

From: [Richard Wagner](#)
To: county_board_recipients@countyofdane.com
Subject: What kind of cities do we want? What sort of county? Plan for cars or people?
Date: Tuesday, September 12, 2023 1:24:19 PM
Attachments: [image.png](#)

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Hey all,

This is copied from Revitalize, or Die's Facebook page. Makes total sense, yes planners??
Which picture is your vision for Dane County?



thanks for reading,
Richard

If I wanted to bake a cake, I would start by picking out the cake I wanted. This seems the most logical way to approach the baking process. Then I would procure the ingredients and then I would find a recipe that would provide me with the process to make this wonderful cake. This is how we do things. We decide what outcomes we want and then work backward from there. We determine what we want and decide how to best achieve it. But this is not how cities have approached real estate development. Exactly the opposite in fact.

While there is no shortage of money spent on public input studies, residents never get to see what they want built. This is because the process overrides the will of the people. But what sense does it make to regulate a thing you haven't even given direction to? Imagine I want to make another cake, but instead of deciding which cake, I start by creating a series

of parameters I can use to bake. I create all of the cooking instructions and the do's and don'ts of baking and then I hire a bunch of people to determine if I am following those instructions properly. Never mind what I want to cook, hell, never mind what ingredients I have!

This is the main reason why modern buildings don't engender any affection. We have adopted the dumbest possible method for creating the built environment. If this was the way we approached cooking, everyone would despise food. The developers aren't the problem, the problem is municipalities adhering to an absolutely flawed system that is only capable of producing horrendous outcomes- they are at fault. Maybe it's a reasonable time to move away from the process driven real estate development approach and consider placing a premium on the outcomes.

Cities could adopt a new model, a model where the intended outcome is identified first. This is basically the idea behind a form based code. Decide what you want all the buildings to look like first, and then sort out how to make it happen. This part shouldn't be too hard. Just look at historic photos of your town and use those as a model. Use what worked and use what people loved.

Once a municipality has determined what the buildings should like look, find out what regulations stand in the way and begin to remove them from the books. Council should be on board with this because it will make everyone's lives better and they will look like big heroes for stripping away bureaucracy. After sorting out regulations to ensure all these new buildings can be legally built, then turn to the process. Here's the great thing, if everyone can agree in the beginning to what is getting built, the process should become shockingly simpler. No hurdles after the fact, sort out all the details in advance.

The city could reach out to the development community as partners instead of the traditional model of treating developers as adversaries. The city has a vision for what needs built, the development community will be an ideal partner in the process. Working together to save money, time, headaches and misery, everyone would be happier and the process would no longer prove an impediment.

With local developers and government working in a partnership, the financials would be out in the open for all to understand. This type of transparency would benefit everyone involved, including the community.

It is entirely possible to reshape the built environment of our communities. We have the technology and money to make our cities nice. Other cities across the world are removing bad urbanism and replacing it with beauty. Our cities can improve. We can easily reshape the environments that are shaping our lives. It's a simple solution and everyone will benefit. All we need is to remind ourselves, that it is up to us to decide the setting in which we want to live our lives and sort out how to make it happen. It starts with a vision, not a process.