

Summary of Peter Calthorpe's Wellington Presentation

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Peter Calthorpe is founding Principal of Calthorpe Associates, a San Francisco-based urban design and planning firm specialising in creating communities that are diverse, mixed-use, pedestrian friendly and offer realistic housing and transportation choices. Projects undertaken range from urban infill and redevelopment plans to new towns and regional growth strategies. With over 30 years practising and lecturing in this field Calthorpe has received numerous awards for sustainable design, and is a founder of the Congress for New Urbanism (Calthorpe Associates, 2003).

Background

Historically, government agencies treated transport and land use planning independently, when in fact these two factors of human development are co-dependent: Escaping the urban problems associated with high density city living, settlers in 'New Urban Frontier' cities in Australasia and North America built detached family homes on cheap land bordering these 19th century cities. Mass transport enabled breadwinners to commute to work in the city each day. The reliable public transport systems in turn supported further expansion, turning suburbs into 'Edge Cities'.

Since the 1960s there has been growing discontent amongst residents and government officials that suburban sprawl is not the utopia it was thought to be, with general agreement that it degrades the environment, economy and quality of life. Urban renewal and intensification are promoted as solutions to reverse sprawl, its negative effect on travel, energy use, environmental and human health and to reintegrate Edge Cities with the old central cities they surround. Peter Calthorpe, advocates a regional approach to reverse the unsustainable development patterns of the last 60 years.

Regional Design

Successful regional design understands and maximises circulation patterns to enhance economic growth: Major transport routes and nodes become the skeleton around which a more sustainable region is designed. Employing 'Smart Growth' techniques within a regional design strategy enables the graceful maturation of suburbs and revitalisation of older urban neighbourhoods, thereby creating continuity in the evolution of the region. Smart Growth focuses on the long-term economic, environmental and social health of existing communities by:

- ◆ focusing new housing and commercial development within already developed areas, and preserving historic and cultural landmarks
- ◆ providing greater accessibility and mobility choices
- ◆ protecting natural habitat and watersheds
- ◆ creating safe, livable, walkable neighbourhoods that foster a greater sense of connection and responsibility
- ◆ maximising the return from public investments in existing and new infrastructure

Cities with dominant centres, like Wellington, can create a reliance on mass flows of people, energy, materials and information, causing a build up of complex infrastructures that become unable to cope with the pressure exerted on them. This pressure can be alleviated through the adoption of regional design incorporating:

- ◆ mixed-use **centres** at a neighbourhood, village, town and urban scale
- ◆ **districts** of special-use areas not appropriate for a mixed-use environment
- ◆ **preserves** of open space
- ◆ **corridors** to connect the region's centres and districts

Calthorpe illustrated this using a number of case studies from *The Regional City. Planning for the End of Sprawl* (Calthorpe et al, 2001). The Salt Lake area (Wasatch region) in Utah is considerably larger than Wellington, however the existing development patterns and transport corridors and the limitations imposed by natural growth boundaries make Salt Lake's Quality Growth Strategy a relevant case study. Salt Lake City is the strong-core city from which linear development flows (almost 160 kilometres) on a north-south axis. Regional sub-centres are positioned along the transport corridor containing motorways and an under-utilised public transport system. The four key design elements listed above are encompassed in the Quality Growth Strategy:

- ◆ Riparian corridors, wetlands, lakefront setbacks, mountains, farmlands and council-owned open space are used as a natural Urban Growth Boundary, and form the regional open-space system.
- ◆ Infill development and redevelopment in historic town centres, both incorporating higher density and mixed-use zoning, will accommodate 52 percent of the region's future housing and 57 percent of jobs.
- ◆ Greenfield developments will be undertaken on an east-west axis ensuring residents are close to key sub-centres.
- ◆ The existing public transport system will be upgraded and extended to link greenfield and redeveloped area with the region's sub-centres and Salt Lake City.

Wellington's population of around 445,000 is widely dispersed (primarily) along an established transport corridor containing both rail and road links into the strong central core of Wellington City. Incorporating the principles espoused by Calthorpe into Wellington's Regional Strategy is prudent, as it will maintain the CBD whilst revitalising older suburbs and creating safer, liveable communities with greater connections within and between the region's urban and town centres. Furthermore, a regional approach will enhance rather than replace the existing transport network, which already supports the majority of the region's urban centres.

References

- Calthorpe, P and Fulton, W (2001) *The Regional City. Planning for the End of Sprawl*, Island Press, Washington.
Calthorpe Associates (2003) [internet] available at <http://www.calthorpe.com/>, last updated 17 August 2004.

Salt Lake Area (Calthorpe & Fulton, 2001)

