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Florida Urban Sprawl and its Abatement

by Mason Gaffney

Informal outline of remarks to Governor Bob Martinez' Task Force on Urban Growth Patterns, Tampa, 20 July 88, for use at meeting

SOME EVIDENCES OF FLORIDA URBAN SPRAWL

Jacksonville, Fla., the vastest U.S. city: 760 sq. mi. (sm). Also ranks high in municipal debt: \$3.08 Bil., 4th highest in U.S. That's only \$4.1 Mil. psm, would be bearable with 5,000 or so pop. psm. But Jacksonville has only 761 pop psm, the lowest density among large American cities. So per capita (pc) debt is \$5,329, which is 2.4 times the New York City debt pc, 3.8 times the Los Angeles debt pc, and many times the mean debt for all American cities.

The Jacksonville debt looks higher yet when one considers that Florida ranks low in state and local government spending pc: it is #40 in "direct general expenditures pc"; it is #38 in state and local gov. employment per 10,000 pop. It is #37 in state and local tax revenues pc. The Jacksonville debt suggests that debt service may make up a disproportionately high share of the spending there is. Debt is generally the legacy of rapid growth coupled with sprawl and advance provision of capital-intensive infrastructure.

I am not here to judge Jacksonville -- never even been there. Raw data can lead a person badly astray. I am told Jacksonville annexed all of Duval County, no doubt with good intentions and for what seemed like compelling reasons. But these data give one a clue that parts of Fla. may be moving out on a limb. The long, exciting but often sad history of "The Great American Land Bubble" includes too much imprudent assumption of debt to finance premature infrastructure at low density. The Jacksonville data may fit the pattern. Maybe not -- but it is prudent to raise the question, to look and evaluate. Hence the timeliness of this Task Force and its charge.

Low density and high pc debt often go together because the capital costs of urban infrastructure are functions of area, as well as population. Table 1 contains some selected data in support of the point.

separately distrib.

High growth rate

Florida is of course a high growth state. Pop. grew 23.4%, 1980-87. That is 4.6 times the U.S. growth rate of 5.1%. This has been going on for a long time. The annual rate 1930-70 was 3.90%, highest in the U.S. (U.S. was 1.26%; Ariz. 3.58%; Calif. 3.19%.) Calif. flagged, 1970-80, with 1.71%; Ariz. raced ahead with 4.35%; Fla. still sustained a rate of 3.68%. Fla.'s 6-year annual rate, 1980-87, works out to 3.57% -- still a blistering pace. Fla. is now the 4th largest state, and if Texas' depression continues, Fla. could become #3.

Urban growth

Fla.'s growth is urban. 5 of the 10 fastest growing Metropolitan Areas in the U.S., 1980-85, are in Fla: Naples, 36.0%; Ocala, 32.3%; Ft. Pierce, 31.4%; Ft. Myers, 30.2%; Melbourne, 26.6%. Other high rates, ranging from 25.4% to 13.4%, are in W. Palm Beach, Orlando, Ft. Walton Beach, Daytona Beach, Panama City, Sarasota, Bradenton, Tampa, Lakeland, Jacksonville (they'll probably need it), and Pensacola.

The speculative mindset

Some of these new growth poles were unknowns until recently, rising from obscurity. But then, so did Houston, Phoenix, San Antonio and San Diego, if we go back 30 years, so a speculator around any one of these can dream he is boarding an express elevator for great wealth. This, I submit, is a dangerous state of mind. Speculators so minded can become holdouts who overprice their land, forcing settlement to bypass them and leapfrog. Call that Mindset #1. Other speculators, of Mindset #2, react by forcing the future and developing for what they think and hope will be a higher demand intensity. Land holdouts of Mindset #1, intermixed with developers of Mindset #2, create urban chaos.

What about rationality and market efficiency, as touted by the latest trends in economic theory? Here is where a page of history is worth volumes of theory, and I suggest you turn to the page headed "Florida, 1926". Anyone who can read that page and retain his faith in market rationality and efficiency is in the grasp of some impervious a priori ideology we cannot hope to penetrate, and I won't try. Just read the page.

With such sustained urban growth Fla. has of course become a highly urban state. Pop. density is 222 psm, ranking #10 in the nation, a very high ranking for such a large state. 91% of Fla.'s resident population is in metropolitan areas, ranking #6 in this respect. So when we talk about urban growth we are talking about what makes Fla. boom, or bust, or -- dare we hope -- reach some benign, stable equilibrium.

