

Money talks, but can it also add up a sum for the worth of Earth in America?

CHAPTER 34

FIRMS OFFER A RENT TOTAL – FOR A PRICE

Pay the piper, call the tune; but will it be melodious?

ANSWERS FOR SALE

Astronomer Carl Sagan's book, later a film, *Contact*, got NASA to finally fund SETI. (signals from outer space are also ignored, just like sightings of land value, so the chapters of this book are in good, celestial company). If it becomes as successful as Sagan's, this book (maybe later a documentary), could get agencies and foundations to fund the determining of anew indicator – the worth of Earth in America.

Some well-connected companies – self-described experts at tabulating, do sell measurements. They claim the ability to calculate whatever feature of an economy or demography that a buyer could want. So, that includes figuring out the value of land and resources? And provides a total more precise than our current ballpark figure?

Firms like Case-Shiller, CoStar, and Statista suit the needs of the mainstream. Case-Shiller are cited all through the business press, CoStar sells to the Federal Reserve, and Statista draws from over 20,000 sources. These three offer to sell the total value of US residential real estate, and property values in general – more than we want.

With their resources, they may also be able to determine just the well-cloaked land portion of real estate. And they may be able to tack on the value of land used for purposes other than residential or commercial or industrial: i.e., agricultural, pastural, sylvan, mineral, and spectral (the air-waves), and other resources, such as water. Asking them to figure in the value of anything else natural may be asking too much.

Whatever they'll do for you, they'll do it for a price – affordable or not.

MONEY MAKES THE GROUND GET COUNTED

Good data costs big bucks. That's one good way to keep the curious Ghoi polloi ignorant – raise the price of knowledge. For a researcher or

a writer conducting a labor of love, that cost is an out-of-pocket expense from not-so-deep pockets.

Who besides a gadfly researcher will pony up? Presently, the specialists who suspect the relevance of rent won't invest their talents (Ch 25). Those who could afford to hire investigators don't sense the relevance.

Even the generous who're interested in economics, like most everyone, have a hard time seeing the relevance of rent. One spending stream can't be that significant, can it? What's the big deal about rewarding producers of goods and services, versus rewarding owners of never-produced land and resources? Not much. Unless you want to forecast, assess your surplus, and project the gains from healing land.

RAISING FUNDS

Given the millions of human minds and the diversity of human interests, some individuals and foundations do get it; those are the geonomic (Earth-focused economics) ones. The activist group Common Ground USA, comes to mind, as do two New York-based foundations: Henry George School and the Robert Schalkenbach Foundation. Even this writer has on occasion been funded by them to research rents.

In the NGO world, the above are small fry. But there are well-heeled sources to target:

- foundations with deep pockets set up to benefit the public by giving grants to enable the necessary research that no one else is doing; organizations with large memberships who respond to special appeals, and
- well-heeled individuals known to donate to worthy causes.

In the era of modern social media, millions on the cutting edge are sympathetic to crowdfunding appeals in Kickstarter, Indiegogo, GoFundMe, *et al.* At some of these sites, it takes money to make money – they charge fees. At all of them, it takes time to learn the ropes.

Fortunately, some humans are curious enough about the true worth of Earth to give money to a stranger to find it out. A critical mass wants to know how much they and all their fellow citizens spend to own or use a location, or natural resource or government-granted privilege. Plus, they could claim credit for launching a new and better indicator; and for making it safe for funders and researchers to climb aboard the rent train.

Money in hand, one could hire the pro statistician. Yet, needing to turn to a for-profit corporation raises the question: why should taxpay-

ers be funding the responsible public agency? Why spend taxes on those huge staffs in public agencies just so they can pay huge staffs in private agencies? If a public agency won't perform its fiscal duty, why not abolish it and save the public money? An agency fulfilling its mandate – is that something to lobby for?