

HUD secretary: Salt Lake is driving a change across America

Published: Wednesday, June 1, 2011 5:47 p.m. MDT

SALT LAKE CITY — He's no stranger to housing, but U.S. Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Shaun Donovan wasn't in town to check out our digs.

After signing over a \$5 million grant in October — one of the largest sums doled out for regional development in the country — he wanted to see what the city plans to do with the money.

Wednesday's explanation included a walking tour of the 200 S. 500 West block, between Utah Transit Authority's Intermodal Hub and the historic Rio Grande building. It's a spot that Salt Lake Mayor Ralph Becker said used to be "a really derelict, downtrodden piece of our city" and will soon be "transformed into a new and much more healthier, walkable, livable community."

"I imagine the secretary usually comes to places where there are sparkling, new things to celebrate, but in the true tradition of how we go about building our communities, what we've really shown him is an area that is primed for remarkable redevelopment in our city," he said.

Plans have it bustling with affordable housing, various shops and meticulously designed public spaces.

"All of you ... have forged a partnership that has turned this community into a national model of what connecting families to housing, and more broadly, to opportunity, is needed if we are going to — as the president likes to say — win the future in the United States of America," Donovan said.

"I saw with my own eyes how the \$5 million we are investing in this ground-up, grass-roots process is going to help link affordable housing to jobs, to transportation," and generate economic growth, he said.

He praised what's being done in Salt Lake and surrounding areas to provide more housing and transportation choices and save future infrastructure costs.

"Communities like Salt Lake City won't just be a part of winning the future, you'll be driving that kind of change all across this country," Donovan said.

The Wasatch Choice for 2040, a four-county land use and transportation vision, set in motion by public/private partnership Envision Utah, has six site plans already at work — including the Rio Grande area — showcasing different community types that are all served by various modes of transportation.

Envision Utah Chairman Robert Grow said the "impressive transit system already in place can and will be the catalyst" for development that will serve the expected 1.4 million additional people who will live and work along the Wasatch Front by 2040.

The hope is that by providing examples of functional communities, others throughout the state will follow.

Planning for the future growth, Grow said, will help to reduce traffic congestion, improve air quality, use less water and energy, protect critical lands and preserve the character of existing communities.

"Most importantly, we will adapt to changing consumer preferences over time so that all Utahns will be able to live the way they want to in the future," he said. "It is the hope and dream of every Utahn to have a safe and secure place to live and raise their families, a decent home that they can afford, in a good neighborhood."

E-mail: wleonard@desnews.com Twitter: [wendyleonards](https://twitter.com/wendyleonards)