



## CONTEXT

The context in which your home is located plays a major role in how fast or slow it is. This is primarily because location defines how much commuting you have to do. For most suburban households, automobile driving is the single biggest source of energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions. Living close to where you work, shop, and go to school significantly reduces this environmental footprint. It also improves livability by reducing the amount of time spent in your car. However, this does not necessarily mean living in the inner city. Many people work, go to school, and shop outside of the downtown core. As a homeowner, the most important decision is to choose a location that is close to these other parts of your life. Alternatively, you can reduce your car usage by choosing a location with good mass transit service.

But context is a lot more than just transportation. It is also important to live in a walkable community that has accessible neighborhood shopping and good, safe sidewalks and parks. Walking takes you out of your car and the physical activity is good for you.

The age of the community is also an important contextual consideration. A house in a new neighborhood generates an additional environmental load from all of the new roads, sewers, services, and other infrastructure that is required to support the house. When choosing a home, consider an existing, older neighborhood to eliminate this environmental impact. Renovating or remodeling an older home further decreases your environmental footprint by extending the useful life of the structure. Finally, remember that your house also exists in a context of utility service providers. Like location, these are also not created equal. Support clean energy source options, even if they cost a little more.

### Context

#### Slow Home: Rules of Thumb



##### LIVABILITY

- Daily automobile travel time limited to a half hour maximum per day.
- Home is located in a walkable neighborhood.
- Shops, parks, and other amenities accessible by walking or cycling.

##### ENVIRONMENTAL FOOTPRINT

- Mass transit options are within close proximity.
- An existing or renovated house in an established community.
- House operates on energy from clean utilities.

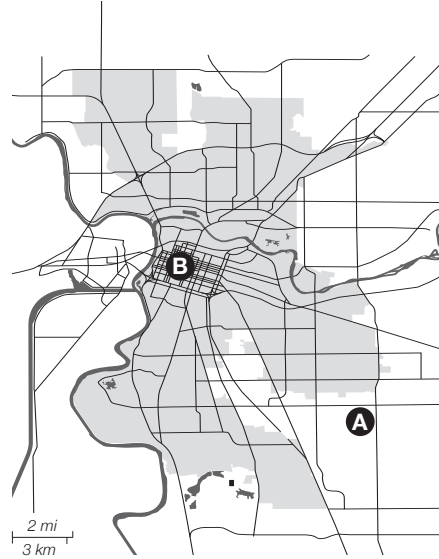
## Context:

## FAST HOUSE COMMON PITFALLS

## 1 House is too far away from workplace

This single family house **A** is located over 25 km away from where the homeowner works. **B** The result is an excessive amount of commuting and a large environmental footprint. It is difficult for this house to be Slow no matter how good the design of the rest of the house is.

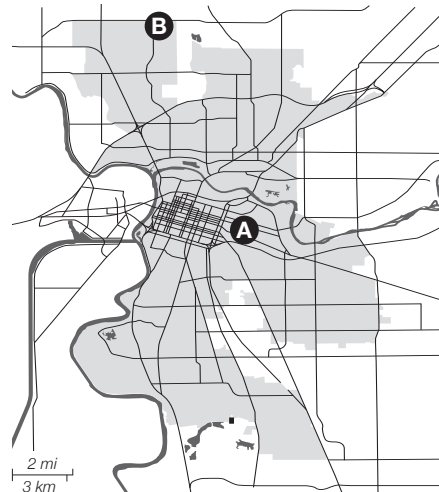
*(2555 sq ft single family house, California)*



## 2 House is on wrong side of suburban edge

This multifamily unit **A** is located in an established community close to downtown. However, because the homeowner works out on the suburban fringe **B** this house still has a large environmental footprint due to the amount of commuting.

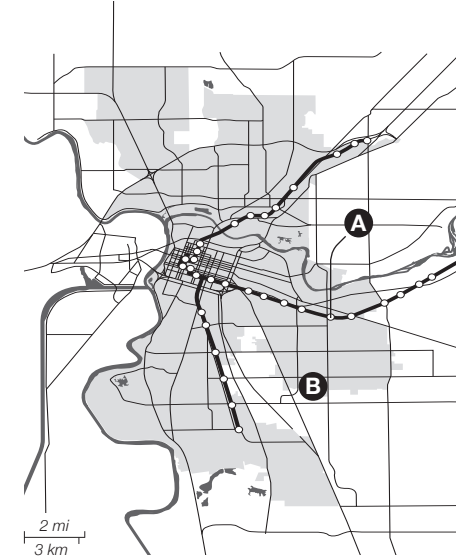
*(2555 sq ft single family house, California)*



## 3 No accessible mass transit

In the future, automobile use will become more expensive and mass transit options such as buses and light rail will be more popular. As this house **A** is not located in proximity to a mass transit stop, **B** its long term value could be jeopardized.

