

Urban Workgroup Notes from August 5 Kick Off Event

Elements of Sustainable Urbanism

- Outside of car
- Bad example: town built along rail lines “rust belt” today, in the southwest, Route 66 orientation is the car
- Houston built around cars
- Common element is human beings
 - Design for humans, not for technology (cars)
 - Relevant for people in 100 years
- Everything goes more local
 - Food
 - Community
- Make more labor intensive, not less
 - Grow food
 - Walk
 - Make stuff
 - Have less stuff
- Policy towards sustainability plan, not react
- Look at change in needs for community such as infrastructure and access
- Multi-modal issue for all projects
- Reduce need for physical space, replace space needed for cars with human resources
- Education
- Preservation of what we have
 - Preserve character, neighborhoods, buildings (retrofits)
- Conservation of resources
- Resilience – shift to renewable and less energy
- Climate extremes – storms and droughts
- Address basic human needs
- Physical connectedness versus isolation
- Flexibility in use overtime
 - Environment has vital functions over time
 - Tend to scrape and rebuild
 - Need to reuse
- Access to seamless systems of care – mixed incomes, access to care
- Have good employment for people coming out of homelessness
- Maximize resources, space, landscape, infrastructure, parks, stormwater management – can overlap needs
- Functional places that survive over time
- Difficult task is making all the sustainability elements (economic, equity, environment) work together in balance

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Unique

- Density – as it relates to economic sustainability balance
- Proximity
- Economic value
- Intensity of shared space
- Innovation
- Diversity of economic-social groups, income, economic development
- Value on land, not people – no established value for humanity
- Competition for resources
- Example: Central Park is valued because of surrounding density. Also not linear
- Measurement – can't improve what we can't measure
- Greenspace in tiny pieces, should be aggregated
- Street is common area
- Willingness to trade value of private space to shared space
- Climate and walking – need trees and interesting places along the way
- Urbanism is not for all

Opportunities

- 114 towns and cities at different scales. I.e. there are some rural areas such as City of Waller that have more urban settings/livable centers
- Take public policy away from unincorporated areas
- Unsatisfied demand for walking paths, etc. Can happen more quickly
- Less illegal than in other places. i.e. do not have to adhere/interpret a zoning map from the 1930s
- Increasing densities allow for potential infrastructure scaled for city
- Many transit stations
- Can spot existing density and provide transit access
- Improvements to bike routes, bike parking at transit stations and buildings
- Lots of solar energy potential
- Diversity of neighborhoods (socio-economic)
- Develop vision that transcends generation
- Choice of variety where greater density can happen
- Appropriate density
- First generation suburban retrofits towards urban structure/community – have opportunity to revitalize suburban strip mall development into something better
- Vast growth of childless households

Challenges

- Public policy focuses on sprawl
- Education to keep people in urban areas – not move out to suburbs

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- Affordability – rethink metrics of affordability. Currently transportation costs not considered when calculating affordability for housing.
- Look at housing and education in terms of affordability – Also look at school costs
- Changing mindset of government officials to long-term livability
- Change reality of development process – tied to personal wealth and government relationships
- Needs to fit within a market
 - System set up for middle income and above
 - Difficult to develop affordable housing
- Pseudo zoning: HOAs
- Recession – economic sustainability – Beautiful places must be economically sustainable
- Intergenerational planning – most are for the young, not for existing elderly in community
- Sustainable urban environment must not be at detriment of others; everyone must have equal access
- People are leaving urban communities – want them to stay or return: Community spirit
- Need an economy not based on growth
- Lifelong learning – criminal justice system
- Cannot have true urban development because of current policies in place – change the legal framework to sustainable development within inner city
- Construction costs on a project basis are costly
- Policy and market need to serve common goal of sustainability
- Transition – until a sustainable urban setting is established, may still need some parking for the transition
- Gentrification pushes out affordable housing
- Look as education as part of housing choice
- Ability to graduate high school and find work
- Address that today’s population demographics will differ in future
- Leadership and common vision that speaks to 7 million. Who carries the torch? Who is the leader of the overall group?
- How to grow group, engage people

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