

# The Case for Megapolitan Growth Management in the 21st Century: Regional Urban Planning and Sustainable Development in the United States\*

Edward H. Ziegler

Professor of Law

University of Denver Sturm College of Law

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## I. Introduction

Since the Supreme Court's early landmark decision in 1926, *Village of Euclid v. Ambler Realty Co.*, 272 U.S. 365 (1926), local cities and counties have continued to exercise primary governing jurisdiction over development of the built environment in the United States. This local jurisdictional arrangement is not in place, of course, everywhere in the world, particularly in Europe. Fast growing nations such as India and more recently China have joined other European countries in recognizing the need for a broader sustainable development framework for urban planning. And even in France, long a European stronghold of local perogatives, there is a movement to put in place a broader, more regional and national, sustainable development framework for control of urban development. This broader perspective on the greater "public interest" significance of urban planning and development also may be decidedly changing in the United States.

Most people in the United States do not live in major cities. Most Americans live, work, shop, and play in suburban areas, scattered about a metropolitan landscape far from any

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downtown urban core. We have become, as other affluent countries in Europe and Asia are becoming, a metropolitan (and increasingly megapolitan) nation. In the United States, the top 100 metropolitan areas are home to 65% of the nation's population (including 85% of the nation's immigrants and 77% of the nation's minorities) and those 100 regions generate two-thirds of the nation's jobs and three-quarters of the nation's economic GDP.

Those largest 100 metro areas also contain over 9000 local governments and one-third of these metropolitan areas span state jurisdictional boundaries. Nearly all the growth in the years ahead in this country (perhaps 200 million additional people in the next 50 years) will be located in just 20 mega regions of the United States. Two out of three people in this country will live in these 20 mega regions by 2040. While we have become an increasingly megapolitan nation, we are just beginning to focus on addressing a number of serious, complex, and regional sustainable development problems.

As cities, state, and national governments, both in the United States and throughout the world, begin to address an array of problematic sustainable development issues, a shift in the framework of governing responsibilities seems likely to occur. Local urban planning and zoning controls, as well as related public and private infrastructure and transportation investments, are all likely to operate, in the years ahead, within, and in support of, an overriding larger state and national sustainable development policy framework. Given the enormous future growth projected for the United States, both in the country's population and in its built environment, questions about broader regional governing arrangements may really be more of merely timing and degree, of the devising and analysis of potential metropolitan institutional forms and arrangements, not if, but simply when and how this transformation occurs.

Questions related to the competence and efficacy of existing institutions and governing arrangements are at the heart of any analysis of sustainable development problems. Adjustments in institutional governing arrangements related to urban planning, housing, energy, and supporting transit and infrastructure development are now increasingly advocated as an antidote to the problems of automobile-dependent regional sprawl. Proposals for metropolitan, regionally-coordinated (even megaregionally-coordinated) approaches to urban planning policy, both in the United States and elsewhere in the world, appear to be based on an increasing awareness of the critical importance of urban planning and related public and private built environment, transportation, and infrastructure investment decisions to resource and energy consumption and to the future economic prosperity of metropolitan areas throughout the world.

Consider the view of Peter Droege, an international expert on sustainable development and the changing role of urban planning in the world: “The overriding mandate in urban development today is not the development of efficient solutions to new and pressing city building needs. Rather, it is the colossal task of undoing the negative effects of almost three generations of planning priorities bred in an era that was gripped by great collective delusions about limitless growth. The new efficiency paradigm is aimed at curbing urban sprawl, oil gluttony and material waste, in a drive to offset the sheer momentum of a century of fossil affluence as burning, all encompassing aspiration.” Peter Droege, *The Renewable City* 131 (2006). Juxtapose that view with the recent statement of The Brookings Institution: “Metropolitan areas cannot resolve their challenges alone. Counties, cities, and suburbs operate within a national policy framework, and face challenges bigger than their own capacities. What’s needed is a new partnership between

federal, state, local, and private-sector players to help metropolitan areas build on their economic strengths, foster a strong and diverse middle class, and grow in environmentally sustainable ways.” The Brookings Institution, *Blueprint for American Prosperity* (2008). In short, as recent reports of national organizations such as the *Urban Land Institute*, the *American Planning Association*, the *Lincoln Institute of Land Policy*, *Smart Growth America*, and the newly formed *America 2050* make clear, there is increasing recognition of the critical role that coordinated urban planning policy at the metropolitan level can play in creating less automobile-dependent and economically prosperous communities in the 21st century.

