

I was invited to participate in Charleston's 39<sup>th</sup> Pechakucha event on June 7, 2022.

Each speaker is given six minutes 40 seconds to present 20 slides (20 seconds per slide).

Here is my presentation. The spoken narrative for each slide in **yellow**.



**PECHAKUCHA 39**  
TUESDAY JUNE 7, 2022 CHARLESTON MUSIC HALL

**FEATURING:**  
KATIE HIRSCH  
KJ KEARNEY  
LYDIA CHERNICOFF  
VINCE GRAHAM  
JACQUIE BERGER  
BEN TOWILL  
CHARLIE LAYTON  
HANNA RASKIN  
EARL NEWELL

**EMCEES:**  
BRIAN PORTER  
KYLE BARNETTE

**DJ:**  
PROFESSOR PING

PHOTOGRAPHY AND POSTER DESIGN: RUBY HAZZARD



# RADICAL URBANISM AND THE REVIVAL OF CIVIC ART

VINCE GRAHAM  
PECHA KUCHA  
JUNE 7, 2022



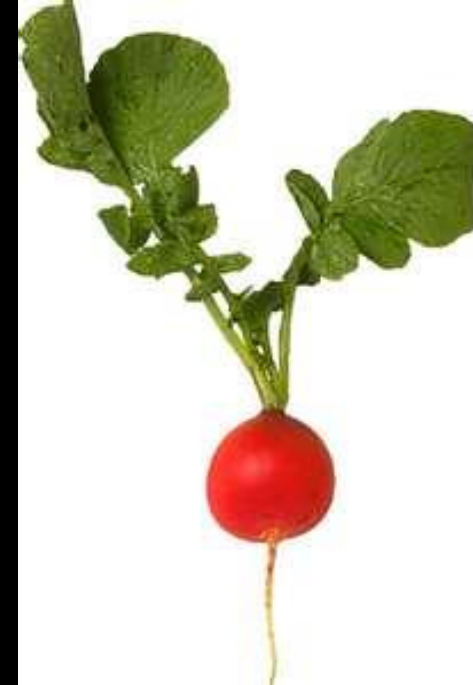
Two fish are swimming in a creek. An older fish, approaches. He says in passing, "Morning boys, how's the water?" The two fish continue. One then turns to the other... "What the hell is water?" Over the next 6 minutes , I hope to convey a deeper appreciation for water.

# Radical *adj* \ra-di-kəl\

## 1. of or going to the root or origin

*“The word ‘radical’ comes from the Latin radix, meaning ‘root’...The proper radical is one who tries to get to the root of things, to not be distracted by superficials, to see the woods for the trees. It is good to be a radical. Anyone who thinks deeply will be one.”*

~M. Scott Peck



The first definition of “radical” is “of or related to the root.” Let’s get radical about urbanism, especially the public realm, those shared spaces we own in common. The public realm represents the common good. Pollute the public realm, the water if you will, and you degrade the common good. Beautify the public realm and you enhance the common good.

