An Ideal City: *A Proposition*

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Ideal City

Each iteration of humanity thus far has built on the definition of what a city is. The ancient Mesopotamians were content to be within a short walk of a nearby water resource. Most recently, it seems as if the definition has split into two factions, urban and suburban. Undoubtedly humanity has reached exponentials heights, reaching high into the sky with their concrete skyscrapers and far across the horizon with their master-planned communities. That’s not to say that either is without problems; it has become increasingly evident that reform is needed. Many point to Le Corbusier’s *Unité d'Habitation*, a series of self-sustained buildings with many of the amenities humans enjoy today, as a prime example of what the future of cities will look like. As these ideas continue to be adopted in many forms, be it Japan’s *Sky City* or India’s *Floating City*, I fear that such projects are far too optimistic that they will be embraced by the population, and far too advanced to be realistically seen in this lifetime. The following is not a blueprint for a specific city in the deserts of Saudi Arabia or the hills of Europe, but rather a guideline of principles all future cities should adopt. Theoretically, an ideal city must find the balance between being sustainable, technologically advanced, and efficient, whilst also being quickly obtainable, easily adoptable, and within the realm of today’s lifestyles.

Although this city is intended to be suitable for recreation anywhere in the world, first a working prototype must convince the general population that such a project is not only achievable, but also ideal. The local geography chiefly in mind for the prototype is that of Colorado. Albeit a bit random, Colorado has a variety of features that make is a qualified candidate, the first of which being its mountainous terrains. While on one hand these mountains impact the weather in regulating it, they also provide good barriers and create strong currents in the local rivers. The next qualification is the rivers, which this city can put to good use through the utilization of hydro-electric power. Location has a variety of impacts on energy creation, also including wind power through the use of Colorado’s brisk and strong winds and solar power with their readily available sunlight. The last factor is perhaps the most unique. Certainly other locations provide more resources to fuel such an exposition, but they do not have the population of this state. As proven recently in politics, the people of Colorado are very progressive, having recently made marijuana legal. While a drug and a city are far from equal, the proposition suggests the population is open-minded and young. Such a society would make good role-models for why such a city would work. I cannot stress enough that this city is built with the idea that it can be built anywhere with some obvious modifications for the local geography, but ideally Colorado is the destination in mind.

Having chosen a location, selecting the right layout to optimize this geography is essential. From an aerial perspective the city will have a roughly circular shape. Depending on the exact orientation of the city in conjunction to a river, the river will flow through the city. Be it flowing north to south or east to west the source river will be split into three different tributaries that run through the city in a bayou. Essentially these would function as pedestrian
highways, where active lifestyles can be enjoyed and quick foot transport is easy. Running perpendicular to these waterways will be three highways. Seeing as this city is a blend of downtown and suburbia, the only use of these will be to move within the city or to leave it. As will later be explained, car use should be kept to a minimum and thus traffic should be kept to a minimum. The highways will be elevated to contrast with the bayous and decorated with murals from local artists. In terms of dimensions, the city will not be to the scale of a metropolis, but certainly big enough to have all the amenities and resources that are necessary. The advantage of such a small city lie in power consumption. Although it is evident that in the future we must build upwards as opposed to outwards, smaller cities will lower the concentration of any emissions. To lower these emissions however, power will be supplied from three main sources. The first will come from dams upstream of the city, the effect will be to not only regulate the tributaries that run through the city, but provide power as well. Downstream will be a water treatment facility. As demonstrated by Israel’s astounding recovery from drought, water can be reclaimed from sewage. Therefore sewage will also be in a nearby facility, removed and downwind of the city. Each facility will be covered with solar panels in a structure to hide the fecal matter from sunlight. Such a manner has been known to contribute to emissions. To further combat energy consumption and aid sustainability, nearby mountains will also have solar panels built on their backsides facing outwards of the city. While the saying “out of sight, out of mind” applied, solar power is clean and thus should have no implications. The mountains facing the city however can have benefit through the use of wind-power, using Colorado’s winds to provide additional power. All these sources will provide power and sanitation to the city, however within it services must also be provided. Certainly not an original idea, but one that needs to be implemented, solar panels will be placed above most buildings, using this additional surface area to provide direct power. This will be encourage by the local government which will fine private corporations that chose against using solar panels. Having all these energy resources and taxes from corporations, the city can invest back into infrastructure. While the technologies mentioned are expensive they are investments. While investing in so many energy providers is costly, they will pay off monetarily for the city and with health for the planet.

