

PLANNING

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and an unsentimental analysis of what community can and cannot accomplish.

Zoned for futurity

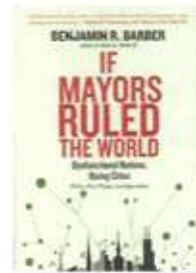
Sonia Hirt, AICP (Virginia Tech), came late to U.S. zoning, making her an ideal author to set it in comparative and historical perspective. *Zoned in the USA: The Origins and Implications of American Land-Use Regulation* (2014; Cornell University Press; 245 pp.; \$75 cloth, \$24.95 paper) covers some familiar ground but also succeeds in placing these ubiquitous and slow-to-change regulations in a different light.

Hirt focuses on international comparisons and on the “formative years” of American zoning (1905–1935). Her main insight is that U.S. zoning practice is neither normal nor inevitable. Instead, it is “fairly unique in the world,” and on the surface inimical to Americans’ mistrust of government meddling. Further, the U.S. is not a nation of home owners. Many countries—including Ireland, Portugal, and Chile—have higher rates of home ownership. Instead the U.S. is a “nation of homezoners,” who in the last century or so have chosen to wall off single-family homes “from interaction with all other forms of urbanization.”

In 1909, Los Angeles zoning established “residence districts,” excluding only clearly noxious industries from them. Gradually this modest form of anti-nuisance zoning morphed into districts that excluded all commercial and industrial uses. “Stores with families above should be relegated to the dark ages of the past,” wrote Edward Bassett in 1927. (Planners in that era also believed that separating home and work would reduce congestion.) The final stroke was to exclude all residences but single-family homes, on the grounds that apartment buildings would literally cast shadows on their world.

Hirt takes care not to caricature. She notes that early advocates assumed a fine-grained zoning structure, imagining that most essential land uses, while separated, would still be reachable on foot. The author’s goal is to help readers think differently, to see how arbitrary and time-

bound these efforts were—and to accept that they failed massively. “One begins to wonder whether the original promises of zoning were either highly suspect from the beginning or have since been turned on their heads.” Even the most plausible of the promised benefits have not materialized. The uniquely American idea of rigidly setting apart single-family homes as the privileged lifestyle has produced neither world-class rates of home ownership nor world-class civic-mindedness.



If Mayors Ruled the World: Dysfunctional Nations, Rising Cities
2013; Yale University Press;
416 pp.; \$30 cloth, \$22
paper.

Can mayors rule?

“Cities alone offer real hope for democratic governance locally and globally,” writes political theorist Benjamin R. Barber (City University of New York) in *If Mayors Ruled the World: Dysfunctional Nations, Rising Cities*.

He argues the case in 12 chapters divided into two sections, “Why Cities Should Govern Globally” and “How It Can Be Done,” packaged with brief profiles of 11 mayors from New York to Lagos to Moscow, Seoul, and Singapore.

It’s obvious that cities can enact measures that cautious or gridlocked national governments cannot. But state and national governments can countermand or invalidate them as well. Barber’s case reads more like a fan letter than a serious brief for action.

He asserts that we read about failing nations all the time, “but not about ‘The Fall of Cities’ or ‘Failed Towns,’” which is simply false. Elsewhere, he denounces urban corruption (“an unmitigated disaster for democracy”) and offers a lengthy roster of crooked mayors now under indictment or worse.

The legal fact that very few cities are also nation-states is smothered in abstract verbiage. (In the concluding chapter, the author writes that “cities must be prepared to counter nation-state jurisdictional

arrogance and ideological rigidity with problem-solving urban practicality; they must even be willing to turn urban practicality into a gentle but firm revolutionary pragmatism”—perhaps involving a worldwide “parliament of mayors” that would be “a proactive cosmopolis able to intervene on behalf of cities”).

Also shortchanged are considerations of the revenue cities receive from nationwide taxation and the protections that a national constitution and the Department of Justice can provide to victims of urban corruption and local prejudice.

