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FOR HISTORY'S SAKE, LET'S STOP SPRAWL

Author(s): RANDOLPH JONES Date: August 25, 2003 Page: A15 Section: Op-Ed

WHILE EARLY COLONIAL VILLAGES AND OUR ONCE ROBUST INDUSTRIAL CENTERS DEFINE THE HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT PATTERN OF THE COMMONWEALTH, SUBURBAN **SPRAWL** HAS UNALTERABLY CHANGED THE CHARACTER AND IS THREATENING TO CHANGE THE FUTURE OF OUR REGION.

As citizens, we have a choice - to be bulldozed by consumptive **sprawl** or to rediscover the legacy for compact growth found in our traditional "cities and towns."

It is through examining urban design opportunities to reclaim our urban centers as an alternative to **sprawl** that we can forge a more compact pattern of future growth. Here's a list for creating well-designed, attractive housing with densities appropriate to their surroundings within our "city and town" framework:

- * Redeveloping the core: The high-rise residential icons of the 1960s - Tremont on the Common and Rindge Towers, for example - have been redesigned to fit more comfortably within our urban neighborhoods. Tent City in the South End exemplifies mixed use at its finest, successfully reclaiming a key urban site for mixed-income housing by breaking down dense, monolithic structures both visually and programmatically.
- * Create "developable" sites: Though densely developed, our metropolitan cores provide unique opportunities for residential growth. The current proposal for Columbus Center will build on air rights over the Massachusetts Turnpike to create a new residential townhouse complex that knits together portions of the Back Bay, Chinatown, and the South End. Air rights over the Allston and Readville Yards are also being studied for new residential uses.
- * Preserve historic sites: These properties in a region of streetcar suburbs represent unique opportunities for preserving key neighborhood assets while increasing residential densities adjacent to transit. My former firm was instrumental in redeveloping two vacant elementary schools in Newton Highlands for special needs and market-rate housing and a much needed community recreation center.
- * Develop suburban transit centers: The newest mixed-use project type to be added to our primer on density is "transit-oriented development" at commuter rail stations. Kudos to the new "housing-over-commercial" on Main Street in Canton. This is a walk-to-transit development that has recreated the classic mixed-use of our traditional city and town centers.
- * Housing on Main Street: Our existing neighborhood commercial centers provide unparalleled opportunities to create housing over the 1930s retail structures along our urban arterials. Integrating new housing with the local businesses will create more pedestrian-friendly "main streets."
- * Mixed-use districts: This concept is an excellent strategy to increase residential density

in areas with existing infrastructure. Communities such as Framingham are creating new mixed-use zoning initiatives to stimulate new housing investment in their downtown.

* New neighborhoods will continue to be reinvented in our former warehousing, industrial, or maritime precincts. The Fort Point Artists Community, emerging mixed-income residential neighborhoods in the South End and new housing in the Waterfront District and East Boston, underscore the attractiveness of urban living.

* Neighborhoods of HOPE: Boston's subsidized housing units within its urban neighborhoods are being revitalized as mixed-income neighborhoods through HUD's innovative Hope VI Program. Greater housing densities throughout all communities in the Commonwealth will be necessary to address our critical affordable housing shortfall. If we are to take advantage of the myriad of opportunities that our older urban centers - whether city, town or village - offer as exciting places to live, work, and recreate, a statewide strategy for increased residential densities in locations outlined by our primer, must be aggressively pursued.

A commitment to such a mission will require no less than what was subscribed to at the founding of our colony - a new density compact for the Commonwealth.

Starting today, we need:

* A common development agenda for a coordinated policy and legislative and regulatory framework that encourages and supports redevelopment in the older communities.

* An investment strategy in those locations where existing infrastructure can best serve future growth and development.

* Local action plans that maximize the vast number of opportunities for mixed-use projects in our core communities.

Sprawl does not have to rule. A sustainable future will only be created by people returning to the places of activity and greatest density in the Commonwealth - the neighborhoods of our cities and towns. It's time we made that option possible.