

STEWARDSHIP, SUSTAINABILITY, AND CITIES

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The automobile has provided extraordinary mobility, contributed to prosperity, and shaped the American landscape. Cul-de-sacs in sprawling suburban neighborhoods featuring spacious homes with three-car garages on large landscaped lots define the American Dream. Increasingly, academicians, public officials, and public interest groups question whether the design of our communities and levels of consumption are healthy, desirable,

or sustainable. Suburban sprawl—generally defined as the conversion of agricultural lands and open space on the urban fringe to low-density, segregated-use development (tract housing, office parks, big-box retail and strip malls) largely accessible only by automobile—contrasts with traditional, pre-World War II urban development (higher density, mixed-use, walkable neighborhoods).¹

What are the public health, social, economic, and environmental impacts of suburban sprawl? Does automobile-dependent suburban sprawl provide a sustainable model which other cultures and countries should emulate? This chapter examines the impacts of suburban sprawl—whether it represents a sustainable model for developing countries—and illustrates how the teachings of Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, and other early Church leaders regarding building Zion provide inspiration and guidance for building stronger, more sustainable communities in the United States and abroad.

Adverse Impacts of Suburban Sprawl

Governors of many states have recognized the adverse impacts of suburban sprawl. California governor Arnold Schwarzenegger campaigned on promises to rebuild blighted urban centers and curtail government-subsidized, “fiscally unsustainable sprawl.”² During his campaign, Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney promised “to make it more difficult for developers to gobble up these green spaces and . . . [to] prevent sprawl by directing new development into infrastructure-rich areas, not on green space.”³ Former New Jersey governor and EPA administrator Christine Todd Whitman stated, “Suburban sprawl is eating up open space, creating mind-boggling traffic jams, bestowing on us endless strip malls and housing developments, and consuming an ever-increasing share of our resources.”⁴ A Pew Center national opinion poll concluded that of local issues, Americans worried more about sprawl and traffic congestion than they did about crime, education, and jobs.⁵ The problems associated with suburban sprawl of concern to elected officials and citizens are discussed below.

Automobile dependency and sprawl. In most metropolitan areas of the country, the number of automobiles has increased at a rate significantly higher than population growth. While the national population grew by 49 percent from 1960 to 1997, the number of automobiles increased by 181 percent.⁶ The rate of driving single-occupancy vehicles (measured as “vehicle miles traveled”) also increased nationally by 41 percent from 1970 to 1993. In Utah, vehicle miles traveled has increased 52 percent from 1991 to 2001.⁷

Not surprisingly, increased drivers and rates of driving resulted in increased traffic congestion. The average commuter in the United States spends an average of seventy-two minutes a day behind the wheel and fifty-one hours a year stalled in traffic.⁸ In southern California, transportation planners warn of a nearing complete failure of the highway system as traffic can now barely move no matter what time of day.⁹ Despite significant investment in new highways

around the country, traffic congestion continues to worsen in both large and small cities around the country.¹⁰

Most major metropolitan areas have sought to decrease congestion and accommodate those real estate developments in more distant suburbs by building new freeways and expanding existing freeways. While adding highway capacity may relieve traffic congestion in the short term, it may actually increase congestion and suburban sprawl in the long term:

Most major cities that built extensive freeways then found that this process spread out land use and generated more and more traffic, until very soon after completion the freeways were already badly congested. The obvious response to the failure of freeways to cope with traffic congestion is to suggest that still more roads are urgently needed. The new roads are then justified again on technical grounds in terms of time, fuel, and other perceived savings to the community from eliminating congestion. This sets in motion a vicious circle of self-fulfilling prophecy of congestion, road building, sprawl, congestion and more road building. Automobile dependence is inevitable in such traffic engineering. Awareness of this phenomenon, called induced or generated traffic, is now much more common in the literature. In fact, traffic is now being referred to not as a liquid that flows where it is directed, but as a gas that expands to fill all available space.¹¹

Former Maryland governor Parris Glendening summarized: “We cannot fool ourselves—or the public—any longer. We can no longer build our way out of our highway congestion problems. It is not an environmentally or financially feasible solution.”¹² As congestion increases, more people flee to farther suburbs attracted by new, less-expensive subdivisions and less traffic congestion even though commuting time increases. Soon, however, their quiet subdivision on the urban edge becomes surrounded with new subdivisions and strip malls to accommodate others fleeing urban centers. To address traffic increases, more roads and highways are

constructed and people flee to even more remote suburbs and longer commutes. Thus, automobile dependency functions as both a cause and a symptom of suburban sprawl.

Some metropolitan areas, most notably Portland, Oregon, have largely broken the sprawl-congestion cycle by imposing urban growth boundaries, investing extensively in mass transit, particularly commuter rail and light rail, and steering redevelopment of urban centers. Portland has reduced the rate of increase of vehicle miles traveled, while at the same time reducing air pollution and increasing population and economic growth.¹³

Societal impacts. Increased driving and sprawl growth patterns result in various societal impacts. Professor Robert Putnam of the Harvard School of Public Policy observed that “more time spent alone in the car means less time for friends and neighbors, for meetings, for community projects, and so on.” Based on his extensive research, Professor Putnam concluded that sprawl “associated with increasing social segregation, and social homogeneity appears to reduce incentives for civic involvement, as well as opportunities for social networks that cut across class and racial lines.”¹⁴

Perhaps the most extreme form of suburban sprawl—gated communities—have increased in popularity in the United States and around the world, allowing the upper middle class to sequester themselves behind security gates from those of a different economic class and often race. Approximately twenty thousand gated communities exist in the United States, housing an estimated eight million residents.¹⁵ Gated communities exacerbate social alienation, economic and racial segregation, and metropolitan fragmentation. They have come to symbolize the “anti neighborhood.”

