



American Planning Association
New York Metro Chapter

Making Great Communities Happen

To the Editor:

In Nicolai Ouroussoff's *In Arabian Desert, a Sustainable City Rises* (Critic's Notebook September 25) he notes, "Ever since the notion that thoughtful planning could improve the lot of humankind died out, sometime in the 1970s, both the megarich and the educated middle classes have increasingly found solace by walling themselves off inside a variety of mini-utopias." This statement is shortsighted, focusing on individual failures while ignoring planning's long history of success. Mr. Ouroussoff should be pleased to know that there has been a resurgence in 'thoughtful planning' and a trend away from gated communities and unsustainable development practices.

While some communities have "found solace in walling themselves off," the most significant trend in the past two decades has been the increase of mixed-population, mixed-use communities, where all members of society interact. Proof is found in the growing population of our cities compared with our suburbs and rural lands, and in the economic resilience of neighborhoods with diverse populations and uses. In fact, in North America, Canadian cities now incorporate over 80 per cent of total population due in no small part to the attractiveness, economy-of-scale, and multiculturalism of urban centers. Further, it is no small coincidence that planners from China, India, Brazil and other rapidly growing economies are today forging partnerships with planners in North America and Europe to exchange ideas and learn best practices for building sustainable communities and manage precious resources.

The 40,000 worldwide members of the American Planning Association can attest that our thoughtful planning has improved the lot of humankind. We invite you to join us in these efforts, instead of dismissing them.

Planners are uniquely positioned to help address the needs of all, and emphasize the integration of our racial, economic, and social groups to the betterment of our communities. We employ our skills to improve the elements of society, including housing, transportation, schools, work places, parks, infrastructure, retail centers, and commercial and industrial areas. Economic and social considerations are taken into account during the planning process. Our vision is one of vital communities, fully accessible to all people, with healthy, safe places to live and work, and public officials and citizens who actively participate in making the choices that determine their future.

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for the Executive Committee
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