Sustainable Urban Planning:
A More Energy Efficient Lifestyle
with a Return to the Walkable City

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Walkable City v. Urban Sprawl

- European cities, the epitome of walkable cities, where residents may transport by public transit and on foot to navigate the city to get to destinations, shop, socialize, etc.
American suburbs and sun-belt cities are the epitome of urban sprawl, which creates a lifestyle dependent on the automobile.
What is Urban Sprawl?

Components:
- Low density of land uses
- Land uses expand in an unlimited & noncontiguous way outward from the urban core
- Lack of integrated & comprehensive land use planning at the regional or community level
- Spatially segregated land uses
- Consumption of exurban agricultural and other lands in abundance
- Reliance upon the automobile to access individual land uses
By worldwide standards, the type of sprawl that plagues the U.S. is more accurately deemed “hypersprawl.” Densities in European development are about 10 times greater and Asian cities can be 15 to 20 times greater than density in the U.S.

This hypersprawl requires expensive infrastructure and large amounts of energy, increasing the urban footprint.

The U.S. comprises 5% of the world’s population yet consumes 25% of the global oil production, most of which is used in transportation.
How Did We Get Here?

**Euclid**

- In 1926 in the *Village of Euclid, Ohio v. Ambler Realty Co.*, the Supreme Court upheld Euclid’s zoning ordinance as a reasonable extension of the village's police power.
- This decision provided the legal basis for urban sprawl as sprawl generally occurs because local governments encourage development through zoning ordinances that reflect the desires of their respective citizens.
Euclid-Style Zoning

- Therefore, the traditional zoning utilized since *Euclid* has created the segregated land uses and urban sprawl that contribute to energy inefficiency in the U.S.

- *Euclid*-style zoning divides land uses into residential, commercial, and industrial zones, with the primary purpose of protecting property values and human health by segregating these “incompatible” land uses from one another.
In addition to the new zoning scheme that allowed for segregated land uses, the following factors helped create the American hypersprawl:

- Widespread use of private autos;
- Inexpensive energy;
- Federally subsidized Interstate Highway System;
- Federal home ownership programs; and
- Federal encouragement of new land development via friendly federal tax policies.
With local zoning ordinances that separated commercial and residential uses and federal incentives to develop new commercial space, developers created the shopping “strip” on cheaper, primarily auto-accessible suburban land. Taking sales away from urban downtowns, businesses increasingly moved to the suburbs, feeding this hypersprawl pattern.
“Leave It to Beaver”
Lifestyle Spells A Development Disaster

- After WWII, local citizens became especially concerned with distancing new development from economic and social problems of older city cores, protecting the property values of suburban single-family homes, and accommodating the automobile needed for the suburban lifestyle.
A new American lifestyle emerged in the Post-WWII era that continues to pervade our society today. In this lifestyle, convenience is king as resources seemed to be limitless, leading to culture plagued by an unsustainable level of consumption.

- In just one generation the new home size has doubled. Until very recently, trucks and SUVs comprised 50% of all automobile sales. With larger, usually suburban, homes and energy inefficient automobiles, we consume more energy, especially oil, and emit more greenhouse gases. More disturbingly, all this occurs with largely complete disregard for the unsustainable nature of this lifestyle driven by our insatiable taste for convenience.
Moving Away from Energy Inefficient Hypersrpaawl?

- The value of single-family households, segregated from the hustle and bustle of urban life, has waned in recent years.

- Evidence of a rising demand for a walkable lifestyle:
  - Price premium the consumer is willing to pay to live in a walkable urban place, which is now from a 40% to 200% price premium on the price per square foot basis for a walkable urban residence as opposed to a competitive nearby drivable suburban residence.

- In 2003, for the first time in U.S. history, condos, both old and new, cost more on the price per square foot basis than single family housing.
Using Sustainable Development to Fuel the Move Away from Sprawl

- According to the President's Council on Sustainable Development, “[E]conomic growth, environmental protection and social equity should be interdependent, mutually reinforcing goals.”
Using Sustainable Development to Fuel the Move Away from Sprawl

- The Three Es of Sustainable Development:
  - Economy
  - Ecology
  - Equity

- Sustainable development seeks to balance and integrate the need for economic growth with the need for environmental preservation and conservation, and intergenerational and intragenerational equity in decision making, therefore, cautioning for moderation in the pace and scale of redevelopment efforts.
Sustainable development initiatives can be applied to the conventional zoning framework.

Conventional zoning promotes sprawl by prohibiting mixed-use and high density development, requiring minimum setbacks, etc.

