Growth & Change in the West: Can We Adapt Sustainably?

As we emerge from the pandemic, the West is facing immense pressures from growth and change that challenge our notions of sustainability in our region. The changing nature of work has allowed significant migration to high-amenity communities, straining local infrastructure, driving up housing prices, and displacing long-time residents. The cost of living in many areas of the region far outpace the average incomes, resulting in economic dislocation and rising income inequality. An intractable housing affordability crisis is spreading beyond our urban areas to exurban communities and rural towns, where people are now moving in greater numbers. The numbers of unhoused people who are camping in urban rights of way, parks, and public spaces is exploding. These growing populations, drawn to our iconic landscapes, are loving our public lands and national parks to death.

At the same time, the impacts of climate change are upon us. The West is experiencing an extended drought that threatens our regional water supply and our forests. The fire season is growing in duration and severity with each passing year. The condition and range of habitat to support biodiversity and Western wildlife is declining. The heat island effect in developed areas is affecting public health and our quality of life.

As we face these challenges (and many more), we wonder how the region will adapt to these mounting pressures and what measures we need to be taking now to ensure greater resilience to whatever the future holds. How do we ensure that newcomers to the region do not price out long-time residents? Can we grow in ways that are inclusive and equitable, providing housing and access to jobs and opportunity across the economic spectrum? Are there limits to our capacity to absorb growth? Can we resist the pressure to build housing in marginal and hazardous places, like floodplains and the wildland-urban interface? How do we manage increasingly scarce resources like water or access to national parks in ways that are equitable and fair? As the region recovers from the pandemic and booms again, can we ensure that our shifting land use practices are sustainable? Finally, can we Westerners adapt, culturally and politically, to the changing realities in our communities and invest in the policy tools that could enhance our long-term resilience?

These are some of the many questions that we will consider at the 2022 Western Places | Western Spaces conference. The conference will take place at the University of Denver’s campus on March 23 – 25, 2022, and will include both in-person and virtual attendance options. We invite your participation in making this conference our best ever!
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 conference is the place for land use and development professionals in the West to share knowledge and network. With four hundred 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 attendees are from the Rocky Mountain West: Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and 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 at the University of Denver campus on a Thursday and Friday, and typically includes about 30 – 35 sessions. Each session is 90 minutes, and runs concurrently with four to six other sessions in the same time block. Most sessions will be live with some options for virtual attendance and presentations.

Plenary events are an hour in length and are held during the lunch hour. Off-site tours are scheduled for afternoons 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 an in-depth look at a specific land use topic on the Wednesday prior to the start of the regular conference activities.

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**Ways to Apply**

**Submit a Session**

We are primarily looking for sessions that address the theme and topics of this year’s conference, but could focus on other “hot topic” issues. Sessions are 90 minutes in length, and should include 30 minutes for audience engagement. Panels typically consist of 3–4 speakers plus a moderator.

**Speaker Nominations**

A speaker nomination is a good option for those who may not be able to develop a full session but could lend their expertise to fill out an existing panel. RMLUI will work with session organizers to add selected speakers to increase depth and diversity of existing sessions.

**Please Note:**

As much as possible, we would prefer to have speakers present in the room for their sessions, but we can accommodate remote presentations. Please indicate on the submission form if you plan to incorporate virtual presentations.

**How to Apply:**

For all submission types, use the online application form. The first page has a check box that allows you to select the type of application you want. If you have any questions, please contact RMLUI at rmlui@law.du.edu.
Submitting Your Proposal

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 (see page 4), 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.

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, and 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. Please indicate if any speakers will be presenting virtually.

Please adhere to the following guidelines when preparing your proposal:

- Proposals are due by Friday, August 13, 2021.
- Please review the Western Places | Western Spaces conference theme and the highlighted topics 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.

Selection Criteria

RMLUI seeks to provide a broad selection of offerings focused on the conference theme, highlighting innovative developments, and covering the topics listed in the Themed Tracks section.