California percentage growth has slowed, finally; Texas has crashed, disastrously; Fla. may be showing the first signs of tapering off, as Arizona's growth rate pulls ahead. Some of its older cities and neighborhoods are already in trouble. Golden dreams never last forever. Could Fla. be the next Texas? No one knows, but it is fair to ask this: is Fla. ready in case it should be next to falter? What should it do to prevent or prepare?

Auto orientation

Fla ranks #6 in motor vehicle registrations pc, and #2 in domestic travel expenditures pc. (One might venture a guess it ranks #1 in boat registrations.) All that fits the pattern of low density sprawl.

Land-using urbanization

An unusually high share of Fla.'s total surface area, 7.39%, is "urban and built-up". The share is higher yet in tiny industrial states, but notably smaller in other states of comparable size: 4.32% in Ga., 5.12% in Ill., 5.25% in Mich., 5.76% in N.Y.

Table 2 shows pc urban land-consumption in several states.

It is useful to ask how much urban land is needed at various common and familiar densities. At the density of Miami, 10,902 psm, Fla.'s urban population of 10.9 M would occupy 999.8 sm, or 1.7% of the surface of Fla. The pop. actually preempts 4328 sm, or 4.3 times as much.

Before one dismisses that saying no one wants to or should live at that density, consider:

a. Much of Fla.'s pop., perhaps 20%, already lives at that density.

b. Miami Beach has a higher density, perhaps 14,000.

c. Miami contains a good deal of vacant and derelict land.

d. San Francisco, the favorite city of many people, has 15,361 pop. psm, plus vast commercial and military and industrial and shipping areas.

e. Manhattan has 66,000 pop. psm. Manhattan may not suit your tastes, or mine, but both cities attract large numbers from around the world who are willing to pay extremely high rents.

f. An upper-middling Milwaukee suburb, Whitefish Bay, with quiet tree-lined streets, houses 10,000 psm in detached single family dwellings on lots 50'x100' and larger. So does its neighbor Shorewood, Wis. They reach this density simply by being fully built out, unlike most cities.

Alternatively, consider accommodating your urban needs at the density of St. Petersburg, 4283 psm. At the St. Pete standard, 10.9 M people would preempt 2544.9 sm, or 4.3% of Fla. The land actually preempted, 4328 sm, is that plus 70%.

Last, and more realistically, let's accommodate half the metro area people, 5.5 M, at a mean density of 8,000 psm, halfway between the standards of St. Pete and Miami Beach. They would need 687 sm. Now let's see how the other half lives. They would have (4328 - 687) or 3641 sm, which they would occupy -- sort of -- at a mean density of 1483.1 psm. As a quick and dirty stab, this approximates the way things really are. Naturally you would want to work this through carefully, and divide the population into several density classes. But in most cities you find most of the people occupying a little land at high density, and a few people spreading over vast lands at low density.

Some of that low density is due to great wealth and a taste for land, lots of land; some of it is due to bad social organization -- entropy, let's call it, a nice word for chaos. The two combined can generate severe problems.

Balkanization

Jacksonville is exceptional. After annexing its county it still contains only 70.5% of its metro area, but that figure is high above the corresponding one for other core cities. Here are the ratios of city population to metro area pop. for major cities in Fla.

Miami	.128	Tampa	.143	Orlando	.157
Jacksonvl.	.705	W.PmBch	.094	Lakelnd	.146
Melbourne	.149	Pensac.	.188	Daytona	.181
Ft. Myers	.141	S-sota	.217	Tallah.	.533
Naples	.158				

Those figures are generally well below national norms, indicating a higher-than-normal degree of Balkanization in Fla. Accordingly we find that Miami metro area ranks #11 among metro areas, while Miami city ranks #37 among cities; Tampa metro area ranks #20, while Tampa city ranks #56; and so on. Only Jacksonville reverses this pattern.

Balkanization is not all bad. Balkanization tends to discourage cross-subsidy, which is a nice word for leeching. Leeching is common in urban expansion. New peripheral and outlying areas often contrive to tap into existing city capital plant others have already paid for. If the new lands cover only what Dr. Frank calls the "precipitated" costs, that is too often acceptable.

The trouble with any subsidy, of course, is that it fosters activity which at the margin costs society more than it returns. That is the kind of problem this Task Force is here to address. "Metropolitan Unity" and "Equal Rights to Service", appealing slogans though they are, may sometimes lead in the wrong direction.

On the other hand in most metro areas there are various kinds of regional districts that serve as vehicles for cooperation and integration: in Milwaukee, the Metro Sewer Commission; in the L.A. area the Metro Water District of Southern California, extending from Sta. Barbara down south to the Mexican border. Unfortunately

these are also vehicles for leeching. Indeed, that may be the primary purpose in some cases.

