

Effective and thoughtful city planning helps everyone

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We here at River Campus know all too well the consequences of poor city planning. We have the college without the college town — trapped between the hospital, cemetery, park and river, with no easily accessible off campus amenities.

If you've ever visited a more centrally located campus, be it in a big city or a small town, you might know how much this can improve the college experience.

The advantages of good location extend beyond college. In the "real world" they affect everything from how long it takes us to commute to how easy it is to make new friends.

Results of poor planning

Unfortunately, America is suffering from an epidemic of poor city-planning that it is only just starting to diagnose and is equally slow at treating. Our cities are too sparse, not zoned for convenient access to everyday things, and generally lacking in real civic space.

Since World War II, America has been building its cities at an unprecedented low density. "Suburban sprawl" and "urban blight" are popular buzzwords used to describe the problems of this approach.

Low density buildings spaced even farther apart by lengthy roads and vast parking lots disconnect people from each other and force them to waste considerable time, money, and effort just getting from point A to point B.

High density

On campus, imagine doubling the distance between all our buildings, and the toll that would take on our time. The efficiency gained from higher density cities is epitomized by comparing the "New York minute" to how much longer it would take to accomplish as much in a less dense place.

Although density itself is important, it means nothing unless places that people need to go are placed near each other. Living on campus makes Rochester seem sparser than it really is since we have to go so far to find certain things of interest.

Imagine if Park Avenue's restaurants and shops were just on the other side of the river? Our campus dynamic would be instantly enhanced.

Nonetheless, we're lucky our residence halls are within easy walking distance of our classes and some food sources. Such things are usually nowhere near residences in the popular cul-de-sac-plagued areas where houses are often miles from the nearest shop. Sure, that extra lawn space might be nice, but you could all but retire early if you avoid those extra hours trekking to work, shopping, etc.

Life is further enhanced if the places we end up at, however long that may take us, are designed for a good time. To our campus planners' credit, our campus is full of many great places and is continuing to improve in this regard.

Dandelion Square is a good example of how simple changes can transform a dull thoroughway into an attractive gathering place. In fact, the abundance of good gathering places is a primary reason — among several — that it is so easy for us to meet new people and make friends. This social element is what makes college a vibrant, enriching experience.

Honestly, I'm afraid that element will be largely gone after graduation. Sure, workplaces and their cafeterias parallel ours, but then at the end of the day everyone goes their own way. Wouldn't it be nice if cities were set up specifically for remaining in contact with friends and making new ones?

Anti-social cities

City design is an often overlooked as a factor in choosing where to work and live. The prevalence of anti-social city designs in the United States means you can get cut off from the vibrant lifestyle that we take for granted.

You might not have much choice in what city you can get a job in, but you can choose to live near that job, or at least in an area where everything else is close by, including social institutions such as the neighborhood bar. I recommend living within stumbling distance.

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