Economic impacts. Sprawl development threatens long-term sustainable economic growth in a variety of ways. First, the increased capital costs for building roads, sewers, and drinking water lines for lower density development in re-

mote locations places a burden on taxpayers who in essence subsidize sprawl. The increased taxes and impact fees generated from new development in the urban edge rarely pays for itself.¹⁶ Second, knowledge-based companies and their employees insist on quality of life, including environmental quality, as the most important criterion for locating and expanding operations—even above housing affordability, cost of living, and climate, according to recent studies.¹⁷ Poor air quality, traffic congestion, loss of agricultural lands and open space, and uncontrolled sprawl degrade the quality of life, making it more difficult for some cities to attract and maintain high-tech businesses and their skilled work force. Third, rapid suburbanization of the urban fringe and urban blight “are mirror images of the same phenomenon,” according to a report issued by the National Governors Association.¹⁸ As the more affluent flee to the suburbs, the less affluent are left behind, creating a cycle of depreciating property values in the urban core and causing still more middle-class residents to flee. Inner-city schools deteriorate, inner-city businesses close, and welfare roles and crime increase, further burdening municipal governments.¹⁹

Public health impacts. The Centers for Disease Control identified poor urban design, suburban sprawl, and automobile dependency as major factors contributing to obesity, respiratory and heart disease, diabetes, and pedestrian fatalities. The convenience offered by automobiles and the lack of pedestrian access to schools, shopping, and the workplace have resulted in a 42 percent decline in trips taken on foot by the average American adult between 1975 and 1995. Between 1986 and 1998, obesity among American children doubled, leading public health professionals to characterize America as a “Couch Potato Society.”²⁰ Moreover, air pollution results from automobile dependency. In many metropolitan areas, including Salt Lake City, more than half of the air emissions of various pollutants originate from automobiles.²¹ In 1997 alone, smog was responsible for over 6,000,000 asthma attacks, 159,000

emergency room visits, and 53,000 hospitalizations.²² The CDC report concludes that

land use decisions are just as much public health decisions as are decisions about food preparations. . . . We must be alert to the health benefits, including less stress, lower blood pressure and overall improved physical and mental health, that can result when people live and work in accessible, safe, well-designed, thoughtful structures and landscapes. . . . As America increasingly becomes a nation that permits and even encourages thoughtless development and unmanaged growth, the impact of these factors grows clearer and we ignore them at our peril.²³

Environmental and land use impacts. As with the increase of vehicle miles traveled, the rate of the consumption of prime agricultural lands, open space, and wildlife habitat has occurred at a rate significantly higher than the rate of population growth. While the population in the United States grew by 17 percent from 1982 to 1997, developed land in metropolitan areas increased by 47 percent.²⁴ In the Phoenix metropolitan area alone, consumption of open space is estimated at one acre per hour.²⁵ While the population of the Los Angeles metropolitan area grew by 45 percent from 1970 to 1990, the amount of developed land increased by 300 percent.²⁶ Nationally three million acres of farmland, forest, and other open space are lost to suburban sprawl each year.²⁷ Loss of prime farmland is particularly troubling given the issue of “food security” — the more dependence on imported agricultural products, the more susceptible we are to possible disruptions in the food supply.

Even though fewer Americans live off the land than ever before, Americans use and occupy four to five times more land per person than they did forty years ago. The landmass developed and open space consumed by suburban sprawl have increased at staggering rates in significant part because the average residential lot and commercial parking lot size continues to grow at significantly higher rates than the population, while population density of residential areas per

square mile continues to fall. Since 1994, nationwide housing lots over ten acres in size have accounted for approximately 55 percent of the land developed.²⁸

In addition to inefficient land use, sprawl development disrupts the natural hydrologic cycles as vast paved areas retard groundwater recharge while straining storm water conveyance systems.²⁹ Moreover, approximately half of the annual destruction of wetlands results from sprawl development and highway construction.³⁰ Sprawl development also increases water consumption. Utah, the second driest state, has the nation’s highest per capita water consumption (293 gallons compared to the national average of 190 gallons per year), owing to Utah’s heavily subsidized water supply, penchant for lawn, large lot sizes, and unrestrained growth.³¹ Remarkably, Utah municipalities perform no regional urban planning even though 80 percent of the population live in metropolitan areas along the Wasatch Front, making Utah one of the most urbanized states in the nation.³²

Aesthetic impacts. During the “City Beautiful” movement (1890s to 1920s), planners and architects such as Daniel Burnham sought to design cities, civic centers, and public spaces as a form of civic art to be enjoyed for generations. Cities that benefited from the movement include Washington DC with its Mall and numerous memorials and Salt Lake City’s Liberty and Pioneer Parks and historic City and County Building.³³ James Kunstler in *Home from Nowhere* asserts that prior to 1945, urban planners and architects in the United States planned cities and public buildings with an emphasis on aesthetics and permanence:

The buildings they constructed paid homage to history in their design, . . . they paid respect to the future through sheer expectation that they would endure through the lifetimes of the people who built them. They therefore evinced a sense of chronological connectivity . . . [which] lends meaning and dignity to our . . . lives [and] puts in touch with the holy.³⁴

