

CITIES & TOWNS

The decision maker's bridge to stronger, **greener** communities

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Postwar neighborhoods are key to suburban revitalization

The nation has a huge quantity of "Leave it to Beaver" neighborhoods from the postwar housing boom that are ripe for changes that will make them more walkable and appealing to new generations of residents.

ROBERT STEUTEVILLE

World War II has long been considered the watershed for automobile-oriented development. Suburbs were built prior to the war, but largely were mixed-use, walkable towns and neighborhoods of the "streetcar suburb" variety.

After 1945, development shifted radically — to automobile-oriented housing with various types of single-use commercial development along arterial highways.

Yet this binary view — traditional neighborhoods before the war; suburban sprawl afterward — obscures differences in postwar suburban patterns that can exert a critical impact on revitalization. Planners and theorists have in recent years been debating how to fix the suburbs, as discussed in books such as *Retrofitting Suburbia* by Ellen Dunham-Jones and June Williamson, and *Sprawl Repair Manual* by Galina Tachieva. This year, Arthur C. Nelson in *Reshaping Metropolitan America* made the demographic case that redevelopment of low-density commercial buildings — largely in the suburbs — could meet all of the US new housing needs in the coming decades.

Suburban malls have been converted into walkable communities in a few well-documented cases, but this concept has yet to become common or mainstream across the US. The inner-ring, postwar suburbs built from 1946 to 1965 could be the key to that shift. These neighborhoods, immortalized in classic TV sitcoms like *Leave it to Beaver* and *Ozzie and Harriet*, and satirized in popular songs like *Pleasant Valley Sunday*, possess hidden assets that make them ripe for public and private invest-

SEE 'POSTWAR SUBURBS' ON PAGE 6

Zaha Hadid's proposed parking garage with swooping overhang atop a pedestrian space typifies Miami Beach's stylish and fun approach to infrastructure. See article on page 9.



Providence warms to 'micro-lofts'

Rhode Island's classic Arcade is to be reactivated with tiny housing units that are becoming popular in cities around the US.

PHILIP LANGDON

If "small is beautiful," as economist E.F. Schumacher asserted in his influential 1973 book, the 48 new apartments in the Providence Arcade are beautiful in the extreme: Most of them are smaller than 340 square feet. Nineteen of them contain only 225 square feet.

Forget the supposed American preference for "living large." In the aftermath of the 2008 world financial crisis, developers have begun experimenting with downsized living units, sometimes called "micro-lofts." These pared-down apartments appear, on the whole, to be a positive trend—making new use of vacant old buildings and bringing new residents to urban centers.

Providence is one of the movement's pioneers. Why? Partly because the Rhode Island capital contains a substantial cohort of college students and recent graduates—some of whom would like to live in the intimate, well-preserved downtown if they could afford it. Providence has a number of underused old buildings like the Arcade that appear suitable for conversion.

The Arcade, the nation's oldest indoor shopping mall, is a columned Greek Revival commercial structure built in 1828. I couldn't have imagined people living in it back in 1980, the year I first strolled its concourse. At that time, the through-block building, with a sober temple-front on each end, had just undergone a major renovation and had been filled with a lively collection of boutiques, food purveyors, service

SEE 'MICRO-LOFTS' ON PAGE 11

**BETTER!
CITIES&TOWNS**

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The 'driving boom' is over

What does that mean for urban places, transportation, and policy?

ROBERT STEUTEVILLE

The trend toward less driving received national attention in May with the release of a report by US Public Interest Research Group (PIRG), and the news has profound implications for both urbanism and transportation.

Total US driving dipped and then leveled off in recent years, and per capita vehicle miles traveled (VMT) has steadily dropped since 2005 — 93 months. Per capita driving is down 8.75 percent, and is now at 1996 levels. The decline has no end in sight. The turnabout wouldn't seem so remarkable if it hadn't followed six decades of steady and substantial rises in VMT fueled by cheap gasoline, highway construction, suburban development, and women entering the workforce.

The trend is most pronounced among the young. "Between 2001 and 2009, the average yearly number of miles driven by 16- to 34-year-olds dropped a staggering 23 percent," wrote Brad Plumer of *The Washington Post*. This cohort includes both Millennials and Generation X, but the trend is strongest among Millennials.

Older drivers are contributing to the end of the driving boom. The most auto-centric generation in US history, the so-called Eisenhoweres who came of age in the 1950s, are now well into the Golden Years. Boomers, nearly as prolific drivers, started reaching 65 in 2011. Retirement brings less driving.

The trend dovetails with the shift toward walkable neighborhoods. US PIRG report, "A New Direction: Our Changing Relationship with Driving and the Implications for America's Future," makes a direct connection between urban living and driving. "Millennials are twice as likely as Baby Boomers and Generation X'ers to express a desire to live in a city," says PIRG. According to a 2011 survey by the National Association for Realtors, 62 percent of people ages 18-29 said they would prefer to live in walkable neighborhoods rather than conventional suburbs, PIRG notes.

THREE SCENARIOS

The report looks at three scenarios: "Back to the Future" where driving starts to rise again at historical levels, "Enduring Shift" which assumes the decline "is real and lasting," and "Ongoing Decline" where today's VMT trend grows into a bigger change.

All three scenarios start in 2009, the last year that data was available by age. Yet aggregate VMT data for the last three years tracks almost exactly with the middle Enduring Shift scenario. From 2010 through 2012 the economy was slowly bouncing back from a deep trough, when one would expect driving to noticeably rise. After the early '80s recession brought on by high oil prices, when VMT dropped significantly, driving did bounce back quickly. In light of this, the Back to the Future scenario seems unlikely.

Assuming walkable neighborhoods and driving trends are mutually reinforcing, some version of Enduring Shift or Ongoing Decline seems likely going forward. Among 16 to 34 year olds, transit use is up 40 percent since 2001, Plumer reports. Rising transit popularity supports both transit-oriented development and the repopulation of neighborhoods with existing transit service.

Other factors are "new mobility" programs like carshare and bikeshare, which only work in walkable places. These services are centered on downtowns and close-in neighborhoods, with a handful scattered in the densest suburbs. The neighborhoods served by carshare will grow over time, and you can chart the spread of high-value areas by Zipcar locations. Bicycling, overall, rose by a quarter from 2001 to 2009.

Some of the strongest parts of the report call for a new transportation policy. When Americans expressed a desire to live in the suburbs after World War II, the full force of federal, state, and local government was brought to bear to support the Driving Boom and the suburban built environment, PIRG notes. In the 21st Century, government should lend a hand to Millennials and others who wish to drive less.

"Federal, state and local policies should help create the conditions under which Americans can fulfill their desire to drive less. Increasing investments in public transportation, bicycling and pedestrian infrastructure and intercity rail—especially when coupled with regulatory changes to enable ... walkable neighborhoods—can help provide more Americans with a broader range of transportation options." ♦

Our trillion dollar dirty little secret

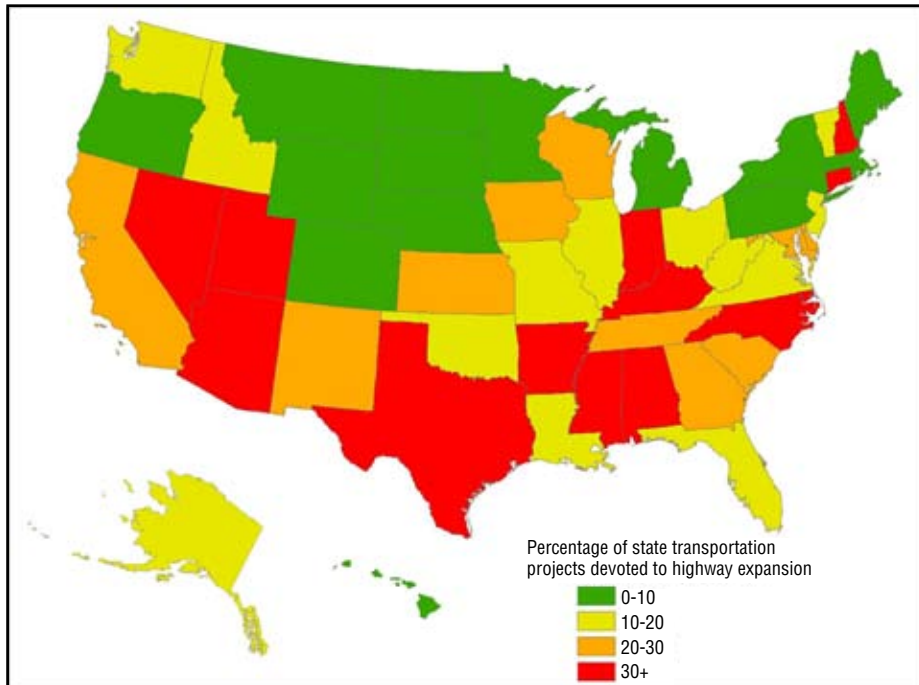
It's time to recognize that we can't maintain the roads we have now, and that continuing down the path of highway expansion is both unaffordable and unnecessary.

STU SIROTA

The recent collapse of the I-5 bridge in Washington State is a stark reminder of the sorry state of our aging highway infrastructure. However, it is also a golden opportunity to begin a dialogue with the American public about a troubling issue that has not been adequately explained or discussed: our national transportation priorities are seriously outdated and are in dire need of reform. In short, we are continuing to waste enormous sums of tax dollars each year on the type of highway expansion projects that do little to ease traffic congestion problems over the long term and in fact often exacerbate them. Moreover, the high cost of new highway expansion is robbing us of the ability to restore our nation's crumbling infrastructure and create a world-class transportation system for the 21st Century.

To understand this better, we need to understand how we've gotten to where we are now. In the decades that followed the end of World War II, the US built an unprecedented network of local, state, and interstate highways. In the early days of this expansion between the 1950s and 1970s, much of this expansion brought about dramatic improvement to mobility and productivity to several generations of Americans via the automobile, while enabling a new system of cheap consumer goods and economic growth. It also facilitated the equally unprecedented rise of new suburban development, built around the automobile, in the form of housing subdivisions, shopping centers, office parks, recreational facilities, and public institutions. Much of this dramatic expansion and change went unchallenged and became accepted as the basis for the economic engine of growth and for creating personal real estate wealth. We also assumed that this pattern of expansion could continue indefinitely, and in fact, most Americans still take this largely for granted today.

