

CITIES & TOWNS

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

SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 2013—VOLUME 2, NUMBER 6

The ultimate 'car city' seeks change

Phoenix pins its hopes on transit-oriented development along the light rail line.

Phoenix is the lowest density, most-spread out large city in the US, with 1.4 million people on 516 square miles, or about 2,800 people per square mile. The metro area, with 4.2 million residents, is even more sprawling.

The oppressive heat and car-oriented infrastructure makes Phoenix one of the least walkable, bikable, and transit-connected cities in the US.

The lack of connections is costly. Last year's *Losing Ground* report from the Center for Neighborhood Technology rated the Phoenix area one of the worst for combined housing and transportation costs. Moderate-income families spend 62 percent of their income on those expenses — half on housing and half on transportation.

While this overall picture will not change soon, significant parts of Phoenix along a 20-mile-long light rail line are poised for redevelopment on a more human scale. The goal of Reinvent Phoenix, a project funded by a \$2.9 million US Housing and Urban Development Sustainable Communities grant, is to convert the station areas of the five-year-old transit system to more compact neighborhoods.

Light-rail ridership is on the rise in Phoenix — it climbed 5.4 percent to 14,286,093 in the most recent fiscal year.

The light rail system is divided into five districts — each of which is getting a plan — outside of downtown. The largest, the 3.9-square-mile Gateway District just north of the airport, includes many low-density industrial and commercial areas as well as residential neighborhoods and three light rail stations.

Relative to the city and metro region as a whole, the Gateway District is tiny. But its plentiful supply of vacant and underutilized properties allows for huge development opportunities, as shown in the plan on page 5 produced from a charrette led by Duany Plater-Zyberk & Company (DPZ). The team included urban designers, civil and transportation engineers, and economic and market consultants.

SEE 'PHOENIX' ON PAGE 5

A park on Main Street in Kentlands, an influential new urbanist community in Gaithersburg, Maryland, that was planned 25 years ago. See page 8 for an article on the impact of New Urbanism.



The suburban era is over

The End of the Suburbs: Where the American Dream is Moving, a book by Leigh Gallagher, Portfolio/Penguin, 2013, 261 pp., \$25.95 hardcover

REVIEW BY PHILIP LANGDON

It was only two decades ago that suburbs became home to the majority of Americans. But now Leigh Gallagher, an assistant managing editor at *Fortune* magazine, is proclaiming “the end of the suburbs.”

Plainly, Gallagher doesn't mean that suburbs are disappearing. What she sees is that the *ideal* of settling in a low-density residential setting, one where you get into a car to reach stores, restaurants, employment, and most other elements of daily life, has lost much of its luster: “Simply speaking, more and more Americans don't want to live there anymore.”

The financial crisis of 2008 hurt outlying communities. “In the wake of the Great Recession, housing values have held up far better in cities than in suburbs, a reversal from the way things normally work,” says Gallagher. In 2011, “for the first time in a hundred years,” the rate of growth at the suburban fringe was less than that of the urban core, she reports.

The economic turmoil of the last five years is not the only reason for the change in popular sentiment. For the most part, the financial crisis and the bursting of the real estate bubble strengthened a trend that was already well under way. Commuting costs had been shooting up for some time. “In 2003, the average suburban household spent \$1,422 on gasoline,” Gallagher notes. “By 2008, that had risen to nearly \$3,000.” She notes: “Many suburban families now spend half their income on

SEE 'END OF SUBURBS' ON PAGE 4

BETTER!
CITIES&TOWNS

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CONTENTS

Volume 2, No. 6, September-October 2013

The ultimate car city seeks change, Page 1, *The end of the suburban era*, Page 1, *Who wants the towers back?* Page 2, *Upward mobility linked to walkability*, Page 3, *500 complete streets policies*, Page 4, *Health in TODs*, Page 7, *New Urbanism still on cutting edge*, Page 8, *Another look at Seaside and Kentlands*, Page 9, *The broad appeal of per-acre tax evaluation*, Page 10, *Beyond resilience*, Page 12, *Report calls for broad real estate reforms*, Page 14, *Hamburg, NY*, Page 15, *Reviews*, Page 16, 18-19; *Overcoming barriers to TOD*, Page 17, *Is starchitecture compatible with New Urbanism?*, Page 18, *New Urban Update*, Pages 20-21, 24, *CNU Update*, Pages 22-23

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COMMENTARY

Who wants the towers back?

ROBERT STEUTEVILLE

In the 1990s, when US high-rise public housing projects were torn down, the demolitions were generally met with relief and celebration. News coverage in the 1980s and early 1990s, including *The New York Times* piece “What it’s like to be in hell,” about the Henry Horner Homes in Chicago, had seared the atrocious living conditions into the public consciousness.

It’s no exaggeration to say that, at the time, high-rise public housing projects were the most dangerous urban places since national crime records had been kept.

US Housing and Urban Development’s HOPE VI program, launched in the 1990s, funded demolition and redevelopment. With help from new urbanist designers, the projects were replaced with “sensible, straightforward, sometimes even beautiful neighborhoods, the kind that used to be the basic fabric of American cities,” notes architect Dan Solomon in his book *Global City Blues*.

More recent backlash against HOPE VI, notably “Where have all the towers gone? The Dismantling of Public Housing in US Cities,” in the *Journal of Urban Affairs*, argues that the poor were evacuated to make way for gentrification. The author, University of Minnesota professor Edward Goetz, compares HOPE VI to 1950s urban renewal.

Certainly HOPE VI resulted in substantial displacement. According to the book *From Despair to Hope*, 72,000 residents of public housing were temporarily or permanently displaced. Only two-thirds of the demolished units were replaced under HOPE VI (instead, substantial market rate housing was built). Former residents who did not find a place in the HOPE VI neighborhoods were usually given Section 8 vouchers.

Goetz argues that most residents ended up in poor neighborhoods with crime problems. Nevertheless, a survey of residents of the former projects found that 85 percent said their current home is equal to or better than their previous home.

The evidence is strong that conditions have improved in the HOPE VI developments and surrounding neighborhoods for the long-term. Crime is down dramatically, housing values are way up, and education, employment, and rates of out-of-wedlock births are improved. “Net public welfare benefits over the thirty-year life of a HOPE VI project — the net aggregate wealth created for society — are estimated to be in the tens of millions of dollars” for each project, notes Margery Austin Turner of the Urban Institute.

THE NOTORIOUS CHICAGO PROJECTS

Chicago removed by far the most public housing units under HOPE VI. “Chicago built some of the most sterile and dangerous public housing towers,” notes John Norquist, CEO of the Congress for the New Urbanism and former Milwaukee mayor.

Henry Horner, Robert Taylor, Cabrini Green, Ida B. Wells, Stateway Gardens, and other notorious Chicago projects were torn down. A recent analysis of crime in Chicago shows that the police districts that included Cabrini Green and Henry Horner Homes saw a 70 to 79 percent drop in crime. The district that had Robert Taylor Homes, Stateway Gardens, and Ida B. Wells benefited from a 40 to 49 percent drop in crime.

There have been problems with HOPE VI in Chicago, notably long delays in the redevelopment of areas where the towers once stood — especially the State Street corridor with Taylor, Stateway Gardens, and Ida B. Wells.

Unlike the 1950s urban renewal programs, HOPE VI demolished only publicly owned buildings, most at the end of whatever useful life they had. The public viewed the most severely distressed projects as unworthy of public financial support. Getting rid of those towers cleared the way for a great deal of revitalization — in some cases gentrification. The area around the former Cabrini Green is now one of the richest in Chicago, an outcome that would have been unimaginable two decades ago.

“Overall I would say Hope VI has been a benefit to Chicago and its public housing population, but you could argue that in the case of Cabrini Green its greatest beneficiaries were adjacent property owners not the Cabrini tenants,” says Norquist.

Nevertheless, it would be hard to find anyone who would choose to rebuild the old Cabrini Green today. The warehousing of the poor in projects with indefensible public spaces was a historic policy mistake that cities are not likely to forget. ♦

Upward mobility linked to walkability

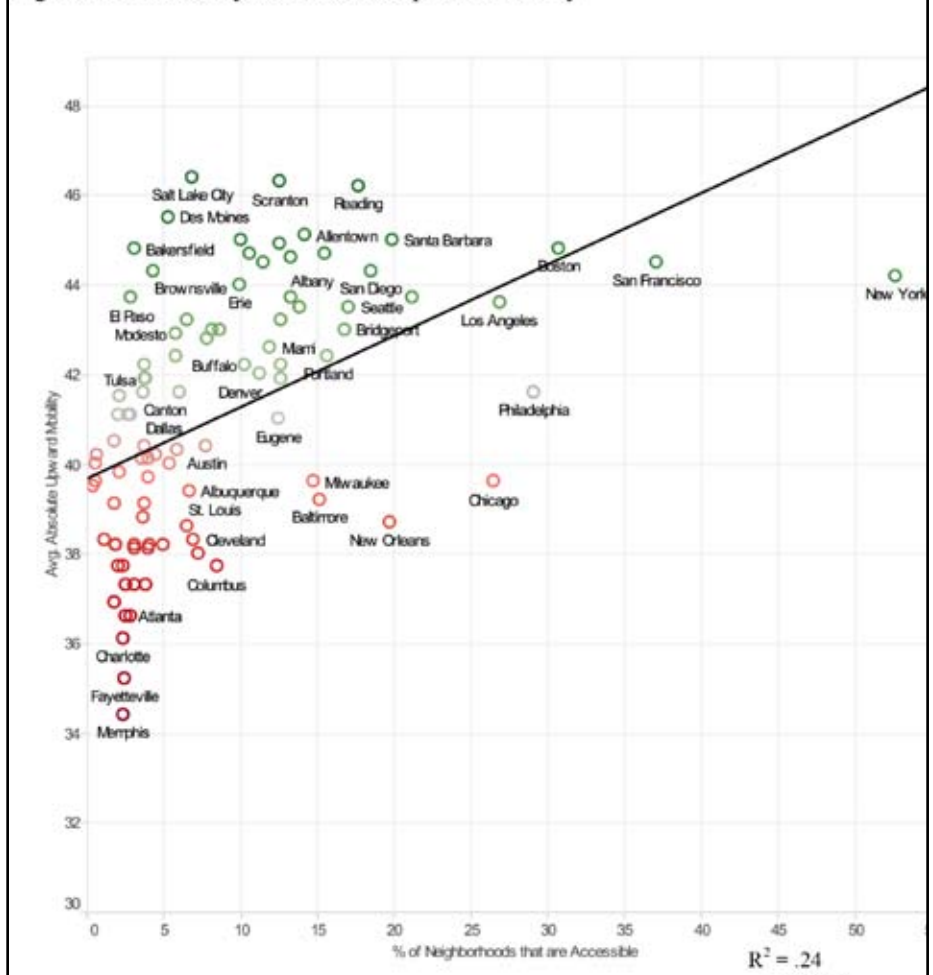
Upward mobility is strongly correlated with compact, walkable communities — largely in cities but also in suburbs. Low economic mobility is associated with conventional “drive-only” suburbs, according to new data from Arizona State University researchers that builds on a recent study by the Equality of Opportunity Project (EOP).

