

# *Nickelsville Memories*

## **A Self-Managed Eco-Village Blows Town**

Photos by readers of [The Blog Quixotic](#)

Disillusionment by David Preston



*Part 1*

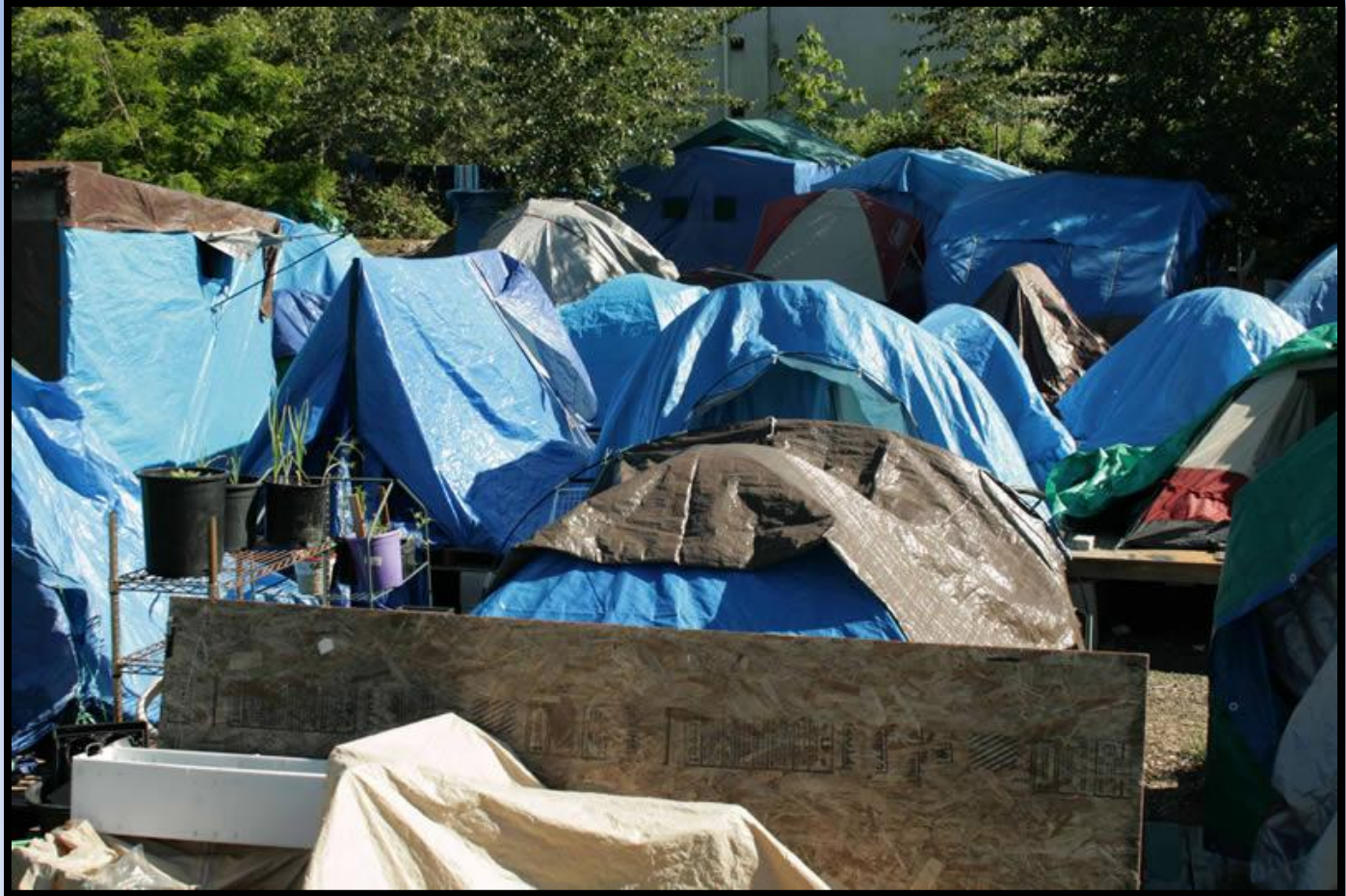
*Back Story*

# *What is Nickelsville?*

Nickelsville is a series of illegal, roving squatters camps that have existed in and around Seattle, Washington since 2009. Nickelsville is organized and run by the Seattle Housing and Resource Effort ([SHARE](#)).

