



## WESTERN PLACES | WESTERN SPACES

2025 CONFERENCE • MARCH 6-7 • 2025 • DENVER, CO

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ADAPTING FOR THE FUTURE  
**MARCH 6 & 7, 2025**

Western communities, and the infrastructure and regulatory systems that they depend on, are experiencing the challenges associated with aging. As we invest in the foundations for the future, we need to address those challenges and seize the opportunities presented as we adapt. The 2025 Western Places | Western Spaces conference will explore the best ideas for how communities can update their planning processes, their infrastructure, and their regulatory systems to meet the moment.

### **AGING POPULATION**

Once a relatively youthful part of the U.S., the Rocky Mountain region is undergoing rapid demographic change. In just the past decade, 7 out of 8 Rocky Mountain states have experienced a 42-55% increase in their age 65+ populations. Combined with slowing birth rates, these aging populations portend big changes for the region: fewer workers; increased demand for public transportation, more walkable communities, access to health services, and leisure activities; and a growing need for more flexible, affordable, and accessible housing.

### **AGING PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE**

Just as the population is aging, so too is the West's built environment. A region that was largely developed in the 20th century is now experiencing the challenges of outdated, insufficient, and crumbling infrastructure. Our current water and energy delivery systems are inadequate to serve future needs. Our existing public transportation, bicycle, and pedestrian infrastructure is lacking and standing in the way

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of a more sustainable future. Our current housing supply is not only insufficient and unaffordable, but also largely not designed to accommodate older inhabitants -- only 10% of our nation's housing stock is considered "senior friendly".

## AGING INTELLECTUAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Finally, our "modern" legal and regulatory systems that govern land development today were established roughly a century ago -- at a time when segregation and unsustainable growth were the norm. Zoning and subdivision rules that helped chart a development course for the communities of the 1950s no longer deliver the desired development of the 2050s.

## HOW CAN WE PLAN TO AGE WELL IN THE WEST?

The Rocky Mountain West is known for its entrepreneurial, innovative spirit. Although our aging region presents great challenges, we have an opportunity now to build the foundation for a different and thriving future by planning for and investing in the systems and infrastructure and inventive solutions to address the challenges ahead.

As we consider the road ahead, we need to ask ourselves:

- How can we leverage necessary investments to make our communities more accommodating to a changing population?
- How can we rebuild our infrastructure for the future, in ways that are sustainable and that provide the foundation for inclusive, equitable growth?
- How can we upgrade our utility systems to better manage increasingly scarce resources like water in ways that are sustainable and fair?
- What energy infrastructure do we need to power our future economy?
- Do we have the legal and regulatory system that allows for modernization and reform?
- How should we be rethinking, refreshing, and rewriting our land development codes with an eye to the future?

We will be taking up these questions, and more, at RMLUI's 2025 Western Places | Western Spaces Conference as we:

- ⇒ Explore strategic solutions in our communities that will result in a more sustainable, resilient, and equitable region.
- ⇒ Discuss ways to maximize infrastructure investments that will be made in the region.
- ⇒ Examine innovative land use planning, policy, and legal approaches that can help our communities address both the crises of the moment and the challenges ahead.

The conference will take place on the University of Denver's campus at the Sturm College of Law on **March 6-7, 2025**. We invite your participation in making this conference our best!

## ABOUT THE CONFERENCE

RMLUI's annual *Western Places | Western Spaces* conference explores growth and development issues facing communities in the Rocky Mountain region—from large cities to small towns—as well as concerns about managing/preserving the West's natural resources and heritage.

Each year, the event serves as *the* place for land use & development professionals in the West to share knowledge, resources, and to network. With four hundred attendees annually, this event helps define and influence the West's land use and development future.

The conference attracts people from across the country, but most attendees are from the Rocky Mountain West states: Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming.

Our conference attendees typically represent national, state, and local government agencies, private planning and design firms, law firms, real estate and development companies, research, policy, and academic institutions, foundations and nonprofit organizations.

The conference takes place at the University of Denver campus on a Thursday and Friday in early March, and includes a keynote, a lunch plenary, panel sessions, and occasional off-site tours.