The book’s conceptual foundations are especially misty because the cities Barber favors are parts of regions. The mayor of Detroit does not speak for Oakland County. But in Barber’s world he does: “Cities are embedded in their local regions that tie together urban and regional interests Treating cities as representative of the regions in which they find themselves will thus make a good deal of sense to regional residents.”

In Barber’s world, cities are representative of the larger regions of which they are a part. Many suburbanites would beg to differ. But in any case, he says that regions would be able to opt in or out of any mayoral or parliamentary decision they didn’t like. This is governance that can save the world?

The possibilities for cooperation among urban areas across national lines are great and already partly realized. A useful book on this subject would examine leading examples of successes and failures along these lines, carefully delineating the specific limits and possibilities and mechanisms—so that mayors and planners can better see how to exert influence while reducing the bombast per capita.

Twitter between covers

Mark David Major, AICP, founder of the *The Outlaw Urbanist* blog, has created another year-long almanac: *Poor Richard, Another Almanac for Architects and Planners* (2014; Carousel Productions; 138 pp.; \$9.99). It consists of one sentence for each day for 52 weeks—equal parts Twitter, Benjamin Franklin, and Ambrose Bierce.



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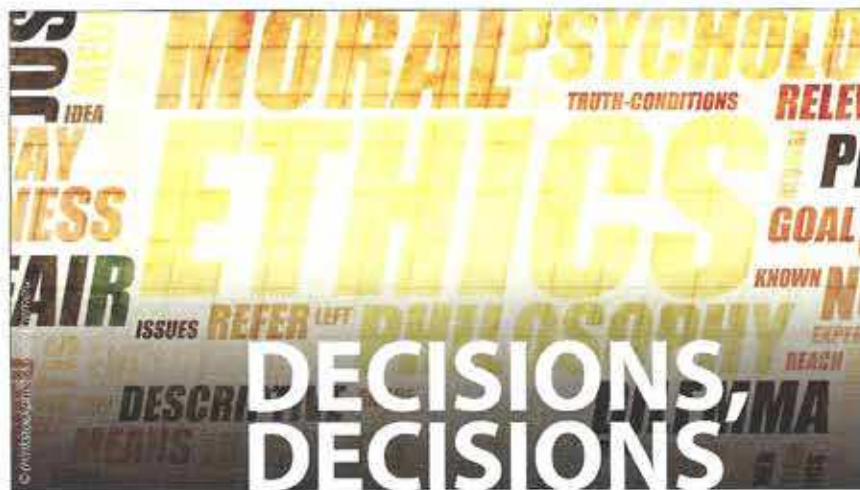
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In the background lurks an agenda of sorts. "Outlaw Urbanists" are said to be "radical traditional urbanists" who take the notably nontraditional view that "our entire system of city building must be torn down and rebuilt from scratch." In a six-page introductory essay the author points out one nonobvious way to rebuild: "The true brilliance of transect planning is that the more it is applied in real world conditions, then the less tenable becomes the roadway classifications of modern transportation planning."

Each week has an image on the left, and seven sayings on the right. All weeks are themed, and the themes may repeat: streets, suburban sprawl, architecture, history. As in life, some days are better than others. Some sayings are acknowledged as coming from prior epigrammatists, including Bible authors. Two favorites: Week 13, Day 6 ("In the city, buildings mate for life") and Week 29, Day 5 ("Never go to an architect or planner whose office plants are artificial").

—Harold Henderson

Henderson is Planning's regular book reviewer. Send new books and news of forthcoming publications to him at 1355 W. Springville Road, LaPorte, IN 46350; e-mail: hhs@earthlink.net.

MEDIA

Light pollution 'gap'

American cities are significantly brighter at night than German cities, according to a study by German environmental scientists. And major urban centers in America get brighter as they grow in size, but in Germany, large cities have fewer lights per capita than small ones. A main point of the study is how improved imaging techniques have made it possible to measure light pollution from space in new ways. The data also has practical applications: It can provide information on which areas to target for energy and cost savings. The study was published in the December 2014 issue of the journal *Remote Sensing*.

—Ilima Loomis

Loomis is a freelance writer based in Maui, Hawaii.

Building healthy schools

The design of schools can impact not only students' academic success, but also