RASM) explains that the idea for the program was the result of a lot of brainstorming by a REALTOR® committee exploring the Walkscore concept in the context of Mankato, a riverfront community that is perceived as a ‘driving community.’ “Once we discovered the availability of this grant, we decided to focus our efforts on the Old Town district,” she says, citing the advantages of the neighborhood’s vintage main street architecture and an exciting new amphitheater for live performances in the city’s new Riverfront Park, just a block behind the commercial street. The neighborhood came with unique challenges, too: it was heavily industrial, including quarries and a metal scrapyards, and lacked visibility from one point to the next. It also lacked parking. “Our goal was to make this area more accessible, more functional, and more welcoming,” says Hansen.

The grant application process was smooth and easy. “It helped that we’d done our due diligence, and were able to communicate our goals and vision to the REALTOR® Party team,” says Hansen. RASM President Elect Jason Beal, a lifelong Mankato resident, issued personal invitations to numerous local stakeholders to participate in the early June event. The day began with an informal breakfast at a local bakery, where participants could meet and mingle. They included representatives from the City Center Partnership and the Old Town district, the Mankato Council for the Arts, public safety officials, neighboring towns, and a handful of REALTORS®. Then Samantha Thomas, a professional walkability consultant, delivered a presentation on the goals and successes of walkability efforts elsewhere in the country.

“It was fantastic,” says Beal. “Samantha’s presentation broke down the concept of walkability, and showed us what could be done, from huge capital improvements to just striping the streets.” Then the group headed out and toured the area on foot, returning to the bakery to brainstorm ideas in small groups over lunch; Thomas took notes, which informed her written report, delivered a few weeks later. Beal praises Thomas’ positive, can-do tone, and her expertise as she led the walk, measured sidewalks, and pointed out impediments: “It was all about ‘What do we have, and how can we work with it?’ with an emphasis on quality, rather than rushing in to anything.”

For weeks following the event, Hansen received numerous requests for copies of Thomas' PowerPoint presentation and the report, as well as glowing thanks, like this from a transportation planner from a neighboring jurisdiction:

I really appreciate you hosting the REALTOR® Walkability Event on June 6. That was a great opportunity to gain some perspective on how Mankato could benefit from changes to the pedestrian realm.

According to Beal, the notion of walkability improvements has gained traction in the community: several local organizations are collaborating to create a "Vitality Fund" with a goal to raise \$10 million to support local projects over the next 10 to 15 years; the WalkShop report outlines just the kind of improvement they are looking to fund.

Meanwhile, the Mankato Council for the Arts is talking about painting alleyway walls in the Old Town corridor with fanciful designs, and RASM is looking into the possibility of securing a REALTOR® Party Placemaking Grant to help the community envision some of the ideas that emerged from the event. "This has generated so much excitement," says Beal, "and we're grateful to the REALTOR® Party for providing us with such tremendous practical resources."

To learn more about how the REALTORS® of Southern Minnesota are using REALTOR® Party resources to help communities work toward improving walkability, contact Chief Executive Officer Deb Hansen at 507-345-6018; or President Elect Jason Beal at 507-381-1060.

SMART GROWTH GRANT

Maine Association Facilitates Smart Growth for Once-thriving Mill Town

July 2018

The state of Maine has the nation's oldest population, the eighth oldest housing stock, low median income, and essentially no public transportation infrastructure. At the same time, the vacant and unused manufacturing spaces in once-thriving mill communities all across the state offer an opportunity for revitalization through mixed-use development of their downtown centers. To help the once-prosperous mill town of Sanford envision a future with walkable affordable housing and fresh economic contributors, the Maine Association of REALTORS® received a Smart Growth Action Grant to support a three-day charrette, or stakeholder-informed design session.

Trish Ohler, a Program Manager at the 5,000-member Maine Association of REALTORS® (MAR), explains that "MAR prides itself on longstanding advocacy for the value of housing choice and opportunity as essential components in a thriving economy. It also continually strives to create smarter alternatives to urban sprawl." The region is fortunate to have a non-profit called the Workforce Housing Coalition of the Greater Seacoast (WHC) whose work in Sanford was supported by the REALTOR® Party grant. In this case, the municipality had already done a lot of advance leg work: redefining its zoning code, creating a Recreation Master Plan, and hiring a staff member focused on housing. By the time the WHC facilitated the design charrette in Sanford, says Ohler, "the event was a springboard for lots of good ideas that had already been percolating for a while."