What is needed is overall metro planning that is free of cross-subsidy; where rates charged to different areas and uses are truly cost-justified. The key word here is "truly". There are manuals of cost-justification used by utility rate-makers, but they give too little weight to density and location factors, and altogether too much weight to costs of metering and of connections. This Task Force must be prepared to do some pioneering, to accomplish its goals.

(A useful by-product of metro planning would be better data. Florida data is unusually chaotic, an effect of rapid and continuing change.)

Unbalanced economic base?

Fla. is a land of certain extremes, not of height or cold, but it ranks #1 in the % of its pop > 65 years of age. That % is 17.7%. Calif., with which Fla. is often compared, ranks #38. Alaska, the youngest state, ranks #50, with only 3.4% of its pop. > 65. The difference is more than marginal.

Fla. ranks #50 in the % of its pop. < 18 years of age (22.5%).

Fla. not surprisingly also ranks #1 in the % of its pop. receiving social security. This is a case where popular stereotypes are true. If age brings wisdom, Fla. has it. It may well need it to cope with the subject set of problems. The more people around who are old enough to remember 1926, the better for Fla.

The stimulus then was the same as now: rising urban and suburban land prices. With population booming, naturally land booms too. Fla. ranks #12 in the rise of "farm" land prices, 1980-87, even though these were bleak years for citrus. Much of this rise is doubtless spillover from urban sprawl. Urban price influence has never stopped at boundaries drawn by the U.S. Census, but infects land prices everywhere.

Near Disney World prices are reported to have shot up 10 times in a few months. Such news gets around, and arouses the age-old lust for unearned increments. So don't get giddy; remember 1926!

At that time Fla. subdivided enough lots (on paper, at least) to house the entire pop. of the U.S.

But age also brings its own kinds of insecurity. Social Security benefits are under increasing pressure. In addition, old folks retirement incomes from securities, rents and capital gains could tumble in a national recession. Fla. is inordinately dependent on conditions outside, over which it has no control.

Fla. is also #1 in (excuse me for reminding you) crime rate. Being #1 is not always desirable. This figure is doubly meaningful because crime rates are usually associated with youth, of which Fla. has much less than its share. So Fla. crime is of another sort, and we can all guess what that is.

Of course, morality and legality aside, drug trafficking is a large industry. And it spawns another large counterindustry, the narco-bureaucracy, America's fastest-growing. The two together are one of Fla's largest industries. But again, the day will come when the nation tires of this all and legalizes drugs, destroying both industries, removing two large props from the Fla. economy.

Lots of Floridians apparently live on income from property located in less salubrious places. Fla. is only #34 in ave. annual pay (Calif. is #6), but #19 in income pc, and #13 in retail sales pc, and (as noted before) #6 in motor vehicle registrations pc and #2 in domestic travel expenditures. Worth Av. in Palm Beach boasts the 6th highest floor space rentals, \$10.50 per square foot, in the U.S. (#4 if we treat three N.Y. City avenues as one), a good sign of concentrated purchasing power at high levels.

Fla. ranks low in manufacturing: #17 in value-added, pretty low for the #4 state in pop. Fla. ranks low in inventiveness: Floridians got .10 patents per 1,000 pop. in 1984, well below the national average of .19, and 'way below other highly urbanized states like Connecticut (.45) and N.J. (.43). Does Fla. possess the industrial and economic resourcefulness and enterprise to meet a crisis, should one arise? We presume its people did once, when younger, but how about now? The evidence suggests that a state low on youth, low on industry, and low on inventiveness should proceed with caution today along high-risk strategies. One such high-risk strategy to eschew would be assuming heavy debts and contingent liabilities connected with land booming.

Fla. ranks low in dependence on Federal spending, other than social security. It is #19 in defense spending; #50 in Federal grants to state and local govts., on a pc basis. It is only 8.2% Federal land, a much lower share than in many western states.

While it is good in a way to be independent, this independence rather underscores the imbalance of Fla.'s economic base, and the importance of avoiding risky overdependence on land booming.

Fla. ranks #48 in the % who vote. How you earned that distinction, and what it may portend, I leave to you. It strikes the outsider as food for some deep soul-searching.

THE COSTS OF SPREAD CITY DEVELOPMENT

Professor James Frank is providing this Task Force an able summary of some basic studies on Costly Development Patterns. He has made some of these studies much clearer than did their original authors; and he has been more than gentle in his courteous dismissals of certain of them. His only cruelty was to remind us they were ever written.