SHARE is a tax-free 501(c)3 non-profit group. In addition to Nickelsville, SHARE also operates a handful of indoor shelters and “legal” outdoor encampments within King County. Since its creation in 1990, SHARE has received millions of dollars in government grants and private donations.

SHARE is run by a guy named Scott Morrow.



SHARE claims that Nickelsville is a result of poverty and Seattle's failure to address the needs of the homeless.

It also holds that Nickelsville is a democratic, self-managed community. Notwithstanding this, there have been credible accounts (as reported in the media) Scott Morrow, runs Nickelsville the way he runs everything else at SHARE: with an iron fist.





Under Mayor Greg Nickels, the Seattle city government had chased the camp out of one squat after another. In honor of Nickels' diligence, SHARE named the camp for him.

During the Nickels era, the camp's population had hovered at around 50 people, and the camp itself was relatively clean and tidy.





Mayor Nickels' successor, Mike McGinn, declared that under his regime the City would not shut down or otherwise molest Nickelsville. Apparently, McGinn was hoping that things would work out best – both for him and for Nickelsville – if the camp were left to its own devices.

The City Council followed Mayor McGinn's lead, negotiating sporadically with SHARE and the Mayor on the question of a permanent home for the camp but otherwise taking no action.

In 2011, a little more than a year into McGinn's term, SHARE moved Nickelsville onto a plot of industrial land in southwest Seattle. Word got out and the camp population swelled with people arriving from around the country.





Under McGinn's hands-off policy, it soon became apparent that Nickelsville was not only not *going away*, it was metastasizing.

The squatters started throwing up shacks and calling the Marginal Way site their permanent home.

One day Scott Morrow showed up at a neighborhood meeting with architectural drawings of a camp expanded to house a thousand people. When neighbors objected to the plan, they were reviled as homeless haters, and “NIMBYs.”





Many people who had hitherto been sympathetic to Nickelsville (including me) were astounded. Seattle has one of the best records in the *country* on caring for the poor. We're good, caring people.

But now, this uncouth little troll of a man (Morrow) was turning our *City on the Hill* into a *City in the Dump*, and blaming us for it to boot.

Morrow staged angry demonstrations at City Hall and pledged that Nickelsville would never move until the City found Nickelsville another place to stay.



Meanwhile, conditions deteriorated inside the camp, as drug dealers took over and the place became a magnet for mentally ill and chronically homeless people who had no desire to seek out permanent shelter or other city services.



Panhandlers, sometimes with their possessions in tow, set up shop in the business district around the camp.



People who had been “barred” from camp for various reasons often stuck around in the woods nearby . . .





Adding to these miseries, the camp became a major public health threat, as the rat population exploded and winter rains brought flooding that left the camp under water for weeks at a time.

The Health Department spent tens of thousands of dollars on rat poison and flood control measures.



Perhaps most disturbing, there were children there! Since the camp's first day on the Marginal Way site, supporters had been soliciting donations of school supplies, toys, and children's clothing. They advertised that families were welcome, in spite of numerous proofs that Nickelsville was unable to keep out sex offenders . . . to say nothing of drug abusers and other felons.

WELCOME TO  
**NICKELSVILLE**  
-----  
OPEN 24 HOURS  
FAMILIES AND PETS WELCOME  
SAFE AND SECURE  
(206)450-5268  
7116 W. MARGINAL WAY SW  
WA 98108  
11/01/11 16:47  
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Document: NARRATIVE

Author: 7455 - GOODMAN, DUANE DEAN

Subject: NARRATIVE

Related date/time: Jun-14-2012 (Thu.) 415

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On 6-14-2012 I was working uniformed patrol as 1F11. I was dispatched to Nicklesville to investigate a possible rape.

