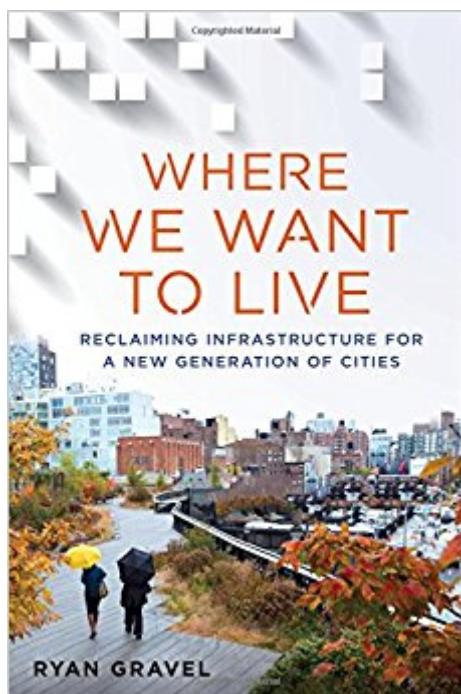


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# Where We Want To Live: Reclaiming Infrastructure For A New Generation Of Cities



## Synopsis

\*\*Winner, Phillip D. Reed Award for Outstanding Writing on the Southern Environment\*\*\*\*A Planetizen Top Planning Book for 2017\*\*After decades of sprawl, many American city and suburban residents struggle with issues related to traffic (and its accompanying challenges for our health and productivity), divided neighborhoods, and a non-walkable life. Urban designer Ryan Gravel makes a case for how we can change this. Cities have the capacity to create a healthier, more satisfying way of life by remodeling and augmenting their infrastructure in ways that connect neighborhoods and communities. Gravel came up with a way to do just that in his hometown with the Atlanta Beltline project. It connects 40 diverse Atlanta neighborhoods to city schools, shopping districts, and public parks, and has already seen a huge payoff in real estate development and local business revenue. Similar projects are in the works around the country, from the Los Angeles River Revitalization and the Buffalo Bayou in Houston to the Midtown Greenway in Minneapolis and the Underline in Miami. In *Where We Want to Live*, Gravel presents an exciting blueprint for revitalizing cities to make them places where we truly want to live.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"This is a local story, but it echoes one of the grand themes in contemporary city-building: the transformation of industrial relics into new public amenities...Gravel makes a case â “ as cogent as any Iâ™ve seen â “ for why governments need to favour this form of development and stop subsidizing sprawl." â •The Globe and Mail"An uplifting story about what people can accomplish

working for a common purpose they make their own." •Kirkus Reviews" What if infrastructure was viewed not as something over-budget and/or in need of repair but as a conduit to creating better, more livable cities? In *Where We Want to Live*, Ryan Gravel makes a passionate case for infrastructure as catalyst, arguing that our collective imaginations and energy can transform the places we live in. Absolutely inspiring." - Allison Arieff, Contributing Columnist, The New York Times  
Crisp and smart. Where do we want to live? Ryan Gravel, who will likely be remembered as one of our nation's highest impact urban designers, has some remarkable answers from his nearly two decade journey exploring the topic. At a time when sustainability, race relations, and economic growth seem more perplexing than ever, Ryan's ideas address all of these issues through a thoughtful approach to the development of our cities. As a doctor, I am also well aware of the tremendous health benefits a walking city can have on our health. Decreases in blood pressure and obesity and increases in connectedness, happiness and joy. I don't always think about these issues on a spectacular day of running or biking on the Atlanta Beltline with my three daughters. I simply know this what a real city can feel like. • Dr. Sanjay Gupta, chief medical correspondent at CNN  
Ryan Gravel's new book starts with the premise that big infrastructure ideas can yield huge economic and social payoffs. With the spirit of Daniel Burnham's famous "make no little plans," Gravel shows how his concept for the Atlanta Beltline is changing everything there, becoming a model for how all metropolitan areas can achieve transformative change. The Beltline is the most important infrastructure project in the country today, linking rich and poor neighborhoods to each other and to transit, and sparking billions of private sector investment already and tens of billions to come. Just as every metro area in the country adopted some form of belt highway, every metro will built a Beltline |surprisingly, Atlanta is doing it first. A hopeful book with achievable goals. • Christopher B. Leinberger, The Charles Bendit Distinguished Scholar and Research Professor, George Washington University School of Business  
In a time of political complexity Ryan Gravel delivers with a beautifully written call-to-action for more responsible and inclusive infrastructure in our cities and metropolitan regions. • " Nathaniel Smith, Founder & Chief Equity Officer, Partnership for Southern Equity

RYAN GRAVEL is the founding principal of Sixpitch and creator of the Atlanta Beltline, the reinvention of a 22-mile circle of railroads that began as the subject of his master's thesis. In September 2016, he was awarded the inaugural Judy Turner Prize. A designer, planner, and writer, he is increasingly called to speak to an international audience on topics as wide ranging as brownfield remediation, transportation, public health, affordable housing, and urban regeneration.

