

BEYOND VS

URBAN SPRAWL



#4



AND, I NEED YOUR HELP.

OF COURSE, BEY.



MY AUNT HAS A HOMESTEAD WITH A FEW ACRES, AND THE GOVERNMENT SAID THEY MAY TAKE IT FROM HER TO BUILD A HIGHWAY.

THAT IS UNFORTUNATE.



I MEAN, CAN THEY JUST DO THAT? SHE KIND OF LIVES IN THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE, BUT APPARENTLY THE HIGHWAY WILL BE 'NECESSARY' FOR COMMUTERS.



HOW CAN I HELP?



WELL... THEY ARE HOLDING A MEETING NEXT WEEK TO GET FEEDBACK FROM THE COMMUNITY ON THE DESIGN, AND I WANT YOU TO HELP ME LEARN ALL ABOUT THIS, SO I CAN GO PREPARED.

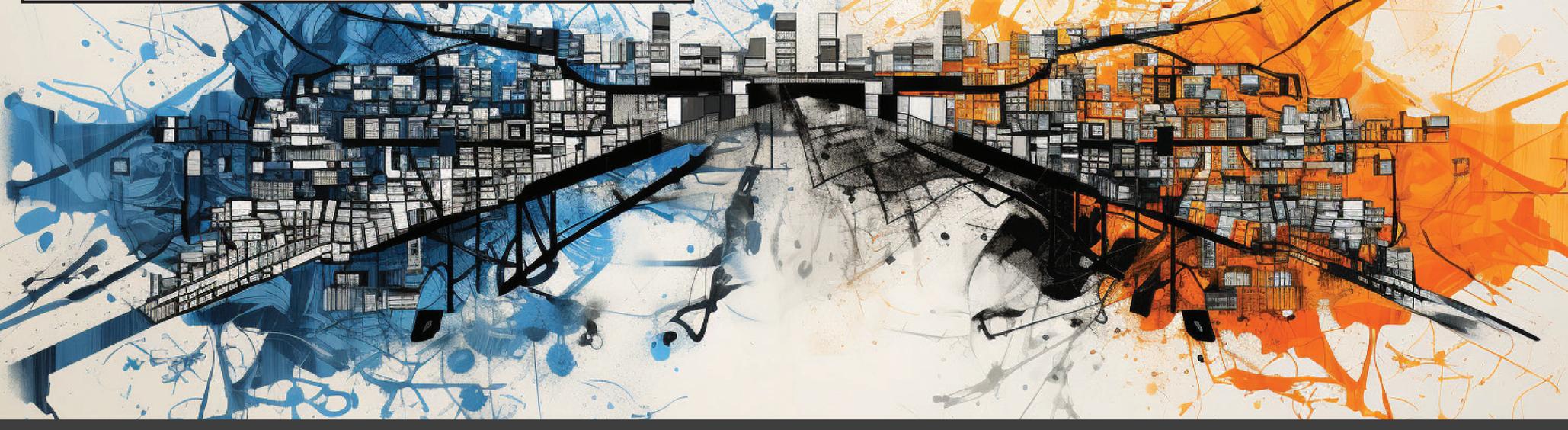
AND YOU SEEM PRETTY, UM... OBSESSED WITH TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE, SO I FIGURED YOU WOULD BE A GOOD ONE TO ASK.

I'LL TAKE THAT AS A COMPLIMENT.



WHAT IS HAPPENING WITH YOUR AUNT IS A SYMPTOM OF WHAT IS OFTEN REFERRED TO AS 'URBAN SPRAWL', WHICH IS THE UNCONTROLLED AND OFTEN POORLY PLANNED EXPANSION OF URBAN AREAS INTO SURROUNDING RURAL REGIONS.

THIS IS OFTEN CHARACTERIZED BY LOW-DENSITY DEVELOPMENT, WHICH INCLUDES SINGLE-FAMILY HOMES, SHOPPING CENTERS, AND BUSINESS PARKS THAT ARE USUALLY SPREAD OUT OVER A LARGE AREA.



