Autonomy, Zoning, and Gentrification

1. Introduction

In many developed countries around the world, there is a serious housing affordability crisis. In the United States, half of all renters are rent-burdened, meaning they spend over a third of their income on rent; one in four Americans is severely rent-burdened, meaning they spend over half their income on rent (Gray 2022: 52). The crisis is not limited to the U.S. One way to measure housing affordability is by looking at the ratio of the median home price to the median household income within a given market; this is called the "median multiple" (Cox 2023: 1). For instance, if the median home price is €100,000 and the median household income is €33,000 within a market, then the median multiple for the market is roughly 3.0. A market has affordable housing when its median multiple is at or below 3.0; housing becomes severely unaffordable when the median multiple is above 5.0 (Cox 2023: Table ES-1). As of 2023, Australia's median multiple is 8.2, Canada's is 5.3, Ireland's is 5.1, the United Kingdom's is 5.3, the U.S.'s is 5.0, New Zealand's is 10.8, and Hong Kong's is 18.8 (Cox 2023: Table ES-2). Housing is unaffordable in most developed countries around the world.

Many economists believe zoning is to blame (Glaeser and Gyourko 2002a; Glaeser and Gyourko 2002b; Glaeser and Gyourko 2003; Glaeser et al. 2005; Glaeser et al. 2006; Glaeser and Ward 2009; Gyourko 2009: 308; Harney 2009; Kendall and Tulip 2018; Metcalf 2018: 69; Einstein et al. 2020: 9; Gallent et al. 2021; Ellickson 2022: ch. 9; Gray 2022: ch. 3; International Monetary Fund 2023). Zoning is how governments regulate the *use* and *density* of private land. Zoning stops developers from building stores, restaurants, and factories in areas zoned for

residential purposes. It stops them from building duplexes, townhomes, and apartment complexes in residential areas zoned exclusively for single-family homes. The link between high housing prices and zoning is easy to see. Demand for housing outstrips supply, raising prices. In a well-functioning market, high prices incentivize producers to increase supply, which brings prices back down (Mankiw 2015: 78). But the housing market is not functioning well. Zoning makes it very difficult and sometimes impossible to increase the supply of housing. Increased demand coupled with inelastic supply is a recipe for disaster.

There are good reasons to be skeptical of zoning. And yet, it is ubiquitous, not only in the U.S. but in most developed countries around the world. Not only is it ubiquitous, but it is popular (Marble and Nall 2021; Trounstine 2023). What, if anything, can justify this ethically dubious yet omnipresent practice? The two common answers in the literature say that zoning is a way to regulate externalities and stabilize property values. I don't think either argument works, and briefly say why in the next section. In light of these failures, this paper focuses on a less common justification for zoning. This justification says we should embrace zoning because it creates neighborhood *stability*; it either stops or greatly reduces the pace of change in a community. Many scholars mention this argument in passing, but it is not expounded upon in detail. The first objective of this paper is to put this argument on as solid a footing as possible by offering a charitable reconstruction of it. The stability induced by zoning, it can plausibly be argued, facilitates autonomy.

After reconstructing the argument in the most convincing terms possible, I kick the tires. The argument faces a significant challenge: zoning, I argue, can only facilitate the autonomy of some by sacrificing the autonomy of others. This renders the autonomy justification for zoning significantly less compelling than it first appears. Examining the relationship between zoning

and autonomy sheds light on related areas of political philosophy. There is a growing literature on gentrification as well as one on justice and housing more generally (Halliday and Meyer 2024). Many articulate what's wrong with gentrification by arguing it inhibits autonomy. I don't deny this, but reflections on zoning and autonomy show that common remedies to the problem of gentrification must be reconsidered. But before getting to all of this, the next section offers a brief overview of zoning.

2. Overview of Zoning

Many conflate zoning with city planning, but zoning is only a narrow subset of city planning. Zoning ordinances are how governments regulate the *use* and *density* of private land (Hirt 2014: 32; Gray 2022: 37).

Let's start with land use. Municipalities are typically broken into disjoint geographic areas and the land in these areas is designated for specific purposes. The three most common categories are residential, commercial, and industrial. There can be other categories such as land set aside for universities, hospitals, historical sites, parks, and so on, but most land falls into these three buckets (Hirt 2014: 35; Gray 2022: 37). To offer a simple example, in an area zoned solely for residential purposes it would be impermissible (unless an exemption were granted) to build a steakhouse or grocery store (which should be in a commercial area) or glue factory (which should be in an industrial area).

These three categories are often further broken down into subcategories. Residential areas, for instance, can be zoned for detached single-family homes, duplexes, triplexes, fourplexes, and large apartment buildings. Commercial areas can also be zoned for small

neighborhood retail, regional shopping centers, and professional offices. Industrial areas are typically subcategorized into light and heavy industry (Hirt 2014: 35-36; Gray 2022: 37-38). Zones can be mixed, for example, by allowing both some forms of residential and commercial land use.

Beyond specifying the use of land, zoning ordinances regulate density. This includes minimal and maximal lot sizes, types of permitted structures (e.g., single-family homes, duplexes, etc.), how big structures can be both absolutely and relative to lot size, how tall structures can be, and more (Gray 2022: 39-42). These can vary widely. Anyone who has spent time on the east coast of the United States has likely noticed that buildings in Manhattan, NY are taller than those in Washington, DC. This is because zoning ordinances in the two cities differ. In Greenwich, CT (a very wealthy part of the U.S.) the *minimal* lot sizes for houses are a shocking four acres, quite a bit larger than minimal lot sizes in Brooklyn, NY or really anywhere else (Ellickson 2022: 7).

How are zoning ordinances created? In the United States, the federal government plays almost no role in private land use regulation. At the federal level, the Standard Zoning Enabling Act allows and encourages states to pass their own enabling acts granting zoning power to local governments (Hirt 2014: 34). Some state governments play a slightly larger role by setting constraints on local zoning, but they too mostly just enable local governments to regulate the use and density of private land as they see fit (Ellickson 2022: 133-134). As a result, "in the United States, local officials remain largely free to determine permissible land uses" (Ellickson 2022: 134). In practice, this means city councils are typically responsible for creating zoning policy (city councils are the elected legislative bodies of municipal governments), although there is significant institutional diversity among local governments, so arrangements can vary (e.g., the

mayor, as elected executive, might also play a role). Due to this intensely local approach to land use regulatory policy, there are roughly 15,000 unique zoning ordinances across the country (Ellickson 2022: 4).

Land use regulation works differently in much of the rest of the world, but private land is still heavily regulated (Hirt 2014: ch. 3). The main difference between the U.S. and other developed countries concerns the role of the national government. As Sonia Hirt (2014: 88) describes it: "One of the most distinctive features of the American land-use regulatory model …. is its high degree of decentralization. Land-use matters in the United States remain an intensely local matter … more so than in other countries." This is not to say other countries do not grant any local control, only that local control is limited and shaped by national control, something that is almost entirely absent in the U.S.

