

The City We All Want



**SIGNS OF
A NEW
IDENTITY**

Pennsauken Township, N.J.

In 1999, Lynn Cummings (above) stepped out to water her lawn and noticed five “for sale” signs surrounding the home an African American family had recently moved into. White flight, she realized, had come to suburban Camden, New Jersey. “Racism was happening in my neighborhood,” she said. “I didn’t know what to do. I just knew that I wanted to live in a town that reflected all the people.”

That transformative moment launched Lynn on a journey from isolation and despair to hope and action. She started canvassing her neighbors, a simple act that grew into organized groups and town hall meetings as residents developed a vision for Pennsauken, pop. 36,800. Eventually, the town established a Stable Integration Board to oversee real-estate transactions and other efforts, and a multicultural community has flourished.

Pennsauken’s story of intentional integration is featured in the PBS series *The New Metropolis*. That film, the new book, *Breakthrough Communities*, and the civic engagement work of Carl Anthony and myself are helping cities throughout the United States to mobilize for sustainability and justice.

M. Paloma Pavel, founder of Breakthrough Communities and president of Earth House Center, is editor of *Breakthrough Communities: Sustainability and Justice in the Next American Metropolis* (MIT Press, 2009). www.BreakthroughCommunities.info

www.YesMagazine.org/breakthroughcommunities
Tips for intentional integration in your community

Carl Anthony

The first American metropolises emerged after World War II, the result of a publicly subsidized mass exodus of white populations that coincided with the migration of blacks from the cotton and sugar fields of the American South to the cities of the North and West. Over the years, segregation in housing and in education increased, and today the nation’s public schools are more segregated than they were decades ago.

Beginning just two years after the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision declared segregated schools illegal, the National Interstate and Defense Highways Act, combined with earlier federal housing policies, encouraged the flight of whites from the nation’s cities to the suburbs. These public investments in highway construction, combined with racially restrictive mortgage-lending programs and redlining of black and integrated neighborhoods, created racially exclusive communities. Since then, poverty has increased and become more concentrated in many of the nation’s cities, older suburbs, and rural places.

Now, climate change presents an opportunity to make over our communities in terms of land use, transportation, and racial and social justice. In the 45 years since the publication of Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*, the environmental and environmental justice movements have become part of the national consciousness. Concerns such as pollution, destruction of habitat, long commutes, rising energy costs, and global warming stem from the runaway patterns of sprawl and metropolitan development. Beginning in the 1990s, profound inequities emerged between older and newer suburban communities as development of farmland—requiring new infrastructure and shopping facilities—drew populations toward the metropolitan fringe.

A recent Urban Land Institute report points out that the United States has little chance to reduce CO₂ production without changes in current development and transportation patterns. By shifting away from suburban sprawl toward more compact, mixed-use development, people

to Live In

would drive less, thus cutting down greenhouse-gas emissions. The authors calculate that shifting 60 percent of new growth to compact patterns would save 79 million tons of CO₂ annually by 2030.

There is a risk, however, that such policies may resegregate our metropolitan regions in new ways. The high-speed rail and pedestrian communities so attractive to upper-income people may drain transportation resources from lower-income communities and drive up the value of land, making affordable housing hard to find. Land-use changes already underway threaten to transform American metropolitan regions into a pattern typical of developing countries: The rich live in the core cities, while the poor live on the periphery.

It is time to address spatial apartheid in the United States. Society shapes its cities, and our cities in turn shape us. But when it comes to making decisions about the shape of our cities, communities of color historically have not participated in proportion to their numbers. Such decisions are routinely made by society's most powerful—businesses, upper-income families, and elected officials—who lack the consciousness and incentive to consider the impact of their decisions on vulnerable populations.

But if African Americans and other communities of color participate in the planning process, society could overcome the legacy of racism, and healthy, socially just, multiracial communities could flourish. All residents should have access to good jobs, real transportation choices, safe and stable housing, a good education, a range of parks and natural areas, vibrant public spaces, and healthful, regionally produced foods. The benefits and burdens of growth and change should be equitably shared. All residents and communities should have the opportunity to be involved as full and equal partners in public decision making. ●

Carl Anthony, founder of Breakthrough Communities, was acting director of the Ford Foundation's worldwide programs on the environment and community development. He founded San Francisco's Urban Habitat Program and the *Race, Poverty, and Environment Journal*.

10 LAND-USE STRATEGIES TO CREATE SOCIALLY JUST, MULTIRACIAL CITIES

- 1. DEVELOP A WIDELY SHARED**, long-range vision for social justice, and set targets. Advocates for climate-change policies have proposed CO₂ reduction targets by 2050. Social-justice advocates should set targets for poverty reduction for the same year.
- 2. FIND WAYS TO MEET** the short-term survival needs of marginalized communities while generating longer-term outcomes that benefit society as a whole. For example, invest in projects that meet the urgent transportation needs of low-income residents while building toward a world-class public transportation system for all.
- 3. AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO SPRAWL**, create public policies to stabilize, reinvest in, and redevelop older inner-ring suburban communities and encourage economic and racial diversity.
- 4. MANAGE VACANT PROPERTIES** consistently with principles of social justice and CO₂ reduction. Transit-accessible vacant buildings can be acquired, held, and managed by nonprofit housing groups in ways that pre-empt speculation and promote community stability. Vacant buildings in newer suburbs can be adapted to community uses such as day-care centers, reducing local transportation needs.
- 5. REPLACE AGING OR UNDERUTILIZED** commercial strips with revitalized corridors that link inner cities and older suburbs through public transportation. These sites, with pedestrian-friendly, tree-lined boulevards, are ideal for mixed-income housing, with opportunities for small, locally owned businesses and community organizations.
- 6. SET ASIDE 20 PERCENT** of new residential development for affordable housing and promote transit-oriented development—residential or commercial projects that are high-density, walkable, and close to public transportation. A commitment to affordable housing and community services in these popular developments can dampen the effects of gentrification.
- 7. BUILD AND STRENGTHEN** social-justice institutions committed to regional equity, and link them all in powerful statewide and national networks.
- 8. REDUCE THE PATTERNS OF CONCENTRATED WEALTH** and concentrated poverty in neighborhoods. Create opportunities for affordable housing in privileged and job-rich neighborhoods and, with the help of community-based organizations accountable to residents, develop middle- and upper-income housing in poorer neighborhoods.
- 9. ADVOCATE METROPOLITAN GROWTH STRATEGIES** that systematically reduce health disparities between vulnerable communities and middle- and upper-class society.
- 10. CREATE OPPORTUNITIES** for communities of color and other marginalized populations to participate in new business-improvement districts, regional collaborations, and governance structures promoting sustainable metropolitan development. — *Carl Anthony*