

Abstract from William Finley:**A Turning Point for American Metropolitan Cities**

American cities have always welcomed growth. However, even facing waves of new growth, a shortage of working class housing, traffic congestion, air pollution and a disappearing countryside that together threaten the health and welfare of their metropolitan areas, there is little evidence that planners or politicians are seeking new directions.

Although regional planning of transportation and utility systems is accepted, thousands of counties, cities and towns jealously guard land use controls, run public school systems, are failing at the renewal of run-down neighborhoods and all but ignoring the shrinking supply of affordable housing. Even with current dire economic and social conditions, it has not yet occurred to officials that the obsolete and uneconomical relationships between center cities and their surrounding suburbs must be replaced by a new form and level of metropolitan-wide planning and governance. The new book, *Curing Urbanitis – The Metropolitan Disease*, spells out new goals, methods and political logic of essential future changes in America's urban drama.

Key words: TURNING POINT AMERICAN METROPOLITAN CITIES

Summary

Americans have a love-hate relationship with big cities. They love the vibrancy, diversity, the sophisticated shops and restaurants, the preserved neighborhoods and the museums and shiny towers that justify and state their importance. They dislike, but put up with, high costs, traffic, crime, rudeness, long commutes, too few taxis, erratic transit and many annoying inconveniences.

What too few people seem to realize is the connection between the problems of the inner city and the suburbs that ring the outskirts. The challenges of urban sprawl in outlying areas--like dangerous neighborhoods in the center city, and severe declines in jobs within reach of working people or inner city public schools--are rarely shared and never undertaken on a truly regional basis. Only in the fields of highway planning, limited public transportation systems, air and water pollution and regional utilities is there any semblance of joint responsibility for these critical, regional problems.

Among the many reasons for this lack of cooperation are suburban complacency, the natural tendency to retain local powers, fiscal selfishness, and state legislatures that are typically antipathetic to minority dominated older cities. Federal leadership in urban affairs has largely disappeared as the United States Department of Housing and Urban affairs (HUD), created in 1965, concentrates on low-income housing, guaranteeing sprawl-producing home loans and totally ignoring the rapidly growing metropolitan regions where over 80% of American live.

Urbanitis is a name given to a variety of major common problems being experienced by almost all of the top 50 metro areas in America. Although each metro area is different, it is amazing how they are all suffering to one degree or another. These conclusions have been backed up by computer searches and informal surveys of people willing to own up about their hometowns. Although many expressed strong loyalty with their metro areas, all were willing to admit the area's problems.

The seven most obvious problems are:

1. **Uncontrolled urban sprawl** eating up the countryside by the development of massive new subdivisions, shopping centers, freestanding chain stores, schools and widened highways;
2. **The festering of inner city neighborhoods** occupied by the poor, who are lacking the skills, education, and family structure necessary to escape their poverty.
3. **Traffic congestion** during peak hours causing stress, high travel costs and long commutes on freeways which were originally designed for high-speed trucking but are now slammed with single-rider automobiles.
4. **Air pollution** is becoming a serious problem in regions where a combination of car fumes, industrial waste, heavy machinery and incinerators make smog a health threat, especially to children and the elderly.
5. The lack of permanent **housing affordable** to younger middle class workers especially teachers, public safety officers, office workers is a nation-wide problem with few obvious solutions in sight.
6. **Overcrowded, underfunded schools.** The backbone of the American dream is a functioning, high quality public school system, and our cities aren't providing quality education.

7. **Metropolitan cooperation** is mandated by the Federal government only for highways and transit, air and water quality and for sanitary sewer systems. However, the most important human services, early education, health care, child and disabled person welfare, family counseling and job training are administered through governmental and non-profit channels in highly segmented and often uncoordinated programs.

The fact is that most of these conditions are going to get much worse unless there is a change in the paradigm about the common future of growing metro areas. For example, one can imagine that combustion engines will fade out in the next decades. But, as China and India start to export good cars priced at cost \$12,000-\$15,000, the number of automobiles could double to further strangle our already built-out highway system.