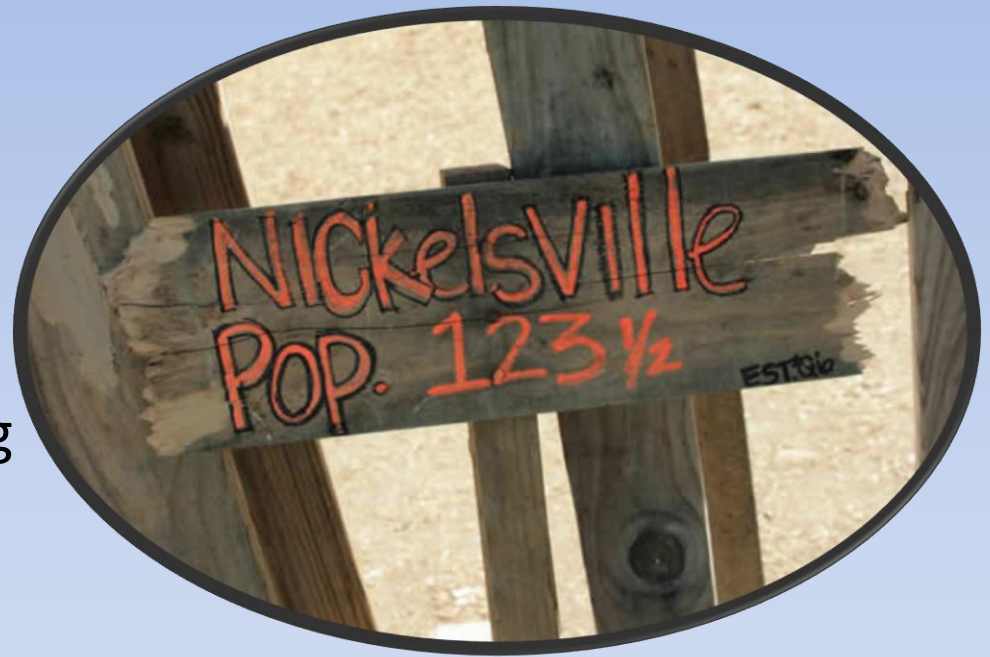
On arrival I contacted Complainant/ [REDACTED] who states that sometime between 2200 and 2400 she woke up to check on her dog and found that her tent was open, her pants and underwear were off and her sweatshirt was UN zipped. C/[REDACTED] stated that she wasn't sure if she was raped or not because she sleeps very sound. I asked C/[REDACTED] if she would like to go to Harbor view to be checked out and she stated "NO" and that she doesn't like Police or Doctors. C/[REDACTED] stated that she would go see a DR after she found her dog that was missing. I asked C/[REDACTED] why she waited so long to call police and she stated that she didn't think she was raped but other people at the camp wanted her to call so she did.

*The above is an excerpt from a typical "incident report" of a police 9-1-1 call response to Nickelsville. I received dozens of reports like this when I did a public disclosure request with the Seattle Police Department.*

*Notice the comment about the complainant not liking police or doctors. That is also quite typical among camp residents and is just one of the MANY reasons why children should not be allowed there.*

The Nickelsville-as-playground idea was the brainchild of one Peggy Hotes.

Hotes, a starry-eyed school marm from the suburbs (and also girlfriend of Scott Morrow) had become intoxicated on Morrow's snake oil and began marketing Nickelsville as a nice, safe place where poor folks with kids could hang out as long as they wanted, rent-free.



Somehow, Hotes had also conceived of Nickelsville as a kind of ecological paradise; never mind that it was one of the most polluted and unhealthy spots in the city. Wood fires burned there almost continually, filling the camp grounds with smoke.



She even bought a pair of goats on Craigslist and dropped them off for the “Nickelodeons” to play with.





Credulous journalists soon picked up on the “family friendly homeless camp” idea and ran with it. The local crisis hotline ([2-1-1](#)) even began referring pregnant women and families with toddlers there.

Occasionally, Child Protective Services would arrive\* and remove the children to foster care, but this side of the “kids at Nickelsville” story was ignored by the media.

\* As a teacher, Ms. Hotes is required to contact CPS every time a child arrived at camp, but it’s doubtful that she called them even once.



In early 2013, matters at Nickelsville finally came to a head, when methamphetamine dealers briefly gained control of the camp and SHARE boss Morrow was forced to remove the portable toilets in order to reestablish his control. At that point, City leaders finally realized they'd have to take action. Someday.

Unfortunately, it would still be several months before the City Council would vote for an eviction. And even then, it was not a unanimous vote.

