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In the public eye: Real estate and our communities

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Generally speaking, most people tend to think of commercial real estate in terms of private industry. However, there are plenty of public projects going on in and around the city of Boston that deserve recognition for the simple fact that they can have such a profound impact on our communities. From economic development to affordable housing, public projects affect people's daily lives in many different ways.

That is what makes the NEWiRE Public Strategies Committee worthy of notice. They work to educate members about how the public and private sectors intersect while supporting and encouraging the involvement of women in the public sector. One way they do this is through their annual Women in Government Reception. The purpose of this event is to recognize women who work in the public sector at all levels, as well as our elected and appointed officials, by honoring their accomplishments.

At this year's reception in March, attorney general Martha Coakley, who is the first female attorney general elected in the Commonwealth, was the guest speaker. Addressing close to 100 NEWiRE members and guests, she noted that March was Women's History Month and discussed the accomplishments of many women of earlier times who were voices for equality and women's rights. She also emphasized that we need to continue to encourage more women to take seats in boardrooms as well as run for public office. (Sound familiar? Not only do we need more women leaders in the real estate industry, but as elected officials as well.)

What the Public Strategies Committee brings to the forefront is that public projects are outstanding examples of public/private partnerships. Take, for example, the \$119 million development of the Dudley Municipal Building, the former site of the long-abandoned historic Ferdinand's Furniture Store and two adjacent buildings in Dudley Sq., where the Boston School Department's headquarters will be relocated. NEWiRE members from both the public and private sectors, including Boston Redevelopment Authority, Massachusetts Housing Investment Corporation, Bank of America Merrill Lynch, Krokidas & Bluestein LLP, Epsilon Associates, Inc., and Nolan Sheehan Patten LLP, are collaborating on this project which is designed to revitalize Roxbury.

Other projects are inspiring in different ways. For instance, a group of women are participating in a trip to Hamburg, Germany, in June to learn about sustainability. They have been working with the German consulate in Boston and have planned this trip to learn about effective strategies for urban renewal and energy-efficient, building design from our German counterparts. The trip is part of an ongoing exchange led by Henrietta Davis, mayor of Cambridge and a NEWiRE member, who had headed a New England delegation visit to Hamburg in 2011 at the invitation of the German Federal Foreign Office. The goal of this trip is to promote an informational exchange that can support the public and private sectors working together to advance climate-control real estate and urban development.

I can say from personal experience that the Public Strategies Committee truly does open your eyes to an entirely different side of real estate. It makes you realize that people working on public projects are making decisions for the community at large, not just their own careers. Thanks to the efforts of the Public Strategies Committee, public and private professionals can network and interact with one another, which often leads to collaboration. It also provides a forum for members to explore new ways of working together.

Three or four times a year, the committee hosts a members only breakfast where attendees can meet with government officials, public policy advocates and educators to discuss a wide range of civic and public policy issues. The panel discussion at the next breakfast on May 21 will be "The Movement to Smoke-Free Housing: The Issues and the Debate." If you haven't been to one of these breakfasts before, I highly recommend that you attend. It's a terrific way to learn about the community around you via real estate.

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