



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Michael Kwartler, (212) 279-1851, [kwartler@simcenter.org](mailto:kwartler@simcenter.org)

ENVIRONMENTAL

SIMULATION

CENTER, LTD.

## **ESC ANNOUNCES SELECTION OF PILOT SITES FOR NEW COMMUNITY PLANNING TOOLS FOR “SHIFTING SANDS COMMUNITIES”**

NEW YORK, NY (June 2, 2008) – The Environmental Simulation Center (ESC) has selected four pilot communities to participate in the Human Development Overlay District (HDOD), a new initiative intended to integrate human capital, social, and community planning through the innovative use of information technology in rapidly changing neighborhoods and communities. The pilot sites had responded to a nationwide solicitation. They are Boston, Los Angeles, St. Paul, and Astoria, Oregon. Representatives of each community will convene with the ESC in New York in June for a project kickoff meeting with leading experts in the fields of social services, small business and job development, real estate, and public health.

261 WEST 35TH STREET  
SUITE 1408  
NEW YORK, NY 10001

T 212.279.1851  
F 212.279.5350  
[www.simcenter.org](http://www.simcenter.org)

MICHAEL KWARTLER, FAIA  
*President*

GEORGE JANES, AICP  
*Executive Director*

The HDOD is premised on the idea that physical place and the people who live there are inextricably interrelated and must be planned for together. However, human capital providers, physical planners, and communities often struggle to work together, especially in “shifting sands” communities undergoing rapid change due to major development projects, infrastructure investments, public policy and regulatory actions, or other pressures. Recent advances in information technology, and particularly decision support systems and virtual reality 3D environments, represent an untapped resource with great potential to address these needs, but only if integrated into a process of active engagement between all major constituencies. These include the proponents of catalytic development projects and policy change; the broader community, including its institutions and organizations that foster social cohesion; and, in particular, low income residents, small businesses, the elderly, and other vulnerable populations. Too frequently these populations do not fully benefit from, yet are most affected by, the catalytic projects and/or policy changes reshaping the community. They will be the target of human development interventions that will be coordinated with physical development interventions through HDOD.

Under the leadership of the ESC, the pilot communities will actively collaborate in the application of innovative information technologies and practical methodologies to address the needs of their communities and its most vulnerable constituents. Three dimensional virtual reality models, a component of the ESC’s toolbox of planning and design decision support systems and methodologies, will make it possible for communities to reach consensus and “common ground” by “road testing” the future to “see” future development. The information technology



ENVIRONMENTAL

SIMULATION

CENTER, LTD.

tools will enable all constituents to visualize and evaluate change and how it affects them so that they can take advantage of new opportunities while planning for inevitable disruptions. The models will be linked to performance indicators enabling the community, small businesses, individuals, and families to evaluate how well they are doing against their own plans, goals, and expectations.

Community indicators will offer a comprehensive picture of the community on an annual basis and how well it is performing in the areas of housing, economic and small business development, demographic change, physical identity and the environment, and public health.

Integral to this effort will be a Community Change Center (CCC), strategically located in each neighborhood, that will act as a "mixing chamber" where people can meet and barriers between "place" and "people" professionals, service providers, and constituents can be broken down.

Each pilot community is supported in their work through a \$125,000 initial grant from the ESC. Together, the pilot communities and ESC will form the seeds of a nationwide community of interest to foster the exchange of ideas, lessons and support.

The grantees include the City of Astoria, Oregon, for their Waterfront Vision Plan; the Asian Community Development Corporation (ACDC) of Boston, Massachusetts, for the Chinatown neighborhood; University UNITED on behalf of the Frogtown Rondo Partnership of St. Paul, Minnesota, for the University Avenue Light Rail line/Frogtown-Rondo area planning; and the Community Redevelopment Agency of Los Angeles (CRALA) Hollywood Office, for the neighborhood surrounding the proposed Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS) Museum of Motion Pictures.

### **About the Environmental Simulation Center**

The Environmental Simulation Center (ESC) is a non-profit organization and a leader in the innovative application and development of information technology to community planning and design, including CommunityViz planning and design decision software. Development of the Human Development Overlay District (HDOD) is supported through a grant from the Ford Foundation.

###