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HOUSING AND DEVELOPMENT URBAN PLANNING

HUD Awards \$100 Million in Grants for Sustainable Communities

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Last week the Department of Housing and Urban Development awarded **nearly \$100 million** as part of its **Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant Program**. The grants will fund planning proposals for “more livable” communities in 45 regions across the country, with a specific goal of integrating affordable housing, quality jobs and schools, and transportation.

The **HUD grants** went to areas big and small—from Chicago (Metropolitan Agency for Planning, \$4.25 million) and New York (Regional Plan Association, \$3.5 million) to Porcupine, South Dakota (Thunder Valley Community

Development Corp., \$996,100). The biggest award is \$5 million to the Metropolitan Council in St. Paul, Minnesota; the **Twin Cities plans** will focus on five major transportation corridors, including those served by commuter rail and rapid bus transit.

None of the grants will go toward actual building, but, as **Next American City** points out, they’re still a step in the right direction:

[HUD lacks] the legal authority to compel either cities or private developers to follow through on the plans that have been created. Nonetheless, these grants provide material evidence of the interest of the federal government in promoting the connections between housing and transportation ...

If American cities can’t figure out regional problems on their own, Japan might soon offer to help. The **Yokohama Smart City Project** is creating energy-efficient urban designs that could be exported to the rest of the world. These “smart cities” would harness alternative energy sources at a central hub then distribute this power to homes and cars connected on smart grids.

While we’re looking at the future of the city, **Popular Science** recently considered how to redesign New York City if climate change submerges “a fifth of its landmass by 2080,” as some estimates report. One strategy is to suspend 600,000 prefab homes on cables attached to the remaining skyscrapers:

By tethering a cable over the flooded streets and avenues—and even extending those cables out to structural towers in New York Harbor—it would be possible, they say, to safely house up to 2.5 million people.

If this figure is meant to imply that some 6 million New Yorkers died in the flood, then the world probably has bigger problems than urban design. But I digress. Powerful electromagnets would aid the suspension. Building facades would be covered in spiky “photovoltaic” energy-collection panels. An efficient desalination tank would convert the overwhelming waters into the city’s drinking supply.

As for the homes themselves, they would each have their own “agriculture module”—columns of soil that provide fruits and vegetables as well as insulation—and would average 800 square feet, which for some New Yorkers would be much less living space and for others much, much more.