Connecting Food and Shelter: Solutions Evolve

Contributed by Culture Change
16 June 2009

Back from the heaven of the future, big rewards are coming for innovative redesigns connecting the essentials of food and shelter. Ideas and implementations include physical and architectural designs, but culture change can operate more effectively, faster and less of a cost.

One big reward is directly to the people: Less commuting for essential activities. As shelter and food are brought closer together, from both directions, transportation will cease to be a disproportionately high cost.

The cost is too great to the quality of life of all beings, depleting precious global resources, adversely effecting the purity and health of water and air and food.

The essentials of our lives are food and shelter. The shelter is already here in multiple dimensions, mile after mile, and story after story, and on beside all that, the shopping malls and parking lots for our mass consumerism, all this connected and filled in with the grid of asphalt and concrete catering to the wasteful and redundant legacy of the private automobile system. This is too wasteful to allow appropriate space and proximity for food, cultivation, production, storage, consumption.

We couldn't see that our obsession with mobility and consumerism, and the infrastructure that they have entailed, overtook the primal necessities and essence of life, food, shelter and quality of life.

Reclaiming Land for Urban Agriculture

Increasing the land space available for urban gardening includes depaving, opening and reclaiming unused space, detoxifying, cultivating, nourishing, composting, creating permanent agriculture ecologies suitable to the local microclimates.

Consider the follow stories below about shrinking cities. De-paving may be a better expenditure than repaving, finally reversing the trend toward ever more asphalt and concrete, and loss of land for essential food production in proximity to the consumers.

Migrations

Myriad kinds of migrations that will have to take place in succession in the near future. People looking for arable land. People looking to restore land. People looking to survive when agriculture has failed because of economic exploitation, climate disruption. Refugees escaping violent conflict. People coming to metropolitan areas to rapidly gain knowledge at educational institutions to become proficient at the skills needed to lead their communities into the future in sustainable ways.

Shelter is essential, and must integrate tightly and sustainably within an ecological niche for the bioregion.

US cities may have to be bulldozed in order to survive

(from www.telegraph.co.uk)

Dozens of US cities may have entire neighbourhoods bulldozed as part of drastic "shrink to survive" proposals being considered by the Obama administration to tackle economic decline.

By Tom Leonard in Flint, Michigan

Published: 6:30PM BST 12 Jun 2009

The government looking at expanding a pioneering scheme in Flint, one of the poorest US cities, which involves razing entire districts and returning the land to nature.

Local politicians believe the city must contract by as much as 40 per cent, concentrating the dwindling population and local services into a more viable area.

The radical experiment is the brainchild of Dan Kildee, treasurer of Genesee County, which includes Flint.

Having outlined his strategy to Barack Obama during the election campaign, Mr Kildee has now been approached by the US government and a group of charities who want him to apply what he has learnt to the rest of the country.

Mr Kildee said he will concentrate on 50 cities, identified in a recent study by the Brookings Institution, an influential Washington think-tank, as potentially needing to shrink substantially to cope with their declining fortunes.

Most are former industrial cities in the "rust belt" of America's Mid-West and North East. They include Detroit, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Baltimore and Memphis.

In Detroit, shattered by the woes of the US car industry, there are already plans to split it into a collection of small urban centres separated from each other by countryside.

"The real question is not whether these cities shrink – we're all shrinking – but whether we let it happen in a destructive or sustainable way," said Mr Kildee. "Decline is a fact of life in Flint.

Resisting it is like resisting gravity."

Karina Pallagst, director of the Shrinking Cities in a Global Perspective programme at the University of California, Berkeley, said there was "both a cultural and political taboo" about admitting decline in America.

"Places like Flint have hit rock bottom. They're at the point where it's better to start knocking a lot of buildings down," she said. Flint, sixty miles north of Detroit, was the original home of General Motors. The car giant once employed 79,000 local people but that figure has shrunk to around 8,000.

Unemployment is now approaching 20 per cent and the total population has almost halved to 110,000.

The exodus – particularly of young people – coupled with the consequent collapse in property prices, has left street after street in sections of the city almost entirely abandoned.

In the city centre, the once grand Durant Hotel – named after William Durant, GM's founder – is a symbol of the city's decline, said Mr Kildee. The large building has been empty since 1973, roughly when Flint's decline began.

Regarded as a model city in the motor industry's boom years, Flint may once again be emulated, though for very different reasons.

But Mr Kildee, who has lived there nearly all his life, said he had first to overcome a deeply ingrained American cultural mindset that "big is good" and that cities should sprawl – Flint covers 34 square miles.

He said: "The obsession with growth is sadly a very American thing. Across the US, there's an assumption that all development is good, that if communities are growing they are successful. If they're shrinking, they're failing."

But some Flint dustcarts are collecting just one rubbish bag a week, roads are decaying, police are very understaffed and there were simply

too few people to pay for services, he said.

If the city didn't downsize it will eventually go bankrupt, he added.
Flint's recovery efforts have been helped by a new state law passed a few years ago which allowed local governments to buy up empty properties very cheaply.

They could then knock them down or sell them on to owners who will occupy them. The city wants to specialise in health and education services, both areas which cannot easily be relocated abroad.
The local authority has restored the city's attractive but formerly deserted centre but has pulled down 1,100 abandoned homes in outlying areas.

Mr Kildee estimated another 3,000 needed to be demolished, although the city boundaries will remain the same.

Already, some streets peter out into woods or meadows, no trace remaining of the homes that once stood there.

Choosing which areas to knock down will be delicate but many of them were already obvious, he said.

The city is buying up houses in more affluent areas to offer people in neighbourhoods it wants to demolish. Nobody will be forced to move, said Mr Kildee.

"Much of the land will be given back to nature. People will enjoy living near a forest or meadow," he said.

Mr Kildee acknowledged that some fellow Americans considered his solution "defeatist" but he insisted it was "no more defeatist than pruning an overgrown tree so it can bear fruit again".

Rural Mich. counties turn failing roads to gravel

June 12, 2009 - 4:43 PM (Channel 3)

LANSING, Mich. (AP) - Some Michigan counties have turned a few once-paved rural roads back to gravel to save money.

More than 20 of the state's 83 counties have reverted deteriorating

paved roads to gravel in the last few years, according to the County Road Association of Michigan. The counties are struggling with their budgets because tax revenues have declined in the lingering recession. Montcalm County converted nearly 10 miles of primary road to gravel this spring.

The county estimates it takes about $10,000 to grind up a mile of pavement and put down gravel. It takes more than $100,000 to repave a mile of road.

Reverting to gravel has happened in a few other states but it is most typical in Michigan. At least 50 miles have been reverted in the state in the past three years.