

# **The New Collaborative Region: Suburbs and Cities Working on the Future**

January 27, 2006

## **Panel Presentation:**

### **Transportation, Land Use and Regional Collaboration:**

### **National Experiences**

**Robert Grow**, *Director, Envision Utah*

My first disclaimer is I am not an architect. I am not a professional planner. When Envision Utah started, I was running a large steel company, and steering the American Iron Steel Institute. I was the volunteer captain of the team. And I have stayed in that role over the years. Not as the chair, but in other respects.

I've been on the phone this morning and then on the Internet. I've seen about 20 e-mails in the last hour and a half because the developers in our community just slammed into the legislature a bill proposing to get land use planning and zoning. The planners are all screaming like wounded animals, running helter skelter, screaming for Envision Utah's help.

And I just sent out an e-mail and said, "Now, remember, we are not the advocates for the cities. We are not the advocate for the developers. We are the place that sets the table. They need a place to talk." And that's what we have concluded to do, is we are all going to get them together and talk about it.

But we continue to set tables for people that discuss their issues, and that's our primary function. I am not going to talk a lot about the process at the outset, but regional visioning is a growing thing across the country. I asked Bob Yaro what percent you think it's been growing, but we all agree this is a phenomena that is catching on partly because there are powerful tools to visual and to model and test outcomes. It's an evolution of place-making to a much larger scale.

In 1995, when we started the committee that it gradually grew in to create a new Envision Utah partnership, we were facing lots of challenges like other regions. I recognize we are different from other regions. We are certainly not Connecticut and New York and New Jersey, but hopefully some of these things will be helpful to you.

We were facing another million residents by 2020 in this 10-county region on top of 1.6 million. Last year, we were the fifth fastest-growing state, and last year we were the second-fastest by percentage, and that's been going on for about 30 or 40 years in our economy.

Our air quality was getting worse. We urbanized lots of new land. We live in a desert. Water is expensive. We were going to need a lot more water. Things were getting crowded, congested. People were feeling a high level of frustration. We actually kicked off the partnership the week we blocked off I-15 to rebuild it right down to the middle of our valleys. Good timing. Business and personal costs were rising. So those were the challenges we faced.

The Envision Utah partnership was a large inclusive group of stakeholders who came together in 1997 with the intent of giving the public their choices about the future and then following their decisions. We did four wonderfully named alternative scenarios, A, B, C, and D. We could have called them the "Big Ugly Sprawl Scenario" or the "Compact Smart Growth Plan." We just thought we wouldn't weight them for the public.

We did a public awareness campaign, sent out 600,000 surveys, and got tens of thousands of responses, followed up with statistical surveying. And the people in Utah chose somewhere between Scenario C and D; walkable, reasonably compact, multimodal transportation systems. And I think a lot of people in the country sat back and said, "How did that happen in Utah?" I could say, "Your perceptions of Utah may not be completely accurate, but some of them would be pretty accurate." If you were to put us on a political scale, I suspect if this is liberal, if this is conservative, most of you would point to this end of the scale. And so we actually have learned to speak the language of smart growth, which we call quality growth in Republicanese and to the populace, and have made fair headway with this.

From those decisions came a quality growth strategy which continues to be aggressively implemented. Six goals: Answer air quality; increased mobility and transportation; preserve critical lands; conserve water resources; provide housing opportunities; maximize efficiency and public infrastructure; spend our money smart.

I know wherever you come from you've got plenty of money for infrastructure. We are a little short these days on the money. So this turned out to be a big part of our learning process about our future.

Now, I want to talk about some of the things we learned, because I am personally constantly amazed that this is still going on. We started about 12 years ago and it has a life of its own. We set out to raise up a generation of planners led by a strong and diverse group of regional stewards. And amazingly it's sort of still happening, and happening with quite a bit of energy.

And so I want to attribute that to some of the things I think we saw in the process. Number one is we stay focused on the objective. We are looking long range, big picture, at big choices about the future. Everybody wanted to drag us into their battle of the day. And we have resisted that. This bill is the battle of the day. We are happy to set the table, have people come together. But we constantly talk about the long-term. We constantly talk about how our decisions together affect the region and we avoid the conflict of the day-to-day.

Number two -- and I second what Bob said -- regional change is not for the faint of heart. It requires optimism, persistence, and resilience. And part of the rule is you can't win with the old political rule of 50 plus one; getting 50 percent of the people, one more vote, you'll win. I think changing a region takes about 80 percent, because you are going to take hits along the way, and so you better build a real head of

steam in the direction you want to go and you just better plan on taking the hits. And the group of you who are energizing it -- and it always takes putting more energy in -- you have to stay at it.

