

## More info on the Smartcode

by Randy Bright <http://www.tulsabeacon.com/?p=572#more-572>

You may recall from last week's article that I have made a deal with the managing editor of the Smartcode, Sandy Sorlien, to continue a dialogue regarding New Urbanism and the Smartcode.

So far, the dialogue is going fairly well. Sorlien seems to be very genuine in her beliefs, however different they are from my own. In this article, I'm going to try to give you the Fox News version, (we report, you decide), but in subsequent issues I will be explaining in greater detail what I see are the problems with the Smartcode.

I think it is important to point out that John Fregonese, the planning consultant that has been hired by the City of Tulsa to develop our new Comprehensive Plan, is not proposing the use of the Smartcode.

I spoke with Janet Tharp from Fregonese's office regarding his opinion of the Smartcode and I was told that he does not believe in or use that particular zoning code. He also does not write zoning codes, and prefers that new zoning codes be customized to the community. This echoes what I was told at the PlaniTulsa kickoff in June.

The reason that is important is that I do not believe the City of Tulsa is the kind of city that could live with a blanket application of the Smartcode. It appears to me to be the kind of code that would inhibit growth rather than encourage it.

Here are some of the things that I have learned thus far from my e-mail discussions with Sorlien of the Smartcode, and I presume that her opinions coincide with other proponents of the Smartcode.

First, creating "walkable" communities is one of the prime objectives of the Smartcode. They see the walkability (or the lack thereof) of a community as a social justice issue. Sorlien stated that "I strongly believe that zoning reform is a social justice issue" and "we (she and I) aren't really debating the Smartcode, we're debating the ideals of walkability. If you don't agree that we should strive to provide environments where people have a choice of transportation, then we should just agree to disagree."

To be certain, walkability is a key ingredient of the Smartcode. It is specifically designed to create communities where all basic needs can be reached by walking.

In one of my e-mails I asked Sorlien, "Why do New Urbanists have no tolerance for the existing system of zoning codes that we now have?"

She replied, "Because they are dysfunctional. Under them, it is literally illegal to develop a walkable mixed-use neighborhood or small town."

I don't think that is correct, at least under our existing zoning codes. It is possible (not simple, but possible) to build that type of development using a PUD. Even the building codes are written such that a mixed-used building (for example, shops on the ground floor, apartments on the floors above) can be permitted.

They are also very concerned about the built environment. The design of the path that the pedestrian takes, and what that person sees on that path, is embedded in the Smartcode.

It is my opinion that what a building looks like is really no one's business except the owner of the building, especially when it is privately owned. Sorlien believes that the design of privately owned buildings, like a church, should meet the approval of the community.

She states, "The size and massing of a church, its placement on the lot, and the location of its parking lots are critical to the walkability and general appeal of its neighborhood. These issues are not stylistic, they are about shaping of the public space outside the buildings – public (civic) space that belongs to everyone and therefore is rightly guided by the government, i.e., by a municipal zoning code – ideally one like the Smartcode that brings everyone into the process of customizing it for your town's local character and needs."

Sorlien expresses a dislike for buildings that depend upon the automobile, although she does agree that they are necessary. She said, "It's so important to make our civic spaces accessible without complete reliance on the dangerous, expensive, and polluting automobile."

More on the Smartcode next week.

©2008 Randy W. Bright

Randy W. Bright, AIA, NCARB, is an architect who specializes in church and church-related projects. You may contact him at 918-664-7957, [rwbrightchurcharch@sbcglobal.net](mailto:rwbrightchurcharch@sbcglobal.net) or [www.churcharchitect.net](http://www.churcharchitect.net).

This entry was posted on Thursday, July 3rd, 2008 and is filed under [Columns](#).