

Planning becomes more complicated within a dense city

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A couple of weeks ago, I wrote about two axioms that are a part of what I am calling the Urban Laws of Diminishing Rights.

The first one was the benefit to the public outweighs property rights, which means that individuals must modify their behaviour when their behaviour becomes a nuisance by virtue of their proximity to others or they must sacrifice their individuality in order to promote uniformity in society.

The second one was what the public sees, the public owns. This means that you aren't free to develop or build your property the way you wish to do so; you must conform to a set of rules that seek to establish a certain look and feel to a community. In reality, these rules are based upon what a very small minority deems is appropriate for you and your neighbors.

Here's a third one: The denser a city becomes, the more complicated planning becomes and the more individual property rights are compromised.

The closer together you construct buildings, and the higher you build them, the more difficult everything becomes. Uniformity without common sense becomes the rule, because the more you bend the rules to common sense, the more you have to bend the rules. Setting precedent with someone who wants to develop their own property their own way becomes dangerous to the status quo, even when that property owner is right about how he or she needs to utilize their property.

So at some point in the process, the rule book gets thicker and thicker with answers for every if-then situation that can be conceived, solely to maintain control of infrastructure development, both public and private. It is said that our stealth fighter would disintegrate in flight if its computers were not constantly making control corrections. In the case of dense development, it becomes critical to maintain control over what it is built and how it is built, so rules become the force of law over things that would be considered unimportant in less dense environments.

And here is a fourth: The fewer morals a society has, the more rules that are necessary to maintain order. This is certainly not an original thought, until you apply it to urban planning. So let me add this phrase: and the more one must assign morals to agenda driven goals.

A perfect example of this is the negative connotation urban planners have assigned to the suburbs, which they call "sprawl". Urban planners have convinced themselves that in developing cities they should do their utmost to deter the suburbs from building subdivisions of single family homes, and to instead promote what they believe is virtue, that is dense development.

Recently I read an article entitled Open Letter to a Car-Addicted City. The author, urban planner and former Vancouver City Planner Brent Tolderian opines his opinion about car-dependency.

The obvious but unstated comparison is addiction to drugs; everyone knows that addiction and dependency are unhealthy and destructive behaviors, so exposure to those words in that comparison assigns the same negative connotation to the car.

He wrote, "...I compared Perth (Australia) to a wealthy addict who was rich enough to hide the implications of his addictions. But the consequences – like congestion and the lack of reasonable transport options – can't be hidden forever and are already showing through. If you put more money into walking, cycling and public transport you can break your addiction, be more successful in addressing congestion, and move more people with less money and less space." But he doesn't refer to the other side of addiction. It is the role of government to construct roads on which people drive their own cars. By extension, it could be argued that it is the role of the government to construct bicycle paths where people ride their own bicycles, and runways from and to which people fly their own aircraft. (How each of these are funded is another topic for another time.)

The public transport he is speaking about is light rail, which requires not only extremely expensive construction by the government, but also the provision of the trains that ride them. The trains, tracks, and personnel are subsidized almost in total by taxpayers who not only find them totally impractical for their use, but who may not even live near them. In addition, they are ridden by a very small percentage of the population. To make them self-funding (which will never happen), development policies come about in an effort to make them viable. It is not reasonable to argue that to encourage, or even force, a population to become dependent on it just creates another class of addiction?



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