On the first day, participants went on a site walk of the mill complex, and submitted ideas, as well as perceived obstacles to development. The second day saw the professional team of architects and planners organizing and analyzing the community input, from which they created two plans, accompanied by a feasibility document, revealed at the end of the third day. About ten REALTORS® participated in the process, along with dozens of other local stakeholders.

Greg Gosselin, 2017 MAR President and a current member of NAR's Housing Opportunities Committee, has been involved in infill development projects in several Maine towns in the past few years; he was on the committee that selected the old mill site as the focus of the Sanford charrette. "The work of the Workforce Housing Coalition is changing communities by providing a vision derived from community input. As REALTORS®, our involvement can help insure that future development includes both market rate and middle market housing."

Rebecca Lapierre, a REALTOR® living and working in Sanford, and a committee member for the local charrette, agrees. "As a REALTOR®, I was able to advise on the type of housing that would work best for the mill area," she says. "My professional expertise will have a real impact on this development, which will in turn have an impact on the future of Sanford."

Since the charrette, the development in Sanford has been progressing swiftly, reports Ohler, with additional funding secured for Brownfield abatement, new interest in the former mill structures, and one being prepped for development, with plans for intown residential units and retail units underway. The civic leaders of Sanford have expressed their gratitude to the REALTORS® for their leadership and support. “This project was a great opportunity to bring REALTOR® knowledge and expertise into the community housing, planning, and development process,” says Ohler, “and the NAR Smart Growth funding was key to this collaboration.”

To learn more about how the Maine Association of REALTORS® is using its leadership, energy, and the resources of the REALTOR® Party to promote downtown revitalization and workforce housing, contact Trish Ohler at or 207-622-7501. See the final report on the Stenton Mill Revitalization Charrette.

SMART GROWTH GRANT

With Better Block Event, Longleaf Pine REALTORS® Demonstrate Just How Pedestrian-Friendly Haymount Can Be

June 2018

The Haymount district of Fayetteville, North Carolina is blessed with neat neighborhoods of cottage-style homes and proximity to downtown. Its vibrant commercial district is currently cursed, however, by an environment hostile to pedestrian traffic. Armed with a vision, a Smart Growth Action Grant, and a whole lot of duct tape, the local Longleaf Pine REALTORS® (LPR) set out to change that. Partnering with the North Carolina chapter of the Association of Pedestrian and Bicycle Professionals, the Haymount business community, and other local organizations, the 1,600-member association mounted a Better Block Event on a weekend in March to reveal how basic improvements such as bike lanes, crosswalks, reduced traffic lanes, and widened sidewalks could transform the area for the better.

“It was beyond great,” says LPR Government Affairs Director Angie Hedgepeth, of the half-day event that drew more than 3,000 visitors and earned a commitment from the City Council to allocate funding for pedestrian safety measures. It was a city staff member who first approached the REALTORS® about the possibility of securing a Smart Growth Action Grant for a Better Block Event, says Hedgepeth. She, in turn, worked on the project with a county transportation planner and a committee of about 70 REALTORS®.

Using its community relationships, ingenuity, and only slightly more money than the \$5,000 grant, LPR effectively transformed a central block of Haymount that had already been the site of one pedestrian fatality. “Beyond the immediate issue of pedestrian safety,” says Hedgepeth, “this effort should benefit property values, business activity, and community connectedness, and could set a positive precedent for the entire region.”

For all its potential, the project came with a steep learning curve: the permits alone, from the North Carolina Department of Transportation as well as the city of Fayetteville, took months to secure. Then, there was insurance for the event, and a stage to rent, musicians to hire, vendors and artists and food trucks to arrange, and dozens and dozens of orange traffic cones. There was a website to create, and a big publicity campaign, and video coverage involving overhead drones. Hedgepeth and her team experimented with various temporary crosswalk application methods after-hours in the LPR parking lot. Two local nurseries and a landscaping company contributed a row of mature potted trees, several park benches, and additional greenery. The night before the event, the REALTORS® pre-marked the roads. At 8 a.m., day-of, they were out stenciling bike-lane markers and applying eight critical crosswalks with architectural drafting paper and duct tape.