So much for an overview of zoning. Why have it? There are two common arguments. First, zoning is upheld as a way to regulate externalities (e.g., Gyourko 2009: 309; Stringham et al. 2010: 96; Hirt 2014: 9; Ellickson 2022: 5). Land use decisions can impose externalities, such as noxious fumes from factories, increased noise and congestion from dense housing, or obstructed views from tall buildings. Zoning can prevent these externalities by separating incompatible land uses, controlling density, and limiting building heights.

There are a few problems with this argument. Note first an ambiguity. When its defenders say zoning regulates externalities, what exactly do they mean? On one interpretation, they mean that zoning ordinances are justified because they *eliminate* externalities. This interpretation is problematic because zoning *creates* new externalities as it eliminates old ones. Externalities are just reductions in subjective welfare. Zoning can reduce people's welfare by restricting what they

can do with their land, raising housing prices, contributing to climate change by encouraging urban sprawl and thus reliance on automobiles, and more.

A more plausible interpretation says zoning is justified because it *minimizes* externalities. On this view, a zoning ordinance is justified if and only if the reductions in welfare it prevents are greater than the reductions in welfare it imposes. This interpretation creates difficult measurement problems. How do we measure the externalities a zoning ordinance prevents? If a neighborhood was not zoned for single-family homes, what kind of housing would pop up? How many new residents would move in? How congested would traffic become? How noisy would the playground get? Measuring the externalities imposed by zoning ordinances is also difficult. Exactly how many people are dissuaded from moving to San Francisco, CA due to its zoning ordinance? How much is contributed to climate change by requiring single-family homes compared to whatever would pop up in absence of any private land use regulatory control? How much longer are people's commutes due to urban sprawl? It's difficult to see how these questions can be answered with any reasonable degree of accuracy. But, if your view is that a zoning ordinance is justified so long as it minimizes externalities, then they must be answered with at least some degree of accuracy.

Finally, even if we could accurately measure all the externalities prevented and imposed by a zoning ordinance, I doubt the argument could justify most of the zoning we see today. This is speculative on my part because, again, it's hard to actually perform the requisite cost-benefit analysis. My guess is that separating factories from residential areas probably prevents more externalities than it imposes, given the massive harm caused by smog and toxic chemicals. Zoning ordinances do much else besides this, however, like require single-family homes with large minimal lots sizes or limit building heights to protect the views of in-place residents.

Again, this is speculative on my part, but I seriously doubt this kind of zoning prevents more externalities than it imposes, especially when we consider zoning's impact on housing prices and the housing affordability crisis. If these speculations are correct, then the externalities argument can justify very minimal zoning ordinances that separate industrial and residential land uses, but not zoning as it actually exists.

The second common justification points to zoning's stabilizing effects on home prices (e.g., Karkkainen 1994: 47; Fischel 2001; Claeys 2004: 749; Serkin 2020: 776). Zoning prevents home prices from falling too much. It does so by restricting the supply of homes. Home prices are elevated by creating artificial scarcity. The problem with this justification is that it treats housing, without good reason, as a special asset class. Most think it would be inappropriate for the state to intervene to prop up the value of other assets like my Tesla stock, raising questions about why homes should be treated differently.

One answer is that many more people own homes than Tesla stock. But if the state's goal in propping up home values is simply to help as many people as it can financially, then there are other policies it can pursue that are even more inclusive. Not everyone owns a home. To help even more people financially, the state can open a 401k or some other kind of investment account for every citizen and make yearly contributions to it. Another response says that for many, a home is financed through debt, whereas Tesla stock is typically purchased through disposable income. However, many other types of assets are typically financed through debt, but rarely do we think these other assets deserve special regulatory protection from the state.

Someone might take on debt to start a business, but few think the state should use its regulatory power to ensure the business succeeds.[1]

Another response says homes should receive special protection because they are many people's largest asset. Many don't own homes, however, so their largest asset must be something else. I don't own a home and my most valuable asset is actually my shares in Tesla. If the state is in the business of protecting people's most valuable assets, then it should pursue regulatory action to prop up the price of Tesla. A final response says homes should receive special protection because they are risky and undiversified investments. A $400,000 home is a lot of money in one specific investment. But in many other cases, people make risky, undiversified investments. There is no shortage of stories of people who put their entire life savings into speculative cryptocurrencies and lose it all (Kale 2021). These are unfortunate decisions, but few think the proper response is for the state to prop up the value of cryptocurrencies to ensure the investment succeeds. Why, then, should the state prop up the value of other risky, undiversified investments, such as homes?

3. The Autonomy Argument

I examined the two most common justifications for zoning in the prior section and offered reasons to be skeptical of them. A less common argument defends zoning on the grounds

[1] This is not to say the state shouldn't offer debt relief if the business fails. Debt relief for a failed business, however, is very different from the state using its regulatory power to prevent the business from failing in the first place.

that it safeguards the existing character of neighborhoods by slowing or altogether stopping the pace of change. Zoning is a bulwark of neighborhood stability (Steele 1986: 711; Karkkainen 1994: 73; Serkin 2020: 771; Ellickson 2022: 192-193; Serkin 2022: 654-659; Quigley 2023: 713). Christopher Serkin offers a clear statement of the view. He writes:

> One of the principal uses of zoning today is to create and maintain stable community character. When people buy property, they are typically buying a constellation of bundled goods and services that best satisfy their preferences. They are buying a house, yes, but also membership in a community with a particular character. Significant increases in density, or changes in the nature of nearby uses, can implicate that character. The result is not necessarily to make a place worse, or objectively less desirable. But it can change its appeal to in-place residents who sought a particular set of characteristics. That is a cost (Serkin 2020: 771).

That zoning through use and density restrictions induces neighborhood stability is obvious, but why is this normatively important? Serkin offers a hint in the passage above—instability makes a neighborhood less attractive to those "who sought a particular set of characteristics"—but Travis Quigley provides a clearer answer in a recent paper. Neighborhood stability matters because it facilitates *planning*. He writes:

> … taking up a 30-year mortgage would make relatively little sense if no expectations could be formed about the medium- and long-term future. The density of population in a neighborhood, the quality of its school district, its approach to and achievement of public safety, the availability of parking (on one hand), or its walkability and public transit (on the other) are all salient to a decision about where to move and build a life (Quigley 2023: 713).

The rough idea, then, is that zoning induces stability, which is needed for agents to make long-term plans about where to live. In my view, this is the most compelling case that can be made in defense of zoning. The argument is never spelled out in detail, however. Those who embrace it mention it only in passing. In this section I use the tools of analytic philosophy to reconstruct the argument in the most convincing terms possible. To do so I rely on the large literature in moral and political philosophy on *autonomy*. Situating the argument in a well-established literature will help us better understand and evaluate it.

