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GROWTH MANAGEMENT'S FOURTH WAVE, REVISITED

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ABSTRACT

In this article we provide an update to Timothy S. Chapin's article, "From Growth Controls, to Comprehensive Planning, to Smart Growth: Planning's Emerging Fourth Wave," published in 2012 in the *Journal of the American Planning Association*. It takes advantage of a decade of insight into national planning and development trends, as well as our experience with growth management in Florida to rethink this fourth wave. Notably, forces have emerged to fight centralized, state and local-directed land planning, led by a powerful *development industrial complex*. We conclude that growth management may struggle to remain a centerpiece of the planning profession unless it embraces some new ideas and new policy models.

INTRODUCTION

In a special issue of the *Journal of the American Planning Association* on growth management, Chapin (2012) summarized the ebbs and flows of state-level growth management in the United States since the 1950s. Chapin was originally introduced to many of the basics of land planning and economic development as a student of Arthur C. (Christian "Chris") Nelson's while a master's student at the Georgia Institute of Technology. There he learned about Knaap and Nelson's work on the Oregon growth management system (1992), as well as the work of others interested in the range of state and local efforts to manage growth (e.g., DeGrove with Miniss, 1992; Landis, 1992).

In his JAPA article, Chapin outlined three waves of growth management that have shaped state - and to a lesser degree regional and local - policies and planning initiatives aimed at managing development in order to provide for more orderly land use patterns. In the piece, Chapin argues that these three eras are best understood as The Era of Growth Controls (~1950-1975), The Era of Comprehensive Planning (~1975-2000), and The Era of Smart Growth (~2000-present).

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As described in the article, the Growth Controls era was aimed primarily at minimizing environmental impacts and limiting where and how much development would be allowed. The Comprehensive Planning era focused upon the power of comprehensive plans, with linkages to land development regulations (most importantly zoning), as a means of promoting orderly and fiscally sound development patterns. The most recent era of Smart Growth shied away from controls and instead saw incentives and wise government investment as a means to seeing communities develop in more desirable ways.

Chapin (2012, p. 10) closed the piece by looking ahead to what he called “the emergence of a new era of growth management in the United States,” one shaped by issues like climate change, recovery from the Great Recession, energy policy, and growing interest in food systems and food supplies. He labeled this fourth wave The Era of Sustainable Growth, emphasizing that land policy would require a delicate balance of remaining pro-development while also advancing conservation imperatives.

In this article we provide an update on this piece, using a decade of insight into national planning and development trends, as well as our experience with growth management in Florida to rethink this fourth wave. While Chapin (2012) was somewhat optimistic in his piece—seeing growth management as becoming more prominent in the broader planning discourse—the last decade has not been kind to land planning and development regulation. Forces have emerged to fight centralized, state and local-directed land planning, led by a powerful development industrial complex. Other events of the last decade have pushed the field of planning in important new directions, but perhaps at the expense of attention paid to land planning as a central element of the discipline. Ultimately, we conclude that growth management may struggle to remain a centerpiece of the planning profession unless it embraces some new ideas and new policy models.

WHITHER GROWTH MANAGEMENT IN THE 2010s?

The last decade has brought more storms than fair winds to the sails of growth management in the United States. Many of the most progressive and entrenched systems of earlier eras have been downsized, undermined by court or legislative action, and seen reduced support from executive and legislative leaders. Notable and once progressive state-level growth management systems in Florida, Oregon, Maryland, and New Jersey all remain under attack, with these systems emerging as less robust at the end of the decade than when it began.

Here in our home state of Florida, a massive rollback of key elements of the state system occurred in the 2010s. The Florida growth management system envisioned in the 1970s and 1980s was a visionary, multi-layered, comprehensive plan-centered leap forward for planning and development review. Comprehensive

plans were connected to land development regulations, state, regional and local planning were required, and resources were to be available for needed, strategic infrastructure investment. The state was seen as central to ensuring that local governments considered environmental and infrastructure impacts, and proposed development was required to be in compliance with local plans.