After World War II, however, planners no longer focused on making cities beautiful, particularly from the vantage of the pedestrian, but designed residential and commercial space and even government buildings, universities, and great institutions largely to accommodate the automobile. Kunstler suggests that the increasing popularity of the automobile led to “the wholesale abandonment of the cities, the adoption of a view that led ultimately to the extreme separation of uses and the perversities of contemporary zoning laws, and the establishment of the anti-city known as suburbia. It was a view of the city as a place fit only for work and vice, and of the suburb as the exclusive realm of the home.”³⁵ Kunstler posits that since 1945 urban design largely lost much of its dignity and appeal leading to cultural impoverishment:

The antithesis to this can be seen in the way we have built things since 1945. We reject the past and the future and it shows in our graceless constructions. Our houses, commercial and civic buildings are constructed with the fully conscious certainty that they will disintegrate in a few decades. . . . This process of disconnection from the past and the future, . . . all done for the sake of expedience, ends up diminishing us spiritually, impoverishing us socially, and degrading the aggregate set of cultural patterns that we call civilization. . . . Our streets used to be charming and beautiful.³⁶

Thoughtful planning, elegantly executed using materials that will endure, has benefits beyond the aesthetic, however important. Dr. Richard Jackson of the Centers for Disease Control links maintaining attractive, aesthetically pleasing surroundings with mental and physical health: “Attractive, naturalized settings encourage engagement, mental refreshment and exercise. Buildings can be designed to provide light, clean air, and opportunities for physical activity. Communities can be designed with pleasing, safe public places to enhance social contact.”³⁷

Loss of sense of place. A report issued by the American Planning Association concluded, a “frequent observation is that American commu-

nities, particularly the newer ones, no longer provide a ‘sense of place.’”³⁸ A “sense of place” reflects the tangible and intangible features of a community that make it special and distinct from other places. Tangible features relate to distinctive architecture and the setting of a place in relation to the environment. Intangible features comprise local traditions, folklore, and social relationships within the community. Sprawl development destroys the physical environment and views that contribute to the tangible features and create a sense of place. Loss of prime agricultural and wildlife habitat constitutes a permanent loss of a regional amenity that has often given generations of residents a sense of connection to the land. Moreover, homogenous subdivisions and strip malls in one part of the country generally are indistinguishable from those in any other part of the country. Those who inhabit bedroom suburbs far from the city core often have little connection with either the suburb or the central city and have little time to build social relationships that foster the intangible factors that help build a sense of place.

Automobile Dependency and Sprawl: The New Global Development Standard?

“Sustainable development” has increasingly preoccupied nations and the international community. In 1992, 160 nations, including the United States, met in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, or “Earth Summit.” This gathering culminated in the “Rio Declaration,” an international agreement that included two sustainable development goals:

The right of development must be fulfilled so as to equitably meet developmental and environmental needs of present and future generations.³⁹

To achieve sustainable development and a higher quality of life for all people, States should reduce and eliminate unsustainable patterns of production and consumption and promote appropriate demographic policies.⁴⁰

The year these goals were adopted by the international community, America, with only 5 percent of the world's population, consumed 24 percent of the world's energy production and 30 percent of the world's raw materials. Of course, these goals are aspirational and nonbinding. The United States, other developed countries, and developing countries have done little to implement them. Since 1992, America's energy consumption has increased 21 percent, materials consumption has increased 10 percent, and carbon dioxide emissions (which contribute to global climate change) have increased over 13 percent.⁴¹

Developing countries appear to be emulating America's automobile dependency, suburban sprawl growth patterns, and levels of consumption, notwithstanding the societal ills they bring. Currently, there are three automobiles for every four Americans. If the average person in China consumed the same amount of oil as the average American, China alone would consume the world's entire annual production of oil. If China achieves the same automobile ownership levels as Japan, which has one car for every two people, China's automobile fleet will grow from 13 million cars today to 640 million.⁴² China has embarked on an extraordinary expansion of its domestic auto-manufacturing industry, hoping to expand automobile ownership in China and flood the U.S. market with inexpensive automobiles.⁴³ In addition, China has devoted enormous resources to increasing its highway capacity by a remarkable 9 percent a year in some metropolitan areas, paving over historic neighborhoods thousands of years old. In China, big box chains such as Wal-Mart have built stores near new highway interchanges, putting Chinese enterprises out of business. Meanwhile, China's bicycle industry has suffered with some of its largest manufacturers on the verge of collapse.⁴⁴

Cities of Tomorrow

In 1950 only 86 cities in the world had populations in excess of 1 million. Today over 400

exist. Currently nearly half the world's population (3 billion people) resides in cities of over 500,000 people. Another 1.5 billion live in urban areas under 500,000 people. An estimated 19 "megacities" (populations over 10 million people) currently exist. Most of the increase in the world's population will occur in large urban centers in developing countries. Demographers at the United Nations estimate that by 2030, over 60 percent, or 8.1 billion people, will reside in cities. By 2025, Asia alone could have three "hypercities" (populations over 20 million people): Jakarta, Dhaka, and Karachi.⁴⁵ Africa will soon have more than seventy cities with populations over 1 million people. According to David Harvey of the Megacities Foundation, if these urban centers in developing countries are not made stable and sustainable, we will have "a deadly mixture of concentrated poverty, social strife, violence, wasteful consumerism and crumbling infrastructure . . . a dystopian nightmare in which all that is judged worst in the fatally flawed character of humanity collects together in one hell-hole of despair."⁴⁶