An integral component of this new



COURTESY OF STU SIROTA

economic system that emerged in the postwar period was the practice of building highways to open up newly developing suburban areas outside of older central cities. While the original intent was to facilitate economic development, the goal of most highway expansion projects since the 1980s was primarily to relieve congestion on the previous generation of highways built in preceding decades. Thus began a silent "vicious cycle" of widening existing highways and building new ones to relieve growing traffic congestion. This initially seemed to alleviate traffic congestion in the short term, but invariably attracted new traffic and adjacent land development, which returned the highways to their former congested states. This eventually led to increased pressure for additional expansion to alleviate congestion, which again temporarily improved traffic flow, only to induce additional traffic and development, resulting in increased congestion, and so on.

OTHER REASONS TO CHANGE

As if the growing realization that we need to break out of the vicious cycle of highway-expansion-induced travel and sprawl development, increased traffic congestion, more highway expansion, etc., isn't enough to reform our trans-

portation policies, additional reasons compel us to change our course. Consider the following:

- **Reality check for transportation agencies.** For decades, transportation agencies throughout the US have planned and constructed successive rounds of highway expansion based on future traffic volume forecasts. Those forecasts have been determined largely by extrapolating past trends in the growth of traffic volumes — on the assumption that the trend line will simply continue into the future. Surprisingly, something very different has happened: Since the mid 2000s, the trend in driving nationwide peaked, and is actually trending downward. This "peak" in vehicle miles traveled (VMT) occurred in 2005. A new report from US PIRG, entitled, "A New Direction: Our Changing Relationship with Driving and the Implications for America's Future," analyzes the recent drop in driving and looks at a future that includes less driving.

The decrease in driving among younger Americans is even more dramatic. Even *Motor Trend* magazine acknowledged the trend, running an article in its August, 2012 edition entitled, "Why Young People Are Driving Less: Is the Car Over?" While economics play a key role, another cause is that Millen-

nials are seeking lifestyles and ways to connect socially that do not include the same dependence on driving as their predecessor generations.

The bottom line here is that if transportation agencies updated their models to acknowledge that the VMT trend line of the 20th Century can no longer be used to predict traffic volumes of the 21st Century, many of the planned highway expansion projects now on the books could no longer be justified.

• **Bewildering priorities.** There is a growing realization among state and municipal governments that an ever-widening gap has grown between the wish list of “needed” highway expansion projects in statewide transportation plans and the ability for these projects to ever be funded. Many states have been forced to defer indefinitely or cancel outright some projects, and are scratching their heads trying to figure out how they will ever be funded. At the same time, an enormous backlog of maintenance needed for existing highways and bridges is going unfunded or deferred. The Federal Highway Administration has identified \$76 billion unmet need for replacing obsolete bridges alone. Yet, with these looming needs and stark new economic realities, the states are still, amazingly, spending over \$100 billion on new highway capacity expansion projects just in the next five years as part of statewide transportation improvement program (STIP) budgets. This information was compiled by research from the Tristate Transportation Campaign in their 2012 report, “Tracking State Transportation Dollars.”

The map (see previous page) shows the extent to which each state prioritizes new highway capacity expansion over road and bridge maintenance and other modes of transportation. Reprioritizing that \$100 billion toward fixing our deficient bridges instead of wasting it on unnecessary highway expansion would completely address our bridge needs — leaving use with a \$24 billion surplus to put towards fixing existing roads. The roads, incidentally, were given a grade of “D” by the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) in their most recent Infrastructure Report Card.

But that’s only part of the story: The STIP is only short term spending. When the cost of long range transportation plans, which identify needs for the next

20 to 30 years, is added, the money targeted for **highway capacity expansion exceeds \$1 trillion.**

• **Smarter investments needed.** Today, state transportation agencies are complaining, “there’s no money for anything,” but in reality, they have money. It’s just being prioritized for costly highway expansion projects that lead to more congestion while consuming a large chunk of the limited funding pie. The prospect of unnecessary highway expansion projects gobbling up over \$1 trillion over the next several decades only throws salt on the wound, in that the new highway construction must itself eventually be maintained and will further stress future transportation budgets that will become an even greater burden to future generations. Moreover,

it leaves far less funding available for more sustainable forms of transportation including transit, pedestrian, and bicycle infrastructure. **Just imagine redirecting that \$1 trillion and, instead, investing it wisely toward addressing our nation’s critical infrastructure needs: fixing our existing highways, transit, rail, ports, aviation, schools, parks and other key infrastructure assets, for which ASCE has identified \$3.6 trillion in need over the next 20 years.**

In the next installment, I’ll examine why transportation policies haven’t been reformed and what needs to be done to change them. ♦

Stu Sirota, AICP, is principal of TND Planning Group in Baltimore, Maryland.

Smart growth costs less, yields more revenues for cities and towns

The fiscal case for smart growth is gaining steam. *New Urban News* (now *Better! Cities & Towns*) reported on a groundbreaking study in Sarasota, Florida, in September of 2010 that showed enormous advantages in per-acre tax yields for mixed-use, downtown properties.

Smart Growth America takes the case to a higher level with a nationwide meta-analysis of 17 studies, including a new study of Nashville, Tennessee, commissioned for the report. The conclusion: Smart growth strategies can help any

town or city improve its finances.

Building Better Budgets: A National Examination of the Fiscal Benefits of Smart Growth Development finds that smart growth helps municipalities in three ways: Upfront costs are lower, service costs are lower, and tax revenues are higher compared to conventional suburban development.

The tax revenue advantages are probably most dramatic, because the central business district properties yield 10 times more per acre than conventional suburban development (see “Raleigh

Raleigh analysis: Tax revenue from the CBD far outdistances conventional suburban



analysis” graph on page 4). Land is a municipality’s most enduring asset, and maximizing the economic value of that land is the key to generating revenues to provide public services.

Building Better Budgets looks at both costs and revenues. The following is a summary of the findings from the report:

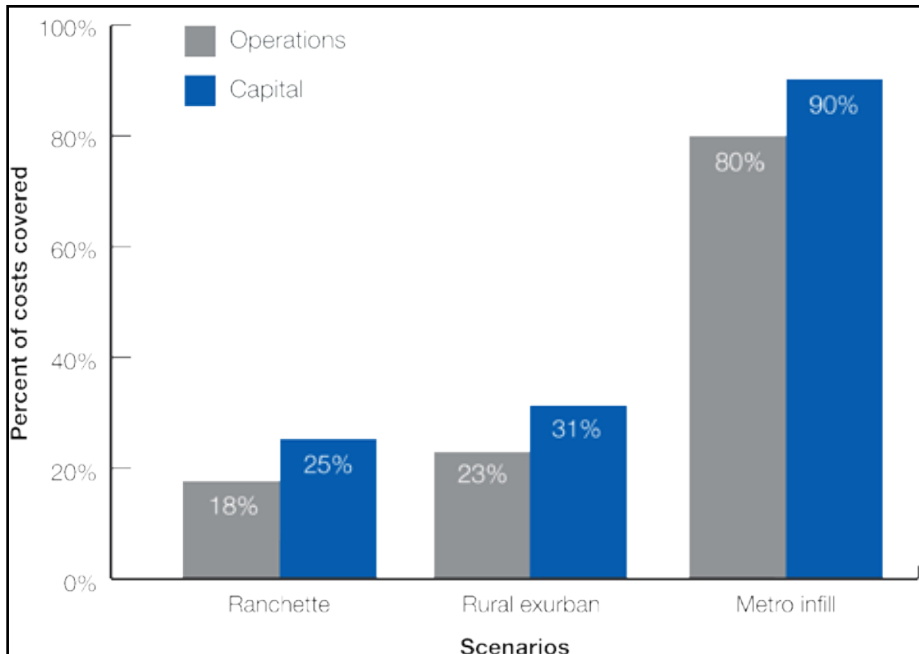
1. *Smart growth development costs one-third less for upfront infrastructure. Our survey concluded that smart growth development saves an average of 38 percent on upfront costs for new construction of roads, sewers, water lines and other infrastructure. Many studies have concluded that this number is as high as 50 percent. Smart growth development patterns require less infrastructure, meaning upfront capital costs, long-term operations and maintenance costs, and, presumably, cost for eventual replacement are all lower. Smart growth development also often uses existing infrastructure, lowering upfront capital costs even more.*

2. *Smart growth development saves an average of 10 percent on ongoing delivery of services. Our survey concluded that smart growth development saves municipalities an average of 10 percent on police, ambulance and fire service costs. The geographical configuration of a community and the way streets are connected significantly affect public service delivery. Smart growth patterns can reduce costs simply by reducing the distances service vehicles must drive. In some cases, the actual number of vehicles and facilities can also be reduced along with the personnel required.*

3. *Smart growth development generates 10 times more tax revenue per acre than conventional suburban development. Our survey concluded that, on an average per-acre basis, smart growth development produces 10 times more tax revenue than conventional suburban development.*

A study for Raleigh, NC, concluded that a six-story building downtown produces 50 times as much property tax revenue per acre as the Walmart store. Even a three-story residential building produces more property tax revenue per-acre than a major shopping mall.

In 2010, local governments in the US raised and spent a whopping \$1.6 trillion. Of that, approximately one-third—\$525 billion—was expended on projects and activities that are heavily affected by local development patterns, Smart Growth America says.



The returns from residential development from various locales

NASHVILLE FINDINGS

Three developments were studied in the Nashville area: New urban infill and greenfield neighborhoods and a 1990s conventional suburban development. The infill development far outdistanced the others in net revenue. The Gulch neighborhood in Downtown Nashville, a redevelopment of a 76-acre brownfield site originally designed by Looney Rick Kiss, generated \$115,720 in net revenue per acre — almost 1,150 times the net revenue generated by Bradford Hills (conventional suburban) and 148 times the net revenue of Lenox Village (new urban greenfield).

The Gulch cost less per unit to provide services than the greenfield projects. The lesson: Investments required for infill revitalization generate a higher return on investment (ROI) than build-

ing in far-flung suburbs — in this case at least. When building does take place in distant suburbs, it appears that a new urban design performs better. The Gulch has additional advantages: It appeals to the young and educated workforce, a key market segment this decade, and it supports transit.

The Gulch — and to an extent, Lenox Village — also offer strong placemaking, which creates a distinctive identity for an urban neighborhood and helps to attract new businesses and residents.

The study examines the cost of providing ongoing city services to the residential component of each project, including police, ambulance and fire service costs as well as the overall impact to the County’s general fund, according to Smart Growth America. Upfront infrastructure cost was not included in the analysis. ♦

The Gulch, an infill development in Nashville that performed very well fiscally.



COURTESY OF SMART GROWTH AMERICA

PHOTO COURTESY OF SMART GROWTH AMERICA

Postwar suburbs

FROM PAGE 1

ment today.

