



Social Outcomes of Land Use Planning

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The next threshold of thinking about issues will focus on **the social outcomes of land use planning decisions**. It is becoming apparent that those large framework decisions are tremendously important because they have a huge impact on how our communities function. In recent decades we have not thought about these things being linked. The way our cities and communities grow and develop, the questions of what gets built and where it is put, have been left to planners, engineers, architects, and city politicians and officials. But in the last decade the environmentalists have begun to ask serious questions about how development patterns have contributed to the degradation of the environment. Now it is time to ask the same sort of questions about the degradation of the social and cultural environments.

The predominant pattern of development for more than half a century has been urban sprawl, the continuous production of low density housing on closed-loop streets at the ever-expanding edge of the urban

region. This housing has a number of features: it is too low density to service with frequent public transit, leading to a dependency on cars; it has few community amenities, other than a strip mall at the entrance to the development; and it tends to be homogenous in nature, with all the houses being in the same narrow price range which leads to non-diverse communities.

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The outcomes are beginning to become apparent in various areas:

1. We find in **immigrant settlement** that newcomers get isolated more easily, trapped in their cul-de-sacs and less likely to mix with people from other backgrounds. Thus their integration takes longer. They also need more artificial supports, which may be as simple as providing transportation to places or events, or as complex as counseling or other settlement programs.
2. In the **health care** community, they are finding that the isolation in these cul-de-sacs leads to poorer physical health, because people are dependent on cars to get out, and have less mental resilience from lack of socialization and stimulation. Residents find it harder to get to medical appointments, or to places where rehab or other maintenance and support programs take place. So they tend to stay at home.
3. There are **labour market** implications as well, as people have trouble getting to jobs. Getting locked into one of these developments often results in people spending unreasonably large amounts of time commuting, hours a day, often in cars that eat up a lot of their incomes.

Something happened in public policy about forty years ago that hardly anyone paid attention to that led to this. When the Toronto subway was built, the first line was from Union Station to Eglinton Avenue. The policy was that at each subway stop there would be high density development that would provide the levels of ridership that would justify the cost of the subway. As transportation expert Richard Gilbert says, if within a 0.6 km radius of a subway station forty thousand people live or work, such a subway station will generate enough revenue from the fare box to pay for its capital and operating costs, including the portion of the rail lines connecting it to the next station. And that's what we got in the first stretch, and even in the second phase that went from Union Station up University Avenue to Bloor Street. We had linked transportation and land use policy.

But subsequent phases featured the rise of the NIMBY (Not-In-My-Back-Yard) people, who said "we'd love to have the subway, but we don't want the density in our leafy, lawny neighbourhoods." They mobilized their local politicians to win that battle over the planners. Virtually every stop on the subway since has been built with densities lower than Gilbert's target, with the most ludicrous example being the

Sheppard line, soon to be joined by the extension of the University line to York University. What it has meant is that subways don't pay for themselves but have to be subsidized. This means that we've lagged badly in building new lines because people don't want to pay the taxes that would be required. What we're opting for now, if the City can get the federal government to contribute, is a lesser compromise of high volume streetcars, which I think are great. But in the meantime we've lost three decades of transit development.

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The same analysis can be applied to the provision of housing, particularly low income housing for people working at low income jobs, and assisted housing for people with illness and disability who need some supervision or special help. When we either don't provide that housing, relying on a market response which is demonstrably absent, or provide it at the far edge of town away from jobs and amenities, the social outcomes are inevitable and often unhappy. It is worth noting that Canada is the only developed country without national housing and transit policies.

It is important to realize that transportation and land use planning aren't just technical matters. The social outcomes of those decisions are absolutely related to the lives of people living in our cities and their neighbourhoods. The difficulty people have getting to work, getting to the doctor, getting to their place of worship, getting to the soccer field is part of our concern about the quality of their lives and their ability to have more control of their lives. When these amenities are not provided in reasonable places at reasonable cost, and not connected with the public services which strengthen people's ability to prosper, we begin to realize the social importance of such land use planning decisions.