The EOP study indicated that sprawling metros such as Atlanta, Charlotte, Indianapolis, and Detroit fared poorly in terms of intergenerational income mobility compared to more connected metro areas with higher densities. In a high-profile *The New York Times* column “Stranded by Sprawl,” economist Paul Krugman theorized that suburban sprawl inhibits job access for young people from low-income households. “Sprawl may be killing Horatio Alger,” he wrote.

In order to test that theory, ASU researchers Emily Talen and Julia Koschinsky examined Walk Scores for 174,186 neighborhood block groups in 359 metro areas included in the EOP study. The researchers had been working for two years on a project involving Walk Scores for block groups — so they had the data in hand.

Walk Score (walkscore.com) is a mea-

Figure 2. Accessibility vs. Absolute Upward Mobility



Cities with a high “accessibility” index also score well on absolute upward mobility.

sure from zero to 100 of accessibility of amenities such as grocery stores, businesses, parks, and schools, to residential

units and the street network. It is one of a handful of nationally available data

SEE ‘UPWARD MOBILITY’ ON PAGE 7

500 complete streets policies approved

The public demand for “complete streets” remains strong as the 500th policy at the state and local level throughout the US was recently enacted, the National Complete Streets Coalition reports.

The Coalition, a program of Smart Growth America (SGA), will mark the adoption of the country’s 500th Complete Streets policy with an event “celebrating communities across the nation that have committed to building safer, more accessible streets for all road users,” according to a statement from the Coalition and SGA.

“I am emboldened by the fact that over 500 Complete Streets Policies have

been adopted in the United States,” said Gabe Klein, Commissioner, Chicago Department of Transportation and National Association of City Transportation Officials Board Member. “Incorporating these progressive policies into practice is crucial to sustaining manageable and equitable growth. More municipalities embracing Complete Streets ensures a safer and healthier future for citizens of all ages and abilities.”

The 500th policy celebration comes just weeks after the introduction of the Safe Streets Act of 2013, which would require states and regional planning agencies develop complete streets policies for federally funded projects within

two years.

“The adoption of over 500 Complete Streets policies by localities, regions and states proves that communities across the country are dedicated to making sure our streets are safe for all users. When these commonsense policies are implemented everyone benefits—pedestrians, bikers, the disabled and the elderly—and it is inspiring to see such a groundswell of support,” said Congresswoman Doris Matsui (D-CA), who co-sponsored the Safe Streets Act along with Congressman David Joyce (R-OH).

“Cities and states have been leading the way, but now it is time for the federal government to step up and show that it, too, is committed to the safety of our streets and to preventing needless and avoidable tragedies,” said Matsui. ♦

End of Suburbs

FROM PAGE 1

housing and transportation costs.”

Also, suburbs have become less and less exempt from problems such as crime, poverty, and vacant stores. “The overall poverty rate is still lower in the suburbs than in the cities,” Gallagher reports, but “the suburbs are now home to the largest and fastest-growing poor population in the country.” Homicides and drug and gang activity have increased in suburbs even as homicides have fallen sharply in cities.

What is the purpose of a suburb? For several decades, suburbs were “built for life with kids,” Gallagher observes, “and we’re not having nearly as many of them.” Families with children, she says, “used to make up more than half of U.S. households, but by 2025 they’ll represent just a quarter, and, strikingly, we’ll have as many single-person households as families.”

Gallagher functions in this, her first book, primarily as a reporter, and a very thorough one. She has read, visited, or listened to many of the leading figures in the New Urbanism, smart growth, and small-house movements, among them Andres Duany, Diane Dorney, Sarah Susanka, Christopher Leinberger, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, Jeff Speck, Charles Marohn, Arthur C. Nelson, Scott Bernstein, Peter Calthorpe, Joe Cortright, Jonathan Rose, and James Howard Kunstler. Much of what she conveys has been reported over the past several years in *New Urban News/Better! Cities & Towns*. The great virtue of her book is that it brings so much salient information together in a single vigorous and up-to-the minute account.

Gallagher grew up in Media, Pennsylvania—a Philadelphia suburb that has many of the virtues of traditional pre-war town design—and she offers fond recollections of how her hometown made life satisfying for people there. She now lives in Manhattan’s West Village, a part of New York that influenced Jane Jacobs’s incisive thinking about community design.

DOWN WITH DRIVING, UP WITH WALKING

A great transformation is now under way, Gallagher believes. A chief component of this transformation is a decline



Above, Scarsdale, New York, an early suburb. Below, the new urban School Street Neighborhood built by John McLindon in Libertyville, Illinois.



in the desire to get around by car and a rise in the desire to have most of the armature of everyday life within walking distance. “I think we’re going to get out of the car because it doesn’t make any social sense,” Gallagher quotes Eric Dumbaugh, a transportation engineer at Florida Atlantic University, as saying. “There’s a cultural shift going on right now, and I think that ... is going to be the game changer.”

Automobile-dependent suburbs have lost the loyalty and affection of much of the younger generation. Who wants to drive? In 1980, Gallagher points out, “66 percent of all seventeen-year-olds had their driver’s license; by 2010, that had dropped to 47 percent, despite the huge swell in the population of millennials.” The average American aged 16 to 34 drove 23 percent fewer miles in 2009 than the average young person in 2001, Gallagher says.

Though millennials have an appetite

for urbanism, this doesn’t mean that all of them insist on living in central cities. “The right urbanized suburbs will do the trick just fine for many in this generation,” she says. Close-in suburbs with walkable business districts not far from pleasant streets of houses and apartments are benefiting from this trend, and will continue to do so.

Gallagher cites a Brookings Institution study of metropolitan Washington, DC, which found that “each step up a five-step scale of walkability—measured by factoring in things like density, pedestrian amenities, personal safety, and proximity of needs—added \$9 per square foot to annual office rents, \$7 per square foot to retail rents, more than \$300 per month to apartment rents, and nearly \$82 per square foot to home values.”

“Even when millennials do set out on their own—and they certainly will eventually—by most accounts, they’re

PHOTO BY NANCY MCLINDON. PUBLISHED IN THE END OF THE SUBURBS

PHOTO BY MICHELLE WOLFE. PUBLISHED IN THE END OF THE SUBURBS

not going to be the least bit interested in the conventional, car-dependent suburbs most of them grew up in," Gallagher says; "...every time they are asked about housing preferences, their answers are the same: they want to be in urban areas and they're not that interested in owning a car."

The new state of affairs is causing homebuilders to undertake less of the

development they used to produce and to introduce a more urban kind of product. "Nearly every major builder these days is working on some effort to effectively urbanize the suburbs," Gallagher says.

The End of the Suburbs is an authoritative account of a "slow-burning revolution, a realignment of our social priorities," that is pushing residential

development "away from distance and toward proximity," she writes. We should welcome both that trend and this book. ♦

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

Phoenix

FROM PAGE 1

Redevelopment areas include a proposed large traditional neighborhood development of 24 blocks and many other smaller infill sites, especially along commercial corridors.

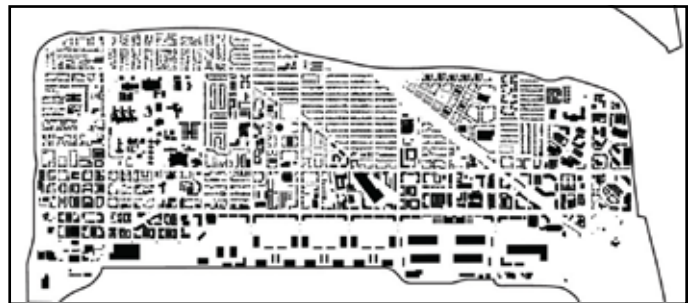
In addition to the light rail stations, the district already includes patches of residential neighborhoods with connected, walkable streets and affordable housing. Yet existing residents have nowhere to walk or bicycle to.

Like most of Phoenix, the commercial streets are oversized and many of the blocks are too large for walking. Mixed-use, fine-grained, urban fabric is lacking and many of the amenities that make walking pleasant — like street trees, on-street parking, buildings that front the sidewalk — are in short supply. About 90 percent of the street frontages in Gateway are categorized as "neutral" or "worse" in terms of walkability — including most of the arterials like Van Buren Street.

Van Buren traverses the district from east to west and is targeted for revitalization. This once-bustling thoroughfare was never very walkable, but it was lively — home to as many as 200 motor courts and hotels in the mid-20th Century. These were independent establishments with lively neon signs — not the homogenized chain motels of today. Van Buren fell victim to Interstate highways that stole the affluent traffic, changing demographics, and sprawl. "More than a hundred



Figure ground drawings show the current gaps in the urban fabric, above, and how they could be filled in by new development, below.



years after the city was founded, our former main drag is lately just a drag — and has been for nearly half a century," writes the *Phoenix New Times*. Thirty miles long, three of the

Potential development in the Gateway District, below, includes industrial (at bottom, near the airport), mixed-use and commercial (red and pink), and multifamily and single-family residential.



miles located in Gateway, Van Buren is an important commercial corridor even in its run-down state. Many believe that Van Buren offers significant potential for mixed-use, compact development.

Because of Van Buren's potential, the plan calls for streetscape improvements here and on critical cross-streets first. New residential development would occur within a half mile of light rail stations, which are situated along Washington Street, a quarter mile to the south. Most Gateway residents must drive to reach these stations, because the alternative is to walk a mile or more on roads with bad frontages.

Phoenix's so-called "Grand Canal" flows through a portion of the district and under Van Buren on a diagonal, but it is currently a utilitarian waterway. Planners envision a mixed-use waterfront with connections to new residential neighborhoods.

Imagining the Gateway District as a walkable place is "ambitious and radical, but also realistically builds upon the existing actual potential of the district," says Galina Tachieva, the project manager for DPZ.

The report envisions the area as a bustling urban community by 2040. Beyond the plans for the Van Buren corridor and the Grand Canal, a series of ideas are proposed, many of which will be applicable to the other districts:

- Leverage the light rail to support higher-density, mixed-use, walkable development — including many new homes — near the stops. A fourth light rail station is proposed. Station areas are conceived as a "Connected Oasis," i.e. "a necklace of compact urban villages."
- Create a pedestrian-priority street network that is entirely lacking now. This plan includes converting major thoroughfares throughout the district into "complete streets."
- Revive a tradition from the first half of the 20th Century of Phoenix being "A City of Gardens and Trees" through ample and appropriate landscaping.
- Create a long-term vision for the urban interface between Gateway and Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport, which abuts the Gateway District to the south. The airport is about a half mile from the light rail.
- Create an innovative infrastructure financing toolkit that will bring together planning and economics.



IMAGE BY STEVE PRICE URBAN ADVANTAGE

A vision for the redevelopment of Van Buren Street, above, with shade trees and bike lanes. Below, uninviting Van Buren as it looks today.



- Apply "sprawl repair" strategies within the areas of Gateway and the city where car-dependent, fragmented single-use suburban patterns have been introduced (almost everywhere).
- Create a new "walkable urban code" using the framework of the SmartCode and the methodology of the Transect.
- Provide residents with more access to food by encouraging the development of food stores and farmers' markets in the district.
- Maintain housing affordability in existing neighborhoods.
- Improve access to parks.
- Facilitate employment opportunities near the light rail stations.

If collaboration between nonprofits, for-profit businesses, and governments can make this plan a reality, the The Sustainable Communities Collaborative (SCC) is a good start. The SCC has organized 35 partners to catalyze development along the Valley Metro light rail. SCC was launched in 2011 with a \$20 million private investment from Local Initiatives Support Corporation and Raza Development Fund.