Twenty-six million housing units were built between 1944 and 1965, Williamson writes in her new book, *Designing Suburban Futures: New Models from Build a Better Burb*, published in May as a 162-page Island Press (see review on page 17). Most of the units from this era are single-family houses and are in decent shape after multiple renovations and additions. They likely house 60-70 million Americans today.

Here's why the postwar suburbs are good candidates for repair:

- **Better connectivity.** Suburban housing is reputed to consist of disconnected cul-de-sacs and isolated subdivisions, and such has been the new urbanist critique. This view is true of later suburbs, but the streets in early postwar housing neighborhoods are mostly connected. Blocks are a bigger and streets more curved than in cities, but at least they link up. A lack of street connections is a huge barrier to the retrofit of *later* suburbs.

- **Narrower, more walkable streets.** The supersizing of streets in America was gradual and affects the walkability of later suburbs tremendously. Retrofitting these streets will be expensive. The postwar residential streets, however, are generally built to a scale that supports walking and bicycling. Some have sidewalks and some do not. Narrow streets with slow, low-volume traffic are often walkable without sidewalks. Postwar neighborhoods mostly need destinations to walk and bike to.

- **Closer to downtown.** The postwar neighborhoods are in inner-ring suburbs that are closer to jobs and transit than are later suburbs. The close-in location will affect real estate values and help to attract investment. Nelson argues that suburbs built before 1980 will hold their value better than those built after 1980. Post-2000 suburbs, he predicts, will have little or no market even in the fastest-growing regions.

- **Inclusion of low-value commercial strips.** This may not seem like an asset, but these 1950s-era commercial strips are ripe for redevelopment and revitalization into mixed-use places. Their low value reduces barriers to redevelopment.

- **Rich in small-lot housing.** Postwar



New mixed-use buildings along Columbia Pike in Arlington, Virginia

PHOTO COURTESY OF DOVIER, KOHL & PARTNERS

suburbs contain much of the nation's supply of small-lot single-family housing. Nelson and other market analysts find that America is oversupplied in large-lot housing and will be for decades to come. Multifamily and small-lot housing are undersupplied. Suburbs that revive are likely to be those with small-lot and multifamily housing — the latter could be added to postwar neighborhoods as low-value commercial strips are redeveloped.

- **Demographic appeal.** Millennials and Gen Xers with children may not want to live in cities due to considerations like schools, but they still want walkable environments. Postwar suburbs are increasingly diverse racially and economically, and that is also appealing to these groups. If they can be made walkable, the appeal could be strong. Baby Boomers, living in these neighborhoods, want active living as they retire. Walkable, mixed-use centers would enable them to retire in place.

- **They are everywhere.** America grew so fast during the first 20 years after World War II that nearly every metropolitan region has a plentiful supply of postwar housing.

- **Incremental development opportunities.** Redevelopment of shopping malls into town centers such as Belmar in Lakewood, Colorado, or Mizner Park in Boca Raton, Florida, required vision-

ary developers with access to significant capital. Postwar commercial strips can be rebuilt incrementally in a series of smaller projects.

- **Potential for combining suburban and urban qualities.** Postwar suburbs have yards, single-family houses, and great tree canopies. The redevelopment of commercial strips could bring urban, mixed-use qualities as well. That's an appealing combination.

- **Existing assets.** Postwar suburbs have had 60 years in which to mature, create quality civic assets like parks and schools, and develop cultural institutions. Redevelopment builds on these assets and there is no need to create them from scratch — as new urban greenfield developments have done.

- **On-street parking.** These neighborhoods have plentiful, underutilized, on-street parking. This resource is useful be when adding infill apartments and accessory units.

EXAMPLES OF POSTWAR SUBURBAN RETROFITS

With such a list of advantages, there must be some examples of successful postwar retrofit — and there are. Lancaster Boulevard in Lancaster, California (see January-February 2013 *Better! Cities & Towns*), features the redevelopment of a 1950s commercial strip flanked by postwar housing. Completed in late



The first phase of the boulevard in Bothell, Washington, is shown in pink. Most of the current redevelopment is on that side.

2010, streetscape investments of \$11.5 million generated \$273 million in economic benefit in two years, a study found. Redevelopment has brought 800 new and refurbished housing units and 50 new businesses.

Columbia Pike in Arlington, Virginia, a 1950s commercial strip with a form-based code adopted 10 years ago, has revived with nine mixed-use projects in recent years adding 1,499 housing units and 163,000 square feet of retail, office, and other uses. The county is now expanding the code and plan and moving forward with a streetcar project (see the July-August 2012 issue of *Better! Cities & Towns*).

In Roanoke, Texas, officials borrowed \$8 million to invest in a two-thirds-of-a-mile commercial corridor called Oak Street and adopt a form-based code. In less than 10 years, the corridor has been transformed with six new buildings, six historic rehabilitations, and a dozen restaurants, says Scott Polikov of Vialta Group, a Gateway Planning company. Now a mixed-use project is planned where the developer would dedicate land for a new city hall. The sales tax increase is already where the city had hoped it to be in 20 years. “The eight million invested turned out to be a hell of a deal for everybody — businesses, property owners, and taxpayers,” Polikov concludes.

Bothell, Washington, is a postwar suburb that is quickly becoming one of the hottest communities in the Seattle region. The city had fewer than 800 residents in 1940, but achieved greater than 100 percent growth in the 1950s and 1960s — rapid growth in these decades is the hallmark of postwar housing communities. Now containing a population of 33,000, the city has experienced disconnected sprawl in more recent decades.

The parts of Bothell that are redeveloping now are the

neighborhoods connected to a pre-war Main Street and an old commercial strip. These neighborhoods took shape in the post-war era. Freedman Tung + Sasaki (FTS) worked with the city on a plan to realign a state highway, revitalize the main street, and turn the commercial strip corridor into a boulevard with mixed-use buildings. This project is still in its early stage, with the boulevard not yet built, yet investment is pouring in.

“City officials said this has resulted in more than \$207 million of planned private investments by residential and commercial developers, including Oregon-based McMenumins, which is turning an old schoolhouse ... into an entertainment complex with a hotel,” *The Seattle Times* reported recently. The newspaper described the area as a “contrasting mix of bulldozers, power drills, and protected wetlands,” as various multistory apartment buildings, condos, and mixed-use projects get underway.

The old school being reused by McMenumins will anchor the new boulevard, and the school has an Art Deco entrance that will be highlighted in the urban design, notes Gregory Tung of FTS. The school is currently set back from the arterial road. The boulevard will be wider and bring the sidewalk within a few feet of the façade. A slow-moving access lane, two rows of street trees, and two rows of parallel parking will separate the sidewalk from through traffic. The street redesign allowed for the creation of a mid-block crossing that terminates a view of the school’s entrance through a gap in the street trees. A majestic Atlas Cedar will also be celebrated through the creation of a small plaza. “Applying a strong orderly and regular streetscape spacing structure (of trees, lights, etc.) to a large multiway boulevard creates ample opportunities to ‘capture’ and take advantage of the idiosyncrasies of the place — and show them off to add to unique placemaking and urban identity,” Tung explains.

The city is constructing the west side of the Boulevard first, and that is where most of the new development is taking place in Bothell.

Twenty-year-old resident and University of Washington-Bothell student Jaclyn Pang is quoted in the *Times*: “There are a lot of 20- and 30-somethings like me who see all these changes going on and it’s just what we’ve been waiting for,” she says. “I’m excited about all the opportunities and being able to walk to everything.”

ARBITRAGE POTENTIAL

John Anderson of Anderson Kim Architecture & Urban Design says commercial strip corridors in older suburbs have a tremendous “arbitrage potential. The difference in value between what is and what could be is tremendous. There’s an amazing opportunity.”

Anderson calls these commercial strips, harshly and bluntly, the “corridors of crap.” There’s some truth to that statement — the corridors are characterized by a hodge-podge of automobile-oriented businesses that are often not well maintained and hardly distinguished architecturally. Nevertheless, many of the businesses themselves are viable and can be viewed as an asset upon which to build.

The first task is to change perceptions of the streetscape, starting with the design speed, Anderson says. Adding on-street parking and street trees will make a difference. Bring businesses out to the sidewalk with food carts and small buildings. Make additional improvements to the streetscape and, finally, mixed-

use buildings can fill in the parking lots. Anderson Kim created such a plan for a commercial corridor in Hicksville, Long Island, near the first Levittown, for the *Build a Better Burb* competition that Williamson writes about in her new book.

A form-based code is important to ensure new development adds to a walkable environment, Polikov says. Roanoke was successful because of the combination of form-based code and street improvements. “Just doing the form-based code without the redo of the street would not have been enough,” he says. “Marrying them both together is the story.”

The existing businesses should be “grandfathered” so they can keep operating without being forced to change, Polikov says. As property values change and the economy turns over, new development will support the new vision, he explains.

The first 20 years of post-World War II development were qualitatively different from what happened in later suburbs — those with “power centers,” mega-schools, McMansions with three-car garages, and lots of cul-de-sacs. Later suburbs are sometimes the locale for retrofit, but special conditions must be in place. High-quality transit service, such as a new light rail service or redevelopment of a 1980s park-and-ride near a commuter rail station, could be a catalyst. In unusual cases, ambitious developers with deep pockets can build a full-scale new urban center on the site of a former enclosed shopping mall, but in these days of tight credit, such deals are rare. Even then, opportunities to connect with existing surrounding development are few.