Cooperation on a regional level is essential.

Policies and Incentives

These problems can only be addressed by a long-term combination of new Federal and State policies and a money-based incentive system to overcome the typical egocentric attitudes of both center city and suburban officials and citizens.

Neither the federal, state nor municipal agencies can create or manage a complex community development assistance program. Government cultures are largely regulatory, cautious and fraught with concerns about job longevity and retirement. Bold, innovative projects require risk-taking, imagination and a 24/7 attitude about reaching goals and meeting deadlines.

To persuade local governmental officials to become creative and positively cooperative in undertaking regional solutions to the problems of Urbanitis will require a broad scale incentive-based grants program. Because local leaders are unlikely to volunteer to cooperate across borders, a financial incentive plan to benefit their jurisdictions – consistent with the regional goals – will have to be invented. Every community has financial needs which could be met by this incentive-based concept.

A New Mechanism

I propose that Congress charter a nationwide non-profit corporation, in the public interest, to be the forceful catalyst in both administering the incentive grants to existing local governments and undertaking the planning and building of new metropolitan areas.

In order to give the new entity leverage with the budgeting functions of the Administration and the spending powers of Congress, the new non-profit will be able to float its own revenue bonds. Those indentures will be backed partially by a Federal guarantee and the net proceeds of the community development activities in building eight to ten new metropolitan cities of at least 500,000 population each. The details on how to achieve this dramatic goal are covered in Curing Urbanitis.

The proposed National Partnership for MetroCities would utilize its funds to match Congressional appropriations on a one-to-two basis; that is, it would match each \$2 of regular Federal funds with \$1 of its own financial resources. This, conceptually, would both give the new corporation the freedom to be creative in its grants program and give Congress an incentive to help it on its way.

No doubt this innovative methodology will be caught up in a myriad of politics but this approach to turning the metropolitan ship around is the only approach likely to succeed. Money talks!

Eventually, when the policies are in place, many subsidy programs affecting local governments, and they are many, could well be tied into the incentive-based grants program. Dealing with Congressional processes will be a challenging task.

On how to cure the seven components of Urbanitis, the following brief insights will point out directions and necessary reforms to make the solutions possible:

1. **Urban Sprawl** will only be halted after a regional entity representing all the citizens of the metro area has the legal and financial powers to prevent development in certain areas and to pay for development rights or other financial arrangements. This method will only come about when Federal leadership and State powers give regions the capacity to accomplish such goals. See the Portland, OR experience.
2. **Dangerous Neighborhoods** cannot be solved by the center city itself but will require regional leadership and resources to provide massive personal, family and organizational counseling, recruiting, job training, financial support, educational innovations, unified services and a generation of consistent efforts to assist people to become useful and productive citizens and move up and out of the neighborhood. See the [Harlem Childrens' Zone](#) on the web.
3. **Traffic Congestion** is caused by one-person cars, auto and oil lobbies, subsidized parking, low gas taxes, political opposition to rapid transit, Federal and State failures to assist metro areas and the lack of regional leadership. It is always the other fellow's fault.
4. **Air Pollution** can only be remedied by the removal of polluters, that is, too many cars, trucks and busses with combustion engines, industrial plants, forest fires and airborne dust. No city or suburb can solve this without Federal and State participation, again, without regional leadership.
5. **Affordable Housing** in terms of allowing middle income people to live reasonably close to workplaces will only come about when a non-profit Metropolitan Community Development Entity is given the task and the financing to buy, build, and redevelop homes and apartments for that target population. Utilizing the concept of a large-scale Community Land Trust may be the answer.
6. One of the mysteries of American life is the consistent willingness to shortchange **public education** at all levels. The movement toward private schools and ultra-rich universities is exacerbating the trend. Our failure to pay professional teachers a professional wage, to rely on stingy State legislatures to finance schools and to totally turn our metropolitan backs on nearly criminal conditions in many inner city schools systems is undermining the foundations of the American Dream, not to mention our competitive global abilities.