Governments and public interest groups at all levels have begun to address how to improve the function, livability, and sustainability of cities of the future. Local groups and municipal planning agencies sponsor workshops on "smart growth" to educate developers, elected officials, and citizens regarding the benefits of transit-oriented development (dense, mixed-use development near transit stations) and pedestrian-friendly urban design. For example, Envision Utah, a partnership of government and business leaders, has advocated a "quality growth strategy" to shift transportation priorities from highway-capacity expansion to greater reliance on transit to meet future travel demand and to create more sustainable, walkable communities.⁴⁷ Nationally, the Environmental Protection Agency has published guidance documents endorsing smart growth principles, while the State Department has published a series of information programs which make the case for smart growth domestically and

internationally.⁴⁸ The United Nations has established a “Sustainable Cities Programme” to disseminate information and expertise on achieving sustainable urban growth and development, particularly in megacities in developing countries.

Underlying smart growth and sustainable cities efforts is the principle that when people live in more compact urban communities, they can use fewer resources, recycle more materials, utilize energy more efficiently, and generally decrease the size of each person’s “ecological footprint” compared to more widely dispersed populations. However, a shift to smaller homes, more use of mass transit, and lower levels of consumption requires substantial changes in individual behavior and values usually motivated by profound ethical or religious conviction.

Role of Religion in Building Sustainable Cities

In his essay “Engaging Religion in the Quest for a Sustainable World,” Gary Gardner observed that “spiritual traditions—from large, centralized religions to local tribal spiritual authorities are beginning to devote energy to what some see as the defining challenge of our age: the need to build just and environmentally healthy societies.”⁴⁹ This movement, he notes, “could help heal the centuries-old rift in the West between religion and the sciences” and provide “moral authority” and “sacred meaning” to “guide us to a socially just and environmentally sustainable future.”⁵⁰ Three examples of religious principles that bear on building sustainable, livable cities follow.

First, the concept of stewardship, a central doctrine in many religious traditions, especially Latter-day Saint theology, has increasingly been recognized as critical to protecting both the environment and ensuring quality of life for current and future generations. In *God’s Last Offer: Negotiating for a Sustainable Future*, Ed Ayers argues that humankind at this particular juncture of history has the scientific knowledge and technological tools necessary to ensure a stable, sustainable

world for future generations. Unfortunately, “civil planners and economists still talk about ‘growth’ as an unmitigated good . . . without accounting for how it can be supported in the long term.”⁵¹ This is largely because “the wealthy have abandoned the poor, and in doing so they’ve embraced the doctrine that they should abandon the idea of a common good. . . . Abandonment of public stewardship—has become pervasive.”⁵² Unless humankind exercises better stewardship regarding the consumption of the earth’s resources, land-use patterns, and transportation, Ayers maintains that disparity between the rich and poor may result in an “ecological catastrophe” that could put humankind’s survival at risk.⁵³ Personal and collective responsibility and stewardship grounded in both science and religion are necessary to avert such disaster.

Second, the care and craftsmanship of urban design, public edifices, and residential dwellings possess an aesthetic dimension that exalts the human spirit and has profound spiritual implications to the way we relate to our surroundings and to each other. We begin to view our homes, neighborhoods, and the earth we inhabit as sacred. James Kunstler explains:

It is the effort that human beings make to put the marks of skill and love on the artifacts they leave behind that ennobles us in the face of life’s tragic nature, and lifts us close to the domain of angels. To behold a beautiful building, or a beautiful painting, or a beautiful garden made by someone now dissolved in time, and to be moved by these things, is to experience a residue of skill and love expended in the face of certain destruction. . . . We ought to know how to assemble a human habitat of high quality that . . . promotes a sense of belonging to a community, that honors what is beautiful, and which does not destroy its rural and agricultural surroundings. . . . We are going to need places that are worth dwelling in, from which we won’t feel compelled to escape every moment we are not working.⁵⁴

Third, the concept and lexicon of “building Zion” and “fleeing Babylon” constitute an

important religious tradition supportive of building sustainable cities. Peter Newman and Jeffrey Kenworthy, professors of urban planning, note in *Sustainability and Cities* that the concept of a Zion community lies deep in “the Western spiritual tradition” in which “the elements of city death are associated with greed and arrogant isolationism (these are usually called Babylon), and the elements of city life are associated with peace and community vitality (these are usually called Zion).”⁵⁵ Thus, Zion can be viewed as the physical design and cultural attributes of the ideal city or community striving for divine acceptance and the common good, while Babylon exemplifies a society that even though economically prosperous, encourages “each individual to walk in his own way, to trust in and be rewarded by the strength of his own arm” and thereby departs from God’s will.⁵⁶

Latter-day Saint Theology and Building Zion

Given that religious tradition and theology can legitimately inform and inspire public policy and assist decision makers in making value judgments, the values and doctrines underlying the city of Zion and the historical attempts by the early Mormons to build a Zion community provide inspiration and sound principles as relevant today as when they were first taught. Unfortunately, the rich legacy of urban planning, community building and environmental stewardship adhered to by the early Saints is not now widely known.

