

Improving America's Communities Policy Proposals that Increase Civic Engagement and Improve America's Built Environment

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Recently, America has begun to experience significant declines in civic engagement. At the same time, nearly half of all Americans are currently living in suburban communities that are fraught with challenges ranging from a lack of community institutions, traffic congestion, isolation, pollution and high levels of land consumption. This paper explores the hypothesis that improved urban planning, new tax structures, and more effective municipal government participation in planning will enable communities to develop in a way that will increase civic engagement among their residents while reducing the damaging effects of poorly planned suburban sprawl.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT, SUBURBAN SPRAWL, AND MASTER-PLANNED COMMUNITIES

During the past four decades, America has experienced significant declines in the number of Americans who are civically engaged in their communities. Several political scientists, architects, and urban planners suggest that America's suburban sprawl is creating an environment that discourages civic engagement because it establishes communities that are dependent upon the automobile, build malls in lieu of town squares, and lack public facilities that encourage public participation and community involvement.

One of the responses by urban planners, architects, and developers has been to design and build master-planned communities. Even though these communities are incorporating many design techniques that originated in America's older cities where civic engagement flourished, they establish communities that are created by professionals rather than born of the cooperative workings of the citizens themselves. Additionally, many master-planned communities establish private government organizations known as Community Associations to govern the affairs of the community.

Even though elected members of these associations often serve with significant and genuine dedication, community associations can be careless in their responsibilities. Such carelessness is evident when an association fails to follow standard parliamentary procedure and provide adequate due process to the association's members. The dereliction of these basic responsibilities compromises democracy within the

community association. Likewise, democracy is further compromised when community associations contract professional, real estate, community management companies that assist the association with community finances, events planning, and enforcement of the community's codes, regulations, and restrictive covenants.

There are two significant problems arriving from suburban sprawl and master-planned communities. First, suburban sprawl results in poorly defined communities that do not provide circumstances that encourage civic engagement. Second, master-planned communities stifle authentic civic engagement through the establishment of restrictive covenants, private government organizations, and contracted, professional, real estate, community management companies.

In order to invigorate civic engagement in America's communities, communities must begin to incorporate proven and effective urban design techniques that will reduce automobile dependence, decrease isolation, and provide forums of communication that foster civic engagement in both new and existing developments. Additionally, when new development occurs, municipalities should resist allowing developers to create an abstract form of community with community associations that act in concert with professional managers to create and enforce design criteria standards, among a myriad of other community regulations and restrictions, which limit the freedom of their citizens by insulating their ability to participate in local government.

Finally, states should restructure their tax laws from point-of-sale tax revenues, which drive communities to cannibalize one another in an attempt to secure retail within their jurisdiction, to a system that encourages mixed-use development and smart growth. A new tax structure will motivate communities to incorporate the policies recommended in this paper. In the end, if these policies are implemented, America's communities will be safer, more pleasant, and more enlightened with increased civic engagement.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

In 2002, the American Political Science Association formed a Standing Committee on Civic Education and Engagement. This forum of discussion resulted in the 2005 publication of the book *Democracy at Risk*, which is authored by nineteen distinguished political scientists from across the nation who set out to discuss the level of civic engagement in American democracy. In *Democracy at Risk*, the authors defined civic engagement to include, "any activity, individual or collective, devoted to influencing the collective life of the polity" (Macedo, 2005). They further explained that civic engagement includes voting, campaigning, rallying, marching, attending public meetings, lobbying, writing to newspapers, attending forums, military service, and volunteer service (Macedo, 2005).

As explained by Alexis de Tocqueville, such civic engagement has been routine among many American citizens, especially in the early days of American history. Tocqueville was impressed at the extent to which Americans embraced civic engagement. In his book, *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville stated, "...how is it that each [American] is interested in the affairs of his township, of his district, and of the state as a whole as in his own? It is that each, in his sphere, takes an active part in the government of society" (Tocqueville, 2000). More recently, alarming statistics indicate that civic engagement is dramatically declining and that many citizens are not actively participating in government (Macedo, 2005). Therefore, the question arises: is civic engagement among America's citizens important? If the answer is yes, then a second question can be asked. Does America's built environment influence the level at which Americans are civically engaged?

