Achieving Smart Growth Through Inclusive Development

A White Paper by Milender White
Fast Growth: Threatening the Economic and Social Stability of our American Cities

The last decade has been marked by a rapid increase in urbanization rates as families, funding, and focus shifts back to the core of American cities. Population growth and job creation have outpaced the production of housing units, representing a significant opportunity for smart, community-focused development to arise. In the midst of economic angst and skyrocketing housing costs, the path to building prosperous and welcoming cities is to build a more robust spectrum of housing units. For some, this process incites fear, as community members view cranes and construction as a threat to their way of life. Many residents perceive that growth and development is happening to them, and not for them. At Milender White, our approach to building housing for all residents is a process that is not to or for, but WITH the communities we serve.

Growth Pressures

From 2010-2018 the Denver Metro area became the 11th-fastest growing region in the country. Rapid growth without proactive policies and comprehensive planning can result in many negative impacts for residents:

- Population growth has outpaced investment in multi-modal public transit, resulting in increased traffic delays and Single-Occupancy Vehicle (SOV) trips.

- Population growth has outpaced the construction of new housing units, resulting in growing demand and restricted supply that increases the real and relative cost of housing.

- Population growth has outpaced income growth, resulting in a growing wage and income gap as families are forced to spend more on housing and transportation.

- Population growth has accelerated the rate of displacement, both voluntary and involuntary, of long-term residents.
The Challenge

In July of 2019, Lakewood, Colorado passed an initiative to limit growth in their city. The ballot language sets a 1% growth rate per year—to put this in perspective, Colorado cities have been growing on an average of 2+% per year over the last decade. There is even a current effort to put a 10-county anti-growth initiative on the 2020 ballot that would limit growth along the Front Range of Colorado, echoing Lakewood’s policy.

Southern California has had numerous issues concerning recent growth rates, and how to respond as a region. Municipalities have weaponized a “Not In My Backyard” (NIMBY) perspective to fight growth by using both Environmental and Local Reviews to hold up necessary housing projects in litigation that delay projects and makes certain developments cost-prohibitive or too risky. However, in 2018 then-Governor Jerry Brown signed waivers into law prohibiting municipalities from using these restrictions to prevent the development of housing.

Although the presence of cranes and construction sites can exacerbate the angst of those feeling the impact of increasing growth rates, numerous studies have shown that restricting the supply of housing leads directly to increased housing costs; limiting the supply in the midst of growing demand has sparked an affordability crisis that has spilled over into the homelessness crisis in most American cities.

At Milender White, we believe that building truly inclusive cities requires actually building projects that result in beautiful, safe and inclusive housing for all people. That’s why we’re committed to fostering collaborative environments and catalyzing healthy, sustainable growth.
The Solution

*Inclusive development that redefines smart growth and sustainability.*

At Milender White we are a part of the fabric of the communities we help develop, which is why we understand these concerns from the context of Southern California and Colorado markets. We firmly believe that market-rate developers should be a part of the solution, and not the problem. Therefore, we have put forth the following Inclusive Smart Growth Initiatives that we believe will reshape the policy and politics of what we build. For context, we approach Inclusive Development as development for a full spectrum, including homeless and transitional housing, workforce and attainable housing, and market-rate housing. Smart growth incorporates a true urbanist’s perceptive that *cities thrive on healthy density and broad-ranging diversity*—this means mixed-use projects near multi-modal transit hubs and eclectic clusters where people can live, work, and play within vibrant communities without the reliance of SOV trips.
Milender White’s Inclusive Smart Growth Initiatives

1. Building Affordable Housing

20% of the projects Milender White works on are subsidized housing projects with units ranging from 10% of Area Median Income up to 80%. In the Denver Metro area alone there are over 50,000 families that spend more than one-third of their income on housing, while in Los Angeles that number is 721,000; the growing number of rent-burdened families poses a significant risk to cities as it limits resilience—*even minor shocks can lead to rapid displacement an increased rate of homelessness*. The complexity of this challenge requires a multi-sector collaborative effort, which is why Milender White works closely with the Housing Authorities of each city we help develop. This collaboration helps ensure that affordable housing can be built on time and within budget for the units that are desperately required to meet the need of growing cities.

![Kestrel, an 18-building affordable community.](image)

![Mariposa, built in partnership with Denver Housing Authority.](image)

2. Transit-Hubs and Community-Centered Development

Milender White is instrumental in making the vision of transit-and-community centered developments a reality. Residents at Parkside at City Center have access to a new RTD light rail stop, a 19-acre park, and storefront retail. In Nederland, residents will soon have access to affordable housing at Tungsten Village, designed near the heart of the town, and across the street from RTD Park-n-Ride. In Los Angeles, the Aliso, in the once run-down Arts District, is providing over 470 housing units for work-live residents, families and seniors. In the town of Silverthorne, Milender White is developing a model for new community – the town core, where residents and visitors can spend time, shop, dine, work and live. Our development success along transit hubs is a national model for smart growth that addresses the housing crisis while also impacting the mobility and access challenges that have direct impact on climate change. *We value healthy density and diversity, both in terms of social diversity and diversity of land use and focus our efforts on creating communities for working, living and thriving.* While developers don’t often control or impact the sites outside of the immediate development area, at Milender White, we engage the entire communities where we build. We are “good neighbor” builders who are aware of the adjacent context and its assets. Although the contexts are different, the principles of developing diverse, mixed-use clusters along transit hubs still apply.

![Denver Union Station, one of our favorite projects.](image)

![Community-Centered Development creates beautiful affordable housing.](image)
3. Innovative Solutions to Homelessness

As builders of homes, Milender White cannot stand by as homelessness reaches a crisis-level for our American cities. To combat the negative impacts that occur when regional hubs face growth rates in the midst of a housing crisis, we remain committed to an increase in the number of units we are building for workforce, affordable, senior, veteran and rapid-rehousing needs. We have created over 5000 units of housing for economically-disadvantaged and seniors in Colorado over the past five years. We are currently expanding the women’s shelter in Long Beach, California as a leader in the HomeAid program, and will be constructing a housing project for formerly homeless individuals in 2020. While this is a great start for the municipality, our vision is to create homeless housing facilities in both Denver and Los Angeles that contain 50-60 units and will be combined with workforce development programs on the ground floor for residents. This means one project can address both the housing crisis and the income gap of the city.

Seeking innovative ways to address the homeless crisis will require market-rate developers and policy leaders to harness the growth of their cities in inclusive ways.

4. Builders Must be Community-Centered

Milender White knows that the projects we complete become landmarks in our communities. We value our commitment to providing for our communities through projects that serve in many ways – as gathering centers, as historic icons, as medical and community service provides, as beautiful homes. We seek out partnerships with organizations that benefit from our expertise in building, just as we are inspired by their work with our most vulnerable neighbors. We are proud of our work with the Rose Andom Center in Denver, which provides wrap-around services to those who have been impacted by domestic violence, and of our upcoming project with the Women’s Shelter of Long Beach and Expansion Project at Lydia House Shelter. We give back to our communities by building projects at cost and by continually giving our talents and services to those who need us most. We are a firm that weaves itself into the fabric of the communities in which we develop, so that one day residents will begin to view cranes in the sky and construction sites as assets to the city - and not symbols of loss and change.
Milender White’s Inclusive Smart Growth Initiatives are a way forward to building inclusive cities and growing in sustainable, manageable ways. The time has come to rebuild the American City, and it begins with a new understanding of what is broken, and what our role is to fix it as builders. Milender White aims to be community partners, linked arm in arm with our neighbors as we tackle complex challenges, together.

Through cooperation and collaboration, we will build strong communities.