"In just the past two years, during one of Arizona's worst economic periods of the last century, we've invested \$12 million in 13 developments that are leveraging" \$141 million in private investment, says Shannon Scutari, the director. ♦

Making health a priority for transit-oriented development

Saint Luke's Health Initiative (SLHI), a nonprofit organization with a mission to promote public health, is a partner in Phoenix's transit-oriented district planning project. Saint Luke's conducted extensive field studies in Gateway related to health and safety issues for this report.

GIS mapping tools were used to document accident data, access to food, and neighborhood assets and liabilities. In addition, SLHI interviewed residents in "community health workshops."

SLHI highlights three primary health-related issues to be addressed by the planning district: Access to healthy food, access to parks and recreation, and safe streets/public transportation.

Food access

Gateway currently has only one supermarket, and two other food outlets that accept vouchers from the federal Women's Infants and Children program (WIC). Further, only 3 percent of residents live within a five-minute walk of the supermarket. There are no community based food options such as farmers' markets and community gardens. Ninety-one percent of Gateway residents use a car to access food.

Recreation

Studies show that people who live close to a park exercise more, which has a direct impact on health. Gateway, which has a population of a small town and covers nearly four square miles, has only one public park and one school playground that is open to the public. The playground is heavily used but has limited hours.

The Grand Canal trail is used by some residents, but a lack of connectivity to the neighborhood limits the level of use. The level of use is not only related to distance and accessibility, but also to

having a sense of safety while in the park, SLHI points out.

Streets and public transportation

The relationship between walking and health in the district was analyzed through four "lenses":

- Community identified walking hazards
- Street audits
- Analysis of pedestrian and cyclist injuries
- Thermal comfort - sidewalk temperatures

Residents also expressed concerns about the lack of extended hours, high cost, and inconvenient locations of public transportation stops, which create deterrents to transit use.

The negative impact of the heat island effect was confirmed through temperature analyses along thoroughfares and sidewalks. The report stressed the importance of providing shade along sidewalks and bus stops in order to increase pedestrian activity and transit use.

Plan response

Sites have been proposed for additional food outlets ranging from a new centrally located supermarket at Van Buren and 32nd Street, to locations for farmers' markets and community gardens.

New parks are proposed that offer a wide range of active and passive recreational opportunities. In addition, the proposed Grand Canal greenway extends these opportunities to the regions beyond Gateway and enhances the bike and pedestrian transportation options.

The report addresses mobility concerns raised by the health team. Proposed street sections address pedestrian safety, shading, and bike facilities. Recommendations for an increased level of bus service would better connect the community to the Metro Rail system.

Upward mobility

FROM PAGE 3

sources that serves as a proxy for sprawl or connected neighborhoods.

High Walk Scores don't necessarily require high density. My house in a single-family neighborhood has a Walk Score of 77, or "very walkable." Some suburbs achieve high walkability — these can be distinguished from disconnected, spread-out suburbs that are accessible only by automobile. Drive-only suburbs tend to have Walk Scores below 50, categorized as "car-dependent." In the middle are somewhat walkable places with scores from 50-69.

For the purposes of their analysis, Talen and Koschinsky termed Walk Scores 70 and above as "accessible," and

69 and below "not accessible." Every metro region has "accessible" neighborhoods, and some metros boast many hundreds of them. Yet the vast majority (82 percent) of US metropolitan land is not accessible, the researchers note.

Talen and Koschinsky find strong correlations between accessible areas and high income mobility. The measures of absolute mobility, relative mobility, and the odds of reaching the top fifth income category from the bottom fifth all steeply point in that direction (see graph on page 3). A child born to the bottom fifth income group in a walkable neighborhood has a much better chance of becoming financially prosperous than a poor child born in a non-accessible area. "Our results lend support to Dr. Krugman's hypothesis," they say.

"The apparent inverse relationship between sprawl and social mobility obviously reinforces the case for 'smart growth' urban strategies, which try to promote compact centers with access to public transit," notes Krugman.

The ASU research also makes Joel Kotkin, a nationally known geographic pundit and smart growth critic, look a bit foolish. In August, Kotkin attacked Krugman's theory and put his own spin on the study.

"The study actually found the highest rates of upward mobility not in dense cities, but in relatively spread-out places like Salt Lake City, small cities of the Great Plains such as Bismarck, N.D.; Yankton, S.D.; and Pecos, Texas — all showed bottom to top mobility rates more than double New York City. And

we shouldn't forget the success story of Bakersfield, Calif., a city Columbia University urban planning professor David King wryly labeled 'a poster child for sprawl,' " wrote Kotkin.

Never mind that New York City (metro population 22 million) can't be compared in any reasonable way to Bismarck, North Dakota (metro population 120,000). The study found that the lowest rates of upward mobility are also in relatively spread-out places. Further, cherry picking is always possible in a study of 359 metros with unique economic and social characteristics.

The EOP study found that upward mobility is related to many factors including less inequality in income, better school scores, lower rates of single parenthood and even higher religious affiliation. But the geographic connection to sprawl is now clear, based on the work of Talen and Koschinsky.

This is not a vindication for some metro areas and a condemnation of others. Every US metro has sprawl, and every one has walkable, connected neighborhood fabric. Although Boston, New York, San Francisco, and other dense cities with good transit appear in the top 10 for income mobility in the

biggest metros, there are exceptions.

Salt Lake City has high income mobility and a great deal of suburban sprawl. It benefits from unique social characteristics that appear to work against income inequality. Yet Salt Lake City is aggressively working to address its sprawl problem as well. Since 1999 the region has expanded its light rail system and planned multiple, walkable regional centers while the urban core is coming back to life. As blogger Michael Lewyn points out, "Salt Lake City transit gives more people access to jobs than transit in any other metro area — thus increasing social mobility."

Cities and towns across America that wish to create dynamic economies and opportunity for children in all walks of life would be wise to improve neighborhood connectivity and walkability. As Krugman says, the findings argue for reducing the need for car ownership and improving access to jobs through smart growth practices. That is a realistic and hopeful goal for towns and cities of every size and in every region of the country. Every community has substantial room for improvement. ♦

A quarter century later, New Urbanism still on the cutting edge

Twenty-five years ago a charrette — a new planning concept at the time — was held to design the new town of Kentlands in Gaithersburg, Maryland. Located 13 miles from the nation's capital, Kentlands shaped the thinking of then Housing and Urban Development Secretary Henry Cisneros as he launched the HOPE VI program that ultimately changed the face of American public housing (see Commentary on Page 2).

Arlington, Virginia, planner Dan Malouff used this 25th anniversary to assess the impact of New Urbanism. "In older urban areas, new urbanist development is indistinguishable from well-designed regular infill. So although new urbanism has many infill projects to its name, the term is more strongly associated with suburban development like Kentlands, where it's more distinct," Malouff writes in the blog *Greater Greater Washington*.

These traditional neighborhood developments (TNDs) have proven to be internally walkable but poorly connected their surroundings that usually consists of suburban fabric that is built for the automobile, the author observes.

The drive-only context, therefore, limits the benefits of TNDs. They mostly offered a gateway to America's renewed appreciation for walkable neighborhoods, he says. "New urbanism reintroduced Americans to the concept



Kentlands downtown — this part of town was planned in 1996 and built in the late '90s.

of urban living. And as recent history tells us, once we learned urban living was an option, people flocked to it," Malouff says.

He concludes: "Despite the fact that regular urbanism is back, and that new urbanism is no longer the progressive cutting edge of city planning, we still need it in the suburbs. New growth at the suburban fringe will continue to happen, after all. It always has and it always will," and New Urbanism offers a better model for that growth.

Twenty-five years ago, cities were in deep decline. Most Americans were not ready for the full urban lifestyle. New towns, which showed walkable urban

places could be built again in a way that allowed homebuilders to safely sell their "product," were surprising and innovative.

Now the action is in cities themselves, historic suburban town centers, and transit-oriented development.

TIP OF THE ICEBERG

Yet Malouff alludes to a less visible New Urbanism, separate yet complementary to TNDs.

Kentlands, Celebration, Seaside, Orenco Station, and similar places have always been the tip of New Urbanism's iceberg. The tip is prominent — it sticks out of the flat suburban water — and

it looks big. But what's underneath is much bigger. TNDs are not more than 20 to 30 percent of the total work of new urbanists in the last two decades.

Beneath the surface are the infill developments to which Malouff refers, including a couple of hundred HOPE VI public housing redevelopments, most of which were heavily influenced by new urban design.

Also, new urban thinkers Peter Calthorpe and Douglas Kelbaugh conceived the transit-oriented development (TOD). It mostly did not exist a quarter century ago, but it is taken for granted now. TOD is most successful with attention to placemaking and walkability, using new urban tools like form-based codes (FBCs). Lacking that approach, the result is usually "transit-adjacent development" that delivers less value and freedom and fewer benefits in general than true TOD.

FBCs came out of the New Urbanism and are sweeping the country. Hundreds of cities and towns, big and small, have

adopted FBCs. Zoning reform in other cities, like New York and Philadelphia, includes form-based ideas even though they are not fully FBCs.

Good codes are useless without "complete streets," largely a political and policy-oriented trend that has passed the impressive mark of 500 policies approved nationwide at the state and local levels. These policies call for thoroughfares to accommodate all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit riders, and automobile drivers. Implementation of complete streets lags behind the number of laws passed — but when they are implemented, manuals like *Designing Walkable Urban Thoroughfares*, a peer-reviewed publication of the Congress for the New Urbanism and the Institute of Transportation Engineers, are key.

Complete streets are very important to *Retrofitting Suburbia* and *Sprawl Repair*, books authored by new urbanists on the trend toward making drive-only suburbs more walkable and mixed-use.

Suburban retrofit is likely to continue for the next generation, just like form-based codes, complete streets, and transit-oriented development. All of these will contribute to the revival of connected neighborhoods in our metro areas — within cities and in surrounding towns. Members of the Congress for the New Urbanism remain among the most active proponents and practitioners.

When Malouff says that New Urbanism is no longer on the cutting edge, he is talking about TNDs like Kentlands. TNDs continue to provide a model for better growth when large-scale development is needed.

The less prominent products of the New Urbanism are still on the cutting edge and likely will remain so this decade and the next. As form-based codes, complete streets, suburban retrofit, and TOD march across the American landscape, they transform it. New urbanists may not get credit for what is beneath the surface, but that doesn't mean they're not having an impact. ♦

A fresh look at Seaside and Kentlands

“It's easy to mock Seaside, and plenty do, for being over-planned, a neo-traditional artifice too consumed with nostalgia for an idyllic past that never quite existed as reconceived,” writes Natural Resources Defense Council blogger Kaid Benfield. “Being featured in the Jim Carrey movie *The Truman Show* certainly didn't help.”

But Seaside changed the course of Benfield's career, one in which he has become a major proponent of smart growth and helped to write the LEED for Neighborhood Development standards. “If I hadn't run across an article about Seaside, designed by new urbanist stalwarts Duany Plater-Zyberk — and, around the same time, visionary architect Peter Calthorpe's book about transit-oriented development — I'm not sure what I would be doing now,” he says in a piece called “Reconsidering Seaside, Florida.”

