



VIEWPOINT

How to save renters \$15 million with one easy change

BY CLAY GRUBB - SPECIAL TO THE OBSERVER

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Six months ago, who could have imagined that in one single month, 100,000 commuters in Charlotte would ride over 139,000 miles on electric scooters. City Council member Larken Egleston predicts someone is going to die this year on a scooter. Sadly, he is probably accurate. Whenever I tell anyone I rode my bike to or from work, the first comment I get is almost always, “That is too dangerous.”

Can you imagine what Charlotte would be like if it weren't too dangerous? Designing our streets for people instead of cars will not only help safety, it will also help Charlotte address its serious economic mobility problem. Copenhagenize, the premiere bicycle infrastructure designers from Denmark who are helping me plan new streetscapes in a project in Chapel Hill, says we no longer design streets for humans but have turned them into mathematical equations to be solved. For example, Church Street efficiently moves a lot of cars into uptown Charlotte each day, but the sidewalks can be a dangerous place for me to walk my dog.

If we can build a city where commuters are less reliant on cars, we can provide great opportunities for people who want to live near job opportunities and education. In Richard Florida's book, “The New Urban Crisis,” he makes clear that urban centers offer both better job opportunities and greater levels of the kinds of amenities that can help boost wages and increase prosperity for economic mobility.

Consider this example: If my firm, Grubb Properties, were to build a 300-unit apartment community with moderate rents in downtown Charlotte today it would cost in excess of \$75 million. If we could build that same apartment community without having to provide parking, the cost would be closer to \$60 million. This \$15 million reduction in total cost would allow for an

average monthly rent reduction of over \$250, making the apartments affordable for a far greater percentage of Charlotteans.

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These residents would now be in locations that offer a shorter commute, which they could make by walking, biking, public transportation or even riding a scooter. This saves them money on the cost of an automobile, and saves time. Richard Florida claims that if we could reduce the work commute for the 3.6 million Americans who travel 90 minutes each way to a more typical 30 minutes, it would save 1.8 billion hours.

In Charlotte, it has been estimated that we have a shortage of 21,000 affordable housing units. If those were built in urban areas with greater access to jobs and educational opportunities where upward mobility was more likely, the elimination of parking would save approximately \$945 million. With that kind of savings, it's clear that if Charlotte is serious about improving our community's economic mobility, an important first step is a major investment in bicycle and scooter safety.

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