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## LOWELL URBAN FORUM: From restoring mills to going green, stories of cities revitalized

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LOWELL -- The National Park Service is more than just Yellowstone and the Grand Canyon.

It is an economic-development machine driving billions of dollars in commerce nationwide, National Park Service Director Jonathan Jarvis told attendees of the 2010 Innovative Cities: Best Practices in Urban Development conference at the UMass Lowell Inn and Conference Center yesterday afternoon.

In 2008, visitors to the National Park Service's 392 sites spent \$11.5 billion in surrounding communities, resulting in the creation of 227,000 jobs. More than 38 million of that was spent by the 574,410 people who visited the Lowell National Historical Park, resulting in 667 jobs.

"The economic benefit is undeniable, but sometimes we are inarticulate about it," Jarvis said.

He added that, in addition to the urban National Park in Lowell, the National Park Service oversees dozens of urban sites, including the Statue of Liberty, Ellis Island, the St. Louis Gateway Arch, Cabrillo National Monument, Jazz National Historical Park in New Orleans, Martin Luther King Jr.'s home, and Golden Gate National Park.

Jarvis said one of the little-known benefits of the Park Service is its tax-credit program to spur the redevelopment of historic properties. Since 1976, the Park Service has doled out \$50 billion, \$5 billion this year alone.

In the last five years, Lowell has been the recipient of \$74 million in historic tax-credit funds for six projects, including the

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restoration of the Boot Mills. Asheville, N.C., has received \$16 million for 18 projects throughout its revitalized downtown, and Ann Arbor, Mich., has received \$8.5 million, including \$2 million to restore the city's first high-rise building.

"These are huge investments that result in exponential return," said Jarvis, explaining that the Park Service is happy to partner with any city in preserving their history, not just those in which they oversee historic sites.

Yesterday marked the second day of the three-day urban-planning conference, which included a panel discussion about the partnerships that led to and continue to sustain the renewal of Lowell. The panel included City Manager Bernie Lynch, Lowell Plan President Gary Campbell, and Superintendent of the Lowell National Historical Park Michael Creasey.

The morning also included presentations by Michael Finney, president and CEO of Ann Arbor SPARK; Terry Bellamy, mayor of Asheville, N.C.; and John Norquist, former Mayor of Milwaukee and president and CEO of the Congress for the New Urbanism. Also speaking were two officials from Belfast, Northern Ireland -- John McGrillen, director of development, and Alvin McKinley, director of the Chief Executives' Forum in Belfast.

All of the speakers emphasized the importance of public-private partnerships, diversifying a city's economy, making the most of a city's selling points and adopting sustainable building practices.

McGrillen said Belfast is building a \$100 million Titanic Quarter visitors' center. The Titanic, which sunk in 1912, was built in Belfast.

"We at first a little hesitant to celebrate something which sank," he said. "But it was the leading technology of its day, and it was OK when it left Belfast."

The Quarter, designed to "exploit the interest in the Titanic," will also include the latest in digital infrastructure, which has attracted CitiGroup and the New York Stock Exchange to the area, bringing more than 1,100 jobs.

Norquist said that while switching to energy-efficient light bulbs and installing windmills is great policy, what really saves energy is the density found in cities, people living and working close together.

He said the Green Building Council gave a "gold" award to the HSBC bank building outside of Chicago because it was built with recycled materials, had some vegetation on the roof and grazing cows out front.

The bank's previous location was next to a metro train station. The move resulted in the bank's employees no longer using mass transit to commute.

"And they got a gold award, which was totally inappropriate," he said, adding that the best thing any city can do to save energy is add density.

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He also suggests that all cities work with developers to expedite permitting and also lift parking restrictions in their downtown.

"There is not one place that I saw downtown (Lowell) this morning that should prohibit parking, even on the bridges," he said. "Retailers need on-street parking, or at least the illusion that people will get that parking spot."

The conference concludes this morning with a forum hosted by U.S. Rep. Niki Tsongas.

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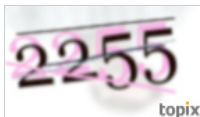
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