

# Forcing people into densely developed areas stifles freedom

November 6, 2014

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Every week I read another article by someone who believes that the only way people should live is in densely developed cities.

As a rule, these people are devoutly anti-suburban, meaning that they believe the suburbs have become the origin of all things evil in urban planning and city development. They believe that the interstate highway system and the urban renewal done in the 60s and 70s were the catalyst for the flight from the city cores that provided the mass of miserable mankind who bought into the single-family suburban lifestyle, or as many of them put it, their “autocentric” lifestyle.

Add to the mix the panic about global warming, to which all of the commuters who drive their cars to their jobs are assigned their fair share of the blame for pumping too much carbon into the atmosphere.

Call me a cynic, but I see things much differently. Anyone who has read this column for any length of time knows that I don't believe in global warming – excuse me – climate change, especially when there is so much lack of scientific evidence, hence the new title. And I certainly don't believe that the only places people should live are in densely developed cities.

Urban planners seem to have all the answers when it comes to planning for dense development. With their guidance, you see, the masses will find joy and happiness if given just enough amenities to distract them from something that people truly enjoy – freedom.

What that means, at least in my opinion, is that people can truly enjoy living in the inner city, the suburbs, small towns or rural areas, if that is what they enjoy.

Speaking from my own experience, while I work in the city, I enjoy living in the country. Nothing is more relaxing, and healthy, than spending a few hours on a tractor or building some home project. I would freely admit that it isn't a lifestyle for everyone, and I certainly wouldn't condemn someone who would rather live without the responsibilities of maintaining a home.

The problem with dense developments, however, is that the closer people live together, the fewer rights they are entitled to, or at least some density-devotees seem to believe that.

So much of urban planning these days focuses on “community” or the concept that people in communities should be more intertwined with other causes, such as “social justice”. Like global warming, social justice doesn't really exist, but liberals tout its virtues just the same. What that eventually leads to, of course, is even greater injustice, because it diminishes the system that our Founders established that gave everyone the right to succeed (or fail), but did not guarantee outcomes.

Of course, this doesn't deter the believers in dense developments in the least. They believe that equal outcomes, or social justice, can't coexist with our Constitution. It's not that they don't like the Constitution, it's just that it just isn't practical when it comes to social justice. Perhaps once social justice is achieved, then we can go back to the Constitution. In the meantime, they say, the benefits of our rules, to our citizens are too important.

From this mistaken belief system - and it has almost become a religion to some – certain urban laws have emerged. These aren't laws in the traditional sense, they are more of an axiom; nevertheless, they have become the unspoken and unwritten law of the land.

The first one is this: The benefit to the public outweighs property rights. When people live more closely together, they must modify their behaviour and give up certain rights. Perhaps they must drive smaller cars, or have no car at all. Keeping their music turned down, giving up owning their own home, or submitting to more rules to promote harmony.

The second one is one I coined several years ago: What the public sees, the public owns. This means that you aren't free to develop your property the way you wish to do so; you must conform to an arbitrary set of rules that seek to establish a certain look and feel to a community. Want to design your building a certain way or paint your house your favorite color? Don't even think about it if it doesn't meet the rules. Want to build a church in your neighborhood? Not if you don't submit your design to the local government to make certain its design meets their standards, not yours.

Can people live in dense areas and be happy? That should be their choice. Should people be condemned as ignorant or unpatriotic if they choose not to?

There is an old saying that “your right to swing your fist ends where my nose begins.”

Perhaps that describes the responsible freedom our Founders wanted for us.



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