

Subject: [Fwd: Fwd: Seattletimes.com: Growing, growing, gone: Relentless sprawl trashes theEvergreen State]

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From: Brian Platts <brian_platts@telus.net>

To: Corrie Kost <kost@triumf.ca>

Subject: Fwd: Seattletimes.com: Growing, growing, gone: Relentless sprawl trashes the Evergreen State

Date: Mon, 12 Aug 2002 17:55:57 -0700

From: "Eric Andersen" <eric_g_andersen@hotmail.com>

To: dnvCouncil@dnv.org

CC: fonvca@fonvca.org

>Subject: *Seattletimes.com: Growing, growing, gone: Relentless sprawl*

>*trashes the Evergreen State*

>*Date: Mon, 22 Jul 2002 17:41:31 -0700 (PDT)*

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>*This message was sent to you,*

>*as a service of The Seattle Times (<http://www.seattletimes.com>).*

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>*Growing, growing, gone: Relentless sprawl trashes the Evergreen State*

>*Full story:*

>http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/editorialsopinion/134497316_layton21.html

>

>*By Mike Layton*

>*Special to The Times*

>

>*The blight of growth spreads over the land like fungus. The Green River*

>*Valley's soils, once among the world's most productive, are gone, smothered*

>*under warehouses and concrete. We'll pay for that some day, or our*

>*grandchildren will. Chain saws and bulldozers are scalping the forests of*

>*the Puget Sound and Lake Washington littoral, from the Sammamish Plateau to*

>*the Cascade crest. Someone will pay for that, too.*

>

>*Actually, we're already paying for those disasters; most of us just don't*

>*know it yet. The folks who caused them huff angrily at suggestions that*

>*settled taxpayers are subsidizing newcomers.*

>

>*But that's what's happening.*

>

>*People born in Washington, or who moved here at an optimal time, 1950, or*

>*1960, or the 1970s, paid taxes for the roads, schools and other services*

>*their local governments built for them. By the '80s and '90s they expected*

>*to burn the mortgage. But immigration happens; people are flocking here*

>*from all over the United States, beckoned by "most livable" messages*

>*filling glossy magazines.*

>

>*Californians by the tens of thousands sold their mansions, paid off their own mortgages early and, their pockets full of cash, moved north — fleeing the growth they created. Others, poor, jobless and homeless, heard rumors — "Boeing is hiring" — and reports of generous welfare grants, bundled the family into the pre-owned car and joined the exodus.*

>

>*Exaggeration? Look at tear-jerk newspaper stories of society's victims and count how many just arrived and can't find a job. Read letters to the editor from newcomers outraged at their new tax rate, reality in Washington's "highest and best use" tax system.*

>

>*Yes, newcomers help pay for new schools and water and sewer systems, but earlier residents, having already bought those amenities, are paying again and again. Communities across the country, from Loudon County, Va., to Modesto, Calif., are questioning the growth myth. Costs of new roads to cope with automobile congestion are just the most obvious.*

>

>*Not so evident but more insidious are health costs of air pollution from auto exhaust. Schools — kindergartens to universities — add to the costs of growth, in new buildings, salaries for additional teachers, school buses. Rising school levies, regular and special, fuel bitter public debates.*

>

>*Crime, growing with the population, afflicts individuals and, collectively, taxpayers in demands on the criminal justice system: more police, more courtrooms, more judges, more jails and prisons.*

>

>*For decades development pitchmen have tried to brainwash us into believing that increasing populations, more taxpayers, strip malls and big box stores paying minimum wages, will cause our tax bills to go down. "Growth pays for growth," is their mantra.*

>

>*But study after study shows the opposite. Growth does not pay for itself, says a report by the Columbia Public Interest Policy Institute in Eugene. Its report, "The Cost of Growth in Washington State," challenges the conventional wisdom which holds that growth increases the tax base, "thereby reducing the overall tax burden."*

>

>*Another study on costs of community services by the American Farmland Trust, a nonprofit conservation organization, together with a grass roots group in Skagit County, spells out clearly who is paying for growth there.*

>

>*Rural open lands, farms and forests, require less infrastructure, fewer roads, and water, and sewer systems and schools, the study said. "Because of these modest services requirements, open land actually created a surplus of (tax) revenue for the county."*

>

>*For every dollar of taxes collected from farm, forest and open lands, the cost, chiefly for roads, was only 51 cents. On the other hand, "residential development overall did not pay for itself, requiring \$1.25 in services for every dollar of (tax) revenue generated."*

>

> "You can't stop growth," the growth industry stubbornly proclaims. Paired
> with that silly shibboleth is its twin: "If we build it they will come."
> They're right on that one. If we don't slow and eventually stop growth,
> roads will choke, subdivisions will fill every fertile valley, cover every
> forested hill, until there is no place left.