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.
- 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.
**Themed Tracks & Session Topics**

**Growth & Change in the West:** As more and more people move to the Rocky Mountain West, all our communities are feeling the pinch. More housing, new infrastructure, more water, and more resources are needed. Are there limits to our ability to absorb this growth?

**Economy & Finance:** The pandemic caused widespread economic dislocation, but also created opportunities for those who were able to adapt their work to a virtual platform. How is the changing nature of work impacting land use development patterns? How are communities adapting to shifting economic trends? What are the opportunities and pitfalls associated with these changes, and what lessons can we learn from communities that are adapting in equitable ways?

**Energy:** The West has abundant energy resources, and there is an increasing focus on tapping renewable sources over fossil fuels. What does this shift mean for the rural West? How do we balance energy needs against environmental protection? What innovations are helping Western communities adapt to shifting priorities and policy approaches?

**Equity:** The pandemic highlighted and exacerbated the inequities embedded in our society. How do we address the chronic underinvestment in communities and infrastructure that impact the health and well-being of our residents? How do we ensure that the impacts and benefits of our land use policies and approaches are equitably distributed?

**Housing:** As the housing affordability crisis deepens and expands across the region, what can we do to meet the need for housing that is affordable and accessible? What new and improved land use approaches should we be pursuing?

**Land Conservation & Open Space:** The importance of parks and open space as critical green infrastructure has never been more evident. How do we ensure that every community has adequate green space to support health and wellness? What tools and strategies do we need to ensure that our conservation efforts are strategic, serving the needs of people and nature? And how do we protect our public lands from being “loved to death”?

**Legal Developments:** What are the most important legal developments impacting land use and real estate development this year? What legislative efforts will allow for, or stifle, innovation and progress? What regulations are holding us back or hindering our ability to meet the needs of the future? What legal trends should we be watching?

**Mobility & Transportation Infrastructure:** How can we support and improve public transportation and mobility options to ensure communities have access to housing, jobs, and other resources? How do we invest in infrastructure for the future and adapt existing infrastructure to provide more flexible options?

**Planning Tools & Governance Structures:** What lessons have we learned from the pandemic, when it comes to engaging communities in planning processes? Are there tools, such as covenants and restrictions, that need to be updated or re-evaluated for a changing world? Are there land valuation and taxation policies that need a refresh, to encourage more resilient, equitable, and thriving communities?

**Resilience & Adaptation:** Facing a future of wildfires, flooding, and drought, how can we prepare for a hotter, drier future and help our communities develop better policy tools to protect against future disasters? What strategies can help us avoid building in harms’ way or retreat to safer ground?

**Small Towns & Rural Communities:** Small towns and rural communities have been especially affected by shifting migration and economic development patterns. What challenges most affect these communities, as we emerge from the pandemic? What strategies and tools are helping them cope? How can they better prepare for a changing future?

**Water:** The West is experiencing a severe drought, even as there is increased demand for municipal water and reduced supply in the dwindling snowpack. How do we balance the human and ecological demands for water? How do we stretch the resource further? How do we plan for future needs? What new and innovative policy approaches are needed to ensure a resilient, adequate, and sustainable water supply?

**Other Hot Topics:** What topics have we missed? What is your community doing that could serve as a lesson to others? Suggest something to be included in the Hot Topics track.
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:
- **Friday, August 13:** proposals due
- September 2021: applicants will be informed of the status of their proposals
- October 2021: selected sessions must be finalized (title, description, speakers)
- November 2021: registration opens
- March 23, 24 & 25, 2022: RMLUI’s Annual Land Use Conference

Questions?

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Sponsorship & Promotional Opportunities

Our conference is not possible without the generous support of our sponsors. These financial contributions help fund our programs and conference activities, including top-notch keynote speakers, plenary lunch events, and tours. Conference sponsorship provides visibility and underscores your company’s commitment to sustainable communities and informed and ethical land use and development practices.

Equally important are our Aspen sponsors, who provide in-kind marketing and promotional support.

For more information, please see the Sponsor page on our website or contact Susan Daggett.