As Macedo (2005) and his colleagues indicated, there will be those who argue that it is not important for there to be a high level of civic engagement among America's citizens, and that having more people actively involved in America's democracy will make democracy more difficult (Macedo, 2005). Nevertheless, I agree when Macedo (2005) and his colleagues stated that "Ultimately...improving the quantity, quality, and equality of civic engagement will improve the quality and legitimacy of self-governance, and it should increase our collective capacity to pursue common ends and address common problems" (Macedo, 2005).

Americans should do all that is reasonable to promote and encourage civic engagement among all American citi-

zens. Through the implementation of proven and effective urban design policy, America's communities will once again begin to establish built environments that promote walking and talking among their citizens. Such environments foster congenial atmospheres that enable citizen interaction and communication to increase. As the community's civic dialogue broadens so will the level of its citizens' civic engagement.

Creating an appropriate urban environment to increase civic engagement is crucial. Civic engagement is not likely to increase while walking New York City's teeming streets where Mark Twain explained that "a man walks his tedious miles through the same interminable street every day, elbowing his way through a buzzing multitude of men, yet never seeing a familiar face, and never seeing a strange one the second time" (Putnam, 2000). If states and communities will begin implementing new urban design policies and reformed tax policies, then built environments will improve and civic engagement will increase.

SUBURBAN SPRAWL

Increasingly, the American dream has included purchasing a four bedroom home with a two-car garage on a quarter-acre lot in a residential suburb that may be anywhere from fifteen to thirty miles away from a downtown location of employment. Why the suburb? Because it makes better sense to move out to the "west valley" where new homeowners are able to "drive 'till they qualify" for a mortgage that will enable them to afford the home that they have been dreaming of than to try and locate in more expensive central communities.

What can a suburban American homeowner expect in their new neighborhood? They can expect to live on a sixty-foot wide street built with wide turns that enable speeding cars to glide by a multiplicity of identical appearing homes, whose front elevations are dominated by driveways and two-car garage doors. There will be sidewalks that wind along tree and shade deprived streets that lead to the subdivision's seven-lane wide major arterial highway that their children will need to cross on their way to school. As for after school activities, the neighborhood children will hurry home to play video games, watch television, and surf the Internet, since there are no parks with safe pedestrian access nearby. While these children are fighting enemy combatants in their latest video game, their parents will be fighting rush hour traffic, which daily doubles the travel time of what should be a maximum thirty-minute drive from downtown.

These are all components of suburban sprawl. Unfortunately, as this family copes with the many pressures of suburban life, they will likely spend more of their time stuck in traffic and less of their time walking; more of their time gaining weight and less of their time getting fit; more of their time in isolation and less of their time socializing with neighbors. These realities of suburban sprawl may ultimately affect the degree to which this family will choose to be civically engaged in their community.

In his book *Bowling Alone*, Robert Putnam (2000) has identified three distinct reasons which illustrate how suburban sprawl contributes to civic disengagement:

“First, sprawl takes time. Second, sprawl is associated with increasing social segregation, and social homogeneity appears to reduce incentives for civic involvement, as well as opportunities for social networks that cut across class and racial lines. Third, most subtly but probably most powerfully, sprawl disrupts community ‘boundedness’” (p. 214).

Putnam’s three distinct reasons establish only a few of the factors that are resulting from America’s suburban sprawl. Additionally, sprawl is contributing to increased traffic congestion, increased pollution, and an incessant appetite for land consumption, while at the same time eroding America’s sense of community and civic engagement. That is why it is critical that the American appetite to consume and sprawl be curbed. Otherwise, America’s civic engagement will continue to decline while harmful social and environmental issues increase.

