

# Introduction to Modern City Planning

(Why city Planners Do More Harm Than Good)

Most planners recommendations are NOT BASED ON EVIDENCE, instead they are based on a series of untested theories, including a hatred of cars and hatred of personal mobility. Planners generally get their planning degrees WITHOUT taking ANY economics classes, so they do not understand costs vs. benefits - that spending \$1000 to save \$100 is a bad idea. They do not respect people's freedom to choose where and how to live, instead they are forcing people into living the planner's fantasy of the ideal society: You should live in "complete neighborhood" that has no cars, is so dense that you can walk to most places you need to go and take a bike or streetcar for longer trips.

This means you will be living in a neighborhood so dense that you have a choice of several restaurants (McDonalds, Wendy's, BurgerKing and many others, several supermarkets (not everybody likes Walmart), a wide variety of jobs for engineers, scientists, doctors, carpenters, machinists, laborers, office workers, manufacturing workers and dozens of other job choices. To have this many of life's necessities within walking distance would require Hong Kong style density (giant buildings full of tiny apartments occupying all available land with few, if any single family homes), with some of the shortest commute distances in the world, but the longest commute times due to congestion. Is that what you want for your neighborhood. Why do planners promote this? Mostly because they believe many things that are not true.

## Planners false beliefs

- Planners plan for people to live in high density housing instead of single family homes, yet surveys show about 70-80% of the people prefer detached single family housing.
- Planners plan to reduce suburb growth which is against most people wishes as shown by where they choose to live: "Suburbs have been outpacing cities in population growth for decades. In 2001, suburbs grew about 1.2% while cities grew by about 0.7%"  
<http://blogs.wsj.com/economics/2016/03/24/more-americans-are-again-moving-to-suburbs-than-cities/>
- Planners claim high density saves money. It does not. Concrete & steel construction is far more expensive than wood. High density drives up land costs.
- Planners claim infrastructure is already in place to increase density. But it actually is not - the existing infrastructure is incapable of handling double or more people in the same area, thus all of the pipes will have to be ripped up (and the streets ripped up) and replaced with bigger ones. This is very costly compared to digging a trench on vacant land, dropping in a pipe and covering it.
- Planners think if they make our cities look like Europe, people will suddenly dump their cars in favor of slow, inconvenient transit, like they believe Europeans do. Actually over 85% of motorized travel in the EU15 is by private car. Mass transit has been rapidly losing market share - bus and rail have each lost 20% of their market share in the last 20 years.
- Planners say that rising housing prices is due to high demand. They forget that basic economic theory says that price is due to supply compared to demand. Too much supply = lower prices, too little supply = higher prices. Planning has reduced supply and thus increased cost.
- Planners think that creating a shortage of buildable land will have no effect on housing cost. That is reasonable to them since they

usually do not know basic economics and they ignore the actual data that shows high density makes homes unaffordable in region after region.

- Planners believe that people will switch to inconvenient, slow, costly mass transit, if we just spend enough money on transit. They ignore the fact that transit costs about 4-6 times what driving a car costs and thus if everyone took transit, our transit taxes would increase by a similar factor 4-6 times (there is little economy of scale in transit systems). Transit gets 70-80% of its money from the general population, not from riders.

- Planners think that we must preserve close in farmland, in spite of the fact that small farmers are abandoning farms due to being unable to compete with more efficient large corporate farms. They also forget history: all cities started small with a central area surrounding by farms. As cities grew over the last 200 years they have always been expanding into farmland and the farmland has moved further out. Why do planners want to stop it now? Especially since the invention of motorized transport made distance largely irrelevant.

- Planners think that we are running out of land, yet the vast majority of land in the Northwest is NOT urbanized.

- Planners think that sprawl is undesirable and ask if we want to become like Los Angeles. The fact is that sprawl is, by definition, low density. Los Angeles is the highest density urban area in the country (New York city is higher density than Los Angeles city, but the Los Angeles region is higher density.)

Planner's plans will make our region higher density, more like Los Angeles, not less.

- Planners mention roads lined with strip malls as evidence of sprawl. Again their lack of economic knowledge shows because they do not know that it takes a lot of customers to support "roads lined with strip malls", so that is a sign of high density, not of sprawl (low density.)

- Planners claim that high density reduces driving, but forget to tell you that the vast increase in the number of people puts many more cars on the same roads, thus increasing congestion. If the same number of people were spread out over the entire region, each road would have a smaller increase in the number of cars and thus less congestion increase.

- Planners do not like "auto oriented" businesses such as strip malls and drive throughs. They don't care that these exist because they serve a need evidenced by the fact that people use them. Discriminating against drive throughs is discriminating against handicapped people who have trouble getting around outside of their car.

These beliefs have destroyed housing affordability in city after city around the world. They have increased traffic congestion. They have made people less well off because of having to spend too much on housing, leaving less for other essentials. That is why many people say planners do more harm than good.

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