

From NIMBYs To DUDES: The Wacky World Of Plannerese

Ric Stephens

Ric Stephens has compiled a list of some of the wackiest -- yet at times quite realistic -- urban planning words, in a vocabulary he has dubbed 'Plannerese.' This week's Planetizen Op-Ed includes a selected glossary of the terms, in addition to 'A Modern Fairy Tale in Plannerese,' which looks at a typical planning issue through the humorous lens of planning jargon.



Community innovation is one of the most dynamic and challenging responsibilities for today's planners. "Sense of place" and "place-making" are evolving concepts focusing on the need for unique and meaningful communities. Our language is simultaneously developing colorful and humorous ways to express sense of place...or lack of it. The most well-known recent planning acronym is NIMBY, "not in my backyard." Spinoffs from this popular planning term include LULUs (locally unacceptable land uses), but the ultimate nimbyism is expressed by BANANA: build absolutely nothing anywhere near anything. Building on these more common planning terms, I have compiled a list of some of the wackiest -- yet at times quite realistic -- planning vocabulary, which I have dubbed Plannerese.

The *lack* of 'sense of place' has been a humorous topic for planners and the general public. One of the most well-known comments regarding "placelessness" is *Gertrude Stein's* suburbia remark "There's no there, there." The repetitive, monotonous design of buildings and places has introduced new expressions such as "blurb" (an indistinguishable suburban neighborhood), as have persons engaged in placemaking or 'disengaged' in planning non-descript places, including DUDE: developer under delusions of entitlement.

The following is a twisted journey into the world of Plannerese -- a modern planning fairy tale that may not be so far from the truth. A selection of the plannerese used in the story is included in the glossary below.

The Three Local Builders A Modern Fairy Tale in Plannerese

On a previous occasion there were three local builders who needed environmental studies, subdivision and design review approval, and permits to build DUs, drop some iron, and capture their market share. Before they began, the Planning Director told them "Whatever you do, do it the best that you can because that's the way to get along in the community."

The first local builder planned his distainable development in the California Raunch style because it was the easiest thing to do. The second local builder planned his indistinguishable suburb, or blurb, in the Moditerranean style. This was a little bit more stylish than the California Non-descript Ranchburger. The third local builder planned his development in the Neo-contempo Italianalienate style.

One night the Design Review Board, who zealously guided local builders, spent "quality time" with the first local builder's shlubdivision. They said "More details, more details, local builder or DBTD/DBTN!" "Designer babble, designer babble," said the local builder. "No Disneyfication!" But of course the designosaurs did recommend denial of the hacked tract map and blocked the first local builder.

The Planning Commission then reviewed the Moditerranean, vanilla, cookie-cutter subdivision. "More planning, more planning, local builder or we'll analyze until you paralyze, and your map will never finalize." "Cheap theater! Amateur night!" said the local builder. But the Planning Commission recommended denial for that subdivision too,

and bankrupted the second local builder.

The City Council then reviewed the Italianalienate vavavoomburb. “More citizens, more citizens” declared the Council “or BANANA ballot box planning will block your Master-Planned Camelot.” “We’ve passed every itty bity city committee, and this project exceeds their caring capacity,” said the builder. Well, the Council muffled and shuffled but they could not slow down that Moditerranean fauxburb. But the sandalistas and treehuggers suffered a ‘sense of immunity.’ “DUDE! DUDE!” they said and challenged the CEQA doczilla as a way to stop the development. The local builder saw the CAVEmen stockpiling petitions and filed a SLAPP. He then obtained a paseo of hired guns—landscrapers, architorturors, and an escheat of lawyers. When the City Council Hearing was held, the dog and pony show induced PowerPoint Poisoning, and the Council only asked for “MVP—more vines please.”

The next day the local developer met with the Planning Director. She said, “You see it is just as I told you: AICP—Any idiot can plan, but the way to get along in the community is to do things as well as you can.” Fortunately for that local developer, he learned that lesson. And he just lived happily ever after...ITNC—in the next county!

Glossary

BANANA: Build Absolutely Nothing Anywhere Near Anything

CAVEmen: Citizens Against Virtually Everything

CEQA: Consultants Employment Quality Act [California Environmental Quality Act]

DBTD/DBTN: Two common vaccines used by planners to “fix” a project they don’t like. DBTD is technically Death By a Thousand Days and DBTN is Death By a Thousand Nicks [also known as the BED Principle—“Bleed ‘em Dry”]

Disneyfication: Architectural fad on a community scale.

Doczilla: Any technical report that should be caged rather than shelved.