City of Zion. In Latter-day Saint theology, the city of Zion represents a specific place and an ideal. As a location, Joseph Smith revealed the place for the city of Zion as Jackson County, Missouri, where the Saints would gather and construct a temple in preparation for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ (see D&C 57:1–3). In addition, Zion constitutes a condition and attitude of a people that are “pure in heart” (see D&C 97:21), and of “one mind, and [dwell] in righteousness” with “no poor among them” (Moses 7:18). Build-

ing the city of Zion required the requisite spirituality and unity of purpose as well as the right urban design. In 1833 the Prophet Joseph Smith prepared and delivered to Bishop Edward Partridge a plat with detailed descriptions of the physical dimensions and layout of the new city to be built in Missouri. The plat and its margin notes included the following design features:

- ✿ The city was to be divided into a square grid pattern.
- ✿ Central blocks were reserved for ecclesiastical buildings.
- ✿ Specific blocks were reserved for public buildings—storehouses, schools, and parks.
- ✿ The city was divided into ecclesiastical districts called wards, resulting in the possible creation of social units or neighborhoods.
- ✿ Individual family lots were regulated relative to the siting of dwellings and the enhancement of the community.
- ✿ An agricultural greenbelt was to be created.
- ✿ Barns, corrals, and heavy industry were to be located on the periphery of the city.⁵⁷

Brigham Young University Professor Mark Hamilton explained that “when the city reached its optimum population of 15,000 to 20,000, satellite communities of the same size and pattern would be created in order to accommodate expected growth.”⁵⁸

Driven from Missouri by mobs, the early Saints never built the city of Zion in Jackson County. Joseph Smith revealed that as a “consequence of the transgressions of my people, it is expedient in me that mine elders should wait a little season for the redemption of Zion” (D&C 105:9). Nevertheless, in each locality in which they settled, including Salt Lake City, the Saints designed and built each community based on adaptations of the city of Zion plat. In recognition of the visionary urban design, which included many modern features of “smart growth” such as compactness, mixed development, and preservation of appropriate open space, in 1996 the American Institute of Certified Planners awarded Joseph Smith’s city of Zion plat the

National Planning Landmark Award. Today a plaque located at Brigham Young Historic Park on the corner of State and North Temple Streets in Salt Lake City commemorates the award with this inscription: "The Plat of the City of Zion, incorporated in a remarkable treatise on urban design addressed to the leadership of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints by Joseph Smith on June 25, 1833, guided the development of over 500 settlements in the Intermountain West, establishing a continuing commitment to the building of well-planned and culturally nurturing cities."

The establishment of "Zion" depended not only upon visionary community design but on righteous principles reflected in the attitudes and conduct of the community's inhabitants. These principles relate to stewardship and sustainability, educational and cultural pursuits, civic unity and public involvement, diversity and tolerance, caring for the needy, and aesthetic attributes.

Stewardship and sustainability. Early Church leaders taught that the Saints would be judged by God according to their exercise of wise stewardship over the "land of their inheritance." The Lord made "every man accountable, as a steward over earthly blessings," decreeing that "the earth is full, and there is enough and to spare" (D&C 104:13, 17). However, the above scripture continues with an admonition regarding *how* humankind is to use its agency and stewardship: "Therefore, if any man shall take of the abundance which I have made, and impart not his portion, according to the law of my gospel, unto the poor and the needy, he shall, with the wicked, lift up his eyes in hell, being in torment" (D&C 104:18). Further, "the Lord, should make every man accountable, as a steward over earthly blessings" (D&C 104:13) and the time will come when "every man may give an account unto me of the *stewardship*" (D&C 104:12; emphasis added).

The Saints viewed the land they occupied as sacred land of their inheritance. According to Professor Hamilton, "In keeping with the sanc-

tity of the temple, the people were encouraged to take greater care of their dwellings and yards, realizing that their land was a place of righteous inheritance. An individual plot of ground was viewed as an integral part of the larger concept of 'sacred space' or a piece of Zion."⁵⁹ Elder Orson Pratt explained that salvation was contingent on the exercise of good stewardship: "This land, about which I have been speaking, is called in some places in the revelations of God to the Prophet Joseph, the land of our inheritance. . . . If we shall be unwise in the disposition of this trust, then it will be very doubtful, whether we get an inheritance in this world or in the world to come."⁶⁰

President Brigham Young taught, "The earth under their feet will be holy; . . . the soil of the earth will bring forth in its strength, and the fruits thereof will be meat for man."⁶¹ He spoke of keeping the natural and manmade environment "pure" as one maintains personal purity: "Keep your valley pure, keep your towns as pure as you . . . can, keep your hearts pure."⁶² Brigham Young emphasized the sacred nature of the earth itself: "Speaking of the elements and the creation of God, in their nature they are as pure as the heavens."⁶³ "The Lord blesses the land, the air and the water where the Saints are permitted to live."⁶⁴ He encouraged the study of the natural environment: "Fields and mountains, trees and flowers, and all that fly, swim or move upon the ground are lessons for study in the great school [of] our heavenly Father . . . [in what] is open before us in good books and in the great laboratory of nature."⁶⁵

President Young repeatedly warned against greedy and wasteful exploitation of natural resources.⁶⁶ "It is not our privilege to waste the Lord's substance," he preached.⁶⁷ "There is only so much property in the world. There are the elements that belong to this globe, and no more. . . . All our commercial transactions must be confined to this little earth and its wealth cannot be increased or diminished."⁶⁸ He warned that exploitation and greed would have eternal

consequences: "It is all good, the air, the water, the gold and silver; the wheat, the fine flour, and the cattle upon a thousand hills are all good. . . . But that moment that men seek to build up themselves . . . and seek to hoard up riches, . . . proves that their hearts are weaned from their God; and *their riches will perish in their fingers, and they with them.*"⁶⁹

For Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, and other Church leaders, real estate speculation constituted a practice repugnant to the doctrine of stewardship and their efforts to build the kingdom of God on earth and the city of Zion. Well before their arrival in the Salt Lake Valley, Joseph Smith expressed his concerns regarding real estate speculation in Far West, Missouri:

Brethren, we are gathering to this beautiful land to build up Zion. . . . But since I have been here I perceive the spirit of selfishness, covetousness exists in the hearts of the saints. . . . Here are those who are beginning to spread out, buying up all the land they are able to do; . . . thinking to lay foundations for themselves only, looking to their own individual families. . . . Now I want to tell you that Zion cannot be built up in any such way.⁷⁰

To ensure good stewardship and equitable allocation of land upon arriving in the Salt Lake Valley, Brigham allowed residents to acquire land at no cost (except for a \$1.50 recording fee), but subdividing one's lot was prohibited, and real estate "speculation" was expressly discouraged.⁷¹ "No man will be suffered to cut his lot and sell a part to speculate out of his brethren. Each man must keep his lot whole, for the Lord has given it to us without price."⁷² Heber C. Kimball recorded in his journal that the "design of President Young was that no speculation in lands by the brethren should be allowed whereby the first comers should enrich themselves at the expense of their brethren who should follow. . . . In other words, the interest of the whole was to be uppermost in the mind of each man."⁷³ Brigham's counselor George A. Smith similarly condemned those who became

distracted with land speculation: "We came here inspired with a feeling to awaken in our breasts an unlimited desire to labour for the building up of Zion. . . . Some of the brethren have desired to go to different parts of the earth . . . for the sake of making it a matter of profit. . . . This feeling of speculation has gone so far as to engross the attention of men in the ministry."⁷⁴

Brigham's counselor George Q. Cannon observed that forbidding real estate speculation helped maintain the compact size of the community:

There was no monopoly of land allowed. No man was permitted to take up a city lot or farming land for purposes of speculation. . . . Farming land was divided and given out in small parcels, so that all could have a proper proportion. . . . The enforcement of this rule made the settlement of the city and the farming lands very compact, and created a community of interest which would not have been felt under other circumstances.⁷⁵

B. H. Roberts, Church historian and member of the Quorum of the Seventy, further explained that upon "the prevention of monopoly in land, community ownership of water, and of timber, rested the prosperity of the early colonies in Utah."⁷⁶ The "collectivism" form of land use existed until approximately 1869, when the U.S. Congress enacted legislation allowing for private ownership of property in the Utah Territory.⁷⁷

The warnings against real estate speculation parallel the obligations to the poor and consequences of selfishness and unrighteousness described in the Doctrine and Covenants: God "built the earth, my very handiwork; and all things . . . are mine . . . to provide for my saints, that the poor shall be exalted, in that the rich are made low" (D&C 104:14-16), but "a desolating scourge shall go forth among the inhabitants of the earth, and shall continue to be poured out from time to time, if they repent not, until the earth is empty" (D&C 5:19), and "I will not spare them if they pollute their inheritances" (D&C 103:14). Similar admonitions are found in Isaiah:

“The earth mourneth and fadeth away, the world languisheth and fadeth away, the haughty people of the earth do languish. The earth also is defiled under the inhabitants thereof; because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant” (Isaiah 24:4-5; see also Hosea 4:1-3).

Education and cultural pursuits. Joseph Smith explained the connection between a compact urban design and enhancement of the educational and intellectual life of a community:

The farmer and his family, therefore, will enjoy all the advantages of schools, public lectures and other meetings. His home will no longer be isolated, and his family denied the benefits of society, which has been, and always will be, the great educator of human race; but they will enjoy the same privileges of society, and can surround their homes with the same intellectual life, the same social refinement as will be found in the home of the merchant or banker or professional man.⁷⁸

Brigham Young emphasized the need to acquire academic knowledge to build Zion: “The business of the Elders of this Church . . . [is] to gather up all the truths in the world pertaining to life and salvation, to the Gospel we preach, to mechanism[s] of every kind, to the sciences, and to philosophy, wherever [they] may be found in every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, and bring it to Zion.”⁷⁹ Within months of their arrival in the Salt Lake Valley, Brigham Young exhorted the members of the Church in a “General Epistle to the Saints” to compile their collective body of knowledge:

The Saints should improve every opportunity of securing at least a copy of every valuable treatise on education—every book, map, chart, or diagram that may contain interesting, useful, and attractive matter, to gain the attention of children, and cause them to love to learn to read; and, also every historical, mathematical, philosophical, geographical, geological, astronomical, scientific, practical, and all other variety of useful and interesting writings, maps, etc. . . . from which important and interesting matter may be gleaned.⁸⁰

Historian Linda Sillitoe characterized the intellectual and cultural achievements of the early Mormon community: “A thriving city, a county with expanding settlements, and multiplying social, intellectual, and cultural opportunities all boasted the value of planning and cooperation.”⁸¹ The early Salt Lake community included a civic theater, orchestra, brass band, and Tabernacle Choir. Intellectual and cultural societies—such as the Universal Scientific Society, Polysophical Society, Deseret Musical and Dramatic Association, Deseret Literary and Musical Association, and Deseret Philharmonic Society—emerged to cultivate appreciation for literature, music, art and science. They provided a forum for lectures, concerts, plays, and reading original poems and other literary works.⁸²