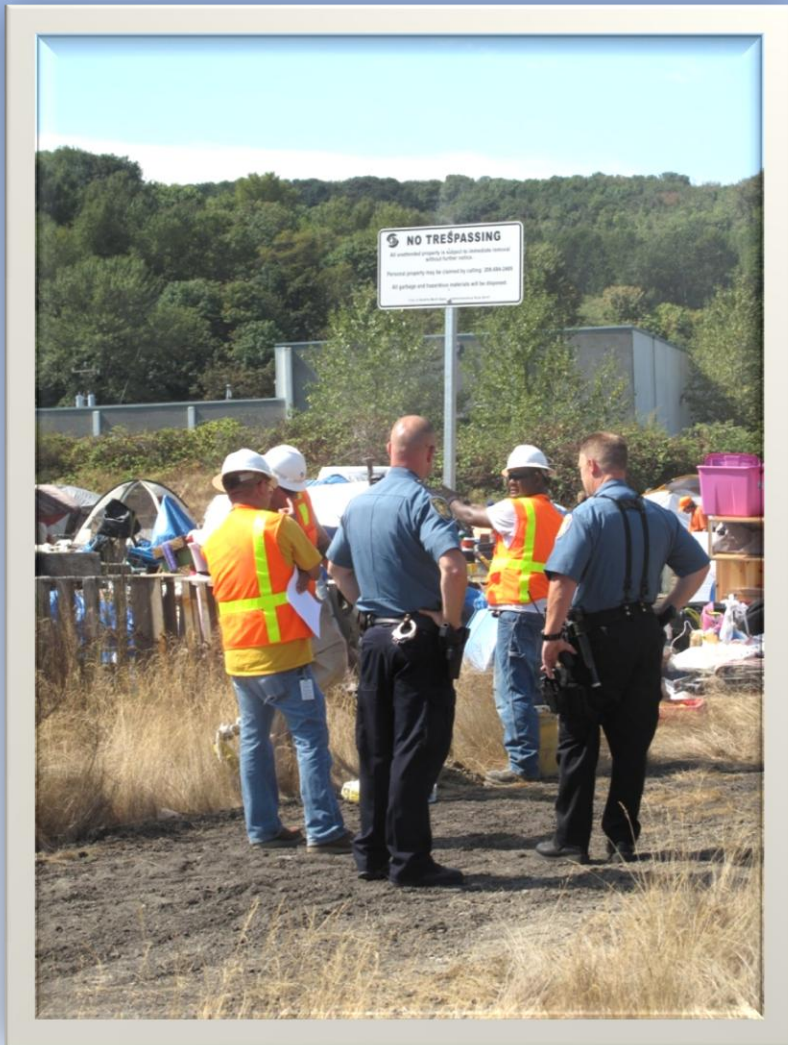


The City gave Nickelsville's "authorities" more than two months' notice that everything and everyone would have to be off the site.

Despite this, moving did not start in earnest until September 1, and the last of the squatters did not leave the site until September 9, 2013, more than two and a half years after they'd moved in.



*Part 2*  
*The Move-Out*



The images and comments that follow are an impressionist scrapbook of *one* aspect of the Nickelsville experience. No, of course they don't tell the whole story. They don't tell the happy side. If you want that, you can go ask someone else. A sympathetic politician, perhaps, or a TV news anchorman who'd like to jerk a few tears and sell some laundry soap.

All I can show you is what the cameras saw after the spotlights were off and all the celebrities and politicians had gone home.