Gravel lives with his family in Atlanta, Georgia.

Gravel has provided a great overview of urban planning and infrastructure solutions for the problems that we face post-sprawl. I live in the Pacific Northwest and work for local government in land use. I found this book to be both inspiring and professionally motivating. The everyday interactions that are experienced when we travel by foot, bicycle, bus or light rail are profound. They help us live our lives more efficiently, happier, and they trigger a feeling of community simply by seeing and experiencing our lives within a group. These moments are seeds of empathy and alter our world view. All of this really matters to creating the types of communities that are vibrant and sustainable. Gravel starts out reviewing city infrastructure in Paris, then Savannah, then his hometown of suburban sprawl and shopping centers in North Carolina. Essentially, Gravel sets forth infrastructure as THE major factor to a city's livability and attractiveness to residents. Then he provides an exciting narrative of the Atlanta Beltline project from the first seeds of inspiration through struggles and finally the 2016 status mid-completion (already viewed as a great success). Gravel's insights are not limited to infrastructure, though. His insights are just as transferable to any difficult to solve political problem. His takeaways of what worked for the Beltline are both helpful and easily analogized. As I've reflected on local political successes and failures, I can see very critically where the process might have gone wrong using the analysis Gravel sets forth. I hope that stakeholders and advocates in communities across the country read this book and feel similarly inspired.

Shows the big picture for community redevelopment

In the end, his idea got co-opted by real estate developers chasing dollars. If Ryan Gravel was as naive, astonished, innocent, apolitical, naive, fortunate, intuitive, and living in a fairy tale as he claims he was, then anyone could have seen it coming. He got pwned. This book is absolutely full of Gravel's wide-eyed false modesty and self-back-patting. However, by his own admission, the campaign for the BeltLine in Atlanta was a pretend grass-roots campaign, led from within government and fed with stories planted in the press. Regular people join a church or a club if they want to make a difference; these folks zone other people's choices out of existence for fun and money. Where did the kickbacks go? Gravel starts his book with a comparison between the walking-size grid of Manhattan and the car-sized grid of the Las Vegas strip. My question is: what American want to live either place? Not too many. Contrary to the author's gasping vapors,

cul-de-sacs are not the enemy. Cul-de-sacs mean safety and quiet streets. There are too many sections early in the book complaining about how people choose to live and telling the reader how "we" - we the bossy - need to shape people's choices and force them to conform. This repeats again in the last chapters. Then, after complaining about the aesthetics of sprawl and its "inflexibility", "unadaptability", "stifling creative solutions," and "unresponsiveness," we come to the Belt Line Plan - A transit/trail combination that, because of its inflexibility and unadaptability, would inspire the kind of zoning changes and construction "we" want. To answer the title's implied question, Where DO we want to live? There is more than one right answer. What if people want to live in a car-affirming neighborhood that values liberty, privacy, and mobility? What if people want to live on a horse property within walking distance of convenient, clean transit? What if people want to live in an easily evacuated city with sensibly-sized freeways and unconstricted traffic? What if people want to live in a self-defending neighborhood of competent preppers? What if people want to live on an acre each within city limits? All of these choices are zoned out by do-gooders doing good.

The beginning and end of this book discusses the growth and decline of suburbia; it didn't tell me much I didn't already know, but it may be useful for readers less familiar with this issue. Even in this relatively dry part of the book, Gravel makes a few interesting points such as a) the evils of long blocks (which make walking boring by reducing pedestrians' choices), (b) the difference between 1950s sprawl (which is basically auto-oriented but usually allows children to walk to school and a shop or two) and more recent, more anti-pedestrian sprawl and c) the inflexibility of cul-de-sac dominated sprawl, which cannot be changed from one use to another as easily as gridded streets. The middle of the book, focusing on the Beltline, was more interesting to me. Gravel notes that while megaprojects often trigger a "Not In My Back Yard" (NIMBY) response to affected neighborhoods, neighbors of the Beltline got behind it. Gravel suggests that it was popular precisely because it didn't originate from a mayor or real estate developer or some other controversial group, and also because it would replace abandoned rail lines that had been centers for crime and vagrancy. (Also, parks tend to be less polarizing than transit or new housing).

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