SHAPING OUR TOWNS AND CITIES

A Discussion Guide
For Exploring Possibilities For Public Policy

Developed by the Interactivity Foundation

SHAPING OUR TOWNS AND CITIES

Special thanks to the contributing Flickr & WikiMedia photographers

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*A*s we look to the future of our towns and cities, what choices might we face about their design and development? From this one core question many more follow.

What basic vision of community design might guide our decisions? What makes good community design? What makes a good place to live? What values might guide our community design decisions? What if our values are in conflict?

The appearance of a community (its aesthetic qualities) is often a key value for many people. What would it take to design beautiful towns or cities? What about designing a community for a thriving economy? Some people value a sense of social connection in a community. Can we design towns and cities for a thriving community life? Can we have communities where young and old live together, where people are urged to stay rather than move to a new community in their later years? Can we design communities in a way that encourages interactions among all kinds of people who live there?

Cities and towns grow beyond their boundary lines as newcomers and immigrants arrive. Populations change with new languages and cultures. Cities also shrink as industries die off or as young people seek opportunity elsewhere. How can community design take account of such changes? What are the environmental considerations regarding community size or community design? How might we harmonize the constructed environment of our communities with the natural environment surrounding them?

Many community design and development decisions depend on transportation policy. Could our transportation decisions be the key to designing our communities? What model of transportation might we embrace as we design our towns and cities? The sprawling design, or lack of apparent design, of many communities depends on widespread car ownership.

What if people need or want other transportation options? What happens if fuel and energy costs spike to the point where car-centered designs are no longer tenable for most people?

Of course many of our community design decisions depend on funding. Our models for funding housing, infrastructure, public spaces, and so on determine much about the design and development of our towns and cities. Finance models determine who gets to live where, in what kind of housing, in what kind of neighborhood, and with what kind of transportation options. They determine the kind of infrastructure we have and the public and private spaces that make up a town or city. What different funding models might there be?

The direction of community design decisions also depends on who gets to make them. These decisions depend on governmental structures based on boundaries that might no longer make sense for a highly mobile society. What happens when the realities of our cities expand beyond the reach of traditional governance structures? Over time, we've seen cities expand into "greater metropolitan areas," megacities, or interconnected urban corridors with increasingly urbanized suburbs and edge cities. Could we coordinate community design policy across a region rather than patching together policies from isolated jurisdictions? Could we harmonize community design decisions across various governmental agencies so we could better integrate, say, our environmental, transportation, economic, and housing policies?

Beijing, China

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New York, New York

These are just some of the many questions that might come up when you think about public policy for shaping our towns and cities. What other big questions can you imagine emerging in our future?

A group of your fellow citizens explored questions and concerns such as these over the course of roughly a year as part of an Interactivity Foundation discussion project. Some of the participants were experts in various fields related to community design and development. Others were simply interested citizens. All of them agreed to explore perspectives beyond their own and to develop diverging policy possibilities beyond their own preferences.

These explorations are loosely focused on "urban design." In this case, "urban" isn't limited to major cities or high-population centers. Instead, you could think of urban as indicating a settlement where people are living in proximity to one another and where they face shared decisions about how to design and develop the built environment of that community. As you explore these ideas, try not to get bogged down in disputes over what counts as "urban" or over the size of the communities under discussion. In this project, the participants used "town" or "city" in non-technical ways to talk about settlements of various sizes where communities face public decisions about how to design or structure their settlements.

In what follows, you will find seven contrasting policy possibilities for shaping our towns and cities. Each policy idea is intended to describe a broad approach that our society might take toward addressing some public policy concerns about community design. Together these policy ideas are intended to sketch out contrasting visions of how we might orient our decisions about designing and developing our communities. They are not intended to spell out every possible policy approach. Think of them as an occasion for your own exploration of different approaches to shaping our towns and cities. What other ideas can you discover? We would love to hear them!

Walkable neighborhood, Daybreak, Utah.

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POLICY *A*
CREATE BEAUTIFUL TOWNS AND CITIES

THE BASIC IDEA

Barcelona, Spain

*W*hat if the most important consideration for shaping towns and cities is to create a beautiful place? This policy approach aims at precisely that—designing and developing beautiful towns and citites. Of course, beauty in a town or city is not just about the appearance of a few pretty buildings or art in public spaces. It's also about the overall interplay of the spaces that make up that town or city. Our sense of beauty isn't a static universal ideal. It's shaped by our culture and history. Beauty relates to personal tastes, local conditions, and geographic or regional variations. This policy doesn't insist on one vision of what constitutes beauty. It does not define beauty for all places and all times. Instead, it offers a platform for seeking beauty in a way that is responsive to local contexts. The core thrust of this policy is to support aesthetic or beautiful design in the built environment in whatever ways are locally determined.