Many influential developers, planners, architects, and public officials have made similar statements over the years.

Two new works on Seaside may persuade some people to recognize the overwhelmingly positive contributions of the place, notes Benfield. These are Dhuru Thadani's book *Visions of Seaside*, reviewed in the August issue of *Better! Cities & Towns*, and a 15-minute video called *Seaside, The City of Ideas*, which is part of the American Makeover Series produced by Chris Elisara. The latter, free on YouTube, “provides as good a short, hands-on lesson about innovative city planning as you are likely to find anywhere,” Benfield notes. “Seaside may have been built on decades-old premises, but it was downright radical for its day.”

“Seaside was employing green infrastructure for stormwater management before we environmentalists knew there was



A typical day on Seaside Central Square, which doubles as a water detention basin in big storms.

such a thing — not because the developer or architects were environmentally conscious, but because they were adverse to debt. Things like pervious pavement and bioretention ponds simply cost less than building conventional “gray” stormwater infrastructure with underground pipes. Lawns were costly and difficult to maintain on the site, so the design emphasized use of native vegetation. Narrow streets, also built to save money, slowed vehicle traffic and supported safe streets for kids,” Benfield notes.

After Seaside, Kentlands in Gaithersburg, Maryland, may have been the most influential new urbanist new town. An

August real estate article in the *Washington Post* reports that Kentlands has aged well. More than 8,000 residents live in Kentlands and its sister community Lakelands. The projects share a downtown that includes more than a million square feet of commercial and office space.

The vision for Kentlands has largely become a reality, reports the *Post*. The community has a Walk Score of 85 in a suburb with an average Walk Score of 57.

The article describes the appealing features of Kentlands. Residents can walk to nearly everything. Children

have freedom that those living in other suburbs can't enjoy.

"Kids here grow up being able to walk down the road to get ice cream with their friends," says resident Judy Gross, who moved here from a drive-only suburb on Long Island. "They make friends they'll have for their whole lives."

Because large swaths of open space were protected, the connection to nature is strong in Kentlands. "You can leave the home and be at one with nature," one resident reported.

This reappraisal of the new urbanist TNDs is timely. The housing market is

starting to hit its stride and is now up to about 900,000 units annually. Of this number, multifamily has grown fastest, infill development is taking a larger share, yet a large and growing number of automobile-oriented single-family houses are being built on the suburban fringe.

Communities need sustainable single-family development, and that can only come in the form of connected neighborhoods. The most useful model comes from new urbanist traditional neighborhood developments. ♦

The broad appeal of per-acre tax evaluation

The idea makes a big splash in the current edition of Government Finance Review.

It's been three years since *Better! Cities & Towns* (then called *New Urban News*, September 2010) published an article on the tax advantages of downtown development. In 2013 the idea is gaining traction with a range of groups, from the relatively liberal Smart Growth America, which published its nationwide report *Building Better Budgets*, to conservatives at the Cato Institute and the blog *Bacon's Rebellion*.

Much of the current issue of *Government Finance Review* (*GFR*), published by the Government Finance Officers Association based in Chicago, is devoted to the idea that planners and consultants Peter Katz and Joe Minicozzi first promoted in this publication — that per-acre tax revenues are substantially higher in mixed-use walkable places than in drivable suburbs. The per-acre analysis is key to understanding the fiscal advantages of smart growth, a range of authors contend.

In *GFR*, the idea reaches an audience of municipal budget officers and CFOs. In the main article, Katz proposes a "fiscal impact quotient" (FIQ), which he calls "The Missing Metric." This is defined as "the number of years it takes for property taxes to pay back the municipality's up-front investment to accommodate a new development," Katz explains. "The figure is derived by estimating the costs for municipally provided infrastructure (capital costs only) for the given property / land use proposal and comparing that figure to the expected annual property tax." In one comparison, the mixed-use downtown development takes three years to pay back infrastructure costs, while a suburban counterpart takes 42 years — longer than the infrastructure would last.

Cato's Mark Calabria endorses the FIQ. "Katz's proposed fiscal impact quotient is at heart a mechanism for overcoming political opposition to dense infill development. In a time of squeezed local government budgets, his hope is that by showing localities which developments will be the biggest net fiscal contributors (and these are usually the densest developments), then approval for these projects will become easier to achieve. The end result is both better fiscal health for local governments and denser development."

Also in *GFR*, Minicozzi expands upon the idea. "Suburban projects tend to be favored over denser downtown development, but data from more than 30 jurisdictions across 10 states show that a municipality receives a greater level of revenue from its denser and more walkable urban patterns than its suburban pattern of development."

One of those studies, in Mountain View, California, shows how per-acre tax revenues not only favor downtowns, but town centers, mixed-use corridors, and transit-oriented developments. "Additionally, the data show that 'downtown scaled values' were popping up in other areas of the community. This analytic helps community leaders identify the high-performance parts of the community and, perhaps, identify new policies to make the best use of those areas. High-scaled value is not limitless, but even adding more of the development patterns that are happening at the transit-oriented developments (TODs) could add significantly to public coffers," says Minicozzi. ♦

Is your city next?

PETER KATZ

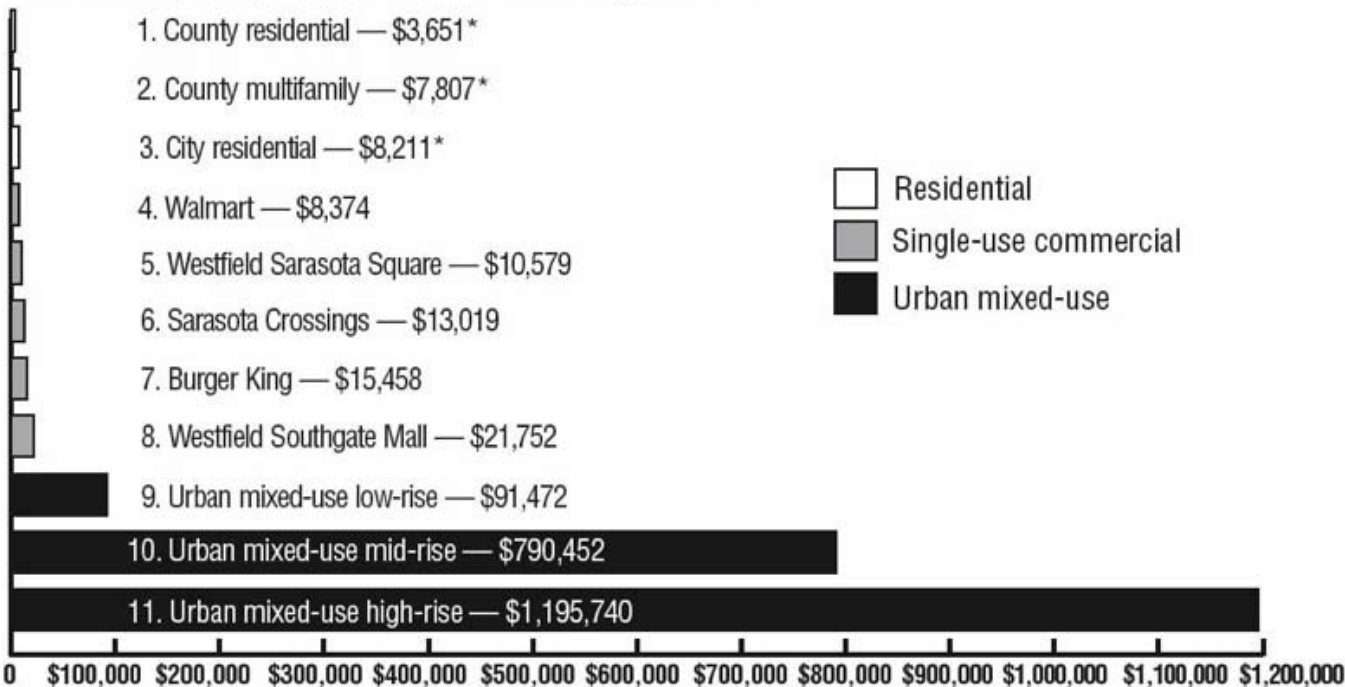
The headline on Time magazine's cover story on Detroit's bankruptcy poses that simple, scary question.

Most of us can think of reasons why our community is different from Detroit. Unless you're in an older industrial city, Detroit probably doesn't look much like where you live: One of the largest of America's Rust Belt cities, Detroit's aging infrastructure is visibly crumbling as nature retakes empty factories and once-proud neighborhoods. Haunting images of such decay accompany much of the recent web coverage about Detroit's fiscal woes.

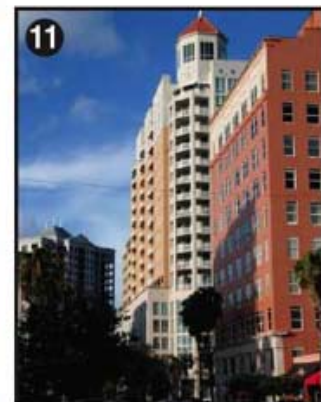
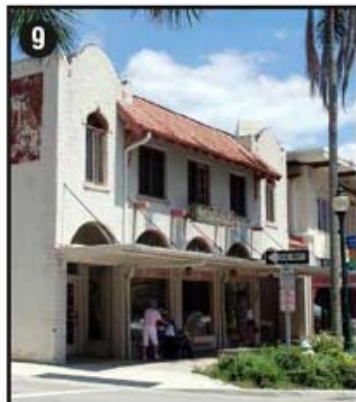
Yet the picture on *Time's* August 5 cover shows something different: It's the top of General Motors' fortress-like headquarters, known locally as "RenCen." The futuristic slice of 1970s architecture would be a great backdrop for "The Jetsons" and their flying cars. Unfortunately, the flying cars never arrived for GM, and the company sank into the largest bankruptcy



Annual tax yield per acre: Sarasota County, Florida



New Urban News; Sources: Sarasota County Government, Office of Financial Planning; Joe Minicozzi, Public Interest Projects. Based on 2008 tax figures. *Based on average sales price per Sarasota County Board of Realtors, 2008 data.



The Sarasota tax table from the September 2010 *New Urban News*, which was reformatted for the current issue of *Government Finance Review*.

in US history. So it stood to reason that the city of GM might eventually succumb to the same fate.

It's ironic that the obsolescence that companies like GM built into their cars now permeates our thinking about place. Just as many drivers regularly trade in their old ride for a new, shinier one, generations of Rust Belt residents have traded in their gritty hometowns to retire in the warm places where they once vacationed. Expectations that the trend would continue

prompted massive growth-related outlays in Sunbelt municipalities. But the 2008-09 downturn wrought havoc north and south: slashed retirement accounts and stalled home sales locked many older workers into jobs and housing they couldn't afford to leave; Sun Belt communities faced huge bills with too few residents to pay them.

Another well-publicized cause of GM's downfall – its enormous pension fund obligation to retired workers – was also a

significant factor in Detroit's bankruptcy. Such "legacy costs" are not unique to GM, Detroit or other recently bankrupt cities such as Stockton and San Bernardino, California; legacy costs are a growing concern for municipalities everywhere.

But whether it's Rust Belt stagnation, legacy costs, or other financial missteps by municipalities under stress, the big "duh" is that the money needed to operate local government is greater than the current revenue coming in. In my opinion, the primary reason for this shortfall, and the common thread connecting Detroit, Stockton and your community, is that the low-density settlement patterns municipalities have adopted over the past half-century make it virtually impossible for new growth to pay its way.

