

Letters from Our Readers: Spring 2010

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My Kind of Town

In the quest for sustainable development, many U.S. metropolitan regions face obstacles similar to those in Chicago's seven counties. I hope your article "Redrawing the American City," by Laura Wright (Winter 2010), is correct that our approach could be a national model for how regions can guide development and infrastructure decisions. OnEarth helped reinforce our belief that there's no one-size-fits-all solution to how communities can meet these challenges. But the many needs they have in common -- for example, efficient infrastructure that contributes to economic development and resource conservation while letting people live nearer to where they work -- are prompting communities to work together toward a more prosperous and sustainable region. Cooperation at the local, regional, and state levels is essential for comprehensive planning to succeed, but federal programs are also key to promoting comprehensive planning in metropolitan regions from coast to coast, helping the United States compete more effectively for jobs in a global economy.

Randall Blankenhorn
Executive Director
Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning
Chicago, Illinois

As a resident of Blue Island, south of downtown Chicago, I can vouch for its easy walkability and bike-ability. I put more miles on my bicycle than on my car each year, mostly because I can actually get to grocery stores, schools, restaurants, shops, and local entertainment by bike. Transit options abound in our community: we have not one but two Metra lines running into Chicago. Access to cheap and reliable public transit helps people make the shift away from cars. Finally, one of our best assets is a true sense of community: neighbors know each other and look out for each other. Residents are remarkably civic minded. Good urban design fosters that sense of community.

posted online by Anonymous

Someone forgot to tell Wright that the unofficial motto of Chicago is "Where's mine?" While Chicago and other large cities, such as Cleveland and Detroit, have potential for infill to reduce urban sprawl, Chicago is hampered by government (city, county, and state) that is rife with corruption and pay-to-play politics.

posted online by Babs

New York, New York

"How Green Is My City" (Winter 2010), Douglas Rushkoff's review of Green Metropolis by David Owen, doesn't adequately take into account the life support of cities. New York City's water comes from 125 miles away in the Catskills; its food from Kansas, Florida, and the distant ocean; its energy from Appalachia, the Mideast, and subarctic Canada. Its garbage cruises the world like a ghost ship. And while they live in apartments and ride the subway, affluent New Yorkers do have second homes in Vermont and do vacation in Tuscany. All of these things increase Manhattan's ecological footprint far beyond its 23 square miles. Accounting for indirect effects and for total consumption is a fairer -- and necessary -- basis for urban/suburban/rural comparisons.

Robert Herendeen
Burlington, Vermont

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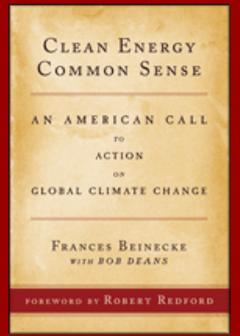
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