Civic unity and public involvement. Joseph Smith taught that “the building up of Zion is as much one man’s business as another’s. . . . Party feelings, separate interests, exclusive designs should be lost sight of in the one common cause, in the interest of the whole.”⁸³ Brigham Young also emphasized the need to build community through collective effort:

We have come here to build up Zion. How shall we do it? . . . I have told you a great many times. There is one thing I will say in regard to it. We have got to be united in our efforts.⁸⁴

Let every individual in this city feel the same interest for the public good as he does for his own, and you will at once see this community still more prosperous and still more rapidly increasing in wealth, influence, and power. But where each one seeks to benefit himself or herself alone, and does not cherish a feeling for the prosperity and benefit of the whole, that people will be disorderly, unhappy, and poverty stricken, and distress, animosity, and strife will reign. . . . Let every man and woman be industrious, prudent, and economical in their acts and feelings, and while gathering to themselves, let each one strive to identify his or her interests with the interests of this community, with those of their neighbor and neighborhood, let them seek their happiness and welfare in that of all, and we will be blessed and prospered.⁸⁵

Diversity and tolerance. Brigham Young valued diversity within the community of Saints. He fondly characterized them as a “mixed” people “gathered from so many of the nations of the earth, with their different customs and traditions, associating with a kind, filial feeling nowhere else to be found,” dwelling “together on the most friendly terms and with brotherly feeling. . . . Into whatever neighborhood you go throughout these valleys in the mountains, amid the great variety of nationalities, with all their different habits and traditions, you find the warmest affection pervading the people.”⁸⁶

As Salt Lake City took shape in the 1850s, the neighborhoods reflected increasing economic and ethnic diversity. While a number of Church leaders settled close to the temple, the surrounding areas were relatively undifferentiated with more affluent homes randomly dispersed throughout the neighborhoods. Most neighborhoods harbored a remarkably diverse and polyglot population. By 1870, with the influx of foreign-born Mormon converts (mostly British and Scandinavian), approximately 65 percent of Salt Lake residents were foreign born.⁸⁷ One could hear in the shops, streets, and churches the foreign languages and accents of immigrants from northern Europe and elsewhere who had recently “gathered to Zion.”⁸⁸ These were followed by an influx of immigrant groups, not of the Latter-day Saint faith, who came largely for economic opportunity. After about 1880, the percentage of foreign-born city dwellers in the Salt Lake Valley gradually decreased.⁸⁹

Caring for the needy. To establish a Zion people, members of the community were taught to give “of their substance, as becometh saints, to the poor and afflicted among them” (D&C 105:3). According to Brigham Young, this duty extended both to the poor within their community and the poor in other lands: “The earthly means which we have been enabled to gather around us is not ours, it is the Lord’s, and he has placed it in our hands for the building up of his kingdom and to extend our ability and resources for reaching after

the poor in other lands.”⁹⁰ He emphasized the need for social and economic unity and equity:

The earth is here, and the fullness thereof. . . . It was made for man; and one man was not made to trample his fellowman under his feet, and enjoy all his heart desires, while the thousands suffer. We will take a moral view, a political view, and we see the inequality that exists in the human family. . . . The Latter-day Saints will never accomplish their mission until this inequality shall cease on the earth.⁹¹

If the people called the Latter-day Saints do not become one in temporal things as they are in spiritual things, they will not redeem and build up the Zion of God upon the earth.⁹²

The early settlers had ample opportunity to practice caring for the poor. A steady stream of immigrants, aided by the Perpetual Emigrating Fund, gathered to the Salt Lake Valley often with little more than the shirts on their backs. Upon arrival, impecunious immigrants were warmly greeted at “Emigration Square,” fed and entertained, then assigned to various wards so that no one bishop or ward congregation would be unduly burdened supplying them with food, shelter, and sustenance until they became self-sufficient.⁹³

Aesthetic attributes. Brigham Young repeatedly emphasized the need to create buildings and cities that were aesthetically pleasing:

We should like to see buildings that are ornamental and pleasing to the eye, as well as convenient and commodious. We wish to see cities that are an ornament to the country.⁹⁴

Progress, and improve upon, and make beautiful everything around you. Cultivate the earth and cultivate your minds. Build cities, adorn your habitations, make gardens, orchards, and vineyards, and render the earth so pleasant that when you look upon your labours you may do so with pleasure, and that angels may delight to come and visit your beautiful locations.⁹⁵

Let us train our minds until we delight in that which is good, lovely and holy, seeking continually after that intelligence which will enable us effectually to build up Zion, which consists in

building houses, tabernacles, temples, streets, and every convenience necessary to embellish and beautify, . . . seeking diligently to understand the great design and plan of all created things, that we may know what to do with our lives and how to improve upon the facilities placed within our reach.⁹⁶

Similarly, at general conference held in the Bowery in 1856, George Albert Smith, then an Apostle, reminded the Saints:

The plan of Zion contemplates that the earth, the gardens, and fields of Zion, be beautiful and cultivated in the best possible manner. Our traditions have got to yield to that plan, circumstances will bring us to that point, and eventually we shall be under the necessity of learning and adopting the plan of beautifying and cultivating every foot of the soil of Zion in the best possible manner.⁹⁷