## II. Automobile-Dependent Sprawl in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

The problems of automobile-dependent regional sprawl were largely perceived during the twentieth-century as “quality-of-life” issues such as the absence of human scale and walkability in our extended built environment, the lack of any real sense of place or of charming public places, the unappealing garage-door architecture and extensive parking lot landscapes, the traffic congestion, the loss of places friendly to children and the elderly, and the loss of nearby open space and wildlife habitat. While all of these are problems still associated with sprawl, they now seem only the most obvious in view of the even more serious problems associated with automobile-dependent sprawl in our twenty-first century.

Consider these growing and more serious costs. Scientists now believe that we can expect global warming and devastating climate change during this century, largely due to carbon emissions from the burning of fossil fuels. This country has the highest per capita consumption of fossil fuels in the world and fossil fuels, particularly oil, are the primary fuels powering automobile-dependent sprawl in the United States. The per-capita consumption of gasoline in

this country is four times that of European drivers and nearly ten times the amount of Asian drivers.

As a result of automobile use, the United States (which has less than five percent of the world's population) accounts for about 25% of global oil consumption and about 45% of the world's GHG emissions from automobiles. Our economy is completely oil-dependent, which renders it particularly vulnerable to fluctuations in oil price and supply. Any significant interruption of foreign oil imports (which account for over 60% of the United States' consumption) would be potentially devastating to our economy.

Over 80% of the oil consumed in the United States goes toward transportation (mostly the driving of cars and trucks) and automobile travel is our single largest consumer source of green house gas emissions (about a third of our total GHG emissions). Moreover there is little prospect of all this changing in the near future. Each year the consumption of fossil fuels, particularly oil, increases in the United States largely as a result of population growth, an increased built environment of homes, offices, and businesses, increased vehicle miles traveled, and the 3 million additional automobiles each year that are added to this nation's roads.

Infrastructure costs supporting this dispersed landscape also are enormously expensive. As it turns out, the suburbanization of America's metropolitan areas has been made affordable only by avoiding consideration of life-cycle pricing for this country's automobile-related infrastructure costs. The United States has nearly a \$2 trillion infrastructure maintenance deficit that increases by an estimated \$100 billion each year. We are passing along to the next generation an infrastructure of bridges, highways, tunnels, viaducts, rail lines, port facilities, levies, and transmission grids that are all badly in need of replacement or repair.

Since 1950, about 2.5 million Americans have been killed in automobile accidents (that's more than twice the number of Americans killed in battle in all this country's wars combined) and perhaps as many as 20 million people have been permanently disabled or seriously injured on our roads. Increasing traffic congestion and air pollution from autos are linked to a range of pulmonary, coronary, and neurological diseases, such as asthma, cancer, heart disease, strokes, birth defects, and brain disease. Researchers also are examining the link between the sedentary lifestyles of our automobile culture and increasing rates of obesity and diabetes throughout the United States. High rates of land urbanization and land clearing are significant sources of GHG emissions and intensive automobile use is a significant cause of water pollution problems throughout this country. This is all a high and deadly price to pay for what is becoming an increasingly expensive, inconvenient, and congested form of travel.

Together, rising oil prices, worsening traffic congestion, and a crumbling infrastructure pose a serious threat to continuing economic prosperity in the United States. Already we spend about 6 billion person hours stuck in traffic each year (at an estimated \$60 billion loss in economic productivity). Higher oil prices will make most of us poorer through rising prices for gasoline, food, commodities, building materials, pharmaceuticals, computers, and nearly all consumer products and services. Rising prices, moreover, will slow job creation, decrease investment, dampen consumer spending, and act as a drain on economic growth. Its impact also will likely be far greater in the United States than in Europe or Asia given this nation's hyper-sprawl landscape and high rate of oil consumption.

