Cyndi Thomas
WLI 2015 Fall Meeting Scholarship Recipient

The ULI Fall Meeting in San Francisco was an inspiring experience. I feel fortunate to have received this scholarship, network with the other recipients, participate in the Urban Development Mixed Use (UDMUC) – Red Product Council, and interact with wonderful women that make WLI possible on a national level.

During the WLI Steering Committee meeting, we received a preview of the groundbreaking ULI research regarding women in the real estate and land use industry. While women make up 25% of ULI's membership, but only account for 14% of its CEOs, it is encouraging that companies like Prologis have not only put diversity in senior management on its radar, but instituted a platform, Breakthrough, to make more women leaders a reality. Programs like this are especially important since 93% of female CEOs oversee small firms with under 100 employees.

Another aspect of the research was focused on mentorship which is a key part to the WLI scholarship. The mentorship received not only from my 'assigned' mentor but that of the other senior women on the steering committee is invaluable, and I intend to stay in touch with many of these women going forward.

The UDMUC – Red Product Council meeting was a fascinating experience. We were given access to a model of San Francisco, incredible views of the city, and a peek into the spire at the Transamerica Center. Beyond the visual pleasantries, the meeting content made for a lively day of pointed interaction between council members and presenters. We heard from leaders at Google, Facebook, Gensler, and Big about new paradigms in design. The suburban focus of the newly completed Google and Facebook campuses seem to contradict the current mantras around millennials and the urban environment. Only time will tell if we are creating lasting value in Silicon Valley, although I suspect that many of the millennials being bussed out of the City to these campuses on a daily basis will age, have a family, and move to the suburbs just like their parents did. The lingering question in my mind centered on the exclusivity of the campus. At some point, if there is limited 'ad-hoc' interaction with the outside world, does groupthink destroy the creativity and spontaneity of these firms? Does the culture suffer? Is 'social – by design' good enough if we are continuously socializing with the same people?
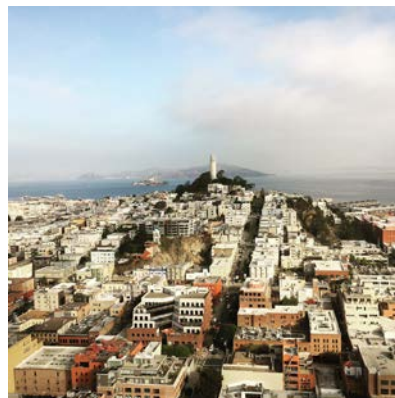
Thank you, again, for this opportunity. I plan to continue my involvement with the ULI-Colorado chapter and hope to continue to attend Fall and Spring meetings with an eye on Product Council participation in the future. See you in Philadelphia.