MASTER-PLANNED COMMUNITIES

One response for controlling suburban sprawl has been to build master-planned communities. A master-planned community includes the following characteristics: development of a large tract of land (e.g. one-thousand plus acres) a preeminent theme that guides community design; multiple building contractors that provide diversity in home styles and construction; established commercial centers and shopping districts; and large open space features (e.g. golf courses, lakes, parks, recreational spaces). Master-planned communities work to establish walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods where families can live, shop, work, and play all within walking distance of their homes. Communities that incorporate such design criteria will have greater success in promoting civic engagement. This claim is supported by Putnam (2000) who states “Getting involved in community affairs is more inviting—or abstention less attractive—when the scale of every day life is smaller and more intimate.” (P. 205). In short, those who advocate new urbanism—the movement to establish built environments that promote quality of life, conservation of energy, and reduction in consumption and pollution, are becoming widely recognized for their tenacious efforts to combat sprawl and waste, especially as those objectives are accomplished through the development of master-planned communities.

New urbanism architects, urban planners, and developers are to be highly commended because thus far it appears that the implementation of their policies and designs is beginning to bear fruit and America’s communities are improving—at least among those who can afford to live in such communities. What is troubling in the zeal to establish master-planned communities is that they can tend to stifle authentic civic engagement. Authentic is used to describe civic engagement in this context because many master-planned communities

have indeed increased civic engagement, but it is a shallow representation of the civic engagement born of republican democracy. Unfortunately, the lack of authentic civic engagement occurs because many master-planned communities establish private government associations and are managed by large independent real estate developers rather than being subject to the public municipality wherein the community is established.

THE PROBLEMS

Out-of-control suburban sprawl and master-planned communities that stifle authentic civic engagement are the two primary problems that are harmful to civic engagement. Three new-urbanism architects, Andres Duany, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, and Jeff Speck, have identified a nexus that is developing between the lack of civic engagement and suburban sprawl. In their book *Suburban Nation* they stated:

“Critical writing in recent years has documented a decline in the civic life of our nation...dozens of books call attention to the same problem: society seems to be evolving in an unhealthy way. Americans are splintering into insular factions, each pursuing an increasingly narrow agenda, with nary a thought for the greater good. Further, more and more citizens seem to be withdrawing from public life into the shelter of their private homes, from which they encounter the world primarily through their television and computer screens. This is hardly a recipe for productive social evolution” (Duany & Others 2000).

Putnam (2000) addressed this issue by introducing another component of civic engagement called *social capital*—the theory that social networks have value. He explained that “social capital refers to connections among individuals—social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them. In that sense, social capital is closely related to what some have called ‘civic virtue’” (P. 19). According to Putnam, social capital was prevalent throughout the first two-thirds of the twentieth century when it reached a pinnacle in the 1960s. However, the trend did not continue and America has seen a significant decline in civic participation during the last third of the twentieth century, especially in the 1980s and 1990s.

Putnam included substantial statistical information to support his claim. One such table comprised of survey information from Roper Social and Political Trends surveys, 1973-1994, is entitled *Trends in Political and Community Participation*. On this table, Putnam shows the relative change during the twenty year period from 1973-74 to 1993-94 of community participation in several key areas that provide a reliable gage for measuring levels of civic engagement. For instance, those surveyed who said they had served as an officer of some club or organization was down 42% over this period. Likewise, the number of people claiming to have worked for a political party was down 42%. People who claimed to have served on a committee for some local organization were down 39%. Those people who had attended a

public meeting on town or school affairs were down 35%. Those who had written a congressman or senator were down 23%. And finally, those people claiming to have written a letter to the paper were down 14%. Putnam argued that “we Americans need to reconnect with one another” (Putnam, 2000).

To draw further from the points made by both Duany and Putnam, I refer to a small experiment in an urban planning class at the University of Utah that illustrates why quality public spaces are needed to improve America's social capital and increase civic engagement. Professor Keith Bartholomew asked the students to observe how people tend to communicate with each other when passing one another face-to-face while walking on a sidewalk. Then, in contrast, Professor Bartholomew asked the class to reflect on how people tend to respond to others they pass while driving in the isolated comfort of a car. It was observed that the way in which people choose to react in each situation is markedly different. People are generally kinder and more cordial toward one another on the sidewalk where barriers that can isolate behavior are removed and their words and actions are exposed. When people are driving in the controlled environment of their own car, however, the students noted that their words and actions tend to be more cynical and critical of others (Bartholomew, 2006).