URBAN SPRAWL IS TYPICALLY DEPENDENT ON THE AUTOMOBILE, AS DISTANCES BETWEEN DIFFERENT AREAS ARE TOO GREAT TO BE CONVENIENT FOR WALKING OR EVEN CYCLING. BECAUSE OF THE DISTANCE BETWEEN HOMES AND CITY CENTERS, NEW CONNECTING ROADS ARE OFTEN BUILT, WHICH IS THE CASE WITH YOUR AUNT.

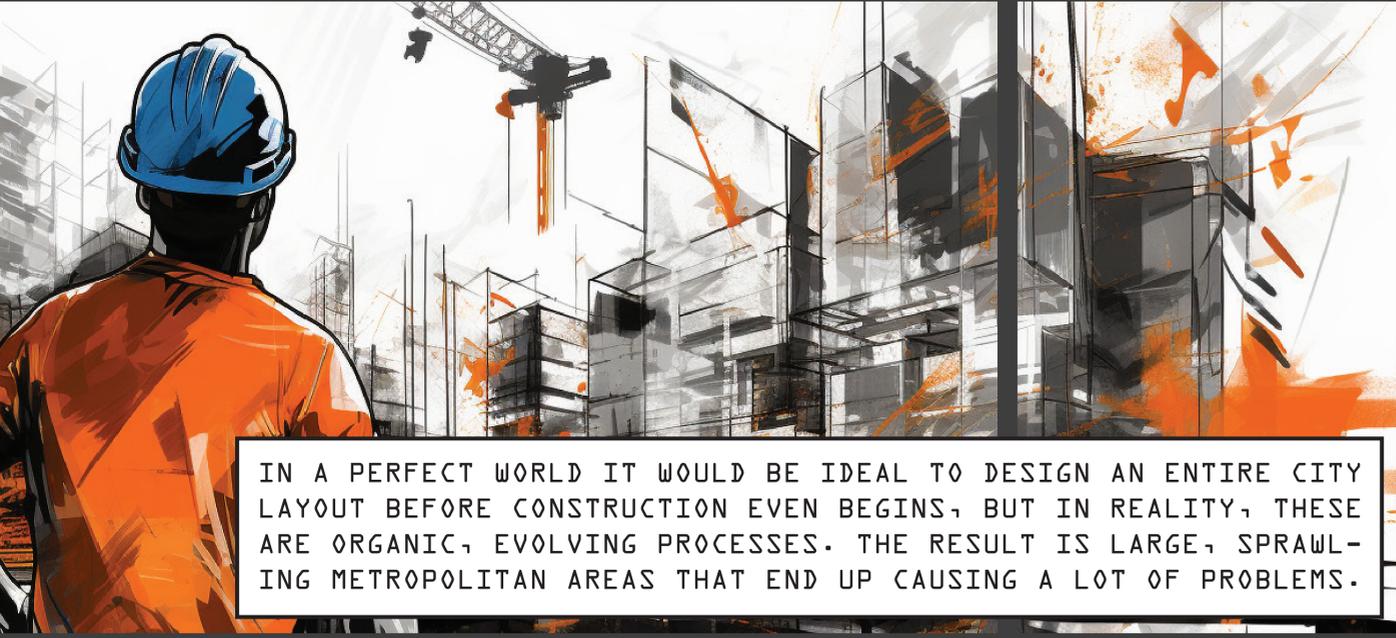


HOW DOES THIS HAPPEN? WHEN I WAS AT COLLEGE, IT SEEMED LIKE I COULD WALK EVERYWHERE I NEEDED TO GO. THEN AGAIN, I WAS LIVING IN A MORE CENTRALLY BUILT CITY.



OTHER FACTORS THAT CAUSE URBAN SPRAWL INCLUDE TAX POLICIES, LAND USE AND ZONING, AUTOMOBILE DEPENDENCE AND URBAN DECAY, JUST TO NAME A FEW.

RAPID POPULATION GROWTH IS OFTEN THE MAIN CULPRIT. WHEN CITIES GROW FASTER THAN THEY CAN BE PROPERLY PLANNED, ENGINEERS DO THE BEST THEY CAN TO CONNECT ISOLATED CENTERS USING ROADS OR OTHER FORMS OF TRANSPORTATION.



