Livable Places **Update**

Emerging Trends in Community Planning and Design

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Cities Can Create Jobs and Improve the Local Economy: According to David Cieslewiez, former Mayor of Madison, Wisconsin, the recent Washington debt debacle teaches us that it is unlikely the feds are going to solve our problems or fix our economy. States are also strapped with ongoing deficits and some of the same polarizing partisanship that has paralyzed Congress. Thus, with creativity and the courage to try new ideas, cities need to — and can — do it for themselves.

Today, there are examples emerging of cities large and small, making progress, a little at a time, toward building stronger local economies. Below are just a few examples.

City of Sacramento and Sonoma County Finance Energy Retrofits, Create Jobs: Sonoma County's groundbreaking effort was initiated several years ago. The County loans money for energy conservation and renewable energy retrofits of residential and commercial properties and recovers the funds from property tax assessments. (In today's market, this may be one of the safer investments available.) To date, the county has loaned local businesses about $55 million. An order from the federal government banned this practice for housing financed by Fannie Mae or Freddie Mac, but commercial properties were not affected.

The City of Sacramento is working with a high-powered investment consortium – assembled by Richard Branson, the eccentric British billionaire – that will enable them to carry out a $100 million energy-efficiency program. The effort will generate an estimated 250 new construction jobs for Sacramento workers to install double-pane windows, solar panels and other efficiency and renewable energy technologies on buildings throughout the city.

A Santa Rosa company will oversee the program and provide low-cost retrofitting loans to property owners via a line of credit from Barclays Capital. As buildings are approved for retrofits, Barclays will bundle loans together from participating cities and sell them to investors as bonds. (Miami has already signed up for the program. More are expected to follow.)

Building owners repay the loans through special property-tax assessments which participating governments will pass through to investors. Cash flow for building owners will improve on day one since energy savings for the projects that are funded must pencil out to more than pay for the increased property-tax assessments. A private insurer will guarantee that the savings will materialize.

Local contractors will be utilized for many of the projects, although aerospace contractor Lockheed Martin will be involved on the bigger jobs. An official from the local Electrical Workers union said this effort could cut his members' 25 percent unemployment in half. For information contact Yvette Rincon, the City of Sacramento's sustainability program manager, the office of Sacramento Mayor Kevin Johnson. Other communities currently offering energy retrofit financing for commercial properties include Palm Desert and the counties of Lake and Los Angeles.

City Smart Growth Policies for a Stronger Economy: Several recent research reports indicate that cities and towns that most heeded the tenets of growth management have fared the best in this worst of times.

A study of nearly 300 California municipalities, soon to be published in *Urban Affairs Review* concluded, "A lot of previous studies have assumed that cities are unable to resist larger macroeconomic forces. But at least in this case, we see evidence that city policies helped to mitigate the effects of a national foreclosure crisis."

The researchers took survey data on local policies and ran it against foreclosure figures between 2008 and 2009. After controlling for a host of economic and demographic factors, including the variation in housing stock, the researchers found that city council opposition to annexing more land was strongly associated with fewer foreclosures.

A complementary study published by the EPA in 2009 found that home values were strongest through the recession in central cities and suburban town centers and weakest in the outer suburbs and poor inner city neighborhoods. They are emerging with the strongest downtowns, the most stable housing, the best values, and the highest "quality of life."

Downtown, where many will soon want to live.
Vancouver, BC

Economic, social and demographic trends suggest this will continue. There are 26 million baby boomers, 55 to 64. A majority says they want to be closer to amenities, work opportunities and grandchildren. Younger boomers (46 to 54) are 53 million strong, and many are trapped in outer suburbs with "underwater mortgages." More fiscally challenged than older boomers, they are also attracted to the amenities and variety of cities. Those in their late teens to early 30's (Gen Y) are 83 million strong. They are the well educated but carry the largest school debt. They will create demand for apartments, and are very attracted to transit choices, coffee houses and public spaces.

