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ULI Keynote Speaker Packs House

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Alex Steffan, keynote speaker at ULI Trends Day

PHOENIX—Keynote speaker **Alex Steffan** drew the largest crowd at the **Urban Land Intsitute's Trends Day** at the Downtown Sheraton on Wednesday. Steffan is a TED speaker, self-described planetary futurist, author of three books and has some succinct ideas about how cities should be planned moving forward.

He spoke to a packed ballroom about changing trends in cities. There were nearly 900 attendees at Trends Day.

Planetary limits will trend a building boom, he said. With population at a peak, not because people are having more children, but because people are living longer, he cited a need for more urban living and less sprawl.

Steffan also referred to areas he said are "beyond resiliency. These are areas that are unsustainable," he said. It's a dilemma many parts of the Valley are facing, particularly parts of Mesa and the west side. "Remaining assets from already brittle places are being eaten up, retail is fleeing, people have nowhere to shop, and soon, nowhere to live,"

A term Steffan says he coined, "ruggedization," is something he believes all cities should be familiar with. And it means having a plan for failure, "being able to take a beating under a large degree of disaster," he said. Steffan cited another Phoenix-relatable example: "Many cities dramatically overbuilt for the auto and now we are seeing a reduction in that trend. People are wanting walkability. There is a shift from that dream house to the dream neighborhood, where they can walk to their stores and restaurants and nightlife. We can do this. We can create design solutions for this. If you use density right, you can change things for the better."

Steffan stressed that collaboration and innovation are key in changing the way cities are planned and built, and he emphasized working with the younger generations on solutions.

"The way to connect is through imagination. We need to build something new. Something that lasts and works," said Steffan. "What are you going to build with the next generation?"