Automobile travel is likely to become increasingly expensive and unaffordable for many households in the United States. Households may now spend nearly 20-35% of their income on automobile transportation. As the world oil supply peaks and demand continues to

grow, automobile-dependent landscapes will become unsustainable. Consider that in 1997 the United States was spending \$1 billion a week for oil, and in 2008, at \$4 a gallon for gasoline, this country was spending nearly \$2 billion *a day* for oil. Depending on how fast the price of oil rises, there is the real potential for urban and economic collapse both in the United States and other industrialized nations of the world.

Population growth in the United States is projected to dramatically increase resource and energy consumption. No amount of recycling, inflating our tires, turning off the lights, or cloth bagging our groceries will likely be sufficient to conserve our way out of this situation. Consider these projections. To accommodate this growth during just the next forty years, this country will need to build perhaps 100 million new housing units and construct more new nonresidential development than all of that development that now exists in this country. If this growth occurs, two-thirds of the buildings that will exist in the United States by 2050 will have been built after the year 2000. Also, at the present annual rate of increase in automobiles, the United States in 40 years could easily have more than 100 million more automobiles congesting the country's roads.

### III. Local Urban Planning and Regional Growth Management

Local zoning and growth management programs are adopted to address quality-of-life issues within a particular local community. Within that community, land use controls may attempt to deal, at least in part, with the internal problems of scattered, haphazard, and inappropriate development. Local zoning and growth management programs are typically low-density and exclusionary in nature, and therefore, they typically have the effect of legally requiring regional sprawl. This has been, and continues to be, a well-recognized and important dynamic of local growth, zoning practice, and regional sprawl in the United States.

Sprawl, in this respect, is the product of the very visible hand of local government urban planning policy. Cities that tout their Green Development initiatives, at least, should be honest enough to count their “zoning policy” responsibility for their “exclusion-driven GHG emissions” from the automobile driving of workers in the city who must find housing elsewhere and from their own city residents who need to drive elsewhere to find jobs. A recent Connecticut state court zoning decision, *Trumbull Falls, LLC v. Planning and Zoning Comm’n of Town of Trumbull*, 902 A.2d 706, 714-15 (Conn. App. Ct. 2006).for example, involved the application of an “as the crow flies distancing requirement” that prohibited any form of planned multi-unit housing from locating within one mile of similar housing within the community. This is the kind of thing that too often passes for “urban planning” in America’s local communities.

Over the years, critics such as Richard Babcock, Anthony Downs, and Robert Freilich have pointed out how local, low-density zoning and growth management programs have the effect of scattering development throughout a metropolitan region. Our regional problem today is that the strong arm of NIMBYism has turned the gentility of old “snob zoning” schemes into zoning schemes that perhaps can best be described as “hyper exclusion on steroids.” We live in a world where everything but (and sometimes even including) low-density, high-end housing is considered a LULU (a locally unwanted land use).

The American scheme of local control of land development through exclusionary and low-density zoning regimes is increasingly recognized as a significant cause of expanding and unsustainable regional sprawl. In some American communities in the path of suburban development, local zoning may legally restrict density to not more than 20 residential dwellings per square mile (about 1 house per 35 acres of land). This is not “urban planning” but planning that avoids urbanization and that guarantees regional sprawl. Contrary to popular myth, this

“open-space” form of zoning is not constitutionally required to protect the property rights of owners. It is simply traditional zoning’s myopic response to the NIMBY notion of “land conservation.” Yet, urban planning is increasingly recognized as a potentially critical tool for addressing many of our regional problems that result from sprawl. The twenty-first century dilemma here is how to turn local urban planning and zoning, which is a large part of this county’s sustainability problem, into a tool for sustainable metropolitan growth.