7. Our failure to recognize the absolute inability of cities and suburbs to solve what are clearly **regional problems** is because no one blows the whistle. Take a deep breath and blow!!

Curing Urbanitis at the Regional Scale

Over 180 million Americans both from the United States and below our Southern border, now reside, work, learn and play in the top 50 metropolitan cities that were founded in earlier centuries. The founding fathers laid out States and then Counties with no vision of which would grow in population and which would stay semi-rural for decades and even centuries. Central Cities were incorporated followed by the creation of smaller surrounding municipalities designed each with its own taxing abilities.

On top of this multi-layered pyramid of governments, more than four levels of taxation were imposed depending on what the upper layers of Federal and State governments allowed the lower layers to levy. Although mostly well intentioned, elected and appointed officials occasionally struggled to cooperate while fighting for their own turfs. Under those conditions, there was seldom a basis for guaranteed cooperation.

Only in recent decades has legislation and potential funding required a somewhat integrated approach to planning and constructing highways, air and water pollution controls and limited efforts to enforce protection of wetlands and other sensitive lands. To tackle the most serious problems of the central cities, their suburban cousins and contentious counties rarely find a common ground for enforceable regional solutions.

What's missing is the essential mechanism for required cooperation and coordination on the issues that are actually regional in impact but ignored by parochial views. It is likely that the territorial vista will remain the same unless there are powerful incentives to require metropolitan-based solutions including establishing ultimate growth boundaries that may straddle the arbitrary lines of several communities.

To transform the cities and their metropolitan areas, a methodology and financial incentive concept must be created to give impetus for regional thinking, planning and actions in return for an attractive funding mechanism aimed specifically at allocating money based on a broad approach to helping these critical population centers become the

livable, safe, compassionate and proud places they desire to be.

Further, to initiate a long-range diversion of a portion of the inevitable national population growth by planning and building entirely new MetroCities in largely undeveloped areas of the country that could attract growth and develop beyond commuting distance from the burgeoning urban centers.

The United States has the territory, the know-how and the economic energy to launch eight to ten new MetroCities with potential populations of at least 500,000 over the next decade. Depending on the ultimate capacities of these new large communities, they could absorb over five million people over the next twenty years. These two major elements are totally complementary and one cannot succeed without the success of the other.

The metropolitan areas, though the major centers of business, education, population integration and cultural values, have been financially starved while a vastly over-fed military machinery and a glamorous but dubious exploration of outer space has eaten up Federal financial resources. The budgets for Housing and Urban Development and other Federal assistance programs for urban centers are miniscule reflecting Congressional and the Administration's disdain for the plight of central cities that are falling behind in livability, even as they grow.

The following descriptions of key concerns will provide guidelines for how, with highly selective funding, cities can transform themselves.

Regional and Metropolitan area thinkers and planners usually only deal with physical systems such as transportation, air and water pollution and, possibly, better design of neighborhoods, sub-centers and the preservation of open space. They are trained *as* city planners to deal with streets, residential developments, utilities, industrial parks, shopping centers and the all-important field, zoning. Others are focused on regional models to analyze many of the key factors in urban growth, especially traffic planning, water supply, waste water management or solid waste disposal.

It should be noted that none of these systems include the all-important fields of education, health care, recreation, social services, changing demographics or extensions of life expectancy. In a single metropolitan area, there may be from six to twenty independent school districts. There might be a regional health consortium to coordinate health care and ambulance services and a coordinating council to encourage the many police chiefs to share approaches to roaming gangs. However, each has a separate budget and reports to locally elected officials dedicated to other fields of public management other than area-wide cooperation and the pooling of resources.

In order for a metropolitan area or urbanized region to qualify for the major new funds envisioned in this approach to managing growth, the watchword will be "Holistic Caring." This will mean that loose cooperation, information-sharing and coordination will be replaced with the use of joint action contracts or compacts between legal jurisdictions at all levels of governmental and non-profit activities. The following checklist is offered as a generalized description of what work needs to be done to achieve true and more meaningful public service.