Despite the significant alteration of the traffic access, Hedgepeth reports, “there was no honking of horns, no screaming; drivers were just easing down the road, giving all the

pedestrian activity the time and space it needed. It was wonderful, and a big relief, because of course, we had no idea what to expect.”

Local youngsters circulating through the event collected surveys from more than 300 attendees, which have been compiled in a report for the City Council. At the end of the day, the REALTORS® interviewed all the businesses in the Better Block zone; all were excited, and one, a new coffee shop, was thrilled to report doing triple its usual trade that day, says Hedgepeth. “People came to our tent and said, ‘Please, can you help make this happen for real?’ and ‘How can we help get this done?!’”

The REALTORS® are on it. The City Councilman representing Haymount has assured them that he’ll find funding for at least the painting of the new crosswalks in the next budget cycle, as a start. Communities beyond Haymount stand to benefit from all the effort, too: an official from a nearby city called the REALTORS® directly, after she’d seen reports in the media, to ask how they’d done it. “It’ll be a while before we’re ready to do something like this again,” laughs Hedgepeth, “but we’re happy to share our new expertise! In so many ways, the grant from NAR is being leveraged in to far greater gains.”

To learn more about how the Longleaf Pine REALTORS® are working to make the communities of Fayetteville, North Carolina, more desirable, livable, workable, and walkable, contact Government Affairs Director Angie Hedgepeth at 910-323-1421. To visit the event website, see <https://www.betterblockfaync.com/home>.

SMART GROWTH GRANT (Mega Board Pilot)
Miami REALTORS® Create Better Block in West Coconut Grove
April 2018

In Miami's West Coconut Grove, the need was great, the timing was right, and the partnerships were in perfect alignment: the Miami REALTORS® were seeking a neighborhood in which to conduct a Better Block project with funding from the REALTOR® Party; the University of Miami School of Architecture was planning to create a marketplace for local vendors; and the residents, while lacking resources, had plenty of entrepreneurial zeal and neighborhood pride.

Miami REALTORS®' 2018 Chairman George Jalil identified West Coconut Grove as an area in need. Known for its colorful, deep-rooted Bahamian heritage, the area had fallen on hard times. In fact, Miami's downtown Business Improvement District fell just one block short of the once-vibrant area, and adverse gentrification issues were also in play, says Danielle Blake, Miami REALTORS®' Senior Vice President of Housing & Government Affairs. A team from Miami REALTORS® walked through the area with a staff member of the local city commissioner; going door-to-door, they talked with local business owners and residents and listened to what they wanted for West Coconut Grove. The answer? A strong return of Bahamian culture.

Scouting prospective locations, the REALTORS® came across an abandoned building with a blank wall overlooking an overgrown green space that seemed ripe with potential. Investigating the property, they discovered that the University of Miami's School of Architecture was already developing a plan for it, with funding from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. The two groups joined forces. Sharing their information and resources, the University focused on creating the marketplace for both established vendors and incubator spaces, and the REALTORS® took the lead on developing a landmark mural and launching the vibrant new market with a Better Block celebration. The REALTORS® also provided considerable volunteer manpower, assembling Bahamian-inspired market structures designed by the School of Architecture.

Early on, YPN Chair Jorge Fernandez had suggested a mural as a feature for the Better Block project. "The mural design was a way for us to bring the community together, most especially the kids," says Fernandez. As a local vendor served a group of neighborhood children a Bahamian lunch, a team of YPN volunteers had them draw representations of the flavors they were tasting. The artist, Wendell McShine, then adapted elements from these crayoned pictures into his final design for the bright and colorful mural. "It feels true to the neighborhood, celebrating its heritage, its flavors, and its children," says Fernandez. A plaque on the painted wall recognizes the Miami REALTORS® and its partners in the project.