While there were many refinements and changes to this system prior to 2010, in 2011 a governor-led initiative to substantially reduce state oversight of and involvement in local development review was passed by the legislature. This system essentially removed state oversight from the growth management system and also curtailed the ability of community and environmental groups to challenge proposed development projects (Linkous, 2021). Since 2011, further legislative action has reinforced the primacy of development over conservation, with local planning often being far more about economic development than sustainable urban patterns.

Similar challenges have transpired in other the growth management states. A mix of gubernatorial disinterest, legislative tinkering, organized challenges from pro-development groups, and a *growth is good* mantra have combined to see elements of growth management programs undermined or marginalized. Local government planning and regulatory initiatives are similarly under attack, with much greater discussion around the economy and jobs and far less discussion around issues like land conservation, water quality, social equity, and climate change.

WITHER GROWTH MANAGEMENT IN THE 2010s: POLITICS, POWER, AND PLANNING

Given this withering of state and local growth management in the last decade, what explains the rollback of some of the landmark programs and a seeming loss of interest in land planning? While there are likely a large number of factors that played a role, here we focus upon four major forces that we see as having contributed to the retrenching of the once-proud and nationally recognized Florida growth management system.

Politics in the Internet Age

One of the most powerful forces reshaping state and local efforts to manage growth rests in the changing political climate in the United States over the last several decades. While there has always been a sizable portion of the electorate that favors smaller government, lesser regulation, and low taxes, this political movement has gained steam and taken on new tones in the last decade. At a local level, adherents rail against government overreach and tax burdens, assert their property and personal rights, and speak to the power of economic growth as the sole means to bettering society. Elements of this movement express concerns about

sustainable development and climate change as insidious global efforts to undermine American power.

Under this worldview, government is no longer just seen as bureaucratic or inept, but rather the underlying problem itself. This movements calls into question successful public health initiatives (e.g. required vaccinations or fluoridation of public water supplies), the need for public investment in conservation lands, and even the nation's commitment to public education systems to promote social mobility. Within this environment it is little wonder that state and local growth management regimes are being scaled down.

Like all movements in the internet age, this political viewpoint is enhanced by social media tools that make it easier for like-minded people to connect and interests with a financial war chest have more expansive and accessible outlets to get their message out. In addition, a national media landscape that embraces controversy, vitriol rather than conversation, and winner takes all debates raises the stakes for interactions between public officials and their constituents. This toxic culture has found its way into planning and development review meetings, where acerbic community meetings have become more norm than outlier, and community conversations devolve into shouting matches between opposing forces.

Development Industry Power

Our experience in Florida – echoed and affirmed by policy experts in other states – finds that the power of the development industry has been a key element behind rollbacks in state and local growth management policies. Within Florida, a *development industrial complex* has coalesced around a potent mix of large- and medium-sized landowners, a vibrant land entitlement industry, community developers that create massive new cities and neighborhoods with remarkable speed (and quality in many cases, to be fair), and trillions of dollars of investment from national and international (re)development interests, all supported by trained professionals in legal, planning, engineering, and financial consulting firms that thrive when the growth machine is humming. In Florida, this development industrial complex is a major and growing part of the state economy and taxes/fees on real estate transactions are a key element of the state's budget. Even in other slower-growing states, real estate is Big Business, especially in communities with challenges in managing growth.

In reading about this development industrial complex, some might connect this with the work of Logan and Molotch (1976) many years ago in describing local growth machines. While there are some similarities, we have seen that in Florida – and we believe in other growth management states as well – a different version of this pro-development machine has been established and taken control. This development industrial complex is backed by much bigger money and actors,

including national homebuilders, huge landowners supported by non-local money, real estate investment trusts and other financial actors drawing on international funds, and a remarkably robust consulting machine. Unlike local growth machines as originally described, this state-level growth machine is not supported by major newspapers and even many local elected leaders understand their communities are not well served by this machine. Despite substantial pushback against it, this regime keeps winning victory after victory as it rolls back state and local development controls.

