



Partnership *for* SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

From think tanks to major home builders, everyone is looking for ways to make the built environment greener and more energy efficient. It's time for affordable housing and economic opportunity to get parity with reduced carbon dioxide emissions as a key tenet of sustainable community development.

Put another way, it's time for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to catch up with ongoing policy innovations at other federal agencies and in states and cities.

The Environmental Protection Agency has been considering the impact of buildings and communities for at least a decade. Transportation and development have been the subject of many studies by the Department of Transportation and various think tanks. State housing agencies have promoted green building and sustainable development through the tax credit allocation process and other programs for years.

But until recently, HUD—with its mission of providing affordable housing and healthy communities—has been absent from the emerging field of sustainable community planning and development.

Under the Bush Administration, HUD didn't have a clue. Expectations were exceptionally low. In fact, most people thought HUD had no hope of being a respected player in federal policymaking.

Today, with Shaun Donovan and Ron Sims at the helm, HUD has leadership that "gets" sustainability. Now that Congress has finally got off its collective bottom and passed appropriations for the fiscal year that started in October, HUD also has funds to pursue its sustainability agenda.

One of the first things HUD must do is make sure that the new emphasis on planning development along new and extended transit corridors is not an invitation to gentrification and housing price inflation. You know as well as I do that the normal forces of real estate development will point in that direction, notwithstanding the temporary moderating effect of the recession.

Without strong leadership from HUD, affordable housing may get lost in the frenzy to promote more transit-oriented development. Remember what happened in the 50s and 60s when federal urban renewal and highway construction programs resulted in the loss of untold numbers of affordable homes? HUD must not let that happen again, even on a smaller scale.