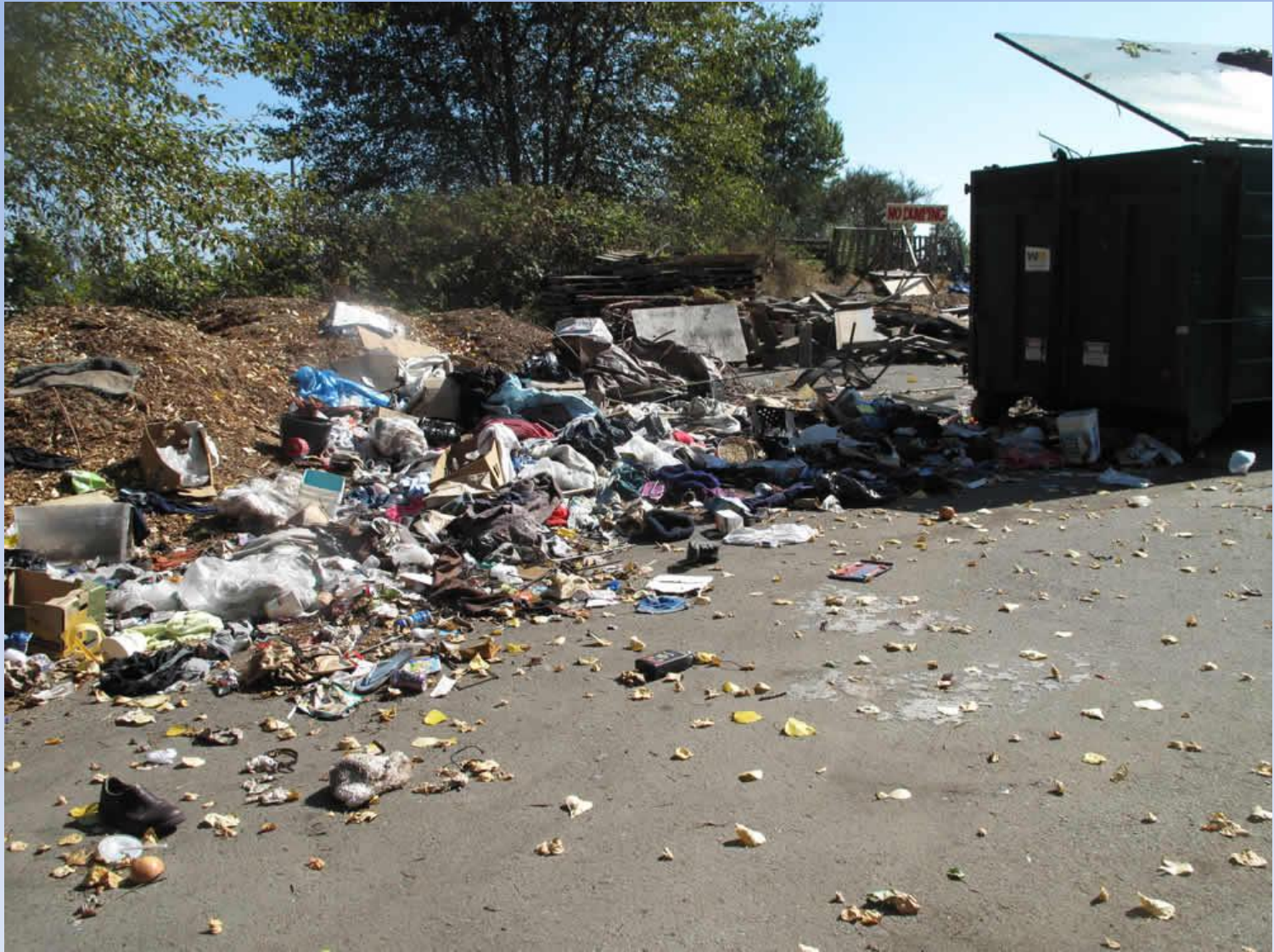


**Honestly. Is this something you'd want in  
*your* neighborhood for two years?**





**Does wanting your neighborhood to be  
clean and safe make you a NIMBY?  
A homeless hater?**







**I wonder: Who really helps the homeless?**

**Is it those who buy them toys and tell them to blame others for their problems?**





**Or is it those who hold them accountable  
for their actions?**



And who *hurts*  
homeless people?





**Is it those who expect everyone  
to follow the same rules?**





**Or is it those who claim that rules don't apply to you if your poor?**







OBVIOUSLY Im  
Homeless S... so ...  
WHY LIE









Nickelsville left the Highland Park neighborhood in much worse shape than they found it.

- *That's not the economy's fault.*
- *That's not the government's fault.*

*That's Nickelsville's fault!*



Weeks after the so-called eviction, there are still dozens of Nickelsville outcasts, or people who simply refused to leave.

Meanwhile, Scott Morrow and Peggy Hotes have vowed to fight on. Since September 1st, they've set up three new Nickelsvilles, each one of them unpermitted, unaccountable, and illegal.

The City of Seattle will be doing clean-up at the Marginal Way site for months, shovelling thousands MORE dollars on top of the \$1 million pile that's already been wasted on public health remediation, court costs, failed attempts to provide social services . . .