Professor Frank's selection of sources, his treatment and interpretation of them, are truly outstanding. This Task Force is fortunate to be so well served. I will not repeat what he has covered so ably.

It should be noted, however, that the standard studies cited were not done with Fla. in mind. Some of this work needs to be done again, adapted to Fla. geography and Fla. institutions and the Fla. economy. We have already seen many ways in which Fla. is an extreme case. No doubt it has many other idiosyncracies.

One or more case studies are needed, from Fla. Such a study would compare facilities as they are with how they could and should be if rationalized, and settlement patterns were rationalized. Such a study would be more telling than the comparison of sterile, hypothetical density differences such as postulated in the studies. No scholar can postulate patchwork infrastructure designs as absurdly whimsical and accidental and wasteful as those met in reality; he would be ridiculed. Truth is stranger than fiction, especially academic fiction. We need to begin by observing actual behavior.

I have done such studies, but not, alas, in Fla. They are greatly rewarding. They identify wastes and losses, and point the way to improvements and savings far greater than one imagines at the start. I would advise this Task Force to undertake some case studies.

Another problem with the standard studies of costly development patterns is their narrow scope. They are too sobersided, too engineering-oriented, too limited in imagination. There are two broad classes of benefits from compact settlement, of which they consider only one, or parts of one, that is the saving of street improvement costs and the like. The greater gain is to facilitate urban linkages of all kinds, with all their synergy.

In the arid west, irrigated farms were forced together to economize on the cost of water distribution. But once together they discovered all other distribution costs were also lowered, for power, gas, telephone, deliveries, etc. Radio stations reached more people in any given area; newspapers could be delivered. Groundwater reservoirs could be recharged using less water, because the area covered was reduced. Rural roads could be shorter. Urban services were nearer. And the cities found collection costs were lower, so packing and food processing plants developed amid these concentrated farm sources. Labor was more easily pooled and shared among different crops with different peak seasonal loads. This is how California (pardon the expression) became the nation's leading farm producing state.

But beyond and above all this is intellectual synergy, the highest function of urban civilization. Bring people together with easy intercommunication and you foster mutual mental stimulation. This may be hard to measure, but let's look again at data on patents issued per 1,000 population. Here is how some of the state's stack up.

Connecticut	.45	New Jersey	.43
California	.25	New York	.21
FLORIDA	.10	Wyoming	.07
Montana	.07	Idaho	.07
Alaska	.03		

I could go on, but you get the picture. The highly urban states generate lots of patents per capita; the highly rural ones

very few. I do not doubt, and I suspect you don't either, we would find the same pattern in art, literature, theatre, cinema, dance, music, and so on.

But how about the position of Florida, a highly urbanized state, so low on the totem pole? That supports my suspicion that something about the pattern of Florida cities is failing to achieve the first and prime function of cities, that is to facilitate congregation, to bring people together to interact, to relate constructively with one another.

Aliens also take out U.S. patents, and it is the highly urbanized countries that take most: Switzerland, .200; Sweden, .116; Japan, .114; W. Germany, .111; etc. These are countries with efficient, well-organized cities and urban life.

There is more to life than patents and copyrights; they are but indices to quality of life and creativity and fulfillment of individuals. But indices they are, indices that alert us to the potential gains from urban synergy. These gains are incomparably more important than the narrow engineering savings from shorter lines, valuable as those are.

Another problem of standard studies is that they treat only of those costs for which a municipality is directly responsible (and sometimes not all of those). They seem to be addressed to municipal officials viewing decisions from a totally parochial, limited, particularistic worldview. But land use densities and siting also affect county and state costs, like state-financed expressways. They also affect costs of distributing private utilities, and these engage in extensive cross-subsidy.

Settlement patterns affect the length, siting and proximity of high-pressure trunk gas lines, with their propensity occasionally to burst; of high-voltage power lines, with their possibly damaging emanations; of high-speed expressways, with their noise and fumes. Standard studies do not attempt to include these factors.

Scattered settlement invades areas previously available for waste disposal. The "NIMBY" byword stops the siting of dumps, junkyards, rendering plants, recycling plants, sewage treatment plants, power plants, incinerators, and no end of needed

facilities, which then of course have to locate farther out, adding to sprawl. Sprawl increases the need for autos, whose space demands use about half the land in cities, and stretch them out more, discourage pedestrian traffic thereby, and so increase demand for motor vehicles in a continuing treadmill whose end we have yet to see.