On February 3, 2018, Miami REALTORS® hosted a festive Better Block celebration launching the new 'MKTPlace at Goombay Plaza.' From 4:00 to 7:30 p.m., locals, visitors, and elected officials enjoyed Bahamian food, reggae music, dancing, and a

dramatic light show on the new site, where every Saturday, local vendors now have a place to sell their wares and perpetuate the beloved local Bahamian culture. Associate Professor and Director Chuck Bohl of The University of Miami School of Architecture says, "There's really a thousand things that have to happen to get a simple market like this up and running, and there's never enough hands, so to have a group as resourceful as the REALTORS® Association to come in and help us has been really instrumental." Forging a strong relationship with Bohl's department has been a great benefit for the REALTORS®, notes Blake. New partnerships with the local community and strengthened connections with elected officials will also be invaluable moving forward.

"Here at Miami REALTORS®, we are very excited about our community outreach program," says Chairman George Jalil. "The West Coconut Grove neighborhood is rich in history and the residents are very welcoming. The Goombay Plaza project, a great success, raised critical awareness that REALTORS® care, and are very involved in the growth of their communities. We look forward to many more such projects in the future."

To learn more about how the Miami REALTORS® are serving their communities with REALTOR® Party resources and a strong culture of volunteer man-power, contact Danielle Blake, Senior Vice President of Housing & Government Affairs, at 305-468-7015.

SMART GROWTH GRANT

New Hampshire REALTORS® Envision Smart Growth for White Mountains

JANUARY 8, 2018

In the White Mountains region of New Hampshire, one of the nation's earliest tourist destinations and a favored second-home location, the pronounced lack of affordable housing limits service industry opportunities for a would-be workforce. The drain on the economic sustainability of the broader community is already being felt: two of the region's most popular tourist attractions have been forced to partially and temporarily close in high season, due to lack of staff. Looking ahead, a recent report projects that first-time home purchases will be down in New Hampshire in the next five to ten years. But, with a REALTOR® Party Smart Growth Action Grant, the 150-member White Mountain Board of REALTORS® (WMBR) has helped communities to envision solutions and begin to remove barriers to affordable housing by sponsoring design and planning charrettes in partnership with the Mount Washington Valley Housing Coalition (MWWHC.)

"To me, it's a no-brainer!" states 2018 WMBR President Theresa Bernhardt, explaining that Victoria Laracy, the executive director of MWWHC, had reached out to the REALTORS® for help funding the charrettes. "We have access to these REALTOR® Party funds, and this is what we do: provide housing." Two charrettes held in October 2017 were the third such project that WMBR has sponsored since 2013, each one building on the work of the previous charrettes. A *charrette* is an intensive design and planning exercise that brings together representatives of all stakeholder groups; in the towns of Bartlett and Conway last fall, that meant hard-working teams of planning officials, bankers, property representatives, REALTORS®, architects, engineers, site planners, construction estimators, neighbors, local businesses and workers in need of housing.

Laracy, whose organization has planned and hosted each of the programs, cuts to the chase: "These charrettes demonstrate how the economics of development need for zoning to be in place in order to achieve adequate affordable housing in a free market. In both Bartlett, where there is a 0% vacancy rate, and Conway, where the rate is 1%, our teams demonstrated that significant affordable housing could be created, with a reasonable rate of return for the developer, if zoning restrictions were changed, even slightly." The official report from the October charrettes has been shared with the communities and local legislators, as a first step to address zoning updates. "This wouldn't have been possible without the support from the REALTORS®," she says.

Bernhardt, who was one of two REALTOR®-members of the Conway team, says, "It's a fascinating process, watching completely well thought-out, viable plans being presented at 6:00 PM on what was a blank piece of paper at 9:00 AM. To have all these experts at the same table working on a given project involving real, available parcels of land, was an incredibly efficient and productive way to go about finding options and eliminating others." She reiterates Laracy's assertion that zoning was the stumbling block to affordable housing for both town teams: "Under current zoning, we discovered that the

seven-acre parcel of land we were working with could only support 28 total units of housing, which was not an economically viable project for any developer. But if zoning were to allow for increased density, then 70 units could be built on the same parcel, twenty of which would be offered as affordable housing, with a near 8% annual return to the developer. Those are the kinds of numbers that make projects like this feasible. They clearly demonstrate why we need to work with our planning boards to change the zoning ordinances that are restricting affordable housing.” She adds that, in addition to an open community discussion at the outset of the process, the final charrette presentations were attended by over sixty local residents. “There is real concern, and real engagement. The REALTORS® are proud to be part of the group that is seeking solutions and moving them forward.”