Autonomy is a complex concept with many interpretations (Swaine 2020). The interpretation I adopt views autonomy as self-governance or self-direction. John Stuart Mill (1978) pioneered this account of autonomy, though it has been most comprehensively elaborated in the writings of Joseph Raz (1986) and Steven Wall (1998), and it is their work I follow. "The ruling idea behind the ideal of personal autonomy," Raz (1986: 369) writes, "is that people should make their own lives." Autonomous agents form, pursue, and successfully execute life plans. While sophisticated philosophical accounts of planning exist (e.g., Bratman 2007), such nuance is unnecessary for our discussion. We can understand life plans as comprising a set of goals and a series of actions that, if pursued, will likely result in the achievement of these goals (Kogelmann 2021: 100). For example, an agent might set the following goals: to become a lawyer, a mother, and a marathon runner. The agent then devises a set of actions that, if pursued, will likely result in the achievements of these goals. To become a lawyer, she will attend law school; to become a mother, she will locate a suitable partner and attain financial stability; to run a marathon, she will begin training and adopt proper nutrition. She then executes these actions.

Specific conditions must be in place for individuals to devise, pursue, and effectively realize their life plans. According to Raz and Wall, it is the state's responsibility to ensure these

conditions are in place (Wall 1998: 132; Raz 1986: 372). For example, agents must possess specific abilities and characteristics. They need to have the necessary cognitive faculties to "form intentions of a sufficiently complex kind, and plan their execution" (Raz 1986: 327). To effectively manage their own lives, self-directed agents also require a specific motivational and psychological makeup: they must possess "vigor," and be unburdened by various ailments such as "world-weariness, emotional distress, depression, laziness and perhaps a growing sense of the meaninglessness of the world and one's place in it" (Wall 1998: 139). Self-governing agents must also maintain their independence (Raz 1986: 378). They cannot be excessively dependent on or subordinate to another's will. I refrain from further examination of these conditions as they are not related to zoning.

Two background conditions are particularly relevant to zoning. First, agents must have sufficient choice options to be autonomous (Raz 1986: 375). If you live in a society where only one occupation is open to you—say, serving in the military—then you cannot be autonomous because there is no possibility for you to chart your own path through life. You cannot decide your fate; it has been decided for you. Wall writes: "Having access to two options that are significantly different may be better than having access to ten options that are very much alike … a person's option set must include a range of significantly different options" (Wall 1998: 141). Call this the *Variety Condition*.[2]

Second, once an option has been selected and pursued for enough time, it must remain an option for those who pursue it (Raz 1986: 411). Wall (1998: 143) writes: "In order for people to have access to a sufficiently wide range of options they must not only have access to options that

[2] Here I follow the terminology from Kogelmann (2024).

would allow them to develop their capacities and talents, but also to particular options that have become indispensable to this development." Call this the *Stability Condition*.[3] The Stability Condition is important because it ensures agents can finish the plans they start. It is related to Henry Sidgwick's (1981: 268-271) idea of conservative justice. As A. John Simmons (2010: 20) articulates it: "we are generally sensitive to the moral dangers of 'rug-pulling' … that is, cases where people base life plans or important activities on the reasonable expectation that the rules will remain unchanged … and then have the rug pulled from beneath them by sudden institutional change."

Zoning helps ensure the Variety and Stability Conditions are satisfied for certain kinds of plans. I call them *neighborhood plans*. They are plans agents form about the kinds of places they want to live. Some people want to live in big cities, others in rural areas, still others favor the suburbs. Some wish to exclusively rely on public transportation, others prefer to commute by car. Some prefer the peace and quiet that comes with low-density living, others prefer the frenetic energy of a high-density urban environment. Some people want to wake up to pristine views of an ocean or mountains or lake or unplowed field, others want to go to bed with views of skyscrapers or neon lights. These are all examples of neighborhood plans.

A dearth of private land use regulation may lead to violations of the Variety and Stability Conditions for neighborhood plans specifically. Consider first how a lack of zoning might cause problems for the Stability Condition. A couple in their late 60's decides to retire. They spent their

[3] Stability is important for autonomy but can serve other ends as well. In a recent piece, Daniel Guillery (2023: 356) argues that stability serves the end of *orientation*, which is your ability, both literally and metaphorically, "to find your way around your environment."

whole lives saving and planning to move to a sleepy mountain town where they can enjoy a quiet, peaceful retirement filled with hiking and fishing excursions. They find a town with the desired traits and buy a home. The town has no zoning ordinance. Six months after the couple moves in, a developer begins buying land in and around the town. Her goal is to turn the sleepy mountain town into the next Las Vegas, NV so she begins building large casinos, music venues, an airport, and more. As a result of the developer's land use decisions, the couple's plan to retire in a sleepy mountain town is thwarted.

Cases like this highlight the instability agents might face in an environment with no zoning policy at all. When there are no restrictions on private land use, the kind of community one lives in can change rapidly; a lone individual's land use decisions can alter an entire community's character. This violates the Stability Condition, which says choice options agents have pursued for a sufficiently long period of time must remain options for them. Zoning helps secure the Stability Condition so agents can complete the neighborhood plans they are in the middle of pursuing. It does this by freezing some of a community's characteristics (Ellickson 2022: Part II). If one desires to retire to a sleepy mountain town, then a well-constructed zoning ordinance will ensure it remains a sleepy mountain town for the foreseeable future by requiring large minimal lot sizes and restricting building height. This allows agents to be autonomous with respect to their neighborhood plans.

Just as it helps secure the Stability Condition, zoning also helps ensure the Variety Condition is satisfied. Applied to neighborhood plans, this condition says agents must have sufficient variety when choosing a community to live in. Raz (1986: 375) himself recognizes the importance of this: "A choice between hundreds of identical and identically situated houses is no choice, compared with a choice between a town flat and a suburban house." By having different

subcategories for residential land uses, zoning ordinances ensure agents have options they find reasonably attractive. There is an area zoned for low-density living for those who find that lifestyle attractive; if you like high-density living, then there is an area zoned for that too.

Absent private land use regulation, there is a danger that all neighborhoods within a geographic region (say, a major metropolitan area) may end up with similar traits. This is because a neighborhood's traits are a collective property that depends on how each individual property owner uses her land. It takes only one property owner to sell her land to a developer to transform a low-density neighborhood into a high-density one (e.g., the developer can knock down the seller's single-family home and build apartments). Developers might offer substantial sums of money to do this. Without zoning, maintaining neighborhood character is thus a collective action problem that is difficult to resolve—how do you stop that one neighbor from selling to the developer?[4] If an entire metropolitan area ends up with high density, then the

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[4] There are mechanisms other than zoning that can solve this problem. Some metropolitan areas—such as Houston, TX—rely heavily on *private covenants.* Private covenants are legally binding agreements attached to property that restrict how the property can be used. Unlike zoning, private covenants are created by private parties. Moreover, they "run with the land," meaning they transfer with property ownership and bind future owners.

