

WLI Fall Meeting 2014 Essay
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After attending the ULI Fall Meeting in New York, I feel more inspired to encourage great things in my work as housing and land use planner and in my position as a planning commissioner. Having cultivated most of my urban planning career in the public sector, I had the opportunity to hear different perspectives on topics that go beyond the traditional focus areas of planning.

As a guest of the Commercial Real Estate Council, I learned a great deal about the changing forms of retail development and its relationship to traditional forms of commerce. For example, outlet shopping centers represent one of the fastest growing sectors of the shopping center business but there is a risk of diluting a brand if the physical location of the outlet is too close to the main product. In another sector, the emergence of e-commerce and the concept of blended retail outlets have allowed some companies to adapt to fashion trends more easily than traditional stores, such as in the case of eyeglass retailer Warby Parker. To me, these emerging trends in commerce can represent different opportunities for economic development in cities that are experiencing socio-economic and demographic changes. In the case of outlet malls, a city can cater to both tourists and nearby residents since outlets can be a larger regional draw than a traditional shopping mall. In the case of Warby Parker, communities experiencing a need to retain its younger generations could re-imagine how they develop retail areas in order to appeal to emerging fashions and tastes.

At the Fall Meeting, I also had the privilege of attending the WLI Steering Committee meeting, where I heard about different approaches to increasing the number of women in the land use and real estate industries. One approach that particularly stood out to me is the idea of having mentors, not only for young women, but also for young men. There is a conundrum that a number of young women feel that they need to be "fixed" if resources are directed solely toward them and the targeted group may not view mentorship as something that will benefit them. A program geared toward both young men and women might help keep women engaged in the industry while avoiding the perception that women need to be fixed.

I am grateful for the opportunity to attend the Fall Meeting as a WLI scholarship recipient. The lessons I learned in New York will help develop my career in planning and government and I look forward to more involvement in ULI in the future.