

Sustainable Urbanism.

The confluence of sustainability and urbanism offers a rich framework for planning, designing, building and managing small cities and towns.

From **sustainability** theory we get three ideas:

- From Thomas Jefferson we get the aspiration that we should make decisions as though we loved our seventh generation of descendants.
- The Rio Earth Summit in 1992 said sustainability is making sure the present generation can meet its needs while assuring that subsequent generations can meet theirs.
- There are three spheres of human activity – economic, physical and social; to which I add the “governance sphere” that provides balance and equity to resolve the inherent conflicts between the three operating spheres.

From **urbanism** we get a strong identification of the important components of the physical realm. On a global scale, we are concerned with air, water, land and, of course, climate. On a more local scale we focus on urban and rural lands with the urban lands organizing themselves into neighborhoods, corridors and centers; each of which has to be supported by a holistic natural and urban open space systems along with urban physical and social infrastructure.

As we describe and define each sphere of the sustainable urban systems we find ways to create jobs with livable wages, fees and taxes to support public systems. We also find urban and rural development policies and programs to preserve and enhance the natural environment while providing homes and venues for work, education, healthcare, public safety and welfare support to residents and businesses.

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The American Society of Landscape Architects [ASLA], among others, started the conversation to conflate sustainability and urbanism a while ago:

“Urban development should be guided by a sustainable planning and management vision that promotes interconnected green space, a multi-modal transportation system, and mixed-use development. Diverse public and private partnerships should be used to create sustainable and livable communities that protect historic, cultural, and environmental resources. In addition, policymakers, regulators and developers should support sustainable site planning and construction techniques that reduce pollution and create a balance between built and natural systems.”

[**LINK:** <https://www.asla.org/sustainableurbandevlopment.aspx>]

Douglas Farr continued the conversation with his 2007 book – *Sustainable Urbanism*. He has done a great service by specifically linking sustainability and urbanism including five aspects of urban development: definition, compactness, completeness, connectedness and biophilia.

The graphic below presents a picture of the combined ideas.

- The role of the **economic sphere** is to produce jobs with livable wages and revenues [taxes and fees] for government to provide physical and social infrastructure.
- The **physical sphere** manifests itself with flora & fauna and bricks & mortar that provide natural environments and places for homes, work, education, recreation, safety and healthcare.
- The **social sphere** is where all the social infrastructure hosts programs, services and activities that support urban life.
- The **governance sphere** is the *equity mechanism* where the conflicts between the operating spheres are resolved. With good government, resolution comes with balance and equity.