Scatter aborts farming near town, and puts more distance between farm and city. Scatter causes aquifer pollution over wide areas and forces cities to reach out farther for water supplies. Scatter increases commuting times, and air pollution. The list goes on and on, and each item is real and consequential. One simply cannot rely on the myopic, limited standard studies to begin to appraise the scope of the vital issues affected by settlement patterns. I urge this Task Force -- having addressed and mastered the nuts-and-bolts issues -- to lift its sights high above them to the greater ones. Such sight-raising turns what looks like a collection of minor matters into a major, a very major matter.

And there is more. At the national level, urban sprawl increases the cost of postal delivery, hence postal rates. No one at the local or even state level considers that a cost of sprawl: "zat's not mein depahtment" is the attitude. Yet in the aggregate it is everyone's department, and some level of government should face it and apply appropriate incentives.

State Government is probably the optimal level. Local govts. are too particularistic to address the big issues; Federal govt. is too remote; state govt. may be optimal. State govts. have many problems, and blemished track records. Their legislative logrolling is not notably less noxious than that in Washington. Yet an enlightened Executive, supported by an aroused public, could just do a better job than any other level has yet. It is, at any rate, in that hope and faith that this group meets, and I share that hope and faith.

CONTAINMENT POLICIES FOR URBAN SPRAWL

This last section deals with three kinds of containment policies:

---negative (like exclusive agricultural zoning);

- neutral (cost-justified zonal differentiation of utility rates and availability);
- and positive (encouraging central infill and renewal by allocating more hook-ups there, lowering rates, and imposing heavy fixed charges on central land).

This material is to be presented orally, and in an attached chapter, "Containment Policies for Urban Sprawl".

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State Government is probably the optimal level. Local govts. are too particularistic to address the big issues; Federal govts. are too remote; state govts. may be optimal. State govts. have many problems, and diminished track records. Their legislative controlling is not notably less noxious than that in Washington. Yet an enlightened Executive, supported by an aroused public, could just do a better job than any other level has yet. It is, at any rate, in that hope and faith that this group meets, and I share that hope and faith.

CONTAINMENT POLICIES FOR URBAN SPRAWL

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Mason Gaffney, "Florida Urban Sprawl and its Abatement", July 88

Table 1: Land-consumption and per capita debt, 1985-86
(Preliminary and fragmentary)

Cities are ranked by density. Note trend: debt/capita rises as density falls (acres/capita rises).

Florida cities underlined.

City	Acres/cap	Debt/cap
New York	.027	2,194.
Paterson	.038	111.
San Franc.	.042	1,941
Chicago	.049	635.
Philadel.	.053	1,894.
Boston	.054	1,078.
Inglewood	.056	447.
<u>Miami</u>	<u>.059</u>	<u>635.</u>
<u>Yonkers</u>	<u>.063</u>	<u>605</u>
Berkeley	.067	55.
Detroit	.080	859
Pittsburgh	.084	940
Cleveland	.088	714
Milwaukee	.096	825
<u>St. Pete</u>	<u>.149</u>	<u>769</u>
Albuquerque	.184	2,334
Tucson	.191	1,715
<u>Tampa</u>	<u>.199</u>	<u>2,075</u>
San Antonio	.211	2,680
Houston	.212	1,371
San Diego	.215	1,132
Austin	.215	3,816
Wichita	.232	4,168
Riverside	.234	5,000. *
Phoenix	.290	1,537
Tulsa	.329	2,265
Nashville	.648	2,545
<u>Jacksnl</u>	<u>.841</u>	<u>5,329</u>
Okla Cty	.958	879
Anchorage	4.708	3,320

Source: Statistical Abstract; Riverside from local sources

Mason Gaffney, Florida Urban Sprawl and its Abatement, July 88

Table 2: Per capita Urban Land Consumption, Fla. & Comparison States

(Preliminary: subject to revision)

State	Pop. (M)	% Urban (est.)1980	Urban Pop. (M)	Urban & Built up Land (sm)	Density of Urban Use	
					Pop/sm	x/Fla
Fla.	12.0	84	10.1	4328	2334	1.00
CA	27.0	91	24.6	5094	4829	2.07
GA	6.1	62	3.8	2547	1492	.64
IL	11.6	83	9.6	2891	3321	1.42
MI	9.1	71	6.5	3078	2112	.90
NY	17.8	85	15.1	2828	5339	2.29
PA	11.9	69	8.2	3239	2532	1.08
MO	5.1	68	3.5	1745	2006	.86
AZ	3.3	84	2.8	1109	2525	1.08
CT	3.2	79	2.5	937	2668	1.14
MA	5.8	84	4.9	1375	3564	1.53
NJ	7.6	84	6.8	1813	3751	1.61

Source: Statistical Abstract; Riverside from local sources