Given the size, economic power, and oftentimes deep connections of these groups to political leadership, the development industrial complex has become more than just a lobbying force. In Florida, this group has become active in writing and rewriting legislative language and implementing rules, organizing campaigns in response to nascent environmental and community engagement movements, and become strategic partners and investors in planning initiatives that begin from a pro-development point of view. These groups have also been successful in discouraging citizen challenges to land use decisions through legislation that institutes attorney's fees provisions for prevailing parties, which places citizens at significant financial risk when embarking upon legal challenge.

In terms of their engagement in planning processes, scenario planning within Florida has been supported by core elements of the development industrial complex, as these planning efforts start with an assumption that greenfield development is a necessity. However, unlike traditional growth management approaches, scenario planning is often a community engagement exercise with few regulatory teeth and no commitment to embed recommendations within state, regional, or local land development plans and policies. In supporting these initiatives, the development industrial complex is central to discussions of future development patterns, but with little risk of seeing new policy or regulatory initiatives result.

Decline of Local Government Power

In an environment in which the state planning apparatus has been rolled back in Florida and elsewhere, this would presumably allow room for local policy entrepreneurship to flourish. As described in Chapin, Connerly, and Higgins (2007), one of the long-time planning challenges faced in Florida has been a one-size-fits-all comprehensive planning approach that left many counties unable, and sometimes unwilling, to prepare and implement what were seen as onerous local plans. As the state has stepped down their engagement in land planning, local bodies could conceivably develop and pursue policy solutions that better reflect local conditions, draw upon the unique mix of local partners, and then more easily communicate these policies to community members. Under these conditions, lesser state involvement may actually yield better and more effective plans and policies.

However, at the same time that state governments have rolled back their planning efforts, they have also actively been limiting the ability of local governments to pursue policy entrepreneurship. Because of the mix of forces described above—a current anti-government political climate and the power of the state development industrial complex—local government power and the tradition of home rule have been under attack and local planning efforts are not thriving but consistently on the defensive. This has led the National League of Cities to develop a resource on the theme of a *Local Democracy Initiative* to combat continued preemption of home rule, with similar efforts found within the Florida League of Cities and the Florida Association of Counties.

Within Florida, the state has actively stepped in many times over the last decade to override local development and environmental policies, including limiting local development fees and taxes, overriding plastic bag bans, negating tree replanting requirements, and nullified a local limitation on cruise vessel size in the Florida Keys. In the planning realm, the state issued a new requirement for property rights elements in comprehensive plans, while also routinely adding new statutory language that exempts certain types of development, and in some cases even certain projects, from certain development reviews.

Taken together, the state's abandonment of an active role in land planning and limitations to home rule have had a chilling effect on land planning efforts. Within Florida, this is compounded by the undermining of regional planning bodies, most notably water management districts and regional planning councils, through funding reductions and limitations on their power and authority. As things currently stand in the Florida growth management landscape, the state has chosen to disengage, regional planning bodies have been neutered, and local governments have been handcuffed in their ability to develop policy responses.

Planning's New Directions

A last factor that seems to have contributed to the changing landscape for growth management rests in the evolution of the planning discipline itself. Over the last few decades both authors worked as professors in a Top 20 urban planning program, much of it during this period of the dismantling of growth management. During this time, we were pleased to see the discipline rightly and necessarily wrestle much more directly with fundamental flaws in the field related to race, gender, and disadvantaged communities. At the same time, however, some of the core traditions and anchor points of the discipline seemed to be crowded out by these ideas.

The last decade has seen much needed movements in the profession and within planning schools to speak to the importance of embracing, planning for, and planning with historically underrepresented groups. To the discipline's benefit,

more attention is now paid to communities of color, the roles and needs of women in planning and community building, LGBTQ+ populations, immigrant groups, non-English speaking populations, and other groups that were outside of the mainstream of the planning profession and planning education. To our great joy, the Black Lives Matter and the Me Too movements have yielded some (but not enough) changes to governance structures, organizational responses, and program curricula. To be clear, we affirm and applaud these changes and know them to be essential to the discipline's future health and success.

