CHAPTER 11

Boom Commandments

WALK THE DOWNTOWN STREETS of any American city and you're likely to find a Monument to Misguided Dreams. It is not so named, of course, and is not statuary but the residue of our post–World War II urban renewal program, the results of which range from disastrous to merely disappointing. In her classic *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jane Jacobs described these places best: "Civic centers that are avoided by everyone but bums. . . . Commercial centers that are lackluster imitations of standardized suburban chain-store shopping. Promenades that go from no place to nowhere and have no promenaders. Expressways that eviscerate great cities. This is not the rebuilding of cities. This is the sacking of cities."[1]

When the ribbons were cut on these projects, of course, all were hailed as game-changers that would not just beautify blighted areas but energize urban economies, creating jobs within their borders and stimulating further growth and investment nearby. Yet from New York's Jacob Javits Convention Center to San Francisco's Western Addition district and through many equally discouraging sites in between, the promised spillover benefits rarely arrived. In successful cities and declining ones alike, these massive expenditures of public and private capital have usually failed to perceptibly improve their cities' fortunes—and often have harmed them.

Charles Center, in my hometown of Baltimore, is a typical example—and a good illustration of the chasm between rhetoric and reality in redevelopment circles. Upon its completion in the early 1960s, press coverage was adulatory and opinion leaders praised those behind the thirty-three-acre project for their good intentions, brilliant vision, bold artistic sense, and deft political touch. As the decades passed and the city spent many more taxpayer dollars in efforts to revitalize neighboring districts, Charles Center was so often referred to as a catalyst for Baltimore's renaissance that few noticed that it is, actually, a failure both within its borders and beyond them.

Copyright © 2014. Stanford University Press. All rights reserved.

Walters, Stephen J. K.. <i>Boom Towns : Restoring the Urban American Dream</i>, Stanford University Press, 2014.
ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/berkeley-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1742617.
Created from berkeley-ebooks on 2019-05-12 17:54:34.

Many who work there consider it dull, inconvenient, unsafe, and ugly. Its sterile office towers—in which vacancy rates commonly exceed those that prevailed in the older buildings they replaced—overlook plazas that are little used during business hours and abandoned thereafter. Some of the project's acclaimed innovations, such as elevated walkways that enabled pedestrians to move between buildings without descending to street level, were eventually seen to be not just unnecessary but undesirable, and have been torn down. Its only architecturally distinctive building, a theatre in the style aptly named "brutalism," proved so unappealing that it was a chronic money-loser that has been shuttered for many years. The adjoining retail district that Charles Center was supposed to revivify continued its steep decline and remains a jumble of empty storefronts and discount shoe or wig shops. Any nearby investment of significance has been a by-product of the city's relentless renewal offensive and bought with tax breaks or other subsidies. Even in its entirety, this lavishly funded program did not reverse the city's devastating six-decade-long exodus of jobs and residents.

Why has project-based renewal underachieved? First, too often government-guided redevelopment projects are, for all the favorable spin accompanying them, poorly conceived. Many embody the mistaken planning principles that provoked Jacobs to write *Death and Life* in the first place. Their site plans are commonly guided more by utopian visions or academic dogma than human needs; their architectural elements are generally so bland that only a committee could love them; their public spaces lack appeal and, often, even a reason for being. In sum, people tend not to like them, and so they don't work. This is forgivable if, like Charles Center, everything was under construction before the works of Jacobs, and those of more contemporary critics like the New Urbanists,[2] hit print. But too many cities continue to crank out such projects. The problem is not just that too many cooks (in the form of politicians, planners, and rent-seeking developers) spoil the broth, but also that there are weak incentives to change the recipe. When bureaucracies and subsidies are the key elements of the urban redevelopment process and few of the relevant decision makers get much poorer when a project fails or richer when it succeeds, bet on the former.

The deeper reason for the lackluster performance of so many urban renewal projects—including many that are, in fact, well-designed and

Walters, Stephen J. K.. <i>Boom Towns : Restoring the Urban American Dream</i>, Stanford University Press, 2014.
ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/berkeley-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1742617.
Created from berkeley-ebooks on 2019-05-12 17:54:34.

