

PODCAST SUMMARIES

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PlanningxChange Podcast: Key to the City – How Zoning Shapes Our World

Run time: 52 minutes

Hosts: Jess Noonan and Peter Jewell, town planners

Guests: Sara Bronin, Mexican-American architect, attorney and author

Podcast link

<https://soundcloud.com/planningxchange/planningxchange-126-key-to-the-city-how-zoning-shapes-our-world-sara-bronin>

Podcast summary

Guest Sara Bronin is a Mexican-American architect and attorney whose interdisciplinary research focuses on how law and policy can foster more equitable, sustainable, well-designed, and connected places. She is the author of *Key to the City: How Zoning Shapes Our World*, and she founded and directs the National Zoning Atlas. In this podcast, Sara shares her experiences, including being a Commissioner at the City of Hartford, which helped shape the book and the array of issues covered in *Key to the City*.

Why Planners Should Listen

This is a great podcast for Planning students as well as a refresher for Planners. Sara shares the importance of regularly re-evaluating and questioning existing zoning laws instead of blindly replicating them, encouraging more thoughtful planning based on current research and understanding of how people interact with their environments.

During this episode, Sara elaborates on the political nature of zoning, its historical origins, and its impact on cities. She uses examples like Houston's lack of zoning and its reliance on private covenants and Hartford's zoning reforms to illustrate her points. During the conversation, Sara shares a story about her uncle who faced significant legal and financial challenges due to a restrictive covenant that limited the property's use to residential purposes (although the area had evolved into a commercial street). Unlike zoning laws that can adapt to changing conditions, restrictive covenants are rigid and difficult to change. This example highlights the need for more flexible, rationale-based land-use rules that can better respond to evolving community needs.

Sara is also the author to the book *Key to the City* in which she talks about how zoning fundamentally shapes nearly every aspect of life in most populated areas, influencing the economy, society, the environment,

transportation, and housing. She emphasizes that historically, many zoning bylaws were copied from place to place with minimum adaptation and often based on outdated assumptions. This led to the creation of places with car-dependent urban design that now negatively impacts American life.

The War on Cars Podcast: John Mulaney, Natasha Lyonne and the Battle of the Bike Lanes

Run time: 52 minutes, skip to 9 minutes to start

Host: Doug Gordon, television producer, writer and co-author of *Life After Cars*

Guest: Alissa Walker, Editor of *Torched*

Podcast link

<https://thewaroncars.org/2025/06/03/episode-153-john-mulaney-natasha-lyonne-and-the-battle-of-the-bike-lanes/>

Podcast summary

Recently, on an episode of the Netflix show *Everybody's Live with John Mulaney*, the subject matter (slated to be on if Uber was good) unexpectedly turned into a battle about bike lanes with Natasha Lyonne, who said bike lanes should be "shut down" and claimed there is no space for them in Manhattan.

Journalist Alissa Walker, Editor of *Torched*, who was invited to the show as a "public transit expert", soon found herself (as a public-transit-riding Los Angeles resident) not talking about Uber but defending bike lanes and explaining the rational apportionment of

urban space to some famous New Yorkers. Interestingly, when you striped away the big stars and the studio audience, what conspired was indistinguishable from a community board meeting.

Why Planners Should Listen

In this episode, Alissa Walker recants her appearance on John Mulaney's Netflix show where she ended up defending public transit and trying not to become part of the punchline. Through a sound clip in the podcast, you can distinctly hear the surprise in John Mulaney's floored response when he learnt that Alissa took two modes of public transit to attend the show and not the black car service that was offered.

It got interesting when guest Natasha Lyonne side tracked the discussion about Uber to revolve around bicycles and getting rid of bike lanes in Manhattan. When asked about this by host Doug Gordon, Alissa recalls how she felt the conversation wasn't as educational as she had hoped but it did allow her to note that Uber is part of the bigger problem of money spent that undermines public transit.

Alison and Doug also discussed how people choose to move around is often situational. For example, Mulaney and his celebrity guests, when working on set, don't use vehicles to get around; they use golf carts or walk. Somehow this is lost in terms of getting from point A to point B and "transportation" isn't understood in the same way. This podcast is a good reminder that there are many transportation options, depending on one's situation. Now off to watching the John Mulaney Netflix episode firsthand!

