



Ethan Seltzer is a professor in the Nohad A. Toulan School of Urban Studies and Planning at Portland State University. He previously served for six years as the director of the school, and prior to that for eleven years as the founding director of Portland State's Institute of Portland Metropolitan Studies.

Before joining Portland State in 1992 he served as the land use supervisor for Metro, the regional government in the Portland area; assistant to Portland City Commissioner Mike Lindberg; assistant coordinator for the Southeast Uplift Neighborhood Program in Portland; and coordinator of the Drinking Water Project for the Oregon Environmental Council.

Seltzer received his Ph.D. in City and Regional Planning and Master of Regional Planning from the University of Pennsylvania. His doctoral dissertation examined the role of citizen participation in environmental planning. Current research interests include regional planning, regionalism, regional development, and planning in the Pacific Northwest.

In addition to his current work with the Lincoln Institute, his publications include chapters titled *Maintaining the Working Landscape: The Portland Metro Urban Growth Boundary*, in *Regional Planning for Open Space*, edited by Arnold van der Valk and Terry van Dijk (Routledge 2009); and *It's Not an Experiment: Regional Planning at Metro, 1990 to the Present*, in *The Portland Edge*, edited by Connie Ozawa (Island Press 2004).

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LAND LINES: *How did you become associated with the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy?*

ETHAN SELTZER: Regional planning has been at the center of my career for a long time. I used to be the land use supervisor for Metro, the regional government in the Portland metropolitan region. In the late 1980s we were just starting work on what is now the Region 2040 Growth Concept. Part of that work involved seeking out new ideas about planning, land use, land management, and related topics, and through that search, I started to engage with the Lincoln Institute. A few years later, I was part of a planning project organized through the Regional Plan Association in New York that brought U.S. and Japanese planners together. I met Armando Carbonell (chair of the Institute's Department of Planning and Urban Form) through that process, and we have remained collaborators on a number of projects since then.

LAND LINES: *What was the first project you conducted for the Lincoln Institute?*

ETHAN SELTZER: The first one I recall had to do with re-establishing a dialogue around regional planning and building on the ideas put forth by the old Regional Plan Association of America going back to the 1920s. I was also a part of numerous Lincoln Institute seminars, including one held in Chicago on the relationships and interdependencies between cities and suburbs. The papers were published by the Institute in 2000 in the book *Urban-Suburban Interdependencies*, edited by Rosalind Greenstein and Wim Wiewel. Since then I have been involved in several Institute-sponsored projects and events, most recently in conjunction with the showing of the film *Portland: Quest for the Livable City* as part of the Making Sense of Place documentary film series.

LAND LINES: *How has your association with the Lincoln Institute influenced your research?*

ETHAN SELTZER: I think the Lincoln Institute is one of the only, maybe the only, institution that has consistently focused on the confluence of issues associated with planning practice, place, regionalism, and land use. There are few other places that address these issues in such a thoughtful, deliberate manner. The support that the Lincoln Institute provides for thinking and writing about these issues is part of what makes it possible for me to find both an audience and like-minded colleagues. There are other networks important to me as well, notably the connections provided by the Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning. Nonetheless, the Lincoln Institute is uniquely a forum for the things that I am most interested in and where I hope to contribute.

LAND LINES: *What are your current projects for the Lincoln Institute?*

ETHAN SELTZER: I am working on a book on regional planning in America with an explicit focus on practice. I teach courses in regional planning and, though there is an interesting literature on the reasons why regional planning might make sense and the stark challenges to pulling it off, there is not much information available regarding what regional planners do, and how regional planning is distinguished from other types of planning (i.e., city, urban, transportation).

With support from the Lincoln Institute, and in collaboration with coeditor Armando Carbonell, I was able to recruit a group of talented authors and put together a series of chapters that, we expect, will more completely present what gets done in the name of regional planning in the United States today. We also hope this project will provide a basis for better understanding the unique aspects of regional planning practice.

The working title for the book is *American Regional Planning: Practice and Prospect*. Coauthors include Tim Beatley, Robert Fishman, Kate Foster, John Fregonese and CJ Gabbe, Frank and Deborah Popper, Manuel Pastor and Chris Benner, Gerrit

Knaap and Rebecca Lewis, Fritz Steiner, and Bob Yaro. The manuscript will be completed this fall and the book will be published in the spring of 2011.