I suggest that the most important factor in the downfall of these cities is one that was not mentioned in the Time article at all. The problem, use-based zoning, goes unrecognized by most residents and by the journalists who cover cities because the regulatory practice is both ubiquitous and highly technical.

DIMINISHING RETURNS

Because our system of zoning focuses primarily on managing the impacts of development, and because the typical response to perceived conflicts during the approval process is to lower development densities/intensities to levels that are more "acceptable" to neighbors (thereby reducing the size of a development), the overall economic return in the form of property taxes paid by new development to local governments has suffered. Increasingly the inventory of properties that government relies on to pay its bills—what's called "the tax base"—has shifted from high-value, close-in, compact downtowns and city neighborhoods that are thrifty in their use of municipal infrastructure and services, to land-hungry, low density, and thus low-value sprawl that generates a weak return in relation to the enormous expense that government takes on when it approves such places for development.

During the boom years, it was easy to ignore the problem. But such issues are now of increasing importance to cash-strapped municipalities. But unlike the previously mentioned pension fund obligations that, per the example of tiny Central Falls, Rhode Island, can be negotiated down to more manageable levels in a bankruptcy proceeding, even bankruptcy provides no relief from the ongoing costs of maintenance that a municipality takes on when approving low-density development, either on a parcel-by-parcel basis, or at larger scales when it votes comprehensive (or general) plans into law.

Recognizing the shortfall, municipalities in some states are able to charge developers impact fees, to cover some of the enormous up-front costs required for new development. But such fees are of little help 30 years later when aging infrastructure must be replaced. With insufficient property tax revenue to build up needed reserves, and few other resources to fund such expenses, government must resort to local assessments or increased taxes—neither of which is popular.

The larger issue is one that I wrote about in Planning magazine back in 2010. That article revealed the dramatic results of a property study we conducted when I was director of urban planning in Sarasota, Florida. Among its findings: A single mixed-use downtown building (#11 in the chart below) was generating more revenue than a combination of the county's two highest-profile retail centers: the newly built Walmart

Supercenter (#4 in the chart below) and the city's most successful in-town mall, anchored by three nationally department prominent stores (#8 in the chart below). The latter properties, together occupying 55 acres, would certainly require more in the way of municipal infrastructure and services, but the taxes they generated were still \$350,000 less than the single downtown building, sitting on just over two-thirds of an acre!

Such disparities are also the focus of a recently released national study on the topic called Building Better Budgets and are extensively discussed in a new special issue of Government Finance Review. In the latter publication, my article entitled "The Missing Metric" proposes a scoring system that uses an objectively derived fiscal-impact quotient, within the development review process to insure that future revenue collections will be sufficient to maintain the infrastructure and services provided by local government in support of private-sector development.

With municipal budget problems making front-page news across the country, it's not surprising that local governments are taking a fresh look at the financial implications of the buildings they approve and the plans they adopt. But exploring options is much easier than achieving buy-in for new approaches. With local planning issues becoming increasingly polarized around the politics of red and blue, finding common ground will be critical to success. By "following the money" to new approaches that both respect the principles of smart growth, and are much more conservative in their use of precious municipal dollars, I believe that common ground can indeed be found. ♦

Peter Katz is the executive director of Place First (www.place-first.org), and can be contacted at pkatz@place-first.org. A version of this column was previously published on Citiwire.

Beyond resilience: Toward "antifragile" urbanism

MICHAEL MEHAFFY

“Antifragile” is a term coined by the author Nassim Nicholas Taleb, who became prominent for his 2007 book *The Black Swan*. In it he argued that our lives are deeply shaped by rare events: financial crises, natural disasters and other negative events. (And some positive events too.) By definition, these events are not predictable as specific occurrences -- but they are predictable as general phenomena, for which we can prepare and even benefit. Specifically, we can prepare for the inevitable occurrence of such unpredictable events by developing structures that, when these events occur, “have more upside than downside.” No mere academic, Taleb made a fortune as a derivatives trader, using just such a strategy. (Though now an academic, he argues for the salutary educational benefits of hands-on practice.)

For Taleb, the essence of “robustness” (or resilience) is that we have structures that can withstand these “Black Swan” events when they are damaging. (For example, the 2011 Japanese tsunami revealed that the Fukushima nuclear reac-



PHOTO BY MICHAEL MEHRFFY

Antifragile urbanism learns from its evolutionary past, and becomes more diverse and complex. Portland's Pearl District builds on its historic walkable urban fabric.

tors were not robust; they were in fact “fragile”). But there is another category of structure beyond robust -- what Taleb calls “antifragile” -- in which the structure not only withstands such events, but gains benefits from them.

Taleb points out (in his 2012 book *Antifragile*) that this characteristic is everywhere in nature, and especially in biological systems. Muscles endure the strain and damage of exercise, and actually become stronger. The body gets infected with a small dose of an infectious agent and develops immunity. Indeed, evolution itself, as a cumulative process, relies on this “antifragility.” By contrast, removing shocks from these systems actually makes them weaker over time — lack of exercise, or lack of exposure to immunity-generating pathogens.

Key to this antifragility is the ability to fail in small doses, and to use that failure to benefit over time. Muscles get very small tears and strains, which result in strengthening; a few cells get infections and die, but not before sending out markers that identify the invaders. So keeping things “small enough to fail” (as opposed to “too big to fail”) is key. So is the ability to transmit lessons from these small failures, so that the structure can develop new strengths.

But getting “too big to fail” is precisely what’s going on all over the place today. (The banking crisis is a case in point.) “Modernity,” Taleb says, is domi-

nated by a culture of specialists who are rewarded for excessive intervention, and for predictions that are routinely worthless. The big reward for them is not in creating antifragility or even resilience, but stability — or, more accurately, its appearance. Then, when disaster strikes, these specialists, who have very little “skin in the game,” pay a very small price, if any. The result is that nothing is learned. We go back to making structures that are “too big to fail.”

Thus, instead of creating a world in which the most destructive Black Swans are more survivable, all the emphasis is on preventing such Black Swans, and creating an unsustainable state of normality. The inevitable result is that these Black Swans come anyway — and then there’s really hell to pay.

A forest ecosystem is a good example of what goes on. Often numerous small fires support the health of the ecosystem, taking out undergrowth, allowing new species to thrive, and consuming fuel before it accumulates to dangerous levels. But the “modern” practice up until recent times has been to suppress the small fires — resulting in much bigger and more catastrophic fires when they do eventually and inevitably break out.

There is an obvious corollary in economics. The more we suppress economic volatility, and the more we inject cheap credit (and debt) into the system to prop things up, and the more we let institu-

tions get “too big to fail” -- effectively socializing risk and privatizing profit -- then the more we are setting ourselves up for a kind of global Ponzi scheme that is bound to collapse, even more disastrously than before. Taleb thinks 2008 was such a collapse -- he made millions anticipating it -- and he thinks we are now headed to an even bigger global collapse.

More broadly, Taleb sees a looming collapse of many human systems, under the management of their specialist-planners. They are not trained by failure, have no “skin in the game,” think reductively from the wrong models, and are biased toward intervention to prevent black swans rather than prepare for them. The examples he cites take up much of the book, including medicine, economics and politics. (But his is not an ideological politics of the usual left or right, but a pragmatist’s “cut through BS” politics of what works.) There are obvious lessons for planning and architecture too.

THE PROBLEM WITH ‘FRAGILISTAS’

The promoters of this kind of planning are what he calls “fragilistas,” making strategic plans to avoid Black Swans instead of assuring that the Black Swans are smaller and more survivable -- and even beneficial, as the result of an evolutionary process. The dominance of fragilistas across many disciplines is symptomatic of modernity, a problematic era of “humans’ large-scale domination of the environment, the systematic smoothing of the world’s jaggedness, and the stifling of volatility and stressors.”

Taleb offers a short but entertaining section on architecture specifically. “We are punished with the results of neophilia” in cities, he says. “The problem with modernistic and functional architecture is that it is not fragile enough to break physically, so these buildings stick out just to torture our consciousness.” By contrast, the “improved caverns” of traditional environments offer “fractal richness” that he finds makes him feel at home.

Taleb points out, as Jane Jacobs did throughout her career, that our model of “planning” is fundamentally broken, demonstrably incapable of learning from its mistakes. We try to “plan” in

a rational, linear, predictive sense, and the inevitable result is spectacular failure. Indeed, most of what passes for such planning today is pseudo-science, bureaucratic turf-building, and fragile clutter. Worse, it makes our entire civilization fragile.

What we can do, Taleb says, is to develop structures, and processes, that can evolve and get smarter. Intelligence is not just in the individual, or in the individual's planning or design, but in the overall evolutionary process that we adopt. That's why real-world experience is much more valuable than theory: it can evolve, whereas theory is mostly a static rational process of enforced deduction. It is fragile, and it breaks too often. When it does break, little is learned. When it doesn't break, it only forestalls an even larger kind of collapse. This is where humanity is headed, he thinks, if we don't adopt major structural reforms.

To be sure, Taleb says, theory is important, if it's philosophical theory about useful decision-making. "Wisdom in decision making is vastly more important — not just practically, but philosophically -- than knowledge." That's essentially what Taleb is sharing in his books -- a theory of how nature works, and how we had better work too, if we want to survive.

Some will note the similarity to Jane Jacobs' last book

Dark Age Ahead ... and to the idea that we need another kind of planning entirely, and another kind of design. We need a design for the process more than the product, and a "design for self-organization."

Some will also note the implications for traditional patterns and practices, which now appear to be evolutionary processes that confer antifragility. His description appears remarkably close to what Andres and Douglas Duany call the "vernacular mind" — the collective skill in producing beautiful and well-adapted habitat, which is evident throughout human history (at least, up to recent "modern" history).

We need to embrace and empower such a capacity, surely -- instead of regarding its genetic treasury as a modern design taboo. Moreover, we need to embrace a different kind of design, and a different kind of planning — less about designing or planning the product, and more about designing the best, most antifragile process possible, and getting the obstacles out of the way. This is the best way — perhaps the only way — to assure that the product is stronger, smarter, better. ♦

Michael Mehaffy is executive director of the Portland-based Sustainis Foundation, working to develop new neighborhood-scale tools and approaches for meeting the urban challenges of the future.

Report calls for broad federal real estate reforms

The nation should curb mortgage interest and real estate tax deductions to expand housing programs, revitalize cities and towns, and cut the deficit, say Smart Growth America (SGA) and Locus, a coalition of real estate developers and investors in Washington, DC.

The two groups released a report *Federal Involvement in Real Estate: A Call for Action* proposing broad reforms in policy.

"Americans increasingly want to live in walkable places — in center cities, select suburbs, and small towns," notes Locus president Chris Leinberger. "The few federal programs designed to encourage that type of development are not effective enough." A hodge-podge of federal real estate programs were mostly enacted in the 1940s through the 1970s and lack a cohesive strategy to address today's real estate market and housing needs, says SGA President and CEO Geoff Anderson.

The changes to the mortgage interest and real estate tax deductions would bring in an average of \$37.8 billion per year. If phased in, the changes would amount to an average of \$19.7 billion per year for the next decade. "Any changes would need to be phased in,

to not disrupt the market," says Ilana Preuss, president and chief of staff of SGA. Phased in or not, curbing these programs would provide well over 90 percent of proposed revenue in *A Call for Action*.

