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## Making Places Better

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## MAKING PLACES BETTER

Ultimately, the goal of planning is to make places better for people. This can be “tricky” as Ann Forsyth notes in “The Boldness of Healthy Cities: A Tricky Challenge.” And as well-meaning as planners are, what they do can leave people living in places that are changed by planning worse off, as Don Elliott laments in “Do Planners Always Have to Make the Neighborhood ‘Better’? Rethinking the Disturbing Tensions between Redevelopment and Equity”. Even worse is when well-meaning planners make both people and physical places worse off, as Paul Knox warns in “Telos and Techne.” Five articles address these concerns in different ways in this concluding part of the festschrift.

In “Beyond Brownfields Redevelopment: A Policy Framework for Regional Land Recycling Planning,” Joseph Schilling observes that dozens of communities, especially those older industrial legacy cities, have neighborhoods and districts with hundreds, even thousands of vacant homes. Schilling’s article outlines the core policy and program foundations for reclaiming vacant properties and abandoned buildings; identifies the policy and program innovations that can scale brownfields redevelopment to address challenges around equity, sustainability and resilience; and provides a framework for a collaborative, cross agency, cross sector policy and planning framework at the regional level that can advance land recycling.

The late Robert E. Lang crafted the term “boomburb” that is applied to large suburban cities. For the most part, boomburbs are the quintessentially sterile, monotonous suburbs loathed by critics. Debra A. March, Stephanie Garcia-Vause, and Lisa Corrado offer Henderson, Nevada, as a boomburb that uses planning to go a different direction in “Becoming Henderson: How a ‘Boomburb’ Used a Future-Focused Strategic Plan to Become a True Urban Place.” Theirs is a case study of how one boomburb “took advantage of its position in the American suburban landscape to become a true urban place.” March, Garcia-Vause and Corrado offer a checklist for other boomburbs to consider as they plan their own futures. Their article is dedicated to Robert E. Lang.

In “Stewardship of the Built Environment in a Changing World,” Robert A. Young traces the rise of the “stewardship of the built environment” movement from the 1990s to the present. In the 1990s, preservationists and conservationists found that they needed to go beyond qualitative, emotion-laden arguments to quantitative, evidence-based assessments along social, environmental, and economic (SEE) dimensions. Despite SEE efforts since then, the public and especially policymakers still “view preservation and reuse as (1) being accessible and worthwhile only to

wealthier citizens; (2) having little influence on more important issues like climate change; and (3) creating a hindrance to economic revitalization efforts focused on new construction only.” Young adds: “Quite frankly, they are wrong.” His article outlines the challenge facing preservation and conservation advocates to accelerate the “broader acceptance of the stewardship philosophy across the full spectrum of decision makers who control the built environment.”

While a substantial literature advances the restorative powers of nature in the built environment, few focus on role of Japanese gardens to fulfill this purpose. Replete with arguments based on research, strategies, and images, Mira Locher and Keith Bartholomew make the case in “On the Restorative Power of Nature, or Why Every Neighborhood Needs a Public Japanese Garden.” Namely, they argue that gardens in the “traditional Japanese style can play an important role in addressing pressing public health issues in urban areas in the U.S. (and elsewhere).”

Nan Ellin has the last word in this part of the festschrift with “Our Cities, Ourselves.” She asserts:

Just as we are what we eat, we are where we live. We breathe the air, drink the water and inhabit the built and natural landscapes. We make our places and they, in turn, make us. While great places nourish body and soul, poor environmental and urban quality challenges us physically as well as emotionally.

Among other insights, Ellin notes that professions dedicated to shaping the built environment are increasingly:

...regarding human habitat as part of nature rather than a machine for living. Increasing numbers are working toward place prosperity, rather than aiming principally for power, prestige, and profits. Practitioners are engaging with local communities in a more meaningful way, rendering the planning and development process more inclusive, accountable, and effective.

These are welcome trends.