

Livable

The Phoenix metropolitan area is now larger than 7 states including Massachusetts. Ninety percent of this growth occurred over the last 5 decades replacing desert and agricultural lands with highways, suburban tract housing, and shopping malls. As people congregated in suburban areas, the central cities of our poly-centric metropolis were largely abandoned.

Natural resources are not the only thing depleted by sprawl. As a number of recent studies demonstrate, sprawl takes an enormous toll on our physical and mental health contributing to automobile fatalities, obesity, asthma, workplace woes (and decreased productivity), and suburban sorrows (boredom and isolation). Recent research also highlights the importance of urban vitality for economic vitality since corporate headquarters and young talented people choose to locate in the most vibrant cities.

It is now widely acknowledged that the path we have been taking is not sustainable. It is not sustainable environmentally, economically, socially, or aesthetically. But we obviously can not retrace our steps and begin again. Nor can or should we banish the car. Rather, we must figure out a way to retrofit our metropolitan area into a richly sustainable ecosystem. How can we accomplish this? The answer is three-pronged. We need: (1) More "mixed-use" urban pockets (2) More alternatives to the car, and (3) More passive cooling devices that provide comfort throughout the year. Let's look at each of these more closely, focusing on downtown Phoenix.

(1) **Mixed-Use:** To provide a "sense of place" and "quality place," we need places that mix living, working, recreating, and so forth. We need places where people can walk, preferably 24/7. Increasing the residential population through a range of housing options in downtown Phoenix would not only increase the amount of walking downtown, it would also decrease the amount of commuting that currently takes place along with the environmental, economic, and social costs it incurs. To assure social diversity (and avoid gentrification), the city could implement "inclusionary zoning," a strategy that has been successful in New York City, New Jersey, the Washington DC

area, and Santa Fe, New Mexico. Inclusionary zoning involves setting aside a portion of new housing (usually about 15%) for lower-income residents in an identified area. Developers building in this area must either build affordable housing themselves or contribute to a fund allocated toward the lower-income housing.

In addition to significantly increasing the range of housing options, we need more places to walk to. Years of urban dispersal have rendered walking prohibitive in most of the Phoenix metropolitan area. Even in the densest urban residential pockets of downtown Phoenix, there is little to walk to since retail and other amenities are still scarce. Many contend that "retail follows rooftops" in a natural progression, but in this chicken-and-egg situation, where there is a perception of risk for investors of both housing and retail, a swift and assured urban renaissance relies upon subsidies and other incentives.

And third in this category, zoning requirements must be modified in targeted areas to require "build to-s," rather than "setbacks," doors and windows facing the street, wide sidewalks (perhaps with benches, lighting, landscaping, and public art), and parallel or diagonal parking along the street. These criteria assure that buildings line the street to create "streetwalls" so that pedestrians feel that they are in an "outdoor room" when they are walking down the sidewalk. The result is a sense of enclosure, safety, and interest as pedestrians gaze at/into facades and as those inside watch these passersby. The UR (urban residential) zoning that was established to allow Roosevelt Square at Portland Street and Central Avenue demonstrates these principles and efforts are currently underway to encourage infill on smaller lots by eliminating the 2-acre minimum currently required by this zoning category. Two other important initiatives (in progress) should have a tremendous positive impact: Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) overlay districts along the light rail line [Tempe is developing a similar plan but is focusing only on the area around the light-rail stops and is calling it Pedestrian-Oriented Development (POD)] and a new master plan for the area north of Fillmore between Central Avenue and 7th Street.

Phoenix

text Nan Ellin

Although downtown revitalization has been substantial over the last few years, we need to accelerate our progress. One tool used by virtually every city that has successfully rebounded (these are referred to as "comeback cities" in the planning field) is tax increment financing (TIF). This tool allows a jurisdiction such as a municipality to declare a "tax increment district" and to acquire property within that district and resell it at a reduced price, to pay demolition costs, finance on-site improvement, and assist with relocating residents if necessary. The city would issue bonds that are then paid back with revenues from rising property values over the next 25 years. (If sufficient revenue is not generated, the city is liable to pay the shortfall.) In Arizona, however, TIF is currently unconstitutional.

(2) **Alternatives to the Car:** In addition to having more reasons to leave our cars behind, we need to have the ability to do so. The planned light rail and improved bus system are providing necessary alternatives to the car. "District parking," as found in Santa Monica, California and other cities, offers an excellent means of accommodating both cars and pedestrians in the city. Built and managed by cities, these clearly identified, easily accessible, and well-run parking facilities provide ample and safe parking. This consolidation of parking removes a significant barrier to compact urban development. In addition, the elimination of parking requirements for each use offers a significant incentive to downtown development.

In our desert city, mixed-use development and alternatives to the car are not sufficient for a pedestrian-friendly environment. We also need:

(3) **Passive Cooling:** The last half century during which most of Phoenix grew was also a period when urban development deliberately ignored local topography, climate, culture, and history. As a result, we are a city that largely works against our natural setting rather than with it, leading to environmental devastation, economic costs, and physical discomfort. The highly publicized "heat-island effect," the result of substituting asphalt for the natural landscape, intensifies the magnitude of these problems as well as the need for remedying them.

The School of Architecture at Arizona State University has become a leading research center in cooling strategies for desert cities. Primary among these is an investigation into shade structures that range widely in scale, materials, and costs. Effectively designed and realized, shade structures have the potential to provide a comfortable walking environment even in the hottest months, to create connections between currently isolated places, to serve as a catalyst for urban infill, and to provide the sense of place and character that are sorely lacking in our city.

If the light rail stations are not adequately cooled, as well as the parking lots where our cars will sit all day and the route from the parking lot to the station, we will be reluctant to leave our air-conditioned cars and wait for a train. Valley Metro Rail, the organization responsible for planning the light rail, includes a special section in their Urban Design Guidelines devoted to cooling strategies written by Harvey Bryan and the late Jeffrey Cook, both thermal experts from ASU. The success of the light-rail relies upon the implementation of these cooling strategies.

In sum, to make Phoenix a more livable city, we need to attract more housing for all income groups as well as more retail, restaurants and cafes, quality schools, arts and culture, parks and recreational opportunities. We also need to continue working towards delivering mass transit as well as district parking, and passive cooling devices. If these measures are effectively introduced on a wide scale, downtown Phoenix will house a significant residential population and will draw visitors who can circulate comfortably through the city year-round. Once this occurs, people will walk, drive, and use mass transit. And when they walk, it will not only be with a destination in mind but also simply to enter the urban fray, seeing and being seen in the age-old urban tradition that forms the basis of a civil society. Phoenix will buzz with the urban vitality that attracts those who can choose where they would like to live. And those of us already here, who are collaboratively creating this city, will enjoy a higher quality of life and will be able to say, I remember when.... [s]