One of the three interlocking circles of sustainable development is labeled social equity (or sometimes social opportunity or advancement). The three-circle concept recognizes that reconciling economic development with sustainable environmental qualities is not enough; the social needs of the human inhabitants of the land must also be part of the equation. For many Americans, that translates into quality-of-life factors—comfort, security, privacy, and access to common facilities for education and recreation. For many other Americans, however, their principal social concern is equity—equal access to opportunities for jobs, incomes, and education as well as to the benefits of livable communities.

This is not a new issue, of course. Improving the lot of society's poor and disadvantaged has been a continuing political and social goal. But in the context of shaping our communities to achieve sustainable development, the concern for social equity raises practical questions: How? When? Where? And to what extent should people engaged in developing communities assume some responsibility for answering these questions?

Some years ago, concern for environmental justice sounded a warning about ensuring social equity in the process of achieving sustainable development. As more and more people became aware of the extent of unsafe and unwelcome environmental problems, many residents of lower-income neighborhoods and communities realized that they were residing amid those problems. They looked with heightened concern at the proximity of their homes to solid waste disposal or transfer sites, to industries spewing out malodorous and even toxic emissions as well as noise and glare, to contaminated industrial sites, and to polluted streams and ponds. They also noted the number of times that their neighborhoods were chosen as the site for jails, halfway houses, and other necessary but less-than-desirable land uses.

Some of these conditions resulted from economics-driven decisions that define good sites as cheap sites, especially for facilities such as landfills that require large expanses of land. Not by coincidence, of course, many low-income neighborhoods develop in less desirable areas where inexpensive housing can be built on inexpensive land. Historically, working-class homes sprang up within walking distance of the factories, railroad yards, and warehouses where residents were employed. Historically, too, these neighborhoods have housed minority populations that have little political clout to influence the location of locally undesirable uses. As metropolitan areas expanded their reach, many older and poorer neighborhoods have found themselves stuck with the detritus of declining core cities as burgeoning suburbs furiously fend off new locations or relocations of undesirable uses.

The rising clamor over the inequities of these conditions resulted in President Clinton's signing Executive Order No. 12898 on February 11, 1994. The order directs each federal agency to "make achieving environmental justice part of its mission by identifying and addressing, as appropriate, dispropor-
Where We Have Gone/Where We Are Going

In order to become more effective in our efforts to promote sustainable development, it is important to understand the current state of our efforts and the challenges we face. This requires us to look at our past efforts, evaluate our successes and failures, and identify opportunities for improvement.

One of the key challenges we face is the need for more effective communication and collaboration among stakeholders. This includes government, civil society, industry, and the public. Effective communication and collaboration are essential for achieving sustainable development goals.

Another challenge is the need for greater resources and funding. Sustainable development initiatives require significant investment, both in terms of financial resources and human resources.

Finally, we need to address the issue of knowledge and capacity building. This includes the need for greater access to information and knowledge, as well as the need for training and capacity building for those working on sustainable development initiatives.

In conclusion, the challenge of sustainable development is complex and multifaceted. However, with a commitment to effective communication, collaboration, and investment in resources and knowledge, we can make progress towards achieving sustainable development goals.

The executive order is important because

The opportunity to share in the benefits of sustainable development is not limited to those with the means or the resources to participate. By working together, we can create a more equitable and sustainable future for all.

The executive order is important because

The opportunity to share in the benefits of sustainable development is not limited to those with the means or the resources to participate. By working together, we can create a more equitable and sustainable future for all.

The executive order is important because

The opportunity to share in the benefits of sustainable development is not limited to those with the means or the resources to participate. By working together, we can create a more equitable and sustainable future for all.
costly homes that house fewer people and see less and less use as a sanctuary for family and friends. We will not be able to deal with this dilemma effectively unless we face several important truths. First, our nation is increasingly polarized in terms of race, income, and spatial location. Native Caucasians tend to live in neighborhoods of similar-income families. If African Americans sought to live in neighborhoods in the same manner as whites, nearly 70 percent would have to move. Similarly, over half of Latinos would have to move, although less than 30 percent of Asians would need to do so. Despite some gains in integrating our society, our neighborhoods continue to represent separate societies, creating a tinder box of racial animosity and discontent. As Vietorisz and others suggest, "When areas of the region are divided into rich and poor, low-income communities are at a disadvantage in paying for services...[Thus] physical and social conditions in the core of the city deteriorate...reducing attractiveness...which in turn pushes those who are capable of paying out..." 3

Second, we must build our way out of this situation as we have built our way into it. We can start by recognizing that building high-quality, socially equitable communities is the key to salvation. We need to pursue a smarter and better strategy for community development. If not, the resulting social and environmental disaster will threaten the quality of life of future generations. The threat is real. Economic and spatial inequality is crippling America's competitiveness in the global marketplace. For example, the nation's 284 sprawling metropolitan areas require three times the level of expenditure for transportation as that required by smaller and denser European settlements. Transportation in the United States consumes almost 20 percent of the nation's GDP compared with only 9 percent in Japan. If we spent less on travel, we would have more money for education and social spending that would improve the nation's competitive position in global trade. As the Asian nations expand trade, they add significant internal urban structures to accommodate growth; as for U.S. cities, they continue to sprawl and create a situation that, according to economists Sklar and Hook, "should be a matter of economic policy concern [because] no other industrialized nation has [such] decentralized employment and allowed cities to deteriorate to the same degree as the United States." 4

In large measure, houses have fueled the remarkable expansion of the nation's metropolitan areas. Probably no single tax measure in U.S. history has had as profound an impact on development patterns as the mortgage interest deduction for home purchases. This tax break has helped support the largest middle class in the world. As a result, future decisions on how and where we house our growing population are inextricably linked to how and where our cities will grow. Therefore, the third truth is that the course to the future is a retreat to our past. We must somehow find a way to provide a safe and decent inventory of housing that is adequate to house coming generations while reversing the outward movement of housing investment. We must maintain what has been built and stop building more housing for the few and none for the many. We must build homes rather than houses, neighborhoods rather than subdivisions scattered across the countryside, communities that house people near their work and near shopping and services. We must build communities that embrace diversity rather than exclusiveness. Communities that cannot house their own police and fire forces, teachers and secretaries, busboys and trash collectors are incomplete. They shunt the burden of affordable housing to other communities and reap the benefits of hidden subsidies that support their privilege.

