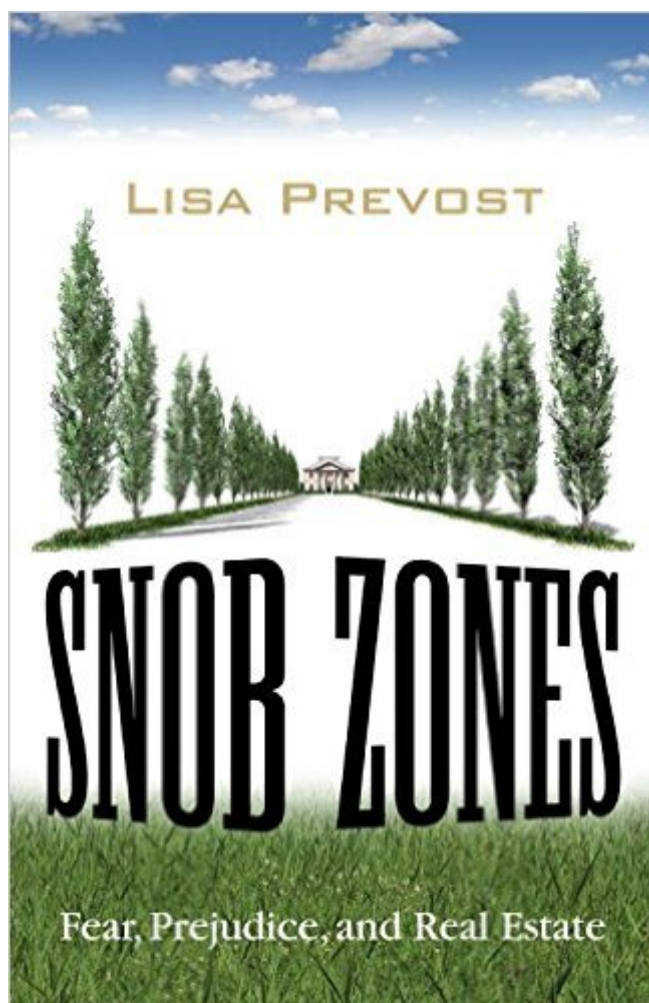


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Snob Zones: Fear, Prejudice, And Real Estate



Synopsis

An exploration of the corrosive effects of overpriced housing, exclusionary zoning, and the flight of the younger population in the NortheastWinner of the 2014 Bruss Silver Award and First-Time Author Award from the National Association of Real Estate EditorsTowns with strict zoning are the best towns, aren't they? They're all about preserving local "character," protecting the natural environment, and maintaining attractive neighborhoods. Right? In this bold challenge to conventional wisdom, Lisa Prevost strips away the quaint façades of these desirable towns to reveal the uglier impulses behind their proud allegiance to local control. These eye-opening stories illustrate the outrageous lengths to which town leaders and affluent residents will go to prohibit housing that might attract the "wrong" sort of people. Prevost takes readers to a rural second-home community that is so restrictive that its celebrity residents may soon outnumber its children, to a struggling fishing village as it rises up against farmworker housing open to Latino immigrants, and to a northern lake community that brazenly deems itself out of bounds to apartment dwellers. From the blueberry barrens of Down East to the Gold Coast of Connecticut, these stories show how communities have seemingly cast aside the all-American credo of "opportunity for all" in favor of "el was here first." Prevost links this "every town for itself" mentality to a host of regional afflictions, including a shrinking population of young adults, ugly sprawl, unbearable highway congestion, and widening disparities in income and educational achievement. Snob Zones warns that this pattern of exclusion is unsustainable and raises thought-provoking questions about what it means to be a community in post-recession America.

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Customer Reviews

A well-written but one-sided view of so-called exclusionary zoning. There's some good background material here, especially on the history of each of the featured locales. But the author relies overmuch on sources that provide conclusions that support her theory that this is really about snobbery rather than actually challenging both sides to explain their reasoning. She's on her shakiest ground defending for-profit developers who are simply using affordable housing laws to achieve a fast buck in built-out communities that can't hope to hit state targets any time soon. And her suggestion that modern day zoning is still mostly driven by racism and religious intolerance is absurd, and unsupported by actual reporting. Another 50 pages devoted to thinking through the topic at a deeper level would have yielded a better and more credible book.

* amendment - I'm surprised this author comes from NH and didn't mention the state's "current use" legislation, a subsidy by the state, tax exempting large land holdings til they're sold. An unfortunate choice of name for the book, it confused effect with intent. While there are clear and glaring examples of snob zoning, I find, living in New England, most zoning is based on sentiment and woods preservation. A great deal of high barrier zoning does in fact blockade the majority. Not only poor but also elderly, young adults and young families. Much of the fear based zoning has caused unintended consequences and this book would've been more useful and valuable had it reached into the unintended consequences and provide smart growth solutions that integrate into rural character. In the mean time, New England towns, in an attempt to preserve rural character, has zoned McMansion clusters with retail raceways running through towns. And there is nothing rural about either.

A troubling and thoughtful look at the efforts of five affluent, and not atypical, New England communities to "raise the drawbridge." Each story is a different aspect of the general trend to keep lovely towns free of the poor, minorities, day trippers and other non-white, non-rich undesirables. Irrational and often illegal, big money's need to preserve a community's homogeneity is ultimately harmful, both to the towns themselves and to the larger region. Even if a bit strident, Prevost doesn't shy away from the complexities of the issue. I don't usually pick up books about politics and social questions, but *Snob Zones*, short and readable, made me glad I tried something new.

On the whole, Ms Prevost's book gives enlightening portraits of the ways zoning, preservation, etc. have been used to "keep out the undesireables." It reminded me of LANDSCAPES OF PRIVILEGE, which was a similar look at Bedford, NY. I disagreed with her chapter on Milbridge, ME. My late parents and grandparents have lived there, as does a cousin and his family. The trouble she describes is less folks trying to be "aryans from Darien" and more a case of people who see that they have had dig hard for their lives and see what comes across as someone getting something for nothing. You don't have to be a racist or snob to be upset at that perception, as incorrect as it might be.

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