So, to solve the collective action problem, everyone in a neighborhood can sign a private covenant specifying that land in the neighborhood can only be used for single-family homes. This covenant binds future parties who buy property in the neighborhood, so a single homeowner cannot spoil the neighborhood's character by selling to a developer who then builds apartments (the covenant stops him). Private covenants are an interesting solution to the problem of stable

Variety Condition will be violated. Lacking sufficient variety, some agents will be unable to pursue their neighborhood plans.

Let me summarize the argument. Autonomy is an attractive normative ideal. It says we should prioritize agents forming, pursuing, and executing life plans. Neighborhood plans are a part of life plans. To form, pursue, and execute neighborhood plans, the Stability and Variety Conditions must be satisfied. Regulating the use and density of private land serves this end. This is the *autonomy argument* in defense of zoning.

4. Autonomy for Me, but Not for Thee

The last section articulated what I think is the strongest case for zoning, that it facilitates autonomy. I now criticize the argument. In this section I argue that, if we add one plausible empirical assumption, then the autonomy argument faces a significant objection. More specifically, if we add one plausible empirical assumption, then zoning secures the autonomy of some at the expense of the autonomy of others. The assumption is that the demand for housing—that is, the number of people who need housing—increases over time.

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neighborhood character, but they raise significant ethical concerns—in particular, whether there is something morally dubious about binding future owners of a property, who have no say in the initial contract. For this reason, I leave the private covenant solution to the side, though more philosophical work on the topic is needed. For a defense of land use regulation via private covenants, see Siegan 2020.

Increased demand for housing happens for two reasons. First, population might be increasing. If more and more people are coming into a country (either by birth or by immigration), then more and more people need housing. Second, demand may increase in specific areas even if a country's population is stable or decreasing. Economic considerations drive this. The demand for housing in places like San Francisco, CA and Austin, TX are at an all-time high because that is where all the tech jobs are; those who want to work in this industry flock to these cities. This second kind of increasing demand is accompanied by decreasing demand in other places. As people flock to San Francisco and Austin, they are fleeing places such as Youngstown, OH and Flint, MI, due to a lack of economic opportunity (deindustrialization from globalization and automation are the main culprit in these cases). In what follows I consider a hypothetical city in which the demand for housing is increasing. I remain agnostic as to what causes it.

Suppose we have a city zoned in a manner that allows its inhabitants to form, pursue, and execute their neighborhood plans. There are several different zones that give people options of where to live: low-density suburban living, high-density urban living, exurban rural living, and so on. Hence, the Variety Condition is satisfied. Like most zoning ordinances, the zoning map changes little, if at all. This gives people stability. You know that if you buy a home in a low-density suburban area, then it's probably going to stay that way for quite some time. So, the Stability Condition is satisfied. These are prime conditions for the formation, pursuit, and achievement of neighborhood plans.

By assumption, the demand for housing is increasing in our hypothetical city. Basic economics tells us that, if the demand for housing is increasing, then the price of housing will increase, reflected in both home and rental prices. If the market is well-functioning, then these

high prices will incentivize developers to build new houses to capture extranormal profits (Mankiw 2015: 78). The increased supply of housing will then bring prices back down. But there is a problem with the housing market in our hypothetical city: zoning makes it difficult for developers to build more homes and apartments. In technical terms, the supply of housing is *inelastic.*

The high-density urban area is already congested, so the natural spot to build more homes is in the suburbs and exurbs. Density restrictions make this difficult, however. One cannot simply buy empty lots (if there even are any) and build apartment buildings or duplexes or townhomes. Suburban and exurban areas are typically zoned for detached single-family homes with large minimal lot sizes. Denser housing is prohibited. Dejected, the developer tries to make the urban part of the city even denser with another high-rise apartment building. Zoning also makes this difficult. Height restrictions are often used to ensure existing residents don't see their pristine views obscured. Even in a city already filled with skyscrapers, building another skyscraper is often quite difficult due to zoning restrictions.

So, the demand for housing is increasing in our city but the supply of housing is inelastic due to its zoning ordinance. Supply cannot meet demand. Basic economics tells us that housing prices will increase as a result. As I mentioned in the introduction, many economists blame the housing affordability crisis in many countries across the world on zoning. What happened in our hypothetical city is illustrative of what is happening in the real world. Increasing demand and inelastic supply is a recipe for disaster.

Our concern is with autonomy, not prices, but increased housing prices will negatively impact the autonomy of two groups. First are those at the lower end of the income distribution. Increasing rent prices may force them to leave their neighborhood. Even if they own, increasing

home prices may force them to leave their neighborhood because they are unable to pay increased property taxes. This phenomenon—increased housing prices forcing the poor from the neighborhood they call home—is sometimes called *gentrification*, although gentrification is a complex phenomenon that refers to more than just that (Huber and Wolkenstein 2018: 380-381). Zoning and gentrification are closely linked: rising prices throughout a city induced by zoning will push those who were barely getting by over the edge (Mangin 2014: 93; Lewyn 2017: 459; Goodman et al. 2020; VanGilder 2024: 1259). This is bad for autonomy, because it violates the Stability Condition. The neighborhood plans of lower-income residents will be upset as they are being pursued.

Also impacted are future generations. As home and rental prices grow more expensive, options are eliminated for future generations. Though members of the next generation may want to live in a big city loft or own a detached single-family home in an attractive suburb, zoning can render these options unaffordable. For instance, in major cities like Washington, DC and Paris, France strict zoning laws that limit high-rise residential buildings can make downtown lofts unaffordable for young professionals. Similarly, in desirable suburbs, regulations mandating large lot sizes and single-family homes can price out young families who might have afforded a starter home in such neighborhoods a generation ago. This violates the Variety Condition. When they are finally ready to buy a home, younger generations lack sufficient choice options because many types of housing are prohibitively expensive.

To sum up the argument, if the demand for housing is increasing, then securing the Stability and Variety Conditions for some through zoning will come at the cost of the Stability and Variety Conditions for others (in particular, the poor and future generations). This is a problem from the perspective of autonomy. We should care about the neighborhood plans of all,

not only some. Note, this tension between securing the autonomy of some at the expense of the autonomy of others is highlighted as a potential hazard by theorists of autonomy. Wall (1998: 143) writes: "Maintaining an important option for some may prevent others from having access to a sufficiently wide range. In such cases the autonomy of some will be pitted against the autonomy of others." This is exactly what happened in our hypothetical city. Zoning secured autonomy for some but in doing so pulled up the drawbridge on others, inhibiting their autonomy. For this reason, call this the *drawbridge objection*.