Copyright © 2014. Stanford University Press. All rights reserved.

well-executed—is that their destinies are influenced far more by the viability of their host cities than the reverse. When planners see a district or neighborhood that is distressed and decide to remake it *without first asking whether the distress is a symptom of larger, more systemic problems*, they are setting themselves up for failure. If practitioners did this in medicine—"Nurse, I'm getting a weak pulse in this patient's wrist; prepare the ER for a vein transplant!"—it would be immediately recognized as folly; they would want to get at the heart of the matter.

In the foregoing chapters, I've tried to do exactly that: to focus on systemic rather than symptomatic measures to revive dying cities and enhance the quality of life in growing ones. One way to summarize the key principles might be to say "protect well the private property of city residents and manage efficiently that property they own in common with each other." That advice is unsatisfactorily vague, however, so in what follows I will put forth ten specific prescriptions—commandments, if you will—that aim to ensure virtuous policymaking and are the foundations of a successful and organic program of urban revitalization.

I. DON'T STEAL

Most of us see taxes as "the price we must pay for a civilized society." A few believe that "taxation is theft." Due to some peculiarities of democracy that make the political marketplace operate differently in reality than in high school civics texts, both views can sometimes be true.

American cities provide ample evidence of this fact. There are, surely, many high-tax, high-service jurisdictions that are healthy and stable, but there are many others that traveled a high-tax, low-service, high-transfer path that has had tragic long-term consequences for their viability and their citizens' welfare. The crux of the problem has generally been redistributionist policies fueled by idealism, interest-group politics, or greed. A key point to stress is that the motive matters not at all, for when income transfers are pursued aggressively at the *local* level, the effects are inevitably damaging. Donor classes will ultimately vote with their feet and exit the high-tax jurisdiction, taking their skills, income, and entrepreneurial energy with them; the capital investment that is the long-term foundation of a successful city also will flow elsewhere. We saw the same ill effects

Copyright © 2014. Stanford University Press. All rights reserved.

Walters, Stephen J. K.. <i>Boom Towns : Restoring the Urban American Dream</i>, Stanford University Press, 2014.
ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/berkeley-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1742617.
Created from berkeley-ebooks on 2019-05-12 17:54:34.

when James Michael Curley, "the Mayor of the Poor," robbed Boston's rich "Brahmins" in order to help destitute Irish immigrants as when successive corrupt mayors of Newark—the three who served from 1962 to 2006, for example, all wound up in jail—robbed that city's residents to line their own pockets.

This is not to say that those with redistributionist inclinations must change their thinking—just that these issues should be worked out at higher levels of government, and *not* where the desire to avoid (or benefit from) transfer programs can cause an unhealthy rearrangement of residents, employers, and investors within a metro area or region, with donors fleeing to lower-tax suburbs and beneficiaries arriving to replace them in core cities. A national approach to income transfers has long been the pattern in Europe, and arguably this has contributed greatly to the relative health and stability of European cities. That simply needs to be the practice here.

The good news is that when key tax rates in core cities have been made competitive with those in surrounding districts, the effects on residential location and capital investment decisions have been favorable, immediate, and dramatic. It's not necessary to fix all a city's problems or alter its political culture to turn it around; the experiences of San Francisco and Boston in the aftermath of their states' tax-cap initiatives make that clear. But it *is* necessary to secure the property rights of a city's homeowners and businesses, and to assure them that the value of their assets will not be expropriated (via tax capitalization) whenever politically convenient.

II. HOLD THE FORT

Take a spin around Detroit and you will see abundant evidence of a city on the downs: vacant office towers, long-dormant and crumbling factories, schools and shops in ruins, once-grand homes abandoned and falling down around themselves. Scattered about also are large, well-appointed buildings that stand above neighboring dwellings, signaling power and status like nobles' castles. And, to some extent, that is what they are, for Detroit's strong unionist heritage has endowed it with a string of meeting halls and social clubs that bear the insignia of cartels of labor that, starting in New Deal days, seized effective control of Motown's leading industry and therefore wielded enormous influence over the city's destiny.

Copyright © 2014. Stanford University Press. All rights reserved.

Walters, Stephen J. K.. <i>Boom Towns : Restoring the Urban American Dream</i>, Stanford University Press, 2014.
ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/berkeley-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1742617.
Created from berkeley-ebooks on 2019-05-12 17:54:34.

This has not worked out terribly well for that industry, workers in general, or Detroit—though, as with much else that has damaged America's great cities, Big Labor's conquest of the manufacturing capital that once was concentrated there remains much celebrated in certain quarters. As with confiscatory local taxes, however, labor market regulations that facilitate the appropriation of returns due to capital both reduce local capital investment and encourage its strategic redeployment to more defensible environs.

