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Cosmic Advice for the Young Planner

Robert Mitchell, AICP

John R. Mullin

Last fall, two of New England's oldest planners were sitting on the top of Mount Monadnock when they were approached by a group of graduate students. After a brief spell of friendly conversation, several students asked the wise ones for sage advice on the pitfalls of local planning. With a glint in their eyes and a sense of puckish humor they started to outline forty ways in which a newly minted planner could short circuit his/her career. And so, in what they hope will be taken with a great rain of salt, they listed the following:

A new planner should...

1. Always suggest that Home Rule be modified for the greater good of the region.
2. Refer to a cluster subdivision as a "cluster subdivision" instead of an "open space development".
3. Tell the Zoning Board of Appeals that variances can only be legitimately granted based on a hardship, not on how long the applicant has lived in town.
4. Propose street widenings, including removal of street trees and stone walls as a solution to traffic congestion.
5. Suggest that the planning board and zoning board be combined into a development review board.
6. Suggest that the planning board and zoning board hold a joint meeting to discuss issues.
7. Recommend regional planning authority over local comprehensive plans.
8. Tell neighborhood citizens groups that the town is revising its regulations to "streamline the development process".
9. Always argue for affordable housing as a component of subdivision.
10. Inform town meeting that condominiums are the wave of the future.
11. Argue for active recreation uses on town commons.
12. Propose industrial uses by-right.
13. Place a downtown sign ordinance before the merchants.
14. Place meters, take away meters, change the time of meters or change meter prices.
15. Place a bus stop in the middle of a new upper end subdivision.
16. Urge the acceptance of compulsory clustering.
17. State that bike trails add value to properties.
18. Respect the zoning of a neighboring town.
19. Advocate adult entertainment uses in the downtown.
20. Point out that transmission towers have not yet been found to be radioactive.
21. Support Walmarts because of lower prices.
22. State that traffic should move faster through downtown.
23. Ignore aquifers. After all, they flow into the next town.
24. Interpret *Nolan* as a legal interpretation that restricts takings, planning and zoning and therefore minimizes the planners work.

25. Raise the specter of spot zoning for whatever use is questionable.
26. Promote the creation of a top down master plan.
27. State that any zoning change will attract “those people” (state your own choice) to the town.
28. Inform the public that Americans love to share their property with others. Therefore, condominiums are positive attractions.
29. Guarantee that teenagers will play in designated areas.
30. Check out the suits of all consultants. The higher the quality, the better the consultant.
31. Say that the industrial developer is already talking to IBM about his proposed project.
32. Say that cloning is simply another land use.
33. Say there is no need to keep the post office downtown.
34. Let everyone know that planners always use mass transit.
35. Inform everyone that planners never shop at K-Mart.
36. Note that the thicker the ordinance, the more apt it is to gain approval.
37. Know that funding agencies weigh master plans on a scale before granting their approval.
38. Recognize that zoning ordinances are best approved as a late night item at town meeting.
39. Know that elected boards always follow CIP recommendations.
40. Listen to their mayors on questions of aesthetics.