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Long-term vision helps cities thrive

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Q: There are theories about how to design good cities, but how can we achieve good outcomes when the cities are already built?

A: Best practice urban design aims to promote liveability, economy and good health, while responding to [climate](#) change.

A key strategy to achieve these outcomes is a combination of compact urban environments that encourage walking and cycling, promoting people's health and minimising the use of [fossil fuels](#).

Bringing people together also supports better public transportation systems and promotes local economies by enabling impulse buys.

But how to achieve those outcomes when cities have already been laid out in a way that promotes sprawl, car-based mobility and big-box development?

We can look at a real-life example.

Portland in the USA adopted an urban growth boundary in the late 70s, which is now seeing beneficial results.

This boundary was aimed at protecting productive farmland, constraining sprawl and promoting urban density.

The result is that Portland is now an attractive city for Millennials. Typically, Millennials value easy commutes and public transport options, and do not like driving. They also value immediate access to retail amenities and well-designed public spaces.

As the largest group currently in the workforce, attracting and retaining Millennials is an important consideration for regional cities in [Australia](#).

Density, diversity and accessibility are the three key aspects of thriving cities.

However, density without diversity generates an undesirable loss of privacy and lack of amenities, and increased diversity with no density of living leads to commercial areas that are empty after 5pm.

It's not a perfect process but we can learn from previous success stories to avoid pitfalls and plan for optimum outcomes. Cities are living organisms that evolve over time, therefore changes to their [nature](#) require a long-term vision endowed with political will, patience and commitment.

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