

---

## Lectures

---

# A Report on Professor Edward Ziegler's Lecture—The Future American Landscape: Urban Planning Law Reform and Sustainable Development

Caroline Baker\*

On Wednesday, April sixth, Professor Edward Ziegler presented a lecture entitled *The Future American Landscape: Urban Planning Law Reform and Sustainable Development in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* as part of the annual Colorado Journal of International Environmental Law and Policy lecture series. Professor Ziegler currently teaches at the University of Denver Sturm College of Law, has written extensively on the topic of zoning and urban planning, and has consulted on a variety of urban planning projects around the world, including working with the cities of Paris and Shanghai, and a myriad of other groups and governments internationally. He is a European Union Visiting Erasmus Scholar and has presented lectures at the University of Trento, the University of Barcelona, the Pantheon-Sorbonne University of Paris and the European Institute for Federal and Regional Studies in Blozano Italy.

The focus of Professor Ziegler's lecture at Colorado Law was the future of urban planning in the United States, specifically in the western states. The United States is, and has been, a commuter culture, where the dream of two cars in every garage is still alive and well. This means the average American is less likely, and less inclined, to seek out public transportation options, favoring instead the "freedom" of his individual automobile. Adding to this penchant for driving is an ingrained sense of

---

\* Caroline Baker is a 2012 J.D. candidate at the University of Colorado.

distrust of public transportation stemming from concerns ranging from those about public safety to unreliability. Furthermore, as American cities continue to expand outwards in a rather haphazard fashion, they outpace the development of both sufficient infrastructure to handle the ever-expanding population as well as the ability to implement effective public transportation systems. This has resulted in a present-day reality where the average American spends about thirty-four hours a year sitting in traffic, the nation is overly dependent on a unsustainable fuel source, and highways across the country are overloaded as populations explode and infrastructure implodes.

Further contributing to the continued sprawling of U.S. development is the great American migration away from cities and into single-family developments in the suburbs. This pattern not only burdens the nation's already over-taxed infrastructure but also exacerbates the environmentally unsustainable trajectory of development in the United States. The increasing number of families living in detached homes means an increase in fuel usage for heating and cooling purposes as well as an increase in emissions from those same activities and many more cars on the road. The "forty acres and a mule" ideal has led to an unsustainable reality.

Professor Ziegler demonstrated how the development of European cities, mirrored against the current situation in the United States, has contributed to their being both environmentally and developmentally sustainable despite having experienced huge rates of growth. European cities have tended to develop concentrically, radiating out from the city centers, and enabling public transportation systems to effectively serve the growing population. Furthermore, the culture of public transportation, meaning the public utilization of public transport options, has traditionally been far more successful in Europe than in the United States. Additionally, cities continue to be the primary population centers, meaning most Europeans still live in multi-family buildings, lessening average fuel consumption and increasing environmental sustainability. In fact, large cities, with vertical and not horizontal construction, continue to be the most environmentally friendly population centers in the world, with Hong Kong leading the field.

That does not mean that the idea of the single-family home has been abandoned. In China, new planned developments are being constructed with the aim of providing single-family community living outside of major metropolitan centers. However, what makes these developments more sustainable than their American counterparts, off of which they are mirrored, is their much higher population densities; their inclusion of retail, office, and housing space; the self-sustaining nature of each development; and finite parking space availability. Only one car per household is allowed. The car is parked in a communal lot on the

outskirts of the community and may not be driven within town. Furthermore, each planned community is connected to the major public transportation networks in the region with train terminals and bus stops in the center of town. Thus, these communities are able to operate in a far more sustainable manner—allowing residents to find all their basic necessities within their own development whilst still being connected to the larger metropolitan area without necessitating owning or driving a car.

Unplanned and uncontained urban sprawl in the United States affects not just the environment and infrastructure; it also affects the economy, national security, and public health. As American workers continue to waste time sitting in traffic, overall productivity suffers, as does overall health. Furthermore, the nation's continued dependence on foreign fuel sources, which is heightened by the continued growth of suburban areas and dependence on automobiles, makes the United States less secure and more vulnerable to the effects of foreign wars and economic troubles. The future of American cities is uncertain, but a little planning could go a long way towards a more sustainable and environmentally friendly future.