A second example that articulates the disintegration of America's civic dialogue is occurring through the online, interactive, comment board on KSL Television's website—Salt Lake City's leading television station. When linking to each story at ksl.com the user has the option of posting a comment to express their point-of-view, or to just read the comments already posted by others. These relatively anonymous postings (showing aliases, or initials, or sometimes first names) reveal an alarming reality about our civic dialogue. Disappointingly, with the protection of anonymity, the majority of people that post comments on the board allow themselves to say just about anything (and they undoubtedly would say more if KSL did not censor some of their comments.) It is a rarity for someone to post a comment that adds any worthwhile substance to the conversation. Instead, the majority of postings are laced with outlandish criticisms, stinging phrases, and constant carping, not only as the comments address the story itself, but also, and possibly even more so, in the responses that participants post to one another. The cynical sentiment that prevails in the majority of these comments is overwhelming and such dialogue is not a recipe for productive social evolution.

Therefore, the following question should be asked of the dialogue that occurs on KSL's comment board: would this same manner of exchange occur if these individuals were having this dialogue at the city library? Perhaps the answer to the question is yes; but if such is the case, then the response to that question is indeed a damning commentary on America's civic engagement of which Tocqueville would find little to praise. America's communities must reintroduce and increase

the number of public environments that will provide for uplifting and productive interaction if healthy civic engagement is to increase.

Putnam (2000) also argued that the many negative effects of suburban sprawl as verified through statistics and research. He argued that these homogeneous, suburban communities, which require continuous use of the automobile, have separated Americans in such a way that social interaction with neighbors and participation in community events has declined. For instance, Putnam wrote that between 1969 and 1995, while the average household size was decreasing, the number of cars per household doubled from one to two. Likewise, during this same time period the average commuting distance to work increased by 26% and the average commuting distance for shopping increased 29%. Putnam (2000) wrote:

“Americans adults average seventy-two minutes every day behind the wheel, according to the Department of Transportation's Personal Transportation Survey. This is, according to time diary studies, more than we spend cooking or eating and more than twice as much as the average parent spends with the kids” (P. 212).

Putnam continues by explaining that the car and commute hurt community life. He stated, “evidence suggests that *each additional ten minutes in daily commuting time cuts involvement in community affairs by 10 percent*” (Putnam, 2000). Thus, those who live in suburban communities are participating less and the social capital of their neighborhood is diminishing ultimately reducing their civic engagement (Putnam, 2000).

A second essay by Barber titled *Malled, Mauled, and Overhauled: Asserting Suburban Sprawl by Transforming Suburban Malls into Usable Civic Space* addresses several additional issues pertaining to suburban sprawl and master-planned communities. His essay focuses on two themes. First, the loss of our classic public spaces to redefined public spaces as developed in commercial centers and malls. Second, the attempt to create utopian societies through master-planned communities that lack genuine characteristics of community and democracy (Henaff, 2001).

Countless examples of Barber's first point are found throughout America's suburban communities where, since the 1960s, and until recently, developers have built hundreds of enclosed malls. Intent on maximizing tenant sales, developers have designed enclosed malls to discourage key elements of civic engagement. Barber stated:

“On entering an enclosed mall, we are asked to shed every identity other than that of the consumer. Eating is about buying fast food and moving back into the stream of shoppers; entertainment means buying Hollywood's latest and all the commodities that go with them; hanging out and people-watching are discouraged by security guards and, more important, the architecture is designed to impede sitting or standing around and keep the traffic flow moving into the shops” (Henaff, 2001).

Despite developers' efforts to make malls as profitable as possible, Barber indicated that their initial success is beginning to fail as consumers are becoming less attracted to the mall environment which is resulting in a downward shift of mall sales (Henaff, 2001). This has left the majority of mall developers in an uncomfortable, and more importantly, unprofitable situation leading several mall developers to begin researching ways to redevelop mall sites into profitable centers.

In expounding his second point, Barber examined the master-planned community of Celebration, Florida, which was built in 1996 by the Disney Corporation. He criticized the Disney Corporation for the way in which they manipulate everyday life in Celebration. Barber stated: "The downside is not in what Disney does (which it often does very well), but in the totalizing nature of its ambitions" (Henaff, 2001).