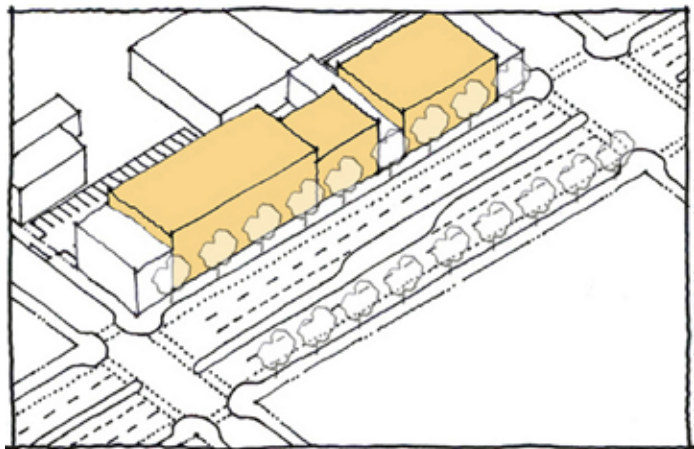
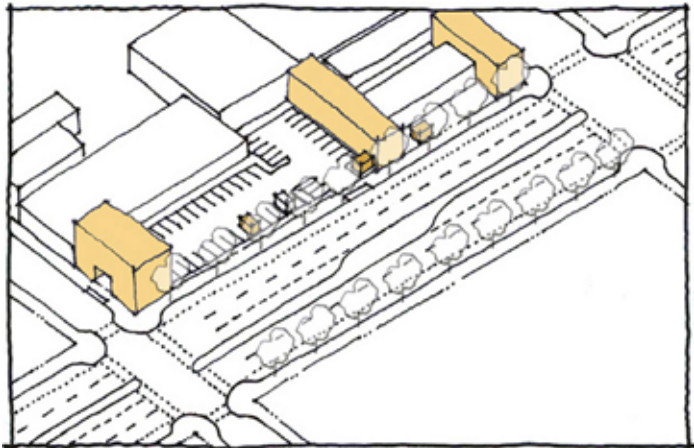
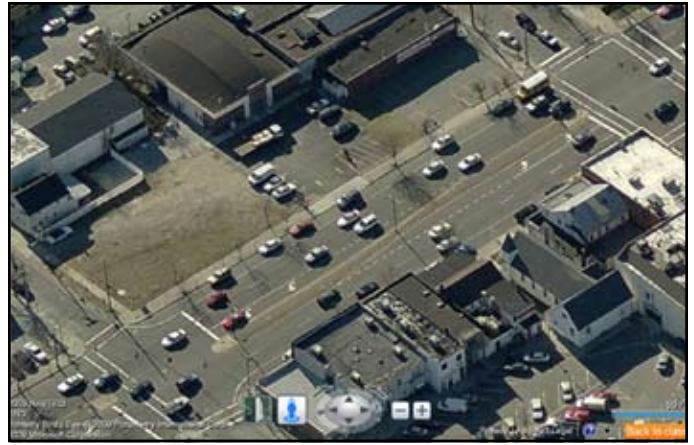
The postwar suburbs have assets that will make for more revitalization opportunities in the next decade or two. These assets include connected, narrower streets and houses on smaller lots — often with one-car garages or carports, in place of the intrusive two-or-three-car garages common in later suburbs. Their commercial strips can be redeveloped with smaller increments of capital. Their inner-ring location is likewise attractive.

The scale of the postwar suburbs, housing a fifth or more of US population, is impressive. Making these neighborhoods more sustainable could keep urbanists busy for a couple of decades.

THE “COMPLETE STREETS” FACTOR

One barrier has stood in the way: A lack of public investment in the commercial arterials to make them more appealing and safe for pedestrians and bicyclists. State departments of transportation that have historically favored fast-moving automobile traffic often control these arterials. This barrier is breaking down, however, as more states and local governments pass “complete streets” laws that recognize the importance of thoroughfares to all users. As millennials, who drive less and favor walkable environments, enter the electorate, the politics is beginning to shift. Transportation officials are starting to recognize that sometimes the best policy is to keep drivers off the road by making neighborhoods walkable and bikable.

Cities and towns with historic gridded streets will continue to revitalize. But living in the city is not for everyone, at all stages of life. It’s important that the US develop sustainable, walkable suburban neighborhoods with plentiful single-family housing. The postwar suburbs offer the greatest opportunity to do so. Over all, these neighborhoods complement cities more than compete with them. The demand for walkable neighborhoods is strong enough that both cities and postwar suburbs



IMAGES COURTESY OF ANDERSON KIM ARCHITECTURE & URBAN DESIGN

The images above are part of a series on the redevelopment of a postwar commercial strip in Hicksville, New York, into a Main Street.

can benefit from revitalization. The creation of more walkable neighborhoods in inner-ring suburbs will help keep some urban neighborhoods affordable in the coming decades.

As successful case studies pile up, demonstrating the high returns generated by redevelopment associated with *Leave it to Beaver* neighborhoods, more public funds could be allocated into remaking the “corridors of crap” into main streets. This, in turn, could generate momentum for bringing new life to the suburbs built after World War II and make US metropolitan regions more sustainable, appealing, and economically viable. ♦

Miami Beach takes infrastructure beyond gray

CLAUDIA KOUSOULAS

When cities invest in infrastructure, it's often the gray stuff like roads and bridges. Or it's hidden away like water and sewer pipes. Not to say that infrastructure isn't interesting and vital to a city's success, but it's hard to get excited about.

But in Miami Beach, where everything seems to be more colorful and dramatic than most American cities, the latest round of infrastructure investments combine flamboyance and function. The city's parking garages are featured in the *Wall Street Journal*, LeBron James is a fan of its bikeshare system, and the expanding network of streetscape and trail improvements weave the city together, from beach to bay.

"It is a coordinated effort," says Richard Lorber, acting planning director. "Decobike has become a part of the city and we've incorporated it into our transportation thinking." Likewise with streetscape improvements; despite initial concern about losing on-street parking spaces, residents recognize that the curb bump-outs, streetscaping, and landscaping add value to their properties.

HIGH-STYLE PARKING GARAGES

Miami Beach has gotten the most press coverage for its public and private parking garages and in fact has set a new standard for not only garage design, but their integration with streets and city



PHOTO COURTESY OF CLAUDIA KOUSOULAS

Designed by Arquitectonica, the Ballet Valet Garage is popularly known as the Chia Pet garage for its landscape screen. This facility helped revive a neighborhood and set a design trend.

life. Architects whose names are usually attached to symphony halls and art museums are undertaking what used to be a pretty dull commission.

Herzog and deMeuron's 1111 Lincoln Road garage functions equally as a party space, a retail anchor, and parking garage. Enrique Norten's refined Park @420 pulls Lincoln Road's retail activity around the corner, while Arquitectonica's Purdy Avenue garage is also a retail anchor for Sunset Harbor, an emerging mixed-use neighborhood. Frank Gehry's public garage, sheathed in steel mesh recalling his signature chain link, is lit to

drift through a color palette that mirrors Miami sunsets. Zaha Hadid is proposing a structure that will swoop over a street and create a pedestrian plaza (see photo on page 1).

The trend toward high style garages began in 1995 with Arquitectonica's Ballet Valet garage. The client, developer Tony Goldman who would go on to develop the Wynwood Arts District, spotted an opportunity on this neglected stretch of Collins Avenue. One block in from the beach and surrounded by clubs and hotels, the garage's retail base kick-started redevelopment. Popularly known as the Chia Pet garage, Arquitectonica's screen of plants became a local landmark.

Unlike the usual approach to garage design, which seeks to hide parking behind a liner building or false front, newer garages celebrate their position in our lives and communities. Most use texture, color, and pattern to create visual elegance. Herzog and De Meuron's garage uses the drama of space and movement. Views shift and drop; every floor creates a different experience. From the outside, the blade-edged concrete slabs hover over dramatic skies and palm trees. Hadid's proposed design is a modernist approach to the experience of moving through space.

Roger Howie of Hadid's office says,

The varying floor heights, almost invisible steel cable fencing, and concrete slabs of the 1111 Lincoln Road garage upend the notion of the parking garage as something to be hidden.



PHOTO COURTESY OF CLAUDIA KOUSOULAS

“A simple premise of how to bring the street into the building guided our initial studies which then progressed into an expressed, continuous vehicular circulation path which provides a unique, even fun, experience for the user.”

But the designs also mediate between the car and the pedestrian. From an urban point of view, their relationship to the street is most important. Some, like Park@420, rely on a simple retail base, others like 1111 draw pedestrians in to experience the space. As well as retail, Hadid’s design includes an urban plaza and features stairs to create a gateway along the Collins Park axis. This sounds more like urban design than transportation engineering.

As well as experiments with screen and structure, the function of these garages is part of their design and economics. They are not places you would park and leave. You could spend the whole evening at 1111—from a sunset drink at the rooftop restaurant, on to dinner, then shopping and people watching in the plaza. Likewise, Arquitectonica’s Purdy Avenue seeks to combine design and function to transcend typical parking garage. “The idea was to create a hub of activity for residents and locals, a place to eat, exercise, and shop—with parking,” says Wendy Chernin of the Scott Robins Companies who worked with the city in a public-private partnership to build the project.

DECOBIKE CRUISES IN

Miami Beach has added 2,741 new spaces with these garages, but the city’s approach is also multi-modal. Decobike has been operating in the city since 2011. In 2012 it expanded north to the Town of Surfside and is poised to cross the Biscayne Bay causeways into the City of Miami. On the beach, Decobike has achieved the best bike-to-resident ratio in North America, with the highest station distribution per square mile nationally. Each of the 1,000 bikes is used four to five times a day, one of the highest use rates in the country.

Decobike founders Colby Reese and Bonifacio Diaz first experienced bikeshare in Paris and Barcelona.

“We were amazed by the amount of usage on the systems. From there, it became a “green business concept that we fell in love with,” said Reese.

When the City of Miami Beach issued a request for proposals, Decobike responded with proposed locations based on their business model and use estimates. Lorber says that the city worked with them to approve the proposed locations or find appropriate alternatives. He points out that the system was initially approved without advertising on the bikes or docks, but Decobike has since requested to place ads.

“We’re not thrilled with the ads, but worked with them again to find appropriate locations,” says Lorber. “Decobike is so well loved and so important, we want them to have a healthy financial viability.”

There were initial reservations about use. Why would anyone use this service if they already owned a bicycle? But as Reese points out, with bikeshare there are no worries about theft or maintenance. And a well-distributed and stocked bike dock network makes Decobike convenient. Reese notes that once the docks were installed, they also adjusted rental and membership options to meet the demands of residents and visitors.

There was also some concern about turning over on-street parking spaces to bike docks, but the popularity of the system and a slew of new parking garages calmed those concerns.

As Reese notes, using a parking space for 20 bikes that turn over four to five times a day is a more efficient use of public space.

Reese and Diaz recount these sensible planner answers, but neglect to mention just how much fun Decobike can be. Miami Beach is a flat city, with great weather and ocean views. A grid street pattern provides plenty of routes for commuting or sightseeing.

And just as the parking garages are a system designed to provide access, so is Decobike. Its expansion north into Surfside was the next step in expanding farther north to Haulover Park and west into the Town of Bay Harbor Islands. Duncan Tavares, planner for the Town of Surfside, says residents and businesses supported bikeshare from the start, and after smoothing some concerns about liability and location, so did elected officials.

EXPANDING STREETScape AND TRAILS

Even within its street grid, the city is upgrading its network of trails and street paths for efficiency, safety, and pleasure. The city’s 2007 Atlantic Greenway Network Plan strived to establish routes that make local and regional bicycle and walking connections. Now that the State of Florida no longer allows wooden structures on the beach, each redevelopment or capital improvement completes another link. The overall effort re-engineers walking and cycling into car-oriented streets and public spaces.

