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## Local Knowledge Contributes to International Policy Making: Urban Thinkers Campus in Omaha to Have Global Effects

A hundred years ago, only one out of every five people lived in an urban area. Today, five out of 10 do, and it's projected that in the next 30 years, seven out of 10 people will be metropolitan residents. And while sociologists, political scientists, and other academics have focused an enormous amount of attention on the rapid growth of megacities—those with populations exceeding 10 million—and the concomitant challenges they face, the effects of divestment in and population migration on rural areas and smaller cities have rarely been a target of their focus.

Perhaps because of gridlock at the federal level and federal divestment in smaller cities and rural areas, at least in part, America's small to mid-size cities have by necessity become more innovative in addressing the issues that divide and paralyze national government, from financial challenges to environmental crises.

The lessons learned and knowledge gained among local governments, leaders, and stakeholders will be used to leverage international policy making as the Urban Thinkers Campus convenes in Omaha on November 16 and 17. The Urban Thinkers Campus here will draft recommendations for inclusion in the Habitat III debate next year in Quito, Ecuador. Habitat III is a major global summit, formally known as the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development. The United Nations has called the conference, the third in a series that began in 1976, to reinvigorate the global political commitment to the sustainable development of towns, cities and other urban areas. The product of that reinvigoration, along with pledges and new obligations, is being referred to as the New Urban Agenda. That agenda will set a new global strategy around urbanization for the next two decades. The Joslyn Institute for Sustainable Communities has been selected by UN-Habitat to host the conference as part of the World Urban Campaign initiative *The City We Need*. The JISC proposal is one of 28 selected worldwide, and one of only two to be held in the United States. Moreover, the JISC Urban Thinkers Campus is the only one that will address small and mid-sized cities and rural areas, making the agenda here even more critical.

JISC's proposal, *The City We Need: The Role and Opportunities in Urban Sustainability for Small and Mid-Size Cities*, centers on the enormously relevant small- to medium-sized urban centers during this period of transformative

urbanization, as well as on the rural areas that are significant sources for this growth. These non-urban areas are wellsprings from which we derive myriad resources. From Alaska's vulnerable commercial and subsistence fishing, to loss of farmland in Nebraska, underutilized farmland in Colombia, and loss of both farming and fishing habitats to pollution in China's Pearl River delta, it has become abundantly apparent that urbanization is inextricably linked to the health of rural communities and their natural resources.

The conference will open at 9:30 a.m. on Monday, November 16, at The Thompson Center on the University of Nebraska–Omaha campus. Admission is free, but will be limited in size. Many of the proceedings will be livestreamed, so people across the state unable to attend will still be able to watch. Open registration will begin October 5.

Among topics on the two-day agenda are urban–rural interdependencies, sustainability metrics, food security, climate change mitigation and resiliency, housing, public policy and planning, innovations in municipal finance for sustainable development, and more. Distinguished speakers at the Urban Thinkers Campus will include, among others:

- Eugénie Birch, Chair, World Urban Campaign, Penn Institute for Urban Research
- Andrew Rudd, Urban Environment Officer, Urban Planning & Designing Division, UN–Habitat
- Jeff Soule, FAICP, American Planning Association
- Beth Kerttula, White House Director of Ocean Policy, and former Democratic leader of the Alaska State House of Representatives
- Chuck Hassebrook, Vice President, Sandhills Wind Energy, and former Executive Director, Center for Rural Affairs
- Francesco Maria Orsini and Camilo Restrepo Ochoa, Urbam, Universidad EAFIT, Medellín, Colombia
- Jim Powell, Assistant Professor of Natural Resource Policy, Sustainability, and Public Administration, University of Alaska Southeast
- Jay Leighter, Assistant Professor of Communications and Sustainability Studies, Creighton University
- Jack Hébert, Cold Climate Housing Research
- Dean John Bartle, College of Public Affairs and Community Service, University of Nebraska–Omaha
- Tim Kenny, Executive Director, Nebraska Finance Investment Authority
- W. Cecil Steward, FAIA, DPACSA, Founder and President, Joslyn Institute for Sustainable Communities

With local governments leading the vanguard of climate change policy, small- to medium-sized (up to 3 million in population) cities are uniquely positioned to explore, promote and exemplify policies supporting sustainable urban-rural interconnections, such as regional food systems and integrated planning, while mitigating the effects of a changing climate and demands on resources.

JISC's focus will be on the role and opportunities for sustainable planning and policy for small and mid-size cities— from urban centers of fewer than 100,000 people up to 3,000,000, and focus on the rural-urban synergy and necessity of sound natural resource conservation management in a time of unprecedented growth.

The event in mid-November will be a two-day forum with a number of focus groups exploring various aspects of the overall prospectus. Through web-based conferencing with partners in Alaska, Colombia, Guangzhou, and elsewhere, the

proceedings will be linked among urban thinkers and researchers and other participants in synthesizing recommendations and insights for the overall UN–Habitat III initiative.

Partners with JISC in the Urban Thinkers Campus are the University of Nebraska–Omaha College of Public Affairs and Community Service, CitiScope, University of Nebraska–Lincoln College of Architecture, Creighton University Sustainability Studies Program, University of Alaska Southeast School of Management, and the Urbam program at Escuela de Administración, Finanzas Y Tecnología (EAFIT) in Medellín, Colombia.

Underwriting and sustaining support for the Joslyn Institute come from the Nebraska Environmental Trust, Nebraska Investment Finance Authority, the City of Lincoln, the Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality, Speedway Properties, and Lincoln Electric System’s District Energy Corporation. Gold-level sponsors include Sustainability Leadership Institute; silver-level sponsors include UNL College of Architecture’s Hyde Lecture Series; green-level sponsors include Design Futures Council and EcoStores Nebraska.

Further information is available at <http://www.joslyninstitute.org/utc.html> .

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