For many years, then, most of the jobs created in the domestic auto industry (and others) have been in right-to-work states, and the unions' occupation of Detroit (and elsewhere) is very much a Pyrrhic victory. In competitive markets, the owners of labor and capital are partners in production; wage growth is enhanced most directly and reliably by added investment in physical capital and technological progress that increases labor productivity. Absent secure property rights to capital in any particular locale, that capital will move elsewhere or simply melt away, leaving laborers poorer. Accordingly, right-to-work laws and greater enforcement of laws against trespass and violence in the context of labor disputes should be seen as job- and income-creating policies.

And the damaging consequences of monopolistic or opportunistic behavior by labor cartels are not limited to the economies of deindustrialized cities and their left-behind residents. Lost benefits of agglomeration—Marshall's "advantages which people following the same skilled trade get from near neighbourhood to one another"—may hamper technological advance more broadly. Cities are and have always been centers of innovation, the benefits of which tend to spread widely. To continue to be so, they have to be places where ownership rights to capital are secure and the returns to such capital are protected from appropriation.

III. GUARD AGAINST SHORTSIGHTEDNESS

We Americans like to seize the day. On average, we save less than 5 percent of our income; even the pleasure-loving French save at three times that rate. Our present orientation is especially prominent in politics, where the election cycle almost guarantees unwholesome myopia. It is standard political practice to deliver goodies to constituents now and worry about

Copyright © 2014. Stanford University Press. All rights reserved.

Walters, Stephen J. K.. <i>Boom Towns : Restoring the Urban American Dream</i>, Stanford University Press, 2014.
ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/berkeley-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1742617.
Created from berkeley-ebooks on 2019-05-12 17:54:34.

the long-term costs if and when reelected—or, if those costs will arrive after term limits expire, not even then. So at various levels of government we see chronic deficits, extravagant promises for future entitlements (especially pensions and retirement benefits for unionized public employees), and repeated raids on capital budgets so that our public infrastructure often fails—sometimes catastrophically.

Preaching the gospel of good government and sound fiscal management will be of no avail in addressing these problems. Not that there's anything wrong with it, but many incentives to behave badly are just too deeply rooted to be countered in this way. Those incentives have to be changed. The best way to do so is to keep day-to-day decisions that require a long-term perspective out of the public sphere and in the private one.

This implies a hard-headed program of privatization of public assets. Whenever and wherever possible, franchise bidding should be employed to efficiently construct, manage, or maintain capital-intensive facilities that otherwise might become piggy-banks for shortsighted pols, whether as sources of funds to buy the support of key interest groups or as parking places for patronage employees. Private owners are not perfect, of course, but they have much stronger incentives than politicians and bureaucrats to control costs and innovate in the short run and to maintain asset quality (via responsible capital budgeting) and their wealth in the long run.

Not all the facilities that are customarily operated in the public sector may be feasibly privatized, but as the French have demonstrated with their water concessions and a few American jurisdictions have learned with respect to tollways, parking garages, and other infrastructure, privatization has enormous potential to resolve near- and far-term management and budget problems. An ancillary benefit might be a more level political playing field: fewer public assets means smaller public employee unions and less powerful interest groups pressuring elected officials to make long-term promises that will be very expensive to keep.

IV. DON'T LIE

If it is not the most sophisticated and important form of communication used by humankind, the price system is at least the oldest. Since hunters started trading with gatherers, we consumers have been telling producers

Copyright © 2014. Stanford University Press. All rights reserved.

Walters, Stephen J. K.. <i>Boom Towns : Restoring the Urban American Dream</i>, Stanford University Press, 2014.
ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/berkeley-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1742617.
Created from berkeley-ebooks on 2019-05-12 17:54:34.

what we want and how badly we want it by our willingness to pay. Their prices, in turn, provide the info we need to evaluate all of life's little tradeoffs in choosing what to buy or do.

This system is breathtaking in its efficiency—*as long as the price signals sent to demanders and suppliers are truthful*. Clearly, lying prices are responsible for much of the inconvenience or waste that is typical of everyday life in city and suburb alike, from the freeways clogged with creep-and-beep traffic to the streets we cruise endlessly searching for free parking. Setting an appropriate money price for access to these facilities, rather than a price in time or fuel wasted, can instantly and effectively solve the problem. And as Stockholm showed with its congestion pricing experiment, the economic and environmental gains can be so prominent that people overcome the delusion that they can enjoy a free lunch, and actually favor honest prices instead.

