Request for Proposals — Session Guidelines

The Rocky Mountain Land Use Institute at the University of Denver Sturm College of Law is soliciting session proposals for the 26th annual Western Places/Western Spaces conference. The event will be held at the University of Denver campus on Thursday and Friday, March 16 & 17, 2017 with an additional workshop on Wednesday, March 15.

Western Places/Western Spaces: Creating Inclusive Communities

Across the Rocky Mountain region, creating spaces that work for diverse populations—rich and poor, young and old, newcomers and natives—is a central challenge of our times. While the West is home to many thriving communities with robust economies and enviable amenities, there are also numerous communities that are struggling to keep pace economically and to manage the challenges of rapid growth. As our region continues to grow and change, increasing in density and diversity, questions about how to maintain affordability and livability, while promoting equity and inclusiveness, are top of mind in many of our fast-growing Western cities and towns.

The theme for the 2017 Western Places/Western Spaces conference, Creating Inclusive Communities, focuses on the challenges and strategies available to cities—large and small—to plan for and build communities in which everyone can thrive. We will address a range of topics, including:

- providing sufficient affordable housing for a rapidly increasing and diverse population;
- planning for mobility that includes not only traditional modes, but also innovative solutions like car sharing and driverless vehicles while providing for pedestrians and bicyclists;
- promoting economic growth and urbanism while protecting existing businesses and residents from gentrification; and
- preparing to use big data to build “smart cities” in ways that enhance the lives of westerners without increasing the economic and cultural divides.

At the same time, we will continue to explore options for conserving and protecting our lands and natural resources. Water and energy development—whether from fossil fuels like oil, gas, and coal or renewable sources like wind and solar—remain inextricably linked with the West. And as our metropolitan areas grow, it becomes increasingly important to preserve the character of our rural and agricultural communities, as well.

Last year, we took the time to review what we’ve learned from 25 years of land use planning and development. This year, we will look at how to put those lessons into practice to address these challenges.
About the Western Places / Western Spaces Conference

The Rocky Mountain West is characterized as much by its vibrant and diverse communities as by its sweeping plains and rugged mountains. The Western Places/Western Spaces conference explores the growth and development issues facing communities—from large cities to small towns—as well as concerns about managing and preserving our natural heritage.

RMLUI’s annual Western Places/Western Spaces conference is the place for land use and development professionals in the West to share knowledge and network. With 500 attendees annually, this event helps define and influence the West’s land use and development future.

The conference attracts people from across the country, but most are from the Rocky Mountain West (Arizona, Colorado, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, Wyoming). Attendees represent national, state and local government agencies, private planning and law firms, development companies, academic institutions and non-profit organizations.

The conference takes place on a Thursday and Friday, and typically includes about 30 sessions. Each session is 90 minutes, and runs concurrently with four to six other sessions in the same time block. Plenary events are usually an hour in length and are held during the lunch hour. Mobile tours are typically scheduled for Thursday or Friday afternoon, and run for three and a half hours (including transportation to and from the site). We also offer an optional day-long workshop that provides a more in-depth look at a specific land use topic on the Wednesday prior to the start of the regular conference activities.

Session Topics

We are looking for sessions that fit within the conference theme and selected topic areas. Listed below are the issues we are seeking to explore during the conference. The submission form will ask you to select the topic or topics most applicable to your proposal.

- **Climate Change & Adaptation**: With reduced snow pack, longer periods of drought, increases in the number and spread of wildfires, and more severe flooding, the West is already experiencing the impacts of climate change. How are communities responding? What more should we be doing to adapt to the climate challenges of the future? How can the West become more resilient in the face of these changes?

- **Density & Urban Growth**: The explosion in population growth across the West has pushed many communities—from large cities to sprawling suburbs—to adopt greater density, which has many land use benefits, but also has created congestion and revealed some downsides of density, triggering political backlash and neighborhood opposition to redevelopment. How can communities strike the right balance? How can they develop support for density or manage the backlash associated in redevelopment? How can we create density that is diverse, inclusive, equitable, and livable?

- **Energy**: The West has abundant energy resources, both renewable (solar and wind) and more traditional sources like oil, coal, and natural gas. All forms of energy development include environmental, land use, and economic impacts. How do we better prepare for the boom and bust cycle of natural gas and oil? How do we reduce our need for energy and, therefore, the impacts of its development? Who’s doing it right? What barriers stand in the way? And how does our Western energy profile promote, or prevent, inclusive communities?
- **Financing**: That new transit-oriented, mixed-use center is fantastic, but how do we pay for it? What funding mechanisms are available, who can make use of them, and how do they really work? How do communities and developers put together these financial packages to pay for needed improvements and projects?

- **Housing**: Communities across the West—from large cities to resort towns and rural areas—are facing a major housing challenge. Not only is the region experiencing a major influx of people moving in, but the cost of housing is pricing many people out of the market. How can we address this problem? Paris is contemplating a major tax on vacant apartments and second homes to get them back into the housing market. What innovative ideas might work in the West?