The Social Systems: No city or area can become morally healthy or secure as long as large numbers of citizens and migrants are left to fend for themselves in our competitive society. Recruiting, testing, training and educating those on the bottom rungs is by far the most important challenge and best investment that society can make. New solutions, based on new attitudes and the acceptance of diversity, can be designed and funded to go a long way toward the common goals of equality and prosperity.

The Health Care System: Fortunately, there is now strong national support for some form of universal health care in America. In order to make the health care program work, it is likely that the utilization of hospitals and other facilities may have to be managed on a regional basis. Local communities need to participate in applying the best care that is available in their region for all its citizens.

The Housing Supply System: No society can achieve self-respect, secure neighborhoods and decent housing without a full commitment to make available new or old housing for every commitment to make available new or old housing for every segment of the population. There are nations without slums. The United States has given lip service to these goals but in recent decades has cut back on programs aimed at housing even the working poor. Each region must decide for itself what it will take to eradicate poverty and the living conditions and behaviors it causes.

The Educational Systems: The United States has fallen behind many countries in the quality and availability of meaningful and useful education for all segments of society. This condition is partially due to the limited sources of revenues that school districts and public colleges can utilize to raise teacher's salaries, reduce class sizes and many other reforms that are out there to be effectuated. There is no more important system that affects the future welfare of the Nation.

The Transportation Systems: Recent recognition as to the harmful effects of fossil fuels and the political climate of oil-producing countries seems to indicate a positive future for autos, trucks and busses that use other, safer fuels. However, that improvement will not lessen traffic congestion that is getting worse in most large cities.

Various methods of transit improvement and penalties for too much reliance on the individual vehicles are now starting to be tried. Every Metropolitan area must develop an aggressive program of transportation reform. Freedom to travel is not freedom to destroy many positive aspects of living in a metropolitan area. Great leadership will be essential to manage this critical aspect of urban living.

The Sustainable Community: To be serious about improving the social, economic and physical environment for the benefit of all residents and workers, a new level of understanding is essential to deal with the negative impacts of many of our habits of living.

Starting with the reduction of air and water pollution, managing solid waste treatments, safeguarding the sources of food supplies and the wasteful methods of construction, there are many fields to be reformed in the future. Conserving water is the most obvious.

Conserving Energy: Burning coal, oil or natural gas to create our vital demand for electricity is a flame that is fading. The use of solar, wind, wave or nuclear power is the most civilized approach to manage this all-important task for the whole nation and the world. America should be leading this parade not dragging its feet due to its political connections with Middle East countries or the oil industry. Individual metropolitan areas have the capacity to lead in tackling these problems if they can develop the will to do so.

Enhancing Cultural Richness: Many organizations should explore the possibilities of broadening cultural opportunities, the dignifying of diverse ethnicities, appreciation of local history and the glories of the arts in whatever forms are chosen. Communities should not be deprived of extensive participation in the valued fullness of cultural expressions.

Saving Land: As Will Rogers once stated, “They ain't making any more of it!” The entire realm of SmartGrowth, New Urbanism and other intelligent guidelines for the design of mixed use communities with their highest priorities on walking, subordination of motor vehicles, higher density housing, the expansion of alternate methods of transportation, taxation methods to reduce housing cost and many other totally sensible ideas should be embraced by local governments and business leaders.

Halting sprawl is of primary importance if Metropolitan areas are ever going to get control of inefficient systems, continuing costly extensions of utilities, the ever-widening of highways and the ruination of the countryside. When builders see their futures are in redevelopment areas and that creativity can replace cookie-cutter subdivisions, progress in containing sprawl will have arrived.

None of the above all-important key requirements for rational urban growth will take place until the wisest and selfless men and women step up and devote their abilities, status and their time to creating workable organizations to produce regional arrangements, agreements and compacts to take hold of those systems.

Local elected officials are often limited by the narrow demands of their constituents. Business and academic leaders are freer to stand up, apply logic, spell out consequences and promote methods that will benefit all. Congressional leaders have the rare opportunity to forge working relationships above the level of petty politics. State officials can be more than helpful if the Governor wants to join the parade toward the highest level of regional cooperation and leadership.