In the United States, about 75% of our energy consumption is attributable to buildings (48%) and transportation (27%), two potentially key elements in a sustainable urban development plan. Green development and urban planning together could reduce these figures by perhaps 50-80% through the reduction of driving and utilization of energy efficient infrastructure and buildings. Urban planning and zoning, however, are likely to remain a large part of the problem under the local jurisdictional regime of a NIMBYism that embraces the mantra of “think globally but exclude locally” – as its low-density pattern of land development in many communities seems to be set in stone.

Despite some talk about an “urban renaissance” in America during the 1990s (usually referring to the central business district of American cities), census data make clear that population densities have continued to decline in all regions of this country. Recent 2007 census data, moreover, show that many major American cities, such as San Francisco, Chicago, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Memphis, San Antonio, Cleveland, Minneapolis, Pittsburgh, and Birmingham, as well as a number of other cities, are still losing population. Most new development continues to be in newer outlying suburban areas and nearly all residential-zoned land in nearly any metropolitan region will usually be legally restricted to the development of detached single-family homes, with multifamily zones largely serving as buffer areas along

interstate highways, pod commercial strips, or at other even more undesirable locations, nearly all of which are automobile-dependent.

Whatever the original wisdom of this zoning policy, that time is past. Any national comparative analysis suggests that low-density, suburban sprawl has nothing whatsoever to do with rates of home ownership, housing appreciation, job creation, per-capita incomes, or economic growth (just ask people who live in London, Barcelona, or Shanghai). Our regional, state, national and global economic interests stand today in stark opposition to this local low-density governing regime.

#### IV. Metropolitan Growth Management for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Local low-density zoning and exclusionary growth-management programs are becoming increasingly dysfunctional in view of changing market demographics in the United States. That is, of course, no guarantee of their demise anytime soon. The fastest growing segment of the real estate market today is for higher-density, mixed-use, and less automobile-dependent development. By 2010, seventy percent of our population is expected to consist of singles and empty-nest households, prime buyer markets for this type of higher density housing arrangement. The majority of these childless households are likely to prefer suburban, or even inner-urban, lifestyle-friendly (and less automobile-dependent) intensive village-center built environments.

This people-friendly (rather than car-friendly) “urbanization” of both our older, and even newer, suburban built environments could have the advantage of providing far greater choice in personal lifestyle and housing arrangements and also could provide a far greener urban footprint than conventional sprawl. Studies in this country show that people are willing to trade larger for smaller homes to live in a more “people” friendly built environment with nearby mixed-uses and pedestrian-friendly amenities. Moreover, rising oil prices and the recent serious downturn in the

mortgage and housing markets in the United States will likely combine, at least in the near term, to significantly dampen further low-density conventional tract subdivision sprawl and increase the development in this country of closer-in, higher-density housing. Low-density, automobile-dependent new housing developments on the suburban fringe are likely to be increasingly viewed as products with an uncertain or, perhaps, even a diminishing asset value and will, in any case, be difficult to finance.

The United States will likely witness in the years ahead the densification and “urbanization” of both newer and older suburban areas. This “urbanization of suburbia” is already underway in many regions of this country. Unfortunately, under existing low-density zoning regimes, these higher-density developments are likely to be poorly planned and relegated to isolated and residual buffer zones. By default, they are likely to be designed under existing zoning regimes with densities that are still completely automobile dependent. They are unlikely to be planned and developed as green communities within a regional growth management framework. In short, higher densities will not alone result in more sustainable urban core areas.

In the United States, the problem, too often, is that infill and redevelopment projects have densities that are so low that efficient public transit, perhaps even good bus service, makes little sense. With sufficient densities, extensive intra-regional transit, like light rail, becomes feasible, as does light rail to regional airports, and even high speed inter-regional transit (about 50% of the air flights in the USA could be efficiently accommodated by megaregional high-speed rail), as car dollars are transferred to public transit dollars. One thing seems certain: we are not rich enough now, and surely will not be rich enough in the future, to finance two costly and efficient (both private-auto and public) transit networks in our expanding metropolitan areas.

