The Good, The Bad, and The Indifferent

Doing the Deal
New Partners for Smart Growth
February 9, 2007
Houston TOD: The Indifferent

Ilana Preuss
US EPA
6th Annual New Partners for Smart Growth
February 9th, 2007
Is this Indifferent?

- Built first light-rail line with local tax
  * Alignment down Main Street - connects major employment centers
  * High quality design of rail stations

- Plans for five additional lines - light-rail and BRT
Indifferent

- No partnering - METRO goes it alone
- Codes - suburban parking and setback codes
- No TOD vision - developers work independently
Where it all Began

• Houston invests in first light-rail line 2003
• Main Street Coalition - partnership of developers, NGOs, and businesses
Main Street
City: To Play or Not to Play

- No zoning!
- Parking and setback codes - little flexibility on urban blocks
- Permitting separate from planning - in DPW
- Western mindset:
  * Not the city’s role to tell developers what to do
  * Entrepreneurial spirit
How is this Indifferent?

• Parking codes - not feasible to build at urban densities
• Partnerships - all external to city leaders
• Vision - no agreement in quality of place - no security for developers
Current Market

Market with Placemaking Premium & TOD Parking Ratio
The Future is Now

- Partnering Main Street Coalition, Department of Planning, METRO and Texas A&M
- Funding for Urban Corridors Planning process - Phase I & II
- Discussing code changes
Proposed Strategies

- Create TOD District – Parking & Ped
- Assemble land
- Provide for affordable housing
- Catalyze joint agreements on design guidelines
But...

- Still no city and METRO vision for the new stations - an engineering project only
- Alignments and station locations still decided in silo of METRO

Hints of city and METRO partnerships with developers on catalytic TOD projects - too soon
For more information:

- Smart Growth Implementation Assistance program
  www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/sgia.htm
- Houston Midtown  www.houstonmidtown.com
- Ensemble/HCC Tomorrow report
  www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/noaa_epa_techasst.htm#2

- Ilana Preuss  preuss.ilana@epa.gov
  202-566-2853