

# 1. Architecture and Urban Design



**Research Team Title:**  
Smart growth and new urbanism

**Grand Challenge:**  
Sustainable Design of Buildings and Urban-Ecological Landscapes

**Key Terms:**  
New Urbanism, pedestrian walkways, human scale, zoning, connectivity, mixed-use development, pedestrian-friendly spaces, placelessness, gentrification, urban renewal, combating suburban sprawl, smart growth, urban growth boundary

**Student Leader:** Willy Staley

**Student Members:**

- Juliet Oh - Suburban Development Trends: A Practical Model of the New Urbanism in Otay Ranch
- Lisa Chau - Mixed Use Redevelopment in City Heights
- Danny Yun - Sustainable Design of Buildings and Urban-Ecological Landscapes
- Willy Staley - Smart Growth in Mission Valley: The Case of Rio Vista West

**Mentor(s) Leader:**

- Michael Stepner

**Team Narrative:**

Michael Stepner, FAIA, FAICP, FIUD  
Professor of Architecture and Urban Design  
NewSchool of Architecture & Design  
Urban Designer, Stantec Architecture, San Diego  
Adjunct Instructor, USP/UCSD

## THEORY INTO PRACTICE - SMART GROWTH AND NEW URBANISM

I had the privilege and opportunity to serve as senior research project mentor for William Staley, Danny Yun, Juliet Oh, and Lisa Chau. The mentorship consisted of interviews about Smart Growth and New Urbanism, interviews about specific projects and initiatives, and having the UCSD students attend sessions of my Urban Design Studio at the New School of Architecture & Design.

The topic chosen by the students is especially relevant today. Cities are evolving; the distinction between “city” and “suburb” is disappearing; and the growing concerns about climate change and the focus on sustainability are influencing people to rethink development, not only physical development, but our social, economic, and cultural development as well.

The Urban Land Institute (ULI), in partnership with the Financial Times of London, recently announced its Sustainability City Awards Program. To set the stage, they posed the question, “What do we mean by Smart Growth and Sustainable?” They observed that “sustainability is the design, construction, and management of the built environment to be ecologically sound, economically viable, socially beneficial, and culturally appropriate. Sustainable cities and real estate development have the inherent means to assure their own continued integrity and ability to function without undermining the very conditions on which urban systems depend” (Urban Land Institute).

The case studies selected by the students, and the research and analysis they have undertaken, reflect the principles stated in the ULI/Financial Times definition. They are thorough and thoughtful; and, while not suggesting solutions, they continue the dialogue that needs to be ongoing in order that we may arrive at solutions to the problems that face our urban areas.

Of course, there are many reasons for the situations described in their papers, and they point to the fact that rational, long-range planning solutions are always rooted in current political/community attitudes; but the growth of cities is an evolutionary process.

Planning has been defined as a “continuing process” and, indeed, it must be because the world does not stand still. Thomas Jefferson said that politics and architecture are indivisible; management guru Peter Drucker reminds us that long-range planning is not about the impact of future decisions but, rather, of today’s decisions. The students’ papers reflect the validity of those statements.

While the directions to the mentors in assembling these narratives say, “no bullet points;” as mentors, we are empowered to modify directions. The following bullet points from the students summarize their work, and I could not agree more with the way they have defined it.

It was a pleasure working with them and I look forward to seeing them make their mark on our cities in the future.

### **Theory into Practice - Smart Growth and New Urbanism**

- All of our case studies deal with evaluating the successes and failures of smart growth and new urbanist theories that were put into practice in San Diego neighborhoods and elsewhere.
- Overall, smart growth and new urbanism are easier said than done.
- Each case study demonstrated that there are a number of other factors that contribute to the success or failure of a smart growth / new urbanist project:
  - For example we found gentrification and loss of identity in City Heights.
  - It is also challenging to implement smart growth and new urbanism in brand new suburban subdivisions when such practices were really meant for infill development.
- The terms smart growth and new urbanism are now being loosely applied to projects that don't fit the criteria of these theories.
- Smart growth practices are becoming more and more popular with developments, which also makes it difficult because the issue of targeting buyers and making profits may get in the way of holistic, successful smart growth planning.
- Smart Growth and New Urbanism must go beyond altering urban landscapes—they must educate and persuade the people utilizing the urban space:
  - For example, many people will choose to drive even if efficient public transit or other modes of transportation are readily available, and
  - It is hard to implement smart growth and new urbanism in places where the culture and the mind-set of the people have always been auto-centric.

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**Links:**

<http://www.ci.chula-vista.ca.us>

<http://www.otayranch.com>

<http://www.sandiego.gov/redevelopment-agency/majorproj.shtml>

<http://www.cnu.org/>

<http://www.uli.org//AM/Template.cfm?Section=Home>

<http://www.smartgrowth.org>

**Multimedia Archive:**

Available presentations for this group can be found on the Senior Sequence website at:

[http://seniorsequence.net/?page\\_id=440](http://seniorsequence.net/?page_id=440)