

Cache

Planning News

October 2020



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a list of 22 benefits of Street Trees.

Bicycle - Auto Safety Tips

As our communities become more bike friendly and with schools back in session it's important to take steps to keep everyone safe on the roads

When you are commuting, recreating, or traveling to school on a bicycle there are some simple steps that you can take to make sure that you, and others on the streets make it to your destination safely:

Use Hand Signals

Perhaps nothing is more frustrating for a driver than encountering another vehicle on the road that doesn't use their blinker. As driving vehicles is the most dangerous thing most of us do, it's important to know what other people are doing so that we can get home safe. The importance of communicating clearly and effectively are even more important for those who are traveling on bicycles as they do not have several thousand pounds of metal protecting and surrounding them. Below we list the standard hand signals, and what they mean. As drivers we should pay special attention to these signals when we're driving, and when on a bike, we should be careful to always use these signals to clearly communicate our intentions.

All hand signals are made using your left arm, allowing you as a rider to keep your right hand on the handlebars and in control of your vehicle. A left turn is indicated by simply holding your left arm out to your side. A right turn is indicated by holding your left arm out at a 90 degree angle so that it creates an L. Alternatively you can extend your right arm straight out to indicate you're turning right. Slowing or stopping is indicated by extending your left arm out and bending at a 90 degree angle with your hand facing the ground (an upside down L)

Safety Gear

As obvious as it sounds, and as annoying as it can be, wearing safety gear is important for cyclists. Wearing a helmet, and making sure your bike is visible (particularly in the dark, and twilight hours) can be the difference between getting home safely and not. Helmets and bicycle lights can be found at any bike shop and big box stores.

Get



◀ LEFT TURN



▶ RIGHT TURN



■ STOP

comfortable on the Road

If you find yourself riding your bike and there isn't a bike lane, the safest location for a cyclist is likely in the center of the road. Not only are the roads cleaner here (re: less likely to get a flat or knocked off course by a large rock) But you are more visible to motorists, also by taking space in the center of the road you will discourage aggressive drivers from trying to squeeze past you in locations where there simply isn't room. Riding in the center of the road also keeps you out of the car door danger zone, and will allow you to avoid pedestrians that may be moving from a sidewalk to cross the road, or getting into a vehicle.

For motorists it's important to remember that cyclists have a right to use the road as well, and while slowing down to pass a cyclist safety may be slightly annoying, it will only delay your trip a matter of seconds, and will allow someone else to make it home to their families safely at the end of the day, it is also their legal right to ride in the road, and is much safer for cyclists and pedestrians than riding on sidewalks, as sidewalk crossings of roads make it much more difficult for motorists to see cyclists.

For cyclists it's important to give pedestrians the right-of-way, to avoid riding on sidewalks where conflicts can increase, and if you have to pass a pedestrian to do it from behind, while giving proper notice using a bell or verbal cue. When riding in the road be deliberate with movements, communicate with hand signals and eye contact.

Give space when passing

Utah State Law requires motorists passing cyclists to give at least 3 feet of separation, so when you encounter a cyclist on the road, do what you'd do if you saw an emergency vehicle, slow down, move over and give plenty of space.

Is it time to end single-family zoning?

Ever since the Supreme Court upheld zoning in the case of *Euclid v. Ambler*, single-family residential zoning has been a hallmark of zoning and development ordinances nation-wide. Looking back nearly 100 years later and seeing the results of single-family zoning, the shortcomings are laid bare, failures and abuses of the policy are abundant, and many experts argue that abandoning single-family zoning may not only be the way to revitalize our communities, but it may be our ethical responsibility as well. Abandoning this practice may be the first step toward addressing the housing affordability crisis, and providing social justice by reversing decades of policy that has unfairly targeted the poor, working classes, and minorities.

The Ethical Choice

A number of the “Principles to which we aspire” as Planners and members of the AICP deal directly with the prevalence of single-family zoning, including:

1b - We shall have special concern for the long-range consequences of present actions.

1f- We shall seek social justice by working to expand choice and opportunity for all persons, recognizing a special responsibility to plan for the needs of the disadvantaged and to promote racial and economic integration. We shall urge the alteration of policies, institutions, and decision that oppose such needs.

3b - We shall educate the public about planning issues and their relevance to our everyday lives.

