

# Today's problems are small compared to densification

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by Randy Bright <http://tulsabeacon.com/todays-problems-are-small-compared-to-densification/>



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I have for years in this column expressed a deep concern for the manner in which cities are being planned in America, especially in regards to the Pied-Piper movement towards dense urban development.

The automobile, one of several key inventions of the last century or more, has been one of the most effective forces in shaping America's once held position in the world as the most advanced civilization in the world, and is now being demonized as the cause for all social ills.

Walkable communities, we are now told, are the goal for all cities to achieve, and the communities that aren't walkable – the suburbs – are deserving of the same disdain as the automobile.

Thus, a society of planners seek to “repair” the suburbs by creating rules in the form of comprehensive planning that would densify urban areas to attract citizens away from suburban, exurban and rural settings to the more right-thinking urban areas. Suburbs that survive the hoped-for migration will eventually be densified as well, or as we see in some cases (Detroit), removed altogether.

Of course, this is nonsense, but that has little to do with the reality that cities are creating comprehensive plans and new zoning laws whose long-term goal is to accomplish exactly that, to the exclusion of the vast opinions of its own citizens. I don't think I would be mistaken to say that the majority of citizens don't even know that it is going on, and won't until they realize that they have lost the rights to their own property.

I was pleased to read an article today that tells me that there is someone who understands the impact that this kind of planning will have on American cities. Richard Reep, an architect living

in Florida, posted an article on the website [newgeography.com](http://newgeography.com) entitled *Urban Housing; A Master Plan for the Few*.

Reep identifies two trends that are emerging, one of which is the “increasing lack of affordability” and the “increasing authoritarianism” found in “mainstream urban America”, and says that there are fewer affordable housing solutions designed for “Generation Xers, seniors on fixed incomes and the struggling middle class”.

He is correct. In cities across America, but especially on the east and west coasts, regulations have driven up the cost of housing far beyond the reach of the middle class, and this has actually driven the middle and lower classes away. In many cases, what is left is a gentrified class and the impression that the regulations has brought on prosperity.

Reep points out that the suburbs and rural communities are growing and stable, and that it is in those places that affordable housing will be found.

He writes, “Non-affordability, as a trend, is strongly linked to a co-evolutionary partner that is driving a wedge between the haves and the have-nots: an authority figure which has become a new interlocutor in the urban conversation, a sort of urban do-gooder to save us from ourselves, pushing more requirements and accepting fewer improvisations... The gloved hand of quasi-government authority has come to rest upon our cities with an increasingly tight grip, in the name of the green lobby or in the name of the traditional town... Today, our confidence is shaken. The rise of authorities to dictate urban form signals that the era of innovation and improvisation is over, and that American cities are entering a new era of more rigid control of what gets built. The authority, in the name of a Master Plan, treats the city as if it were a vast, private land holding, and its citizens as if they were animals in a forest that was about to be developed.”

Reep’s article should be read in its entirety, as he squarely identifies many of the same problems I have discussed in this column, especially regarding the social engineering (my words, not his) aspect of city planning.

His article also includes a warning. “Master Plans that rigidly enforce an urban form of yesteryear may become next year’s white elephants. Cities bearing these master plans may find themselves with a regulatory burden that is reducing their desirability as places to live and work”.

Again, he is correct, and he is not the only one who is speaking out, which I will address in next week’s column. The social ills that we have in our cities today will pale in comparison to those that dense development is bringing upon the American cities of tomorrow. If this is not stopped, we will become like the great cities of third world countries, whose main avenues appear prosperous but whose backstreets are filled with poverty, just an illusion of hope.

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