

New urbanism changes the face of society

ONE of the world's leading town planners has blamed fellow designers, developers, marketing professionals and a lack of public foresight for the demise of traditional neighbourhoods on the Gold Coast.

Demetri Baches, managing principal of US-based DPZ Pacific, said true community had been sacrificed routinely to special interests, with the Gold Coast, one of the most regulated places on Earth, being turned into an urban sprawl.

But Mr Baches, who led the design of Little Beach at Paradise Point, believes the tide has turned.

He said there were signs that developers and communities were no longer content to build and be neighbours to unsustainable, American-styled subdivisions.

But, Mr Baches said that in order to make a better living environment, many practices had to change.

"Typically in Australia the development path is to mimic whatever last sold well or copy the latest fad from somewhere else," he said.

"And on the Gold Coast particularly, with its ever-present population pressures, it's not hard to understand how it's been allowed to happen.

"Sprawl has a seductive simplicity in that it has been made easy to plan, construct and sell by all the players involved in building the places we live.

"The attitude is you don't want to get in the way of growth by having to think about it too much."

Mr Baches said that neo-traditional



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Demetri Baches . . . community sacrificed

planning, or new urbanism, was beginning to take hold in Australia beyond academic circles.

He said the general planning and development communities had started to take note and were beginning to explore its techniques and principles.

"The key principles of new urbanism revolve around interconnected neighbourhoods encompassing a diversity of housing types, public open spaces, and civic sites, in a mixed-use, pedestrian-scaled community," he said.

"The most loved neighbourhoods contain a centre, an edge, a diversity of housing stock, a mix of uses within easy walking distance of residents and a connected network of thoroughfares and open spaces that vary in character."

Mr Baches said the shift away from the nuclear family and its needs had a profound effect on Australian lifestyles, as it had in the United States.

"New urbanism offers a range of block sizes to suit different lifestyles in a move initially seen as radical and challenging to the quarter-acre dream," he said.