A LOWER CAP ON THE MORTGAGE DEDUCTION

The report authors ask for "limiting the mortgage interest deduction to primary residences, and capping the deduction at \$500,000 instead of \$1 million in mortgage value. We also recommend limiting the real estate tax deduction for households earning over \$100,000 per year. In addition, the capital gains exclusion should be lowered from \$250,000 for individuals and \$500,000 for households to \$125,000 for individuals and \$250,000 for households. The ability to claim the exclusion should be limited to once every 10 years to ensure that this tax benefit is not being used for activities like housing speculation."

The report further calls for reform of the federal flood insurance and the Federal Housing Administrations single-family housing program, both of which would save taxpayers money.

These funds would more than pay

for \$7 billion in new and expanded programs, the biggest part of which is \$4 billion more in Low Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC). This program helps provide 100,000 affordable housing units a year, but doesn't come close to meeting demand or need, according to Richard Baron, a low-income housing developer with McCormack Baron Salazar in St. Louis, who spoke in support of the report.

Further, the report asks for an expansion of the historic Rehabilitation Tax Program costing \$1.6 billion. This includes extending rehabilitation tax credits to any buildings at least 50 years old (currently the cutoff is 1936) — but limited to buildings within a half mile of a town center or "an existing or planned transit facility."

Finally, a program enabling individual mortgage savings accounts to promote homeownership and an "innovative financing structure for rehabilitated infrastructure" are also proposed. "Decades of deferred investment and maintenance make it too expensive for municipalities," to rebuild infrastructure needed for revitalization — which puts the cost on private sector, says Dennis Allen, director of planning and development for ZRZ Realty, a

Portland, Oregon, developer, who also supports the report's recommendations.

The time is ripe for these reforms, says Anderson. The US Senate and House of representatives are "seriously talking about tax reform," he says. "If there was any window, now would be the time."

Frank Alexander, Sam Nunn Professor of Law at Emory University, says the comprehensive fix outlined in A Call for Action is unusual and long-needed. "Real estate finance has been my primary focus for the past thirty years, and in that time few—if any—organizations have called for a unified approach to real estate programs. Smart Growth America's call to coordinate these complex programs fills a void in today's policy debate."

Better real estate strategies can make regions more economically competitive, says Anderson, "but we also have a fiscal responsibility." These reforms will "more effectively serve real estate and finance goals in a way that does address deficit reduction." He called the recommendations "a starting point. This is a conversation that is long overdue."

In January, SGA reported that the federal government spends \$450 billion a year for real estate loans and grants, largely toward single-family housing. More recently a report called Building Better Budgets found that smart growth generates 10 times the tax revenue of conventional suburban development. ♦

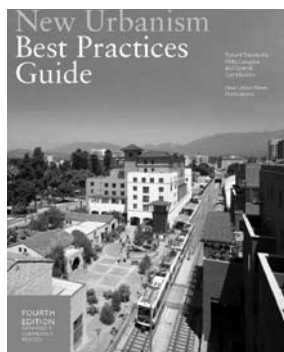
The inspiring story of Hamburg, NY

The *New York Times* told the inspiring story in August of an Upstate New York village that defied the Department of Transportation and created a human-scale Main Street that restored community to a downtrodden downtown. Route 62, a state highway that happens to be the Village of Hamburg's main street, is classified as an "urban principal arterial."

As such, the New York DOT proposed 12-foot travel lanes — the same width as Interstate highways — and other design details that are standard for urban arterials all across the US. Nine times out of ten — that's a conservative estimate — the car-oriented designs are accepted without question despite Context Sensitive Design guidelines and, more recently, Complete Streets laws. The results are fast-moving thoroughfares that repel people.

In the case of Hamburg, the village brought in walkability proponent Dan Burden, as *Better! Cities & Towns* (then called *New Urban News*) reported in 2009. The village rejected the state's proposal and suggested an alternative, which was put to a popular vote and supported, 4-1. The public support may have tipped the balance and the state agreed to the alternative. As the *Times* reported:

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PHOTO BY DAN BURDEN, WALKABLE & LIVABLE COMMUNITIES INSTITUTE

Hamburg, NY, Main Street

In fact, all of Hamburg's Main Street was redesigned to slow vehicles, a technique known as traffic calming. Two lanes, instead of the three that had been planned, were built, and the lanes' width was shrunk from 12 feet — highway-size ribbons that invite drivers to go fast — to 10 feet. That created more room for trees; on-street parking, which is good for businesses; and "safety lanes," which provide room for drivers to open car doors safely and also serve as de facto bicycle lanes.

In the two years after the reconstruction, car accidents on the new road dropped by 66 percent and injuries by 60 percent.

Burden used a tape measure and found the lanes were only 9 feet wide in places. Surprisingly, tractor-trailers still use the thoroughfare and congestion and travel time through the village have decreased. That's because traffic lights were removed in favor of roundabouts. The slow-moving traffic encourages pedestrians and bicyclists, and the main street has come alive again. According to the *Times*:

Over four recent years, business owners, inspired by the new road, spent a total of \$7 million on 33 building projects. The number of building permits rose from 15 in 2005 to 96 in 2010 and property values along Route 62 more than doubled over the same period. In 2012, the village's Main Street was placed on the National Register of Historic Places, which brought tax incentives that villagers hope will lead to still more development.

The project has made Hamburg more connected, boosting safety and economic development. The village is not the only community where reconstruction of car-oriented highways as complete streets has yielded big economic and social dividends. *Better! Cities & Towns* profiles four municipalities from Virginia to California, and Washington State to Texas in the June issue. These four suburbs, similar to Hamburg (which is six miles outside of Buffalo), have this in common: Local residents and leaders came up with their own plans, often different from transportation planners and the DOT.

These stories are happening more frequently, yet they remain outside of the norm — which is why the *Times* is reporting on this story. Road widenings that make walking and biking trips more difficult — even in mixed-use places — are more common. To get around this problem, new urbanists are petitioning US DOT for a change in the functional classification

system that determines design of most major thoroughfares. As we reported:

[Transportation engineer Rick] 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. ♦

REVIEWS

Urbanism Without Effort: Reconnecting with First Principles of the City

By Charles R. Wolfe

Island Press, 85 pp., 2013, \$3.99 e-book

REVIEW BY PHILIP LANGDON

In this short e-book, Charles R. Wolfe, a Seattle environmental and land-use lawyer, urges people to make "spontaneous, organic neighborhood life" the starting point in any plan for new buildings, public spaces, or transportation facilities. To that end, he fills his electronic book with examples, quotations, and observations spanning hundreds of years of world history.

In Wolfe's view, architecture and planning today usually focus too heavily on plans, model codes, transportation models, building appearance, and other such factors. What tends

SEE 'WITHOUT EFFORT' ON PAGE 18

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Overcoming barriers to transit-oriented development

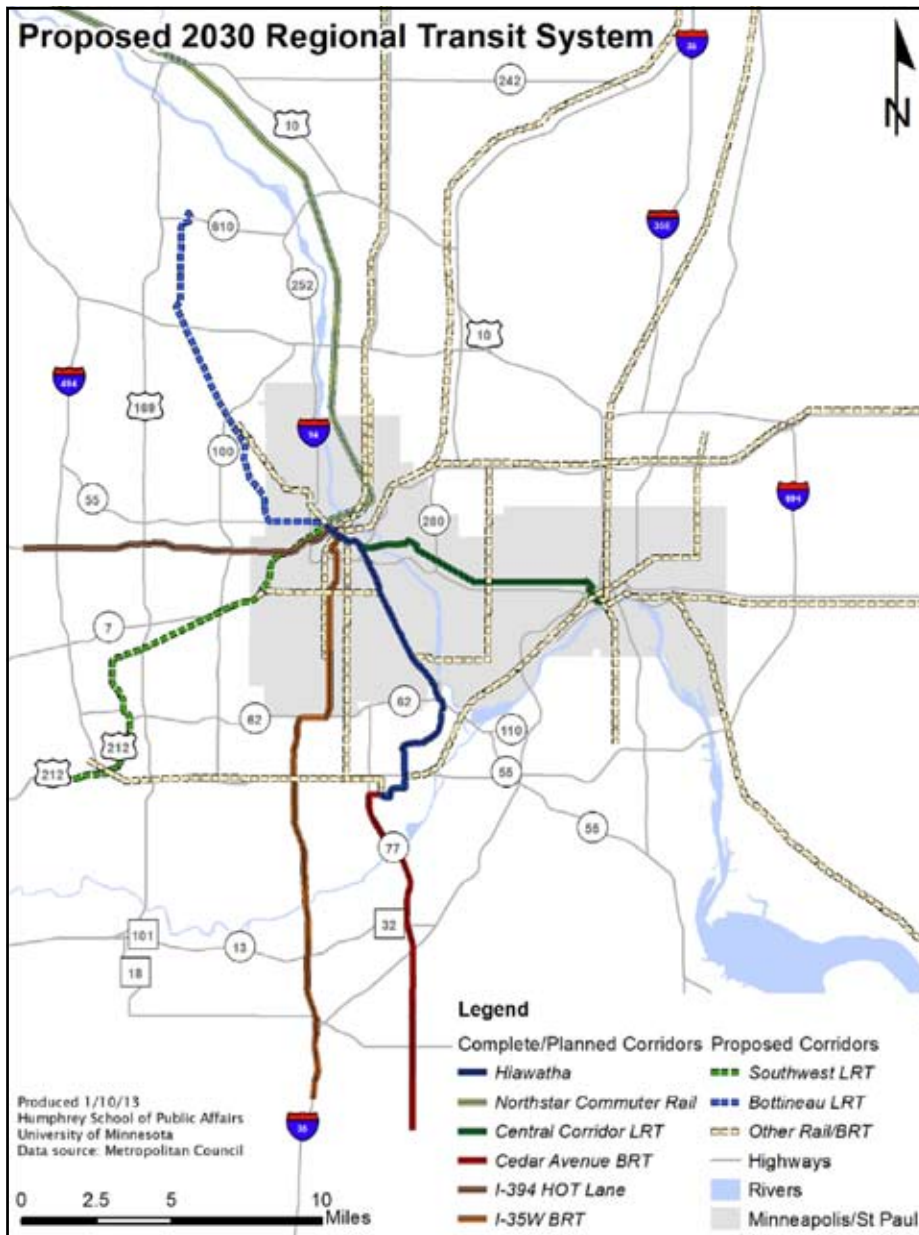
A study by University of Minnesota researchers Yingling Fan and Andrew Guthrie looked into barriers to private sector development in transit-oriented sites. While transit-oriented development (TOD) is in demand, barriers could be reduced further through reform of land-use regulations, the researchers say.

“Multifamily residential developers, redevelopment specialists, and large corporate office tenants have a strong interest in transit-accessible sites, but single-use zoning, low maximum-density regulations, and high minimum-parking ratios are significant hurdles,” say the researchers.

University researchers conducted interviews with 24 central-city and suburban developers, 3 real estate brokers, and 16 business leaders in the Twin Cities to learn whether and to what degree transit factored into their current and future site-location decisions.