What We Must Do
As the nation ages, the options for housing a growing population will undergo a remarkable transformation. Over the next decades, a substantial proportion of the young population cohort will consist primarily of under-educated minorities with skills suitable only for lower-paying jobs. They will not be able to afford single-family houses on half- to one-acre lots in distant suburbs. What housing will be affordable to such people? What about the millions of far-flung, large-lot homes produced today? We must plan now to produce affordable housing in places close to jobs and existing infr-

Creating a Livable Neighborhood in Baltimore

The Terrace development in Baltimore, pictured in chapter 2, includes both physical elements and socioeconomic programs to address neighborhood needs, including:
- a mix of for-sale and rental townhomes of similar appearance;
- inclusion of a business center, retail shop, and community recreation and day-care center;
- recruitment and training of community residents in the construction trades; and
- the new Lexington Terrace Joint Venture, which has organized and manages a community support program, including case assessment and referral services, vocational training, educational services, career counseling and placement, employee assistance programs, day-care services, primary health care services, family support services, recreation and after-school programs, public safety and beautification programs, and housing management programs.
community in Washington, D.C., once an isolated, dangerous, and dilapidated area, is being revived through the efforts of both for-profit and nonprofit developers who are organizing volunteer and public agency support to re-create a livable community. The William C. Smith Company, for example, has restored 900 rental apartments and is building 210 for-sale townhomes on a 54-acre site previously occupied by 1,400 rundown apartments, 60 percent of them vacant and boarded up. Aided by District of Columbia housing finance programs that make home prices affordable to local residents, and by equity funding from Fannie Mae’s American Communities Fund, the townhomes are selling briskly. Even before beginning construction, however, the company fashioned a comprehensive, imaginative program to reestablish the residential values of the neighborhood. First, company staff worked with residents and police to make the area safe, including eviction tenants engaged in illegal activities or who refused to obey resident rules. The developer worked with local school officials and invested over $300,000 in the physical improvement of two local schools. Subsequently, the developer “adopted” five more schools and the local library; for the latter building, the company organized volunteer and staff efforts to relandscape the grounds, paint the building, and enlarge the book collection. Perhaps most impressive was the company’s $1 million investment in a Splash Park water-recreation facility for local residents. Now the developer is leading efforts to fund a nonprofit cultural and recreational community center.

3. Regional planning as the backbone for supporting growth. The current crazy quilt of jurisdictions that govern the delivery of urban services is too fragmented to provide a coherent approach to housing or economic development at either the regional or local scale. A fresh approach is required to create a regional template for the development process. Regional planning efforts (not regional government, which is virtually unknown in the United States) should allocate commercial, residential, and industrial development within a framework of environmental constraints. Building construction should be promoted where it is needed, not where it is easiest to accomplish.

4. A regional tax structure encouraging “best use.” Tax policies steer development. Current forms of taxation based on sales taxes and user fees as well as on property taxes promote forms of development that may meet fiscal criteria but are deficient in creating communities, including most forms of housing. Moreover, taxes on existing properties often treat land as a secondary value, reducing incentives for transfer to higher and better uses. Frequently, for example, a landlord finds it less costly to leave a building vacant than to rent it at rates lower than its presumed “market” rent. Land should be taxed on the basis of its potential use rather than on its current nonuse or poor use, thus driving more rational uses of land for housing and other purposes.

In addition, states should collect and reallocate sales and similar taxes according to population and job growth rather than according to the point-of-sales mechanism so often employed. Such a policy would help correct the fiscal imbalances and irrational land use patterns caused by competition between jurisdictions for sales tax—generating commercial development. Taxation on land use potential coupled with state-level tax collection and reallocation would begin to make regional development work in favor of better housing for more people.

5. Housing development integrated with overall community development. Few communities have developed housing plans that indicate how different housing types could be designed and
Conclusion

In summary, there are several key points to consider when thinking about the future of our communities and cities:

1. The importance of local economic development cannot be overstated. Communities must focus on creating jobs and developing the skills and infrastructure needed to support these jobs.
2. Collaboration and partnerships are essential for addressing the needs of our communities. This includes working with local businesses, government agencies, and other stakeholders.
3. Education and training programs are critical to preparing the workforce for the jobs of the future.
4. Public transportation and green spaces are important for promoting a healthy and sustainable community.
5. Investing in affordable housing is crucial for ensuring that all members of society have a place to call home.
6. Open space is essential for providing opportunities for recreation and social interaction.
Endnotes

1 This chapter was adapted from a presentation by Professor Edward J. Blakely at the conference, “Housing in the 21st Century,” sponsored by the Urban Land Institute on March 29, 2000, in Washington, DC.

2 Executive Order No. 12898, signed by President Bill Clinton, February 11, 1994.


5 This list was adapted from Victoriz, Goldsmith, and Grenge, Working Paper No. 176.

6 For more discussion on this subject, see Edward J. Blakely and Mary G. Snyder, *Fortress America* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1997.)