While there may be regional transportation planning for light rail or high-speed bus service, so-called transit oriented development (TOD) at station stops or key transit nodes is often simply not occurring in this country (and is unlikely to occur, even for many years ahead, in part, due to the profusion of alternative development sites within a region) at densities that justify either the infrastructure investment or that actually make possible a wide array of pedestrian-friendly mixed uses and amenities. TOD densities make real sense when the neighborhood allows many residents to live, work, shop, and play without owning an automobile or without having to even use public transit on a daily basis. Providing an auto-free built environment as a widely available lifestyle option for day-to-day living would seem to make great sense in an age of rising energy prices and where the traditional low-density built environment paradigm is fast becoming a fading and disfavored vision in our housing markets.

There are, perhaps, some lessons to be learned here from our brethren across the Atlantic. America is not Europe, of course, but we should keep in mind that cities there have much more experience with public transit development and, generally being less wealthy countries, are likely, perhaps, to be more sensitive to the costs and benefits of infrastructure investment and related housing development. Under European transit models, a TOD area might include a one-mile or more radius around a transit stop and have blended densities of 25 to 100 units per acre. Densities in Europe often are related and commensurate to the purpose and policy of public infrastructure and transit investment. That apparently is still a novel idea in America. This type of coordinated and planned development is unlikely to occur in this country within a reasonable and financially-feasible timeframe, however, without regionally-coordinated growth management goals, plans, and standards supporting that development. For example, both the BART rail transit system in San Francisco and the Washington D.C. Metro rail system, each

constructed over 30 years ago are still anticipating the development of European-style densities at many TOD sites in nearby station areas. True automobile-independent TOD development needs to be initiated in this country nearer the beginning, rather than toward the end, of this century.

In the United States, regionally important TOD areas are nearly always under local zoning control and more compact and intensive development is often prohibited or substantially scaled back when opposed by neighbors. TOD that consists, for example, of a park-and-ride lot, a pod shopping plaza, or a Taco Bell, and a nearby two or three story apartment or office building, is not an alternative sustainable development vision but merely an expensive attempt at traffic mediation. As a traffic control measure, we might be better off just paying some people not to drive.

TOD sites, also, are too often just that - undersized individual sites - when what is needed is space for whole neighborhoods and communities. Similarly, the fact that there are areas around a new housing project to walk and ride a bike does not make that built environment “pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly.” That designation should require that there be real places and destinations to walk and ride to (only then is it truly less automobile-dependent) and that is unlikely to occur without much higher development densities. Too much of the space and expense of the built environment we are developing today, even under the banner of Smart Growth, is still devoted to the parking, housing, and movement of automobiles. We should not be giving, for example, a “Green Award” to a solar powered multi-tiered parking garage. Ultimately, there will be a high cost incurred from “just pretending” that we are solving these development problems.

Successful higher-density and mixed-use development (that is not automobile dependent) for planned urban core areas will likely require regionally coordinated selection and designation of both “growth” and “no growth” areas. These plans, of course, need to be regionally integrated and coordinated with major public transit and infrastructure investment decisions. None of this will likely be possible under the existing local jurisdictional-governing arrangement. The one unequivocal success of Portland, Oregon’s regional growth management program during the last 30 years is the regional share of office and commercial development that has occurred in its downtown core area largely as a result of deliberate planning policies that steered that development into that designated growth area. It is also a regional planning technique that is used in some European countries with great success.

Rising oil prices and changing market demographics are combining to support exactly this kind of planning and zoning reform. Already, in the current market downturn, higher-density, less auto-dependent housing appears to be holding its value better than housing on the suburban fringe. Public transit-friendly housing developments also are reported to be outperforming more auto-intensive, conventional subdivision developments. For the first time in this country’s history, resale prices of multi-unit housing are doing as well or better than detached single-family homes in the same region. Fortunately, this growing demand for higher density and less auto-dependent development coincides with the need to plan for sustainable pedestrian, bicycle, and transit-friendly “green development” in our metropolitan areas.