DUDE: Developer Under Delusions of Entitlement

Fauxburb: Modern suburb replicating post WWII suburbs with eclectic architecture.

PowerPoint Poisoning: Nauseous state of mind and body induced by viewing “professional” presentations.

Sense of Immunity: Mistaken belief that land use regulation does not apply for a particular neighborhood or site.

SLAPP: Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation

Additional Terms

Spinoffs of NIMBY:

BANYs Builders Against NIMBYs [Not In My Backyard Activists]

GOAH Gedoudaheah

GOOMBA Get out of my business area

GUMBY Gaze upon my backyard [Opponents of residential walls and fences]

KIIMBY Keep it in my backyard

NIABY Not in anyone’s backyard

NIMD Not in my district

NIMEY Not in my election year

NIMFOS Not in my field of sight

NIMFYE Not in my front yard either

NIMTOO Not in my term of office

NITL Not in this lifetime

NOPE Not on planet earth

NORF No observable redeeming features

NOT None of that

NOTE Not over there either
NUMBY Not under my backyard
PIITBY Put it in their backyard
QUIMBY Quit urbanizing in my backyard
WIIFM What's in it for me?
YIMBY Yes in my backyard

Repetitive, monotonous design of buildings and places:

Anyplace syndrome: No 'sense of place'

B4 and after: Big, bland, beige box...still. Less than inspiring architecture even with extensive landscaping.

Comprehensive Flan: The relatively bland, custard-like filling in many Comprehensive Plans.

Custard development: Bland clustered development.

Déjàvenue: An impression of having seen or experienced the same street before.

Gagplanistan: A place of massively meaningless planning.

Generic: The stores and strip malls you can see in any town in America.

McPlace: Standardized "sense of place."

Nullibiety: State of being nowhere.

Pablumia: A universal name for urban communities whose ambiances of uniqueness and regional flavor have been eradicated in favor of cookie cutter chain retail stores, restaurants, background music, entertainment and interchangeable local residents all dressed as Americans. The word is from the baby food, Pablum, which has a bland consistency and is completely tasteless.

Placebo: A place that has the appearance, but none of the value of a real place.

Oatmeal Architecture: Contemporary bland, beige, stucco architecture.

Ranchburger: A one-story generic southwestern tract house.

Replaceable places: The same drive-ins, prefab motels, offices, and salesrooms on every road and corner.

Second Street: Average, lackluster or normal. Stemming from the fact that Second Street is the most common name in the United States.

Taupeville: A neighborhood that requires buildings to be all neutral colors, usually beige and taupe. Generic, non-descript, lacking in personality and boring. 'Over the taupe' implies something more creative or excessive.

Terrorforming: Extremely bad urban designing. The opposite of "terraform:" to change a planet's surface and atmosphere so that life as it exists on Earth is possible.

Urban fabric softener: Generic zoning that smoothes out the distinctions between areas.

Vanilla: An adjective for a bland or boring design or plan.

Suburbia:

Betty Crocker Suburb: A suburb without child care facilities.

Blurb: Indistinguishable suburban neighborhoods.

Peter Pan Suburb: Suburb designed without consideration for the elderly.

Sitcom Suburb: Neighborhoods of traditional Cape Cod or colonial houses with neat front lawns.

Suburbidity: A thick, hazy condition of sense of place.

...and many other 'burbs' such as boomburbs, baddaboomburbs, biz burbs, exurbs, fauxburbs, mallburbs, penturbs, shruburbs, technoburbs, zoomburbs, and vavavoomburbs.

Practitioners:

Blandscape architect: Minimalist landscaper.

Bungalow Bill: Tract house architect.

CAVEman: Citizen against virtually everything.

Designosaur: Designer with an enormous impact.

DUDE: Developer under delusions of entitlement.

Hippodamist: A city planner [from Hippodamus, a fifth-century Greek architect, who planned the first city].

Inferior desecrator: Interior designer.

Landscrapper: Landscape architect.

Meisterplanner: An artistic or epic planner.

Sense of place:

Scents of place: The odors, smells, aromas, and fragrances associated with a place. The most powerful of the senses is also the most overlooked in planning.

Sense of entry: The front door is big and far away.

Sense of immunity: Mistaken belief that land use regulation does not apply for a particular neighborhood or site.

Ric Stephens is a Principal with Alpha Community Development located in Portland, Oregon. Alpha's expertise is in development with a community perspective. Alpha offers planning, surveying, interior design, civil engineering, structural engineering, landscape architecture, development investment, and development management. The [Plannerese Dictionary](#) is available from [Trafford Publishing](#).

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