

More on the goals of New Urbanism

by Randy Bright <http://www.tulsabeacon.com/?p=668#more-668>

If you have been reading my column over the past six weeks or so, you know that I have been in an ongoing dialogue with the managing editor of the SmartCode, Sandy Sorlien. She has asked that I clarify something I had written about in an article on New Urbanism in the October 19, 2006 issue of the Tulsa Beacon. I believe that it is fair to do so, because it distinguishes between two viewpoints within the New Urbanism movement.

In that article, I cited Ten Solutions that had been listed on the www.newurbanism.org website. Sorlien pointed out that this is not the official website of the Congress for the New Urbanism (CNU), the group that she belongs to, and that the owner of the [newurbanism.org](http://www.newurbanism.org) website had previously drawn their ire for not identifying its authorship.

Since that time, these Ten Solutions have been revised by the owner of the website; earlier, the word “immediate” was deleted and sometime since then they have been revised a great deal more. Nevertheless, both earlier versions may mislead readers, so Sorlien has furnished me with comments regarding the Ten Solutions from Steve Filmanowicz, the CNU communications director.

Due to the length of the comments, I will cover the first five this week, and the last five next week.

Here are the first of the Ten Solutions as they appeared in 2006, with Mr. Filmonowicz’s (SF) comments following each one.

“1. An immediate and permanent moratorium on all new major road construction and expansions.”

SF – “This statement is overly broad and fails to acknowledge that road and street construction needs reform, not complete elimination. What about urban boulevards replacing freeways? Or new street connections through superblocks? Our position is that freeways have been overfunded by most states and the federal government for decades, so that a shift toward better funding of transit and well-connected local street networks is overdue. Now that automobile dependence associated with sprawl is costing families dearly in rising gasoline prices, policies that support the transportation options and walkable neighborhoods will help keep the American dream alive.”

“2. An immediate and permanent moratorium on all new airport construction and expansions, as well as an end to all aviation subsidies.

SF - “Subsidies for airport expansion may not make sense now, at a time when most carriers are cutting way back on routes and service. However, CNU generally leaves issues like this for communities to decide. Certainly the opportunity exists in many regions to expand train service to replace short-haul trips.”

“3. A huge increase in funding for Amtrak and the immediate construction of a nationwide new train network across America connecting every city, town, and neighborhood with an efficient, state-of-the-art electric train network comparable to what is currently operating all across Europe and Japan.

SF - “Rail networks should be expanded, but not everywhere. Rail works where it connects to walkable mixed-use neighborhoods. So a good policy is to tie the expansion of rail to policies and plans that encourage the development of such neighborhoods.

“4. An immediate tripling of minimum vehicle miles per gallon standards for all vehicles produced in America - accomplished by a quick and complete conversion of all factories to the building of only hybrid, solar and fully electric vehicles.”

SF - “These are the website owner’s personal opinion. Should it be a tripling, doubling or quadrupling? What’s immediate? Who will be able to afford the \$70,000 electric vehicles pumped out by these factories?

More efficient vehicles are a good thing, but they must be combined with a built environment that gives people convenient alternatives to driving everywhere. Vehicle type is one factor. How much people use their vehicle and trip length are even bigger factors.”

“5. An immediate moratorium on the construction of any new coal fired or nuclear power generating plants.”

SF - “New Urbanism can help create communities that reduce energy use. While lowering carbon emissions is important, and can be done partly through the choices we make about how we generate power, decisions about power plant construction and fuel options involve many factors.

The Canons of Sustainable Architecture and Urbanism available at cnu.org/canons offer guidance on coordinating power generation and community design.”

Though Sorlien and I continue our dialogue (and debate), and neither of us has changed our positions, there has been some room for understanding on both sides.

It is important that we all deal in the facts and one of the facts is that not all New Urbanists are alike. I know the kind of readers that read my column, that they would want to know the difference, and I trust their integrity to make the distinction.

As Paul Harvey would say, “the rest of the story” next week.

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