# What's it all been for?

Can Scott Morrow and SHARE prove that Nickelsville has saved anyone's life, helped anyone get off drugs, or found anyone a job?

**No!**

What *can* be proved is that people have *died* at Nickelsville, that people have been *hurt* there, that people there have hurt *others*, or that they've hurt *themselves*.

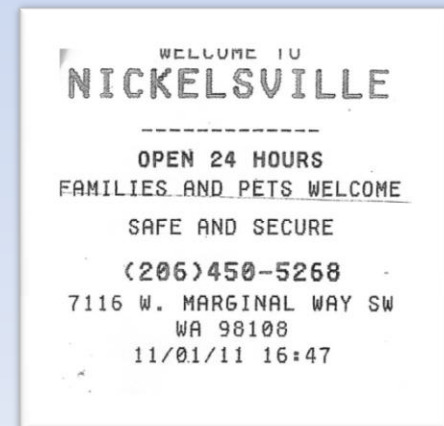
Don't believe me? Just ask the Seattle police . . .

30	12000142886	05/09/12 18:00	7116 W MARGINAL WY SW	Assault 1
31	12000159197	05/23/12 18:23	7116 W MARGINAL WY SW[NICHOLSVILLE	Disturbance - Other
32	12000165126	05/28/12 19:39	7116 W MARGINAL WY SW	Assault 1
33	12000173474	06/04/12 13:04	7116 W MARGINAL WY SW [NICKELSVILLE	Assault 1
34	12000176168	06/06/12 16:15	W MARGINAL WY SW / HIGHLAND PARK WY	Disturbance - Other
35	12000182208	06/11/12 14:24	7116 W MARGINAL WY SW	Dead Body 1
36	12000183740	06/12/12 19:08	7116 W MARGINAL WY SW	Fraud, Bad Check, Identity Theft
37	12000185303	06/14/12 03:19	W MARGINAL WY SW / HIGHLAND PARK WY	Rape
38	12000188151	06/16/12 04:13	7116 W MARGINAL WY SW	Suspicious (Person, Vehicle, Circumstances)

Excerpt from actual police summary report on Nickelsville. Full report [here](#).

Did Nickelsville cause these crimes? Not necessarily. But they didn't *prevent* them, either.

So much for unicorns and rainbows.  
And Eco-Villages



**All this money wasted . . .**

**A neighborhood, trashed . . .**

**Children put in harm's way . . .**

*Again, I ask you . . .*





What was it for?

Visit [\*The Blog Quixotic\*](#) to learn more about

Nickelsville

Scott Morrow

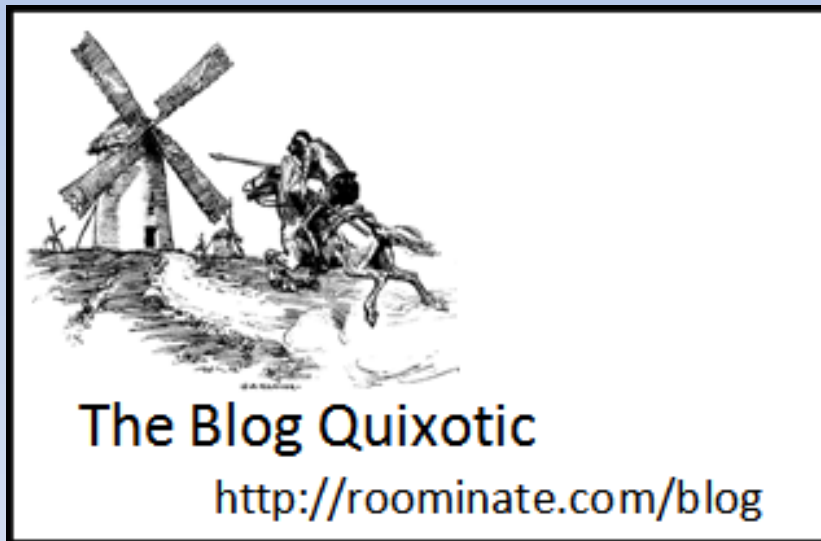
Peggy “Eco Peg” Hotes

Mike McGinn

Nick Licata

*And The Whole SHARE Gang!*

**Questions?**  
**Comments?**  
**Death threats?**



**feedback@roominate.com**