Under the police power, state and local governments can rewrite comprehensive plans and conventional zoning ordinances to mandate sustainable development principles, such as mixed use and high-density development.
Modern Approaches of Sustainable Development

- **New Urbanism**: focuses on generating denser development via citizen participation in planning. It emphasizes architecture and community design to create more pedestrian-friendly streets. It advocates for mixed commercial and residential development to create a denser, less automobile-dependent walkable community.

- **New Urbanism**: Criticized from the Left as not going far enough.
Modern Approaches of Sustainable Development

Smart Growth:
- Encourages a unique sense of community and place;
- Preserves and enhances valuable natural and cultural resources;
- Equitably distributes the costs and benefits of development;
- Expands the range of transportation, employment and housing choices in a fiscally responsible manner;
Modern Approaches of Sustainable Development

- **Smart Growth:**
  - Values long-range, regional considerations for sustainability over short-term, incremental, geographically isolated actions; and
  - Promotes public health and healthy communities.
Modern Approaches of Sustainable Development

- **Smart Growth**: “Such goals are achieved through measures including ‘[t]ax incentives, brownfield redevelopment, elimination of sprawl-enhancing subsidies, [the development of] urban growth boundaries, and transferable development rights.’”

- **Smart Growth**: Criticized by the Right as going too far.
Specific Strategies to Recreate the Walkable City

- **Redevelopment Agency:** Establishing a redevelopment agency to oversee the implementation of re-zoning and urban redevelopment enacted by a city council can create a more accountable, centralized, and efficient redevelopment process. Redevelopment should create a multifunctional downtown. Today, most cities have a redevelopment agency.
Specific Strategies to Recreate the Walkable City

- **A Multifunctional Downtown:** A wide variety of functions and activities should occupy downtown, including housing, work, shopping, government, tourist attractions, and culture.
Specific Strategies to Recreate the Walkable City

- **Pedestrian-Friendly Downtown:**
  By providing sufficiently wide sidewalks and/or pedestrian zones and markets closed off from automobiles, a city can create a pedestrian-friendly downtown. Additional aesthetics include:
  - public art, active storefronts, attractive landscaping, decorative benches, cafes and outdoor tables, sidewalk merchandise displays and vendors, and signs.
Specific Strategies to Recreate the Walkable City

- **Historical Structures or Memorials that Mark the Unique Culture of the Urban Area:** Preservation of historical structures and the erection of historical memorials help establish the city’s unique identity, luring tourists and locals downtown for its unique assets.
Specific Strategies to Recreate the Walkable City

- **Waterfront Development:** provides a visual and physical attraction to the waterfront, generally located adjacent to urban downtowns. For example, Navy Pier, Chicago.
Specific Strategies to Recreate the Walkable City

- **Office Development**: attracts economic development, which feeds the recreation of the walkable city as office personnel and traveling business persons become patrons of downtown businesses, including hotels, restaurants, shops, and stores. This fuels mixed uses of the walkable city.
Specific Strategies to Recreate the Walkable City

- **Mass Transportation Enhancement**: Offering rapid mass transit, including subways, trams, shuttles, and buses, creates a less automobile-dependent urban core, decreasing energy consumption and attracting patrons who can rely on dependable mass transit systems for transportation.
Specific Strategies to Recreate the Walkable City

- **Mass Transportation Enhancement** also includes incentives such as park-and-ride lots. Legislatures are increasingly utilizing incentive-based regulations to make transportation more sustainable by decreasing automobile use, rewarding those who reduce their driving and penalizing those who do not. Incentive-based regulations include gasoline taxes and toll collection.
Specific Strategies to Recreate the Walkable City

- **Alternative Human Powered Transit:** Foot and bicycle transportation are increasingly encouraged by creating wider sidewalks and bike lanes in urban cores.
Sustainable Development: From Hypersprawl to Walkable City

- In conclusion, sustainable development can accomplish far-reaching changes in our built environment. By encouraging public participation in the formulation of more equitable planning and zoning ordinances, sustainable development can foster the movement to American walkable cities.
A New Conception of Land Use Planning

A new conception of land use planning must be utilized in local communities or on even larger regional or state levels to address urban sprawl, moving into a new era of integrated land uses that demand less energy and facilitate a lifestyle in which familial, economic, and social interests may intersect in a single built community.
What More?

- While sustainable development will likely prove key to transitioning from a hypersprawl society to a walkable society, a cultural revolution is the root of the problem and, therefore, the ultimate solution.

- With WWII came a transition to an unsustainable lifestyle based on individualism and the insatiable desire for ultimate convenience of the automobile.
Downsizing Our Lifestyle

- We shouldn’t stop at “sustainable development.” Rather we are in need of a “sustainable lifestyle.” A true transition to a sustainable society will only occur by downsizing to a sustainable national lifestyle, embracing mutual responsibility for our environments and neighbors, and participating in our communities to create a cohesive culture of sustainability.