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## Live from CNU 20: The Economic Benefits of Good Urbanism

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**Keywords:** Congress for New Urbanism (CNU 20), Best Practices, Land Use, Urbanism, Policy

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One of the best panels here at CNU today discussed quantifying the benefits of new urbanism and smart growth in a comprehensive manner. It featured Joseph Minicozzi, New Projects Director at Public Interest Projects, Galiena Tachieva, partner at DPZ, Michael Pagano, Dean of Urban Planning at the University of Illinois at Chicago, and Peter Katz, the planning director of Arlington County.

I found this panel particularly enlightening because much of the discussion at CNU 20 seems to stem from frustration within the movement that new urbanism has still failed to stem the tide of sprawl-like domestic development patterns. This panel offered a clear-cut, policy based argument for walkable urban development that focused on financial incentives. In a way, it's a way for planners, architects and engineers involved in smart growth to take a step back and understand how they can make their argument more effectively in times of budgetary restraint.

Specifically, Peter Katz emphasized the need for a 'decision support system' that would help local and national policy makers justify implementing smart growth best practices. To do this, he proposed a so-called Fiscal Impact Quotient (FIQ) – a tool that would allow communities to assess developments according to their total impact, including infrastructure costs, not just as factors of near-term property tax revenue. Leaving aside the need for a couple of jurisdictions to actually pioneer this regulatory tool, he drew an interesting analogy to the idea of MPG – miles per gallon. Today, mpg has become integral to any discussion about cars, whether in the halls of Congress or at the dinner table. Historically, that wasn't the case, until California stepped up in the 70's and started legislating fuel efficiency standards. These standards have succeeded in elevating public knowledge and discussion to a level where increasing mpg has (almost) unanimous support. The urban vs. suburban development debate is still

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<p>"Hi there. I don't want to come across as a defensive local, however, I feel that what I've read above is quite inaccurate, so I'd like to</p>		

missing this type of easy science 'equaliser' so it'll be interesting if 'FIQ' could become that.

The data presented suggests that it could. Across all speakers, the one unifying factor was just how clearly the financial analyses supported urban development over suburban sprawl. Minicozzi spoke on how as density goes down infrastructure cost per capita goes down, as does carbon footprint per capita, as does VMT, etc. Comparing a suburban WalMart to a typical downtown commercial development, WalMart resulted in property taxes of \$50,000 per acre compared to about \$330,000 per acre downtown. Even if you were to decrease density of typical downtown development by half, you'd still have a 16% ROI, as compared to only 4% in the suburbs.

So the question becomes, if it's so clear cut, what's the hold up? Why are our development patterns not adjusting, especially in an era where budget restraint seems to be the driving force behind public policy across the globe? These are questions that we'll have to answer soon, not only as a country but particularly at CNU, as the Congress tries to outgrow it's early stages and become a much broader force.

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