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RUSSIA, YEKATERINBURG

Mitigating Competing Interests through Urban Land Reform

Yekaterinburg is the fourth largest city in the Russian Federation with a population of 1.4 million. It is a major economic, transportation, scientific and cultural centre, positioned on the border between Europe and Asia. At the start of the 21st century, the city's urban development processes were still reflective of Soviet philosophy, characterized by long term, arbitrary laws, which had resulted in a decline in the urban environment and quality of life. Contributing to this was the reflexive development decisions made by municipal authorities, which were heavily influenced by private interests. In 2005, a new Urban Planning Code came into force, specifying the need for all municipalities to develop a new urban planning tool, the Rules of Land Use Development (RLUD), which would be a turning point for the City of Yekaterinburg.

The RLUD sought to balance public and private interests to improve the urban environment for the future. It was developed with a consortium of noncommercial foundations, beginning with an analysis of over 87,000 plots, to determine the current land uses, along with the social, economic, transport and ecological condition of the area. This process identified distinct territorial zones, with specific overlapping uses, resulting in the creation of the Land Use Planning Map, a graphic manner of reflecting the intensity of development and services. In contrast to past urban development laws, the approach of the RLUD was distinctly democratic and public hearings were held frequently regarding the new proposed

land use zoning and many modifications were made based on this feedback. Previously classified information on industrial and waste zones was also declassified, underscoring the transparent outlook of the RLUD. Once established, the RLUD formed the legal framework for the implementation of the Urban Development Master Plan, regulating urban planning activities, identifying shortages of transportation and social infrastructure, protected sites of cultural and historic significance and restricted the impact of industrial activities on the urban and natural environment.

The implementation of the RLUD tested a new approach on how to seek agreement between private parties and local authorities, creating a better integrated and coordinated planning system. The reformed process provided a new feedback channel for communication with the public after an extended period of exclusion from the urban development process. Reflective of the open and consultative approach were the several hundred public hearings held regarding changes to definitions, with the City Duma approving certain changes to the definition of statute-allowed use based on this feedback. This process has made the relationship between authorities and developers more transparent, while accommodating the interest of landowners. The RLUD has become a model for urban development that improves the quality of the human environment through successfully balancing competing interests in a participatory and collaborative approach to land use development.