

Subject: [Fwd: sustainability and smart growth: more balanced views]

From: Brian Platts <bplatts@shaw.ca>

Date: Wed, 21 May 2008 23:08:37 -0700

To: Corrie Kost <kost@triumf.ca>

Subject: sustainability and smart growth: more balanced views

From: John Paul Morrison <jmorrison@bogomips.com>

Date: Wed, 21 May 2008 15:23:01 -0700

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I have noticed that there is a lot of discussion about Smart Growth and the GVRD's Livable Region strategy. There is the assumption that Smart Growth is good for everyone, and that there is no down side. Indeed it seems difficult to believe that anyone would be against having a region that is cleaner, more environmentally friendly, and more livable.

However there does not seem to much debate about some of the more controversial issues surrounding "Smart Growth". Many of these aspects of Smart Growth are simply opinions, or they are not based on real evidence, but they are presented as fact. The FONVCA even highlights a link to "The Natural Steps", a web site that advocates Smart Growth (The executive director Kelly Hawke Baxter is a member of the a member of the Advisory Board of the Smart Growth Canada Network). In the interest of balance and fair debate, I believe some other perspectives should be allowed.

According to Randal O'Toole, Senior fellow with the Cato Institute and author of *The Vanishing Automobile and Other Urban Myths: How Smart Growth Harms American Cities*, writing about the GVRD's Livable Region: "To avoid sprawl, the GVRD closed more than 70 per cent of the region's land to development and mandated that all cities in the region accommodate growth by increasing population densities. The result has been skyrocketing housing prices and, for most families, an end to the great Canadian dream of owning your own single-family home."

The full article can be read here: http://www.cato.org/pub_display.php?pub_id=8284

From: "Smart Growth" Threatening the Quality of Urban Life

http://www.fcpp.org/main/publication_detail.php?PubID=701

Any Canadian urban area that is considering anti-sprawl or smart growth strategies should carefully consider the predictable consequences that are now emerging in Portland. Perhaps more important, the justification for smart growth rests on faulty foundations. Anti-suburban advocates have failed to identify any problem that requires such policy interventions. This paper's conclusions include the following:

- It is claimed that urbanization is consuming valuable agricultural land. However, urbanization covers only 3 percent of the total land in the US that has been used for agriculture in the past 50 years. In Canada, too, urban areas are comparatively dense, and the largest are the most dense. The top population quintile of urban areas covers one-eighth of the land area of the lowest population quintile.
- Despite claims by anti-suburban advocates that smart growth policies would reduce traffic congestion, virtually all of the evidence indicates that greater traffic congestion is associated with higher densities. Portland, with the strongest smart growth policies in the US, has experienced among the worst increases in traffic congestion.
- Mass transit service is not a substitute for cars. Mass transit does an effective job of providing mobility to large downtown areas and within dense urban cores. But beyond those markets, mass transit provides little service that is competitive with automobiles. People will not abandon their cars for mass transit services that are slower or less convenient.
- Air pollution increases as urban traffic speeds become slower and less consistent. The higher traffic intensities that are associated with higher densities produce more concentrated levels of air pollution.
- Anti-suburban advocates propose that planners seek a balance between jobs and housing, to minimize travel between home and employment. But households seek locations for residences based on many factors, and the most important of them may not be proximity to employment.
- Higher population densities are not popular, and the transportation objectives of smart growth cannot be met without radically higher densities that would require the dismantling of most suburbs. Portland has been forced to abandon its densification plans and will remain less dense than the suburbs of Toronto.
- Anti-suburban advocates claim that newer, less dense communities have higher government costs. In fact, U.S. data indicate that such communities have the lowest government expenditures per capita. Further, Oregon, which has adopted the strongest smart growth policies of any U.S. state, has experienced considerably higher-than-average increases in government costs and three times the increase in Georgia, where such

policies are absent.

- The belief that larger municipalities have lower unit costs than smaller municipalities has been part of the justification for municipal consolidations that have occurred recently in Ontario, Québec and Nova Scotia. U.S. data indicate that the largest municipalities have the highest costs and that medium-sized municipalities have the lowest costs.
- Land rationing increases housing prices and raises barriers to home ownership, especially for younger households, ethnic minorities and immigrants. Portland, with its smart growth policies, had the greatest loss in housing affordability in the U.S. during the 1990s. Harvard University research indicates that the principal cause of housing affordability differences among U.S. markets is land-use regulation.
- The anti-sprawl development policies of London, England, have produced a much more sprawling urban area than the more traditional policies implemented in Paris, France (and in much of Canada). Suburban residents of Paris have access to jobs throughout the metropolitan area, while suburban and exurban residents of London can reach far fewer jobs in the same travel time.

>From "Seven myths about sprawl"

<http://www.heartland.org/Article.cfm?artId=9156>

The biggest problem with the open space myth is its limited definition of open space. Suburbanites consider their large yards to be an important component of open space. These open spaces are probably used by recreationists more often than public parks are, and they are certainly used more than private farms and forests. Most smart-growth advocates count private farms as open space but deny that private yards are open space. So they advocate conserving farms but want to shrink people's yards.

Summary of web sites that highlight the problems with densification and Smart Growth - core aspects of the Livable Region Strategy:

http://www.cato.org/pub_display.php?pub_id=8284

http://www.fcpp.org/main/publication_detail.php?PubID=701

<http://www.demographia.com/db-planetizen.htm>

<http://www.heartland.org/Article.cfm?artId=9156>

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