The principles to which we aspire are clear, and aren't up for debate, leaving the real question for us to address: “is single-family zoning ethical?” Jake Wegmann of the University of Texas-Austin argues no stating “For members of the planning profession to make headway against the climate and inequality crises, they must cease defending the indefensible concept of single-family zoning.” Not taking Mr. Wegmann at his word let us examine his claims:

Climate Crisis

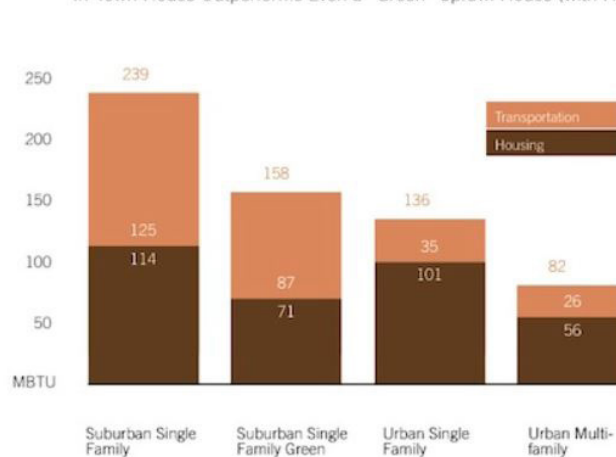
Does single-family zoning present a challenge to sustainable climates and environments? The answer is quite clear: yes. The prevalence of single-family zoning has a profound impact on the environment. On average over 70% of the residential property in our towns and cities is zoned for single-family dwellings, this means wide lots, two-car garages. It means large housing tracts with cookie-cutter homes, and it means properties that aren't within walking distances of shops, restaurants, work, and it means mass transit is inefficient and ineffective. This sprawl encourages auto-oriented development and increases the environmental impact of development. The over-abundance of single-family zoning forces residents to drive farther and farther to get to work and the shops, and as the development pattern discourages other ways of travel, it all but requires residents of each new development to drive, putting more cars on the road. Each new development pushes farther from our town cores forcing residents to drive further. In addition to lengthening the distance of trips each auto-oriented single-family development also increases the number of vehicles on the road, meaning each mile traveled is slower and slower.

This has the effect of increasing tailpipe emissions and is a leading contributor to smog which clocks our valley in the winter.

As we can see in the graph from the New York MTA, and republished in City Lab, the amount of energy used by single-family suburban homes vastly outpaces both single-family and multifamily developments in denser, more urban environments. We see these cost savings from both the reduced transit impacts, but also from energy and construction cost savings from things like having shared walls, smaller footprints, and more walkability.

Not only are denser, and walkable communities more environmentally friendly, they are also more fiscally responsible for buyers and municipality alike, providing homeowners and renters: lower purchase prices/rents, smaller energy bills, lower building cost. For municipalities providing more efficient uses of land is a no-brainer, they increase the value of property per acre, increase tax receipts, encourage new business development (the reason Cache County doesn't have a target or Costco isn't from lack of desire but because the number of rooftops within a set space is a top factor in where they chose to locate), while decreasing the long term budget burden many communities face, by reducing

Figure 17: Household Energy Use in Compact versus Sprawling Neighborhoods: Average In-Town House Outperforms Even a “Green” Sprawl House (with Hybrid Cars)



the amount of infrastructure (infrastructure maintenance being the most expensive bill for most communities, and with future reconstruction costs holding over communities heads as a ticking time bond.

Market reports similarly indicate they are also desirable with pent up, unfulfilled demand, HUD reports show a need for 4.6 new multifamily units by 2030, this can be seen in action on the ground in Cache County with many dense developments showing long waiting lists.

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Single-Family Zoning

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Inequality Crisis

Does single-family zoning contribute to the inequality crisis? The answer to this is a resounding yes. Not only does single-family zoning make housing more expensive, but single-family residential zoning's origins are also unpleasant, it was originally intended to keep undesirable people (the poor and people of color) away from high-opportunity places. (parts of cities and communities with opportunity, parks, open spaces, access to transit and services, etc). While I'd argue that no community in Cache valley uses single-family zoning today to purposely promote inequality, it may still have that unintended consequence. Single-family zoning, particularly when paired with large lot sizes increase the cost of housing by requiring more land to be purchased to develop a unit, this requires additional infrastructure (which can cost upwards of \$550 a foot) this exponentially increases the cost of new housing. This means for many, affordable housing options can only be found on the edge of a community, or to the suburbs where land is cheaper, usually farther away from parks, shopping, services, and where commute times are longer. This also has the effect of concentrating the "have nots" in housing away from those with means, as property taxes fund schools, this means the less well-off are more likely to be relegated to underfunded schools, putting a further dampening effect on upward mobility.

Counter Claims and reaction

With the negative aspects of single-family zoning becoming fairly well known, it begs the question, of why is it still the most common residential designation nationwide? The fact is change is always unpopular, and there are many reasons why those who have benefited from single-family zoning, would want to keep it. Below we identify some common criticism of ending single-family zoning and responding to them.

- Getting rid of single-family zoning will harm home values.

This is perhaps the most common concern raised when considering a rezone to allow for multi-unit housing, so it's assumed we'd hear the same concern when considering getting rid of single-family zoning altogether. While it is not the role or responsibility of cities or planning to ensure that residential property value will increase, the results also clearly show this is simply an unfounded, unsubstantiated fear. Craig Cheatham with the Realty Alliance states that markets with multiple housing types get a boost of life, the added flexibility makes the areas more interesting and financially viable for occupants, and investors and the additional entry-level inventory boost the entire market, raising property values.