# Art (*noun*)

**Skill as a result of learning or practice**  
(*Art*, Old French 10th century)



**Practical skill; craft**  
(*Ars*, Latin)



**To fit together**  
(*Ar*, Proto-Indo European)

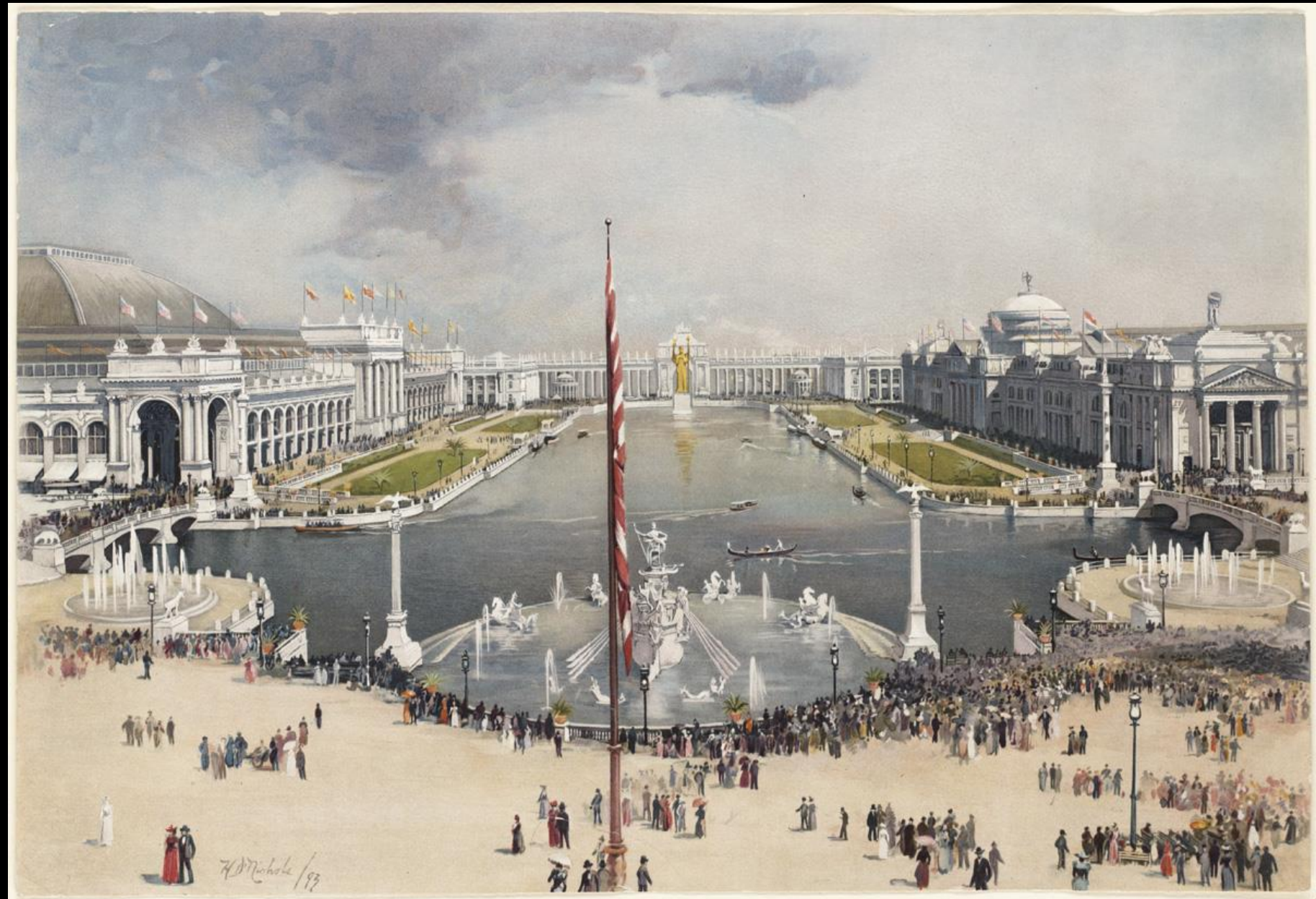
*“Supreme art is a traditional statement of certain heroic and religious truths, passed on from age to age, modified by individual genius, but never abandoned.”*

**~William Yeats**

Now to get radical about art. The word's roots pre-date ancient Greece and Rome. The way art is understood today as primarily something to look at, would've been foreign to the ancients who viewed art as the practice of fitting things together to make the whole greater than the sum of the parts. Whether poetry, carpentry or hospitality, art involved participation.



# Civic Art



Urbanism defines the very spaces of our lives. But like fish in water, we're often unaware of it. You live inside buildings, you look at paintings within them, you listen to people speak in them. But you couldn't reach a building without a street. Why not design the street to be beautiful?



1922

THE AMERICAN VITRUVIUS:

AN ARCHITECTS' HANDBOOK OF

# CIVIC ART

BY  
WERNER HEGEMANN  
AND  
ELBERT PEETS

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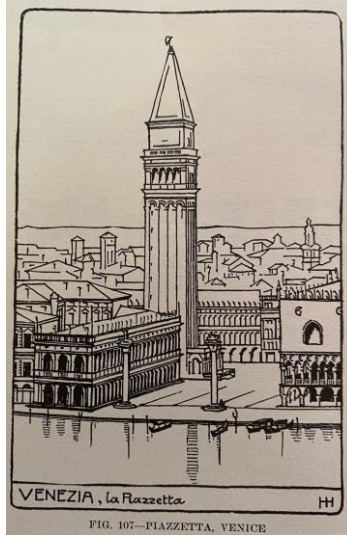
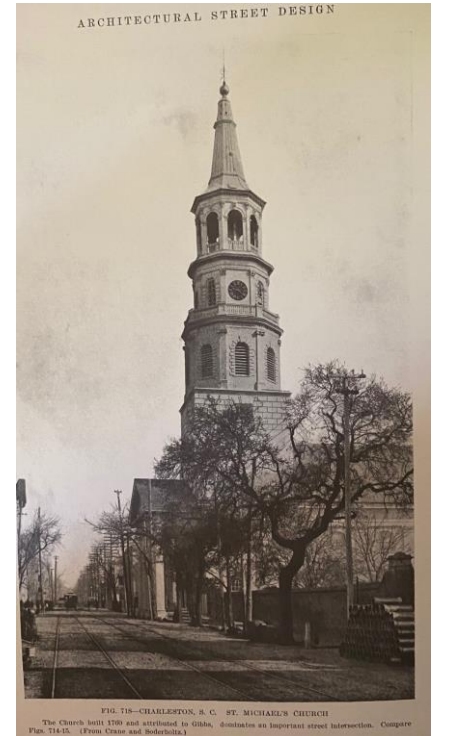
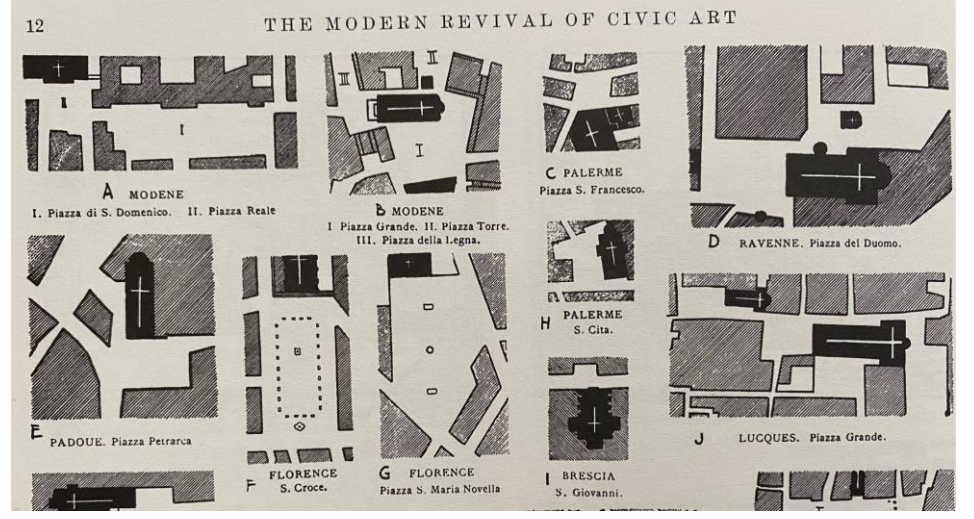


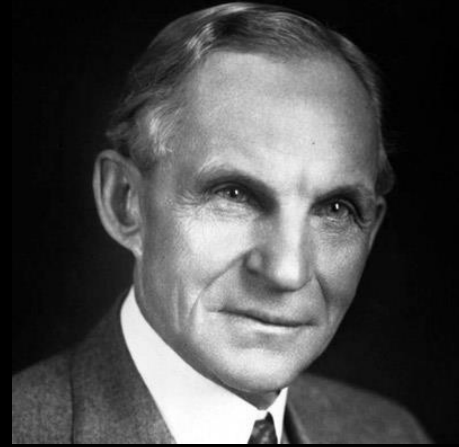
FIG. 107—PIAZZETTA, VENICE



This book, published a century ago, documented historical plazas and architecture. With chapters on street and park design, the authors called for the revival of civic art. But their noble ideas conflicted with the emerging industrialized vision for cities. In 1900, 8,000 autos were registered in the country. By 1920, thanks in part to the popularity of Ford's Model T...



