The Quality of Life in Our City

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A Solution for Implementing Affordable Quality Housing in a Smart Growth Model

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CHAPTER ONE
Introduction

Smart Growth (SG) development entails retracting the city; hence, it aims to house low-income residents at new affordable housing facilities within a metropolitan area. On the other hand, the dense living conditions would cause land price to surge due to the scarcity of available land. In this situation, housing developers would be more burdened by high land costs and the low-income families have no alternatives than pay high rental prices to building owners. This research comprises of constructs developed from selected literature review on Smart Growth concept and criteria of importance in meeting the Affordable Quality Housing standards (QOL indicators). The research describes selected successful affordable housing financial models and identifies key considerations for social, economic and environmental sustainability in the design of this model. This study highlights how these models could assist low-income families build their lives and enable them to buy their own homes eventually. The research concludes by enumerating and explaining critical recommendations and practical solutions for developing a Affordable Quality Housing model for Smart Growth. As a contribution to the field, it is expected that the model become an alternative solution for housing developers who cannot rely on government subsidies to develop Affordable Quality Housings for the whole nation.

Housing problems in big cities

Usually, with the climbing price of house and rental, low-income people (even middle range income) have only two choices: 1) choose bad housing inside the big cities and decrease the quality of their life or 2) live outside the city and suburbs. Middle-income and low-income people are the government servants such as clerks, teachers, police officers, nurses, etc and most of them are working in the crowded and center parts of cities. They will become the more recent residents of low-income commune houses or they will migrate to live at the perimeter of a city in order to live in much cheaper areas. Indeed, with the increasing urban cost, the city will be empty of necessary and critical employees. Those who continue to fulfill these employment vacancies, they will be under pressure since they must allocate a lot of time, money and energy to maintain their livelihood and their daily transportation. Inevitably, the authorities will face more problems such as shortage of transportation, pollution, inefficient personnel and sprawl.

The main problem is: “extending the city increases the price of housing and decreases the quality of living in strategic locations of the city”. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to encourage planners
and researchers to search for new solutions that can protect low and medium-income people inside cities and give them an acceptable quality of living standards.

Using sustainable development principles in developing big cities is always equal to increasing Total Development Cost (TDC) which means more pressure on low-income earners (Lamb 2008). Meanwhile, introducing a standard of living together with housing at affordable price is another inseparable goal of Smart Growth. This research looks for a solution for merging Smart Growth principles and Affordable Quality Housing (AQH) as a new trend in housing development.

This research tries to use Smart Growth's goals to retract the city and transfer low-income residential projects from border areas to affordable quality housing within the old core of the city hence; writer tries to introduce a model for permanent Affordable Quality Housing units within a city (not in suburb). This trend will guide planners to a sustainable funding mechanism for the development of affordable housing in strategic locations.

In this chapter, the researcher introduces Smart Growth and planning according to this new vision as well as explains about regulations in planning. This study describes different definitions of Affordable Housing and different mechanisms in different countries. Only a strong bridge between an advanced planning and new housing standards can allow Affordable Quality Housing development to prosper.

**What is Smart Growth?**

Smart Growth is a new method of metropolitan development leading to more compact regions, hence, offering an alternative to sprawl (American Planning Association 2002). Given that housing comprises a major share of the built environment, policies that promote denser residential development form a key component of Smart Growth but some of these policies need new mechanisms.
The American Nightmare of suburban sprawl, wasting green lands and resources. ([http://www.medicaremoron.com/](http://www.medicaremoron.com/))