By 2030, a network of 14 connected transit corridors is planned for the Minneapolis–St. Paul metropolitan region. The success of this network hinges on ridership from nearby housing and businesses. It depends, in other words on TOD. Here is the summary of the findings, in bullet-points:

- Interviews with businesses and developers revealed pent-up demand for transit-oriented development (TOD) in the Twin Cities metropolitan region.
- Regulatory and cost barriers, combined with the uncertainty of transit expansion, inhibit the market from responding to this demand for TOD.
- Developers view transportation access as highly important when selecting sites but will sacrifice transit access if a transit-oriented site is more expensive or presents more complex regulatory hurdles than traditional auto-oriented design.
- Employers say that providing a great work location is critical to recruiting highly skilled young professionals who are likely to desire—or demand—urban living and access to transit.
- Multiple participants say efforts to make transit-accessible housing affordable by design rather than by subsidy are crucial to promoting mixed-income neighborhoods in station areas.



Furthermore, employers who might consider a move to transit-oriented locations are focused on existing employees with a strong connection to driving. “However, as younger professionals succeed baby boomers in the workforce, demand for walkable neighborhoods with access to transit will play an increasing role in TOD,” the researchers note.

Multiple developers told researchers that for affordable housing to be financially feasible, it needs to be “affordable by design” (through increased height and density limits and reduced parking ratios) rather than by public subsidy.

Several participants also said that transit access itself—by dramatically reducing household transportation costs—makes all TOD housing inherently more affordable.

Fan and Guthrie recommend increased communication and collaboration between the public sector and private developers who have expressed an interest in TOD. These groups include multifamily residential developers, redevelopment specialists, large corporations, startups and other small, innovative employers, and employers of low-wage workers. ♦

Is starchitecture compatible with New Urbanism?

The 998-unit, mixed-use Marina Lofts project in downtown Fort Lauderdale, Florida, has all of the elements that one would expect from a new urbanist design. A waterfront park is created by changing the angle of one of the buildings — also preserving views of an adjacent high-rise.

The gap in the city's Riverwalk is bridged by Marina Lofts, creating a continuous public space. The first-floor of the buildings are active with retail and restaurants. The street grid is respected and the site is perforated with pedestrian-friendly walkways. Depending on height limits in any particular location, there's no reason why the project wouldn't be approved as right by a form-based code.

What's unusual for a new urban project is the edgy and novel architecture. The architect, Bjarke Ingels of Bjarke Ingels Group (BIG), is a rising international star — a starchitect who won the European prize for architecture in 2010 and won *The Wall Street Journal* Innovator of the Year award in 2011.

JAGGED FACADES

The project combines new urbanist elements with the hallmarks of "starchitecture." One building is broken by a jagged gap filled with hanging gardens on both sides of a pedestrian space. The other building has a hole in the façade. Both buildings look like they were assembled out of manufactured boxes.

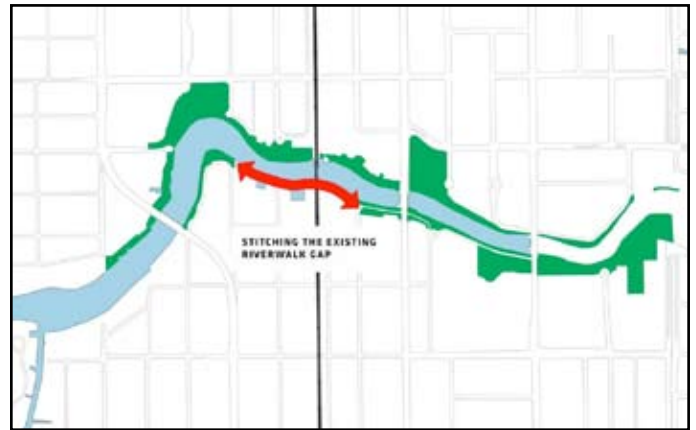
Often, good placemaking takes a back seat to the whims of starchitects. Pedestrian-unfriendly frontages are common in buildings designed by the likes of Frank Gehry, Rem Koolhaas, Peter Eisenman, Thom Mayne, and Zaha Hadid, although Gehry did win an award in 2005 from the local chapter of the Congress for the New Urbanism for his Disney Hall project. Some new urbanists at the time questioned whether Gehry, who has been critical of the New Urbanism, or the building itself, deserved the award. Much of the exterior of the concert hall consists of blank walls.

Yet Ingels, a young Dane who worked for another starchitect, Rem Koolhaas, seems to really care about urbanism and sustainability.



IMAGES SOURCE: BJARKE INGELS GROUP

Marina Lofts in Fort Lauderdale, above. The development bridges a gap in the riverwalk, illustrated at right.



The \$150 million project was described by the developer, Asi Cymbal, as "affordable luxury," with efficiency units renting for as low as \$1,100 a month.

The proposal also envisions many tenants using bikes to get around or using the downtown's nearby planned Wave electric street cars, according to the South Florida *Sun-Sentinel*.

Downtown Fort Lauderdale, by the way, is erupting with development. This project is one of 41 undergoing review, approved, or under construction for the greater downtown. The city was mostly built out by 1970, and stagnated in population from 1980 to 2000. The annexation of suburban neighborhoods enabled the city to grow again in the last decade. Since 2010, the city has grown downtown. The Marina Lofts has been viewed by some as a catalyst for more

development.

Probably the most controversial aspect of the development was the required removal and replanting of a massive, century-old tropical "rain tree" on the site. ♦

REVIEWS

Without effort

FROM PAGE 16

to be overlooked by building and design professionals, he says, is "indigenous urban spirit"—the ability of people to breathe life into public spaces pretty much on their own.

Urbanism Without Effort reminds me of Bernard Rudofsky's 1964 classic, *Architecture Without Architects*. Rudofsky, a

REVIEWS



IMAGE CREDIT: CHARLES R. WOLFE, URBANISM WITHOUT EFFORT

The Ramblas in Barcelona, Spain

Moravian-born writer-designer-teacher who settled in New York, used that book to promote “nonpedigreed architecture”—vernacular, often anonymous creations that satisfied human needs beautifully. Wolfe is Rudofsky’s spiritual descendant, enamored of the graceful ways in which past cultures, usually with limited resources, fashioned congenial settings for daily life.

Wolfe encourages the reader to use camera, pencil and paper, or other devices to assemble an “urban diary”—a collection of views of, and thoughts about, places that foster human activity. Such places, he suggests, are more abundant than we suspect. In an alley near his home, Wolfe notes that some of his neighbors show movies on certain nights—relaxed get-togethers that strengthen community connections, at little expense. Says Wolfe: “I believe the best urbanism is often the urbanism we already have.”

Studding his pages are quotes from Ada Louise Huxtable, Grady Clay, Christopher Alexander, Rob Goodspeed, Richard Sennett, J.B Jackson, Rem Koolhaas, Alexander Cockburn, Joseph Rykwert, and Roberta Brandes Gratz, to name just a few. There are photos from Venice, Barcelona, London, Lisbon, Las Vegas, Melbourne, and many less well-known cities and towns. Many of the images are captivating; they show people using public spaces in unprompted, informal ways.

I wish Wolfe had refrained from taking so many gratuitous swipes at Jan Gehl (the Danish urban designer’s

prescriptions tend to be “overly generic, conclusory, or paternalistic,” Wolfe says), “tactical urbanism,” Celebration, Florida, and other individuals, places, and movements that have, in my estimation, brought significant improvements to community life during the past 30 years. Wolfe issues criticisms in a glancing, not particularly convincing manner. He complains, for instance, that tactical urbanism and “pop-up” places don’t always have “a meaningful and lasting effect.” But how could they, when they were typically conceived as *short-term* interventions?

Despite praising holistic, naturally occurring urbanism, Wolfe doesn’t provide much detail on how people might actually infuse this kind of thinking into the places we build today. If you’re looking for careful instruction, this isn’t the best source. *Urbanism Without Effort* is mostly a book of inspiration and aspiration. It makes the reader yearn for places with soul. For how-to guidance, you’ll have to go elsewhere—such as the growing shelf of new urbanist literature. ♦

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UPDATE

■ The **Villages at Whitehall**, in the planning stages for five years, is a major traditional neighborhood development (TND) in southern New Castle County in Delaware. It involves the development of approximately 1,100 acres on a 2,000-acre property. The project is comprised of seven villages and hamlets, each varying in size and number of dwelling units but all containing a mixture of homes, civic and retail space and employment opportunities. "The Villages at Whitehall seeks to create a legacy project in Delaware that will change the pattern of development to be more consistent with a significantly

improved quality of life," says developer Brian diSabatino. *Better! Cities & Towns* is planning an indepth look at this project in the November issue.

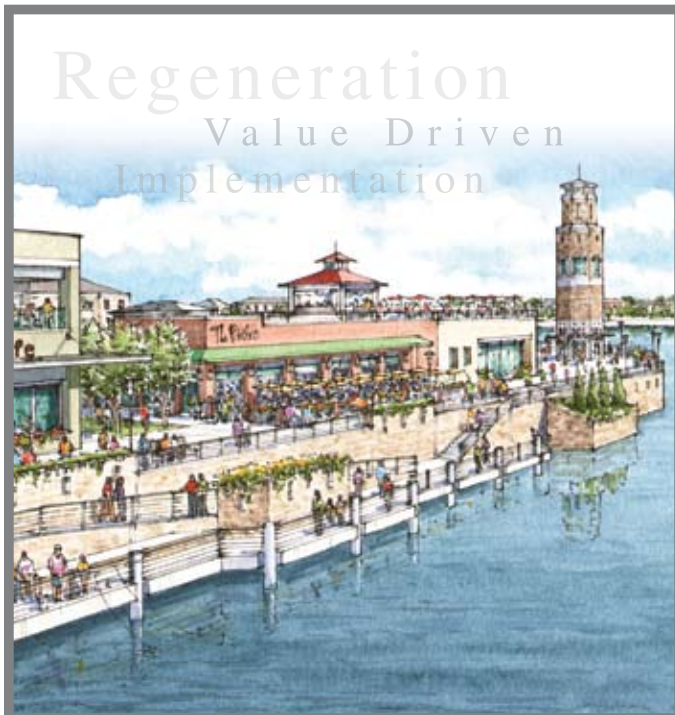
■ A new study provides more confirmation that **violent and accidental deaths of all kinds are more common in suburban and rural areas**. The primary cause: Automobile accidents.

The study, by researchers at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP) and the University of Pennsylvania, is the first to look at overall death rates nationwide for all sorts of accidental and intentional injuries — crashes, gunshots, drownings, falls, poisonings, even animal attacks — across the nation, rather than for selected areas or specific injuries, reported *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. The analysis was published online in the *Annals of Emergency Medicine*. It is called "Safety in Numbers: Are Major Cities the Safest Places in the United States?"


The more "urban" the county, the safer, researchers concluded. Homicides are higher in cities, but many other causes of death like suicides and drownings are not. Fatal automobile accidents are much higher in suburban, exurban, and rural locations. A previous study, by University of Virginia researchers, looked at auto crashes and homicides and came to a similar conclusion: Cities are safer.

People who are considering moving out of cities because of safety concerns may want to "reexamine their motivations," Sage Myers, an emergency medical physician and one of the

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Safety in Numbers authors, told *The Inquirer*.