To learn more about how the White Mountain Board of REALTORS® has been helping to pave the way for more affordable housing in its communities, contact 2018 WMBR President Theresa Bernhardt at 603-986-5286; or Victoria Lacey, Executive Director of the Mount Washington Valley Housing Coalition, at 603-662-5482.

SMART GROWTH GRANT

Data from Traverse REALTORS® Proves Invaluable to Downtown Development Planning for Affordable Housing

December 2017

In the highly desirable downtown neighborhoods of Traverse City, Michigan, affordable housing is scarce. Bounded by a beautiful bay of Lake Michigan on one side, and Boardman Lake on the other, the city's land base is already largely built, and development is further limited by zoning that restricts building height to 65'. According to Kim Pontius, CEO of the 900-member Traverse Area Association of REALTORS® (TAAR), this presents challenges for the economy of the city, whose largest employers are located downtown; for the surrounding counties, which rely on the urban property tax revenue; and for the REALTORS®, who aren't able to respond to the demand for affordable housing where it is needed.

With a REALTOR® Party Smart Growth Action Grant, TAAR helped the city engage a specialized consulting firm to create a 3D economic model demonstrating the potential tax revenue from various possible development configurations. "This is just the information needed to assist developers and the City Commission in making good decisions for the community," says Pontius, noting that the municipal budget didn't allow for this level of analysis. In fact, it was the City Manager and the head of the city Planning Department who brought the project to TAAR's attention, and asked for funding assistance: the REALTORS® of the Traverse City region have earned a strong local reputation, when it comes to Smart Growth projects. The \$15,000 grant covered about half the cost of the analysis, and the balance was funded by the city and county.

The report itself was dramatic and clear. "I've been involved in economic development and transportation planning long enough to know that the whole world changes when you begin looking at situations in 3D, instead of 2D," says Pontius. Urban 3, the firm we hired, has tremendous expertise in addressing all the issues and conveying results with powerful visuals." The Asheville, NC-based firm spent several months collecting data, then developed its report, using colorful three-dimensional graphics that revealed beyond question where the highest tax-value development could occur. Joe Minicozzi, principal of Urban 3—and a very engaging speaker—presented his findings to a broad audience on four separate occasions, all of which TAAR helped promote: at a downtown theatre, at a local school auditorium, at the opera house and at a Rotary Club meeting.

The report, called "Building Potent, Lasting Value in Traverse City," is posted on the city website, and that of TAAR, as is a link to Minicozzi's presentation.

"It was no surprise that the highest taxable value by far is in the heart of the city," explains Pontius. "What Joe did was to show just how much higher, while attempting to enlighten the audience that going vertical is the only way to capture ample tax revenue for the city and county to prosper." Using examples of other cities that have limited building heights, Urban 3 showed how such restrictions will ultimately defeat the

prosperity goal. The report drills down and reveals that 52% the land in Traverse City is actually un-taxable, and therefore not part of the revenue stream, and shows the critical difference between a parcel's true cash value and assessed taxable value.

Pontius reports that TAAR's support of the project has only strengthened the association's healthy working relationship with the municipal and county governments. "The head of the Planning Department and the City Manager can't say enough good things about the help the REALTORS® have provided," he says, adding, "It's clear we're continuing to serve the best possible future of the city. Now that the report exists, the data will be an ongoing critical reference. Meanwhile, it's planted seeds, and gotten people thinking."

To learn more about how the REALTORS® of greater Traverse City, Michigan are helping to educate planning commissions at the city, county, and township level, contact Kimberly R. Pontius, CEO of the Traverse Area Association of REALTORS®, at 231-947-2050.