Celebration is not a community that has grown out of the cooperative associations of average people; rather, it is a development by a large corporation that influences everything from community design, to economy, schools, and government. Barber further argued that Celebration is an extension of the mall atmosphere wherein Disney has created a controlled environment with a captive audience to whom they may constantly market Disney products (Henaff, 2001). This is not an ideal model for future developers to follow. Nevertheless, there are several similarities between Disney's Celebration, Florida and Kennecott Land's Daybreak development in South Jordan, Utah.

While Daybreak lacks what Barber identified as Disney's "let's-theme-park-the-world" attitude, Kennecott Land is implementing many of the characteristics that are found in the design of Celebration, Florida. It is now common for developers, like Disney and Kennecott Land, to contract architects and urban planning consultants who promote new urbanism ideals as reflected in the master-planned community. Unfortunately, however, these developers and designers can succumb to the desire to enshrine their master-planned community, for the foreseeable future, through establishment of codes, regulations, and restrictive covenants that run with the land making it extremely difficult, if not impossible, for any future property owners to make adjustments to the designer's initial plan.

Daybreak is the first of approximately ten proposed master-planned communities that are being developed by Kennecott Land along the West Bench of the Salt Lake Valley at the base of the Oquirrh Mountain Range. Kennecott Land, formed in 2001, is a land development subsidiary of the Rio Tinto Group, an international mining conglomerate that owns Kennecott Utah Copper and the Bingham Canyon Copper Mine. Decades ago, Kennecott Utah Copper purchased the tract of land now being developed for potential mining that never materialized (History, Kennecott Land). Rather than continue to preserve this undeveloped tract of land, Kennecott Land was formed as a way to introduce new revenue for the company through land

development, and to provide available land to help accommodate Utah's unprecedented population growth (expected to double from 2.2 million to 5 million by the year 2050).

The Daybreak community is being developed within the jurisdiction of South Jordan, Utah, while the remaining communities will be developed in what is presently unincorporated Salt Lake County. Kennecott Land's completed development will cover an expanse of approximately ninety-three thousand acres, or one hundred forty-five square miles, which represents fifty-three percent of the developable land in the Salt Lake Valley. It is the largest metropolitan land-owning by anyone in the United States. Kennecott Land estimates that the West Bench development, to be completed by 2050, will consist of one hundred sixty-eight thousand residences that will house approximately four hundred fifty thousand people (Varella, 2005). If those projections are met, then Kennecott Land's West Bench development will dwarf Disney's twenty-thousand resident Celebration, Florida. Because Kennecott Land's West Bench development could affect nearly a half-million people it is imperative that master-planning be done in such a way that it promotes civic engagement.

While Kennecott Land's communities may be beautiful and functional, they appear to stifle civic engagement through the establishment of (1) community associations, or private governments; (2) restrictive covenants; and (3) the contracting of a professional, real estate, and management company, Capital Consultants Management Corporation of Dallas, Texas, who manages Daybreak and Celebration, Florida. Evidence of Kennecott Land's desire to assume control of the entire development of the Daybreak community is documented in a portfolio feature of Kennecott Land's Daybreak development that was published in *Land Development* by the National Association of Home Builders. It states,

"Daybreak's rapid success is attributable to Kennecott Land's holistic approach to development of significantly large areas of property. What's more, the company's business model includes acting as a "master developer" of these large areas—that is, they design, plan, entitle, develop infrastructure, finance, and prepare design guidelines for their communities. They select and manage builders who share a commitment to excellence and Kennecott's design standards" (National Association of Home Builders, 2005).

There are many people that prefer the privatization of government responsibilities and would welcome developers like Kennecott Land, who are willing to take on the entire development process, and relieve city planners of the need to address all of these details. Likewise, design firms will prefer developers like Kennecott Land because they will establish the restrictive covenants that will maintain their design for years. While there is merit to both of those arguments, I suggest that municipalities should not allow developers to establish restrictive covenants that dictate every detail of the com-

munity from the type of fences that people may have to the colors allowed on their houses. Such restrictive covenants may preserve the planners design, but are not healthy for civic engagement because they introduce elements of control that begin to lead down a slippery slope of limiting basic freedoms and liberties.

