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Let me begin by saying that I am honored to be on a panel with such distinguished specialists. I'm not one of those. I have spent a long time, however, experiencing, reading about, and to some extent writing about cities, and my non-professional perspective may be helpful.

Although there are new trends in urban planning today, such as landscape urbanism, most urban-planning ideas can be traced to Jane Jacobs, the great critic of top-down planning.

I am second to no one in my respect for her. I have a first edition of her book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, which I bought in 1967. In college, I was a volunteer in a famed settlement house in Boston's North End, a place beloved by Jacobs and highlighted in her book. As a young adult, I met people who remembered the destruction of Boston's West End neighborhood for the sake of "urban renewal"—a destruction that Jacobs discussed in her book. I have lived in a lot of cities, from midtown Manhattan to downtown Chicago and Washington DC's Georgetown. I know about streetscapes and urban density and "unslumming" (all Jacobean terms). I even know transit. I may be the only person who ever defended New York's subways in a letter to the *New York Times*.

I also know suburban spaces. As a teenager in a St. Louis suburb, I was like the friends of Nicholas Lemann whom he talks about in a *New Yorker* piece (June 27, 2011). They were residents of suburbs who had "taken a solemn vow to leave as soon as they had the opportunity and never return." I, too, thought the suburbs were sterile and dull. At the age of 16 I went off to what I believed to be the hub of the universe—Boston.

I have two themes in these brief remarks. One is that Jane Jacobs, who wrote about "great" American cities—not even medium-sized cities—has been seriously misinterpreted by smart growth enthusiasts and new urbanists. The other is that times have changed, and the smart growth and new urbanist messages are not as relevant as they would have been in the 1960s.

Let me first discuss, smart growth enthusiasts and new urbanists and then allude to the changes in the past fifty years.

Smart growers want to enliven the cities, but they want to use coercive techniques. They have adopted some of Jane Jacobs' proposals but they have lost the essence of the spontaneous growth that she describes.

Jacobs' proposals for "great American cities" have been applied to moderate and small cities like Raleigh, North Carolina, and Helena, Montana. Smart growth enthusiasts have defined urban spaces as particular downtown centers they want to revitalize—even while diverting funds from lively districts that are diversifying on their own. They have invented "traffic calming" to force people out of their cars—thus keeping them away from the downtowns. They have turned city streets into pedestrian walkways, with a result so disastrous that all over the country cities have been forced to restore the roads. (Both Raleigh and Helena have had that experience.) They have required "high density" and "mixed uses" but failed to attract enough people to keep downtowns alive—possibly because they made it difficult to park. They have subsidized convention centers, hotels, and restaurants that fail again and again.

Now, I agree that Jane Jacobs was not happy about the automobile and she looked to governmental measures to reduce the dominance of automobiles in the city. But she was describing New York City, one gigantic city, and she saw the problem of the automobile as a war between a coercive power—Robert Moses who wanted to erode city spaces for the sake of the automobile—and her small band of people living in the streetscapes of New York City. She was fighting a coercive power, and she felt that some coercion from the other side, to erode the use of the automobile, was legitimate.

Now, on to new urbanists. They don't push for coercion in the downtowns. Rather, they have given up on real cities and tried to create new mini-cities using what I view as a desiccated version of Jacobs' high-density and mixed-use insights.

I have been to Middleton Hills, Wisconsin, and Kentlands in Gaithersburg, Maryland. These are charming, nostalgic places where the garage is hidden in the back alley (to avoid the "snout house" look), whose streets form rigid grids to encourage walking and neighborliness, where retail community centers are planned but frequently no retailer wants to lease because customer traffic is so low, where residents are supposed to sit on their front porches, the better to talk to people in houses that are so close that lawns are almost non-existent.

In Raleigh, North Carolina, I lived briefly in an echo of this new urbanist design. The narrow house did have charm; I'm not saying that these places are bad, just nostalgic and not necessarily what most people want.

And we have alternatives, including the suburbs.