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# 2025 TOPIC TRACKS

**Housing:** In some communities, the housing stock is aging; in others, the housing stock is not designed to serve the needs of the future. Across the board, housing is unaffordable for too many. Seniors are particularly affected: of those who are housed, 1/3 are considered cost burdened by housing. And our existing housing supply is not designed to accommodate older inhabitants. What policies do we need to make a dent in this housing crisis? How can we remove restrictive zoning, streamline permitting processes, establish design standards, or offer incentives for development of more flexible, accessible, and affordable housing? How can we develop successful intergenerational housing? How can we create and sustain local investments and maximize federal funding?

**Energy:** Our aging, fragmented energy infrastructure is inadequate to meet future demand and technology. Lack of transmission capacity is delaying our transition to healthier, cleaner renewable energy. Current zoning laws, ordinances, and local opposition limit siting of wind and solar. How can we ensure local and state laws support the development of renewable projects and the promotion of electrification. How can we establish setback, noise, and height regulations that balance community concerns and support the responsible development of renewable energy? How can we build community resilience using microgrids and distributed energy technologies?

**Water:** The legal system and infrastructure supporting the development of water resources in the West were established many decades ago and are inadequate to ensure equitable, sustainable supplies in the face of a changing climate. As the West gets hotter and dryer, water demand is increasing, while supplies are decreasing. How do we equitably balance the demands for water? How do we better manage stormwater, groundwater, and surface water supplies? What policy approaches, new infrastructure, and other investments are needed to ensure a sustainable water supply?

**Transportation & Mobility:** How can we improve public transportation, bike/pedestrian infrastructure, and mobility options to ensure access to housing, healthcare, and other resources? And how do we ensure that under-resourced and/or rural communities have adequate infrastructure investments?

**Small Towns and Rural Communities:** Small towns and rural communities are especially affected by aging populations and aging infrastructure. What challenges most affect these communities, and what strategies, tools, and investments can help them thrive?

**Land Conservation & Open Space:** Access to quality parks, open space, and healthy food are critical for our communities to age well. How can we equitably and strategically invest in parks, green infrastructure, and ecosystem services to mitigate climate impacts and promote healthy communities? How can we better protect rural ag land, open space, and wildlife habitat in the face of growth? How can we promote urban agriculture?

**Climate & Disaster Resilience:** Facing a future of wildfires, flooding, and drought, how can we prepare for a hotter, drier future and help our communities develop better policy tools to protect against future disasters? What strategies can help us avoid building in harms' way or retreat to safer ground?

**Legislative Developments & Legal Issues:** What intellectual or regulatory infrastructure is holding us back or hindering our ability to meet the needs of the future? What are the most important legal issues impacting land use and real estate development this year? What legislative efforts will allow for, or stifle, innovation and progress? What issues should we be monitoring? How should our regulatory systems and approaches be updated to better support our goals and objectives?

**Tools & Technologies:** What new tools and emerging technologies, like AI, can help us plan better communities, make more strategic and data-driven decisions, or improve professional practice?

## **Equity, Diversity & Inclusion**

The last few years have shed a spotlight on the embedded inequities in urban planning and land use. How do we ensure that everyone has a voice in the decisions that impact their communities?

## **Professional Responsibility & Ethics**

(For professional planners and attorneys).

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# PREPARING YOUR PROPOSAL

Proposals should be submitted using the [online form](#). We recommend that you draft your proposal offline first, and then copy/paste your final responses into the online form (there is no way to save a working draft online and return to it later). For reference/offline drafting, you can download a sample Word document of the online questions [here](#).

For **sessions** (including panels, roundtables, tours, and workshops), be prepared with the following information: title, description, outline, learning objectives, and speaker information. You should also be prepared to describe how your session supports the conference theme and highlighted topics, as well as how you will engage with participants during your session.

The **title** and **description** of your session will be used not only in evaluating your proposal, but also for marketing materials if your session is accepted. Titles should catch the reader's attention, and the description should let the audience know what the session will cover. For examples, please refer to programs from past conferences on our website.

