

Journalists Cultivating the New Emerging Story

Image



Ben Kaplan seeks to actualize possibilities in new urbanism for his hometown

Ben Kaplan is one of a new breed of journalists focused on not only discovering but cultivating the new, emerging story in their local communities.

While the exact quality of the new, emerging story is difficult to pin down, it includes a sense of the need for greater connectivity between people, between people and their places and between people and themselves, their true spirits.

"In this historic transition from one era to another, something new is happening, a new vision, a new sacred story is coming into being," author Thomas Berry writes. "A vast transformation is occurring in the depths of human consciousness which is

leading to a recovery of the soul, the earth, the universe and a sense of the sacred.”

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— *Thomas Berry*

A resident of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, Ben is energized by the possibilities in designing cities around people rather than cars, as a way to create “better, more vibrant, more livable communities.”

The approach, called new urbanism, is seeing growing local interest, and is also a manifestation of global trends.

Ben is actively experimenting with how he can further bring this approach to life in his hometown as a multimedia journalist working with an innovative team called We Create Here.

An offshoot of the media firm, The Gazette Company, the [We Create Here](#) team aspires to create narratives that are helpful in developing the region’s prosperity.

While Ben is focused on new urbanism, his colleague, Sarah Binder, is energized about the possibilities in supporting a local community of entrepreneurs, creatives and innovators through a blend of media-making and hosting conversations. The focus of her work is also a local demonstration of paradigm shifts happening globally.

To help cultivate the new story around new urbanism, Ben is currently focused on a very tangible outcome — the revitalization of a stretch of road/street called Mt. Vernon. This 18-block, 1.5-mile avenue weaves through some of the wealthiest and poorest parts of Cedar Rapids.

Mt. Vernon features homes from the 1800s mixed in with modern-day plazas. Over time, it's become a predominantly car-friendly thoroughfare.

Ben's dream is to make the street more people-friendly. He wants to see changes that make walking and cycling safer and easier, street parking possible and the whole place more welcoming and vibrant with activity — people activity, that is, not car activity.

"It's possible to have a really profound, positive impact for not a lot of money," Ben says. "The word that urban planners use is placemaking. It's about treating a place like it already has value. It's really that simple."

Ben is conducting in-depth research in order to create a plan for the changes he envisions. He's also "seeding" his ideas via his We Create Here writing for the general public. He then plans to present a full proposal to key community decision makers as well as host community conversations on the subject. Articles will be interwoven with these latter activities as well.

Ben's ultimate goal is to see some version of this particular aspiration come to life.

He isn't looking for this to happen just for the sake of that particular street and its users.

If this change can be effected, he says, other places will see what's possible when you have a different kind of conversation about how a city is shaped.

There are journalists/change-makers in other parts of the world who share an interest with the We Create Here team in discovering and cultivating “the new, emerging story.”

If you are one of those, we’d love to hear from you.

You can comment on this story below, or e-mail [michelle\(at\)axiomnews.com](mailto:michelle(at)axiomnews.com).