

# Pittsburgh Tribune-Review

## Mixed-use communities appeal to young adults

By Justin Vellucci

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Developers should start looking at strip malls and suburban sprawl as things of the past.

That's the message Brookings Institution visiting fellow Christopher Leinberger emphatically delivered Friday at the eighth annual Southwestern Pennsylvania Smart Growth Conference, held Downtown.

Younger adults' yearning for more urban lifestyles, combined with the rising price of gas, are making some towns and bedroom communities outside major cities less desirable, Leinberger said. It's a trend that's even visible on TV, where the suburbanite lives of "Leave It To Beaver" were replaced by city-focused sitcoms like "Seinfeld" and "Friends."

"This is a reflection (that) what we want and our kids want (is) fundamentally different," Leinberger said.

That doesn't mean suburbs should funnel a generation of apartment renters and homeowners into Downtown Pittsburgh. Leinberger stressed many communities can tap into the trend of walkable urban development by encouraging mixed-use, transit-friendly development and zoning.

Officials from across the region lauded the prospect of building communities where residents are within walking distance of retail shops and transportation.

"I think (Leinberger) is right on with where the trends are going," said Baldwin Borough Manager Timothy J. Little, who noted the importance of having easy access to mass transit.

"We need to have people be able to access our communities," said Pasquale DeBlasio, a former Bridgeville mayor.

Two officials from different corners of the region both said they are equipped to develop -- or redevelop -- communities into the type of local neighborhoods Leinberger touted.

The Mon Valley, for example, could benefit by replacing shuttered businesses and old industrial sites with new forms of development, said Laura Zinski, executive director of the Mon Valley Initiative.

"We have waterfront, big vacant land. And the industrial sites are flat," Zinski said. "People should be falling on themselves to get that."

In Cranberry, the focus on mixed-use development started several years ago, when leaders started evaluating space for its fast-growing population, said John K. Trant Jr., the township's chief strategic planning officer.

Later this year, developers hope to begin selling units in two new residential developments that Trant cited as examples of future growth.

"I think (the mixed-use approach) reaffirms a lot of things Cranberry Township has been looking at and doing for a number of years," Trant said.

Court Gould, executive director of Sustainable Pittsburgh, said numerous towns in Western Pennsylvania could take advantage of this approach to development around residential and commercial use centers.

"(Leinberger's speech) was validating that there are now great opportunities and solutions to be found in our region," Gould said. "I think that's part of this message: 'It's beginning to happen.'"