



## **For Immediate Release**

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**Contact: Conan Smith, Michigan Suburbs Alliance**

(866) 960-8803

**Brad Garmon, Michigan Environmental Council**

(517) 487-9539

**Cece Grant, Transportation for America**

(517) 775-9301

**Ponsella Hardaway, MOSES**

(313) 962-5290

**Tahirih Ziegler, Detroit LISC**

(313) 596-8222

## **\$2.8M HUD Grant Opportunity to Transform Region *Advocates Celebrate SEMCOG Award, Prepare for Engagement***

DETROIT – A \$2.8 million “Sustainable Communities” regional planning grant from the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development to SEMCOG (the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments) has advocates cheering and regionalists anticipating a process that will help unify government, business and nonprofit interests around a long-term prosperity plan for metro Detroit.

SEMCOG was one of 45 regions across the country to win part of \$100 million to support efforts to build more sustainable, economically vibrant communities. These are the first in a series of grants from an unprecedented Partnership announced last year between HUD, US Department of Transportation, and the Environmental Protection Agency. The regional planning awards build on successful efforts across the country that have brought together elected leaders, the business and civic communities, and the public to develop long-term strategies for growing local economies and improving environmental sustainability.

“This is an incredible opportunity for metro Detroit and a real coup for the great team at SEMCOG,” said Conan Smith, Executive Director of the Michigan Suburbs Alliance. “As our region struggles to reinvent itself in the face of dramatic economic change, this planning award will help our civic leaders ensure that a vision of equity, prosperity and environmental sustainability are driving our investments.”

Smith is also a Washtenaw County Commissioner and sits on SEMCOG’s Executive Committee, which approved the framework for the proposal in June.

Communities from every state in the U.S. competed for the awards announced today. HUD has requested an additional \$150 million in the FY 2011 budget to continue this program and has supported the Livable Communities Act, legislation sponsored by Senator Chris Dodd (CT) and Congressman Ed Perlmutter (CO) that would make HUD’s Sustainable Communities grant programs a permanent

part of its work. The groups praised Michigan Senator Carl Levin and Congressman Dale Kildee for their leadership in creating the grant program. Levin chairs the Senate's Smart Growth caucus.

"Cosponsoring the Livable Communities Act was a visionary move that is going to have very positive results for Michigan," said Cece Grant, Michigan organizer with Transportation for America, a national coalition of organizations supporting sustainable transportation planning. "Both of these gentlemen deserve our gratitude. I hope that more of Michigan's delegation will raise their voices in support of the continuation of this program in next year's budget."

Brad Garmon, Land Programs Director at the Michigan Environmental Council, noted that five other Michigan metropolitan areas (the Grand Valley Metropolitan Council, the Tri-County Planning Commission, the Northeast Michigan Council of Governments, the Northwest Michigan Council of Governments and the Region 2 Planning Commission) put together innovative and compelling proposals that were not funded this year but would possibly benefit from an expanded program.

"There is a real appetite for this work," he said. "The energy and creativity that went into those proposals shows how passionate Michigan residents are about sustainable development. I hope our federal delegation understands how important this is to all of our communities and that Detroit should be just the first of many regions to tackle this challenge."

Detroit and its residents stand to be major beneficiaries of a regional sustainability plan, which advocates anticipate will help focus development resources on joint city-region priorities like housing, mass transit and food systems, development priorities that help ensure a high quality of life. According to the Center for Neighborhood Technology, in metro Detroit housing and transportation costs alone can consume upwards of 80 percent of a family budget, leaving sparse dollars for fresh food, higher education or basic recreation.

"Obviously our most pressing regional need is employment," said Tahiri Ziegler, Executive Director of Detroit LISC, "but building wealth for families runs a close second – that means ensuring that the basic costs of living don't eat away every available dollar."

The region is also one of the nation's most segregated in terms of race and income, according to the Lewis Mumford Center at SUNY Albany. Insularity and concentrated poverty both pose challenges to the region's economic recovery and should be addressed as part of a holistic regional sustainability strategy. Ponsella Hardaway, Executive Director of MOSES, a faith based group of congregations throughout the region, expressed hope that the award would help focus attention on social equity issues.

"Metro Detroit is a passionate place full of caring people," she said. "Making our region a place others can see their futures in is a job for every resident. This award creates a special opportunity to pull together our communities' leaders – not just elected officials and CEOs but anyone who loves metro Detroit and is willing to dedicate themselves to growing our shared prosperity – and craft a blueprint for the future that we can all believe in."

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