

Retired Urban Planner Richard G. Bickel Recently Featured on Close Up Radio

ARDMORE, PA, UNITED STATES, January 9, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- In a world where city planning can feel shrouded in jargon and authority, Richard G. Bickel, retired urban master planner, cuts through the noise with a message that's as refreshing as it is overdue: urban planning is simply a conversation, not a mystery. After decades shaping communities in the Northeast and beyond, Bickel is charting a new path for the field by replacing intimidation with invitation and top-down mandates with good old-fashioned listening.

Bickel's philosophy rests on the powerful yet underappreciated idea that planning is a communication mechanism, not just a technical discipline. "Everyone should know more about it and not be mystified," he says. "Urban planning relies on common sense. The real skill is friendly persuasion." In an era when debates about affordable housing, public transit, and neighborhood character often erupt into acrimony, Bickel's approach couldn't be more timely.

Rather than showing up to public meetings with a predetermined plan and a planner's badge, Bickel urges colleagues to recognize their own perspective and affiliations. "As an urban planner, you are usually not an independent actor. You have to see where you're coming from, who you represent, and how that shapes your vision," he explains. This humility, rare in stories of urban master builders, distinguishes Bickel from the likes of Robert Moses, whose towering legacy in New York City remains both legendary and cautionary. Moses, as Bickel recounts, wielded exceptional power thanks to political backing and a forceful personality, leaving behind expressways, bridges, and parkways sculpted to his will. But Bickel is quick to point out the perils of unchecked authority: "Most planners would love to have that kind of power, but we never do



and that's for the best."

Bickel's career has taken him from the neighborhoods of Philadelphia to the ferry docks of Nantucket, confronting the hopes and fears of residents at every stop. He's seen firsthand how communities react when change comes to their doorstep, sometimes with curiosity, more often with suspicion. The famous "Not In My Backyard" syndrome, or NIMBYism, is a recurring challenge. As Bickel notes, "NIMBY comes up whenever people feel threatened at any scale. Whether it's a neighborhood facing new development or a city losing funding, the reaction is the same: dig in, delay, defeat."

His tenure at Philadelphia's public transit agency created a front-row seat to these dynamics. Tasked in the 1990s with managing a new parking garage project adjacent to the Ardmore train station, Bickel faced a roomful of residents convinced that congestion and chaos were imminent. "They didn't see opportunity, only the worst-case scenario. It took decades before construction finally began." For Bickel, this underscores the essential work of planners: patiently building trust, answering fears with facts, and, above all, embracing compromise.

Central to Bickel's vision is the delicate dance between growth and the preservation of neighborhood character, which is always a tension that defines cities across America. "From a planner's perspective, diversity is a good thing," he observes. But for many suburban homeowners accustomed to uniform blocks of single-family houses, that same diversity can seem like a threat. The mention of affordable housing or mixed-use development can instantly sour the mood, conjuring images of high-rises or unwanted apartments next door. "The social principles of integration and mixed development are alien to most people's experience," Bickel reflects. Yet he remains optimistic that, with persistence and genuine dialogue, communities can break down those mental barriers and imagine a broader, more inclusive future.

His analysis stretches from the crowded commuter corridors of the Northeast to the rail ambitions of California, tracing the uneven progress of American cities and the distinctive challenges they face. Bickel is quick to highlight the places where architecture, design, and land use have blended with success, citing the influence of Frank Lloyd Wright in Wisconsin or the vibrant networks of rail towns outside Boston, New York, and Philadelphia. But he also warns of pitfalls, from ill-conceived infrastructure projects to missed opportunities for compromise.

Bickel's insights are not limited to the drawing board or planning commission. He believes the human stories embedded in every neighborhood are the real blueprint for a thriving city. Whether it's a generations-old family home or a new arrival seeking community, every voice has a place in the conversation. And for Bickel, the most essential tool isn't a map or a zoning code, it's the willingness to listen.

As cities today grapple with the growing pains of density, affordability, and changing work patterns, Richard G. Bickel's legacy offers a road map that is as practical as it is profound. "The theory of planning is one thing," he says, "but the reality is you've got to work with people. Be

ready to compromise. That's what makes a city work."

About Richard G. Bickel

Richard G. Bickel is a retired urban planner who has served with distinction at the Montgomery County Planning Commission, the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA), and the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC). He is currently a Senior Advisor at EconSalt, supporting thoughtful, pragmatic approaches to urban planning nationwide.

Close Up Radio recently featured Richard G. Bickel, Senior Advisor for Econsult Solutions in a two-part interview with Doug Llewelyn on Monday January 5th at 10am EST, and with Jim Masters on Monday January 12th at 10am EST

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For more information about Richard G. Bickel, please visit <https://econsultsolutions.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Bickel-Richard-G.-Bio-1.pdf/> and <https://www.24-7pressrelease.com/press-release/526916/richard-g-bickel-faicp-celebrated-for-excellence-in-the-field-of-urban-planning/>

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