

**Natalia Chavez**

**2019 Fall Meeting Reflection: Urban Land Institute/Randall Lewis Health Mentorship Program**

As a graduate student for the last year, I had been attending some of the Urban Land Institute's events, and when I saw that they had a mentorship program at the intersection of health and the built environment, I was thrilled. My interest in these two areas stem from having worked in both healthcare and real estate. Real estate developers are seeing the importance of building healthy communities and incorporating design elements that promote healthy living.

I was connected to my mentor, Belinda Sward, and I couldn't have been more pleased with her enthusiasm to be a resource for me. She has over 20 years of experience providing market and customer-based strategies for real estate, working with developers, homebuilders, and investors. The Fall Meeting provided me with an opportunity to meet my mentor in-person and also to meet the other four mentees.

The ULI Fall Meeting in Washington D.C. had attendees from around the world. There were multiple sessions occurring simultaneously so there was something for everyone. I attended sessions on climate change, activating social nodes in urban spaces, and addressing the housing affordability crisis. The affordable housing session was particularly interesting to me as it has been affecting communities around the United States, especially communities of color. Some of the suggested solutions were to move toward more modular, factory-built housing so that prices could be lower and the development of affordable homes on land owned by community land trusts. These homes typically sit on a long-term ground lease and are rented or sold to individuals. At the moment, I'm conducting a research project at the Harvard Kennedy School on a similar topic: commercial land trusts.

Throughout the week, I had the opportunity to meet various individuals in the real estate industry. I will be graduating next year and this networking opportunity will be important as I hope to break into the real estate industry as either an equitable developer who builds healthy spaces or policymaker. I was honored to be my mentor's guest to the Community Development Product Council, which is often restricted to a select group of ULI members. The council started with a roundtable ice breaker where participants addressed the question, "what are you doing to be recession proof in the later innings of this cycle?" I was surprised to find that many participants did not believe the recession would hit their markets because they were quite strong. This is different than the rhetoric that I've been hearing about the recession's impact on the housing markets. I was also intrigued that I was able to hear from Douglas Duncan, Fannie Mae's senior vice president and chief economist about forecasts and analysis on the economy, housing, and mortgage markets.

The Randall Lewis Health Mentorship Program allowed me to attend the ULI Fall Meeting and hear from experts around the world. I am excited to see everyone again at the 2020 Spring Meeting in Toronto!