An Evolving Vision of Beautiful Design

Beauty, as the saying goes, is in the eye of the beholder. Our sense of beauty in the design of a city can depend a lot on what we're used to. But beautiful design is not just about meeting our expectations or having everything look a certain way. Sometimes beauty is what surprises our expectations, like a striking piece of architecture that stands out from its surroundings. This policy approach is not about enforcing a monolithic or cookie-cutter "look" on a city or town. In fact, it's more likely that diverse appearances can strike us as beautiful. One way this could be implemented is by establishing community design standards that encourage aesthetic innovation.

This policy recognizes that aesthetic tastes vary over time, so it is open to an evolving vision. While embracing this

variation, the policy also recognizes that there are some enduring features of community design that most people find aesthetically pleasing. Attractive communities, for example, tend to have streets with sidewalks, buildings with windows to allow in natural light, and open spaces for gathering. People tend to be attracted to communities that have open public spaces connecting to the natural environment. Such communities also tend to accommodate a mix of styles or aesthetic visions. This policy approach might set flexible principles that recognize broad features of aesthetic design even while encouraging innovation and individualization.

The goal of this policy is to encourage and support beautiful design in the built environment of our towns and cities. This means taking into account the overall design of the community, including the open spaces and green spaces, and not just individual structures. This policy's focus would include beautification efforts that place works of art in public spaces. But it also would extend beyond such efforts by looking at the interrelation of the whole community.

This policy approach recognizes the relationship of aesthetics to quality of life. By taking care of the appearance of neighborhoods, the policy would indirectly foster a more robust civic life and safer neighborhoods (avoiding the so-called "broken window" problem, where neglected appearances lead to a decline in civility and civic optimism). Taking care of the physical appearance of a community can help revive the spirit of the residents, fostering a sense of pride in the place where they live.

Hundertwasser Haus in Vienna, Austria

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HOW IT MIGHT WORK

Millennium Park, Chicago, Illinios

1. The policy might support the creation of community design standards that both encourage aesthetic innovation and recognize general features of aesthetically pleasing design. Common design features could include: incorporating space for social interaction (pedestrian areas and squares), making sure there is access to restaurants and markets, and making connections to sunlight and the natural environment. The policy might take a principle-based approach, with the idea of setting up design principles as the broad parameters for development. This would allow for individualization and adaptation over time.

2. The policy might encourage the adoption of a "form-based code" approach to community design regulations, which sets standards for the physical appearance and scale of the built environment rather than focusing on the traditional zoning approach focused on building uses.

3. The policy might increase public funding for design and upkeep of aesthetically pleasing communities and for art in public spaces. Publicly financed incentives could be used to encourage beautification. There could be financial and social-recognition awards for innovative design. There could be tax incentives for making neighborhoods more attractive. Publicly funded incentives could be used to make design services more affordable to more communities and households.

4. The policy could create mechanisms for public deliberative involvement so that citizens could give voice to their aesthetic visions for their community.

5. The policy might focus on general standards of efficient design rather than letting things develop haphazardly. This would mean setting design parameters in advance, so developers wouldn't have to retrofit urban design to deal with predictable problems. Efficient design would entail, for example, making sure that communities have interconnected means of transportation, such as an airport that is reachable by rail line from an urban center.

EXPLORING POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES

1. What are some of the different impacts this policy approach might have on the development of our communities? What kinds of communities do you envision with this approach? What would it be like to live in such a community?

2. What trade-offs might come with this policy approach? What broader effects might it have? How might it impact the economy, the environment, and the culture of a place?

3. What other ways could the policy approach be implemented? Can you think of ways it could be improved to help it reach its goals?

Hamburg, Germany

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THE BASIC IDEA

New York, New York

*W*hat if our chief design concern for towns and cities is to foster a vital sense of community with robust social interactions? This policy approach responds by focusing the design of the built environment so that it enables positive social interactions. It seeks to structure the built environment to help break down social barriers, to help forge shared community experiences, and to help expand civic engagement in the life of the community. The policy is motivated by a desire to foster more social interactions among all the diverse groups that make up a community. You might think of this policy possibility as the opposite of a "gated community" approach.

Get Everyone in the Mix

Social disconnections can be toxic for communities. The design of the built environment of our communities can encourage or reinforce these social disconnections—or it could help heal them. This policy acts to bridge or break down social divisions by designing communities for social interaction. It focuses community design and development decisions on the goal of creating welcoming spaces that foster civic or community interactions. In general, this means creating spaces where people come into contact with all levels of society, so that no group or class is invisible or hidden.

With the design of socially interactive spaces, community members are more likely to be aware of the entire mix that makes up their community. One way to embody this approach is to make public investments to support the development of community gathering spaces, such as public squares, parks, galleries, or libraries. For this policy, it is important that such community spaces not be silos with single purposes. They should be multipurpose public locations: libraries that are not just book repositories but also community meeting spaces, sports fields that are not just for school or official league play but also for the general recreation and fitness uses of community members.