More broadly, the prices of government services should not only be honest but unbundled. Arguably, chronic budget deficits signal a lying price, falsely telling voters that government costs far less than it actually does. But this is more a problem at the federal level than with states or localities, which are often subject to balanced-budget constitutional or charter requirements. Nevertheless, cities can take steps to ensure that their costs are communicated and allocated in such a way that voters can make intelligent choices about which services they want and which are too costly, as Indianapolis does with its array of fees and earmarks tied to particular jurisdictions and functions.

Copyright © 2014. Stanford University Press. All rights reserved.

V. COMPETE

Everyone knows that competition is good and monopoly bad. We push ourselves a little harder, think of better ways of doing things, and waste less time and other resources doing them when a desired reward is made contingent on besting a rival or when we're a little bit worried about our job security. The problem is that outside the domain of sports, in which we clearly *enjoy* competitive dynamics, most of us seem to prefer *not* to compete: businesses commonly try to erect market-entry barriers, workers seek sinecures and tenure, and bureaucracies devise myriad rules to see that rewards are doled out by formula instead of merit.

Walters, Stephen J. K.. <i>Boom Towns : Restoring the Urban American Dream</i>, Stanford University Press, 2014.
ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/berkeley-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1742617.
Created from berkeley-ebooks on 2019-05-12 17:54:34.

The challenge, then, is not merely to help policymakers *see* that major benefits will arise from competitive delivery of many government services, but rather to get them to take on the interest groups devoted to insulating themselves from competitive pressures and *deliver* these benefits. Nowhere is this more clear than in public education, in which an iron alliance between teachers' unions, administrators, anti-market ideologues, and even some affluent parents (who fear that innovations such as vouchers might enable poor students to buy access to their higher-performing schools) has been very successful in fending off attempts to break up local public school monopolies.

Pro-competition advocacy groups and even some charitable organizations have done yeoman work in winning trial voucher programs in a few cities; charter schools are gaining traction in many others. These efforts are generating copious evidence of success that will inevitably lead more states and localities to consider upsetting our increasingly expensive and disappointing public education status quo. It might also be time to fight special-interest fire with fire—by, for example, forming parents' and taxpayers' unions and recruiting religious denominations as allies in the political struggle against education monopoly. In many older northern cities, for example, Catholic parish schools that enhanced the economic and social mobility of generations of immigrant families are now struggling to stay afloat as their members prospered and exited urban neighborhoods. They could serve the same function for non-Catholic residents, but it's hard to beat "free" government schools, no matter how dysfunctional those might be. It's time for such religious groups to go on the offensive and lobby for the vouchers or charters that will enable their schools to grow once again. The evidence shows that this would not only change the lives of *their* enrolled students but also improve the performance of rival (public) schools with which they'd vie for customers.

VI. GET BIG

Scale economies—through which enterprises enjoy lower unit costs as they grow larger—are one of the most important influences on the strategic behavior of firms. They often dictate production and marketing plans, mergers, spin-offs, and myriad other business decisions. Exploiting them can be the difference between enduring success and failure.

Copyright © 2014. Stanford University Press. All rights reserved.

Walters, Stephen J. K.. <i>Boom Towns : Restoring the Urban American Dream</i>, Stanford University Press, 2014.
ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/berkeley-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1742617.
Created from berkeley-ebooks on 2019-05-12 17:54:34.

Public-sector decision makers, on the other hand, usually assume that their scale of operations is fixed and given by existing political borders. True, some cities can annex or merge with neighboring jurisdictions and "grow the business," but even when this is technically possible they often face resistance from voters suspicious that consolidation might be a scheme to pick their pockets. Fixed borders, however, need not prevent elected officials from exploiting scale economies in key government services.

For example, if costs per ton of trash collected will fall 10 percent when volume in a particular area doubles (perhaps because some overhead costs can be spread more broadly, or pickups organized more economically), then this area's jurisdictions might pool their collections and realize these savings by negotiating an appropriate contract to cover the relevant territory (using either public employees or a private concession) without adjusting their borders. That is, there can be functional consolidation without altering the political map—if officials think entrepreneurially. Absent a profit motive, bureaucrats often don't do so, of course, but elected officials have an incentive to broker these sorts of deals because they will benefit at the polls when they pass resulting savings on to their constituents in the form of a reduced tax burden, or use freed-up budget dollars to enhance other key public services.

