


MULTI-HOUSING NEWS

 PRINT THIS

Powered by 

 Click to Print

[SAVE THIS](#) | [EMAIL THIS](#) | [Close](#)

Q&A with Dr. Catherine L. Ross: Shrinking Footprint of American Home Offers Greater Potential for Multifamily Developers

Published: July 24, 2008

Dr. Catherine L. Ross is the first executive director of the Georgia Regional Transportation Authority. She has extensive experience in transportation and urban planning, and organizational management consulting for both the public and private sectors. She is an internationally known transportation planner with experience in conducting transportation planning, urban and regional planning, quality growth and project impact assessments.

Dr. Ross is Georgia Tech's College of Architecture's first endowed faculty member. She holds the Harry West Chair of City and Regional Planning and directs the Center for Quality Growth and Regional Development (CQGRD).

She talked to *MHN* Online News Editor, Anuradha Kher, about the role of the multifamily industry in transit oriented development (TOD), how public/private partnerships make TOD more successful, and why it will take a cultural change in America to make this happen.

MHN: Do transit-oriented cities need to have predominantly multifamily housing?

Dr. Ross: Transit-oriented cities certainly do have multifamily housing. I am not convinced that they have to predominantly have multifamily housing. It is quite common to find that cities with extensive transit also have higher densities with housing that includes lofts, condominiums, apartments and live/work play communities. These cities have communities that are developed around transit systems offering compact, mixed-use development with high-quality pedestrian environments. Many different types of housing can benefit as a result of proximity to transit. However multifamily housing, when it is located in a place that offers access to a wide range of attractive services and activities, can be an anchor in the development of transit-oriented communities.

MHN: What are the challenges/obstacles in creating a transit oriented future?

Dr. Ross: A primary obstacle is the design of our communities and neighborhoods, which has been largely driven by the automobile. To a great extent, we have constructed our homes in suburban enclaves with jobs locating in places that are totally automobile dependent. In addition, retail is located along commercial strips or in huge malls that once again require the use of the automobile. We are confronted with reconfiguring the built environment in urban and suburban communities providing transit alternatives. This will mean developing and redeveloping communities that are more compact but offer high-quality living



environments. While most Americans have enjoyed the use of their cars, millions of us are now abandoning this mode of travel as a result of the escalating costs of gasoline and the push/pull of climate change and its impact looming large. Many are opting for more close-in locations or switching to transit.

A transit-oriented future will also require significant investment in transit systems including light rail, heavy rail, commuter systems, high speed rail, bus, pedestrian and bikeways. The construction of a more comprehensive and efficient transit system within the United States will require significant increases in funding for transit as well as a cultural change, which recognizes the benefits of expanding our travel and living choices.

MHN: Transit oriented development is the hottest topic in the multifamily industry right now. Will this trend continue on to be a defining one in the history of American housing?

Dr. Ross: Transit-oriented development is enjoying a resurgence in contemporary urban America as a result of a number of market and environmental phenomena. Towns and cities were initially constructed around public transit systems so in this sense, this is a re-emergence of a historical development pattern. Transit-oriented development creates the opportunity for unique market solutions. These solutions are most successful when there is a partnership between the public and the private sector. Previously, it was largely the public sector and policy interventions that drove transit development. The link between transit-oriented development and the multifamily housing industry will continue to expand and become more concrete in response to both the challenges and opportunities in the market place. This current union is one that will enjoy a substantial place in the history of American housing.

MHN: How much part does government play in making sure that America becomes more transit oriented?

Dr. Ross: It is imperative that the government play a role in assuring investment in transit as part of a strategy to assure the continued mobility of both passengers and commodities. The increasing requirement of more sustainable transportation in response to climate change and the escalating cost of travel can best be accomplished through a partnership with a continuing role for government.

MHN: What role do multifamily developers play in ensuring that a city becomes more transit oriented?

Dr. Ross: Multifamily developers play a very large role in creating transit-oriented communities. Much of the construction will take place around transit stations resulting in significant social, environmental and economic benefit. Creating greater housing choice while expanding the opportunity for residents to travel on transit results in the revitalization of declining neighborhoods, congestion relief and the creation of transit-oriented communities. In addition, there is great evidence that the footprint of the American home is shrinking, offering even greater potential for multifamily developers.

MHN: What are the cities in the United States that can be considered good examples of great transit-oriented societies?

Dr. Ross: New York City is an outstanding example of a transit-oriented society. The vast majority of transit trips made in the United States occur in New York City, which is extremely multi-modal. In addition, Philadelphia, Portland, Ore., Seattle, Washington, D.C. and Chicago are all good examples of transit-oriented cities.

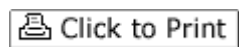
MHN: How much of a push back is there from lobbies of car manufacturers and how can cities tackle

this problem?

Dr. Ross: Historically, car manufacturers have generally supported the highway lobby and not been equally supportive of transit. However, they are currently experiencing very difficult times in the market. This is particularly true for American car manufacturers who find themselves with limited ability to respond to the changing preference for smaller, fuel-efficient or alternative fuel-powered vehicles. As the American preference for vehicles is changing, and the demand and need for public transit is expanding along with the cost of gasoline, there may be a lessening of focus on transit on the part of American car manufacturers. Whether this occurs or not, cities and towns will continue to be called on to offer sustainable, cost-effective, dependable, safer transit alternatives.

Links referenced within this article**Find this article at:**

http://www.multihousingnews.com/multihousing/content_display/industry-news/e3i05185ecb9182ed52f1c798957a279820



[SAVE THIS](#) | [EMAIL THIS](#) | [Close](#)

Uncheck the box to remove the list of links referenced in the article.

◆ 2008 VNU eMedia Inc. All rights reserved.