IN A PERFECT WORLD IT WOULD BE IDEAL TO DESIGN AN ENTIRE CITY LAYOUT BEFORE CONSTRUCTION EVEN BEGINS, BUT IN REALITY, THESE ARE ORGANIC, EVOLVING PROCESSES. THE RESULT IS LARGE, SPRAWLING METROPOLITAN AREAS THAT END UP CAUSING A LOT OF PROBLEMS.



LIKE WHAT?

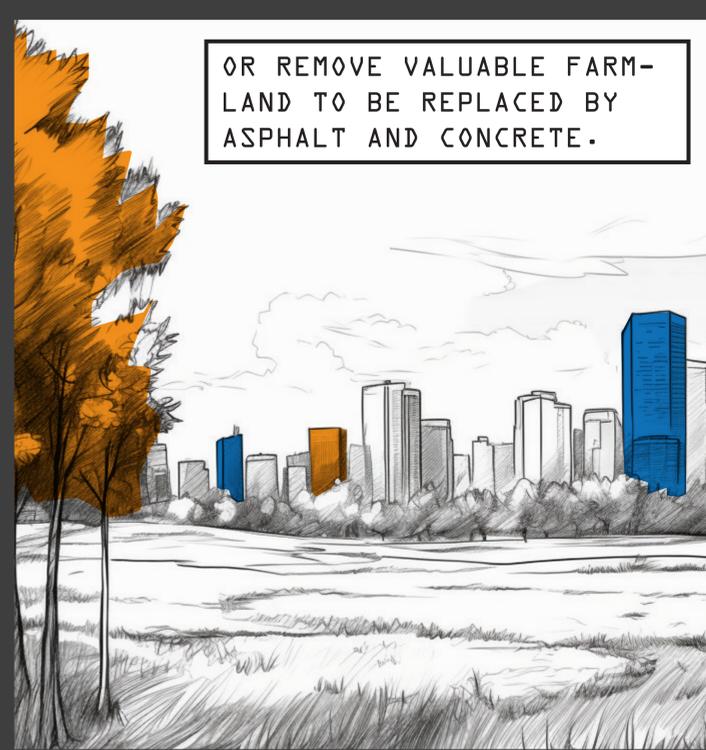
MANY OF THE WORST PARTS OF LIVING IN A CITY, INCLUDING LONG COMMUTE TIMES AND POOR AIR QUALITY FROM EXCESS TRAFFIC.



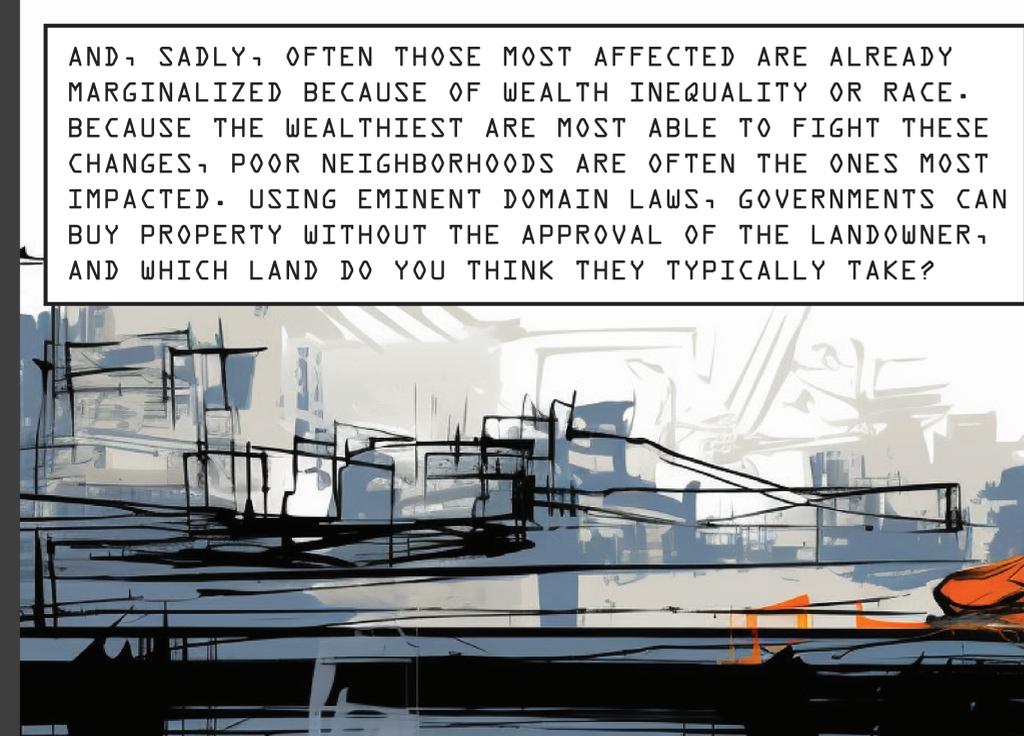
WHICH CAN LEAD TO A HOST OF NEGATIVE HEALTH EFFECTS.