The session **outline** provides the Selection Committee with a more in-depth look at how your session will be structured, the topics you plan to address, and the issues that each speaker will cover. You should also include any points that help your session provide continuing education credits. Use a simple format like a basic bulleted list.

**Learning objectives** describe what lessons participants will take away from the sessions. These are used in obtaining continuing education credits for the conference, but also are used in evaluation criteria.

**Moderators and speakers** should be able to demonstrate content expertise in the topic, as well as be engaging to the audience. Session panelists should be diverse and be prepared to discuss how tools and methodologies can be transferred to other cities and towns. Individual speakers should consider what additional value they can bring to an existing panel and what topics they would like to discuss.

**Please adhere to the following guidelines when preparing your proposal:**

- Proposals are due by **August 31, 2024**.
- Please review the Western Places | Western Spaces conference theme and the highlighted topics to make sure your session is a good fit for the conference.
- Comply with word limitations.
- Limit panel/roundtable-style sessions to one moderator & three speakers.
- Panels & roundtables should present a variety of perspectives, and represent different geographic, ethnic, and gender diversity.

Please provide all of the information requested. Incomplete proposals will not be considered.

# WAYS TO APPLY

## Panels & Roundtables

These sessions are 90 minutes total in length, including 30 minutes for audience Q&A and engagement. They are typically comprised of 4 presenters (2 to 3 speakers plus a moderator). While we are primarily looking for sessions that address the theme and topics of this year's conference, sessions could also focus on other "hot topic" issues.

## Workshops

Workshop sessions are typically a half-day to full-day and are held on the Wednesday before the full conference (workshops this year will be on March 5, 2025). Workshops are designed to provide participants with a deep-dive into practice-focused topics or training. Examples of past workshops topics include Affordable Housing, Real Estate Finance, and Preemption of Oil & Gas Regulation.

## Off-Site Tours

Off-site tours showcase projects, themes (e.g. housing, mobility, or urban gardens), or new developments. Typically, they are 3.5 to 4 hours long, including transportation time to/from the site. RMLUI provides/arranges tour transportation. Tours can be concentrated in one location or visit several locations centered around a common theme.

## Speakers

A speaker nomination is a good option for those who may not be able to develop a full session but could lend their expertise to fill out an existing panel. RMLUI will work with session organizers to add these speakers and increase depth and diversity of existing sessions.

# SELECTION CRITERIA

RMLUI seeks to provide a broad selection of offerings focused on the conference theme, highlighting innovative developments, and covering the topics listed on the next page.

Sessions are required to have multiple presenters who should represent geographic diversity as well as different view points.

RMLUI provides continuing education credits for legal, planning, and real estate professionals. If applicable, we ask session organizers to provide information on how their session meets continuing education criteria on their submission form.

Sessions should strive to:

- Provide useful and practical knowledge participants can use in their own work.
- Address current issues trending in the land use and development communities.
- Present innovative tools and case studies of current projects.
- Offer diverse perspectives with speakers from across the region with different perspectives and backgrounds.
- Engage the audience in a meaningful way.

## Interested in becoming a **2025 CONFERENCE SPONSOR?**

Our annual conference wouldn't be possible without the generous support of our sponsors, whose contributions help fund our educational programming and conference activities.

Conference sponsorship provides visibility and underscores your company's commitment to sustainable, informed, and ethical land use & development practices.

Equally important are our Aspen sponsors, who provide in-kind marketing and promotional support for our event.

For more information on sponsorship opportunities, please contact: [Cindy Lane](#) or [Susan Daggett](#).

# NEXT STEPS

## Apply Online

Applications must be submitted [online](#) by August 31, 2024.

If you have questions or issues applying online, please contact us (see below).

## Proposal Review

The Selection Committee will review all complete proposals and make a final decision by (tentatively) late September. RMLUI reserves the right to make changes to sessions, including adding speakers and/or combining sessions with similar content.

## Timeline

July 19, 2024: RFP Opens

Aug. 31, 2024: [Proposals Due](#)

Sept. 2024: Proposal Decisions

Nov. 2024: Registration Opens

March 6-7, 2025: Conference

## Questions?

Please contact:

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