Mix Up Neighborhoods

Our approach to housing and the design and development of neighborhoods can do a lot to enable more social interaction and reduce social isolation. This approach could entail creating mixed-use neighborhoods with retail and housing in close proximity. The result would be to encourage people to be out and about in their neighborhoods. This policy could also mean requiring and facilitating the inclusion of mixed-income and mixed-generational housing that is integrated within neighborhoods. Mixed-income housing could be supported in a number of different ways, with public rent subsidies for low-income households, publicly subsidized mortgage programs for low-income homeowners, or public requirements for private developers to incorporate a portion of mixed-income housing in their developments. In contrast to the "gated community" approach, this policy would have community amenities available to all residents.

Similarly, the policy would support the design and development of infrastructure to enable more person-to-person interactions. This could include the development of more pedestrian-friendly community spaces, with sidewalks and pedestrian zones for shopping areas. The policy would focus the development of roadways to connect communities. This would mean transitioning away from multilane highways that bisect urban neighborhoods—or not building them in the first place.

Given the premium this policy places on creating publicly significant spaces, it would also support investment in high-quality community assets, such as top-flight schools, recreational facilities, and libraries. Such spaces would be useful both as places for community interaction and as symbolic spaces that indicate the residents' investment in their communities.

To encourage a vital sense of community, this policy approach would also aim to expand citizen involvement in community design and development decisions. It would support various means for residents to have a voice in shaping their communities. It would facilitate the "people-to-people" connections of dialogue within and across different communities and locales, whether this is done within a given city (where one neighborhood might learn from another) or across national boundaries (where a city in one country might learn from a city in another). By engaging residents in this way, the policy would cultivate a sense of civic pride and identity among residents.

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HOW IT MIGHT WORK

Charlottesville, Virginia

1. The policy would focus on public investment in those things or places that can be gathering spaces for a community, or places that provide a sense of meaning and pride, such as public squares, pedestrian shopping zones, farmers' markets, stadiums, playing fields, public schools, and libraries.

2. The policy would encourage neighborhood design plans that facilitate interaction and increase residents' public visibility in their neighborhoods: front porches and front steps for homes rather than back decks; front entrances where people are seen going in and out of their homes rather than garages.

3. The policy would support the development of infrastructure that encourages positive social interactions: playgrounds, dog parks, pathways for pedestrian and bike traffic, and pedestrian shopping zones. Walkable neighborhoods (with sidewalks and other infrastructure to encourage foot traffic) also foster more social interaction.

4. The policy would support mixed-income housing to address concerns about gentrification and social isolation. There are a number of ways this could be done. Developers might be required to have a percentage of dwellings for low-income households. Residential fees for amenities could be covered on a sliding scale or via a trust fund from a percentage of the housing development's profits. There could be public subsidies for low-income families living in higher-income neighborhoods. There could be government loan programs targeted to home ownership for low-income families.

5. The policy would support efforts to bridge or prevent social division. The policy might engage civil society organizations (including neighborhood associations), along with public office holders to encourage more dialogue among residents. The policy could support citizen or "neighborhood colleges" to teach civic literacy and engagement in isolated communities (such as areas with new immigrant populations).

EXPLORING POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES

1. What are some of the different impacts this policy approach might have on the development of our communities? What kinds of communities do you envision with this approach? What would it be like to live in such a community?

2. What trade-offs might come with this policy approach? What broader effects might it have? How might it impact the economy, the environment, and the culture of a place?

3. What other ways could the policy approach be implemented? Can you think of ways it could be improved to help it reach its goals?

Open-air market, Barcelona, Spain

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THE BASIC IDEA

*W*hat if the key to good community design and development is maximizing people's ability to connect with the things they need or want in their lives? This policy approach responds by focusing on two closely related concerns: maximizing access and maximizing mobility freedom. Good community design means design where people have access to goods and services. It also means a community where people have multiple options of mobility, thus enhancing their freedom of movement. Bad community design restricts access. Bad design reduces the options for mobility, for example, by designing a community around a single form of transportation, such as the automobile.

Seattle, Washington

More Access and More Freedom of Mobility

When we talk about community design, we often focus on transportation. What does transportation do for us? It provides access to other people, workplaces, schools, shops, and services. The underlying concern is how we can have access to the goods and services we need and want in order to live our lives. The goal of this policy is to design communities to maximize such access.

Another way to look at transportation is to see it as enabling mobility. This policy seeks to maximize our mobility freedom. Optimal community design is a community where people have multiple options for mobility. Put simply, more mobility options mean more freedom of movement. This means more access to the things we want

and need to live our lives—and more freedom is a good thing. This policy would make sure that people have access to multiple means of transportation, whether this means by foot, by various forms of rail, bus, or car. Overall, this policy approach would design communities so that people have multiple choices regarding how to be mobile or how to gain access to the things they need and want in life.

Design for Ready Access

Part of the thinking behind this policy is that a well-designed community is one where people have affordable means of access to needed and desired goods and services. When it's relatively easy for people to get around to conduct their lives, this enhances people's quality of life. In a basic sense, this policy would focus community design and development on creating more physically interconnected high-density communities—communities designed for human beings rather than

automobiles. The guiding vision would be of a community where people of all ages and abilities could make their way to goods and services and carry on their daily lives.