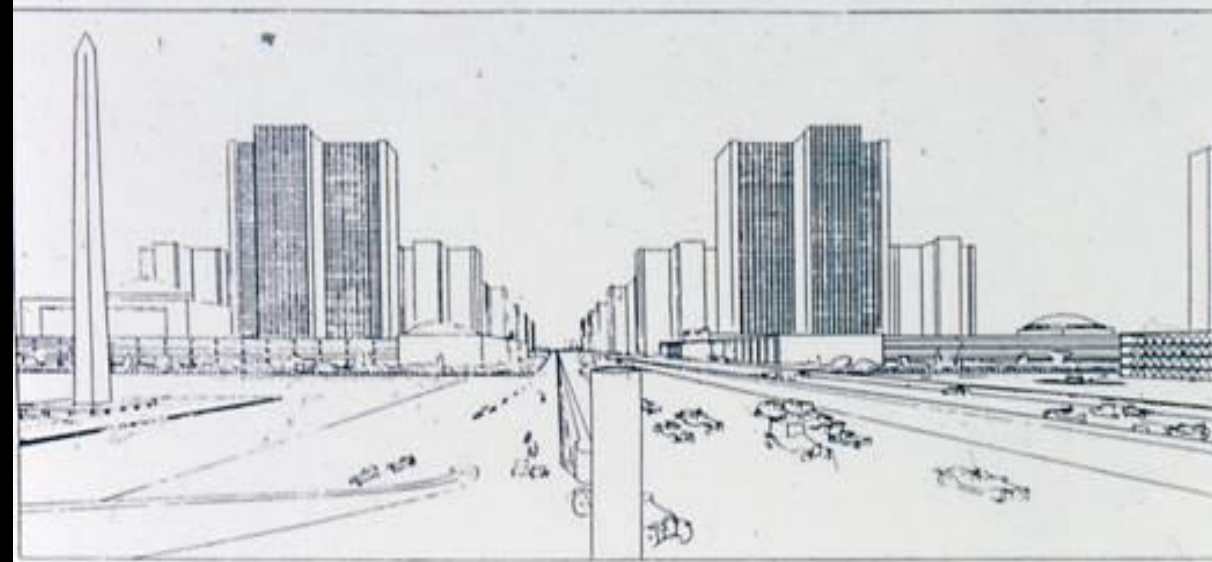
# Attacks on the City



**“The automobile has rendered confinement within the City unnecessary...**

**What is the answer to the ‘problem of the city’? Plainly, the abolition of the City. We shall solve the City Problem by leaving the City. Get the people into the country and you have solved the City Problem by eliminating the City.”**

*The Modern City, A Pestiferous Growth, Henry Ford (1922)*



A superhighway forms a triumphal entryway leading directly into the center of the Contemporary City (1922). From *Oeuvre complet de 1910–1929*.

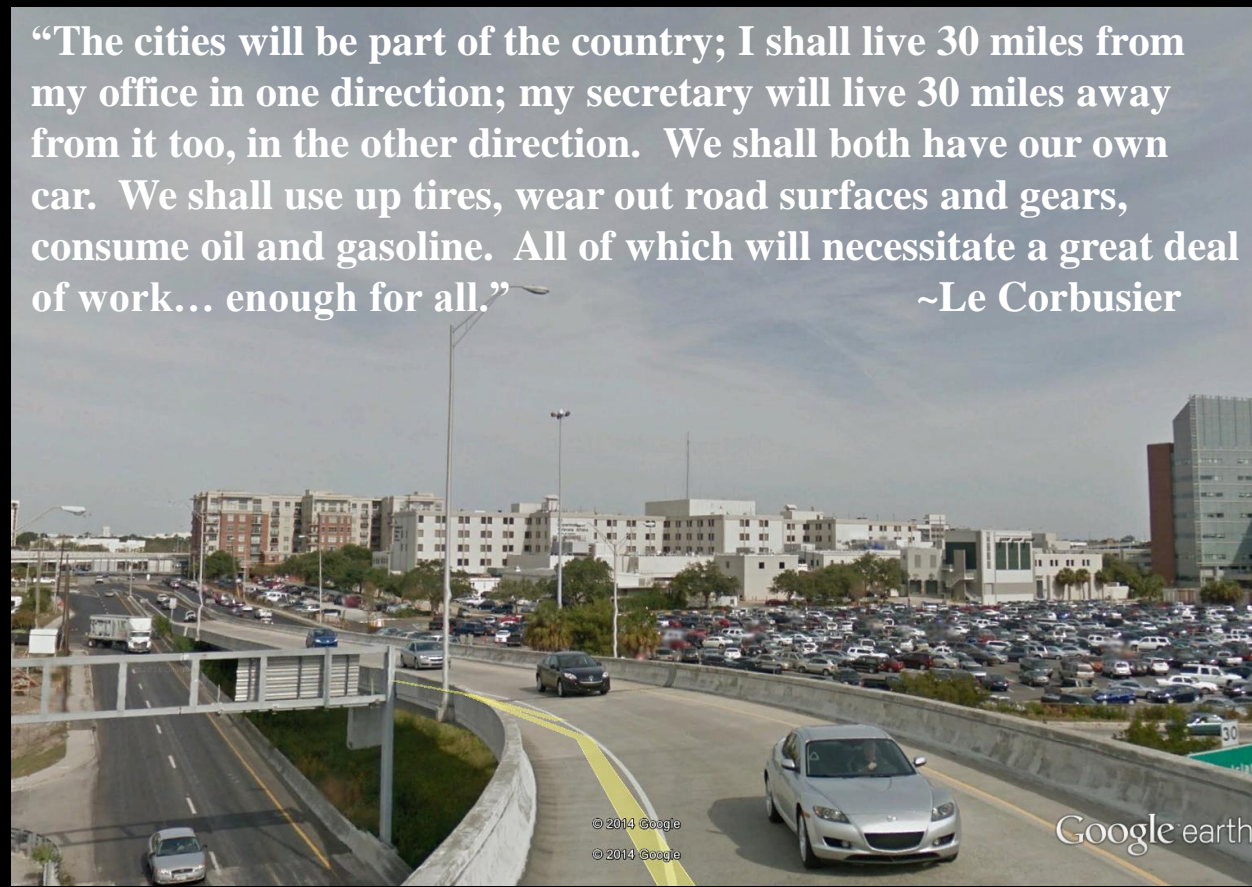


*A Contemporary City for 3 Million People, Le Corbusier (1922)*

**...there were 9.2 million. Ford deemed traffic the “problem of the city.” His solution: eliminate the city! Meanwhile, Corbu proposed to demolish central Paris and replace it with skyscrapers and superhighways. Europe’s leaders of the time dismissed these nutty ideas.**