The Atlantic Greenway Network path runs north-south along the beach as a poured concrete path with a trademark wave pattern paving, providing recreation and transportation connections.



PHOTO COURTESY OF CLAUDIA KOUSOULIS



PHOTO COURTESY OF CLAUDIA KOUSOULAS

The blocks south of Fifth Street now include a mix of housing, from single-family to high-rise, fronting walkable streets made pedestrian-friendly with landscaping, paving, curb bump-outs, and crosswalks.

While the Atlantic Greenway Network Plan makes beach to bay connections and runs along the beachfront, the City

also considers neighborhood function and aesthetics in its streetscape improvements. The South Pointe Master Plan identifies 13 neighborhoods for a planned progress program of streetscape improvements. The plan works from eight typologies that include curb bump-outs, tree grates, lighting, shade trees, and what everyone wants to see when they come to Miami—palm trees.

As the city works its way through each neighborhood, citizens help develop a “basis of design” report that identifies designs and applications unique to each neighborhood. The resulting improvements, says Lorber, encourage people to walk by creating safe and comfortable streets for pedestrians and by corralling cars, but also include stormwater and drainage improvements.

While many of these designs take on a particular tropical style, they are also lessons for other communities. Garages that become landmarks and destinations, a continuing commitment to transportation alternatives and trail connections, and streetscape that adds value on every corner don’t need palm trees to be successful. ♦

Claudia Kousoulas is a freelance writer and an urban planner with the Montgomery County Maryland Planning Department, where she blogs on The Straight Line.

Micro-lofts

FROM PAGE 1

businesses, and offices. With a three-story atrium as its spine, the Arcade provided a handsome pedestrian passage between Westminster and Weybosset Streets, in Providence’s diminutive financial district.

Unfortunately, the mix of tenants that arrived in the 1980s didn’t thrive as decades passed. “Walkup second- and third-floor retail in Providence is not economically viable,” says the building’s owner, Evan Granoff. The atrium, though visually appealing, has the disadvantage of occupying much of the building’s space yet not producing needed rental income. “The building has a 20,500 square foot footprint and three stories but only 29,000 square feet of rentable space,” Granoff points out.

When office vacancies rose in the financial district in recent years, the Arcade’s business suffered, so in 2008, Granoff’s company, 130 Westminster Street Associates, emptied the building. Granoff decided the best hope for its future lay in turning the National Historic Landmark into a mixed-use structure that would cater to young urbanites on tight budgets. The crucial element in the \$7 million undertaking was conversion of the upper two floors into mini-housing units. The apartments—for which there’s a long waiting list—are to be occupied beginning this summer. Rents will start at \$550 a month.

AN EXPANDING MARKET NICHE

At the Traditional Building Conference in Norwalk, Connecticut, this spring, J. Michael Abbott, a partner in Northeast Collaborative Architects, which has offices in Providence, Newport, Rhode Island, and Middletown, Connecticut, noted that micro-units are proliferating in North America and around the world. “This is the future,” he told conference-goers. “Everyone is downsizing.”



COURTESY OF NORTHEAST COLLABORATIVE ARCHITECTS

The arcade from the street

In Abbott’s view, tiny apartments are a method to “bring back affordability. Students, service workers, young people could live in the city.”

Steve Durkee, director of development at Cornish Associates, which has been creating apartments in downtown Providence’s old buildings since the early 1990s, agrees. Cornish owns 196 apartments in downtown Providence, and Durkee says they’re 100 percent occupied. But, he points out, they “have a much higher price point” than many people can pay. With micro-units, he says, “you can get younger people who want to live downtown and can’t pay \$1,800 a month.”

Durkee believes micro-lofts will diversify the housing stock and bring new activity into the financial district, which, after the recent emptying out of the 26-story Bank of America building, had become “dead as a doornail.”

James Bennett, the City’s economic development direc-

tor, says the Arcade's apartments "are set up uniquely for the live-work-play lifestyle" that's becoming popular in pedestrian-scale cities. He anticipates that micro lofts will be fitted into other historic downtown buildings once the Arcade is occupied. There's talk of installing mini units in part of the Bank of America tower (known locally as the Superman building, because it resembles the *Daily Planet* building where Clark Kent worked).

"We have a strong educational infrastructure in Providence"—40,000 to 45,000 students in colleges and universities, Granoff says. "If we could create an attractive place for them to live affordably, they could stay and start a business."

The surprise, so far, is that the people putting their names on the waiting list are not all twenty-somethings. "About a third are students," Abbott said.

Roughly another third are young people embarking on their careers; in many cases they're burdened by college debt, yet eager to have an apartment of their own—without a roommate. But there are also other kinds of renters, such as people who want a pied-a-terre in Providence, and companies that want to put their visitors in an apartment rather than a hotel room.

LOW RENTS AND SOCIABLE SPACES

As designed by Northeast Collaborative Architects, 19 units are studios of about 225 square feet. Another 27 units are one-bedroom units—predominantly 300 to 340 square feet, though a few are larger. Also offered are a two-bedroom unit of 900 square feet and a three-bedroom unit of 875 square feet.

Apartment configurations were shaped by massive, load-bearing ma-

sonry walls that would have been difficult to alter. Rather than move walls, the decision was made to let the apartments' dimensions conform to the building's fundamentally "very cell-like" structure, Abbott explained.

For an architect, Abbott said, the process is like designing a yacht. With space extremely tight, almost everything is built in. A typical unit has a built-in sofa, built-in lighting, and a 50-inch TV attached to the wall. Bathrooms measure approximately 5 by 5 feet, including a shower.

Bedrooms are generally seven feet wide, with built-in drawers underneath the bed. For an overnight guest, there's a Murphy bed. Kitchens contain a three-quarter-size refrigerator, a sink, a microwave oven, and an 18-inch-wide dishwasher (to eliminate the clutter of dirty dishes). There is no stove. Presumably occupants will not do much cooking. "We opted for 'rooming-house' zoning

Micro-lofts march across North America

Many cities have recently welcomed mini-apartments. Among them are these:

- San Francisco last year amended its building code to allow apartments as small as 220 sq. ft. (The living room cannot be smaller than 150 sq. ft.) The City is initially allowing 375 micro-apartments to be built, after which the results will be evaluated. The intent is to encourage affordable mini-units in an urban market so heavily in demand that the average rent for a studio has climbed to \$2,100 a month. San Francisco's micro-units aren't very low in price. A four-story building containing 23 micro-apartments of 290 sq. ft was charging rents of \$1,600 a month, said a news report.

- In Boston, approximately 195 mini-units, some as small as 350 square feet, are planned in five building projects in the "Innovation District," a 1,000-acre expanse on a South Boston peninsula. *Curbed Boston* reported in February that in one building, units with no more than 600 square feet were being offered at \$2,299 a month.

In response to criticism of high rents, Paul McMorrow of *The Boston Globe* wrote that "micro-apartments are more expensive to build than conventional apartments," since they contain more walls, wiring, plumbing, and bathroom fixtures than would be needed—per square foot—in larger apartments. He argued that micro-units are a good way to "achieve density without towering height"; a substantial number of micro-lofts can be provided in just a few stories. This density can, in turn, generate street life and economic activity.

- Oregon's state building code allows apartments as tiny as 120 sq. ft.; if there's a bedroom, at least 70 sq. ft. must be added to that minimum. But micro-units arrived in Portland only recently, when the market shifted and financiers started to look favorably on such housing, says Eden Dabbs in the

Portland Bureau of Planning and Sustainability. Some parts of the city do not require off-street parking, she points out; in those areas, developers have been able to offer very small units, at a reduced cost to tenants.

Portland's vacant Everett Hotel, nearly a century old, was converted to Everett Micro-Lofts, with 18 units marketed to people with incomes of \$35,000 to \$40,000 who want to live downtown. The building was promoted as having a perfect Walk Score (100) and a very high Transit Score (92). For \$895 a month, a tenant gets 288 square feet plus utilities and Internet. Freedom Center, in the Pearl District, offers 150 studio apartments of 267 to 385 sq. ft., with rents of \$785 to \$1,050 a month, and includes social areas where residents can relax with other tenants.

- Vancouver, British Columbia, known for expensive real estate, has made way for units as small as 226 sq. ft. "We took a position against these kinds of units 20 years ago, but times have changed," Tom Durning of the Tenant Resource and Advisory Council told Canada's *Globe and Mail*. Some micro-lofts rent for about \$850 a month (Canadian).

- New York City's Mayor Michael Bloomberg last summer announced a competition for the design of a pilot apartment project containing units of 250 to 370 sq. ft. Groundbreaking is expected at the end of 2013 on the winning proposal: 55 units with balconies on East 27th Street in Manhattan. Some units will be income-restricted.

Micro-unit designs from New York and around the world are on display through Sept. 2 in the "Making Room" exhibition at the Museum of the City of New York. The well-received show features a full-size, flexibly furnished micro-studio apartment of 325 square feet—a size, the museum points out, that is prohibited in most sections of the city.

status," not an apartment-house classification, Abbott explained. Rooming-house status allows rooms with small dimensions, but it prohibits stoves.

Though the 225-square-foot studios have a mostly open feeling, the one-bedroom, 275-square-foot apartments are subdivided into three distinct areas: a living area, a kitchen, and a bedroom. One advantage of the three-part division is that a tenant doesn't have to keep the bedroom tidy; it remains out of sight.

On the sides of the building, most of the windows had been filled in over the years. "We reinstalled over 170 windows," which let in abundant light, Granoff says. "They also let a lot of light out of the building." The new brightness should make the Arcade a beacon in the financial district, he says.

No car-parking is included in the rent. A ramp leads to free bicycle parking in the basement—the city's first bike garage.

On the ground floor are common spaces for residents, including a mail area, a laundry area, and a lounge with a flat-screen TV. The hope is that residents will be drawn from their tiny apartments into the illuminated atrium and from there to ground level, where they can spend time with fellow tenants or eat and drink at the three restaurants and cafes the developer is trying to recruit. Abbott foresees "a lot of social interaction" among residents.

DESIGN-ORIENTED SHOPS

Along with three food-service establishments, Granoff hopes to install 17 stores in the ground floor. "It's targeted retail—all design-based, to play on the artistic design strength that is Providence," he says. Roughly 80 percent of the retailers will be small enterprises that already have a location elsewhere in the state. "The others," he says, "are Internet businesses getting their first brick-and-mortar locations."

The stores, like the apartments, will be small—350 to 370 square feet. That will be economical enough—costing about \$1,000 a month, including property taxes—for merchandisers with modest budgets. Yet the revenue reaped by the developer should be the city's highest on a square-foot basis, Abbott predicted.