There are limits to the drawbridge objection and it is important to be clear about them. The drawbridge objection says zoning secures the autonomy of some at the expense of the autonomy of others. Does all private land use regulation do this? No. Only zoning that makes the supply of housing inelastic is subject to the objection. The basic argument is that when housing prices increase, the Stability Condition is undermined for lower-income residents who now must leave their homes, and the Variety Condition is undermined for younger generations who see many options priced out of reach. Supply inelasticity is what drives increased prices. So, if a zoning ordinance does *not* lead to an inelastic housing supply, then it will *not* lead to higher prices, and thus will *not* have this negative impact on the autonomy of the poor and future generations. The drawbridge objection dissipates.

The autonomy argument can thus support some forms of zoning without running afoul of the drawbridge objection. If an ordinance makes the supply of housing inelastic, then the autonomy argument cannot support it, for it sacrifices the autonomy of some to secure the autonomy of others. If an ordinance does not make the supply of housing inelastic, then the autonomy argument can support it, for no one's autonomy is sacrificed. As a rough heuristic, the autonomy argument will have trouble supporting density restrictions, such as neighborhoods that

are zoned exclusively for single-family homes. These regulations make the supply of housing inelastic by preventing developers from building denser forms of housing (e.g., townhomes, duplexes, and apartment complexes) to satisfy growing demand. The autonomy argument will have an easier time supporting use restrictions, like the kind that separate residential from industrial land uses. So long as enough land is allocated for residential uses, and so long as these residential areas are sufficiently dense, these regulations should not greatly impact the elasticity of the housing supply.

With all this granted, we should not overstate how much the above qualification limits the reach of the drawbridge objection. Many neighborhood plans require density restrictions for successful execution. Consider retirees who want their sleepy mountain town to stay quiet, families who want their suburb to remain peaceful while raising kids, urban professionals who prefer their row of brownstones to multi-story apartment complexes, condo owners who want to protect their pristine views from new skyscrapers, and nature enthusiasts who don't want their remote areas transformed into suburbs. These neighborhood plans do not strike me as unreasonable. And yet, protecting them requires the kinds of zoning regulations that are subject to the drawbridge objection.

5. Replying to the Drawbridge Objection

In the prior section I presented the drawbridge objection. The objection causes significant problems for the autonomy argument. In this section I consider and ultimately dismiss four replies to the drawbridge objection.

5.1 *Background Mitigating Policies.*

The drawbridge objection argues that zoning causes inelastic housing supply which raises housing prices; these high prices threaten the autonomy of the poor and future generations. In response, one might argue that zoning need not have this pathological effect if other background policies are implemented alongside it. More specifically, if we implement rent control alongside zoning, then prices will not be allowed to increase. Since housing prices do not rise, the autonomy of the poor and future generations is not threatened.

Rent control will indeed keep prices down, but it will not stop the autonomy of some from being sacrificed for the autonomy of others. It will just change *whose* autonomy is sacrificed. In the prior section I argued that rising prices sacrifice the autonomy of two groups: the Stability Condition is undermined for lower-income residents who must leave their homes, and the Variety Condition is undermined for younger generations who see many options priced out of reach. Rent control does indeed stop low-income residents from being displaced by keeping their housing prices low (Munch and Svarer 2002; Diamond et al. 2019: 3366; Kholodilin 2024: 5). However, rent control "benefits current residents while doing nothing for new migrants to cities" (Metcalf 2018: 66). That is, rent control does nothing to help newcomers. It can actually make things worse for them by decreasing the supply of housing (Mankiw 2015: 116; Diamond et al. 2019: 3366; Kholodilin 2024: 5). If you limit their profits from renting, landlords will find more profitable uses for their land.

Newcomers thus face a housing shortage. If prices cannot be used to allocate scarce housing, then another mechanism must be adopted. The typical answer is waitlists (Barzel 1974; Mankiw 2015: 116; Kholodilin 2024: 5). For example, the average wait time for an apartment in rent-controlled Stockholm, Sweden is 9.2 years; in desirable neighborhoods, it is as long as 20

years (Savage 2016; Anderson 2022). This inhibits the autonomy of newcomers. Telling a young person they must wait ten to twenty years before they can move to a certain neighborhood effectively reduces their menu of choice options. It puts some neighborhood plans out of reach. The Variety Condition is violated.

So, will rent control when coupled with zoning mitigate the negative pathologies highlighted by the drawbridge objection? No, it will just shift these pathologies around. There will be *less* violations of the Stability Condition for existing residents at the lower end of the income distribution, but *more* violations of the Variety Condition for future generations. Autonomy will be violated, nonetheless.

Some might argue this is an improvement because it is morally worse to disrupt existing plans than it is to prevent individuals from ever forming plans in the first place. I am unsure about this. When I read the defenders of autonomy such as Raz and Wall, I find no evidence they would agree with this sentiment. Autonomy is about forming, pursuing, and executing life plans. For them, it doesn't matter *where* failures of autonomy occur (i.e., at the *forming* stage or the *executing* stage), only *that* failures of autonomy occur. However, even if we grant the intuition that disrupted plans are morally worse than an inability to form plans in the first place, defenders of autonomy must still admit that preventing younger generations from forming plans is bad. For this reason, rent control does not successfully respond to the drawbridge objection, for it limits the planning abilities of future generations, which is bad (even if it is not *as bad* as disrupting current residents' plans).

More generally, the problem with this argument is that it conflates a *symptom* with a *cause*. The argument assumes high housing prices caused by inelastic supply are the problem, but high prices are better understood as a symptom of the real problem, which is insufficient

housing.[5] For this reason, we should be skeptical that any background policy can mitigate the pathologies of the drawbridge objection if it does not increase the supply of housing or decrease the demand for it (more on this latter suggestion in section 5.3 below). For example, housing vouchers are another common response to high prices. But "in low-elasticity housing markets,

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[5] One might respond that the problem is not insufficient housing, but insufficient *affordable* housing. I don't think this modifier is necessary, because new housing supply in any submarket—such as so-called "luxury housing"—affects prices in other submarkets. Suppose a city adds several thousand new units of luxury housing. By increasing supply, this should lower the price of luxury housing. Some individuals who currently do not own or rent luxury homes can now upgrade and will do so. This opens up supply for the tier of housing below luxury housing—call it "high-end housing"—which should lower its price. Now, some individuals who currently do not own or rent high-end homes can upgrade and will do so. This opens up supply for the tier of housing below high-end housing, which should lower its price. The process continues.

