Global Climate Change and the Road to Extinction
Global Climate Change and the Road to Extinction

The Legal and Planning Response

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CAROLINA ACADEMIC PRESS
Durham, North Carolina
Even if every SUV were downsized to a Schwinn, every truck and bus repowered to burn biodiesel, and every refrigerator retrofitted to run with solar panels, we are playing Russian roulette with the very thing that makes our life on earth possible—a steady, temperate climate.

This book is dedicated to Al Gore, the world’s spokesman and leader in addressing global climate change.
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Preface

In the spring of 2007, while living and teaching again in the Netherlands, I went to see “An Inconvenient Truth,” Nobel Peace Prize recipient Al Gore’s Academy Award winning film on global warming and climate change. While watching the film, I had an epiphany: global warming is a threat to life as we know it, eclipsing all other global, national, and local concerns and that urban planning and urban redesign can significantly mitigate the effects of climate change. I had been aware of global warming for some years, particularly as to the danger to low-lying lands from rising seas. But as I began to read everything I could find on warming and greenhouse gases, starting with Al Gore’s book *An Inconvenient Truth*, I realized that Earth is on a destructive path and with it, mankind is heading for early extinction. In this book, I do critique Al Gore’s support for the Kyoto Protocol and his modest prescriptive and normative response to climate change. In fairness, we are moving quickly toward a crisis and our knowledge of the effects of warming is expanding rapidly. I am sure that Al Gore also recognizes that more recent information calls for even more aggressive policies to mitigate the effects of our ever-increasing emissions of greenhouse gases. I applaud his leadership and am proud to acknowledge that I have joined his army of fighters for sustainability and survival.

I am not a scientist, but even the most moderate experts are predicting a scenario that has already adversely affected species, changed disease patterns, and increased flooding and, in the coming decade, will cause water and food shortages, hundreds of millions of deaths, and climate refugees to be followed by climate conditions and economic chaos that will threaten the quality of life and the very life of our children and grandchildren. I do not believe that political leaders in the United States and abroad want to face the threat of climate change because they fear that such honesty would shake economies and political futures. Instead, the response is a mild commitment to increase miles per gallon automobile efficiency and efforts to stimulate alternatives to fossil fuel-based economies. Many people assume that scenarios of devastation are science fiction and thus respond by ignoring scientific forecasts. The premise
of this volume is that the risk forecasted is so grave that it is only prudent to look to the future and make the changes in urban design and consumption necessary to avert extinction and move to a more sustainable existence. Few dispute the existence of peak oil and the coming crisis of insufficient supply and escalating costs of oil, natural gas, coal, and nuclear energy and that we should plan to convert to renewable energy. No one should dispute that our current policies are subsidizing pollution and carbon emissions. No one should dispute that we could generate an economy based on conservation, creating a new generation of jobs and opportunities. The point of this book is not only to avert extinction should dire predictions be correct, but to take the crisis of global climate change and treat it as an opportunity to launch the sustainable lifestyle and economy as a gift to our progeny. It would be ironic and tragic if this generation, a generation which has been more protective of its children than any generation before it, would also ignore the greatest threat to them.
Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Bryant Garth, the dean of Southwestern Law School for his support and encouragement. I would also like to thank the wonderful family of Carolina Academic Press: Keith Sipe, Linda Lacy, Bob Conrow, Tim Colton and Jennifer Gilchrist for their continued support of my work and for publishing my fifth book with them. The CAP family is consistently enthusiastic about my interdisciplinary work and is the most nurturing and innovative law and textbook publisher. I also appreciate the careful reading and comments on the manuscript by Austen Parrish and Nick Tackes.