Integrating high-density development to enable greater accessibility of goods and services would entail creating more mixed-use development, so that residential, retail, office, and even industrial spaces are more closely connected. This could mean designing neighborhoods and setting housing and zoning policies to enable people to live in proximity to where they work and shop. It would also mean enabling an array of housing options to encompass a mix of income levels and ages reflective of a community. This would allow lower-income residents to live in proximity to their workplaces and needed resources. It would also enable people to "age in place."

Integrate Mobility Options

To maximize mobility freedom, this policy approach would provide multiple mobility options. It would include public support of multiple forms of transportation beyond the automobile, making sure that people can travel to procure goods and services without needing to own or use a car. It would support the development of integrated and interconnected transportation opportunities. By integrating the means of transportation (including mass transit systems), people could more readily and reliably connect mass transportation to bike sharing, pedestrian access, or personal automotive use. Creating such integrated transportation possibilities within and among communities would be a key way to establish the kinds of access on which this policy is based.

Designing walkable communities would be a key feature of this policy. This would mean supporting or requiring high-density development, making it is easier for people to make their way by foot or bicycle. It would mean constructing sidewalks, pedestrian-friendly streets, bike lanes, and pedestrian-accessible buildings. Streets would be optimized for human traffic rather than for cars (or for emergency vehicles, as is often the case when communities are designed for wide roads). In short, you might summarize this approach as "build sidewalks, not parking lots." If towns and cities are developed on a more human scale, then people could readily carry out core parts of their daily lives on foot, enabling greater access.

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HOW IT MIGHT WORK

1. The policy would require more high-density development so that key services are within walking distance. It would support public investment in infrastructure for walkable communities (sidewalks, pedestrian shopping zones, etc.). It might also incentivize high-density areas, so that high-density areas end up keeping more of their tax dollars rather than being net-donors to low-density areas.

A fused-grid model for walkable mixed-use development

2. The policy might put more public investment into maximizing mass/public transportation options. It might create a dedicated funding stream for public transportation to avoid the service disruptions that can occur from ebbs and flows of funding. It would also direct public investment into systems that enhance the reliability of integrated transit options, so that people could coordinate their transit connections and reliably meet their destinations. For example, this could include the development of mobile apps that show the accurate arrival time of the next train or bus.

3. The policy might be implemented in a way that focuses on pricing transparency, so that people better understand the costs associated with different community design and/or transportation choices. For example, people could see that owning and driving a car necessitates other private and public costs (such as maintaining traffic police and medical care for accident victims). Alternatively, it could shift more of the costs for mobility decisions to individuals (such as choosing where to live, or choosing to use a car for transportation). This would encourage people to think more carefully about their mobility decisions and about the kinds of development they might want.

San Francisco, California

EXPLORING POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES

1. What are some of the different impacts this policy approach might have on the development of our communities? What kinds of communities do you envision with this approach? What would it be like to live in such a community?

2. What trade-offs might come with this policy approach? What broader effects might it have? How might it impact the economy, the environment, and the culture of a place?

3. What other ways could the policy approach be implemented? Can you think of ways it could be improved to help it reach its goals?

NORTH FIGUEROA STREET CRASH DATA – 2009

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THE BASIC IDEA

Hurricane damage, Elizabeth City, North Carolina

*W*hat if our chief design concern is fostering the capacity of towns and cities to thrive throughout changing conditions? This policy approach focuses on designing and developing towns and cities to best manage their long-term sustainability. It adopts a vision of a "city" as a system that is constructed for adaptability and resiliency. Unfortunately, a common trend in our urban development policy is to create and sustain monocultures by propping up failing industries or supporting unsustainable sprawl development. These tendencies often interfere with the resiliency of our communities. In contrast, this policy approach attempts to enhance the resiliency of our cities and towns by treating them as ecosystems that thrive on diversity.

This policy vision can apply at the level of a single community, by viewing that community as a dynamic ecosystem rather than a static unit. It can also apply across a region as we look at inter-related communities as parts of ever larger and more encompassing ecosystems within a region and beyond. This policy approach takes a long-term environmental and economic benefit perspective toward managing community development. This means factoring in long-term costs of community development choices, providing a more accurate sense of the long-term implications of these choices.

A City as an Evolving Ecosystem

Part of the thinking behind this approach is to adopt more of a holistic ecosystem perspective on community design and development. Instead of thinking of a city as an isolated entity, we need to think of it as an integrated system of living things. This expands the time horizon from a focus on a single individual to that of a living system that adapts and changes through many lifespans. Aspects of a city may come and go, just as individuals do within an ecosystem, but the interrelated system can thrive.

This means we should try to manage these changes proactively in ways that enable our communities to be more sustainable over the long-term. Too often we try to freeze communities at a certain point in their development. We prop up aging industries or dying neighborhoods, keeping them on perpetual life-support. In contrast, this policy approach says we shouldn't try to keep things just as they are. We should anticipate and better manage the change that communities will naturally experience.

