

FREEWAY CITY by Brad Masi

Comments by Robert N Brown on Showing at Bottlehouse Brewery 2/18/20

I want to thank of all you for taking the time to join us this evening. Even though I have already seen a slightly earlier version of the film, I will save my comments on the film itself until the panel discussion, after we all have had a chance to experience the film.

Right now, I'd like to start with a comment about Norm Krumholz, who appears in the film and for whom Brad has dedicated this film. Thank your for that, Brad.

As many of you know, Norm Krumholz was the City Planning Director in Cleveland in the late 1960's and the 1970's, first under Mayor Carl Stokes and then under Mayor Ralph Perk and then, briefly, under Mayor Dennis Kucinich -- before Norm began a career as a professor at Cleveland State University for over three decades.

Norm was a city planning radical, a city planning revolutionary! He advocated for a form of city planning that focused less on land use and development -- the traditional focus of city planning work -- in favor of a focus on adopting policies that focused on the needs of the community's most impoverished residents. He called it "equity planning."

The mantra of Norm's 1975 Cleveland Policy Plan was "promoting a wider range of choices for those individuals and groups who have few, if any, choices."

While some of us came out of planning school with a similarly noble outlook, many of us allowed that commitment to be compromised and suppressed as we shifted our focus to the daily demands of the job. Somehow Norm was able to "keep his eyes on the prize" throughout his long career.

Norm was unique among city planning directors not only in his support for impoverished residents but in his ability to work within the establishment -- specifically, the bureaucratic and political world of city government -- to accomplish many of his decidedly anti-establishment goals and policies. Other "rebels" would have quickly fled city government to become a critic or commentator, while Norm continued to fight the good fight from the inside (a

double agent?), even as the context of his work changed from the supportive environment of Mayor Stokes to the somewhat disinterested administration of Mayor Perk to the brief and chaotic era of Mayor Kucinich.

Finally, in what most impressed me about Norm, was his openness to presenting other points of view to his students. For thirty years, Norm invited me to be a guest speaker in his CSU class. For his last two years at CSU, Norm asked me to co-teach his City Planning “intro” class. Despite some of our ideological differences, as I was a bit more of a traditional city planner, Norm always showed respect for me and my perspectives.

Today in our increasingly polarized society and our “echo chamber” news feeds, I can’t think of a more valuable lesson than what Norm had to teach us through the example he set of maintaining the passion for his core beliefs while respecting the beliefs held by others.

On December 21, 2019, at the age of 92, Norm left us, just a couple of weeks after experiencing a stroke.

In many ways, Norm was the conscience of the city planning profession. I miss him dearly. And I am gratified that his commitment to equity planning has found a home in the work of Mayor Jackson and his commitment to serving the needs of, as he says, “the least among us,” and in the work of current Cleveland City Planning Director, Freddy Collier, and his focus on the facilitating healthy living opportunities for all city residents.