

# City Living

**O**ur urban environment is ours, but you wouldn't know that at first glance. The way a city looks is decided by a cloud of government and big business. But citizens have more power to shape their world than they usually think. Read on for some pretty good ideas.

Photos by  
Dereck Mangus



## Urban Housing For All

**T**he United States has five percent of the world's population but produces 20 percent of the world's greenhouse gases. The largest contributions come from utilities (electricity, heat, etc.) and transportation. How we produce so much more per person can be summed up in two words: suburban sprawl. Someone living in a big house out in the 'burbs, driving everywhere, uses far more energy than someone in a smaller place in the city who frequently walks or takes mass transit. And today, over half of all Americans live in suburbs. How best to address global warming? We need millions of Americans to move from suburbs to cities.

Today's suburbs are highly segregated by income, causing a huge income gap. For example, Weston's median household income is \$153,918; Chelsea's is \$30,161 [2000 data]. Apparently, John Edwards is right: there really are two Americas. In cities, however, rich and poor do live together. Walk two blocks down Pond Street in Jamaica Plain and you go from stately pondside mansions to little apartments on Centre Street. Here, everyone gains an appreciation of people not like themselves, even by simply passing a homeless person or a corporate suit on the street. And everyone shares the same schools and school expenses (private school notwithstanding). How best to address the opportunity gap between children, who happen to be born into wealthy or poor households, and to improve education for

all of us? We need millions of Americans to move from suburbs to cities.

by Seth Baum

Imposing some draconian law mandating this urbanization would be horrible. It reeks of China's notorious one child per family limit. Besides, it would never pass any legislative body. However, there is another way, a better way. What if millions of Americans actually want to move from suburbs to cities, thereby using less energy and sharing schools?

This can happen, and Boston is a shining example of how to do it. The city is beautiful, exciting, and very people-friendly. Mass transit is excellent (with plenty of room for improvement), and walking is even better. It's no wonder so many people have been moving here, or to other great cities like New York and San Francisco.

However, these are also the most expensive cities in the country, a fact that prevents more people from living there. This is both unfortunate and counter-intuitive, since such denser cities are so much more efficient: When everything's more spread out, we have to pay for more roads, more electric lines, and more gas and water pipes. We have to pay for school busses going further, and for our automobiles going further (and for having automobiles in the first place). Why is it that more efficient, higher density places are more expensive?

The main reason is that there aren't enough of these places. It's basic