There is empirical evidence that building luxury and high-end homes lowers prices across all housing submarkets in a metropolitan area (Been et al. 2019: 28-29; Been et al. 2024: 8-11). As one group of researchers summarizes the literature: "new research tracing the chains of moves that new supply sparks provides substantial evidence that adding housing frees up units in a variety of neighborhoods across the income spectrum, and therefore provides additional competition that can lower rents (or slow rent growth) in neighborhoods across a city or metropolitan area, not just in the area surrounding the new construction and not just in higher-rent submarkets" (Been et al. 2024: 10).

vouchers can end up increasing the cost of housing" by increasing demand (Metcalf 2018: 65). Absent more supply, background mitigating policies will be ineffective. Policies that increase the supply of housing (e.g., public housing) can have a positive impact (Metcalf 2018: 61-64). Of course, public housing will upset existing neighborhood plans by overcrowding sleepy mountain towns and quiet suburban neighborhoods.

5.2 *Slow Change, Not No Change*.

Another reply points out that defenders of the autonomy argument don't want to completely freeze neighborhoods; they only want them to change *slowly* (Karkkainen 1994: 80; Serkin 2020: 783-786). Slow change, it might be argued, allows us to have the best of both worlds. If change is allowed to happen, then new housing can be built to meet growing demand and keep prices low. This ensures the Stability Condition is satisfied for low-income residents and the Variety Condition for future generations. And if the change is slow enough, then the Stability Condition will remain intact for current residents.

This reply makes two key claims: slow change is sufficient to keep housing prices low and slow change will not disrupt existing neighborhood plans. Both claims are contestable. Focusing on the first claim, whether slow change is sufficient to keep prices low depends on two details: how fast demand is increasing in a given market and just how slow the change really is. Adding a few hundred homes a year to a major metropolitan area is slow change indeed. If that metropolitan area has a hot housing market like San Francisco, CA, then a few hundred homes a year is probably not enough to keep prices sufficiently low to ensure poor individuals can stay in their homes and future generations have adequate choice options. In some cases, slow change will not be fast enough.

Turn to the second claim. Why think slow change will not disrupt existing neighborhood plans? Economists often favor slow change because it allows individuals to *adjust* their plans. For instance, Adam Smith was an advocate for free trade at a time when protectionism was the dominant policy paradigm. But though he was an advocate for it, Smith did not think free trade should be implemented hastily. He recognized that if existing tariffs were immediately abolished, it would "deprive all at once many thousands of our people of their ordinary employment and means of subsistence" (Smith 1981: 469). Instead, Smith (1981: 469) argued that "the freedom of trade should be restored only by slow gradations, with a good deal of reserve and circumspection." In other words, change policy slowly so impacted individuals have time to adjust their plans.

Smith's advice is prudent, but adjusting a plan is not the same as successfully executing it. Autonomy, though, is about the formation, pursuit, and successful execution of life plans. Consider an example. Althea's goal is to be a graphic artist. Fifteen years into her career, new AI tools such as Midjourney come out that substitute her labor. Althea is out of work. Her plan is disrupted and autonomy inhibited. Now suppose the state, pitying Althea and others who face similar circumstances, passes a law that says AI tools like Midjourney cannot be used for commercial purposes for the next three years, after which they can permissibly be used. This gives Althea time to find something new to do with her life. This is desirable compared to the world in which Althea is unemployed tomorrow, but her plan is still disrupted. Her goal in life was to be a graphic artist but that is no longer an option. Adjusted plans are failed plans.[6]

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[6] For analysis of how new AI technology can impact autonomy, see Kogelmann and Carroll (2024: §2.2).

Likewise, if someone retires to a sleepy mountain town, it might help them to know it will become the next Las Vegas, NV in five years rather than the next six months. But either way, their neighborhood plan is disrupted.

Slow change allows individuals to adjust their plans, but that does not help with autonomy. Perhaps the claim is that slow change allows individuals to *complete*, rather than merely *adjust*, their plans. This would help with autonomy, but at the cost of making the current reply incoherent. Neighborhood plans are long-term. Retiring to a sleepy mountain town can last twenty years. Raising one's children in a quiet suburb can take twenty years. Change that is slow enough to allow individuals to complete these plans is extremely slow. So slow that now the reply's first key claim—that slow change allows enough new housing to be built to keep prices low—is false. As I have already argued, whether this claim is true depends on just how fast demand is increasing in a given market and just how slow the change really is. If a housing market sees rising demand, delaying new construction for twenty years so individuals can complete their plans will result in higher prices. This disrupts the neighborhood plans of low-income individuals pushed out of their homes, and also limits the options of future generations. Change slow enough to allow individuals to complete their neighborhood plans is not fast enough to counter the drawbridge objection.

5.3 *Suppressing Demand*.

A third objection attacks the empirical assumption the drawbridge objection relies on. The assumption is that the demand for housing is increasing. Increased demand coupled with inelastic supply is a recipe for disaster, sacrificing the autonomy of some for the autonomy of

others. Zoning is what makes housing supply inelastic. If we are unwilling to part with it, then perhaps we focus our attention on the demand side of the equation. How can we limit the demand for housing?

The demand for housing within a country is clearly linked to its population: the more people, the more demand. There are two ways a country's population can increase: fertility and immigration. To blunt the demand for housing, these two sources must be stifled in some way. In wealthy countries, fertility usually takes care of itself. Once a country reaches a certain standard of wealth, its fertility rate typically hovers at or below replacement levels, although there are some exceptions to this general trend (Sciubba 2022). Perhaps, then, immigration should be severely limited to suppress housing demand. This proposal strikes me as deeply unjust, but I don't want to press the point because it requires engagement with a very large literature on the ethics of immigration that I don't have space to adequately discuss (e.g., Huemer 2010; Freiman and Hidalgo 2016; Joshi 2018).

Suppose our city is wealthy enough such that fertility hovers at or below replacement levels and immigration is significantly curtailed. Does this mean the demand for housing will no longer increase? No. There is another source of increased demand that can happen even if a country's overall population is stagnant or decreasing. Often driven by economic considerations, people shift where they want to live. In a dynamic economy, new industries take root while others dissipate. This is what creative destruction is all about (Aghion et al. 2021: 1). This dynamism will shift the demand for housing in different parts of the country. Firms working in the same industry tend to cluster around one another; economists call these *industrial clusters* (Taylor 2016: ch. 6). If you want to start a tech company in the U.S., you do it in San Francisco, CA or Austin, TX. All the great American car companies—Ford, General Motors, and

Chrysler—were started near Detroit, MI. At its heyday, manufacturing took place mostly in midwestern states like Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. If you want to work in finance, you need to get to Wallstreet.

As industries rise and fall, those pursuing economic opportunity will pick up and move. This can increase the demand for housing in certain areas. If zoning freezes these cities, the autonomy of some will be pitted against the autonomy of others, even if population is not increasing due to low fertility and immigration controls. This, I think, is a reasonable diagnosis of what's happening in San Francisco, CA, a city known for its exorbitant housing prices. The issue is not people having too many babies nor is it too many immigrants, but rather too many college graduates looking for jobs in the tech industry.