Design by Anticipation

This policy approach emphasizes anticipation. Adopting a long-term ecosystem perspective means planning for longer timeframes, with greater attention to the probabilities of change. The timeframe of community development would shift from the relatively near term of 7- to 20-year cycles to 100- to 500-year timeframes. This doesn't literally mean making an urban development plan for 500 years. Designing infrastructure to withstand a "500-year storm," for example, means designing infrastructure to resist a storm that has only a 1/500 chance of occurring in any given year. To do this, we would need to raise our design standards for communities so they can withstand disruptions that we currently project to be low probabilities. This means anticipating changes, such as environmental, population, or demographic, beyond the immediate horizon.

Urbanized dike, the Netherlands

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BedZED energy-efficient housing, Hackbridge, England

Coordinate Community Design

In addition to anticipation, this policy also focuses on a coordinated approach to community design and development. This entails the coordination of different functions within a city and across connected localities in a region. Many of our municipal boundaries no longer meet the demands of the present and the emerging future. They are too geographically limited and no longer adequate to address the actual integration of many communities across a region. Beyond intercity regional coordination, this policy approach would also establish interagency coordination for community design and development so that governmental efforts would not be working at cross-purposes in shaping our communities. This would enable, for example, better coordination of environmental, transportation, and housing policies, so that these are mutually supportive of common goals and public priorities for resilient communities.

Calculate and Price the Risks

To enable this long-view approach, we need to weigh the risks and benefits of our community design and development decisions. This policy approach would publicly support an array of informational and educational efforts. Publically supported research studies and educational efforts would help citizens and policy makers alike to better understand the costs and consequences of community development decisions. These educational efforts would help create a more anticipatory culture for development policy in contrast to a crisis-driven approach. They would also help create buy-in among citizens. Research-based projections of the regional probabilities of disasters or other environmental events would help people better weigh, and bear in advance, the true costs of development decisions. Without such research, the true public costs for private development choices are unaccounted for,

leading to a system where the public bears the cost for private-development decisions. This in turn encourages more risky private development, or what's called "moral hazard," since the losses will be born by the public.

On the basis of that research, it may be that some areas are too costly or risky to develop. It could be that the built environment needs to be changed so that it is more in harmony with the natural environment. This would shift the costs and risks to the individuals choosing to build in hazardous locations. Alternatively, these areas could be placed off-limits for development. The policy might support the dissemination of best practices for sustainable development across communities, whether within or across regional and national boundaries. A community struggling with a sustainability challenge might learn from another that is successfully managing this challenge. A city like New Orleans could learn from the Netherlands about managing encroaching sea levels.

To manage sustainable development, this policy approach would focus on ways to help communities carefully balance their inputs and outputs, paying attention to their consumption of local resources and their overall environmental impact. This could mean that there are inherent limits on the size of a community. If a city or town grows too large for its local resources, it might downsize or find alternate ways to manage its resources more efficiently. Overall, the policy would encourage more environmentally sensitive community design and development in harmony with the natural environment.

An environmentally sustainable neighborhood in Charleston, South Carolina

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HOW IT MIGHT WORK

1. The policy might develop a system of incentives to support sustainable development for communities to become and remain resilient.

2. The policy would encourage more high-density development since such communities can make more efficient use of resources with a smaller ecological footprint.

   a. This could mean managed decline, encouraging a sprawling neighborhood to shrink back toward a municipal center rather than propping it up at an existing level. There could be incentives for people to relocate so that city services and infrastructure only need to be maintained in a smaller area.

3. The policy might set a clear municipal limit within which public services would be offered (beyond that, people/developers would have to pay extra to be connected).

4. The policy would require more regional coordinated governance for geographic regions or greater metropolitan areas rather than focusing on disconnected municipal governments. The policy could also support intra- and intercommunity forums (regionally, nationally, or internationally) to help communities learn best practices for sustainable design and development. This could mean that the policy would lead to, or require, a change in our political system to enable more long-term planning and more regional and intercity collaboration.

Heliotrope energy-positive building, Freiburg, Germany

5. The policy would encourage actions to help communities avoid becoming monocultures by artificially holding on to one type of industry. It would instead encourage diversity.

6. The policy would develop ways to bring more expert advice into communities for guidance on long-term planning.

7. The policy might develop a system of disincentives to discourage less sustainable development or development of hazardous areas. These disincentives could take the form of removing any public subsidy of development in hazardous areas (no public support for infrastructure development to hazardous areas or for rebuilding loans after disasters). There could be tax disincentives or surcharges for development of communities in areas prone to environmental calamities, such as coastal storms and sea level rise, or where resources are declining, such as water in the arid southwest.

EXPLORING POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES

1. What are some of the different impacts this policy approach might have on the development of our communities? What kinds of communities do you envision with this approach? What would it be like to live in such a community?

2. What trade-offs might come with this policy approach? What broader effects might it have? How might it impact the economy, the environment, and the culture of a place?