The boomers and Gen Y together constitute 162 million Americans whose housing preferences and needs will increasingly be met in central cities and the suburban cities that are becoming more dense, diverse, and offer more of what these folks want.

Seattle Brings in Thousands of Jobs by Rebuilding Infrastructure: In 2003, when he was Seattle's Mayor, Greg Nickels spearheaded the city's investment of hundreds of millions in streets, sewers, power lines and a streetcar in order to provide the infrastructure needed to turn the worn-down South Lake Union area into a mixed use neighborhood. The project was undertaken in partnership with a developer who promised to bring in about 24,000 jobs to the neighborhood in 15 years if the city would make needed infrastructure improvements.

It turns out that the City's investment was an excellent decision. Already home to over 14,000 jobs — including Amazon, and large medical research and biotech companies — the South Lake Union district now has 30 percent more jobs than predicted to date, in spite of the unexpected recession.

This is quite a change for an area that the local newspaper called, in 2003, "the city's garage, a half-ignored place where Seattle has crammed stuff for 100 years." Former Mayor Nickels also spearheaded the US Mayors Climate Protection Agreement. A blogger recently said about him "he got the big stuff right."

Cities Look to Keep Food Dollars Circulating in the Local Economy: Ohio State University has completed a study of the City of Cleveland that demonstrates that city residents could get all their basic nutritional needs met from food raised within the city limits while retaining $29 million to $115 million in the local economy. This would entail putting farms on most vacant lots, growing food on some commercial rooftops and helping homeowners grow food on their own property.

Similarly, at a recent convergence of the Citistates Group in Chattanooga, TN, participants were told that if the city were to get just 5 percent of the food it consumes from the local region (compared to only a half of a percent today) it would keep an annual $100 million in the local economy.

Seattle's local officials have set a goal of getting 25 percent of their food from the region. They have found that this is not as easy as just setting a goal or creating more farmers markets. In order to make this work the whole food distribution system must be addressed. Much like old zoning codes, when it comes to our food they realize we've made the less healthy, less environmentally sound thing easy and the healthier, more environmentally sound choice harder. The City aims to change that.

New York's Mayor Michael Bloomberg has taken a small step forward toward that end, signing a law that increases the amount of food that will be bought by city agencies that is grown, produced and processed in New York. Another new law now encourages rooftop gardens by exempting them from building height and floor area limitations.

Fresno Looks to Their Most Precious Resource for Economic Development – Prime Agricultural Land: Agriculture is the principal industry in Fresno County — generating more than $5 billion annually — with table grapes, stone fruits, nuts, vegetables, cotton, dairy and livestock among its important products. While industrialized agribusiness operates there, the majority of Fresno County's farms are relatively small and family-run, and nearly half of those are minority-operated.

Sadly, between 1990 and 2004, more than 21,000 acres of land in Fresno County was lost to development, much of it being high-quality farm land. This growth pattern has continued with malls of up to 2 million square feet and a large residential development built eight to ten miles from the city center. The American Farmland Trust has estimated that if conventional growth patterns continue, by 2040 the county could lose another 135,000 acres of farmland.

This pattern may be about to change – a new regional plan called SEGA (for Southeast Growth Area) hopes to preserve farmland with a plan to focus growth in towns and villages where infrastructure is already in place. It is expected that this project will be part of the City's new general plan.

In addition to preserving their most valuable resource, the City and County could be looking at how to use locally grown products for local economic development. Glenda Humiston, Director of the USDA for California, has pointed out that much of the agricultural produce grown in California travels to China and elsewhere to be prepared and packaged.

According to Humiston, $50 billion dollars a year is currently being expended by local economic development entities for luring outside private businesses. She believes that in rural communities, funds would be better spent to build the storage warehouses, refrigeration units, packaging facilities, and other businesses that would provide value-added jobs for locally grown products. Humiston will be working with the City of Fresno to help develop this opportunity.

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