

Expert: Suburban sprawl must end

Contributed by Posted from Asheville Citizen-Times
Wednesday, 08 October 2008

ASHEVILLE — Neighborhoods of the future need to be packed more densely and have access to alternative forms of transportation and nearby shopping options to meet the needs of an aging and more diverse population, a planning expert told a local group Saturday.

“We want to make sure that the neighborhoods of tomorrow are designed, built and planned very differently than they have been in the past,” said Mitchell Silver, director of planning and urban design for the city of Raleigh. “The challenge of the 21st century is suburban sprawl.”

Silver was the featured speaker at the third annual Neighborhood Congress sponsored by the Coalition of Asheville Neighborhoods. About 50 people attended the event at Jubilee Community Church.

As baby boomers reach retirement age, homebuyers will tend to be older and have fewer children and will want smaller homes in neighborhoods with amenities like parks, sidewalks, stores and restaurants, Silver said.

“We want to reduce driving and make them more pedestrian-friendly, and have the necessary goods and services within walking distance, and have the social places where people can gather,” he said. “People want housing choices.

“They want choices in mobility, so it’s important to have transportation networks that are not just driving, but walking and biking and transit.”

Denser is better

City planners should discourage suburban sprawl and encourage developers to build more densely packed housing, Silver said. Denser development increases the tax base, encourages use of mass transit and is good for the economy, he said.

“The next generation is looking for density,” he said. “So if you don’t have density, they are going to choose to live in places that offer those housing choices. Sprawl and low density make no economic sense.”

Mike Lewis, a member of the Coalition of Asheville Neighborhoods, said he found Silver’s talk instructive.

“We’re not going to be able to disperse our communities anymore,” he said. “We’re going to have to live closer together.”

Asheville Mayor Terry Bellamy also spoke at the event. She said the city is working on master plans for downtown, the transit system and parks and greenways.

Published 10/05/2008

Clarke Morrison Call Clarke at 828-232-5849 or
e-mail CMorrison@CITIZEN-TIMES.com.