*(2140 sq ft single family house, California)*



## 4 Neighborhood has no walkable amenities

In this new community, it is almost impossible to walk to the closest shopping and service center. **A** In the case of this house, **B** there are no sidewalks for at least half of the journey, and two very busy roads that must be crossed. The result is a unpleasant walking experience that promotes the use of a car.

*(2140 sq ft single family house, Alberta)*



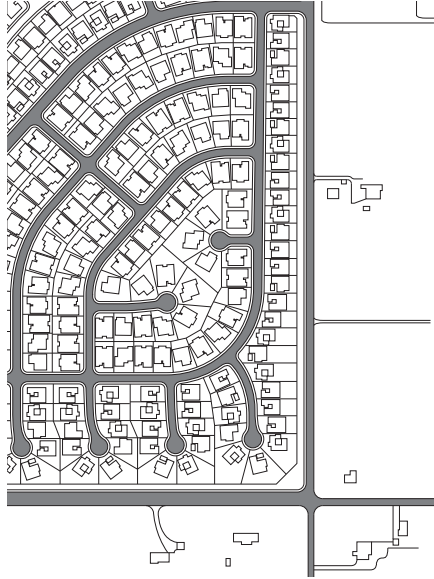
## Context:

## FAST HOUSE COMMON PITFALLS

## 5 New house in new community

A new single family house in a new suburban community has a very large environmental footprint. Although the initial purchase price may not reflect this cost, the long term value of the house can be jeopardized by increased transportation costs and future carbon taxes.

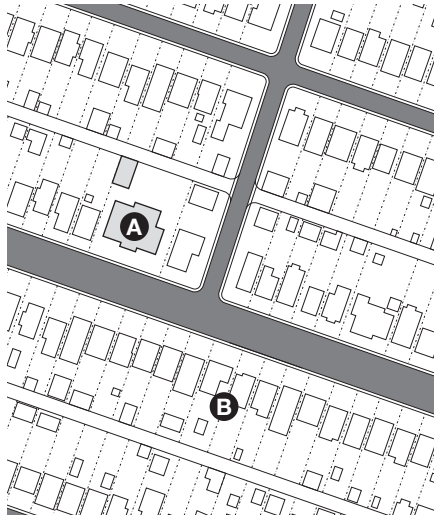
*(2424 sq ft single family house, Colorado)*



## 6 Supersized new house in old community

Although this house **A** is located in an established community, it is out of scale for its context. **B** These supersized McMansions actually reduce the density of the neighborhood because this one large house replaces two older homes.

*(5245 sq ft single family house, British Columbia)*



## NOT ALL SOURCES OF ENERGY ARE CREATED EQUAL

Much of the energy used to power, heat, and cool our North American homes comes from “dirty energy” sources, so called because of the excessive environmental damage they cause during their extraction, processing, and consumption. Coal is one of the most common of these dirty energy sources. The acid rain and carbon dioxide gas emissions generated when coal is burned for power are significant. Coal mining also pollutes groundwater and destroys natural habitats. Finally, there is the cost to human health from coal. Recent studies have shown a 70% increased risk for developing kidney disease, a 64% increased risk for lung disease, and a 30% increased risk for high blood pressure in communities located close to coal mines.<sup>4</sup>

Every house that is powered by a dirty energy source such as coal is partly responsible for these problems. Noted environmentalist David Suzuki argues in his Green Guide book that it is possible to choose green power in a growing number of jurisdictions throughout North America. “Participating customers voluntarily pay a premium on their electric bills to support renewable energy such as solar and wind power. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency offers a handy Green Power Locator that identifies where you can buy green energy. In Canada, you can contact your local utility or check the list compiled the Canadian Wind Energy Association (CWEA).”

The potential is far reaching. Denmark for example, gets more than 20% of their electricity from wind. If Canada was to achieve that same level of wind power infrastructure there would be enough wind energy to power 17 million homes. Fortunately, there is something you can do even if wind power isn’t available in your region yet. According to Suzuki one option is to, “buy renewable energy certificates, also called green tags or green certificates. Renewable energy certificates enable you to support the renewable projects of other utility companies.”<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> The Public Health Impacts of Coal, No Dirty Energy Website, <http://www.nodirtyenergy.org/index>, Nov. 2009.

<sup>5</sup> D. Boyd & D. Suzuki, *David Suzuki's Green Guide*, Vancouver:Greystone, 2008, p. 35.