- Multifamily housing will destroy the character of the neighborhood:

This is another NIMBY classic, one that has also been shown to be inaccurate. Minneapolis removed single-family zoning in 2019, and far from seeing a massive

rush to rebuild the city, it has seen some modest proposals to add a few (under 5) tri-plexes in areas traditionally reserved for single-family residential. The development will remain market-driven, and total intensity can be tailored to fit other important criteria. What this experiment has shown us is there is a demand for missing middle housing, and that if allowed it will filter in and match with the existing built community.

We should acknowledge that it's only been a little over a year since Minneapolis made the change so maybe this is an unfair comparison. Taking a big picture view of our cities we have a lot of anecdotal evidence that this is true. Pre automobiles, most of our cities and towns were mixed-used, consequently, that's why some of our most desirable and prosperous communities are those build before the 1930s. Center Street in Logan with its mix of Mansion homes, small single-family homes, mid-rise apartment buildings, and duplexes is one example, The Avenues of Salt Lake City where small grocery stores, yoga studios, laundromats, cafes, and restaurants have prospered next to the most expensive mansions, modern gems, small 1 and 2 bedroom craftsman homes, and low to mid-rise apartment buildings is similarly one of, if not the most desirable neighborhood in Salt Lake City. That's not to say modern development can't incorporate these same principles, and perhaps no-where has done as good of a job of incorporating different housing types, mass transit, parks, and open space, and trails into a community as Daybreak on the south end of Salt Lake County, with dwelling units ranging from \$200,000 - \$1 Million + it proves that successful, vibrant communities aren't those that separate people, but those that bring them together giving space to everyone, regardless of socioeconomic status.

- Property owners have less control.

Another common refrain is perhaps the easiest of all to refute. By getting rid of single-family zoning property owners gain more flexibility and control over their property, not less. Those making this case may be lamenting the fact that they are losing control over the property rights of others.

- I don't want to live in multifamily housing.

This is a valid point, and concern our communities need to provide a wide range of housing types to be successful and meet the needs of all of our citizens. Luckily removing single-family only zoning from our zoning ordinances does nothing to prohibit the development of single-family homes, instead, it turns over future development to the market, allowing new housing to be built which meets the needs and demands of the public, so long as there is a desire for single-family homes they will continue to be built. The built evidence of tens of thousands of years shows us that this has, and will continue to be the case if we open our zoning ordinances up.

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Single-Family Zoning

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Conclusion

The development of our towns and cities, like the development of the country as a whole, is an experiment, like any other experiment, it is imperative that we examine the results, and form conclusions based on the evidence provided to us. The 100-year experiment with single-family zoning has left us with a housing affordability crisis, traffic congestion, dirty air, budgets stretched to a breaking point maintaining far-flung infrastructure, all while tracing its roots back to socioeconomic and racial discrimination. At this point, it is important to note that in the course of human development, from the time we stopped following the herds of animals across the plains to today, that development like the single-family development we see today is the

outlier, not the norm, a bold experiment that in many ways has failed to deliver the promises it is built upon. Based on its outcomes, it behooves us to challenge the status quo, and do something different, and failing to do so will yield the same results.

Luckily we also have ample evidence from the days before single-family zoning to examine, and the patterns of human development which evolved over thousands of years show quite conclusively that we can mix our housing types, shops, and places of work and create healthy vibrant places. Eliminating single-family zoning restrictions isn't going to be the silver bullet for housing affordability, or right all the wrongs of the past, or make our communities vibrant overnight, but it will allow the market to function more freely, restore property rights to property owners, and move us toward more sustainable, and proven forms of development.

Benefits of Street Trees

1. Urban trees reduce traffic speeds and reduce crashes.
2. Trees help create safer visual walls for motorists
3. Street Trees increase safety with medians
4. Trees create increased security with more pleasant walking environments
5. Treescaped streets improve business
6. Trees improve drainage infrastructure
7. Trees provide rain, sun, heat, and skin protection
8. Cities with trees reduce harm from tailpipe emissions
9. Urban trees absorb harmful pollution
10. Trees lower urban air temperatures
11. Streets with trees help lower ozone levels
12. Trees convert streets, parking and walls into more aesthetically pleasing environments
13. Urban trees soften and screen necessary street features such as utility poles, light poles, and other needed street furniture
14. Trees help reduce blood pressure and improve overall emotional and psychological health
15. Tree-lined streets improve time-in-travel perception
16. Trees help reduce road rage
17. Street trees can improve visibility of vital traffic signs
18. Trees add value to adjacent homes, businesses and tax base
19. Trees make a natural barrier for safety and fun
20. Trees act as a filtering and screening agent
21. Trees lengthen pavement life
22. Trees create a connection to nature and the human senses