VII. PRESERVE THE UNSEEN

The Great Migration of African-Americans from the rural South to the urban North that started during World War I and continued for almost four decades was tragically ill-timed. Prior immigrants had found more competitive (and therefore vibrant) labor markets and more secure rights to residential and business property on their arrival in America's great industrial cities than these latest migrants would find upon theirs. How this would hamper the economic and social advance of urban blacks in the last half of the twentieth century has been much written about.

Less widely appreciated is how another great pre– and post–World War II phenomenon—the extravagantly funded program to clear slums, eradicate blight, and rebuild America's aging cities—exacerbated these harms. Those implementing the era's grand renewal plans had only the best of intentions, of course, but they overlooked something very important: how invisible

Copyright © 2014. Stanford University Press. All rights reserved.

Walters, Stephen J. K.. <i>Boom Towns : Restoring the Urban American Dream</i>, Stanford University Press, 2014.
ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/berkeley-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1742617.
Created from berkeley-ebooks on 2019-05-12 17:54:34.

social capital affects the viability of a neighborhood and the welfare of its residents. As Harrison Salisbury elegantly summarized, “Bulldozers do not understand that a community is more than broken-down buildings and dirty storefronts. It is a tight skein of human relations. It has a life all its own. The wreckers tear this human fabric to ribbons.”[3]

We Americans no longer routinely bulldoze poor neighborhoods in order to erect high-rise slums, but we still have difficulty appreciating the unseen networks that help city-dwellers of all income classes to work, play, acculturate, learn, raise children—in sum, to *live*—better. In the name of economic development, we still condemn, relocate, wreck, and rebuild altogether too cavalierly, without due regard for the intangible assets we destroy in the process. In the name of compassion and social justice, we routinely devise programs that uproot people from places about which they are knowledgeable and in which they are comfortable in favor of places where we merely *hope* they will have superior opportunities and their children better teachers and role models. We need to be far more humble in our plans for people, more respectful of their rights to enjoy the returns on social capital they’ve worked hard to create, and more determined to ensure that growth and opportunity flourish organically in all neighborhoods.

VIII. BE FAIR

Many of us are too busy to pay much attention to politics and become actively engaged in the policy sphere, and so we often get rolled by small and well-organized groups (“special interests”) with more to gain, per individual, than the rest of us. Even when we’re engaged on key issues, however, we sometimes agree to policies that are socially inefficient, inequitable, or both. Often this is because we weigh our own interests and act (or vote) accordingly. But sometimes we do this not because we’re being selfish, but because we’re simply unaware of a likely inequity arising from a particular policy. This can be a by-product of the fact that the people to whom we’re being unfair are not at the political table (and so not informing us of their objections) when we’re making a decision.

Consider growth controls, exclusionary zoning, or “greenlining” (like that imposed in Oregon), for example. There’s abundant evidence that,

Copyright © 2014. Stanford University Press. All rights reserved.

Walters, Stephen J. K.. <i>Boom Towns : Restoring the Urban American Dream</i>, Stanford University Press, 2014.
ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/berkeley-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1742617.
Created from berkeley-ebooks on 2019-05-12 17:54:34.

over time, such regulations both raise housing costs for future residents and reduce vertical and horizontal equity, redistributing wealth somewhat randomly—in some cases from poor to rich, in others among similarly situated individuals. Experimental economists have also shown that *we humans don't like doing such unfair things*. We often put aside our personal interests to treat fairly those with whom we deal; some speculate that concern for fairness may be hardwired in us.

But we certainly can't avoid unfairness if we don't know it exists. It is therefore incumbent on policymakers, opinion leaders, dispassionate researchers, and voters of good will to assess carefully the equity implications of policies up for discussion and speak out about these effects. It would be naive to suggest that all voters or elected officials will always shrink from adopting policies that harm those outside their jurisdiction or those yet unborn—but perhaps enough will that some of these harms can be avoided, or alternative policies devised that can mitigate them to some degree.