Successful implementation actually started at the beginning. People say, "Well, what did you do to implement it once you had the vision?" I said, "I never thought of it that way." We always thought about how were we going to implement it when we picked the people to start off. And so we brought together a group of regional stewards. We said, "Take your personal interest hats off, be a Utahan, think about our future together. There will come a day when we have scenarios, and then you can all go debate. But you are supposed to bring energy and staying power and individuality to this process." So everybody in our valleys could say, "I don't know him, I don't know her, but I do know her and I trust her to make sure this is an honest process." And so we brought together all the groups that we could think of.

Now, this may shock you, but David Bragdon lives under a form of government that was passed in the '70s in Portland. Utah passed almost an identical law in 1973. It was dismantled at a public referendum the following year. And Mike Levitt, who is now the head of HHS, his father lost his chance to be governor because he supported that bill. So when we started Envision Utah and placed it on our governor's mind, now his son is governor. You know, regional visioning, regional planning is political suicide.

And so we had to bring together enough support that everybody would feel like they could come and the train was moving out of the station.

We are constantly reassessing and renewing.

And we do that by bringing the major stakeholders together on a regular basis and say, "Are our objectives still correct?" Reprioritize our goals. "Are we focused on the right issues that will change the region the most?" And we do that by redoing scenarios. And I will show you some of that in a moment. But this is constantly about keeping engagement with your key stakeholder groups and individuals.

Involve the media from the very beginning as stakeholders. The publishers of the newspapers, the station managers of the TV stations were all involved.

This is a cartoon when we started from our best political cartoonist named Grondahl, and it shows Envision Utah with a shotgun and a hand of carrots behind his back, and the little cities, the rabbit, going, "I get a choice here." See the cynicism in that?

This is a Grondahl cartoon about a year and a half ago. We were having a fight over do we change our sales tax allocation. We call it, "Zoning for Dollars." It's a very pernicious thing in Utah.

You've got two cities fighting over retail, and you have a woman sitting in the stands with a newspaper that says, "Envision Utah." That's actually JoAnn Seghini, the mayor of one of our towns, Midvale. And they are making a comment, "You mean we could have a place where cities actually get along? What fun would that be?"

So which side is Grondahl on in this article? The side of the cities? Or out there with the big tough guys fighting over retail? Or Mayor Seghini? And so we've seen a sea change in attitude that has been driven by a lot of public education that's been done

for free. You cannot pick up one of our newspapers on any given day and not find an article that implicates growth issues and talks about how we ought to do it right. And that's taken a long time.

One of the other comments Bob made that I want to second. He said, "I have been at this 18 years and I am just beginning to understand how the place works." Those of us who think about regions come at it quite humbly after a while. Lasting change requires addressing the real causes, understanding the inputs of urban growth patterns. And I have found that what I am learning has been a constant search for real causes of the way we grow. I finally decided that our regions are a result of millions of personal individual decisions about what they want in their lives. And until we get to that level of changing our region and understanding it, not much will change for the long term.

So we approach this quite humbly, that we are still very much learning from you and other places around the country.

Now, fear is a great short-term motivator, but it's a terrible long-term motivator. So the motivator we try to create, the motivation is, "Let's create a great future together."

For example, we use this slide to scare the heck out of everybody in Utah. We were 2 million people, said, "2050, we are going to be Philadelphia, 5 million." I apologize if you are from Philadelphia.

New York is a lot denser and bigger. By the way, New York, I think, has the best organized neighborhoods on the planet. They are just vertical. Everything is down around the bottom of the block and you can live and work upstairs. I am not kidding. It's a highly sophisticated society.

But anyway, that was scary to Utah, because that is not what they wanted. So we rallied them around the crisis. I-15 shut off. We can't go anywhere. And that's where we're headed.

In the long-term, enduring partnerships are founded on personal relationships. Envision Utah is a network of relationships, first from civility, then a trust, and then a friendship. And so we are constantly bringing new stewards into this process, and they are working together to fulfill widely-shared desires, aspirations, and hopes for ourselves and our children.

Regional visioning challenges basic, deeply-held values-based assumptions. Regions change one mind and one heart at a time. You have to talk to people in a way that is personally relevant to their personal choices, or nothing changes. And so we started out with the intention of understanding who we were. We started with the values of our community.