An individual's community is a place that they can influence and shape. If restrictions are necessary, then let them be presented before the public for approval. Public involvement through democracy is what gives genuine feeling and character to a community. It is what makes a community born of the people that live in it. This occurs because each participant assumes a stake in the community's development. If the community succeeds or fails it will be a direct reflection of the people who live there. Establishing this type of policy makes it incumbent upon municipalities to educate their citizens about the need to incorporate new urbanism design. I am not referring to design details that dictate items like house color. Instead, I'm referring to new urbanism design principles that establish mixed-use development, safer streets, mass transit, and other similar and important design attributes. When properly informed, Americans make good decisions. They should be trusted by developers and planners to make such decisions in the development of their communities.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

TAX POLICY

Many municipalities face significant difficulties when they try to implement policies that will improve their built environment without raising taxes. The pressure to provide all of the services and infrastructure that is necessary and demanded by a community's residents has driven municipalities to reevaluate their revenue sources.

Municipalities derive revenue from three main categories: property taxes, fees, and local sales taxes (Wassmer, 2002). In many regions, municipalities are already collecting property taxes at the maximum allowed rate. This is especially true in California where the 1978 passage of Proposition 13 capped property taxes at one-percent for all property owners (Lewis, 2001). Raising property taxes is extremely unpopular and can lead to political suicide for any politician who recommends doing so. This creates a significant challenge for municipalities who are experiencing revenue shortfalls, especially since it is estimated that the property taxes collected on five residences are only sufficient to cover the costs associated with three (Bell, 2006). Likewise, municipalities are limited in the number of fees that they can levy. This leaves the sales tax as the last real possibility for municipalities that need to increase their revenue.

Utah State Senator Gregory Bell explained that as municipalities continue to evaluate how they can increase their revenue, they "like all other entities, will follow the course of least resistance" (Bell, 2006). In determining what that course will be, municipalities compare and contrast their

revenue sources with their expenditures to find the revenue that will provide the greatest fiscal outcome. This process is best described by the term *fiscalization of land use*, which is a term that was pioneered by D.J. Misczynski and refers to "local efforts to employ land-use regulation so as to increase local revenue streams" (Lewis, 2001, P. 24). It is reasonable, therefore, to understand why municipalities choose to court retail, since it can increase their local sales tax revenue. Robert W. Wassmer of California State University, Sacramento, explains in a recent journal article that municipalities generally prefer an increase in retail activity because "in most instances [it] requires a relatively small amount of local government services and generates relatively little environmental damage" (Wassmer, 2002).

In Utah, the current sales tax system collects between 5.75% and 8% on every retail dollar spent. Four point seventy five percent of the tax returns to the state. One percent is reserved as the local option portion. The remaining 0% to 2.25% varies between municipalities where sales taxes have been increased to provide revenue for various county and town interests that relate to parks, highways, mass transit, hospitals, resorts, etc (Utah State Tax Commission, 2007). The 1% local option portion is evenly split with one half returning to the point-of-purchase and the other half being distributed pro-rata, statewide, based on population (Utah Code Section 59-12-204, 59-12-205). For example, if during the course of a year, Nordstrom, in Salt Lake City, sells \$100 million worth of merchandise, then the state will collect \$4.75 million, Salt Lake City will collect \$500,000, and the remaining \$500,000 will be dispersed equally to all municipalities, statewide, based on population. Utah is ahead of the curve to modify sales tax distribution by having already split the local option sales tax in this manner. Many states still return the full 1% local option sales tax to the point-of-purchase.

Unfortunately, there is a limited amount of retail that can be supported by any one region or community. This leads municipalities to compete with one another to locate, within their jurisdiction, all of the possible retail that the region can support so that they may receive the half-percent local option sales tax revenue. Wassmer (2002) explained that "the greater the reliance on a municipal revenue source that generates a local fiscal surplus from local retail activity, the more likely it will be that local officials zone for retail land uses and utilize local incentives to encourage it" (Wassmer, 2002). The competition between municipalities to lure the limited retail from one municipality to the next has been referred to, by Senator Bell, as a *cannibalization* of cities that is harming the built environment, contributing to sprawl, and decreasing social capital. Senator Bell explained the consequences of this phenomenon, which are often referred to as *zoning for dollars*:

"The financial incentive to create sprawl-type, auto-oriented, retail, facilities is very high. This often comes at the cost of losing established Main Street businesses and creating town gateways connecting the main part of town with free-

ways and major roads lined with big box retail, car lots and malls. The ambience and connectedness of the traditional town with its smaller scales and walkable facilities are usually sacrificed" (Bell, 2006).