It should be emphasized that higher-density housing development is not itself the solution to the need for greener development options. Higher-density neighborhoods simply provide the opportunity to plan for green development. To accommodate future population growth, there is likely to be increasing densities over time in this country’s metropolitan areas

through infill and redevelopment of both newer and older suburban areas. Rising oil prices will support this trend. Unless planned and designed otherwise, however, our communities and regions are likely to remain automobile-dependent places, where, like Los Angeles (the highest density urbanized area in the United States), Americans will live their lives in poorly planned, high-density, and automobile-dependent environments. If this occurs, life in America will surely be poorer and planned largely around high fuel costs and traffic congestion. It will also likely be unsustainable in its present form. Without the initiation of some regional-governing framework that establishes sustainable goals and standards for local urban planning and zoning, this seems the likely scenario for America's metropolitan areas in the years ahead.

#### V. Metropolitan Urban Policy and Sustainable Development

Higher density areas can be designed to consume far fewer resources and energy, provide for more economical and efficient infrastructure and public services, particularly public transit options, and can be designed to accommodate a wide mix of housing types and a broad array of people-friendly nearby uses and amenities, and all at a human scale not possible or practical in a landscape of low-density sprawl. This, of course, is, and has been, the vision of the "Smart Growth" and "New Urbanism" movements in the United States. For nearly a generation in this country, these groups, as well as others, have promoted this kind of change in the current development paradigm of automobile-dominated regional sprawl. The truth, however, is that these efforts over the years have seldom produced developments fully in accord with this alternative vision.

About 80% of all new housing starts in recent years have been detached single-family homes (with the houses getting bigger despite decreasing household size). Even New Urbanist developments that have been built tend to be isolated low-density projects that seldom have an

array of nearby people-friendly mixed uses and human-scale amenities and tend to be largely, if not completely, automobile-dependent. Nearly all the various forms of higher density, multiunit housing now being built in this country, moreover, are likely to be completely automobile-dependent. We have been shaping the built environment in the United States to fit the memory (and increasingly outdated preferences) of a bygone century.

. The problem is that these forms of green development projects are often simply illegal under local zoning codes or are strongly and successfully opposed by nearby NIMBYs that dominate the local urban planning process. The truth of the matter is that cities are great at talking the “green talk” but actually quite lousy at walking the “green walk” in local urban planning and zoning. As a recent reports point out, under the current local governing arrangement, NIMBYs are in a position to block, at nearly every turn, any real change and zoning reform.

Some self-styled Green Cities, like Denver, are actually involved in the down zoning of whole neighborhoods, increasing their “exclusion-driven GHG emissions” from expanded regional automobile driving. Moreover, local zoning programs seldom utilize their site orientation and design controls in regulating land development to promote solar or other renewable energy systems. In some areas, wind turbines and their support facilities may be prohibited by local zoning from locating and operating within an entire community. Even this country’s electric transmission grid is badly in need of upgrading and is proving inadequate for our renewable energy needs due in part to local NIMBY opposition to infrastructure expansion and replacement. Clean energy systems, such as wind turbines (representing hundreds of millions of dollars in private capital investment), are actually being shut down in some areas of the country due to the inadequate capacity of the electric grid network. This is a national problem

that is expected to get worse. The United States' inadequate electric transmission grid has the potential to significantly affect investment in renewable energy technologies. Wind and solar energy technology now produce less than 1% of this country's energy.

Reform of local urban planning and growth management programs is increasingly likely to focus on the creation of potential forms of regional and metropolitan based policy frameworks for addressing sustainable development problems. A recent policy report on climate change of the American Planning Association, for example, expressly recognizes the need for a new regional framework for planning and calls for new federal and state legislation creating policies, programs, standards, and funding prioritization related to mitigating greenhouse gas emissions and promoting higher-density, mixed-use, and less automobile-dependent development.

