

# Why are Tulsa's officials pushing high-density housing?

August 13, 2015

By [Randy W. Bright](#)

In an article authored by Joel Kotkin entitled, *More Local Decisions Usurped by Ideological Regulators*, Kotkin makes the point that high-density planning is being forced upon citizens, not just in his home state of California, but across the nation.

In particular to California, Kotkin wrote that their governor was one who “has made little secret of his detestation of the very suburban “sprawl” that accommodates some 85 percent of residents in large U.S. metro areas.”

He cited Ontario (California) Mayor Pro Tem Alan Wapner, who said, “powers once reserved for localities, such as zoning and planning, systemically have been usurped by Sacramento. The state determines policies and then employs, bureaucracies such as the Southern California Association of Governors and the Bay Area Association of Governors, to be its ‘smart growth; enforcers.’” Wapner stated that, “They are basically dictating land use.”

Two weeks ago, I suggested that my concerns about our new zoning code might be a moot point, given that Obama administration and HUD had released the Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing (AFFH) rule, the purpose of which was “to end the deep-rooted pattern of segregation in communities across the country.” It will require communities to create rules that would force neighborhoods to ensure that subsidized housing was made available to the poor. This mandate, of course, would not be funded by the federal government, but would be forced upon local governments to fund.

To enforce such a rule, racial data collection would be necessary. As *New York Post* writer Paul Sperry wrote, “A key part of President Obama’s legacy will be the fed’s unprecedented collection of sensitive data on Americans by race. The government is prying into our most personal information at the most local levels, all for the purpose of ‘racial and economic justice.’”

Kotkin correctly points out that such a heavy-handed government edict is not necessary to achieve racial equality in the suburbs, writing, “Ironically, this targeting of suburbs is occurring just as minorities, who, like other Americans, generally prefer lower-density living, are flocking there. African American ‘strivers’ have moved away from the city in increasing numbers in recent decades...in the largest U.S. metropolitan areas, 44 percent of residents live in racially and ethnically diverse suburbs, defined as between 20 percent and 60 percent nonwhite.”

Even famed Italian architect Renzo Piano has recognized the legitimacy of American suburbs with his Bay Area project City Center Bishop Ranch. *Tech Insider* writer Ariel Schwartz wrote, “...Piano is taking on a place (the exurbs) and a type of structure (a mall) that most prominent architects would never deign to touch. But the suburbs deserve quality architecture too. Suburbia isn’t going anywhere, despite plenty of claims to the contrary, and neither are the malls. During

the 2000s, suburbs actually grew more quickly than urban areas.” Piano plans to recreate the mall, but as a “new kind of gathering place for the community.”

I think that most in Tulsa city government get it that Tulsans do not want to be on a trajectory to become a dense, TINK (two-income, no kids) kind of population, but I think that the proposed code is written such that it could allow or promote more widespread use of practices that are antagonistic toward property rights. Specifically, I am referring to the reservation of agricultural zones for high-density develop (which, by the way, is in our current code) and to the institution of form-based codes.

What I find puzzling about Tulsa’s new code, as well as the new codes of many cities, is why the bent toward anti-suburban, pro-density development. Is it because it is real wave of the future? If so, w

hy? Because people really want to live cheek-to-cheek, or is it because it is believed that that is the only style of living the federal government will allow? Is it promoted to enhance tax revenues, or to accommodate the EPA or people who believe in manmade global warming, or even that it is some moral belief regarding sustainability?

Regardless the motive, the fact remains that much pressure is being placed on local governments to do things according to federal government, and that the ultimate goal of the federal government is control of local government.

There is a solution to that problem, which I will cover next week.



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