# Human vs Inhuman Scale

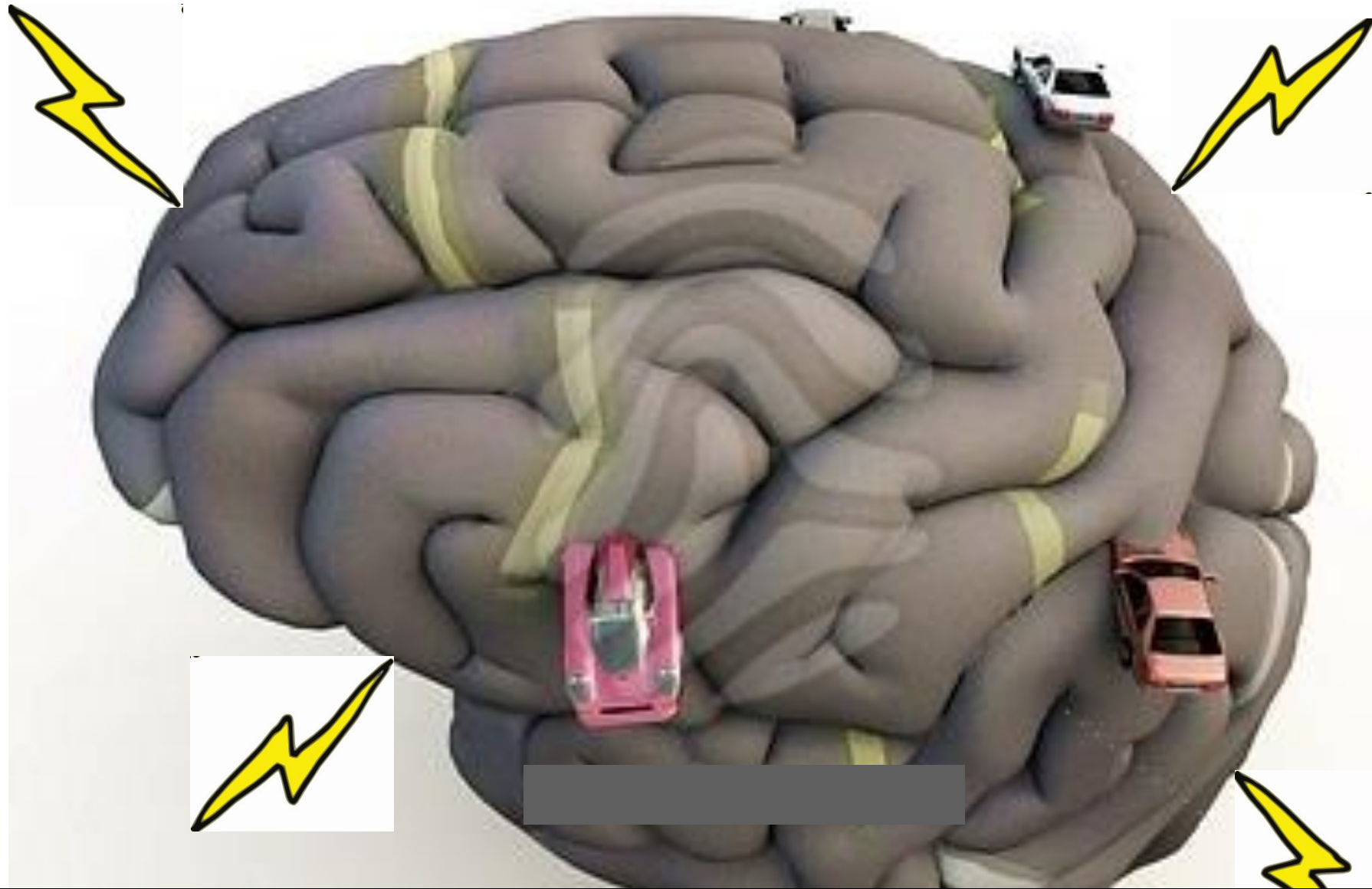


“The cities will be part of the country; I shall live 30 miles from my office in one direction; my secretary will live 30 miles away from it too, in the other direction. We shall both have our own car. We shall use up tires, wear out road surfaces and gears, consume oil and gasoline. All of which will necessitate a great deal of work... enough for all.”  
~Le Corbusier