I grew up in Webster Groves, Missouri, a suburb spawned not by the interstate system but by the Missouri Pacific railroad at the end of the *nineteenth* century. In the early and mid-1900s, the proper businessman—such as my grandfather, Walter B. Donnell—could walk or drive to the local rail terminal and take the train to downtown St. Louis. He could take the train back home for dinner in his handsome Colonial-style house, with its rolling green lawn and oak trees.

It worked for him, and suburbs are working for a lot of people now. According to the U.S. Census, half of all Americans live in suburbs. Yes, those towns are automobile-oriented and hard to walk in because they are designed to allow people to move about freely in cars. But that seems to be what a lot of people want.

Thus, my first message is that smart growth and new urbanism proponents misunderstand Jane Jacobs in some cases—and smart growthers turn her analysis into coercive prescriptions. My second message is that times have changed, so that some elements of her message aren't as relevant today.

What we have seen since Jane Jacobs wrote her classic (although she has an even greater classic, *The Economy of Cities*) is *change*. In a nutshell, the suburbs aren't as sterile and, frankly, the cities aren't as beautiful and interesting as they used to be. Why? Because Americans have choices—freedom—and wealth, and many want what my husband, Rick, calls “their little piece of wilderness” in their back yard, even if it means long commutes to their workplace. Although many young people—single or married, perhaps with one or two small children—love the cities, as I did, at a certain point it is very difficult for a family to live downtown.

Let me remind you of a point about Jacobs's discussion of Boston's North End, known as Little Italy even now. It became a vibrant, thriving place only after people were free to move out of it. Discrimination against Italians and lack of money to afford nicer places kept the North End a ghetto for awhile. Only when that discrimination declined and eventually disappeared, and the economic condition of the North End population improved did the North End stop being a ghetto. People could choose to live there. As one North End resident, a butcher, told Jacobs, “People who stay here don't have to, you know. They like it.”

That was in 1961, and the North End still thrives as a place with “deeply-rooted ties to Italian culture,” to quote the *Boston Globe*.

But the freedom that allowed immigrants who settled in the North End to move on to Wellesley or Newton has enabled half the people in the country to live in suburbs. And the suburbs have improved. They remain low density, but they have a lot of vitality. They even have beauty.

About a decade ago, I wrote an article called “Nature in the Suburbs.” It was actually about the resurgence of wildlife throughout our country, but it included the fact that suburban towns are surprisingly compatible with animals—even small wild animals.

When people move onto what once was rural land, they modify the landscape. Yes, they build more streets, more parking lots, and more buildings. . . . At the same time, however, the new residents will create habitat for wildlife. They will create ponds, establish gardens, plant trees, and set up bird nesting-boxes. Ornamental nurseries and truck farms may replace cropland, and parks may replace hedgerows.

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A decade ago, who would have thought that New Jersey would host a black bear hunt? Or that Virginia would have 329 known active bald eagle nests? Who would have expected *Metropolitan Home* magazine to be advising its readers about ornamental grasses to keep away white-tailed deer?

I am the last person to say that all suburbia is beautiful. I've been in edge cities that Joel Garreau made famous in his book *Edge City*—such as Tysons Corner and northern Dallas—and they put my teeth on edge. But I also know that there are beautiful suburban places. Some of them are off the beaten track, invisible to those who stick with the main thoroughfares and arterial streets.

Indeed, with the vast majority of people living in metropolitan areas (which include both cities and suburbs) the urban/suburban divide is really not all that important any more. That's the message of Nicholas Lemann in the *New Yorker*.

Many cities have large areas that are neither suburbs nor cities. I live in a leafy residential neighborhood in Raleigh, North Carolina, a couple of miles from downtown and a mile or so from a large university. It is an eclectic neighborhood, with a mansion around the corner and a public housing project down the street. It's full of wildlife, especially chirping birds. I like to say that our small backyard can sound like a jungle, with only the howling monkeys missing. As Lemann wrote, perhaps cities and suburbs are no longer “fundamental opposites,” but “points on a continuum.”

I could say a lot more, but I will end on this note: We have freedom in this country—not perfect freedom, but a lot. Every day people are making improvements in their lives, wherever they live. We have to be careful that we don't let urban planners and government bureaucrats make our lives miserable by forcing us into grids and spaces and cubicles that we don't want.