3. What other ways could the policy approach be implemented? Can you think of ways it could be improved to help it reach its goals?

California wildfire

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THE BASIC IDEA

Urban farming, St. Louis, Missouri

*W*hat if the key to successful community design and development is fostering a clear sense of community identity—a sense of being someplace special? This policy approach responds by focusing community design and development around community identities. This includes everything from encouraging local economic activity to fostering a broader sense of civic identity. The policy is motivated by the belief that every place, every town, and every city has a "soul," or unique character, that needs to be encouraged for that place to thrive.

Understanding and supporting the distinct identities that make up the soul of a place is vital for community design and development. This applies at a neighborhood level and a broader citywide or regional level. This policy approach is also motivated by concerns about the possible negative effects of globalization and other trends that diminish local communities and local identities. To counter these trends, the policy seeks to help communities capture more of the benefits of local economic activity, thus enhancing their self-sufficiency.

Avoid Anonymous Places

Many communities dilute their identity, becoming just another anonymous place. But a town that looks like anywhere is really nowheresville—no place special. This policy moves in the opposite direction. It presents a challenge to anonymous places. It focuses on helping and encouraging communities find and promote their core identities. To do this, the policy would create and support mechanisms to engage community members in public deliberations, decisions about community identities, and the developmental decisions to fit those identities.

To orient community design and development around the theme of fostering localism, this policy would have communities emphasize their local resources, production, and services. Local governments might, for example, set up a public body to focus on the strengths of local businesses and make recommendations on how best to support economic development. This could include setting up business development districts and using tax or credit policies to foster economic development. The policy might also encourage public investment in local industry and local workforce development, operating on the notion that a community's residents are its human capital and that the value of this capital should be maximized.

Keep it Local

With this theme of keeping things local, this policy approach would focus on meeting community needs from local resources. It would seek ways to support new models of small-scale manufacturing and distributed manufacturing, especially where networks of supply chains can enable more local production to support the economy. The policy would place a greater emphasis on local food production, including urban or close-in agriculture. It would encourage the development of locally sustainable approaches to energy. It might also set urban growth boundaries, creating a limit for the development of public infrastructure and public services. People who develop outside of that boundary would either be ineligible for public services or would have to bear the full cost of accessing them. The policy might also focus on helping people remain in their home communities so they could continue living in the same place or locality.

This policy approach encourages and enables "local" identities to emerge—it doesn't impose them from above. There has to be a natural fit with geographic and physical realities, as well as with the historic cultural realities of a place. To be vital and adaptive to change, the sense of community identity should be both future-oriented and rooted in the heritage of a place. For example, a waterfront city may evolve from being a cargo port to being a tourist center while retaining its focus on the waterfront. This sense of identity also has to be adaptive to the shifting contours of what counts as "local" as communities expand over time.

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HOW IT MIGHT WORK

1. Local governments might set up a public body to make decisions about supporting economic development. Such a body should be broadly representative of the community, including young community members, since community design is not only about heritage but also the future.

   a. Such public bodies would have to figure out the kinds of industries (or economic activity) that the local area could support. It would have to work out what it means to be "local," and it would have to work out what sorts of support might be most beneficial and sustainable.

   b. The policy might set up local development districts to support home-grown economic development. It might foster local co-ops or other collaborative ventures to meet local needs. It might refocus banking on local economic development by requiring that banks, or a certain class of community development banks, invest primarily in the local economy (perhaps expanding micro-lending for local small business development).

2. The policy might include the provision of special economic incentives (such as tax credits) for local businesses. Alternatively, it might include the elimination of tax incentives across the board in order to create a level playing field, since many large non-local corporations currently insist on receiving such tax incentives in order to locate within a certain area (when corporations receive these breaks, local businesses have to pay a greater share of the tax burden or government services have to be cut). This could be implemented at a national level if states and communities reach a "do not compete" agreement, a multi-lateral agreement not to offer tax incentives to lure corporations to locate in their borders.

3. The policy would encourage more local food sourcing, e.g., recapturing urban vacant lots for farming, vertical farming, hydroponics, and aquaculture. Tax policies could be used to keep green areas around urban centers for food production. With farm-lease programs, farmers who are unable to afford their land could sell it to the city, which leases it back to the farmer at a manageable cost. Local grocery stores can be supported as the centers of local economies, and existing public centers (such as libraries or town squares) could be used for local fresh food access, such as farmers' markets.

4. The policy would encourage more focus on local sustainable energy, perhaps by encouraging energy-neutral or energy-positive buildings, such as solar-powered edifices. Energy-positive buildings might sell energy back to the local grid or to a neighborhood power co-op. Those with better wind or solar access might sell or trade their excess to neighbors. The use of micro-generators and alternative-energy sources, such as wind and solar, could be set up on a small scale and connected to a local grid. The policy would encourage the formation of localized small-scale power networks and neighborhood power co-ops.

EXPLORING POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES

1. What are some of the different impacts this policy approach might have on the development of our communities? What kinds of communities do you envision with this approach? What would it be like to live in such a community?