LAND LINES: *Regional planning seems to be a really challenging idea in America. Why are you so interested in it?*

ETHAN SELTZER: You are absolutely right, but it's often hard to find a place in the scheme of things for regions and regional planning. The history of America is told with broad, sweeping regions in mind—the South, New England, the West—but the history of planning in America is largely one of local institutions, states, and the federal government.

Regional planning, then, is both present at the outset and a latecomer to the planning game. The institutional turf is quite congested. Although the need for better regional coordination and planning actually predates the “invention” of modern city planning in America (consider that the Burnham Plan for Chicago was a regional plan), regional planning has never been able to mount a convincing challenge to the profoundly local emphasis of planning.

Still, it simply makes too much sense to put aside regional planning for long. One need not be a rocket scientist to recognize that many of the things we care about and depend on are not well managed or defined by local jurisdictions.

When I worked as the land use supervisor for Metro in Portland, I was struck by the fact that everyone—rich, poor, and in-between—lived regional lives. That is, households in our region were working, socializing, recreating, worshipping, schooling, and sleeping in territories of their own devising, none of which corresponded to any single local jurisdiction. Consequently, planning by jurisdiction, which is the norm in Oregon and elsewhere, becomes a more complicated proposition. It really makes one wonder for whom the planning is intended. If it is simply about maintaining local property values, then we've both made that task overly complicated and are poorly serving a whole host of larger values, goals, and objectives.

However, the other thing that struck me while working for Metro is that if people don't feel empowered to address the issues right in front of them when they walk out the front of their house or apartment building, then they will never relate to the kinds of things we are talking about at the regional scale. Local empowerment made regional planning and growth management possible. Local and regional, then, go hand in hand, and you cannot have one without the other.

Having worked at the regional level, served as president of my local planning commission, and provided planning assistance to neighborhood associations early in my career, I am familiar with the ongoing tensions between these scales—the scale at which we live in the region, and the scale at which we are empowered at the locality. I think this tension is always going to be present, and I am under no illusions that it will evaporate or that the region will “win” any time in the future.

Still, I, like others, keep coming back to the region because to ignore it is to give up on things that are important to our sense of place and quality of life. The region helps us understand the world and how it works, and makes one look deeply into the causal relationships that link us together and to the natural world. I guess the ecologist in me will never give up on that.

LAND LINES: *What other kinds of research topics have you been investigating?*

ETHAN SELTZER: I guess you could summarize my work under several headings. I have written about planning in Portland, particularly regional planning and the way that Metro developed a regional growth management plan. That work has been incorporated in publications and projects in the United States, Japan, and the Netherlands.

More recently, I have been engaged in the work of America 2050 on megaregions. I have provided information about Cascadia, the megaregion of the Pacific Northwest, and participated in several research seminars organized to further our understanding of the nature

of megaregions, planning for megaregions, and the utility of that concept for better understanding issues associated with sustainability and competitiveness in the years ahead.

I have also worked with Connie Ozawa, a colleague at Portland State, on the kinds of skills needed by entry-level planners, and therefore the nature of the relationship between graduate planning education and planning practice. I am also working with colleagues at the University of Oregon and Oregon State University to investigate the dynamics underlying and opportunities for bridging the “urban/rural” divide in Oregon. A book on that topic will be published by Oregon State Press in 2011. The fundamental themes that tie all of this together have to do with place and practice—the place being the Portland metropolitan region and the Pacific Northwest, and the practice being what actually gets done by planners.

LAND LINES: *Any last thoughts?*

ETHAN SELTZER: In an interesting way, the Lincoln Institute's association with the ideas of Henry George and their extension into thematic areas of land as property, taxation, and land planning is very contemporary. The challenges we face in the United States and globally due to climate change and instability, the pressure for sustainability, urbanization, and the future of our cities and metropolitan regions all come together around these themes.

Ultimately, the challenges that we talk about in sweeping terms must make sense and be addressed democratically and locally. Pulling that off in a manner that acknowledges the global context for local action is really about infusing what we do as planners and academicians with a new ethical commitment to acknowledging and acting at the true scales at which these issues operate. 