



In the Shade

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Viewpoint on Urban Growth:

Balance our Economy with our Environment

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A prosperous and robust economy can coexist with a healthy environment, but to achieve balance requires an informed public and the collective will to change how we grow our communities. Why is the balance important? Growing communities with a mindset geared exclusively to pro-development and pro-business principles can lead to an unhealthy environment.

China's current air quality issues prove the point. Citizens are wearing dust masks to go outside, birth rates are negatively affected and driving is being restricted, as is the use of fireworks (*Dallas Morning News* articles 2-5-2013 and 2-10-2013). On a positive note, Singapore recently developed 10 principles for living in high density cities.

Few people are involved in how our communities develop or redevelop. They are not aware of the resulting long-term consequences to the health and well-being of our children. Education is critical in stimulating public awareness of future growth and its effects. Our best hope is that the public conscience will ultimately drive us to build responsible and balanced communities.

According to Dr. Richard Jackson, Chair of the Environmental Health Science Department at UCLA, the way we build structures and communities is creating health problems which are greatly increasing health care costs. Dr. Jackson provided an excellent presentation on the subject in Arlington recently (2-15-2013).

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According to the North Texas Council of Governments, our regional population is expected to double to 12 million people by 2050. Expert planners at Vision North Texas say we are headed for traffic nightmares, poor air quality, increased urban heat island effect (energy demand) and other negative effects if we continue to develop our communities as we have in the past. Vision North Texas is a public, private and academic partnership created to serve as a forum for dialogue and action on these important issues.

Since we all breathe the same air and use the same water and soil, it makes sense to have a shared regional vision of socioeconomic and ecological goals. These are some of the most important issues of our times. We have a moral obligation to work together to leave the world in a better condition than we found it.

A few years ago, when developers were asked why they were not building more “green” or “sustainable” projects, they responded that they did not know how to build greener or how to make money doing so. Today, better builders know how to build greener, and good developers know how to develop more responsibly. Building greener may cost more short-term, but it is a wise investment that provides cleaner air and water, plus a better quality of life long-term.

The best builders and developers understand the important role that trees and healthy urban ecosystems play in providing a sustainable urban infrastructure for the future. For those who are observant, the very essence of nature provides sound guidance for reaching urban sustainability.

In the future, increasing numbers of people will want to live where both the economy and environment are vibrant and sustainable. Each community can choose whether to grow smart or watch people relocate into communities that plan for balanced and responsible growth. We can change tomorrow, but only with an informed and involved public working to find answers for the common good.

To learn more about Dallas/Fort Worth regional efforts to plan for future sustainability, 10 principles of development excellence, “Greenprinting” and much more, visit www.visionnorthtexas.org.