In order to return balance to community planning in municipalities, Senator Bell argued that the point-of-purchase benefit derived from the local option sales tax must be removed and redistributed based on some other criteria (Bell, 2006). That is the only way to redirect a municipality's focus from acquiring more and more retail to building walkable, safe, communities that endure. This proposal, however, is extremely unpopular among municipalities that have established significant retail in their jurisdictions. Wassmer stated "the political reality is that some jurisdictions have grown accustomed to the fiscal surplus generated by local land policies that favour retail activity and loathe losing it" (P. 1324).

A second reason why municipalities resist further modifications to the sales tax structure is best explained by Paul G. Lewis (2001) of the Public Policy Institute of California in San Francisco. He stated "taking away local control over the sales tax in California, however, would place cities in the position of dependent claimants, fighting for yet another state-controlled revenue source – much the same position they are in now with respect to the property tax" (P. 31). The reality is that the local sales tax is the last source of revenue that municipalities can influence, shape, and structure to benefit their local situation. Nevertheless, it is incumbent upon each of the various stake holders to work to reform how these local option sales taxes are distributed. The manner in which the local sales tax system is currently constituted is broken and must be fixed if America's communities stand any chance of escaping the harmful effects of suburban sprawl. Until this change occurs, municipalities will have no incentive to implement new urban design measures to improve their communities. It is essential that action be taken immediately to curb this harmful trend.

COMMUNITY ASSOCIATIONS UNDER THE AUSPICES OF MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT

Throughout this article, I have argued against community associations that are established through the codes, policies, and covenants of master-planned communities. Among the many concerns of community associations, my greatest concern is that the members of these associations are often elected through substandard processes. Generally, community association elections embody little semblance of an official, municipal, election. Instead, these elections often utilize photocopied ballots and voting by proxy which subject the election to inaccurate results. Such elections do not typify republican democracy in its true form.

If it is determined that a community association should be established in a master-planned community, provisions should be instituted to establish such an association under the auspices of the municipal government wherein the master-

planned community is located. Organizing the community association in this way will not only establish a better structure to safeguard the association from failing to follow standard parliamentary procedure and provide adequate due process to the association's members, but it will also provide for a more fluid communication between the community association and city officials.

An excellent example of the establishment of such associations is found in the twenty-three community councils located throughout Salt Lake City, Utah. These organizations are successfully increasing civic engagement while at the same time establishing a profound influence on city government. According to the city's website:

"Salt Lake City recognizes neighborhood-based community organizations whose purpose is to provide community input and information to city departments. The community councils are encouraged to make recommendations to the city on all matters affecting the city or each organization's particular community or neighborhood. All City Council districts have community councils" (Community Councils, 2007).

Although private management companies, which are contracted to assist community associations, guarantee aesthetically pleasing and functional communities through the continued enforcement of the designer's plan and restrictive covenants, the management companies and the community designers are taking away the deliberative citizen processes that shape communities. Such management companies are suitable for small developments but should not be allowed to manage the affairs of larger master-planned communities.

REDEVELOPMENT

Douglas Rae, a political scientist and member of the Yale faculty since 1967, left his chairmanship of Yale University's political science department in 1990 to serve for eighteen months as Chief Administrative Officer of New Haven, Connecticut. Rae recounted his experiences and observations while serving in New Haven's city government in his recent book *City*. The following quotation from Rae's book provides an excellent vision for future development of America's communities and built environment. Rae (2003) said,

The old urbanism—the city of steam and manure—cannot be recaptured, and it would not suit our needs if it could be. But certain critical details of that older urbanism—the magic of small commitments to place, the value of strangers in ordinary life, the humanity of well-ordered sidewalks—must be among the principal guideposts to a new era of urbanism in the twenty-first century" (P. 31).