**But here in the U.S., obsessed with consumption and the machine aesthetic, the auto-centric vision was embraced. Consider Charleston. Until 1960 the city was just the peninsula. It's population, about 70,000. But federally funded highways made for easier commutes to the 'burbs and the peninsula's population began its decline to 33,000 today. From 3,600 acres in 1960, the city grew...**



# Auto Mind: Its Causes and Consequences



...20-fold to 72,000 acres, 95% of which was planned for auto-dependent sprawl. This “auto mind” was imposed on the peninsula to facilitate commuting with giant interchanges and highways like the Crosstown built through the heart of neighborhoods.



# Fond memories associated with cars...



We've been swimming in these waters ever since. Fond memories reinforce this conditioning. Some of us got our first kiss in a car. Others were conceived or have conceived in cars. Observing trends of the preceding decade, Aldous Huxley wrote *Brave New World* in 1932. His prescient work of science fiction foresaw an authoritarian government that maintained...

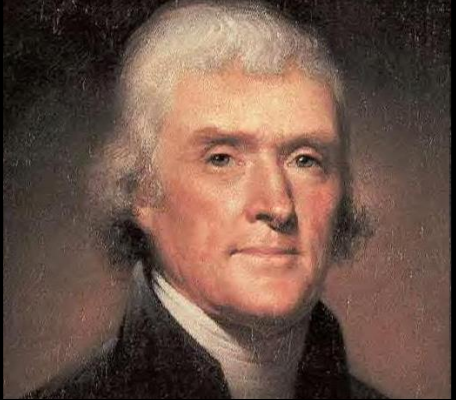




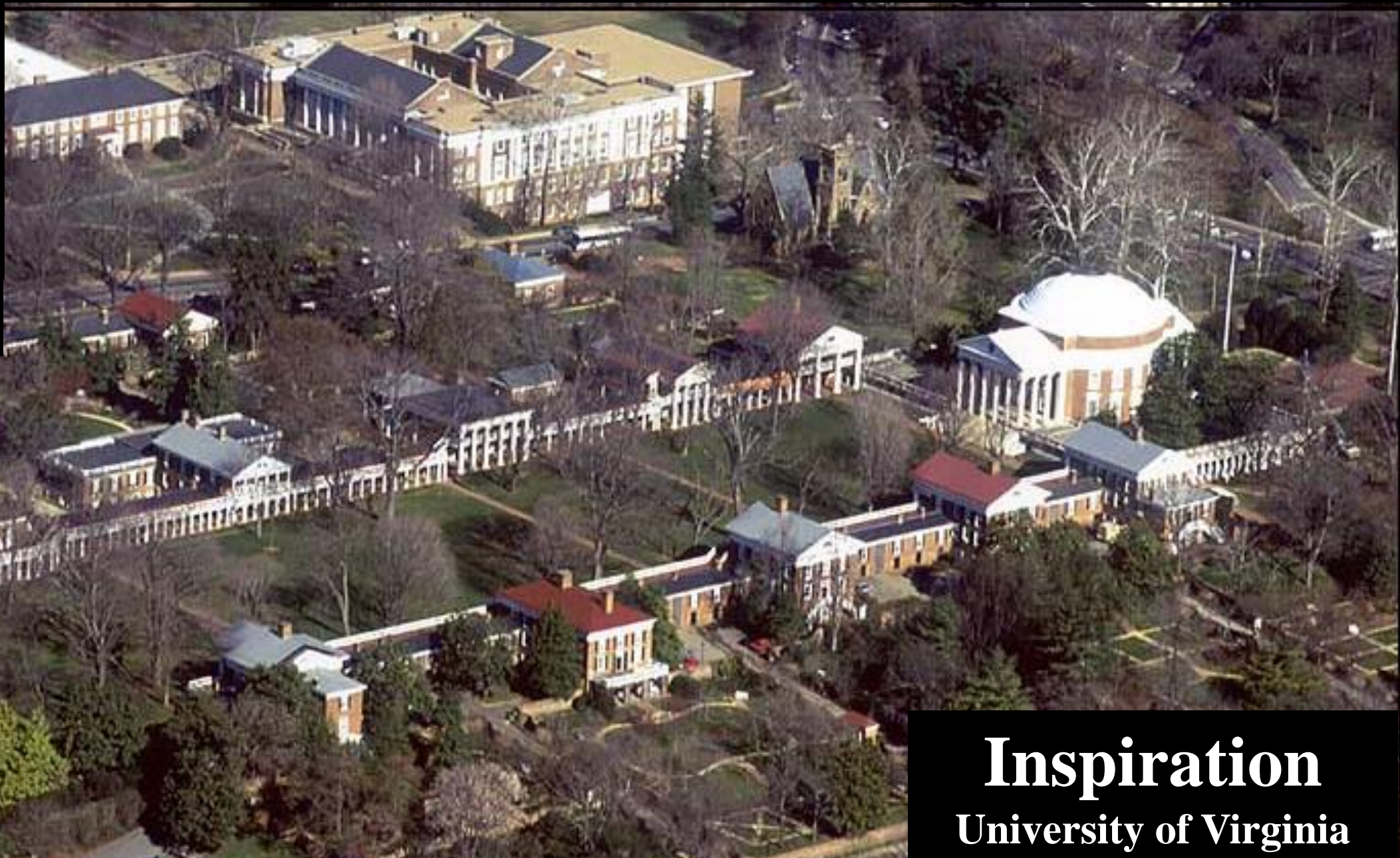
**“The idea was to...compel them to consume transport.” -Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (1932)**