>
> Victims of the growth industry unwittingly subsidize the destruction of
> their own neighborhoods and pay for the privilege in property taxes driven
> ever higher by the costs of roads, water and sewer systems, police and fire
> services, libraries, city halls and schools to accommodate newcomers. Local
> officials, policy makers, and taxpayers have known all this, deep in their
> brains, for decades. It's time they accept those truths.

>
> Impact fees, which the state Growth Management Act allows local governments
> to levy on new development to pay for new growth, are an attempt to bring
> fairness to property tax growth by curbing sprawl. They enrage developers,
> some local officials and land speculators. Such fees, they proclaim, are
> added property taxes. Many property owners swallow that line and then
> wonder why their taxes continue spiraling upward.

>
> Opposing the further trashing of our once verdant land is possible, but it
> takes political will, fighting city hall and staring down bullies who
> believe the Earth is their commodity. Educating the neighbors to protest
> proposed new sewer trunk lines and development permits is the first step.

>
> I confess I was once an accomplice to growth. For 35 years I wrote
> newspaper stories and columns plugging freeways, railroads and, my
> favorite, a monorail, between Seattle and Olympia, where I lived for 45
> years. Friends warned me that I was not going to like what I was promoting.
> They were right.

>
> Growth metastacizes in the body politic. Olympia is still a nice place to
> live, and to raise kids. Schools are good, but it is strangling in growth
> as it increasingly becomes another Seattle bedroom community. Local
> governments, albeit often muddled, are decent and generally well
> intentioned. But like most others across the country they're subservient to
> developers.

>
> "If we build it they will come."

>
> They'll come and keep coming, and they'll fetch their neighbors from Iowa
> and Arkansas and their sisters and their cousins and their aunts. And, when
> all those newcomers settle here, we've been taught to believe, they'll
> create new jobs and the taxes they pay will lighten the burden for people
> already here.

>
> Yeah.

>
> This magic is called "broadening the tax base." Next to belief in Santa
> Claus it's our most enduring myth. When America was young there was
> substance to the idea that growth was good. New communities do need roads,
> schools, sewer systems.

>

>Until the late 19th and early 20th centuries, most new construction did pay
>for itself by expanding the tax base. But there's a limit.

>

>"Smart growth" still works, if you're a developer. But if you're a
>taxpayer, a homeowner, a small business person, a worker, blue or white
>collar, more people means more taxes for all, old timers and newcomers
>alike. At some point you're going to be crowded by growth and paying for
>the discomfort.

>

>We don't build new towns any more; instead we put up subdivisions to suck
>populations out into the countryside, into ever newer subdivisions,
>sprawling often without sidewalks or nearby commercial services. Cities are
>left crumbling behind while developers take their loot to bless new
>paradises with growth. And we'll all live happily ever after.

>

>Cities are beleaguered by developers and the state Transportation
>Department, growth's advance guard, bulldozers their battle tanks. There
>goes Olympia, see new Bellevues pop up all over the place. New freeways are
>terraced up the western Cascades — Interstate 405, soon 605, is 805 next?
>More automobile exhaust, more smog, more crime.

>

>Land speculators flaunt the "proppity rights" flag in fierce, twisted
>patriotism turned to rage, hatred of all government. "Nobody's gonna tell
>me what I can do with my land."

>

>The growth industry's tactics are intimidation, loud mouths erupting in
>endless mind-numbing hearings before legislative committees, city and
>county councils and planning commissions. Mercenaries in this urban
>guerrilla warfare are land-use lawyers, coaching clients venting bile at
>farmers and home owners daring to believe their right to property enjoyment
>is as valid as the speculator's and developer's.

>

>"You're against growth? What kind of Commie are you? Go back to Russia if
>you don't like it here."

>

>Growth and its feeder, population, pivot on the "jobs, jobs" argument. If
>we stop sprawling how will those road workers, loggers, house builders,
>carpenters, painters, cement finishers, feed their families?

>

>Well, Europe thrives in farmlands green and productive. Cities hundreds of
>years older than ours thrive without sprawl. We can do as well. Replacing
>the ticky tacky oozing up everywhere will provide decent jobs for workers,
>opportunities for builder-entreprenuers. Monster trucks ensure work forever
>rebuilding freeways.

>

>Is it selfish to oppose growth for newcomers, immigrants? Developers, not
>otherwise sympathetic to poor folks, toot that horn, too. Challenging
>growth will require thinking and leadership, by businesspeople, politicians
>and taxpayers. But it can be done.

>

>We're dog-paddling against a rising tide of sprawl, congestion and blight.

>We moan and whine about it but never speak the answer — take in the WELCOME
>mat. Let would-be immigrants go elsewhere. There are still places to accept
>growth, and need it, until mankind devises the ultimate cure for the growth
>cancer — population control.

>
>Of course you can stop growth. Just do it. Just say "enough."

>
>Mike Layton was for many years an Olympia-based reporter and columnist
>covering the Legislature and politics.

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