The living area of one of the Arcade micro-lofts, above, and a floor plan, below



MUNICIPAL AID

The City helped make the project feasible by granting the Arcade "a substantial reduction of property taxes" over about a decade, says Economic Development Director James Bennett. The Arcade (now being marketed as "The Arcade Providence," an inversion of its longtime name) is one of 10 projects in the city that were designated historic and this eligible for tax breaks. In addition, the project qualified for state and federal historic tax credits.

The project was subjected to design

review under the City's Downcity Overlay Zoning District, which was established as a result of Duany Plater-Zyberk & Company's planning work in Providence in the early 1990s. Robert Azar, the City's director of current planning, says the review was unconten- tious, since little alteration was proposed other than installation of windows in positions where they used to be. ♦

Philip Langdon's latest book is The Private Oasis: The Landscape Architecture and Gardens of Edmund Hollander Design.

Minor league ballparks as downtown amenities

Regions Field in Birmingham is a recent example of baseball adding to the appeal of an urban place.

With downtowns coming back and more traditional baseball parks gaining popularity, a number of cities are combining the two trends. The new Regions Field, home of the Double-A Birmingham, Alabama, Barons is contributing to the city's revival.

The \$64 million, 8,500-seat stadium opened in April and two apartment projects with a total of 482 units are in the pipeline on nearby properties. One brew pub expanded adjacent to the park and another is slated to open in 2014. Birmingham-based apparel maker State Traditions recently moved its headquarters into the neighborhood. The stadium was financed by a 3.5 percent increase in the city's hotel tax.

The facility is sited on a very large city block and includes only 250 parking spaces. The rest of the estimated 2,500 spaces needed are located in scattered hospital, university, and county parking lots — underutilized in the evenings and within a 5- or 10-minute walk on city streets. The design, by HKS Inc. of Dallas, and Hoskins Architecture and GA Studio of Birmingham, creates a pedestrian passage that goes through the block, helping connectivity. The stadium hugs the street on two sides and is designed in an industrial steel and brick style, evocative of Birmingham's past.

The nearby development is not necessarily caused by Regions Field, but the ballpark is a catalyst. A feasibility study in 2009 estimated that the facility would bring \$500 million in economic benefit over several decades.

The stadium, which has gotten good reviews from the baseball media, joins other downtown minor league ballparks built and proposed around the country.

Among them are a \$40 million stadium to be built in **downtown El Paso** as part of \$473 million in "quality of life" bonds approved by voters in 2012. The stadium, set to open next year, would move the Tuscon Padres to El Paso. As a result, the city estimates over 600 new jobs and annual spending upward \$18 million from ballpark visitors.

In **Columbia, South Carolina**, Hughes Development Cor-

AutoZone Park, imbedded in an urban neighborhood



COURTESY OF LOONEY RICKS KISS



Regions Field

poration recently acquired 165 acres near downtown for a mixed-use development plan, which includes a new ballpark. While Columbia has no current minor league baseball team, the city hopes that turning the former site of a South Carolina State Hospital mental ward into a bustling live/work/play environment with a state-of-the-art stadium will entice regional teams to consider relocation. A new urban plan was completed for this site in 2005 by Duany Plater-Zyberk & Company, although whether the developer will follow that plan is not clear.

BUILT MODELS

Modern built downtown minor league stadiums include AT&T Field in Chattanooga, Tennessee, AutoZone Park in Memphis, Tennessee, and Coca-Cola Field in Buffalo, New York.

AT&T Field opened in 2000 with a seating capacity of 6,300 for the Chattanooga Lookouts. Baseball writer Joel Mendelson describes the stadium and its impact: "It's within walking distance to the very vibrant downtown district that's home to the Tennessee Aquarium, an abundance of restaurants, parks along the river, and a host of other activities for people of all ages. I haven't been to downtown Chattanooga since I was a kid, and to see the development that's taken place over the last 15 years is astounding."

AutoZone Park is imbedded in the downtown of Memphis, Tennessee, which has a metro population of 1.3 million. The stadium has a capacity 14,300. It opened in 2000, designed by HOK Sport (now Populous) and Looney Ricks Kiss for the Memphis Redbirds. The project was part of a larger mixed-use development plan that included civic spaces.

The Nashville City Paper in 2011 described AutoZone Park as: "A city-assisted investment that baseball and urban enthusiasts say provided a needed jolt to decaying downtown Memphis since its 2000 opening. Condos with spectacular field views flank the outfield walls. A hotel and restaurants occupy previously forgotten real estate. A retail center known as Peabody Place popped up just down the street."

The granddaddy of old-style downtown ballparks is **Coca-Cola Field** (formerly Dunn Tire Park, North AmeriCare Park,

Downtown Ballpark and Pilot Field), an 18,050-seat, 1988 facility in Buffalo, New York. This stadium is credited with starting the trend toward old-style ballparks with a site in the urban fabric of downtown. It is home to the Buffalo Bisons.

When the stadium was built, Buffalo was in the middle of one of the worst declines ever of US major cities. It lost 55 percent of its population. The stadium was built in a somewhat desolate area of downtown, adjacent to a freeway. For a long time, the stadium spurred little revitalization.

Yet Buffalo's downtown has come back in the last 10 years, and the stadium was credited with contributing to that revival. In an article titled "Bisons, stadium remain diamonds for downtown," *Buffalo Business First*, a business journal, said the stadium "has served as a cornerstone of a new wave of downtown development that has included such sports facilities as the Flickinger Center natatorium and HSBC Arena as well as residential units and new commercial properties.

Ballparks appeal to a wide demographic — from creative class types to working class families. Minor league stadiums offer less expensive tickets and concessions that are affordable to most families. These facilities add another layer to downtown culture, which also includes music, theater, food, fine arts, and architecture.

In the case of Birmingham, bringing the Barons downtown is a point of pride for a city that lost its baseball team to nearby Hoover, Alabama, in 1988. Although downtown has benefited from considerable development in the last few years, the city as a whole lost 37 percent of its population since 1960 — including a drain of 30,000 people in 2000-2010.

Although the aforementioned stadiums appear to have had a positive impact, that's not always the case. "Generally, a lot of new ballparks aren't all that great a stimulus because team owners have a singular vision," and because the architects are often don't follow design principles beyond profits

for the owner, says Philip Bess, director of graduate studies at the University of Notre Dame School of Architecture and a baseball stadium expert. "They could actually [create more profit] if they were better urban designers," he says.

Most of the best examples of urban ballparks are historic ones like Fenway in Boston that sit on constrained sites — essentially one typical city block in a dense, urban neighborhood.

While few architects are willing to design within such constraints today, a new ballpark still offers an opportunity to create a plan for the surrounding neighborhood that helps spur revitalization. The ballpark becomes one factor among many that bring energy to the area. One barrier, Bess says, is the parking required for a ballpark, which detracts from a walkable environment. From that standpoint, Single-A and Double-A parks, which require less parking, may offer urban design advantages — especially in cases where parking is shared, like Regions Field. ♦

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Petition seeks change in sprawl-inducing street policy

US Department of Transportation (DOT) officials would consider a change in the way they classify thoroughfares — to the benefit of pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit users — but they need a show of support.

Complete streets are among the most pressing needs for both urban and suburban revitalization — yet efforts to change roads to accommodate all users are stymied daily by road standards determined by the US functional classification system.

Now a petition is circulating that could make the first change in this system in five or six decades. The designations arterial, collector, and local would not change — they are too deeply imbedded in the system. Yet these designations are further divided into rural or urban locations. The petition seeks to add a third location category — suburban.

So what? So the change would have far-reaching implications for communities. It could make smart growth projects easier. It could help boost walking and bicycling, complete streets, and active living.

The petition was launched at The Congress for the New Urbanism in Salt Lake City, on May 30. A week earlier, May 23, new urbanists Rick Hall of Hall Planning & Engineering, Victor Dover of Dover, Kohl & Partners, and John Massengale, architect and urban designer, met with high-level US DOT officials including Beth Osborne, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Transportation Policy. The response was positive. The DOT is

all about promoting livability, complete streets, and multimodal transportation, Osborne told the group. But the DOT needs a petition to show support and overcome inertia because the current system has been in place for so long.

Hall says that more specific standards are needed. Currently, if a thoroughfare is in an “urbanized area,” and is designated “arterial,” one standard applies. Since metro areas are largely suburban, that standard is geared to creating suburban, auto-oriented environments. “Suburban is the default for anything that is urbanized and not rural,” says Hall.

For years, new urbanists have been pushing for more flexibility in the standards with limited success. “I had a realization,” Hall says, “that we need greater specificity rather than flexibility. Flexibility just scares the transportation engineers. People will die, is their worry, if they relax the standards.”

In reality, the higher-speed streets are the deadly ones. Yet the transportation engineers have to stick their necks out every time a “substandard” — read “walkable” — thoroughfare is approved, Hall explains. The engineers become gatekeepers, defeating 60 to 70 percent of plans to create complete streets, Hall estimates.

“When you change to three categories, you become much more specific as to when the different standards can be introduced,” Hall says.

If a place has 100 intersections per square mile, which is the minimum for a walkable neighborhood, plus meets other criteria like mixed-use, the thoroughfare would be designated as “urban,” and urban standards would kick in. The starting point for design would be *Designing Walkable Urban Thoroughfares*, a peer-reviewed recommended practice written by the Institute for Transportation Engineers and CNU.

Existing urban thoroughfares, such as Main Streets and arterials that go through cities, would be easier to retrofit and maintain as complete streets.

Moreover, suburban arterials and collectors could be designated as “future” walkable thoroughfares where official plans support such a transformation. These suburban streets could get funding over time to convert to complete streets under the proposed functional classification system. How important is this? No suburban retrofit will work without complete streets.

The transportation engineer or planner working for the Metropolitan Planning Agency that was a gatekeeper has, with the proposed system, responsibility to learn and administer truly urban standards where appropriate.

These standards tend to reduce speed, but not capacity. “Short of eliminating pedestrians from the side of the road, nothing will lower pedestrian fatalities like lowering speed limits in towns and cities,” Massengale says. “Lower speed limits also mean the urban designer can eliminate from the street the highway-scale signs, bold striping and colored reflectors that work against making places where pedestrians feel comfortable.”

Dover says the change would not be a panacea, but would greatly help smart growth efforts.