Given the unique shape of this endeavor, an equally unique street system is in place. As aforementioned, it is hoped that this city lacks an excess of cars. Many drivers will tell you they dislike grid-like, one way streets because they are difficult to navigate. Thus, this city will embrace this system in hopes that it discourages driving, but still offer the experience for out of towners. Streets that run sideways will be given a number, odd or even explaining their direction. Streets that run perpendicular will be given a letter, so that the nature of a grid is fully embraced and universally understood. The design of the streets and parking structures will help encourage this goal without making driving unpleasant. For one thing, all parking in the city will be operated by the city. The revenue made from these facilities and the excess of the energy previously mentioned will pay off in reducing traffic. But first, parking structures for the most part will be subterranean, one or two floors below ground. By maximizing space as such, more
room is given for land use. The shallowness of these structures is to prevent crimes from occurring in these areas, this adequate lighting will be provided, probably through solar powered panels on terraces and sidewalks. On the sidewalks, street lamps will also function off solar power, staying on at night and keeping the city illuminated at night so that crimes are less likely to occur. The sidewalks themselves will be biased towards the west side of the street. Given this is where the sun rises from, this part of the street will have natural shade cover. The sidewalk on this side should be 15 feet wide, large enough for pedestrians to cram it, but also suitable for terrace seating, hedges, flora, and other sidewalk amenities. Next to the street will be a bike lane, approximately 10 feet wide, ample space compared to current bike lanes, for all sorts of non-motorized vehicles. Remember the aforementioned excess money the city has been generating? This can be used to fund the public transport which will run above ground on train lines. The boarding for these trains will be parallel to the sidewalks and place the train away from pedestrians on the other side. The train will have different lines that complete routes up and down each pair of corresponding streets. Outside the most will be two driving lanes, one for moving forwards with traffic, and the other for making turns. If you have been visualizing, you may realize this means bikers can only cross the street by using crosswalks. This was intentional as to reduce the number of bike and car accidents, using the train as a barrier, and also an alternative to driving. The far sidewalk will be similar to that of the other side with ample space for pedestrians, but covered with solar powered to provide power to traffic lights and elsewhere whilst also providing shade. An additional subway line will operate in the city in the future if such a system is ever needed. Given the small size of the city, this should not be the case, but such a service would be like tollways, being government owned and charging prices for the amenity. By blending so many ideas, hopefully a more ideal network of streets can be made that will decrease emissions whilst also being efficient.

Ideally self-sustainable, the city will also have some additional regulations to ensure peace and order. The entire city will center around a city hall, placed in the middle of the city, with the middle highway and tributaries splitting to accompany this landform. Much like Central Park, this will be a green area where families can come and enjoy nature within the city. On all four sides will be different offices, one being the city hall, another being a grid of museums, another being a mall, and the last being a university. The university will have it’s main commons and classes in the area, but facilities outside the bound of the immediate town centre such that the entire city can emulate a campus for students. City hall will also host an office for the local justice system and organize weekly events that make use of the greenery so immediately available. Museums will operate privately but donate a portion of earning to the local government. Within this bloc must also be a theatre where local arts can be performed and encouraged. The mall will have a variety of retailers, inviting brands from around the world to join. Around this center of the city, imaginary pods will be made. There will be no zoning in the city as Houston has done, however a requirement that without special permission, each building must be 10 stories or taller. Each pod is about 8 blocks by 8 blocks, easily walkable. All the pods
make a rectangle around one central pod in which athletic amenities like stadiums and artificial lakes for boating are built. Each pod will also have its own small fire department, law enforcement service, and clinics. Within it will be all the amenities needed on a weekly basis. From gyms to libraries, schools to stores, the internal contents of building like Unité d'Habitation will be externalized. On the subject of schools, one building would be dedicated to education, housing all child care needs from high school to day care. Each residential building is required to have a courtyard in its middle to increase green space. Generally that which is not obtainable within the block can be bought around town and easy to get through by using public transport. Each housing unit will be relatively small and make use of mandatory technologies like smart bulbs and multi-purpose furniture. Floor plans will vary but hardly have more than three bedrooms so that parents are mindful of how many children they have such that overcrowding is not a problem. Rather than building a medical or industrial city as the strength of a town, this ideal city will have a variety of cities within it, offering most services one would need to live comfortably.

All my life I’ve lived in different suburban neighborhoods in the United States. Life is great within these bubbles but all my life I’ve dreamed of moving out. I often picture myself living in an urban loft overlooking the skyline of New York City, or Chicago, or Los Angeles. Yet as an urban planner, I have the exciting prospect of merging all three and creating a medley of my own ideas, not only for myself, but for those who think like me. By no means is this project the most daring or innovative of those proposed. What it is however is realistic. It doesn’t stray far from what life is like today, and perhaps that’s good. Humanity is a stubborn race; change thus far has taken thousands of years. But as the environment worsens, change needs to be made quick and it doesn’t have to be crazy.
The following is an image of the Hoover Dam from History.com
According to my proposition, a similar dam would be constructed upstream of the river that will run through my ideal city.

The following is an image of the Japanese Sky City concept from trndic.com
While this is an ingenious idea of maximizing space and providing amenities, such an idea seems far too futuristic and similar to a dystopia for my own tastes.
The following is an image of the park in front of the New York City Hall from biking-in-manhattan.com

A similar green space would be used in front of this city hall but would also have a university, museums, and a mall on the other sides.

The following is a map of Colorado from raftingcolorado.net

As you can see, there are a variety of locations for this city to be situated. The only requirement as of now is a river, but if other technologies can compete with hydroelectricity, they can be applied instead.
The following is an image of the Buffalo Bayou from swagroup.net
This is how the bayous in the city will look similar to. They will essentially be pedestrian highways.