

**An open letter to elected officials, urban planners and developers --More density is not humane.**  
Please explain why bigger is better.

By Lisa Albrecht June 8, 2018 - <http://www.startribune.com/an-open-letter-to-elected-officials-urban-planners-and-developers/485001721/#comments>

As a 67-year-old, white, retired university professor, I write in the name of the common humanity of all Minneapolis residents. I moved here more than 30 years ago from New York City to become a professor. I chose Minneapolis because it was an affordable and livable city. Today, it is no longer affordable and less livable than ever. As a former chair of the Minneapolis Commission on Civil Rights, I believe that we, as residents, need to always voice our concerns about the future of our city.

I have owned two homes in south Minneapolis and an over-55 condo in Uptown, and now I rent an apartment in the West Calhoun neighborhood. I've worked hard all my life and have benefited from the opportunities afforded to me. I grew up in a small, rent-controlled apartment; neither of my parents went to college.

Today, urban density means bigger is better. It is happening all over the U.S. Developers win — not those of us who love city life without the “urban density” of it. Bigger is not better, except for the developers, who make more money. We do not have the infrastructure in this city, nor in West Calhoun, to accommodate more people. There is even a hotel planned for a postage stamp of land at Excelsior Boulevard and Lake Street! If we ever get the Southwest light-rail line, perhaps it might mean fewer cars and less traffic, but we are a gas-guzzling people and love driving our big cars alone.

I believe in what many people call the human spirit. To be full human beings, we do not need to sit in traffic for hours nor dodge potholes each spring. We need to feel safe when we cross busy city streets, to have room to breathe, to trust police officers and to not fear for our lives (particularly if we are people of color). To be full human beings, we need poor and working-class people to have decent and affordable housing in every neighborhood.

Today, those with power and money support expensive urban density to expand our tax base. Additional expensive housing doesn't help anyone other than those who are already wealthy. Urban density means building “up,” since we don't have the space anymore to grow horizontally. We humans do not need higher apartment buildings so that developers can become wealthier. I left New York City more than 30 years ago to escape that model of city life. I love waking up each day to see Bde Maka Ska.

In writing this article, I looked at the [Minneapolis 2040 Comprehensive Plan](http://minneapolis2040.com) (minneapolis2040.com), which is a draft document about our city's future. It is complex and long. I spent hours wading through (and nearly drowning in) hundreds of pages of online documents about our future (minneapolismn.gov). Residents may comment on the comprehensive plan online (if they have access and know how to do that), and/or they can attend public meetings with various elected officials to raise concerns. But to me, this plan looks pretty much like a done deal. The website says there have been multiple opportunities for people to have input. I'm not sure how I missed the meetings.

City bureaucracies are incredibly complex beasts with tentacles reaching into all our lives. There's no way anyone can keep up with all the important decisions. I've prided myself on trying to be aware of what's happening in this city. After looking at many of the tentacles of our city government, I've clearly fooled myself. It's a full-time job to read and understand what's going on, let alone attend many meetings. Who has that kind of time? Certainly not someone with a full-time job or more than one job, someone who is a single parent, or someone in ill health.

I want our elected officials to explain why they believe that bigger is better, and why building more and more huge buildings will help the people of Minneapolis, including those in my neighborhood. How are we to

remain full human beings if our human spirit is stunted? How do we remain kind and decent people who serve our communities selflessly when we are surrounded by less and less space and more and more greed?

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