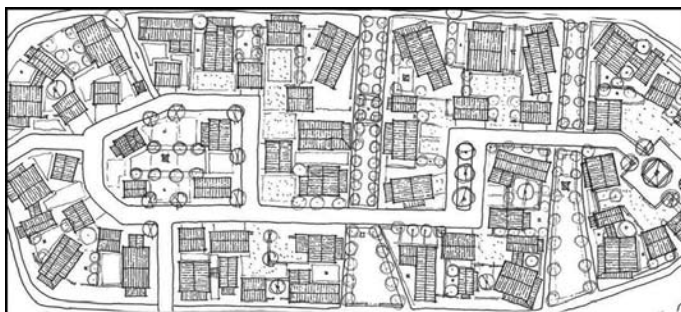
A 2010 study of 20 California cities reported in *Better! Cities & Towns* (formerly *New Urban News*) points to why automobile accidents in the suburbs are more severe and why they trump other safety concerns. California cities with more spread out, disconnected street networks (built after 1950) had automobile fatality rates three times as high (10.1 per 100,000 population from 1997 to 2005), according to that study, by traffic engineers Norman Garrick and Wesley Marshall. Cities with connected networks built mostly before 1950 had only 3.1 fatal crashes

per 100,000 population.

■ A piece by Alan Durning of Sightline Institute provides an in-depth analysis of how **parking requirements raise baseline rents** in new apartment buildings. Even relatively modest off-street parking requirements increase the per-unit cost for the developer by about 50 percent, Durning shows, raising required rents from about \$800/month to \$1,200/month. Interestingly, this is pretty much in line with what developers are saying. The comments on Durning's piece are revealing. Some react to sug-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 24

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CNU Charter Awards add new categories for 2014

The CNU Charter Awards, the global awards for excellence in urban design, are getting a facelift this year. New Jury Chair Jeff Speck has altered and expanded the list of categories that applicants can apply for, recognizing the advances and new directions taken by new urbanists in previous decade.

The categories for this year will be:

- * Best Regional Plan
- * Best City Plan
- * Best Neighborhood Plan
- * Best District Plan
- * Best Corridor Plan
- * Best Urban Infill
- * Best Street
- * Best Block
- * Best Building
- * Best Suburban Retrofit
- * Best Tactical Intervention
- * Best Planning Tool or Process

ONE STANDARD

While the new categories represent a significant expansion of the Charter Awards, Speck says that they are fully within the new urbanist tradition. "As in all previous years, submissions will be judged against only one standard, which is the time-tested principles put forth in the Charter for the New Urbanism," explains Speck. "While these principles are unwavering, past awards have shown us the great degree of diversity that they welcome. I have proposed this reorganization of the award categories—perhaps temporary—as a reminder that the Charter



anticipates a broad range of interpretation, and in hope that it might encourage a larger number of designers to consider their work in its light."

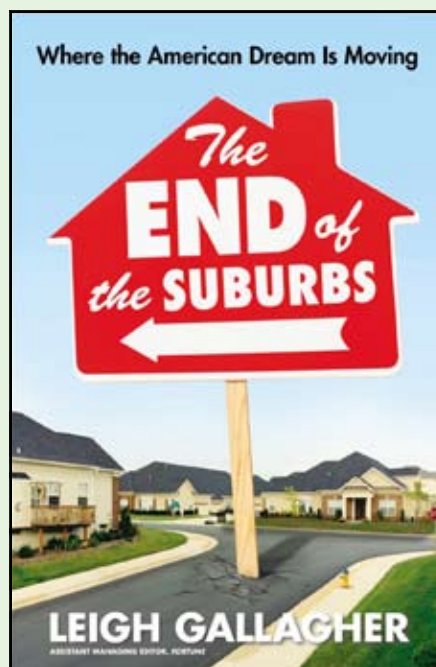
Winners of the 2013 Charter Awards included a student project to radically rethink housing projects on New York's Lower East Side and a holistic approach to a Rwandan village. Winners were selected by a top-notch team of new urbanists and invited experts including Shelley Poticha, Director of the Office 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. This year's jury promises to be just as accomplished and exciting.

Professionals and students should be pleased with the change in the award submission categories, as it gives more opportunities to be considered "best in show." The 2014 Charter Awards will be accepting submissions as of November 1st, 2013 and will close January 8th, 2014. ♦

'The End of the Suburbs' celebrates New Urbanism

JOHN NORQUIST

The *End of the Suburbs* is a new book from Leigh Gallagher, assistant Managing Editor at *Fortune Magazine*, that bluntly assesses the future of suburbia. Gallagher says it's over; at least in the form it's taken for the last 50 years. She marshals demographic and consumer preference data in a driving narrative demonstrating that the large lot, separately-zoned and auto-centric suburb is doomed. Gallagher describes the success that tract housing giant Toll Brothers has had by incorporating urban infill into its product mix. She also cites CNU member John McLinden's successful suburban retro fit in Libertyville, Illinois and Sam Sherman's work in Philadelphia. Gallagher sees the comprehensive nature of market change exemplified in the way that Target



and many of the other Big Boxers are embracing urbanism.

"Retailers," writes Gallagher, "experts when it comes to following moneyed consumers wherever they go, are all over this: hardly any new suburban shopping malls have been built since 2006, and big-box chains are packing up, slimming down, and squeezing smaller versions of themselves into denser communities."

The End of the Suburbs went on sale August 1st. I secured an early review copy, and it reads crisp and fast at 210

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

pages and is packed with useful facts from researchers like Arthur Nelson and Chris Leinberger. New urbanists are featured throughout the book, including Chuck Marohn and his description of the sprawl-based Ponzi Scheme. Andrés Duany is featured throughout, and writes on the back cover that the book is "...the most convincing book yet on the lifestyle changes coming to our immediate future."

If you buy the book, I have a suggestion for you. After you read it, give it to

your local mayor or council member. Local officials need to learn that walkable communities perform well in the market and generate the tax base that so many municipalities desperately need to pay for basic services. This book is poised to be a bestseller - it's probably the first book about new urbanism available at Walmart stores. So I encourage CNU members and friends to embrace *The End of the Suburbs* and use it in your advocacy efforts.

See another review of *The End of the Suburbs* on page 1. ♦

Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk talks about the impact of New Urbanism

In the latest episode of the Official CNU Podcast, founder Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk looks back at the influence new urbanism has had on the culture, and talks about her current work.

CNU: You were in the news recently for stepping down from your position as Dean of the Architecture Dept. at the University of Miami. What's next for you? What prompted that decision?

Plater-Zyberk: After 18 years, it was the right time to go. We had a great run with a great faculty and a supportive administration. There are great things going on at the University of Miami. I'd like to think that we made some contribution to the New Urbanism through our faculty and our students. Many graduates are working in the field. But change is good, and knowledge spans time. It's better for people to come and go, and this was just a good time for a transition.

CNU: What are some of the landmark accomplishments of CNU that you've seen since the organization was founded?

Plater-Zyberk: In terms of sheer numbers, within the first decade of the organization you might not have pointed to very much. A lot of the sprawling metropolis that we were proposing alternatives to continued to be built. But just in the last couple of days, an op-ed piece in the *New York Times* by Paul Krugman

(*"Stranded by Sprawl"*, July 28, 2013) attempted to deal with sprawl in Atlanta. I thought he was reaching in some cases, but clearly the focus has been brought to (the issues *New Urbanism* deals with) to a group of people who otherwise wouldn't be thinking about it. But the real impact has been in cities that have changed their codes, regional plans that have been completed, and I don't know how many beautiful communities and revivals of cities and towns that have resulted in the last 25-30 years.

So I think we've been very important

contributors. Not the only ones, certainly, but along with other organizations and a cultural shift to the point where we now have economists saying that cities are important, young people saying that they're not interested in owning a car, and a myriad of cultural changes occurring across the United States and having an influence abroad. I actually think that without the CNU this might not have happened in the same way, because other organizations are not as focused on the built environment as we are. We're a very important knuckle, or hinge, among things like smart growth on one hand and maybe traditional architecture on the other. It's probably hard to put metrics to it - we are in the age of metrics, right? - but I think you can point to an awful lot of things that we've played a very important role in.

CNU: Absolutely. And what are you working on today? What are some of the exciting projects that you and DPZ are involved in right now?

Plater-Zyberk: We're part of a team for a sustainable communities project in Southeast Florida as part of a HUD/EPA/ DOT partnership grant. Dover, Kohl and Partners is leading that team, and we're working on a fifty-year plan for 7 counties. It's called seven50 and our colleagues are doing a great job leading the project. Part of that is of course looking at climate change and how that might affect South Florida. As part of leaving the deanship, I've said I'm going to try to address that very specifically. We have risks that other parts of the country do not, and they are directly related to the built environment. What the public sector does and what the private sector does relatively independently in our country - you know, the public sector does the roads and the private sector does the buildings - there has to be much more integration between those groups to deal with climate change. So that's the kind of challenge I'm going to try to take on locally.

SUBSCRIBE to the Official CNU Podcast to hear more from Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk and get the latest news on our work. In the next episode, Leigh Gallagher talks with CNU President John Norquist about her book *The End of the Suburbs*. Go to cnu.org/podcast. ♦



Plater-Zyberk

UPDATE

FROM PAGE 21

gestions that off-street parking requirements should be eliminated as an attack on those who drive, while others point out the spillover effects of providing no on-street parking. The latter point is valid, but denies the externalities resulting from America's ubiquitous off-street parking requirements. In addition to the elimination of affordable housing, studies have also shown that parking requirements have negative economic impacts and contribute to global warming.

■ Atlanta's apartment sector continues to lead the real estate recovery in that region. A recent examination of the Atlanta apartment market by Bleakly Advisory Group, a real estate and land use economic consulting firm, confirmed that **Atlanta renters appear willing to pay up to 10 percent more in monthly rent for a unit in a walkable urban location.**

Increasingly, the most preferred locations for Atlanta apartment dwellers,

and thus apartment developers, are intown in spots within walking distance of retail and lifestyle amenities such as grocery stores and parks. These walkable urban locations, which are often also near MARTA rail transit stops, appeal to a new generation of renter, Bleakly reports.

Bleakly assessed the monthly rent levels of 23 apartment projects built since 2007 located within one mile or

less of a MARTA rail station to determine the impact of a walkable location on rent levels. Although all the assessed projects are near a MARTA station, about half of them are built in areas lacking in convenient pedestrian infrastructure and amenities. Therefore, Bleakly divided them based on their walkable attributes using each project's Walk Score.

The analysis determined that apartments in locations with a Walk Score of 70-89, making them "very walkable," with most errands able to be accomplished on foot, achieve 6 percent higher rents on average to those comparable projects in "car dependent" and "somewhat walkable" locations (with Walk Scores of 48-69). At a finer-grain level, the one bedroom units in the more walkable projects garner a 4 percent premium, and for two bedrooms the premium is 10 percent on a price per square foot basis over the apartments in locations with Walk Scores below 70.

■ **Seawall Development Co.** is acquiring nearly three blocks of property along the west side of Remington Avenue in Baltimore, moving forward with a project that some term a "massive" redevelopment project that could give the area a Main Street-style district, the *Baltimore Business Journal* reports.

The company wants to bring new office and retail space to two existing industrial buildings and raze a third block for a new residential and retail complex where the foot of Remington Avenue meets 27th Street, according to the report.

"One of the keys to this is the synergy it's going to create between the three blocks," Seawall Development partner Evan Morville told residents. ♦

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