

Developer's task: See solution in problem

Certain inevitable forces flow through real estate. Some are natural forces, elements of the physical environment such as stormwater, wind, sunlight and soil structure. Cultural forces – vehicles, pedestrians and utility lines are examples – are generated by humans.

Just as individual landowners can increase their property's value by applying permaculture principles, developers can improve on their investments by designing communities that work with these inevitable forces.

When developers regard such forces as solutions to problems rather than as nuisances, everyone benefits. The result is enhanced when the solutions are integrated in a mutually beneficial manner. This integration applies the permaculture principle, "cooperation, not competition, is the key to sustainability."

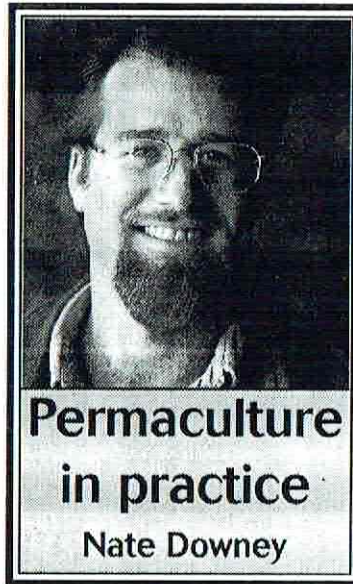
Especially here in the arid southwest, natural forces are best understood as potential resources. Too

often developers think of stormwater as a waste product that should be directed as quickly as possible away from homes and roads. Imagine how much more beautiful and comfortable our subdivisions would be if stormwater was given a chance to percolate into the local soil.

Perhaps the solution to the "problem" of our strong winds could be a windbreak of properly placed trees and shrubs. The solution to our relentless sun could be a system of well-situated shade trees, and the solution to the fragile, dry dirt left behind by development could be a heavily-mulched soil that supports native grasses and wildflowers.

Imagine stormwater directed to our windbreaks and shade trees, which in turn would provide protective microclimates for healthy grass and flowers.

Especially now, as we turn the corner of a new millennium, cultural forces, (like natural forces) are best understood as elements that enhance, rather



than hinder, the quality of life in our communities. Too often we demand too much space for our motor vehicles and not enough access for alternative forms of transportation. Imagine how much happier and healthier we would be if we had plenty of bike paths and safe sidewalks and easy access to reliable public transportation,

Perhaps the solution to high heating bills could be

an increased number of passive solar homes; and to high crime rates could be more eyes on the street (as opposed to closed garage doors). Perhaps developments could even address psychological problems by encouraging positive interaction among neighbors.

Imagine further that these cultural solutions were intelligently integrated in a synergistic system. Our relationships to our cars would become less of a priority in our lives than our personal relationships, and these would allow us to feel safer and more comfortable at home.

The main difficulty with this approach, which is essentially the approach of the New Urbanism/anti-urban sprawl movement, is another cultural force: the marketplace. Developers do not have the luxury of waiting very long for a positive return on their investments. Even though the payoffs of New Urbanism are greater in the long run, the up-front costs will be higher, especially when one

figures in the amount of time necessary to educate bankers, bureaucrats, regulators and consumers.

It is up to us, as citizens and consumers, to encourage developers, planners, regulators and bankers to provide sensible alternatives to urban sprawl. If we believe that we would be better off living in communities that work with (not against) the inevitable forces that effect development, we should empower ourselves by voicing our opinions firmly and consistently.

Eventually more and more forward-thinking "powers that be" will recognize the great economic potential inherent in communities that are ecologically and socially conscious.

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