

Good morning.

My name is Peter Kahn, and I serve as the Associate Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Office of Policy Development within the Office of Policy Development and Research for the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development also known as HUD.

For those of you who do not speak government titles, my position is held by a career civil servant, and I am the senior career civil servant within the Office of Policy Development. My job is to ensure that the day-to-day workings of the office stay on track and to help execute the policies put in place by appointed members of the administration

I have been with HUD for nearly 17 years, but it is only in the last two years that I have been fortunate enough to work in the policy office.

It has been my experience that the Biden-Harris Administration is generally focused on a “whole of government” approach to addressing many issues. This means that there is better alignment between the efforts of our federal agencies. This approach is also relevant to our collective efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and achieve of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). While no single approach to housing issues will be effective throughout a single country, let alone across different countries, sharing best practices, collaboration, and innovative solutions will drive improvement for cities everywhere.

As we gather today, we must acknowledge that the world is off track to achieve the SDGs by 2030. A number of factors, including the COVID-19 pandemic, ongoing conflict, and the climate crisis have set back progress towards many SDGs, including SDG 11 – making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. The challenges we face in fostering sustainable cities and communities makes discussions like this one all the more important.

Some elements of the Regional Action Plan fall under the primary responsibilities of other branches of the U.S. government so today, I’ll focus on HUD. In fact, just yesterday, it was announced that Amb. Nina Hachigian is the first Special Representative for Subnational Diplomacy. Amb. Hachigian will lead the US government’s efforts to engage our local partners, foster connections among cities in the U.S. and abroad, and develop solutions and partnerships to key issues facing

local and state actors. Prior to her new assignment, she served as the Deputy Mayor for International Affairs for the City of Los Angeles.

One of the first impressions that I had when reviewing the Regional Action Plan, particularly given the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic are the necessary trade-offs between **short-term needs or requirements** compared with the **long-term structural changes** recommended throughout the plan.

While the OECD research provides some words of caution concerning quick action by governments to address the crises with an eye toward long-run recovery (RAP, page 10), I was heartened by the historic level of resources provided by my government for housing assistance programs coupled with a relaxation of some of the normal regulations accompanying the regular funding that is appropriated for these purposes. This flexibility allowed assistance dollars to become available to those that needed the additional resources.

Another connection that I made between the Regional Action Plan and HUD's work is around public and private integration. There are two examples of this that immediately come to mind.

The first is affordable housing construction. One of the largest programs in the United States used to develop affordable housing is known as the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit.

This program incentivizes the development of affordable housing using the federal tax system. Essentially, developers construct housing units that are income restricted, that is, the units are available to renters with incomes near the median income for the area in exchange for annual tax credits. Under the terms of the program, the developers agree to the income restrictions on the units for a minimum of 15 years and many cases, for additional years beyond the minimum.

The second example that I would like to share is HUD's largest rental assistance program, the Housing Choice Voucher program.

In this program, voucher holders use their rental assistance to pay a portion of their rent while the other portion of their rent is determined by their income level. There are limits imposed on the level of rent for the unit selected from the private rental market, and the unit must meet some minimum quality standards, but utilizing this method of assistance helps to forgo direct development and maintenance costs.

Upon reflecting on the trade-offs that policy makers must consider as we strive to attain the goals detailed in the Regional Action Plan, the most significant trade-off that occurs to me is the balance that must be considered between existing programs and new programs.

Programs that were developed outside of the framework put forward in the Regional Action Plan will likely continue to be necessary, even if they do not have the same structure or guiding principles that a program developed using the Regional Action Plan benefits from; therefore, the balance is twofold.

First, we need to ensure that sufficient funding is in place to make sure that the ongoing program operations remain successful.

The second consideration is how do we find the resources to enhance existing programs to benefit from the Regional Action Plan's recommendations.

While it is a variation on the same theme, many of the recommendations in the Regional Action plan rely on data. Therefore, policy makers must weigh the trade-offs between defining metrics based on currently collected data vs the need to create new data collections.

Along these lines, policy makers must also consider how to implement new data collections. For example, our Department of Commerce conducts an annual national survey that captures a wealth of socio-economic information. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, this survey was unable to be completed due to a variety of issues.

Therefore, our colleagues within the United States Census Bureau implemented some experimental techniques to collect vital information on a weekly basis.

While not as in-depth as the information collected by the Department of Commerce, these rapid "pulse" surveys provided valuable information to policymakers throughout the pandemic.

A final consideration, and not necessarily a "trade-off", is that policy makers must remember that local communities have different needs and operate under different sets of rules.

State legislatures and local governing bodies provide a significant amount of structure. Consequently, policymakers at the national level must have the foresight to provide the necessary structure to make guidance such as the Regional Action Plan something more than "a nice to have," but provide enough flexibility to

ensure that going forward, the Regional Action Plan is viewed as a meaningful and worthwhile guiding principle.

Finally, I want to highlight two actions that the Office of Policy Development and Research undertakes that fall in near perfect alignment with the Regional Action Plan. This is not to say that there are only two items, but the two I am about to highlight are significant.

These are A2.5 – Monitoring and Evaluation, and B1.3 Evidence-based Processes.

For Monitoring and Evaluation, one of the action items is the assembly of reliable and robust urban data and statistics. HUD provides funding to the Department of Commerce to undertake the American Housing Survey or AHS.

The AHS is a large, national, longitudinal survey conducted every other year that provides up-to-date information about the quality and cost of housing in the United States and major metropolitan areas. In addition to the standard survey questions, the AHS includes topical modules that provide insights into a variety of topics. Recent topical modules include Disability and Home Accessibility, Urbanization, and Emergency and Disaster Preparedness.

Lastly, PD&R, which is HUD's primary research office, provides numerous studies annually to help the Department make informed evidence-based decisions. Recently, PD&R publicly released our Evaluation Policy Statement that details our core values: Rigor, Relevance, Transparency, Independence, Ethics, and Technical Innovation.

Housing and community development are two of the most important tools we have to forge stronger, more inclusive, more prosperous, and safer urban centers for all.

Once again, I would like to thank the organizers for inviting me to participate and I look forward to learning from all of you during the rest of the conference.