2. What trade-offs might come with this policy approach? What broader effects might it have? How might it impact the economy, the environment, and the culture of a place?

3. What other ways could the policy approach be implemented? Can you think of ways it could be improved to help it reach its goals?

Transforming the harbor, Hamburg, Germany

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THE BASIC IDEA

Habitat for Humanity homeowner

*W*hat if the central concern for community design and development is protecting the value of communities from the ups and downs of economic cycles? Our homes and our communities are of great value to us, personally, socially, and economically. But this value can be undermined by the booms and busts of our economy. This policy approach embraces a variety of mechanisms that aim to protect the value of our homes, our neighborhoods, our towns, and their vital infrastructure from the effects of market volatility. It aims to protect the fabric of our communities from the economic forces that could tear it apart. This approach is informed by a vision of our homes, our neighborhoods, and our communities as realities with social, cultural, and personal values that transcend their financial value. Since they are more than financial realities, they deserve to be protected from the socially undesirable impacts of economic forces. The policy is designed to make sure that the market is a level playing field by assuring fair access to housing and credit. Overall, it aims to ensure that the

marketplace serves the greater good of our communities by protecting their value.

Protect Investments in Communities

One focus of this policy would be to help communities maintain and develop infrastructure that is vital to retaining overall community value. One way to do this would be to create an infrastructure bank (or banks), with local, regional, and national focal points. Such a bank would provide a way for vital investments in community infrastructure to be made even at times when economic downturns would lead to contractions in such public works. It could use a combination of public and private sector money to enable long-term and low-cost loans for infrastructure revitalization or expansion. The policy would envision such an infrastructure bank to be focused on a long-term development perspective for the good of the community rather than on a short-term perspective of maximizing gains for private developers. Such a bank might fund things like the repair of city water systems and storm drainage or the development of new transit options. A public infrastructure

bank could be required to ensure more of a community or civic voice in development decisions. Along the same lines, the policy would also support the use of tax policy, such as Tax Increment Financing (TIFs), to build up areas with economically weak neighborhoods. This would work by dedicating certain districts or areas where a portion of the tax dollars captured would then be available for local investment in neighborhood improvements or infrastructure development.

This policy's focus on protecting community values would also entail protecting home values and buffering homeownership from the extremes of the economic cycles. To protect home value, the policy might establish a government regulatory body, such as the FDIC, to protect and insure the values of homes and other neighborhood assets. Just as the FDIC insures bank deposits up to a certain amount, this policy would insure a certain level of housing value. This would protect people should the value of their home decline severely. This body would also act to discourage or restrain speculative markets on housing and real estate.

Lower the Barriers and Risks for Residents

This government body would provide consumer protections for housing credit and assure that people and communities have equitable access to credit. In the past, government policies have favored credit for certain kinds of housing and for certain social groups (favoring single family homes and suburban development for whites and disfavoring urban housing and credit for minorities). The policy approach would focus our housing/real estate credit policy in a more inclusive way to support stable, resilient, and sustainable communities of different shapes and sizes, rather than supporting a certain type of house and housing development.

The policy might also encourage the expanded use of nonprofit community land trusts, and other cooperative approaches to lower the cost of entry into homeownership. With such a land trust, the nonprofit organization buys and retains ultimate ownership of the land, and then makes the homes (or lots) available at affordable prices. When homes or buildings are resold, the profit is calculated by a formula that would keep the home affordable for the next buyer—and return some of the value to the land trust. This would end up lowering the potential profit from home sales (which would dampen real estate speculation), but it would also shield such homeowners from exposure to extreme losses in market value.

Similarly the policy might protect certain neighborhoods or settlements from the impact of rising property prices and rising property taxes. Kinship communities and settlements where extended family members might have passed along property informally over generations could be protected from external acquisition and development. Family farms face similar economic pressures, especially in areas of growing urbanization or suburban sprawl. In such cases, the use of nonprofit land trusts could be used to help a group hold on to the distinctive character of their settlement while dispersing the costs of ownership over a whole community. Further, tax breaks could be used to buffer such settlements from the rising value of surrounding property. Cities could also develop lease programs where they buy protected communities' land and then lease it back at affordable rates to the current residents.
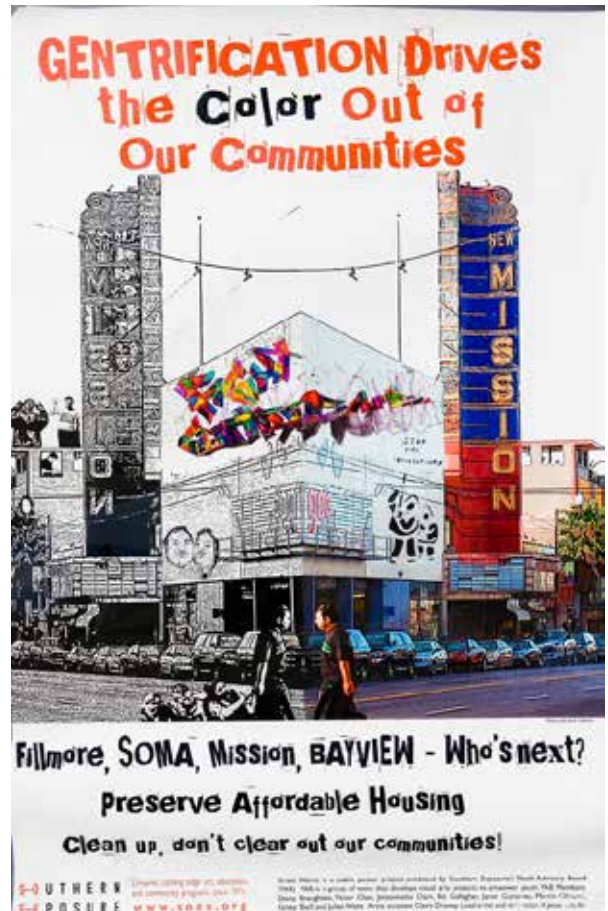
Overall, the policy would change the perception of the "home" as an income generator, money machine, or just another commodity to be traded. Our homes, neighborhoods, and hometowns are socially, culturally, and personally valuable realities whose status as such needs to be protected from the excesses of economic forces.

