

Freestuffland' may be coming to a neighborhood near you

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by [Randy Bright](#)

Have you heard of that new city, Freestuffland? If not, you probably will soon if those who are in charge of planning policies get their way.

An astounding article appeared on the Planetizen website this month entitled, “The Truth about Creating Policy: It can’t be Evidence-Based.”

The opener of the article read, “You’re up there presenting to council the policy you just developed. You’re confident in your baby: it’s evidence-based, after all. You probably even wrote that in your report. You did your background research, accumulated and consolidated information. You poured over it and whittled down the data into tight policy statements. You completed what’s considered the ‘problem-oriented approach’ to writing policy. There was a gap, a problem. You resolved it. That’s what your policy is based on. It’s likely a failure.”

The author of the article cites two researchers who wrote a paper in the Policy Sciences journal who dispute basing policy on scientific evidence, writing that those authors said that “we have begun to draw on social and organizational psychology to understand how emotions act as informational short cuts and coexist with cognition. We’re learning the importance of group processes in leveraging emotional decision-making over rational thought.”

There is a grain of truth here; those researchers conclude that “the choice is not whether or not to focus on skillful persuasion which appeals to emotion, but how to do it most effectively while adhering to key ethical principles. Generating trust in the messenger and knowing your audience may be more important to success than presenting evidence.”

San Diego is one example of giving out free stuff. The San Diego Tribune reports that its “free shuttle service – known by the friendly acronym FRED – will get an expanded fleet that officials hope will improve the private company’s performance... San Diego will spend up to \$5.7 million over five years to help New York-based The Free Ride put more all-electric shuttles on downtown streets. The money comes from revenue from parking meters and public garages downtown. The original five-year budget was \$2 million.”

This free stuff is all provided at no charge to riders, compliments of those who drive their own cars and are (over) charged to park in the city. In order to provide even more free rides, downtown officials are reportedly seeking grants from other government agencies, which will be compliments of the taxpayers.

Others are angry with the Trump administration because of its proposal to more than double admission fees to national parks, presumably to bring income more in line with the expenses of

operation and to place the burden of support on the actual users of the parks. Eleven states' attorney generals have filed suit because it would "limit public access for low-income people and communities of color."

Houston, long a bastion of freedom (especially in terms of city planning) is looking at transitioning to something more politically correct after it took its beating from Hurricane Harvey last August.

In a Planetizen interview, its planning director indicated that the old pattern of building new highways to stimulate growth was not being considered, asking "Is there a smarter and more resilient growth pattern that could be achieved if we focus transportation investments more in the core rather than in the periphery? Growing up, not out, is a more resilient and smarter way for this region to grow."

Citing Houston's mayor, the director spoke of Houston's Complete Community program, which "is about ensuring all neighborhoods, including our underresourced (sic) communities, have access to all the resources that people need to thrive." The mayor "has been very clear that we need to create equitable neighborhoods that are well connected by transit, that have long-term affordable housing and that have access (to) a variety of quality services, be it education, social services, libraries, parks."

The author of the article stated that the flood had little to do with the change in direction; programs for walkability, dense development and addressing concerns about urban sprawl, gentrification and socioeconomic disparities were under way before the flood.

So why the concern about American cities becoming the next Freestuffland? Because giving stuff away to make us feel good and to control outcomes robs our citizens of their initiative to make something of their lives. Moreover, it disparages those who work hard to provide for their families and who create wealth and jobs. More on free stuff issues next week.



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