The basic logic of focusing on the importance of dealing with all the systems of the society simultaneously is that the proposed new funding mechanism will only become available when the regional leadership produces a multi-faceted plan on how it proposes to spend the newly identified funds. Unless the plan is convincing in terms of the attention that has been given to improving the interrelated systems, no funds will be granted.

All potential funding will be tied to the steps being taken to halt sprawl in order to assure that the metropolitan area is serious about controlling that dimension of growth. The reason being that it is unlikely that all the other areas of concern can be eventually solved until the outward spread of development comes to a halt. Once those steps are taken, then the governmental jurisdictions will have more incentive to think and act in a truly cooperative fashion.

The Turning Point

Recommended National Policies on Urban Growth

At this most important intersection along the road of community and national urban development, the Nation has several choices. In simplest terms, it can continue with the unfettered growth of metropolitan areas with the resulting consequences of congestion, endless sprawl, the breakdown of systems not designed for such populations and the further degradation of the environment. Currently, American cities slated for more growth are on a slippery slope toward urban conditions that no one wants but don't know how to avoid.

Or it can, with visionary and courageous leadership at national, state and regional levels, take bold steps to create a political machinery to deal with the crises in center cities, ever more costly suburbs and the ruination of the countryside. By recognizing the threats inherent in the coming wave of population expansion and the likelihood of where those tens of millions will settle, it should be clearly evident which road to take.

No one pretends that most elected and appointed leaders are prone to vision or political courage but, from time to time, the right issues and the right circumstances may present the opportunity to make the right choices. Of course, doing nothing is also a choice. The concepts for metropolitan change presented here are not mysterious or rocket science. They are straight-forward achievable goals and mechanisms. The enormous accomplishments in Portland, OR, can be tested and touched and be experienced at the cost of a plane ticket. That success story is not applicable to all metropolitan cities but their way of thinking can be molded to fit other sizes and configurations.

Although it is too early to congratulate ourselves, it would seem that our nation may be on the road to understanding, accepting and beginning to tackle the realities of man-made climate change with its threatening global warming. Even in an age of terrorist threats, politicians of almost all stripes are focusing on the critical issues of oil's damage and dependency and the urgent need for other forms of useable energy. Few would have predicted, a decade ago, this sea change of scientific understanding at the citizens' level.

We need not stretch our imagination too much to know we can come to grips with the issues of overpopulation, how to help old cities not designed for such demands and the enormous human and financial costs of the growth track we are on. On the whole, those who have decried the negatives of urban sprawl have offered no alternate solutions to the problems caused by the thirst for new housing, new infrastructure and other community-serving improvements.

The recommendations in this book will be difficult but not impossible to achieve. Fortunately, our nation has the know-how to deal with the hardware issues of controlling urban expansion and the building of new metropolitan cities.

But, there are no medicines on the shelf to deal with the deep, complex problems of inner city residents plagued by low skills, too many children, weakened family structure and cultural deficiencies. The crushing anguish of poverty has no easy solutions. To date, minimal safety net programs have been hampered by overlapping or gaps in assignments, uneven funding and no real commitment to lift the least fortunate out of their misery.

As David Brooks reported in the *New York Times* in July, 2007, "You have to holistically change the environment that structures behavior." He pointed out that the only presidential candidates who have even addressed the issues of urban poverty were Edwards and Obama and that even they prescribed different approaches toward long-term solutions. It should be obvious that urban poverty is everybody's problem. It will not go away, it will only get worse. It will never be obliterated unless regional, state and national leaders accept the searching out of solutions as their challenge.

Many national foundations, including Ford and Enterprise, have launched massive efforts to upgrade housing conditions for the poor in dozens of cities. The Enterprise Foundation, created by James Rouse, has attempted a holistic approach to uplifting entire families, neighbors and whole blocks of people, in one of the worst neighborhoods in Baltimore, by utilizing a wide variety of assistance in family planning, job training, drug counseling and similar activities. Although major improvements in living conditions have been accomplished, lack of funds, jobs and Black political leadership have hampered real success.