IX. CUT OUT THE MIDDLEPEOPLE

In many cities, one of the unsavory leftovers from the era of Robert Moses–style urban renewal is a redevelopment bureaucracy that sits astride every deal that might bring needed capital—and fresh ideas—to urban tracts small and large. Even when a city's economic fundamentals are sound and entrepreneurs are eager to move properties from lower-valued uses to higher ones, the transaction costs associated with navigating this bureaucracy and satisfying the innumerable middlepersons with authority to modify plans or levy charges can eat up prospective gains and scotch deals. This is ironic, since these agencies often justify their existence partly by virtue of their ability to wield the power of eminent domain and reduce transaction costs by eliminating holdout problems. Often they are, instead, sand in the redevelopment gears.

Those populating the various bureaus, councils, boards, and commissions that stand between willing sellers and buyers of developable property argue that their regulatory oversight can prevent egregious errors in the design and execution of a particular project. Sometimes this is even true—just not enough. Architect Alexander Garvin, for example, *defends*

Copyright © 2014. Stanford University Press. All rights reserved.

Walters, Stephen J. K.. <i>Boom Towns : Restoring the Urban American Dream</i>, Stanford University Press, 2014.
ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/berkeley-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1742617.
Created from berkeley-ebooks on 2019-05-12 17:54:34.

these efforts by arguing that "disillusionment with planning is far from justified. Dozens of projects are triumphs of American planning."[4] Dozens! Out of thousands. All too often, then, the nettlesome process of pleasing all these intermediaries prevents things from happening at all, or raises their costs, or increases the chances that they will be unsatisfactory if and when realized.

Entrepreneurs are not infallible, of course. For every Tudor City or Rockefeller Center of enduring value, they might install a "superblock" development that works no better than, say, Charles Center. But, again, incentives matter. Individuals like Fred French or John D. Rockefeller, who put their own wealth at risk when they develop a site, have a far greater tendency to avoid architectural or planning blunders than any civil servant or committee—and to remedy any errors quickly once they become apparent. Accordingly, cities can unlock a great deal of creative energy if they will more fully and frequently trust market participants to identify what needs to be done and allow them to proceed with fewer regulatory or zoning impediments. Which does not mean that planners need to simply go away—but they need to act as facilitators of development rather than impediments to it. More of them need to go to work for (or become) developers and design creative ways to make city projects more popular and profitable rather than merely pleasing to bureaucracies.

X. DON'T BREAK THE WINDOWS

The density of cities—the fact that in them residents are closer to many other people and have readier access to facilities that they find useful and important than they might in suburbs or exurbs—is both a great virtue and a vulnerability. Density can yield troublesome externalities alongside productivity-enhancing agglomeration effects; it will attract thieves and drug-dealers along with artists and entrepreneurs.

City-dwellers must admit, therefore, that realizing the benefits of urban life involves some trade-offs. Cities are rich in their diversity, but this does not mean they can be excessively tolerant of disorder and, sometimes, mere nonconformity. In a dense environment, where people continually encounter strangers whose intentions are unknown to them, it will be *more* rather than less important to devise and enforce norms of conduct

Copyright © 2014. Stanford University Press. All rights reserved.

Walters, Stephen J. K.. <i>Boom Towns : Restoring the Urban American Dream</i>, Stanford University Press, 2014.
ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/berkeley-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1742617.
Created from berkeley-ebooks on 2019-05-12 17:54:34.

than in environments where strangers are less common. The standards of acceptable behavior can vary from neighborhood to neighborhood or even block to block, as George Kelling found when he walked the streets of Newark while he and James Q. Wilson were developing their "broken windows" theory of efficient policing, but without them cities will inevitably decline as residents defend themselves against perceived threats to their security by barricading themselves in their homes or fleeing to more defensible spaces.

This might mean, for example, that in areas where the data show that gun violence is a problem, residents might have to empower police to "stop, question, and frisk" (or, as it was practiced in Pittsburgh, to "stop-and-talk") in order to discourage the malicious or just impulsive from carrying weapons. In areas that are tempting targets for property crime, city-dwellers might have to live with technological intrusions into their privacy (for example, cameras to deter muggers). Such compromises to civil liberties will be troubling to many and intolerable to a few. But we as a society need to get past the foolish presumption that these trade-offs are never worth making, and that tiny sacrifices of liberty can never be compensated by increases in security. Clearly, we need to implement such policies sensitively as well as efficiently. Refusing to make such trade-offs, however, or to consider that maximizing our liberties may not be optimal, can do great harm to our cities and the quality of our lives.