In many ways, they succeeded. A visitor from Pittsburgh wrote in 1849, "I shall never forget the first sight of this valley. It shall remain on my mind as the most beautiful spectacle I ever beheld. . . . Their city occupies more ground than Pittsburgh, but each man has a large piece of ground around his dwelling. The bridges are all good, the streets wide, and the fences very regular."⁹⁸ Remarkably, this was just two years after the first settlers arrived. One journalist from the East visited the Salt Lake Valley in 1851 and described the community as "a large garden laid out in regular squares."⁹⁹ Historians Thomas Alexander and James Allen observed that the city fathers "paid careful attention to planning and beautification, and their wide streets, with irrigation ditches running down either side, became a standard item for commentary from travelers."¹⁰⁰ Passing through the Salt Lake Valley in 1877, renowned naturalist John Muir noted:

Most of the houses are veiled with trees, as if set down in the midst of one grand orchard. . . . [Homes] are set well back from the street, leaving room for a flower garden, while almost every one has a thrifty orchard at the sides and around the back. The gardens are laid out with great simplicity, indicating love for flowers by

people comparatively poor. . . . In almost every one you find daisies, and lilac bushes, and rows of plain English tulips. Lilacs and tulips are the most characteristic flowers, and nowhere have I seen them in greater perfection.¹⁰¹

Conclusion

The city of Zion plat and the concepts underlying the building of Zion merit more than mere antiquarian interest. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland proclaimed that "the gospel of Jesus Christ holds the answer to every social and political and economic problem the world has ever faced."¹⁰² Joseph Smith's city of Zion plat, and the early Mormon vision of building Zion represented a conscious and unequivocal commitment, based on the concept of stewardship, to care for the poor, build lasting and aesthetically pleasing communities, and engage in sustainable use of the land and protection of the environment for the benefit of future generations. These principles are relevant and useful today – indeed now more than ever.

Every community and culture must decide how to accommodate growth. For the Latter-day Saint community living along the Wasatch Front, the concept of building Zion has special significance. Joseph Smith taught that Zion would someday serve as a "standard for the nations" (D&C 115:5; see also 45:63–69). The Saints believed that Zion would be "celebrated as a City on a Hill, a pattern for their own communities and a light to the whole world."¹⁰³ As they lived their religion and gradually built a Zion community, Brigham Young envisioned that "all the world can say there is a pattern for us, not only in our business and worship, but in our knowledge of [all] things . . . until the knowledge of Zion shall reach the uttermost parts of the earth, and the kings and great men shall say, 'Let us go up to Zion and learn wisdom.'"¹⁰⁴

The commandment to build a Zion community was never rescinded even though the Saints no longer gather to the Salt Lake Valley. Past and present Church leaders have taught that the

Saints must build what amounts to a temporary Zion until they are found worthy and sufficiently skilled at building cities to be called upon to again return to Jackson County.¹⁰⁵ Church members living along the Wasatch Front might ask themselves if the land-use decisions they individually and collectively make are sustainable and reflect the values of those who sacrificed and labored to settle the Salt Lake Valley to build Zion. As Saints of the Latter-days, ought we not to live and build cities worthy of emulation consistent with revealed principles? Hugh Nibley sardonically described his view of development along the Wasatch Front:

Come with me down into the valley, where the Saints once converted the plain into a garden—they had in mind preparing a place fit for Deity to visit and for angels to dwell in: fertile, bounteous, unspoiled by those who planted and dressed their gardens, taking good care of the land and being happy in it. Then a long tentacle started reaching down South State Street, which was then the main highway, with its brash commercial clutter and its vulgar procession of arrogant billboards. . . . Quickly this spread out all over the valley as freeways connected one shopping center with the next, while subdivisions wiped out the only available orchard-lands within five hundred miles, and on all sides the farms and their way of life melted away before the relentless inroads of real-estate promoters from all over the land.¹⁰⁶

Broader lessons can be gained from the teachings of early Church leaders which apply to building sustainable, livable cities throughout the world. Few would disagree that the ideals preached by Brigham Young and other pioneer leaders regarding community building—stewardship and sustainability, education and cultural pursuits, civic unity and public involvement, diversity and tolerance, caring for the needy, and aesthetic attributes—all enrich the intellectual and spiritual life and health of a community.

Moreover, the concept of building Zion has broader spiritual and practical implications that those of other faiths and convictions can em-

brace. Specifically, both Joseph Smith and Brigham Young maintained that the physical design of a community and the values underlying social order had both temporal and spiritual dimensions. For Brigham Young, the distinction between the “spiritual” and “temporal” represented an artificial dichotomy:

In the mind of God there is no such thing as dividing spiritual from temporal, or temporal from spiritual; for they are one in the Lord.¹⁰⁷

We cannot talk about spiritual things without connecting with them temporal things, neither can we talk about temporal things without connecting spiritual things. They are inseparably connected.¹⁰⁸

The work of building up Zion is in every sense a practical work; it is not a mere theory. A theoretical religion amounts to very little real good or advantage to any person.¹⁰⁹

Herein lies the most profound lesson gleaned from the early Mormon legacy of city planning and community building. The design and attributes of our neighborhoods, communities, and cities impact future generations and have spiritual, if not eternal, consequences. Elder Steven E. Snow of the First Quorum of the Seventy explains:

Our generation, more than any other, has the ability to irretrievably change the land. Financial rewards provide tremendous pressure to unleash our technology to reinvent our surroundings. There will be growth; change will come. But failure to care for the land on which we live means turning our backs on a heritage laid down carefully and at such great cost by our forefathers—and will leave us immeasurably poorer.¹¹⁰



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