Suppressing this source of increased demand requires draconian measures. The state would have to regulate where *within* a country citizens can live. If there is too much demand for housing in San Francisco, CA, then the state must prevent more citizens from moving there. It's hard to imagine anyone supporting a policy like this. It violates the freedom of movement, a fundamental right that garners broad support across ideological lines (e.g., Rawls 2005: 228; Somin 2020). Policies like this are necessary, however, to suppress increased demand for housing driven not by fertility or immigration, but rather the pursuit of economic opportunity. There are thus two problems with responding to the drawbridge objection by suppressing demand. First, it requires curtailing immigration, the ethics of which is at the very least questionable. Second, it requires suppressing freedom of movement within a country among its citizens, which is undoubtedly unjust.

5.4 *Community Autonomy, Not Individual*.

A final concern applies not to the drawbridge objection but to how I articulated the autonomy argument. The autonomy argument says zoning is important because it allows *individuals* to be autonomous, in that it allows them to form, pursue, and execute plans *qua* individuals. Perhaps this is a mischaracterization. Perhaps zoning is valuable because it allows *communities* to be autonomous, in that it allows them to govern themselves *qua* communities. Zoning isn't about ensuring an elderly couple can complete their plan to retire to a sleepy mountain town; it's about ensuring a community has the tools to determine the collective properties of its environment. A community ought to decide for itself how dense its neighborhoods are, how congested its traffic is, and what its skyline looks like. Zoning is a tool that facilitates this.

This defense of zoning is grounded not in liberal autonomy, but democratic autonomy. Autonomy is not only an important value in liberal theory (e.g., in the work of Mill, Raz, and Wall) but in democratic theory as well (e.g., Richardson 2002; Wilson 2021; Lovett and Zuehl 2022). Unfortunately, this version of the autonomy argument runs into the same problems as the initial one, *mutatis mutandis*. Zoning secures the democratic autonomy of some communities, but only at the expense of the democratic autonomy of other communities.

As a first premise, note it is an affront to community *A*'s democratic autonomy if community *B* imposes significant externalities on *A* without *A*'s approval. This is because an entity other than the members of *A* is determining *A*'s collective properties; democratic autonomy, though, means the members of *A* together determine *A*'s collective properties. For example, if *B* places all its factories on the border it shares with *A*, and the wind and rivers carry the factories' pollutants into *A*, this intuitively seems like an affront to *A*'s democratic autonomy.

As another example, if community *B* builds a massive dam upstream that significantly alters the water flow to *A*'s agricultural lands, preventing *A*'s citizens from maintaining their traditional farming practices and forcing them to restructure their economy, this too seems like an affront to *A*'s democratic autonomy.

Problematically, zoning in one community can impose significant externalities on other communities. Consider an example. There is a large metropolitan area consisting of two communities, Wealthy and Poor. Many people are trying to move to the metropolitan area because it has an industrial cluster in a new, hot area of tech. Unhappy that newcomers are coming in, Wealthy imposes rigid zoning restrictions that allow only single-family homes and large minimal lot sizes. This act of democratic autonomy keeps Wealthy's density low. But it has an unfortunate side effect: all new construction will now happen in Poor, increasing density and putting a strain on its public services. Wealthy has imposed an externality on Poor. By exercising its democratic autonomy through zoning, one community infringes on the democratic autonomy of another.

Poor can respond, of course. To ensure the community looks the way its members want, Poor might try to ameliorate the externality imposed by Wealthy by putting its own zoning restrictions in place. This does not stop Wealthy from imposing an externality on Poor, but simply changes how the externality manifests. People still want to move to the metropolitan area to work in the new industrial cluster. Many of these people are young college graduates without significant resources. Housing is cheaper in Poor than it is in Wealthy, so this is where the young folks move. With increasing demand and inelastic supply, housing prices in Poor increase. This places significant pressure on the members of Poor. Many can no longer afford rent or pay their property taxes. This too is an externality imposed on Poor, but in different form. Because

Wealthy, through an act of democratic autonomy, makes it extraordinarily difficult to build new housing, Poor must pay the price, either with increased density or higher prices. This is an affront to Poor's democratic autonomy.

6. Rethinking Gentrification

The autonomy argument succumbs to the drawbridge objection, which makes it a far less compelling justification in defense of zoning. I now take lessons learned from the analysis and apply them to an important and related topic: gentrification. In contrast to zoning, there has been quite a bit of recent work in philosophy on gentrification (Huber and Wolkenstein 2018; Putnam 2021; Draper 2022; Jenkins 2022; Draper 2023; Hoover 2023; Krishnamurthy and Moore 2024; Sundstrom 2024). I can only comment on a small part of it. I am interested in the argument that says gentrification is wrong because it threatens agents' autonomy. The prior analysis of zoning and autonomy offers insights that challenge and can help refine this thesis.

Gentrification is a "transformative process driven by the influx of middle-class people into formerly lower-class areas" (Huber and Wolkenstein 2018: 381). This influx can impact a neighborhood in many ways, but let's focus on two. First, it can result in displacement (Huber and Wolkenstein 2018: 381; Putnam 2021: 167). Increased demand for housing raises prices. Lower-income residents lack the capacity to pay higher prices, so they must leave their neighborhood. Second, gentrification can change the character of a neighborhood. Residents in gentrified neighborhoods "are faced with a changing 'lifeworld,' having to adapt to strangers in their midst and perhaps hitherto unknown social practices" (Huber and Wolkenstein 2018: 318).

This can trigger "a sense of alienation in an environment they were once familiar with" (Huber and Wolkenstein 2018: 318).

What's so bad about gentrification? Some point to the threat it poses to planning agency and hence autonomy (Huber and Wolkenstein 2018: 382-386; Putnam 2021: 170; Krishnamurthy and Moore 2024: 10-12). This account of what's wrong with gentrification is inspired by Anna Stilz's (2013) broader work on *occupancy rights*. Stilz is not concerned with gentrification, but cases in which groups are forcibly removed from their native homeland, such as the forceable removal of Navajo Indians from their homeland in Arizona in 1864. This is wrong, according to Stilz, because it disrupts *located life plans*. Located life plans are plans that can only be pursued in specific geographic spaces (Stilz 2013: 336). They are distinct from what I have called neighborhood plans. Examples include careers, membership in religious, social, and cultural organizations, the ability to participate in recreational activities, and more (Stilz 2013: 338-339; Huber and Wolkenstein 2018: 382).

Just as forceable removal can threaten located life plans, so can gentrification. Consider an example. Suppose an agent, let us call her Bertha, takes it as a goal to be an actress. This is a located life plan. Bertha can't pursue this plan in Akron, OH or Lubbock, TX, because there is no demand for actresses in these labor markets. She must live near Los Angeles, CA. Los Angeles gentrifies, forcing Bertha to leave the city because she can no longer afford rent. As a result of her displacement, she can no longer pursue her plan of being an actress. In this way gentrification threatens autonomy.

