

## **Pastors are recognizing the dangers of New Urbanism**

by Randy Bright <http://www.tulsabeacon.com/?p=3291#more-3291>

On December 10 of this month, I will be attending a meeting that will inform a number of pastors and legislators about the problems that many of us see with the sustainability movement. Here is a summary of what I intend to share with them.

My concerns regarding sustainability, New Urbanism, the “Green” movement, and form-based codes were raised when I realized that their impact could be very detrimental to our churches. My concerns were confirmed when I learned that Ft. Collins, Colorado, had adopted a form-based code in 1997 that included an urban growth boundary that forced dense development by prohibiting construction around the perimeter of the city. A city planner there said to me, that while churches were allowed in nearly all zones, “good luck finding land.” These kinds of codes create land shortages and very high land prices.

My concerns were again confirmed when I received a comment from a proponent of New Urbanism that read, “We are opposed to the mega-church isolated in the countryside or suburbs surrounded by acres of parking. This is an environmentally and socially unsustainable model - it paves the landscape, it forces driving, it isolates the membership from the rest of the community, and it isolates the non-driver from the church. It is profoundly anti-civic.”

About that time, the Kilo vs. New London eminent domain decision was handed down by the Supreme Court, giving governments at all levels the right to take property from one private party and give it to another private party, an outrageous breach of property rights that the Constitution guarantees. Not long after that, the City of Sand Springs forced two churches out of a “blighted” area (along with a number of homes and businesses), and nearly forced a third one out, all to make room for a new retail area that still sits vacant today.

The Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act (RLUIPA) was designed to protect churches from zoning abuse. The Justice Department in Washington had read some of my articles and called to offer their assistance with any cases of church abuse I was aware of, but I explained that I did not believe that RLUIPA would be effective in protecting churches from form-based codes. Later, a court case would hand down a decision saying that as long as churches were living under the same rules as everyone else, there would be no protection under RLUIPA.

Then I began to realize how important light rail was to the movement. Light rail is highly sought for because of the belief that people need more “choices” in transportation, and that if light rail is available, people will drive their cars less, creating less pollution and traffic congestion. But there is plenty of information available that shows that not only does it not lessen pollution or congestion, but that a very small percentage of the population ever uses it. Furthermore, it is far more expensive than road construction and carries far fewer people than a highway can.

As I continued to study it, I began to realize just how deeply this movement is embedded in our lives already. Without a doubt, it is a very popular movement, even among church circles. I have tried twice to speak at a major Christian convention, but the convention producers are completely uninterested.

The thing about the sustainability movement is that there appears to be something in it for everybody.

For city, county and regional governments, dense development means more property tax revenues, the ability to force undesirable structures out, and to manage development. For environmentalists, it means saving the planet from global warming. For young professionals, it means cool downtowns with a nightlife.

For the light rail lobby, it means getting millions of dollars in funding from the federal government, funds that often are diverted from roads and highways. For some churches, it is perceived as a new way to attract people to their church. For architects and engineers, it means getting the opportunity to do innovative design that they might not have done otherwise. But few people know the overall depth or reason for the movement itself.

The recent revelation that global warming scientists falsified data to “prove” global warming, it will make little difference to those who see the moral imperative to cling to their beliefs as being more important than the truth or rights.

The truth about this movement is that it does not respect the Church, the Constitution or the beliefs and rights that they hold. I am glad to see that pastors and legislators are finally becoming informed about it

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