We did an in-depth value study with a company that's a communications expert, which had done work for the 10 top Fortune global companies, and about 75 of the Fortune 100 global companies, called Worthland Worldwide. And they had this technique for understanding the values of people, not just what we want in our lives, but why we want it and how to talk about it. And we did that because we came to believe that values are the most enduring things about us and that's how we make our decisions.

I have a really smart friend who came up to me a few years ago and said, "I finally understand you. I've got you figured out." And I said, "Okay. Go ahead." He said, "You use all your brainpower to obfuscate the fact you decide on your feelings."

Now, am I alone? So understanding people's values is about talking to them so that they feel it so that it changes the way they satisfy their values. They find a better way. It's about making it personally relevant to them and to their choices.

By the way, if you are a crass person who believes in markets, all those millions of choices people make based upon their values are the market; okay? So if you want to meet the market, follow people's values. You want to communicate with people, provide what they need, follow people's values.

I am going to skip a couple of slides here.

That are about the traditional planning approach.

What we did is just attack this value process on the front end, said, "Let's understand who we are. Let's use the best tools and techniques to find out what people want in our region, then let's create a vision of how the region can provide that, then let's come up with a strategy. Then we'll do what we normally do; we will plan and fund and build stuff."

We normally jump to the plan/fund/build before we find out and study how it's going to impact our values.

At the bottom here in red are attributes of living in Utah. The urban environment of Utah. The next level is the functional consequences of that in your life. The next level is the psychosocial consequences of it. The top level is values. This is done with over hundreds of multi-hour interviews, and then you statistically back it up. And from that you come up with gateway values for a region; what do the people really want and why, so you can talk about it.

How many of you like traffic? By the way, how far away is the airport from here? Okay, that's actually not my question. What's my real question? How long will it take? I want you to look over there. In red, you can see traffic.

But traffic is the thief of your time. You want to campaign for a public referendum for transportation and you say, "You are going to get this many roads and intersections and buses," nothing happens. But if you say, "You are going to get home in time for dinner with your kids," it gives you back your time.

What would you do with the time -- if I could give it back to you -- which traffic steals? And it's all in the chart. So you learn how to communicate about values.

As we went into the recession of '92/'93 and people were less concerned about growth because it was slowing down, we swung to the fourth major value in Utah, which is financial security, jobs, higher-paying jobs, economic development; and we re-positioned Envision Utah to talk about economic development until the economy moved.

By the way, this is a similar map for Florida, done by the same company. This is the seven-county region around Orlando. And if you look at what they care about, why are people in Florida? What's the first thing that might come to your mind?

Weather. That's number one, top of mind. But it's not what they care about most at the values level. At a values level, they care about safe and secure communities. That's the number one driver on why people choose the things they choose in their lives.

The number two is family friendly activities. And by the way, that's where environment fits. Floridians don't use the word "environment." They use the words "nature" and "outdoors" and they talk about places to go and experience with their friends and their families.

And so when you talk to people and use these values, you communicate not just to their head, but to their heart and to their gut.

Anyway, we use that -- these are the value pillars for Orlando. This study was done recently, and they are using this to create the regional stewards, the politicians. This study has appeared on the front page of "The Orlando Sentinel" on what Floridians value in the future of their lives.

So if I were to pick one thing about Envision Utah that I think has given it staying power all the way through, it is that we communicate with values, we persuade with reason. You have to know the facts, you have to study things, you have to be good at that. But then we motivate by making the things personally relevant at an emotional level of how it affects them and their children.

This is a slide I really like because it's got my daughter, Lisa, and her husband, Carl, in it. They now live in Beijing, but they bought that yellow bungalow house for \$600,000.

My son, Matt, and his wife -- he's finishing his doctorate of history at Notre Dame -- bought that \$87,000 house in South Bend, Indiana. What's the difference in value of those two houses? It's actually the \$450,000 yellow attached garage. That was it.

How many of you have a son or daughter that graduated from college in the last five years? If you did, raise your hand. What was their starting salary in their first job?

How much house can you buy here on a \$50,000 salary? Nothing. Okay. Now I'm communicating to you about values, about you and your children. See what I just did? I took the issue of housing prices, and I could have done a whole lot of charts for you, but now I am talking -- if we spent more time on it, we'd be in a great discussion on the importance of housing to you and to your children.

Watch your words. I was asked to speak at a ULI conference called, "Selling Density." And I thought, "Selling"? Selling. That means to persuade people to buy things they really don't want or need.

"Density." If I call you "dense," what am I calling you? I am calling you stupid. It means stupid and crowded. So I am trying to persuade people to be stupid or crowded when I'm selling density.

