

Sprawl is not synonymous with growth and development. Not all development produces a net increase in jobs or tax revenue.

omy and change a town's way of life. Studies have demonstrated that superstore profits come at the expense of existing merchants, especially small businesses.

Money generated by local stores typically circulates in the community. But money generated by superstores goes directly to out-of-town corporate headquarters.

The challenge involves encouraging new development to take place in ways that build on a community's existing resources rather than duplicating or destroying them. Opposing sprawl does not mean opposing economic development. In fact, it means just the opposite – guiding development to maximize the economic benefits to the community. The construction of too much retail space does not make the economic pie larger.

Some see the superstores and their effect on communities as the American way and call it progress. But the free market theory of economics functions on notions of cost reduction and increase in efficiency. In the superstore theory of economics costs are cut by shifting them to someone else. Superstores build big, cheap, ugly buildings that no one wants to live near. They pressure their suppliers to reduce costs so the suppliers have to move production to poorer countries and pay wages that do not support a decent life.

Superstores employ part-time workers, provide no useful job training and no health benefits – citizen taxes or insurance will pay for workers' health care. Superstores pressure towns for tax breaks, free roads, water lines and sewers. The taxpayers pick up the costs.

The superstore theory of economics is not only unjust to others, it undermines the market system. It distorts prices by hiding real costs. It is not the American way to condense the business community into one giant superstore monopoly. When thousands of small businesses are killed off and only a handful of national companies remain, it does not take an economist to predict what will happen to those discount prices. Residents have to live with the disruption that sprawl creates.

Citizens can encourage new development and insist that developers not destroy historic, scenic and community resources. We have a responsibility to create and use planning and zoning tools to preserve these resources and create human environments for people.

This is an issue which requires balance and perspective, both short and long term. This can only be accomplished through public deliberation and action. In Winsted, the Winsted Design Coalition and in Torrington, the Main Street Action Team are beginning to address these issues.

For information on responsible development practices and how to encourage superstores to be better corporate neighbors, contact the National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1785 Massachusetts Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036 or the Office of the Community Lawyer, P.O. Box 1044, Winsted, 06098.

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