**...stability by keeping the populace fixated on consumption. The built environment was designed to maximize auto transport, just like U.S. policies of the last century. Consider your own conditioning – childhood toys, family vacations, daily commutes to school. Then finally you turn 16 and gain freedom. That was surely me.**





**Thomas Jefferson,  
Civic Artist/Developer**



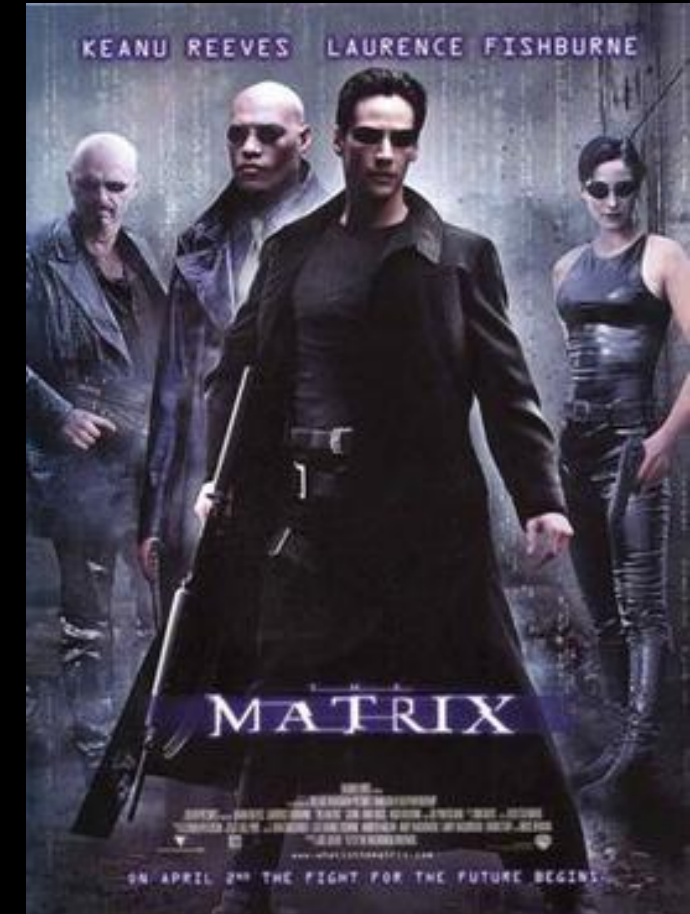
# **Inspiration**

## **University of Virginia**

**But then, 40 summers ago my parents drove me north to this foreign land called Virginia and dropped me at college. First year students were not allowed cars, but no matter. I could walk to eat, to class, to parties and events. A completely different human ecology. After graduation I returned to Atlanta...**