URBAN SPRAWL CAN ALSO MAKE CONSTRUCTION OF INFRASTRUCTURE ELEMENTS LIKE BUILDINGS AND ROADS MORE EXPENSIVE.

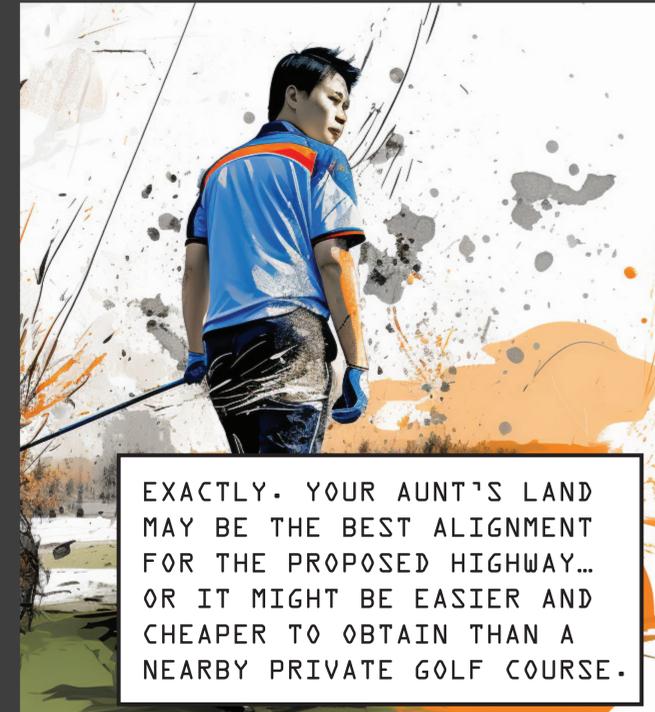


OR REMOVE VALUABLE FARM-LAND TO BE REPLACED BY ASPHALT AND CONCRETE.



AND, SADLY, OFTEN THOSE MOST AFFECTED ARE ALREADY MARGINALIZED BECAUSE OF WEALTH INEQUALITY OR RACE. BECAUSE THE WEALTHIEST ARE MOST ABLE TO FIGHT THESE CHANGES, POOR NEIGHBORHOODS ARE OFTEN THE ONES MOST IMPACTED. USING EMINENT DOMAIN LAWS, GOVERNMENTS CAN BUY PROPERTY WITHOUT THE APPROVAL OF THE LANDOWNER, AND WHICH LAND DO YOU THINK THEY TYPICALLY TAKE?

THE LAND WHERE THE POOREST PEOPLE LIVE BECAUSE IT'S THE CHEAPEST.



EXACTLY. YOUR AUNT'S LAND MAY BE THE BEST ALIGNMENT FOR THE PROPOSED HIGHWAY... OR IT MIGHT BE EASIER AND CHEAPER TO OBTAIN THAN A NEARBY PRIVATE GOLF COURSE.



THAT SOUNDS AWFUL, BUT YOU ARE PROBABLY RIGHT. SO WHAT CAN WE DO?

