



# New Urbanism Need Not Compromise Its Principles

by Jaimie Ross

**T**he Congress of New Urbanism (CNU) held its national conference in Palm Beach County in May, drawing over 1500 participants from around the country and the globe. As a presenter on the panel *Gentrification without Displacement*, I delivered this message: “Florida is the poster child for the proposition that New Urbanism must be coupled with an inclusionary housing requirement or it will not serve very low income populations.”

The CNU advocates smart growth and adheres to a set of principles that includes ensuring a mix of incomes. But with the exception of HOPE VI projects which have a legal requirement to serve lower income populations (they use land which is the site of former public housing), Florida’s approximate sixty new urbanism developments have failed to provide any housing for Florida’s very low income residents. The CNU philosophy to create communities with a mix of incomes has clearly not been realized.

New Urbanism, also known as Traditional Neighborhood Design (TND) development, began with Seaside in the Florida Panhandle. No one knew at that time what a success the new urbanism design would be. The developer included small cottages in the design of Seaside and fully expected those to serve as employee housing. But as the desirability of new urbanism or TND grew, so did the home prices. Even the smallest cottages would only be affordable to the wealthy. One of the most egregious failures to include housing for low income Floridians in a new urbanism development is Baldwin Park in Orlando. This large TND without any housing for very low income residents sits on the former site of a Navy Base, which could have been used to house the homeless in accordance with the Congressional priority for housing the homeless in base re-use plans. The national CNU conference was held in Palm Beach, which boasts CityPlace, another example of New Urbanism in Florida without housing opportunities for the people who work at CityPlace in the lovely retail stores and restaurants.

But this failure to realize the goal of providing diverse neighborhoods has a remedy. When local governments change land use to permit New Urbanism/TND development or transit oriented development (TOD), that change in land use should come with a requirement that affordable housing is included within the development. For that land use requirement to be effective it must be long term and enforceable. If it is not long term, the affordable unit will only remain affordable for the first residents who will ultimately sell the unit at whatever price the market will bear. Long-term affordability can be secured through a land use restriction agreement or by using a community land trust.

Why should the local government put an affordable housing requirement on the New Urbanism/TND developer or the developer of a TOD? When local governments rezone or grant a land use change to permit these developments they have used their official powers to increase the property value and wealth of private land owners. These public office holders have an obligation to act in the best interests for the health, safety, and welfare of the public and to recapture some of the land value they have created for the private sector to ensure that the current and anticipated population of low income residents in their jurisdiction are included within the community. In Florida, the obligation to ensure the provision of housing for all income groups is found in our comprehensive planning laws (see Section 163.3177, Florida Statutes). And while most developers may not endorse land use requirements to provide affordable housing, this one will help New Urbanists to finally realize their goal of inclusive communities. [HNN](#)

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