This little change, of what Dover calls a “flawed technicality,” could have profound affect on livability and complete streets. Go to www.change.org and search for “United States Department of Transportation: Update Functional Classification System.” ♦

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BOOK REVIEW

Designing Suburban Futures

New Models from Build a Better Burb

By June Williamson

Island Press, 2013, 138 pp., \$35 paperback, \$70 hardcover

REVIEW BY ROBERT STEUTEVILLE

Since June Williamson’s and Ellen Dunham-Jones’s book *Retrofitting Suburbia* was completed in 2008, the number of suburban retrofit projects in their database has risen 475 percent, showing that interest in this subject has not diminished. In 2010, the Build a Better Burb competition was held on Long Island, New York, the winning projects inspiring Williamson’s new book, *Designing Suburban Futures: New Models from Build a Better Burb*.

Designing Suburban Futures has two parts. The first is a concise, pithy, and lucid analysis of how the suburbs came to be and the efforts underway to reform them. The second part is less practical, but I’ll get to that later.

The book is “an urgent response to the documented ecological, environmental, social, and economic problems of the dominant sprawling suburban form,” Williamson writes.

More than 60 percent of the US population — that’s 190 million people — live in the suburbs including 550 “micropolitan areas,” Williamson says. How did so many become attracted to the suburban lifestyle? She traces the suburbanization of America back to the pastoral English ideal promoted in the first half of the 19th Century which influenced leading designers like Frederick Law Olmsted. Streetcar suburbs followed in the late 19th and early 20th Century. They are walkable and mixed-use and have more in common with historic cities and towns than the suburbs of today.

The shift to totally automobile-oriented suburbs came after World War II, supported by federal policies such as “redlining” of existing neighborhoods. The late 20th Century “saw an explosion of nonresidential development in the suburbs, as office jobs and retail decanted out of cities into the expanded metropolitan landscape.” *Designing Sub-*



LONG ISLAND RADICALLY REZONED. FROM DESIGNING SUBURBAN FUTURES. ISLAND PRESS. 2013

From Long Island Radically Rezoned — one of the Build a Better Burb proposals

urban Futures is a hopeful book, written on the premise that sprawl will one day grow into healthy, diverse, culturally rich communities.

Williamson describes many of the tactics for placemaking and promoting diversity and transportation options in the suburbs that have been successfully

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BOOK REVIEW

implemented in recent decades. She doesn't shy away from specific design recommendations that planners may find useful. "Many suburban streets are overly wide and lack comfortable sidewalks and crosswalks. In residential areas within an interconnected street system, an overall right-of-way of 60 feet with 16-foot sidewalk and tree-planting strips on either side of a 28-foot roadway should be sufficient," she notes.

Suburbs that thrive must meet changing market demands. "The future success of suburbs will hinge on the ability of housing markets to be nimble in response to changing demographics," she writes. Suburbs, particularly those where homeowners' associations are ubiquitous, may have a difficult time acting nimbly. To wit: The author's examples of how policymakers are encouraging more housing diversity often come from cities. Seattle has passed a law on allowing widespread accessory units on single-family lots and New York

City is encouraging very small apartments called "micro-units." One hopes to see more suburban municipalities encouraging the construction of diverse housing types.

While this book lacks case studies of built projects — that's the strength of *Retrofitting Suburbia* — many of the best examples of mall retrofits are discussed in some detail, such as Belmar in Lakewood, Colorado, and Mashpee Commons in Mashpee, Massachusetts.

The author recognizes the importance of the New Urbanism in reforms critical to suburban revitalization. As the new urbanists pursued greenfield and infill developments, they encountered substantial obstacles. "However, conventional zoning codes, building and lot regulations, street standards, and developer's practices and pro formas stood in the way and had to be engaged and reformed, a complex, one might say radical, process that is still ongoing."

OBSESSION WITH NOVELTY

The rest of the book focuses on projects submitted to the Build a Better Burb competition. The entries suffer from architects' obsession with novelty and attention-seeking at the expense of the proven and practical.

There is no shortage of more sustainable and resilient communities to learn from, but with a few exceptions the winners bear them little resemblance. As Williamson argues, the suburbs are ill ecologically, economically, and socially. Yet instead of tested cures, the submissions reach for edgy ideas with slick images and cool-sounding names.

One submission uses major infrastructure like roads or underutilized parcels for carbon sequestration. That's fine — but this concept is rendered as a Midwestern-style combine harvesting grain from what is now a parking lot and other startling landscape transformations. What about just planting lots of street trees? These would comfort people on foot, calm traffic and improve safety, reduce health costs from accidents, and raise social capital if volunteer groups do the planting. But humble street trees are less likely to win a design competition than more radical visions.

Another winning project utilizes suburban school bus fleets as mass transit. The designers argue that these fleets are evenly distributed geographically throughout the suburbs and could offer important service — when not carrying kids — that the regular transit system fails to provide. The elementary schools become transit hubs. "The submission is a clever, well-presented value-added response to the problem of intra-suburban transportation," wrote one juror. Except that it is highly unlikely to work. Suburban elementary schools built in the last 30 years are too isolated to be useful as transit hubs. Even if schools could serve that function, school buses are used in the mornings and the better part of the afternoon, when mass transit is most needed.

Those are two of the more practical submissions. A wilder one envisions the obliteration of municipal boundaries on Long Island, replaced by new governments drawn to resemble the spots on a giraffe or butterfly wings. Much of what is now inhabited — we're talking areas

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with hundreds of thousands of people — revert back to nature as current residents presumably abandon their homes, perhaps in migration, to take the overt biological analogy a step further.

The over-valuing of novelty is imbedded in the culture of the architecture profession and arguably is part the problem for the built environment. *Designing Suburban Futures* is targeted at architects who will be attracted to the images of Build a Better Burb. In doing so, they may learn something from Williamson's own ideas, which are well-researched and practical. Serious-minded urbanists and developers might also benefit from this mixture of good sense and oddball schemes. It's good to get exposure to a wide range of thinking and keep a finger on the pulse, for good or ill, of current design culture. ♦

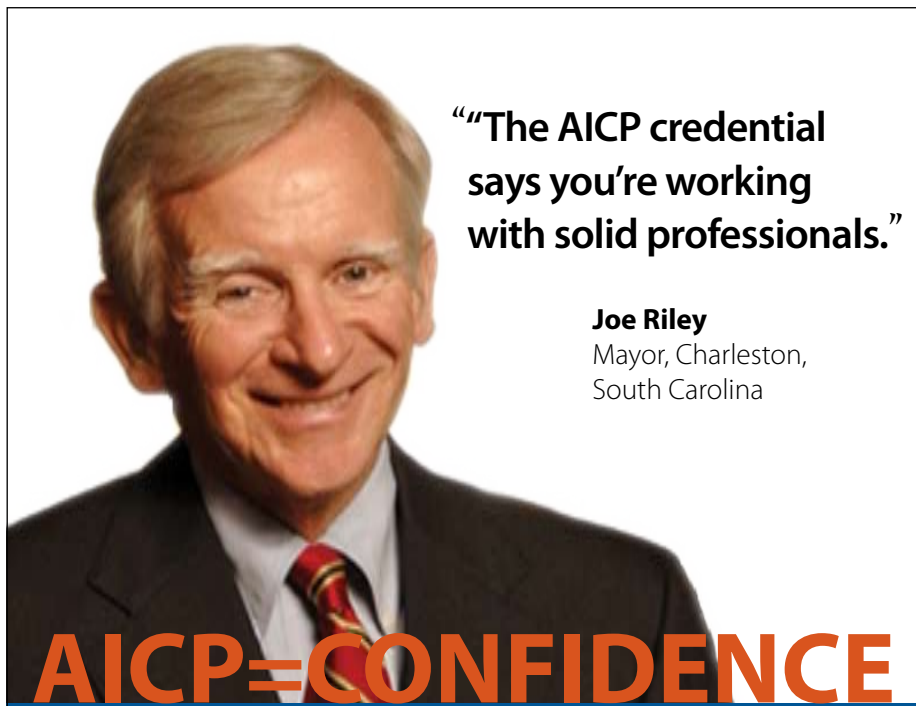
UPDATE



SOURCE: THE NEW YORK TIMES

Dan Gilbert in his office

■ The *New York Times* published a fascinating piece on a billionaire's investment in a two-square-mile area of downtown Detroit. **Dan Gilbert**, worth \$3.5 billion, ironically made his fortune by founding Quicken Loans, a mass production mortgage house that is part of the conventional suburban finance machine. There is no such machine that targets downtowns, a gap that Chris Leinberger and the Congress for the New Urbanism are trying to address, but in the meantime Gilbert is choosing to invest his personal money in mixed-use downtown real estate. Gilbert moved 7,600 employees downtown and has renovated buildings with 80 startup and small companies. While some doubt that central Detroit will thrive, the city's downtown has too many assets — great historic architecture, world-class cultural institutions, medical and academic assets, jobs — to not grow in value given today's demand for



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Photo by Brownie Harris

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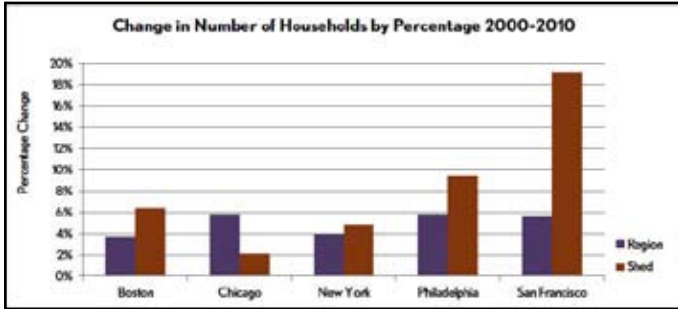
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SOURCE: CENTER FOR NEIGHBORHOOD TECHNOLOGY



urban living.

■ Households grew faster in “transit sheds,” areas within a half-mile of fixed-guideway transit service, than metro regions as a whole from 2000-2010 in four of the five major US transit regions — New York City, Boston, Philadelphia, and San Francisco (see graph above). Only in Chicago did transit sheds grow but not outpace the region, according to a study by the Center for Neighborhood Technology (CNT), “Transit-Oriented Development [TOD] in the Chicago Region,” released in April.

This graph is striking because it shows a strong pattern of household growth in denser, more walkable areas outside of downtown in these cities. In these cities, transit sheds tend to be largely developed — they don’t have vast amounts of greenfields like outer suburbs. Further, most of the last decade included a

great deal of sprawl. Despite these barriers, transit sheds were repopulated through TOD and the reoccupation of older housing stock. This revitalization could go on for several decades, with advantages in existing infrastructure use, reduced driving, and reduced transportation costs for households. CNT argues that investment in transit sheds is essential for “the triple bottom line, or the economic, environmental, and social sustainability of the Chicago Region.”