WELL, THE FIRST THING YOU CAN DO FOR YOUR AUNT IS TO ATTEND THE PUBLIC MEETING NEXT WEEK. BELIEVE IT OR NOT, THE ENGINEERS AND PLANNERS WORKING ON THESE PROJECTS DON'T WANT TO TAKE ANYONE'S LAND. THEY ARE FACED WITH DIFFICULT DECISIONS, AND YOU MAY BE SURPRISED BY HOW MUCH THEY LISTEN TO THE CONCERNED PUBLIC.



THE SQUEAKY WHEEL GETS THE GREASE?

SOMETHING LIKE THAT. IF YOU CAN GET INFORMED AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE- BOTH SPECIFICALLY ABOUT THAT PROJECT AND IN GENERAL ABOUT THESE ISSUES- YOU WILL BE BEST PREPARED TO HELP YOUR AUNT KEEP HER LAND.



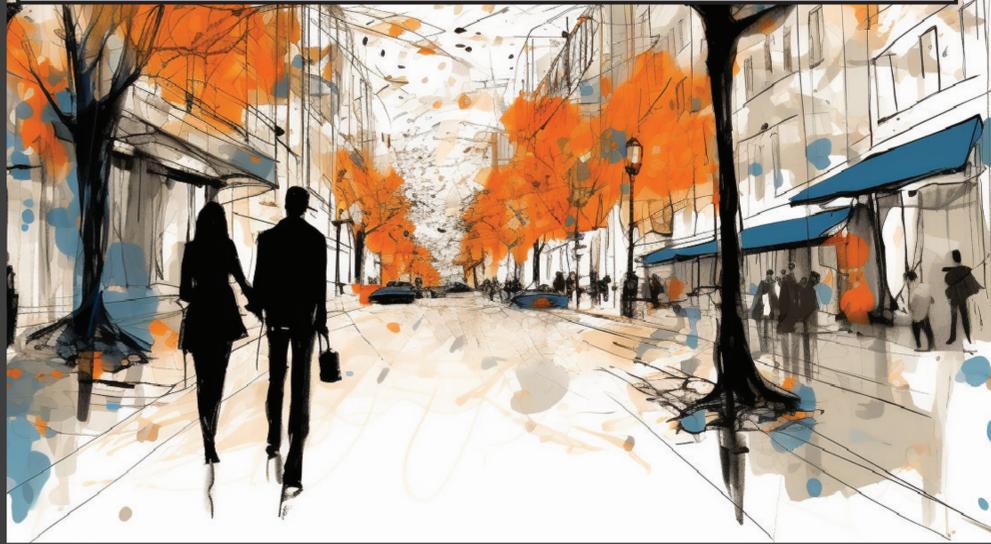
WHAT CAN BE DONE ABOUT URBAN SPRAWL IN GENERAL?

AS I MENTIONED, THESE PROBLEMS DEVELOP ORGANICALLY AND OFTEN OVER DECADES. BECAUSE OF THIS, SIGNIFICANT IMPROVEMENT WILL LIKELY TAKE A LOT OF TIME AND EFFORT.

BETTER METHODS AND STANDARDS IN URBAN AND TRANSPORTATION PLANNING ARE HELPING IDENTIFY THE ISSUES AND OFFER MORE EFFECTIVE SOLUTIONS. ENGINEERS AND PLANNERS ARE ALREADY ACTIVELY WORKING ON THESE PROBLEMS.



MANY OF THESE ISSUES INVOLVE ZONING, WHICH SEPARATES DIFFERENT TYPES OF LAND USE. CITIZENS CAN WORK TOWARDS ZONING REFORM TO ALLOW FOR MIXED-USE DEVELOPMENT FOR MORE COMPACT, WALKABLE COMMUNITIES. SMART GROWTH PRINCIPLES ALSO PROMOTE THE CREATION OF SUSTAINABLE, LIVABLE AND ECONOMICALLY VIBRANT COMMUNITIES.



URBAN GROWTH BOUNDARIES AND GREEN BELTS CAN LIMIT URBAN SPRAWL BY RESTRICTING WHERE NEW DEVELOPMENT CAN OCCUR AND HELP PROTECT NATURAL AND AGRICULTURAL LAND.