Rae's vision for future development should be considered not only when establishing new development, but also in the redevelopment of America's decaying and sprawling neighborhoods. One such location is Valley Fair Mall in West Valley City, Utah. The mall is situated on a sixty-acre site that is located on Constitution Boulevard between 3500 and

3800 South streets. The mall's construction was completed in 1970 during the era when many indoor suburban malls were built. Valley Fair Mall consists of forty-four acres of paved parking and six hundred thousand square feet, or fourteen acres, of retail space. Like most suburban malls, Valley Fair Mall is arguably West Valley City's most valuable land bank.

At the time of its construction, Valley Fair Mall was located in the Granger neighborhood of Salt Lake County. In 1980, after two public votes, the residents of the Granger, Hunter, and Redwood neighborhoods successfully voted to incorporate the region into what is present day West Valley City (2007). West Valley City, as is the case with most suburban communities, does not have an urban center or recognized downtown. Therefore, I propose that West Valley City reverse the suburban trend and implement the policies that I am advocating by redeveloping Valley Fair Mall, and surrounding sites, into a new, central, eighty-acre downtown for West Valley City.

The sites that I recommend for redevelopment include: Valley Fair Mall, Granger Elementary School, Granger Christian Church, Firestone Tires, Big O Tires, Jubilee Foods, Party City, and a small apartment complex. A possible name for the new development could be "Valley Fair Promenade: A Downtown for West Valley City." Unlike master-planned communities, multiple developers, under direction of the city, should be part of this venture, which, comprising eighty-acres is the equivalent of eight Salt Lake City blocks, or seventy-two Portland, Oregon blocks. If Utah's population projections remain accurate, then the state will need to redevelop locations like Valley Fair Mall in order to accommodate all of the anticipated growth.

Hypothetically, this redevelopment could ultimately look like the following: it would have a downtown consisting of seventeen blocks that average three-hundred fifty feet in length. Such a configuration would be walkable while formatting well with the existing street pattern. One of the center blocks could be reserved for a park which would serve as a public gathering place and is an essential element for a successful downtown. On another central block, perhaps across from the park, could be a location for a new West Valley City Municipal Government Center. Another block adjacent to the park could be a site for a new Granger Christian Church. Granite School District could build a new Granger Elementary School on the same location as the existing school. West Valley City could invite KTVX channel 4 to locate in this new urban center where they would become more competitive with KUTV channel 2, which recently relocated to new Main Street in Salt Lake City. A small convention center could be built along with a new hotel. A new cinema, theater, office towers, condominiums, and mixed-use buildings would be encouraged. Light-rail service would also be brought to the location connecting West Valley City's urban center with other urban centers in the Salt Lake Valley. Certainly, the economy will determine whether a develop-

ment of this magnitude could be supported, but the concept should at least be considered.

An urban center redevelopment of this nature would have a positive influence in redefining West Valley City and the heart of Salt Lake Valley. At the same time, this new development would be a conglomerate of civic opportunity. What had once been a sixteen-acre mall with a forty-four acre parking lot would now be a thriving center of urban activity. West Valley City would become an attractive and desirable urban center. West Valley City would be recognized as a community built by people through multiple developers and a place where civic engagement flourishes. West Valley City would become another enduring installation of the American experience.

CONCLUSION

Thus far, America's experiment in democracy has proven to be an effective form of government which has given her citizens a voice in government while protecting their individual freedom. To ensure that America's experiment in democracy continues to flourish at the local level, government leaders and policy makers must curb the effects of suburban sprawl by implementing proven and effective urban design techniques that will establish public facilities that incite public participation and community involvement. Likewise, municipalities must discourage allowing developers to create an abstract form of community by establishing community associations that act in concert with professional master-planned community managers to create and enforce design criteria standards that limit the freedom of their citizens by insulating their ability to participate in local government.

If the following three policy recommendations are implemented, civic engagement in America's communities will increase. First, states must revise their sales tax laws from a policy of point-of-sale revenue distribution to a policy that distributes local option sales tax revenues based on population. Second, municipalities need to establish community councils in lieu of master-planned community associations. And third, municipalities must change their focus from zoning for dollars to planning with vision. If each American will do their part to implement these policy proposals, our communities will be safer, more pleasant, and more enlightened with increased civic engagement.

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