

Sprawl Gets Personal

Narrative

1 How many of you drove to school today? Were you alone in the car? If an auto virus made all automobiles, SUVs and trucks unusable how would you get to school? What do these small every-day facts tell you? (*responses*)

2 When you are an adult you expect to have a job, find a place to live and use some mode of transportation. You may have some preconceived notions about where and how you'd like to live. I want to make you think a bit about those ideas and perhaps do a project that might inspire thoughts about your quality of life. The subject is *Sprawl Gets Personal*.

3 In fact sprawl is so well known that it has its own jargon. Here are some terms you may or may not have heard. And here's a cartoon. How many sprawl-issues can you identify in this one picture? We'll talk about all this later.

Show: Carchitecture; Snoutnosed House; McMansion and Granny, Nanny, Danny Flat; then leave them in view.

(Carchitecture--architecture designed especially to accommodate cars; Snoutnosed House--a house with an attached garage that is more prominent and closer to the street than the actual house; McMansion-- a name for a newly built out-sized house. The name slyly suggests a similarity between the house and a gaudy, mass-produced McDonald's restaurant; Granny, Nanny, Danny Flat-- a small apartment attached to or on the grounds of a bigger family home for an older adult, a child's nanny or a young adult child.)

4 Can you guess who said the following and when:
“Americans are in the habit of never walking if they can ride.”?
(*Louis Philippe, Duc d'Orleans, 1798*)

5 Think about where you live presently. What are some places you have walked to in the last 2 days? (*Wait for answers*)

6 How many of you have part-time jobs? How do you get to them? (*Answers*)

7 Do your parents commute more or less than 1/2 hour to work? (*Answers*) Did you know that the average national commute for an employee is now almost 50 minutes one way? An adolescent suburban male is more likely to be killed by an automobile than his urban peer by a gun. (*see Factoid Sheet*)

8 How many cars does your family own? Investment in cars leaves less money for other things. What are some expenses connected with owning a car? (*responses*)

9 Think of the many parking lots to accommodate cars. 70% of the old central business district of Cleveland is surface parking. (*see Factoid sheet*) One car actually generates several parking spots: garages, street parking, lots at employment and various shopping areas. Of course, a car can be in only one place at a time but the parking places needed for it will be permanent. Think of all the shopping centers around us.

10 **Here's a Factoid for you:** In 1967 there were 9,000 shopping centers in the USA and in 1997 there were 43,000. Malls serve populations entirely dependent on automobiles. When are these parking lots fully used? (*Wait for answers-- usually at Christmas time; can you think of any other time?*)

¹¹ During WW II President Truman levied a tax on passenger train tickets to discourage people from riding trains so there was more room to haul military material. This tax was not lifted until a few years ago. This tax revenue was used to develop what? . . . (*Ask students*) ... (highways, not trains). *What do you think might have happened if this tax revenue had returned to trains immediately after the war?*

¹² Highways and commercial aviation have their own trust funds. Trains, rapids, and buses do not and must compete with everything else for funding. Because of all the money and planning devoted to highways, automobiles account for 85% of the miles traveled by Americans in the USA.

¹³ There is an old saying that the junk in your house expands to the space allotted it. This saying can be applied to highways as well. People believe that adding lanes to roads will solve traffic congestion; yet almost without exception auto and truck traffic expand when lanes are added. If we build them, they will come!

¹⁴ In general short blocks forming a grid are an important part of the recipe for encouraging walking, biking and neighborhood activity. Are you aware of any neighborhoods with this grid pattern of streets? (*responses*)

¹⁵ Narrow roads and difficult intersections are useful in communicating to drivers that they do not, in fact, own the road. Narrow streets are often safer than four-lane roads. Can you

guess why? (*Leave time for discussion.*) A Florida town had a difficult intersection that was scheduled to be modernized with more lanes. In researching the intersection engineers learned that it was the safest in Florida. Just the knowledge that it was a difficult intersection to maneuver kept drivers from speeding.

¹⁶ Zoning laws tell us how we can use land and what kinds of activities can take place within buildings. They have played a big part in creating our need for cars. Years ago we had mixed-use areas. Homes, stores and factories were located in the same neighborhoods. When the Industrial Revolution was in full swing the factories produced such dirty and toxic emissions that cities were nearly unfit for human habitation. In the 1930s businessmen in Pittsburgh took extra white shirts with them. Can you guess why? (*Leave time for discussion.*) Because the ones they put on in the morning would have become dirty from soot by lunchtime.

¹⁷ To solve these problems concerning factory pollution the city planners started advocating the separation of residential and industrial areas. But we went too far. Now, businesses and industrial parks are flourishing, separated from almost all residential areas. Planners have been separating everything from everything else. Typical zoning codes now have several dozen land-use designations; not only is housing separated from industry but low-density housing--homes on large lots--is separated from high-density housing, which is usually a mixture

of apartments, townhouses and free standing homes on small lots. Medical offices are separated from general offices, which are in turn separated from restaurants and shopping.

¹⁸ Breaking up our living environment into all these segments takes up an awful lot of space. It is easier for developers to buy farms and build new projects there rather than assemble the needed land in an already built-up area like the city. Here's what happened to farms in Ohio between 1982 and 1997. (*Show map*) Every red dot represents 2,000 acres of newly developed land within 15 years. Ohio is one of the states with the most dots because we have more sprawl and a lot of excellent agricultural land.

¹⁹ It's common to refer to farms, meadows, bogs and forests as "undeveloped" land, but that is not an accurate description. Farmland is obviously highly developed for growing food! Natural areas, as well, are not "undeveloped." Can you name some of their uses? (*habitat for animals and birds; trees store carbon dioxide; bogs sponge up rain, cleanse it and help prevent flooding*)

²⁰ It's easy to see that sprawling development can't go on forever. We need farms. We need nature. Also, it makes sense to locate public buildings where the people are. Locating post offices, libraries, and city halls too far away to walk to them forces people to drive. Then they all need separate parking lots which take up more land.

²¹ Other areas of the country are taking steps to shape how development occurs in their regions. The Oregon state legislature adopted growth boundaries over 25 years ago, which mandate where new construction may take place; Maryland adopted smart growth policies that are designed to give incentives to build in areas the state wants developed; Minneapolis and its surrounding suburbs have a revenue-sharing scheme to help poorer areas address needs. (*See "Useful Websites, Regional Efforts" for more solutions.*)

²² Although Ohio ranks near the bottom on national surveys concerning land-use public policies, that is beginning to change:

- In 1996 a few northeast, Ohio inner-ring suburbs organized *The First Suburbs Consortium*. It is now the largest government-led advocacy organization in the country working to revitalize fully-developed communities, and it's a grassroots organization!
- In January 2004 a new state-wide organization was formed, *Greater Ohio*. Its mission is to educate people about good development and to lobby state officials to pass laws that will strengthen regional cooperation and better protect Ohio's countryside and natural resources.