

Bocharov, Yuri

Russian professor visiting to see how Fairhope does it

He's looking at
private use of land, to
guide his country

By MAURICE GANDY
Correspondent

Dr. Yuri Bocharov, research fellow and professor of the Russian Institute for Town Planning, has come to the Mobile area to "especially study the land use in Fairhope, the single-tax system."

It is Bocharov's hope that private ownership patterns in Fairhope can be adapted for use in long-range planning in Russia. He said state-planned towns in Russia are all similar. It is hard to distinguish one from another.

"This doesn't promote people to express themselves," Bocharov said. "Our system is too rigid."

He also is studying development of American-style malls. Currently, there are few large malls in Russia, with one or two in the larger cities such as St. Petersburg.

"We tried for 70 years to build a special system of cities around the Soviet Union," Bocharov said. "I was here in the United States two years ago. I left the Soviet Union, but I returned to a new country — Russia."

It is now impossible for the government under Russia's new social system to finance housing, he said.

"The government has no money.

Now only the main design scheme that I and others are developing will be supported by the state," he said.

As deputy director in the Central Institute for Town Planning under the old Soviet system, Bocharov helped plan and build several new towns and two cities from the ground up.

The living quarters, in huge apartment blocks, were built around the industry or agriculture of the area. But they were not constructed with people in mind, Bocharov said.

"Nobody asked the residents what they wanted," he explained.

Studying in the United States at Dartmouth College in 1974, Bocharov had produced a model for future Soviet cities.

"I predicted our cities would collapse around the year 2010 if we continued to do as we had done in our building practices and lack of maintenance of facilities, such as sewers and water lines," he said.

"Nobody listened. Now, I see it happening, even sooner. By 1995, if something isn't done, the collapse will come."

The solution, Bocharov said, is to organize a new settlement system; to reconstruct and build towns with a new approach.

"We hope people begin to care about themselves and begin to build their own houses, instead of relying on the state as was done previously," he said.

There are many obstacles to this plan with the biggest being the question of private land ownership.

"Workers are used to working and living collectively. They like to live in one big group and be poor, but equal," he explained. Only about 5 percent to 8 percent of the agricultural population is ready to work for themselves.

Homesteading was tried in the Soviet Union, but the state often gave an individual the worst land, he said.

If the recipient managed to succeed and began earning more than his collective neighbors, "they destroyed the livestock and crops of the neighbor who became too prosperous," Bocharov said. "Don't work," they said, "live with us and be like us." This is the Russian mentality historically."

Other impediments to land use development, he said, include almost 2 million immigrants and returning servicemen in Russia from the newly created states, 50 languages within its borders, a housing inflation rate of 100 to 200 percent, and the lack of a system to assess the value of land.

"We haven't had a free market system, and have no basis for comparison. Russia still has the largest land mass of any country, about 15 percent of global land, so some people believe there is enough for all and the state should give it away," he said.



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Dr. Yuri Bocharov is shown with Mrs. Anna Watts, owner of the Watts-Smith home on Dauphin Street, where he is staying while studying town planning here. The watercolor painting is an original of the Watts-Smith house done by Bocharov.

scenery by creating watercolor paintings of the home and live oaks in the downtown area.

"I am very impressed by your architecture, especially the 'Heart of Dixie' buildings from the last century," he said. "You can see the proudness — the scale of the men, the big men, who built them."

Bocharov has shown his appreciation of local architecture and