HOW IT MIGHT WORK

1. The policy might support the creation of a community development infrastructure bank to support the development and maintenance of community infrastructure in ways that would be buffered from economic cycles.

2. The policy might support the creation of a government body or bodies, along the lines of the FDIC to insure a certain base value of homes, provide consumer protection services in credit markets (especially in relation to home loans), and assure equitable treatment of diverse citizens in diverse types of housing and communities.

3. The policy might facilitate the creation and expanded use of community-based nonprofit land trusts and other cooperative efforts to help make housing more affordable to individuals and to lower the risks of homeownership for individuals

4. The policy might support public educational efforts to help people become well-informed participants in the financial marketplace in relation to their homes, neighborhoods, and hometowns.

GENTRIFICATION Drives the Color Out of Our Communities

Fillmore, SOMA, Mission, BAYVIEW - Who's next?
Preserve Affordable Housing
Clean up, don't clear out our communities!

5. The policy would generally favor residents and neighborhood stability over profits through a variety of possible approaches like rent control, housing and rental subsidies or supplements, and shielding lower- and fixed-income residents from the burden of rising property taxes. The overall thrust would be to avoid the displacement of residents caused by gentrification.

EXPLORING POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES

1. What are some of the different impacts this policy approach might have on the development of our communities? What kinds of communities do you envision with this approach? What would it be like to live in such a community?

2. What broader effects could you foresee from this policy approach? How might they impact the economy, the environment, and the culture of a place?

3. What other ways could the policy approach be implemented? Can you think of ways it could be improved to help it reach its goals?

New Orleans, Louisiana

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THE BASIC IDEA

Athens, Georgia

*W*hat if the key to successful community design and development is enabling free market forces to shape the places where we live? This policy approach responds by empowering private developers to determine the shape of our towns, cities, and their infrastructure. According to this policy, private sector developers would determine the rules for community design and development. Community design and development would essentially be the province of private sector economic planning rather than public or government urban design and planning. In short, it would be a model of company towns and private toll roads.

A privately developed "town center" in Reston, Virginia

Give the Customers What They Want

The thinking behind this approach is that with such an unbridled free market approach, people are more likely to get what they want. Private developers are more likely to cater to the desires of their consumers. This approach suggests a largely hands-off model in terms of government involvement or intervention in design and development decisions. There would be only minimal involvement in meeting the basic infrastructure and public services requirements for a city or town to function. Beyond that minimum, it would let individuals or private entities make up whatever developments they'd like. This is an approach that favors privately developed "town centers," gated communities, private toll roads (or privatized toll lanes), and private transit lines.

HOW IT MIGHT WORK

Gated Community, Hopeland, Australia

1. This policy might take shape with privately developed "towns," such as the "company towns" of past eras. These might be focused around artificially constructed "town centers" created by private developers.

2. The policy might take shape with consortia of related corporations teaming up to craft more integrated communities than would be possible in a single "company town."

3. The transportation infrastructure and transit connections might only be those developed through private investment. This could mean the increased development of toll roads (including privatized toll lanes on public roads) and the development of private transit lines. Alternatively, it could entail the increased use of public-private ventures, where public and private investment are combined in infrastructure development—and where the private sector can harvest profits from the use of that infrastructure.

EXPLORING POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES

1. What are some of the different impacts this policy approach might have on the development of our communities? What kinds of communities do you envision with this approach? What would it be like to live in such a community?

2. What trade-offs might come with this policy approach? What broader effects might it have? How might it impact the economy, the environment, and the culture of a place?

3. What other ways could the policy approach be implemented? Can you think of ways it could be improved to help it reach its goals?

Car-centric housing development in Florida

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