COORDINATED PLANNING AT THE REGIONAL LEVEL CAN HELP MANAGE GROWTH MORE EFFECTIVELY AND PREVENT UNCONTROLLED SPRAWL. THIS CAN INVOLVE SETTING REGIONAL GROWTH STRATEGIES, COORDINATING INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT, AND PROMOTING COOPERATION AMONG DIFFERENT MUNICIPALITIES.

EXISTING URBAN AREAS CAN ALSO BE REVITALIZED TO BE MORE ATTRACTIVE AND LIVABLE. THIS CAN INCLUDE IMPROVING PUBLIC SPACES, UPGRADING INFRASTRUCTURE AND ENCOURAGING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT.



AND DON'T FORGET THAT YOU, AND OTHERS LIKE YOU, CAN MAKE A REAL DIFFERENCE IN ALL OF THIS. AS THE PUBLIC BECOMES MORE INFORMED AND INVOLVED IN THE PLANNING PROCESS, DESIGN DECISIONS WILL BETTER REFLECT THE NEEDS AND DESIRES OF THE COMMUNITY.



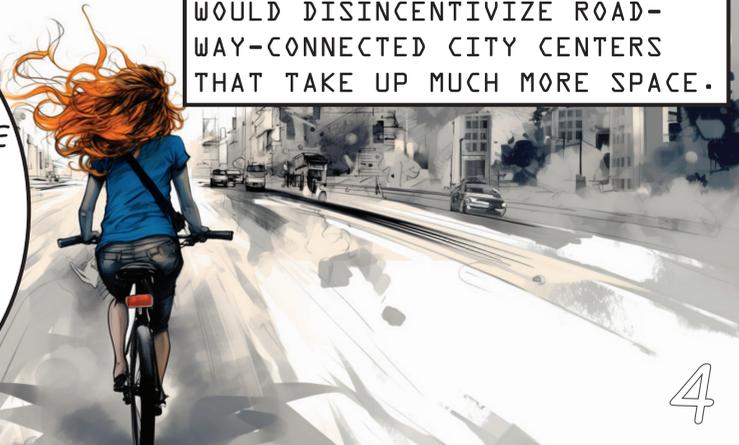
REMEMBER, MOST ENGINEERS AND PLANNERS WANT FEEDBACK FROM THE COMMUNITY. THEY ARE OFTEN FACED WITH DIFFICULT DECISIONS. IF THEY BETTER UNDERSTAND WHAT THE MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY WANT, IT CAN HELP TIP THE SCALE TOWARD A MORE WALKABLE, SUSTAINABLE FUTURE.

WHEN I FIRST HEARD ABOUT THIS, I THINK I WANTED TO GO TO THIS PUBLIC MEETING AND FIND SOMEONE TO FIGHT WITH. I GUESS IT MAKES SENSE THAT, IN MOST SITUATIONS, THESE ARE JUST REASONABLE PEOPLE DOING THEIR JOBS. IF I CAN CONNECT WITH THEM ON A PERSONAL LEVEL, I WILL PROBABLY HAVE A BETTER CHANCE OF HELPING MY AUNT.

