

The Post-Pandemic City

Thomas Fisher, Director

Minnesota Design Center, University of Minnesota

www.designcenter.design.umn.edu

tfisher@umn.edu

Pandemics accelerate us into the future, in ways that are both good and bad, and they reveal inequities and inefficiencies that have long existed and long been ignored.

**TEN
LESSONS
FOR A
POST-PANDEMIC
WORLD
FAREED
ZAKARIA**

BEST-SELLING AUTHOR OF *THE POST-AMERICAN WORLD*

After the 19th C Cholera epidemics, we re-imagined cities not as large villages, but as healthy places with sanitary sewers and mandatory indoor plumbing, which fueled their growth.

NOTICE.

PREVENTIVES OF

CHOLERA!

Published by order of the Sanatory Committee, under the sanction of the Medical Council.

BE TEMPERATE IN EATING & DRINKING!

Avoid Raw Vegetables and Unripe Fruit!

Abstain from COLD WATER, when heated, and above all from *Ardent Spirits*, and if habit have rendered them indispens-

071269 THE GHETTO, NEW YORK, N. Y.



After the 1918 Flu pandemic, we re-imagined cities as **single-use, low-density districts** that allowed for **social distancing** via single-family houses and private cars.



The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated us into a future of **rebalancing the digital and physical worlds**, which has given most of us **more choices** in where we live and work, and how we shop, learn, and travel.

POST PANDEMIC WORLD



MINNESOTA DESIGN CENTER
COLLEGE of DESIGN UNIVERSITY of MINNESOTA

How and Where We Work

- 42% of the workforce now working from home full-time
- 75% of home workers want to continue to do so at least one or more days a week
- 91% of the employers see staff as more productive working from home.
- 30% of jobs cannot be done at home and require face-to-face interaction.



Empty Office, It's No Game photography, FlickrCC BY-2.0

We will need to be **more flexible** in the use of space and **more inclusive** in our zoning policies to reuse the vast amount of empty space from the old economy.



As we move bits more than bodies, we must also rethink how we use – and waste - land as we travel less and zoom more often.



How We Access Goods and Services

- America has over **10 times the number of stores/capita** than Germany
- Permanent closures have reached 97,966, with **60% of closed businesses not reopening** after the pandemic.
- **Online grocery shopping has almost doubled** since the pandemic, with a majority of people surveyed planning on continuing to do so



Broadway Theater, Mt. Pleasant, MI (photographer: Dan Gaken, Flickr CC by 2.0)

To compete, cities must offer more diverse, immersive, memorable experiences, with more locally owned businesses and local entrepreneurs to avoid the “chainification” phenomenon.



We will need, as well, to address the equity gap by **allowing more flexibility and fewer restrictions** on how, where, and in what way people make a living.



How We Achieve Affordability

- 60% of renters have lost income and the moratorium on evictions for 12 million units of housing has ended.
- Half a million Americans are now homeless, and that is expected to grow to 2 million across the U.S.
- 7.2 million more affordable housing units are needed for extremely low-income families in the U.S.
- Apartment development in the U.S. is expected to be down 15.6% in a post-Covid-19 world.



We will need **more creative ways** to address the housing gap and **new partners** – like the health and faith communities – to help meet the need.



With 2/3rds of U.S. economic activity now out of our homes, we need to revisit zoning restrictions on land-use, minimum unit and lot sizes, and who can do what and live with whom there.

USE	Zone					
	A	B	C	D	E	F
Residential	O	O	O	O	O	O
School	X	O	O	O	O	O
Neighborhood stores	X	X	O	O	O	O
Commercial	X	X	X	O	O	O
Big box commercial surface	X	X	X	X	O	O
Industrial	X	X	X	X	X	O

USE	Zone					
	A	B	C	D	E	F
Residential	O	X	X	X	X	X
School	X	O	X	X	X	X
Neighborhood stores	X	X	O	X	X	X
Commercial	X	X	X	O	X	X
Big box commercial surface	X	X	X	X	O	X
Industrial	X	X	X	X	X	O

Japan's inclusive zoning vs. America's exclusive zoning chart

How We Move Around

- With a just a 10-15% change in telework, **rush hour will permanently disappear**
- The coming of **mobility services will dramatically reduce parking demand**
- Meanwhile **delivery jobs have become the fastest growing job in America, increasing 22% in 2020.**
- **Bike sales are up 121% and 85% for electric bikes, increasingly used as transportation.**



With the automation of driving in **shared automated vehicles**, we will see more green infrastructure, more diverse public realms, and smarter, more sustainable streets.



We will also need to ensure equal access to the new economy by every person, in every home, with **digital equity** as a top priority. Every city will need to become a “**smart city.**”



SMART NORTH

HOW A SMART STREETLIGHT WORKS



Challenges: Inequities in income and working conditions between remote and essential workers; Vast amounts of empty commercial space with more affordable housing needed; High-bandwidth access to the Internet needed by all



Opportunities: Pandemics reveal abundances, such as underutilized space, physical assets, and human, cultural and natural capital, and they foster paradigm shifts in how we address unmet needs.