■ The Brookings Institution reported that “job sprawl” continued in the last decade but slowed after the Great Recession. In 85 percent of the 100 largest metro areas, the share of employment grew 10 to 25 miles from downtown. Meanwhile, only 9 of 100 downtowns saw their regional share of employment rise.

These 9 included many of the largest downtowns, such as New York City, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, the District of Columbia, and San Francisco.

Why are so many jobs located in outer ring suburbs and why did those jobs grow relative to downtown in the previous decade? That’s easy: The outer ring is so much bigger. The area within 3 miles of downtown in the 100 largest metro areas totals 2,826 square miles. The area between 10 and 25 miles of these downtowns amounts to 164,850 square miles — 58 times larger.

So long as that outer-ring area is home to a significant population, jobs there are likely to grow. The real issue is to ensure that

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jobs are being created in transit-oriented, walkable places.

Christopher Leinberger, who also conducts research for Brookings, has reported a rapidly rising share of commercial development — especially office buildings — in walkable urban places in the DC area over the last two decades. This trend has been especially pronounced since 2009. Most of these walkable urban places are in the suburbs.

■ **Multifamily properties with sustainability features have a significantly lower risk of mortgage default.** That's the conclusion of a May 2013 report, "The Effect of Transportation, Location, and Affordability Related Sustainability Features on

Mortgage Default Prediction and Risk in Multifamily Rental Housing," by Professor Gary Pivo, which is available from Fannie Mae, Laurence Aurbach writes on *pedshed.net*, also published on *Better! Cities & Towns* online. Pivo looked at the following variables and found the following relationships:

- Commute time: Every 10-minute increase in average commute time increased the risk of default by 45 percent.
- Rail commute: Where at least 30 percent of the residents took a subway or elevated train to work, the risk of default decreased by 64.4 percent. New York City was omitted from this

CONTINUED ON PAGE 24

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A design for a Rwandan village responds to challenging terrain.

Kigali, Lower East Side plans top Charter Awards

A student project to radically rethink housing projects on New York’s Lower East Side and a holistic approach to a Rwandan village took top honors at the **2013 CNU Charter Awards**, announced May 29th at CNU 21 in Salt Lake City. The Charter Awards are the global award for excellence in urban design. Winners were selected by a top-notch team of new urbanists including Shelley Poticha, director of the Office of Sustainable Housing and Communities at HUD; V. Fei Tsen, chairperson of Chinatown Community Development Center in San Francisco; and jury chair Doug Farr, founding principal of Farr Associates.

The jury praised the Rwanda project, designed by the University of Arkansas Community Design Center, for the way it approached a challenging terrain. “The landscape prohibited a simple block format,” explained architect and jury member Vanessa September, who is also a resident of Africa. “So they were very creative and innovative in the way they took that form and rolled it over the landscape of Kigali.” The frames of the buildings are designed to be modular, with modules that can be arranged and modified to fit the needs of the users. It also provides general tactics for hillside development applicable to the city as a whole.

The student grand prize winner is a design by University of California Berkeley student Momin Mohammad. The proposal seeks to take advantage of unused development rights on existing NYC Housing Authority properties. But rather than fully tearing down and redeveloping the existing buildings, Mohammad’s approach readapts dysfunctional mid-century modern public housing sites into the urban fabric, resulting in no displacement and an increase in the overall housing stock. In his analysis, Mohammad found that while almost 82 percent of the project area is currently covered with open space, just under

10 percent is functional. Mohammad’s proposal is to artfully re-extend the city’s grid through those spaces, leaving room for new buildings and additions that engage the street. “The strength of this project, to my mind, is that it really dug into the new urbanist kit of street types,” said juror Mike Lydon. “And they understood how to apply them in a way that made sense.”

Other winners included Torti Gallas & Partners, Opticos Design, Sottile and Sottile, Goody Clancy, Mithun and DPZ. For a full list, you may download a copy of the 2013 Charter Awards book at www.cnu.org/resources/publications. ♦



A plan by Momin Mohammad readapts dysfunctional 20th Century housing projects on the Lower East Side.

Putting the brakes on the Orlando-Casselberry flyover

At the intersection of US 17-92 and S.R. 436 in the City of Casselberry, just outside of Orlando, the Florida Department of Transportation is slated to construct a flyover bridge, which it says will alleviate congestion. Over the past several years, the state has poured tens of millions of dollars into acquiring adjacent land. And finally this September, the construction crews are coming in.

Richard Birdoff, President of RD Management in New York and owner of the Orlando Jai-Alai Fronton as well as more than 50 acres of developable land nearby the proposed flyover, sees the situation differently. "Flyovers are rarely constructed where there is economic wealth and development, and they tend to cause blight and have a chilling effect on economic development and property values," he states. "All you have to do is go down the road three miles to the flyover that was built at the intersection of 50 and 436 and you can see the detrimental impact it has had on the local retailers."

Former Casselberry Commissioner Jon Miller disagrees. Last year in the *Orlando Sentinel*, Miller said that the flyover would be a catalyst for economic growth. He also promised that the structure would be attractive – like "something you would see at Disney."

Research is on Birdoff's side — building more roads and bridges does not bring more visitors. What they bring is more congestion. CNU President John Norquist, who in April spoke with a group of more than 200 in Casselberry rallying against the DOT's proposal, puts it more bluntly: "Does Casselberry want to be a destination or just a great place you drive a truck through?"

THE ALTERNATIVE

Birdoff has done an impressive job of leading the charge against the flyover, hiring firms to conduct studies of alternatives and to look at the actual need.

Pages 22 and 23 are provided to Better! Cities & Towns courtesy of the Congress for the New Urbanism, The Marquette Building, 140 S. Dearborn, Ste. 404, Chicago, IL 60603. 312/551-7300; fax: 312/346-3323. www.cnu.org, cnuinfo@cnu.org

One such alternative, a "boulevard" concept, will not only improve the movement of traffic at the intersection but will also enhance economic development, increase tax rates and property values, and create jobs. The cost of the "boulevard" alternative is also \$10 million less expensive than the flyover.

What's more, the traffic at the location has actually diminished since the plan was launched back in the early 2000s, from a peak of 8,930 vehicles to 7,964, in 2012.

The situation in Orlando represents a national dichotomy in transportation planning. Transportation engineers and planners are still taught that speed is good, and that cities should have high-speed freeways bisecting them and cutting through neighborhoods. But some local, regional, and state transportation departments are embracing alternative models to the highway model (e.g., San Francisco and Portland) that leave the

vital density of cities intact.

Some have argued that it's simply too late to stop the flyover from going up. The July deadline is nigh. Much money has already been spent. But Birdoff's focused attack has had an impact: The DOT has come around to the boulevard alternative. "They basically told me, 'If you can get local support for the boulevard plan, we're willing to consider not doing the flyover and move ahead with the at-grade improvement.' The alternative would use all of the right-of-way that the DOT has already claimed, so no money will have been wasted."

A decision by the Casselberry Commission is imminent — it is on the agenda for their next meeting, in June.

"I hope the Casselberry commissioners have the courage to change direction and support the Boulevard plan," says CNU President John Norquist. "If you really want jobs and economic development, putting in new freeways is the wrong way to go. Just because a decision made over ten years ago seemed appropriate at the time, it doesn't mean we should be locked into it if better alternatives are now available." ♦

Bringing walkable urban thoroughfares to Twinsburg, Ohio

On April 26, CNU hosted a technical assistance workshop aimed at guiding future development and design in the City of Twinsburg, Ohio, and highlighting the *Designing Walkable Urban Thoroughfares* manual as a tool for achieving that vision. The workshop was led by CNU President John Norquist, Board Member Marcy McInelly, and transportation engineer Lucy Gibson of Dubois & King in Vermont, and put on with the support of numerous others.

The City of Twinsburg is currently in the process of updating its Comprehensive Plan. The city is seeking recommendations to serve as a basis for redevelopment of its city center and several key corridors, emphasizing walkability and preservation of historic character.

In 2009, the city lost its largest employer — a Chrysler stamping plant — but recently gained a LEED-certified Regional Academic Center for Kent State University. The city continues to see development pressure near its his-

toric center, and has put a number of initiatives in place to ensure that future development is livable, sustainable, and adds value.

Director of Community Planning and Development Larry Finch commented: "[The workshop] was one of timely importance to the city and to others in our region. The CNU staff and their consultants provided a great introduction to the subject and encouraged the attendees to look at streets in a more holistic, inclusive, and context sensitive manner. The afternoon work group sessions encouraged creative ideas that will be considered as we proceed through the process of developing the City's comprehensive plan."

The Twinsburg workshop was funded in part by the US EPA's Building Blocks for Sustainable Communities Program, via a grant to the Project for Public Spaces (PPS). CNU provided assistance as part of their Partnership in Livability Solutions. Materials from the workshop will be made available at www.cnu.org/streets/twinsburg. ♦

UPDATE

FROM PAGE 21

calculation because it skewed the results.

- Walk commute: Every increase of 5 percentage points in the percent of residents who walk to work decreased the risk of default by 15 percent.
- Retail presence: Where there were at least 16 retail establishments nearby, the risk of default decreased by 34.4 percent.
- Affordability: For properties with some units required to be affordable, the risk of default decreased by 61.9 percent.
- Freeway presence: Where properties were within 1,000 feet of a freeway, the risk of default increased by 59 percent.
- Park presence: Where properties were located within 1 mile of a protected area, the risk of default decreased by 32.5 percent.

All of the sustainability variables in this study are based on existing datasets provided by the Census Bureau and other agencies. Multifamily lenders can mitigate risk by gearing their portfolios toward more sustainable properties. Moreover, lenders can offer favorable financial terms to more sustainable properties without increasing risk, Pivo says.

■ The Obama administration nominated Charlotte, NC, mayor **Anthony Foxx** this week to fill the big shoes of outgoing transportation secretary and livability champion Ray LaHood. Some have speculated that Foxx is likely to follow the administration's line on transportation, which has generally been positive for alternative transportation. Foxx supported a light rail expansion and plans for a bigger streetcar system as

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mayor. He launched a bike-share program. On the other hand, he also spearheaded some big highway projects like the completion of a 60-mile beltway.

■ Three new board members were elected to the Congress for the New Urbanism in June. They were **Erin Christensen**, **Chris Elisara**, and **Ken Voigt**. Christensen, an architect and urban designer, is an associate principal at Mithun based in Seattle, Washington. Elisara is an independent film producer and communications professional whose firm First+Main Media is based in Julian, California. Ken Voigt is a transportation engineer with Ayres Associates based in Brookfield, Wisconsin. ♦

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