Several policies have been proposed to ensure agents like Bertha can maintain their current residence and continue pursuing their located life plans. This brings me to the main lesson those working on autonomy and gentrification can learn from this paper's analysis:

policies proposed to ensure some agents can pursue their located life plans may prevent others from pursuing their located life plans. If the pursuit of located life plans is what morally matters, this is a problem. To put it another way, the drawbridge objection applies to the gentrification literature, *mutatis mutandis*.

Consider an example. Some suggest fighting gentrification through rent control (Huber and Wolkenstein 2018: 287; Putnam 2021: 184). If Bertha's rent is not allowed to increase, then she can continue living in Los Angeles and continue pursuing her located life plan of being an actress. Bertha's autonomy is secured but the autonomy of others is threatened. As I mentioned in §5.1, there is evidence that rent control protects in-place residents, but there is also evidence that it hurts newcomers by decreasing the supply of housing. If scarce housing is not rationed by price, it must be rationed in some other way, typically waitlists. Waitlists for housing in rent-controlled Stockholm, Sweden are over a decade. Rent control may allow Bertha to continue pursuing her located life plan, but future generations who wish to pursue acting may never get the chance. They must wait a decade to get an apartment in Los Angeles, at which time it's too late to pursue their located life plan. Fighting gentrification through rent control protects the located life plans of some, but at the expense of the located life plans of others.

Other proposals for addressing gentrification include housing subsidies (Putnam 2021: 183), more democratic control at the local level (Huber and Wolkenstein 2018: 391; Krishnamurthy and Moore 2024: 19), and more public housing (Huber and Wolkenstein 2018: 387; Putnam 2021: 184). I lack the space to carefully analyze these policies; doing so would also obscure my point. My point is that proposals aiming to secure the Stability and Variety Conditions for some can easily and inadvertently violate these conditions for others. If you think

autonomy is what ultimately matters and that gentrification is bad because it undermines autonomy, then you must take this seriously when developing policy proposals.

There is one proposal for addressing the harms of gentrification that I never see mentioned in the philosophical literature: encouraging new home construction by abolishing, or at the very least significantly liberalizing, zoning. As many social scientists and legal scholars note, there is a tight connection between zoning and gentrification (Mangin 2014: 93; Lewyn 2017: 459; Goodman et al. 2020; VanGilder 2024: 1259). Zoning makes the supply of housing inelastic, which raises its price. Rising prices are what force low-income residents from their neighborhoods, upsetting their located life plans. If you want to keep prices low so individuals can stay in their current neighborhoods, then allow as much new construction as possible. No density restrictions, no minimal lot restrictions, no restrictions on home types, no segregation of residential and commercial spaces, and so on. A housing glut means cheap housing. Cheap housing means people can stay where they are. If they stay where they are they can continue pursuing located life plans.

7. Concluding Thoughts

One goal of this paper was to carefully articulate an argument in defense of zoning that is often mentioned in passing but never examined in detail. I called it the *autonomy argument*. A second goal was to criticize the autonomy argument. My objection said that if zoning is used as a tool to facilitate autonomy, then it will do so for some only by sacrificing the autonomy of others. I called this the *drawbridge objection*. I considered responses to the drawbridge objection. Then, I examined what the drawbridge objection means for the related literature on

autonomy and gentrification. Let me end this paper by considering one final reply to the drawbridge objection. I do so here in the paper's conclusion because it allows me to sketch what, I think, the way forward should be.

Another reply to the drawbridge objection admits that its logic is fundamentally sound but then asks: what's the alternative? Autonomy is an important value. Ideally, we want all people to be autonomous. The drawbridge objection points out this is not possible if zoning is used as a tool to secure it. Protecting neighborhood plans through zoning means sacrificing the plans of low-income residents and preventing future generations from ever forming such plans in the first place. This is no doubt unfortunate, but at least *some* people get to be autonomous. Without the stability and variety zoning provides, even fewer individuals will be autonomous due to the instability and homogeneity that accompany a dearth of private land use regulation. So, the options are: embrace zoning and some individuals will be autonomous, or abolish it and even fewer will achieve autonomy.

This response lacks imagination. According to John Rawls's (1971: 20) method of reflective equilibrium, we work back and forth between our premises and conclusion, revising both until all facets of a moral theory accord with our intuitions. Applied to this case, we have attractive premises (the conception of autonomy as planning and the thesis that zoning is a tool to secure it) that reach an undesirable conclusion (that the autonomy of some must be sacrificed for the autonomy of others). In response, perhaps the thing to do is take a closer look at our premises, particularly our conception of autonomy as planning. There are a few ways to revise it. The remarks below should not be interpreted as concrete proposals for how to revise our conception of autonomy, but rather as rough sketches about possible ways forward.

First, we might revise our understanding of autonomy. This paper followed Mill, Raz, and Wall by understanding autonomy as the formation, pursuit, and execution of plans. There are other ways to understand autonomy, however (Swaine 2020). In a recent paper, Brian Kogelmann (2024: §5) proposes an alternative conception of autonomy after demonstrating that autonomy as planning is inconsistent with a dynamic economy characterized by creative destruction. Kogelmann (2024: 10) proposes a conception of autonomy as weathering storms, where to be autonomous agents "must maintain decent lives for themselves by successfully responding to trials and tribulations with their skills, talents, and effort." The arguments in defense of the conception of autonomy as planning also support this novel articulation of the concept, Kogelmann argues. When confronted with the drawbridge objection we might similarly revise how we understand autonomy, such that individuals can still be self-governed even when their neighborhoods are in constant flux.

Second, we might keep the conception of autonomy as planning, but narrow the kinds of plans we care about. Not all plans are sufficient for autonomy. Raz (1986: 379) says immoral plans do not lead to an autonomous life. An individual who plans and then executes a murder is not autonomous, because he has the wrong kind of plan (i.e., an immoral one). On one interpretation of Mill, we should only care about plans that force agents to develop their skills and talents. The autonomous life is valuable, says Mill (1978: 56), because the planner "must use observation to see, reasoning and judgment to foresee, activity to gather materials for decision, discrimination to decide, and when he has decided, firmness and self-control to hold to his deliberate decision." An individual whose plan is to eat at McDonald's every day is not autonomous, because he has the wrong kind of plan (i.e., one that does not develop his skills and talents). When confronted with the drawbridge objection we might similarly revise our

understanding of which plans are valuable, such that neighborhood plans are no longer the kinds of plans that achieve autonomy, rendering them unfit for protection.

These, again, are rough thoughts about possible routes forward in face of the drawbridge objection. The point is that we need not acquiesce to a world in which only some are autonomous. There are paths forward that don't require us to sacrifice the autonomy of some for the autonomy of others.

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