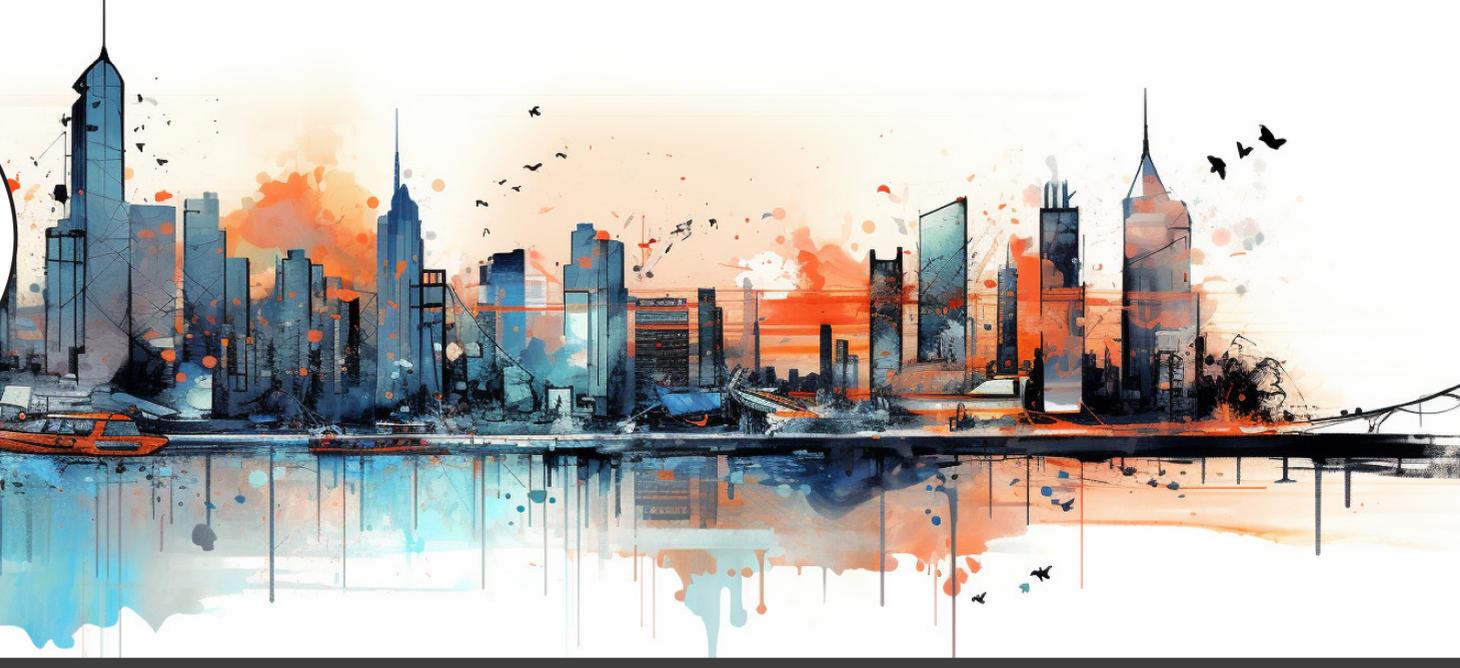
GREAT POINT.

I'VE ALSO BEEN TRYING TO LIMIT MY OWN DEPENDENCE ON DRIVING, TAKING THE COMMUTER TRAIN AND RIDING MY EBIKE MORE LATELY. IT SEEMS LIKE IF MORE PEOPLE DID THAT, THEY WOULDN'T EVEN NEED THIS FREEWAY IN THE FIRST PLACE.

THAT'S GREAT TO HEAR. AND, YOU ARE CORRECT THAT MORE USE OF PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION WOULD DISINCENTIVIZE ROADWAY-CONNECTED CITY CENTERS THAT TAKE UP MUCH MORE SPACE.



I GUESS I WISH EVERY CITY COULD BE REDESIGNED FROM SCRATCH TO BE PERFECTLY PLANNED, EQUITABLE, WALKABLE... ALL THE THINGS. BUT THAT JUST ISN'T REALITY. WE HAVE AN AMAZING, BUT IMPERFECT, WORLD BASED ON THE BRILLIANCE AND SACRIFICES OF SO MANY. IT'S OUR JOB TO MAKE THE WORLD WE HAVE A BETTER PLACE.



I COULDN'T HAVE SAID IT BETTER MYSELF.

YEAH, RIGHT.



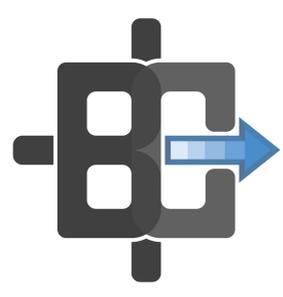
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WRITTEN BY: SAM LYTLE, PE
BRIAN SROUFE, PE
CHAT GPT

LAYOUT AND DESIGN: SAM LYTLE, PE

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