- **Land Conservation**: Because the West is largely defined by its lands, it is important to preserve this natural heritage. Whether it’s urban green spaces or large tracts of wilderness, conserved lands are important to the well-being of the West. What new tools are available for conservation efforts? What new challenges are we facing with these conservation tools? How does land conservation affect our efforts to build inclusive communities, and how do we ensure that land conservation benefits all, in an equitable way?

- **Legal Developments**: What have recent changes in the law meant for land use development and regulation? How will these changes impact future growth and development or the preservation of our land and natural resources?

- **Planning Tools**: Euclidean zoning has now been around for 100 years, and we’ve seen various iterations come and go. Is this still a solid tool for community planning? How is zoning adapting to meet the changing demands of rural/suburban/urban growth? What other tools and innovations are communities using?

- **Smart Cities**: Innovations in technology are making it easier than ever to gather data on how cities are operating, from traffic flows and parking availability to managing energy and water use to delivering social services. How can communities capitalize on these trends and build an infrastructure to continuously collect and use data to improve their services and the life of their residents while securely protecting safety and privacy? How do these new technologies enhance, and perhaps challenge, equitable access to the city in areas such as transportation, building regulation, and land use planning?

- **Transportation**: Transportation is no longer about building new roads. Today’s transportation solutions also incorporate public transit, pedestrian and bike infrastructure, car sharing, and (very soon) driverless cars. Where are these innovations taking place? What’s working? How can cities provide better service for all of their residents? What do we need to be doing now to prepare for the transportation needs of the future?

- **Water**: In the West, where our water comes from, how we get it where it needs to go, and how much of it we can develop without unduly impacting the environment are perennial concerns. Are there any new tools or practices that are making a difference? How are communities incorporating land use planning and water planning to create increases in efficiencies?

- **Other**: What issues are emerging for communities across the West? What are the tools, technologies, and innovations being used to address the challenges facing communities?
Proposal Criteria
RMLUI seeks to provide a broad selection of offerings, including plenary talks focused on the conference theme, and mobile site tours to highlight innovative developments, as well as a variety of sessions covering the topics listed above.

Conference attendees come from across the Rocky Mountain West, and our aim is to offer sessions that reflect the diversity of our audience. Panelists should represent geographic diversity as well as different viewpoints. We strongly encourage sessions that provide the perspective of small towns and mid-size cities.

We are also interested in sessions that utilize formats other than the traditional panel style, such as debates and round tables, and those that encourage audience participation.

RMLUI provides continuing education for legal, planning, and real estate professionals, and encourage session organizers to emphasize this content in their proposals.

Sessions should strive to:
- Provide useful and practical knowledge participants can use in their own work.
- Represent the conference theme and highlighted topics.
- Address current issues trending in the land use and development communities.
- Present innovative tools and case studies of current projects.
- Offer diverse perspectives with speakers from across the region with different perspectives and backgrounds.
- Engage the audience in a meaningful way.
- Support continuing education for legal, planning and real estate professionals.

Submitting Your Proposal
When submitting your session for consideration, you should be prepared with the following information: session title, description, outline, learning objectives, and speaker information. You should also be prepared to describe how your session supports the conference theme and highlighted topics, as well as how you will engage with participants during your session.

The title and description of your session will be used not only in evaluating your proposal, but also for marketing materials if your session is accepted. Titles should catch the reader’s attention, and the description should provide enough information for an audience to know what the session will cover. For examples, please refer to programs from past conferences on our website.

The session outline provides the Selection Committee with a more in-depth look at how your session will be structured, the topics you plan to address and the issues that each speaker will cover. It should be no more than a page in length.

Learning objectives describe what lessons participants will take away from the sessions. These are used in obtaining continuing education credits for the conference, but also are used in evaluation criteria.
Speakers should be able to demonstrate content expertise in the topic, as well as be engaging to the audience. We are looking for well-rounded panels that present a variety of perspectives, represent different geographic, ethnic, and gender diversity. Speakers should be able to discuss how tools and methodologies can be transferred to other cities and towns.

It is our experience that panel-style presentations work best when limited to no more than three speakers. We strongly encourage you to contact potential speakers to verify their interest and availability prior to submitting your proposal. Please note that RMLUI is not able to provide travel assistance for speakers.

Please adhere to the following guidelines when preparing your proposal:

- Proposals are due by Friday, August 12, 2016.
- Please review the Western Places/Western Spaces conference theme and the highlighted topics above to make sure your session is a good fit for the conference.
- Comply with word limitations (text will be cut off longer entries).
- Limit panel style sessions to one moderator and three speakers.
- Please provide all of the information requested. Incomplete proposals will not be considered.

Next Steps

All applications must be submitted online. However, we encourage you to create your proposal in Word and then copy and paste into the online form. You can download a sample form here.

The Selection Committee will review all complete proposals and make a final decision on which to include. RMLUI reserves the right to make changes to sessions, including adding speakers or combining sessions with similar content.

Important Dates:

- August 12, 2016: proposals due
- September 30, 2016: applicants will be informed of the status of their proposals
- November 4, 2016: selected sessions must be finalized (title, description, speakers)
- March 16 & 17, 2017: RMLUI’s Annual Land Use Conference

Questions?

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