



March 18, 2014

**Program Topic: URBAN SPRAWL – DOES YOUR
CITY & COUNTY HAVE A PLAN
TO KEEP GREEN SPACE?**

**Presented by: ENERGY, NATURAL RESOURCES,
AGRICULTURE & ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE**

Director: LaDonn Christensen

Chair: Jill McEwen

Speakers:

**Don Jarvis – Chair of Provo Sustainability and
Natural Resources Committee**

**Dennis Marker – Asst. City Manager and Director of
Community Development for Santaquin City**

Sherrie Hall-Everett – Former Provo City Council member

**Bill Pepperone – Asst. Director of Community Development
for Provo City**

Don Jarvis began by saying that simply adding more housing to accommodate population growth is costly to cities over time. Historically, cities were “walkable.” Walkability is a measure of how friendly an area is to walking, and an important concept in sustainable urban design. Factors influencing walkability include the presence of footpaths, sidewalks or other pedestrian rights-of-way, traffic and road design, land use patterns, building accessibility, and safety.

Currently, our suburban experiment (housing developments on four-acre lots) is poised to backfire on us. Urban sprawl essentially becomes a “Ponzi scheme,” requiring more & more new impact fees. Ponzi schemes offer a quick return on an initial investment made up of money from new investors. Quick money lures victims (in this case, cities and towns) into much bigger risks.

Swapping long-term obligations for near-term cash works for a while. But it ultimately collapses under its own weight. Cities have grown for decades using a pattern that is inefficient, making poor use of our resources and investments.

We've done this, Mr. Jarvis continued, because new growth provides the illusion of prosperity. In the near term revenue grows, while the corresponding maintenance obligations, which are not counted on the public balance sheet, are a generation away.

City real estate is usually 50% devoted to auto-related infrastructure (parking lots, wide streets, garages, gas stations, car lots, tire & auto repair shops). Cars have also changed our concept of walkable space. After decades of such planning, it's hard to envision getting around a city or town without a car. Mr. Jarvis believes this is a mistake, both financially and aesthetically.

City road improvement projects associated with new housing development projects generally take 79 years to recoup the initial public expense outlay from the tax base. For a city to ultimately break even requires a 46% increase in property tax rates. The cash flow back to a city is favorable for one initial life cycle. But beyond that, repairing and replacing wide neighborhood roads and maintaining developments becomes an ongoing financial drain.

Dennis Marker said Santaquin is Utah County's fastest growing city south of Provo. In 1994 the population was 2,500. By 2014 it had grown to 10,000. By 2020 the population is projected to be 30,000.

It is important to Santaquin that it implements city planning that preserves open space, farms, and orchards, as well as new housing and infrastructure. City planners decided to strike a reasonable balance between concerns of farmers and those of the city & county. It requires education and compromise on both sides. Preservation efforts are respected and encouraged while population infrastructure needs are acknowledged.

In 2003, the city became more concerned about orchards being lost to housing developments. Many orchards all over Utah County are being sold to developers. It's happening with alarming frequency throughout the whole state. Mr. Marker feels Santaquin is the last, best orchard-growing area in Utah. Its city planning now incorporates orchard preservation into their growth projections, and values them as an important resource to the community.

Using a traditional "apple a day" benchmark, Mr. Marker said it takes 2.8 bushels of apples (or one tree) to meet that need for 1 person each year. By extension, he said, the state would need a much larger amount of orchard acreage than it has left in order to truly accommodate the needs of Utah's growing population. Santaquin will continue to protect its 3,700 acres of orchards and 5,000 acres of surrounding farmland.

Sherrie Hall-Everett asked, "Why do people want to move into new community sub-divisions?" Often that population consists of young, middle-income families. However, the needs of this demographic inevitably change over time. For example, overly large, extravagant school buildings sometimes adjoin

these developments. Overly wide neighborhood streets require increasing outlays for maintenance as they inevitably fall into disrepair. It is important for cities to include provisions for the changing interests and needs of an aging population in their general city plans.

Parkways and trails enhance quality of life. But traditional city models often dismiss them as unprofitable intrusions into new development. Green space often loses out in the competition for more revenue-generating infrastructure. City planners would be wise to strongly advocate for this space. Housing lots can be readjusted to include townhomes. Ideally, mixed-use development blending residential, commercial, cultural, institutional, industrial, and traditional lots should be balanced with parks, trails, and open space.

Housing developments require an expensive infrastructure of water systems, roads, sidewalks, and sewers to support them. Provo is currently working creatively to inject mixed-use diversity into its downtown development plans. Effort in this direction will require the strong political will of the citizenry. It also requires educating the public to the concept that auto-based urban sprawl will not always be sustainable. With two universities nearby, efficient mass transportation systems are essential to Utah County.

Bill Pepperone asked, “Where do we go from here”? Emphasis on mixed-use is the key to good, even transformative, city planning. Current city planners often fall into a timeworn system that uses zoning to stratify people i.e. “If you aren’t in my tax bracket, you don’t deserve to live here.” Mixed-use and open space planning changes that.

From the financial perspective of a local government, the federal and state governments are unreliable partners over the long term. It is far more likely that they will continue to cut programs that aid cities rather than shift resources to fund local growth initiatives.

Current models now usually call for city and neighborhood roads to be built too straight, too wide. Fire marshals and engineers, rather than city planners, have much to do with that. Auto-based urban sprawl is now the norm. Narrower, tree-lined streets encouraging slower traffic should be encouraged. Again, this will require a strong political will from the citizenry. A little more residential “clustering” (grouping of residential properties on development sites so as to use the extra land as open space) would also be beneficial. For more information, go to www.strongtowns.org.

Reported by Pam Grange

NOTE:

Linda Nelson, Director of the WLC *Health & Human Services Committee*, made a follow-up report to WLC regarding last month’s meeting. She has presented to legislators a Position Paper from the committee expressing concerns for the loose wording and potential for abuse of the proposed bill **HB105 PLANT EXTRACT AMENDMENTS**.

It noted three areas of specific concern. It also offered seven areas (as provided for in existing Florida legislation) that are needed to strengthen the bill.

The Position Paper was presented to *Sen. John Valentine* at a meeting at the State Capital. It was also sent to *Sen. Peter Knudson, Sen. Mark Madsen, Sen. Karen Mayne, Sen. Stuart Reid, Sen. Kevin Van Tassell, Sen. Todd Weiler, and Sen. Pat Jones.*

HB105 subsequently passed the legislature. The ninth substitution of the amended bill passed the legislature and was signed into law by Governor Herbert. It will now be up for review in 2016 after two years of careful tracking.

Thanks to all who worked so tirelessly to make the **HB105 PLANT EXTRACT AMENDMENTS** a safer and more effective study model for Utah's epileptic children.

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