



The pandemic has pushed aside city planning rules, but to whose benefit?

By Emily Badger, *The New York Times*, July 20, 2020

One month into the coronavirus crisis this spring, Oakland, Calif., began to restrict car traffic on some streets — ultimately on 21 miles of them — to create outdoor space for residents who suddenly had nowhere else to go.

Other cities have also responded with remarkably rapid transformations of urban space that had seemed impossible before the pandemic. Boston [announced new bike routes](#). Seattle converted on-street parking to [loading zones for restaurant pickup](#). [Los Angeles](#) and [New York](#) expedited permits for outdoor dining on streets and sidewalks. [Connecticut lifted rules](#) requiring businesses to have a minimum number of parking spaces. And some of these changes are [likely to be permanent](#). ...

But the speed itself — and the changes that cities have prioritized — has also left residents that have long been sidelined in city planning feeling neglected again. Poorer residents weren't going to restaurants much anyway. Many children didn't feel safe from violence in public spaces before the pandemic. ...

Questions about who has a say in shaping cities, and what that process should look like, are not new. But the shock of the coronavirus crisis, which cleared public spaces to be a kind of blank canvas, and the calls to treat those spaces [with racial equity in mind](#) could force cities to reconsider their answers.

Today, visions of urban life reinvented for the future are colliding with unaddressed inequalities from the past. And the urgency of a public health threat is pushing against demands for the long work of inclusion. ...

This is the reality as cities consider what it would mean to have *more* community input: In city planning, participatory democracy has largely increased inequality, not lessened it.

Read more [here](#).