NO CITY LEFT BEHIND

Some of the analysis and recommendations in this book may be troubling to many readers, and all of it may provoke opposition and even anger in at least a few. Those who consider themselves progressives might be especially annoyed. Commonly, to make progress requires one to *do* things, to *un*do bad things, or somehow to take an active role in transforming the world or some piece of it. Yet much of what has been discussed here has held that a great deal of progressive effort, at least as it played out in cities, has failed to move our society forward. Redistributive programs implemented at the local level have provoked flight and sprawl. Anti-competitive labor regulations have fueled urban deindustrialization and damaged economic opportunity. Attempts to eliminate slums often shredded the social fabric

Copyright © 2014. Stanford University Press. All rights reserved.

Walters, Stephen J. K.. <i>Boom Towns : Restoring the Urban American Dream</i>, Stanford University Press, 2014.
ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/berkeley-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1742617.
Created from berkeley-ebooks on 2019-05-12 17:54:34.

woven by many poor urban residents. Bold programs to save the environment have yielded trivial ecological benefits but considerable inequity. A presumption that crime can and should be contained solely by treating its root causes rather than via effective policing has wrecked countless neighborhoods and cost many lives.

Future progress does not become more attainable or likely by denying these facts or ignoring the possibility that good intentions—whether held by progressives or conservatives or ideological neutrals—can frequently go awry. None of the foregoing chapters should be seen as a challenge to or dismissal of progressive thought. Rather, it simply reflects a hard-headed commitment to figuring out what works and what does not. If there is an underlying philosophy or ideology operating throughout this book, it is pragmatism. If the author has a mantra, it is, "If a policy doesn't actually work, it's not really progressive, or conservative, or anything except bad." Just because, for example, playing Robin Hood doesn't make sense at the local level does not mean that redistributionist policies can't or won't make society better or fairer if implemented at higher levels of government.

If we all subject our political philosophies and urban policy prescriptions to tests of practicability or usefulness, I believe we can rescue any city that is in decline and make those that are healthy work better. No matter how much flight a city might have endured in recent decades or how much decay is visible within its borders, I am confident that it can be rescued. Every American city exists for a compelling reason and is endowed with natural, physical, and human capital that carries enormous potential for growth; each can thrive and deliver abundant social and economic opportunities to its residents. No declining cities are truly obsolete or should be written off as beyond hope. None of the growing ones should be so pleased with their current status that they ignore the fundamental determinants of viability described throughout this book and repeat the mistakes others have made.

Most of the wisdom and energy to create the conditions for a boom town will, of course, come from those who live there: residents, business owners, elected officials, and others who not only have the greatest stake in seeing their localities grow and prosper but also the best information about how to implement the requisite strategies. But this is not to say that

Copyright © 2014. Stanford University Press. All rights reserved.

Walters, Stephen J. K.. <i>Boom Towns : Restoring the Urban American Dream</i>, Stanford University Press, 2014.
ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/berkeley-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1742617.
Created from berkeley-ebooks on 2019-05-12 17:54:34.

those at higher levels of government can play no role. State and federal officials have been enormously generous toward urban governments over the decades—indeed, excessively so, often acting as initiators or at least enablers of demonstrably destructive policies via their support of some programs and regulatory regimes. They can nudge localities in the right direction by making some or all of their continued funding contingent on localities' adoption of sound policy fundamentals (regarding tax policy, for example). Indeed, the history of various statewide tax revolts shows that even cities unalterably opposed to policies that will help them thrive can be dragged kicking and screaming to improved health by those outside their borders.

Everyone, in sum, can have a constructive role to play in reorienting public policy as it relates to cities—and everyone should be eager to perform it. Cities are crucial to our quality of life, to national, regional, and local economic performance, and to global environmental quality. Their fate is our fate, and there's no reason every one of them can't thrive. All we need to do is start pulling in the right direction, and we can restore the urban American dream.

Copyright © 2014. Stanford University Press. All rights reserved.

Walters, Stephen J. K.. <i>Boom Towns : Restoring the Urban American Dream</i>, Stanford University Press, 2014.
ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/berkeley-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1742617.
Created from berkeley-ebooks on 2019-05-12 17:54:34.

Copyright © 2014. Stanford University Press. All rights reserved.

Walters, Stephen J. K.. <i>Boom Towns : Restoring the Urban American Dream</i>, Stanford University Press, 2014.
ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/berkeley-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1742617.
Created from berkeley-ebooks on 2019-05-12 17:54:34.