Smart Growth provides long-term savings by eliminating inefficiencies caused by inconsistent and uncoordinated planning. There is growing awareness, too that poorly planned development is a hidden tax on citizens and communities alike (American Planning Association 2002). Smart Growth literature claims that different benefits may result from housing developed at densities greater than a subdivision of single-family homes on large lots (Fulton, 1999). Among them are financial savings on infrastructure such as water, roads, and utilities mentioned by Altshuler (1977), Frank (1989), Burchell (1997,1992), Real Estate Research Corporation (1974) and Windsor (1979). Other benefits are summarized by Danielsen (1999) from: Ladd (1992), savings on schools due to economies of scale; Altschuler and Gomez-Ibanez (1993), savings on municipal and other service delivery and; Burchell et al (1992) and Landis (1995), savings on land costs per dwelling unit by lower land consumption.
Even in well-managed sprawl can not ignore wasting lands and resources.  
(http://www.theage.com.au/)
Daily, teachers, nurses, police and the other medium range income people have to send themselves to center of cities from suburbs.

Smart Growth also means investing in time, attention, and resources in restoring community and vitality to existing cities and older suburbs. Smart Growth in new developments is more town-centered and auto-accessible but also accommodates transit and pedestrian activities and has a greater mix of housing, commercial and retail uses. It also preserves open space and protects sensitive areas such as wetlands.
Sprawl city means many junctions and traffic and wasting time for daily passengers. (Traffic Light Tree, London, UK. Image credits: Squirmelia)

Ewing (1997) believes that Smart Growth recognizes connections between development and quality of life. Smart Growth advocates that if done right, building more compact regions should not conflict with economic development (Arigoni, 2001). Perhaps the greatest challenge that Smart Growth faces is community resistance to new development in already built-up areas. Enacting Smart Growth on a regional scale means that many existing lower density neighborhoods will receive new higher density housing. Suburbanites have a long history of resisting higher density housing for fear of what it might do to the property values, and who may reside in such housing (Baar, 1992). Suburbanites, in
particular, associate higher density affordable housing with neighborhood racial succession (Fulton, 1999). No matter how much current politics oppose sprawl, policies adding higher density housing to most neighborhoods remain a tough sell. Americans appear to hate two things: density and sprawl. Smart Growth’s fate may depend on which they ultimately hate more (Danielsen, 1999).

Preserving and using green lands by going to dense.

Smart Growth is a way of retracting big cities to protect urban residents from themselves against the impacts of unsustainable planning. Smart Growth is a mechanism for improving QOL in large size cities. It attempts to eliminate inefficiencies caused by inconsistent and uncoordinated planning. It saves cost in various aspects that enable planners to attend to other urban issues. What is indubitable in the basic discussion of Smart Growth is about commensurate houses which must be affordable for all urban people.
Affordable Housing

There are different definitions of affordable housing in different countries all over the world. The United Kingdom has a long experience of promoting affordable housing such as council-owned public housings. It also has shared ownership with social landlord and has different programs to decrease housing price for owners (MOH, 2006). Since 1980, the Conservative government of UK launched and strictly supported a new plan under the name “Right to Buy” for low income people.

In Australia, there is a different way in managing affordable housing. Centerlink, as a social group has the responsibility for renting private houses from landlords and renting them to eligible people by subsidy paid directly to tenant (Centerlink, 2008).
The amount of assistance paid is relative to the rent and the number of dependents the tenant has. Australia has another grant for affordable housing which is payable to first home buyers. These people are eligible of taking $14,000 grants for established house or $ 21,000 for a new house (Australian Ministry of Family, Housing, Community Services, 2008).

New affordable housing products are emerging in Australia, including low cost home ownership (linked to affordable finance) and shared equity housing (where the equity is shared with a not for profit housing agency). Private developers and builders can be involved in providing affordable housing for low and moderate income earners. (http://yourdevelopment.org/)

In Iran, affordable housing has split to different types that are categorized differently with different names and is focused on dwelling low-income and middle-range income families. Some of these programs are teachers’ housing program, special housing program for females as heads of families and Mehr program (as Low-income housing). Some programs were not successful but people are still using these plans. The Mehr housing plan is one of the results of Mr. Ahmadi Nejad’s period as president of Iran. This plan is based on cooperatives with government and loan associations.
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