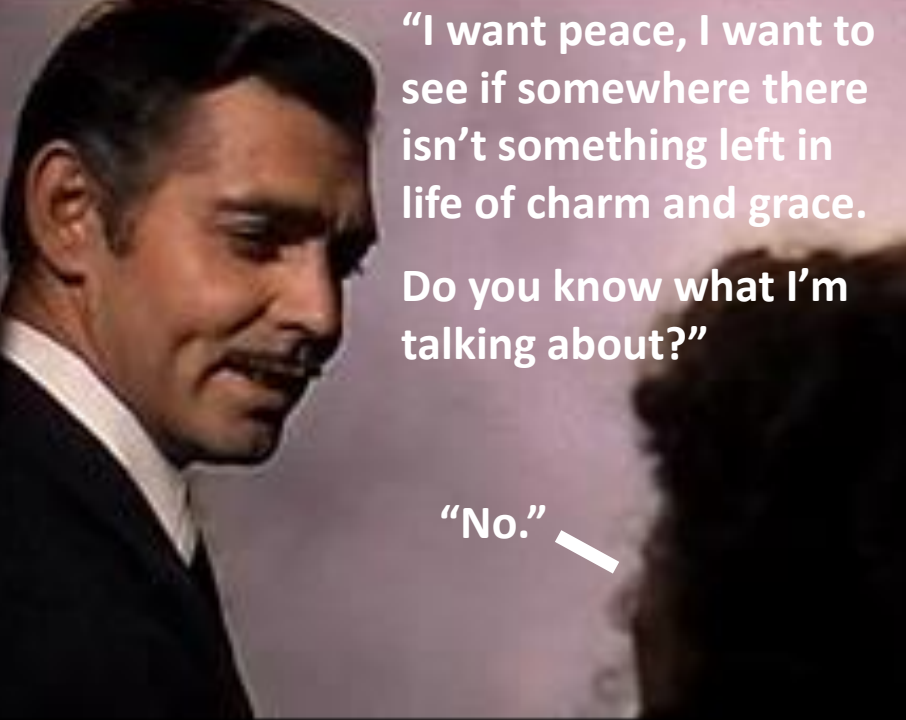


# Anti-Inspiration: Atlanta's dehumanizing traffic sewers



...taking a job at a downtown bank where, along with hundreds of thousands of other fish, I experienced this soul-sucking commute. I felt caught in a dehumanizing matrix. I lasted for three years in Atlanta before landing a job as project manager for a Beaufort County golf course development.





“I want peace, I want to see if somewhere there isn’t something left in life of charm and grace.

Do you know what I’m talking about?”

“No.”



## Inspiration Craven Street, Beaufort

Dismissing Hilton Head as an Atlanta with palmetto trees, I opted to live in Beaufort, purchasing an old fixer-upper. Once again, I could walk to places: restaurants, the hardware store, friends homes... a light bulb went off, it was like UVA! A red pill epiphany. I went deep down the rabbit hole...





**RADICAL**

*“Broad is the road that leads to destruction...narrow is the road that leads to life.”*

**~Jesus (Matthew 7:13-14)**

...unpacking the history of urban design and studying dissenting radicals who questioned the status quo. At my workplace, Spring Island, we offered privacy and exclusivity behind a guarded gate, targeting disgruntled islanders who said “Hilton head used to be nice until all these people moved here” – a “resent thy neighbor” attitude that saddened me.





NEWPOINT HOMES: Subdivision is taking a new approach to Beaufort's Old Point

# Newpoint

*Beaufort Community Taking a New Approach to the Old*



## They Had It Right The First Time.

Thoughts on Recovering the American Dream.



**Embrace Tradition** At **Newpoint** we started **delightful place to enjoy a sunset. Or walk down from the Green through** **Newpoint** homes are built to be appreciated and last longer than the

**What if instead, hospitable Beaufort with its sense of inclusive neighborliness was the model. An idea was born, and 30 years ago, ground was broken on Newpoint across the river from Beaufort. It was a way to integrate my love for history, building and beauty into a business. Other opportunities soon emerged...**





**...like l'On, which my brother Geoff, father Tom and I broke ground on 25 years ago. At five times the size, l'On offered a broader canvas and deeper market. Rather than national tract builders we chose to engage local contractors and designers as our partners in this participative civic art project.**





**Since then I've been fortunate to work with hundreds of others in building new places and renovating old ones. Morris Square, Mixson, Earl's Court, and most recently, working with Reid Burgess and George Holt, on Catfiddle Street downtown, advancing the practice of civic art.**



# Challenges to producing good civic art.

Regulation and politics of land use suppresses supply.



I'On Home Prices (1998 vs 2022\*)

\*Estimate per Zillow

Mental conditioning is reinforced by regulation. Zoning outlaws building places in the manner of old cities. To secure approval for I'On for example, required removing apartments and other vision compromises, then a trip to the SC Supreme Court. Immense demand in the face of constrained supply leads to absurd prices. The solution is simple...legalize human scale design and build more!



# Second Sunday on King Street



I'm hopeful we will. Civic art is being recovered and advanced. Second Sunday wouldn't have been possible 20 years ago. Now it's time to expand it. Why not first Friday on Meeting, third Thursday on Broad, or second Tuesday on John Street? Imagine being able to walk out of here to have supper at a charming table in the street.





# Dum Spiro Spero (While I breathe, I hope)



**Columbia's Main Street on either side of the State House. In the 90s, the north side, which looked like the image at left, was transformed. Our politics is so divisive these days. Why not devote energy to making those places we own in common more beautiful? Not just for ourselves, but for generations to come. Jump in, the water's fine!**