

Journal of Comparative Urban Law and Policy

Volume 5

Issue 1 *A Festschrift in Honor of Arthur C. Nelson on the Occasion of his Retirement - Agenda for Building a Changing World Responsibly: Commentaries and Reflections by Leaders in Urban Planning, Policy, and Design*

Article 3

2022

Foreword

Earl Blumenauer

U.S. Congressman, 3rd District of Oregon, earl.blumenauer@mail.house.gov

Follow this and additional works at: <https://readingroom.law.gsu.edu/jculp>



Part of the [Urban, Community and Regional Planning Commons](#), [Urban Studies Commons](#), and the [Urban Studies and Planning Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Blumenauer, Earl (2022) "Foreword," *Journal of Comparative Urban Law and Policy*. Vol. 5 : Iss. 1 , Article 3, 5-6.

Available at: <https://readingroom.law.gsu.edu/jculp/vol5/iss1/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Reading Room. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Journal of Comparative Urban Law and Policy* by an authorized editor of Reading Room. For more information, please contact gfowke@gsu.edu.

FOREWORD

The Honorable Earl Blumenauer*

I first encountered Chris in graduate school. He was even then a data-driven analytical powerhouse, digging into the numbers to find the story behind the story, which prepared him for a long career providing context for the most important but underappreciated dynamics of urban policy: the intersection of economics, demographics, and human dynamics.

At this moment in our nation's history, Chris's approach is more essential than ever. I saw firsthand the profound effect Coronavirus and the ensuing uncertainty, economic stress, and demands for justice had on our national policies, but the impacts were far more profound at the local level.

The life-and-death nature of racial equity exploded into public awareness as the virus underlined the relationship between race, poverty, health, and housing.

Any certainty about the future of work and of the workplace disintegrated. Will this be the Zoom decade affecting everything from the concept of the workplace to business travel and the neighborhood restaurant?

The brittle, fragile nature of supply chains for highly specialized functions have been revealed as vulnerable for seemingly modest disruptions with staggering ripple effects.

Plummeting ridership raised the specter of a failure of mass transit systems, further threatening urban America's ability to return to normal.

Unrelated to the virus, tragic flooding and terrifying fires reminded us that our window to impact climate change is growing narrower with every passing season.

None of these issues were new, and our approaches to dealing with them will not succeed if we focus only on short-term recovery. Getting our responses right, understanding the longstanding inequities, tensions, and opportunities are the keys not just to recovery from the buffeting of these forces, but to our survival. As so much of Chris's work shows us, the solutions to these seemingly intractable, existential crises are in our own backyard, our neighborhoods, in how we build, manage our lives, and organize the markets, not just the marketplace of ideas.

* Member of Congress representing Oregon's Third Congressional District and member of the House Ways and Means Committee.

Consider:

The climate crisis is accelerated by how and where we live, how we move and what we eat. The design of our communities makes them vulnerable to heat and extreme weather events even as they continue the very carbon pollution that makes them increasingly at risk.

Solving the decades long crisis of racial discrimination in housing is the most powerful tool we have to remedy economic disparity. Where and how people live is the single most accurate predictor of success for our children in schools.

Food waste is the largest source of carbon in our food supply chain. Regenerative agriculture is key to not just healthy food but actually reducing carbon in the atmosphere not just reducing emissions. Teaching people, especially children how to grow, prepare, and appreciate food can help transform brittle and limited food supply chains.

Greater access to healthy food is likewise essential to reducing more than 50 percent of our healthcare costs due to chronic conditions directly tied to poor diet and obesity. The staggering costs and inequity of our healthcare system go far beyond the 18 percent of GDP the industry generates. Health disparities so overtly displayed by the pandemic were obvious in the “deaths of despair” affecting swaths of rural America. Malnutrition was widespread even for those with enough to eat due to poor choices, limited availability of healthy food, marketing, and product development.

In all of these cases, the design of our cities will be transformational. And this is not some vague future vision, we can make these changes today and see actual results achieved this decade. Chris’s work has been instrumental in this optimistic outlook. By identifying the economic and regulatory incentives that will help us change our land use laws, he has given us the keys to unlock stubborn systems.

More than the specific tools, Chris’s approach to chronicling and measuring the interactions between economics, behavior, and demographics is more important than any report looking at the facts. Chris helps us fit them into the big picture. What are the demographic trends? Who will be alive and what will be their needs and resources? What will be the intersection of economics and demographics?

Most important, how do we harness the forces of change to solve problems rather than create new ones?

This is the genius of Chris Nelson, to explore and illustrate the trends and possibilities. Before we can solve problems and avoid new crises, we must understand them, and Chris has been an important guide for me and for so many of us.