While this renewed attention to disadvantaged and underrepresented groups have brought wonderful new energy to planning practice and yielded important new curricular threads, it may have crowded out attention for and coursework in other topic areas, including land planning. We have seen many programs in Florida and around the country include needed coursework on race and gender, as well as social equity and community empowerment, with many core curricula now focusing upon equity as a core principle. However, we have also less material on land planning, infrastructure, and land development, and this content seems less central to current planning curricula. Similarly, national and state planning conferences, as well as local planning events, reflect this social equity turn in the profession – outstanding news to be sure - but conversations about land planning and land development seem far fewer and with much less general interest than just a decade ago.

THE FOURTH WAVE: RETRENCHMENT AND A NEW IMPERATIVE

Whereas Chapin (2012) looked to the coming decade and saw a potential renaissance for growth management with a fourth wave centered upon sustainable development, as we look the decade of the 2020s we are less optimistic. The cultural and economic forces arrayed against long-range, large-scale land planning are formidable and the planning discipline is currently focused, appropriately, on social equity as a core theme for the foreseeable future. While the authors came of age professionally in a period during which land planning was one of the core elements of the discipline, the development and conservation of land no longer seem as prominent in the field. So what does this mean for growth management's fourth wave?

All signs point to a coming decade in which land planning will remain respected, but no longer a central element of the discipline. We cannot envision a scenario in which state-level planning will return in force. Even in environmentally progressive and politically liberal California, state planning focuses upon signal setting, leaving implementation to local and regional planning bodies. At the local level, land planners remain on the defensive, as pro-development forces have linked – with only modest evidence in our view – both the Great Recession and post-pandemic economic recovery to reduced land planning, limited environmental rules enforcement, and fast-tracking development proposals no matter their attributes.

We believe that the path forward for land planning and a successful fourth wave of growth management rests in an at-first-glance incompatible mix of retrenchment and embracing of new ideas. This can return growth management to its core principles *and* allow for better connection with the social equity movement of the day.

In terms of retrenchment, growth management requires a recommitment to and refocusing upon the basics (Nelson, Marshall, Juergensmeyer, and Nicholas, 2017). Ultimately, successful land planning rests on the delineation of places where development is desired versus places where development should not be allowed because of environmental concerns or service provision challenges. Simply stated, at its core growth management rests in the successful balancing of conservation and development. Over the last several decades growth management has been plagued by too many ideas, with design and placemaking, financing, and incentive-models adding too much complexity to this policy regime.

While retrenchment back to the basics is needed, there is also a need to embrace new imperatives, in part to ensure that growth management is understood more widely as central to the profession. The environment has long been central to these policy initiatives, and the climate change imperative is real and massive. But there is also a strong argument to be made that successful growth management *advances* the social equity agenda (Nelson and Dawkins, 2007). With the profession's (re)emphasis upon social equity, land planners need to do much better in speaking to and arguing for the centrality of growth management as a means of promoting equity, investment in communities of color, and community development that meets the needs of underrepresented groups. While there is an awful history of land use planning and regulation undermining these very same goals (Rothstein, 2018), we believe that planning has made a leap forward in self-reflection in the last two decades, acknowledging and working hard to redress these sins. Looking ahead, the social equity imperative must be viewed as essential to, and not in competition with, land planning and growth management policy.

The coming decade will likely see one of two paths ahead for the larger concept of growth management; it will adapt and rise again, or it will continue its decline into irrelevance. Along with our colleague Chris Nelson, we hope that a new set of practitioners, scholars, and industry partners will emerge to lead the discussion and show the way forward. These new leaders need to be more demographically diverse and drawn from a wider array of disciplines, more politically savvy and active, open to policy entrepreneurship, and deeply committed to communicating the importance and necessity of growth management as central to planning, even during this desperately needed social equity push. It is not overstating it to say that the planet might very well be riding on the emergence of

the next wave of growth management leaders. We look forward to working with and learning from them.

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