

WINTER 2019

Hourglass Quarterly



JOBS, EDUCATION & POVERTY

VANISHING MIDDLE CLASS

NEW URBANISTS' EXCEPTION

FARM PRESERVATION

NEW URBANISTS' EXCEPTION

Protecting historic preservation



The Charter of the New Urbanism "We stand for the restoration of existing urban centers" and "Appropriate building densities and land uses should be within walking distance of transit stops, permitting public transit to become a viable alternative to the automobile." You would think that new urbanists would favor infill development that adds density to existing urban neighborhoods served by public transit. But surprisingly, many new urbanists often oppose new housing in urban areas. Why?

First -- new urbanists' interest in historic preservation can conflict with pro-infill policies. The work of Jane Jacobs, a major source of new urbanist thought, focused on protecting existing neighborhoods from "urban renewal" schemes that made cities more automobile-oriented. In addition, new urbanists emphasize the ugliness of sprawl. Urbanists frequently favor preservation of older buildings, and the exclusion of all but the best new architecture.

Many urbanists believe that if nothing is demolished and ugly architecture is outlawed, there will be fewer new buildings, especially in

wealthy historic neighborhoods. Others are focused on spreading the blessings of urban life to more people, even if some ugly modern architecture gets built as a result.

Second -- new urbanists do not always appreciate market economics. Many economists believe that restrictions on housing supply are in part responsible for high housing prices. But because urban economists are sometimes pro-sprawl, some new urbanists tend to discount these economists

Third -- since public housing is politically toxic in most of the United States, most new housing tends to be built by private developers, that is to say, capitalists. And in expensive cities, this housing tends to be occupied by rich people, who also tend to be capitalists. So, some urbanists who believe wealthy capitalists are too powerful are likely to be hostile to housing that might be created by or for capitalists.

Fourth -- many middle-aged urbanists want their houses and their friend's houses to become more expensive, and they may be less likely to support policies designed to hold down median housing costs and rents -- in conflict with progressive support for public housing.

The relationship between new urbanists favoring infill development and new urbanists favoring historic preservation can often be complex. Decisions on what to build and where to build it require balanced thinking.



Based on a November 11, 2018 Planetizen blog post, New Urbanism and New Housing by Michael Lewyn.