Many cities have been nibbling away at the worst cores of their inner city neighborhoods by locating public facilities or encouraging private housing or mixed use developments usually with a small percentage of units reserved for low to moderate income individuals or families. These techniques plus the use of Section 8 vouchers tend to move out some of the poorest people in the neighborhoods. Since available Section 8 apartments are typically clustered, that process simply moves the social-economic problems to a different location. Those tactics have little chance of making the old neighborhoods desirable places to live or do business.

In his landmark book focusing on these problems, *Inside Game/Outside Game*, Urban Strategist David Rusk, using decades of research, declares that only a metropolitan-wide community effort and funding will eventually save the people in the worst neighborhood from more generations of poverty and misery. He also blames urban sprawl around hemmed in cities for the failure to join regional efforts to deal with that crisis. His concepts of tax-sharing make great sense but cannot be accomplished without enlightened State and regional leadership.

His brilliant analysis of the troubled City of Baltimore entitled, *Baltimore Unbound*, is a masterpiece of understanding and intelligent urban medicine. Its holistic recommendations have been ignored.

The time for turning directions calls for embracing key policies for the urban growth of our metropolitan cities can we create the living conditions we want our grandchildren to experience.

Recommended National Policies on Urban Growth

It shall be the policy of the United States Government to lead, assist and provide incentives to metropolitan areas toward a higher level of formal cooperation and unified planning and activities to maximize the benefits of coming urban growth.

Every year, billions of dollars are granted to cities, counties and states to improve the quality of life in their areas. Only in rare cases are there Federal mandates requiring cooperative and unified planning, particularly in transportation and in environmental controls and management.

A new criterion will be introduced in the evaluation of proposed funding for all Federal programs affecting metropolitan areas that will favor those that show affirmative progress toward regional management of urban programs. Federal grants will be made to assist in the restructuring of local governments aimed at consolidation or through the creation of permanent intergovernmental compacts.

No center city should be shouldered with the sole responsibility of erasing their blighted and dangerous neighborhoods. One of the most critical goals in the field of governmental reform will be the utilization of regional resources including planning, leadership and funding toward the broad sharing of responsibilities for the creative improvement of individual and family lives in those areas. Through "holistic caring" about those Americans trapped in dangerous neighborhoods, close attention must be directed to assist those living in substandard housing, those needing intensive counseling and by integrating support programs toward uplifting the quality of life as well as the physical environment.

Each metropolitan area whose local governments, directly or indirectly, receive Federal funds will be encouraged to recognize and measure the

human, social and financial costs of the continued spreading out of community development. Each area will be called upon to devise its own best methodology for achieving the unified capacity to determine areas suitable for development and those areas to be preserved from development.

To effectuate these national policies on Urban Growth, Congress will be called upon to create a new *National Partnership for MetroCities* to serve as the managers of these proposed policies.

This non-profit corporation will manage the described programs in the public interest. It will have the powers of a governmental agency but organized to operate as private company. It will obtain the majority of its eventual funding from private investors but will cooperate closely with the Congress on a matching system in order to support the most costly activities already funded by the legislative branch. The President and the Congress will appoint the members of the Board of Directors of the *Partnership*.

The ultimate goals of these policies are to change the direction of urban growth in the United States. Nothing in these concepts is aimed to stifle growth in smaller cities or outlying areas that may not require massive Federal expenditures due to the lesser impact of that growth. Among its main purposes is the prevention of large city/regions from becoming totally unmanageable mega-cities as are rising throughout the world.

To our heirs we will bequeath center cities and their suburban neighbors that will be free of slums, vibrant in their urban activities and capable of controlling their outer boundaries. This equilibrium will allow the installation of transportation systems geared to moving people not cars. The skies will be clear as will streams and rivers, and, let us hope that by 2035, we will treat newcomers as friends and neighbors and organized the institutions of education and-recreation to help them to grow in their new home nation.