Words matter. "Smart growth," we don't use in Utah very much. It's growing, actually. We're using it more. Smart growth in Utah to some is an intellectual fetish of a self-selective liberal Eastern elite.

Now, I actually am fond of the term "smart growth," but other people are not. They are loaded words in Utah. So Utah is all about quality growth.

I am going to skip all of this. You know the best technique for giving the public their packages of choices is scenarios. And so every place has scenarios you need to look at.

Those are the Sacramento ones. They're gorgeous. Those are the Chicago ones, some of the underlying things you can do. I mean, the tools today are just unbelievable. This is different ways that Boise can grow, with different colors representing different land uses. You know, compact alignments, satellite cities, and so on.

We have focused at Envision Utah on transportation. And the way we have done the most change is by constantly working transportation. We believe that's the lever. When Archimedes said he would move the world with a lever, we believe transportation is the lever. Visioning has to be out farther than the long-range transportation plans, and then change those plans.

So we look at regional choices and outcomes, the major variables going in our land use and transportation, and then scenarios. We measure all of these other outcomes, but we are constantly looking at the transportation choices and how you put land use around those choices. Lots of scenarios are variations on the same theme. They don't teach much. Scenarios need to posit the great questions of a region.

There's a team that's going to do scenarios now for the Louisiana coast. What are the big questions about the Louisiana coast? Well, what do you do with the wetlands, for example? What do you do with the port where you have got to continue to dredge the ship channels? There are big questions there.

And you look at those. And every region will have different questions and, therefore, the scenarios ought to look different.

By the way, what happened to Utah? When we started our light rail effort, it was a Communist conspiracy. There were people that were sure that Marx and Lenin were alive and well and they were going to ride the first train. But when you take a poll of Utah today, 88 percent of the public want the light rail system expanded as fast as humanly possible. It runs at double its 20-year projected ridership today.

Politicians would die for those numbers. That's how strong the sea change in attitude has been. Our long-range transportation plans have all been rewritten so they are balanced plans now.

This is the 2030 plan for transit. And it will by 2030 put 960,000 people within a thousand steps of a major stop they can get on and get off. See, nobody feels cheated because it's the whole region. This is a vision slide. It's communicating the benefits to everyone.

We went out and bought 175 miles of rail right-of-way from the Union Pacific. Anybody ever negotiated with the railroad? Okay. I was the president of their largest customer in a five-state area. I got together and the other business leaders who were their major customers -- they had just merged with the SP. They were bidding against the BNSF for the region. We encouraged them strongly to pay attention to our state and to think about our future.

And guess what? Over five years, we bought this stuff for \$185 million, and it's turned out to be the backbone of our transportation system.

Now, we continue to study transportation. Mountainview corridor, major new transportation corridor. Our study then turned it into a multimodal corridor. We have a voluntary agreement with the mayors. Even the Sierra Club signed on because they liked the multimodal character of it. We just finished regional scenarios again looking at 2040 to get ahead of the 2036 long-range transportation plan.

Okay. Last thing. If you do it right and people become persuaded, developers will actually build it. We now have a 93,000-acre, 60-year project that one developer -- a mining company -- owns 53 percent of the undeveloped land in the Salt Lake Valley. They have the most incredible, transit-oriented, walkable village/neighborhood/town plan you have ever seen, and it's moving through the entitlement process right now like greased lightning because it's based on the Envision Utah concepts that the public has already bought.

Every community has themes. It has history. It has legends. And it has myths. We have our own myths. You have yours.

We talked about the pioneers who came in the valley. This was the first guy. Artist rendering.

Two of them came in together. They only had one horse. This was Utah's first high-occupancy vehicle. Learned to share the ride early. The one on the horse is actually my great-great-great uncle. Two thousand of them came in the next four months and very quickly they learned to work hard together to work and plan together to survive.

When we kicked off Envision Utah, guess who showed up? Brigham Young. He wanted to know why we had messed up his plan. He had laid out these great wide streets. What did we do to it? See how we were tapping into our roots? Regional visions tap into the best of your history. They are about recapturing and holding the best of your past.

We have all these fun things we do where we show people how life can be. Have you all seen this one? Do you ever feel like that getting to work? You get a few people out of their cars. Get a few of them to ride their bike and walk to work. Get some more of them to ride the light rail. Look how much room I have opened up for you and your SUV this morning.

This is about communicating to the person who will never get on the light rail, but who benefits from them.

Transit increases capacity in corridors for those who will never ride the transit. This is all about communication and values and helping people understand there are better ways to grow. Thank you very much.