

Sustainable Suburbs: Reimagining the Inner Ring

The Eighth Annual Urban Design Forum

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A few highlights --

I. N.C. State Design College Dean Marvin Malecha

Car-centered development is going to kill us. We need to work for walkable neighborhoods and beware of washed up shopping malls, and decaying strip malls that sit empty.

II. William Hudnut, former four-term mayor of Indianapolis, congressman and now think-tank fellow. Senior fellow at the Urban Land Institute.

Suburbs can go toward death – or life. We will have decay if we do the same old things. We need to reimagine a sustainable future. Planning must be regional. Our suburbs need to become more urban – with shopping, walking and offices.

We have unsustainable traffic. Vehicle Miles Traveled are outstripping road building and population growth. It is no longer sustainable to pave & drive. Sprawl sucks away the tax base and people

What can we do?

- wise planning
- If it's broke, fix it. Rehab, reuse, redevelop, refill, reinvest.
- think small. Small touches create places where people want to be. Parks, clocks, flowers in your downtown
- create a sense of place
- eradicate ugliness. We are over-asphalted.
- fill in large parking lots with more features such as pools, gardens
- preserve what's good. Historic preservation
- reduce dependence on cars. Create higher densities where people can walk and near mass transit

“Well-designed development is the antidote to sprawl.”

III. Patrick Condon, professor, School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture, University of British Columbia.

The big crisis is global warming and climate change. The United States and Canada produce 30 percent of the world's greenhouse gases. We have a responsibility to address the issue.

Seven Rules for Sustainable Communities

- 1) Restore the streetcar community. Streetcars create networks in small communities.
- 2) Design an interconnected street system. Streets should be webs and not dead ends, major collectors, etc. in a hierarchy. Big box stores look at trips per day and locate where they see high numbers.
- 3) Locate commercial transit and schools within a five-minute walk. Do not aggravate the demands on intersections.
- 4) Locate good jobs close to affordable homes. Stop putting jobs anywhere and building roads to get to them.
- 5) Provide a diversity of housing types.
- 6) Create a linked system of natural areas and parks. Increases property values. Better for our kids. The Emerald Necklace in Boston. You can urbanize around streams but be careful.
- 7) Lighter – greener – cheaper – smarter infrastructure.

Zero impact systems – zero percent runoff.

IV. Ellen Dunham-Jones

Architect and professor, Georgia Institute of Technology.

Human sprawl (obesity) and suburban sprawl correlate.

Prevailing wisdom of the past was to create cheaper homes by building farther and farther out. “Drive till you qualify.” Leads to obesity and other problems.

Retrofit dead urban spaces by building in parking lots. Create streets within large parking lots. Adaptation is key. New suburbs leapt over older ones, now they are old, too. They are all losing value if we don’t address them.

Make a library out of a closed Food Lion store. Get universities, community colleges even doctors offices to use old / empty retail spaces. Create public spaces in dead retail places. Museums, pools. Bright paint & good food are transformative.

Case study: Asheville tax yield per acre

County residential -- \$1,236

City residential \$1,716

Commercial \$2,406

Asheville, N.C. Mall -- \$7,995

1-2 story office buildings - \$7,059

4-story apartments \$18,109

4-story mixed use condos \$44,887

4+-story mixed use condos \$250,125

(source: *Public Interest Projects*)

V. John Knott

President, CEO and founder of the Noisette Company

In times of change the learners will inherit the earth, while the knowers will find themselves beautifully equipped to deal with a world that no longer exists. - Eric Hoffer

Sustainability: "Your well-being is my well-being." We have to shape the space in which we live. Building must address human, spiritual needs.

25 years ago the U.S. was in the top five metrics for health. Now we are in the bottom five.

There is a misconception that green building is not affordable. Green building goes with social responsibility and fiscal stability.

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