



From left to right: James A. Wolfe, Secretary, FDOT District 4; The Honorable Jeff Carlson, Chair, Central Florida Regional Planning Council; Armando Fana, US HUD Miami Field Office Director; Edward Jennings, US HUD Regional Administrator; Suzanne Gunzburger, Vice Chair, South Florida Regional Planning Council; Isabel Cosio Carballo, South Florida Regional Planning Council.

Florida Wins Sustainable Communities Grants



By Ed Jennings Jr.,
HUD Southeast Regional
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The Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant Program was created to increase economic competitiveness by connecting housing with jobs, quality schools, and transportation. Today, HUD, DOT, Energy, EPA, and USDA are integrating in ways some never thought possible. Just last year, HUD launched two new grant programs –

awarding \$98 million to support 45 communities to undertake integrated regional planning efforts in large metropolitan regions but also in small rural and tribal communities. For the first time ever, HUD and DOT combined grant funds to invest \$58 million in 61 grants to support more holistic approaches to connecting affordable housing, job opportunities, and transportation corridors.

Despite the stiff competition, Florida was awarded more than \$5.6 million in planning grant funding to help develop a long-term blueprint for smarter development and regional planning and support more livable and sustainable com-

munities in six rural counties of Central Florida, and in the seven-county region of Southeast Florida.

The Central Florida Regional Planning Council (CFRPC) of Bartow, Florida, was awarded \$1,400,000 which will be focused on the Heartland Region of Florida consisting of the six rural counties: DeSoto, Glades, Hardee, Hendry, Highlands, and Okeechobee. The effort will create a vision for the future that enables growth while preserving natural areas and protecting wildlife and agricultural production, supporting sustainable, healthy communities of all sizes, and ensuring a vibrant economic and social life. The CFRPC is presently revising its budget and work plan for the project and anticipates having an agreement in place with HUD in the first quarter of the year to enable it to begin work on the Regional Plan for Sustainable Development with its Partners. For more information on the CFRPC project, contact Helen Sears, 863-534-7130 ext. 124, email: hsears@cfrpc.org.

The South Florida Regional Planning Council of Hollywood, awarded \$4,250,000, seeks to put in place the

Southeast Florida Regional Plan for Sustainable Development to ensure that planning and investment decisions yield a more prosperous, inclusive, and sustainable region. The project will integrate data, tools, and models to assess the region today, understand the region's future, and track progress. For more information on SFRPC, contact Isabel Cosio Carballo, 954-985-4416, email: isabelc@sfrpc.com.

These local communities understood that old growth patterns were increasingly unsupportable, forcing families to live further and further away from where they worked and costing both households and local governments too much money to sustain. These communities understand that transportation costs really are a housing expense too, and that increasingly businesses and developers are looking to invest in communities that offer more choices. These are exciting times indeed – it's a time when sustainability and livability are becoming more than just buzz words and catch phrases and are actually taking on real meaning. Sustainable communities provide economic momentum and help America compete more effectively for jobs. At the same time, they hold the promise for helping to address long-standing equity challenges, and green the planet. Yet, turning the battle ship around will require not only commitment at the federal level but active engagement by philanthropy, the advocacy and research communities, and private sector leaders.

We know that planning sustainable communities works. Three decades ago, for example, the people of Dallas and its surrounding suburbs realized they could build a stronger economy if they planned as one interconnected region. The result was the construction of a public transportation system - DART - that links Dallas with 12 suburban areas, allowing people to travel quickly and affordably between the places they live, work, and shop. The effects have been astounding. According to a study published by economists at the University of North Texas, DART is expected to generate more than \$5.6 billion of economic activity between 2009 and 2014. Since the system opened, homes near DART stations increased in value on average 25 percent more than those without convenient public transit options. No two regions are alike. What worked in Texas may not work in Florida. That's why we threw away the old Washington playbook of dictating exactly how the grant should be used. Each recipient has broad discretion to pursue a plan that makes sense in the context of local needs.

At HUD, when the grant funding opportunity was announced, we were inundated with applications from every state and two territories - from central cities to rural areas and tribal governments. We know there is a need to closely help each community willing to attempt this shift into livability, so we created a Regional Sustainability Team, with Sustainability Officers who serve as our primary presence in the region and field for advancing sustainable housing and communities. This will involve three principal roles:

- Providing education, outreach, and information dissemination about HUD's sustainability efforts to communities;
- Serving as an informational point of contact for federal agencies, state and local governmental agencies, academic institutions, and private-sector stakeholders interested in partnering with HUD to advance sustainable development practices; and
- Convening meetings of interested stakeholders to identify required resources needed by community leadership to advance sustainable development, and sharing the results of these meetings with the Office of Sustainable Housing and Communities.

Fixing our economy won't happen overnight. After all, the disconnect between the places where people live and work results from decades of poor planning and misplaced priorities. By acting now, we can create good jobs today. We can ensure parents spend less time driving and more time with their children, that more families live in safe, stable communities near good schools and jobs, and that more businesses have access to the capital and talent they need to grow and prosper.

Above all, we can lay the foundation for sustainable economic prosperity for generations to come by helping communities that share problems start sharing solutions. **HNN**

Edward L. Jennings, Jr. is HUD's Regional Administrator for the Southeast serving eight states: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee, as well as, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. Jennings leads the largest HUD region in the nation encompassing over 64 million people. He oversees the delivery of HUD programs and services to communities and evaluates their efficiency and effectiveness.

Note: To speak with a sustainability officer in Florida, please contact your HUD office in your area or send an email to sustainablecommunities@hud.gov.