It seems wise to assess the potential benefits of creating some new regional governing framework that leaves the details of urban planning and zoning to local jurisdictional control but that, quite frankly, requires that local planning decisions be consistent with regional sustainable development growth plans and policies. Perhaps it is time for another proposed Quiet Revolution in land use control, similar to that proposed in this country nearly 40 years ago. There are a number of models in place and much we can learn from the first generation of state-created regional "areas of critical concern" and "coastal planning" agencies, as well as from advisory regional planning commissions, and the successes and failures of regional transportation agencies and regional councils of government. And while it's true that Americans tend to resist regionalism in urban planning matters, perhaps the only thing more "fanciful" today than the idea of "metropolitan planning" is the idea that we will be able to seriously address our urban

development problems without some sensible and sustainable regional governing arrangement.

Local jurisdictional control of urban planning, in any case, has never been held inviolate in this country from federal and state intervention. At the federal level, legislation preempts, to one degree or another, local zoning in a variety of matters, including some energy related projects, housing for the disabled, manufactured housing building codes, religious land uses, and certain types of telecommunication facilities. At the state level, zoning law treatises on the topic provide a long list of A-Z activities and land uses that are partially, or entirely, controlled by state legislation in some states, ranging from forms of affordable housing to cemeteries, child day-care centers, farming, landfills, mining, road access, schools, and utilities. Federal and state governments can be seen to have been as strong as thought necessary, at any given point in time, in curtailing the abuse of local zoning controls. Perhaps, therein lies the future of local planning and zoning reform. What is needed here is a regionally-coordinated and sustainable-development framework for local urban planning. That is not a small matter. The problems, though, are regional in scope, widespread, serious, and worsening.

This new regional arrangement need not involve developers in a more costly, complex, and lengthier government-permitting process. Reform of local jurisdictional controls necessarily should involve the creation of more transparent standards and procedures for securing development approvals, particularly in designated growth areas. This type of procedural reform generally has been an unfulfilled promise of Smart Growth. Builders and others in the development community may welcome this type of regional reform as much, if not most, development in the coming years is likely to be infill and redevelopment -- an

unpredictable undertaking typically fraught with endless NIMBY delays, hearings, and new demands.

While urban design and planning standards for expanding local and regional transit options and implementing green building standards and codes are critically important, there are still other equally important sustainable development issues that could benefit from regionally coordinated growth management policies. Increasingly important in the years ahead will be alternative energy systems planning, inter-modal transit planning, regional food security, water supply and treatment, green urban cooling and heating networks, waste treatment and recycling, regional freight transport, the planning of green carbon sinks and park networks, and the preparation of green development sites. These are all undertakings that could greatly benefit from regionally-coordinated goals, plans, technical support, and funding. While there may be few top-down solutions that fit all urban regions, our metropolitan areas are facing regional problems that will require the near transformation of our metropolitan world in the first half of this century.

## VI. Some Concluding Thoughts

National and state implementing legislation will be needed to establish a new regional framework for sustainable green development and urban planning policy. Providing some regional framework for growth, however, may help us avoid waking up some years from now to a world of unsustainable plug-in automobile traffic jams, unsustainable solar-powered housing sprawl, a collapsed regional road or utility infrastructure, or a metropolitan area without a ready and affordable supply of drinking water, energy, or food. We need to create a growth-management policy that avoids addressing critical growth issues in the future

with ad hoc, massive, last-ditch, crisis interventions. We are not likely to be rich enough or wise enough, or possess the social cohesion in the future, to make that approach work.

Our urban planning policies in the 21<sup>st</sup> century need to be metropolitan in scope and focus on devising and implementing growth strategies that provide people in this country with affordable and sustainable housing and transportation options. Higher densities that are likely to occur in this country's metropolitan areas in the years ahead hold the potential for addressing many of our sustainable development problems, but only if this new development embodies a green design policy that provides transit-friendly and automobile-free lifestyle options. Urban planning policies and standards should focus new growth in designated intensive urban-core areas within a region at densities that allow many, if not most, residents therein to live, work, shop, and play without having to use an automobile. Adoption and funding of metropolitan area growth policies through a coordinated regional governing arrangement may be our best (and perhaps only) bet for building this sustainable future. This is a huge undertaking and we are already late to the task.