

# Better Cities & Towns

Better *places*, stronger communities.

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2014—VOLUME 3, NUMBER 6

## Transit: land use is key

*Land-use policy allowing people to live in mixed-use neighborhoods has the biggest impact on US transit, according to pro-transit group.*

**H**ousing market trends could drive increased transit use, suggests a study by TransitCenter, a philanthropy focusing on mass transit located in New York City. The nationwide TransitCenter survey explores what transit agencies and policymakers could do to boost transit in coming years.

Of particular interest to urbanists: “The top predictor of whether or not you use transit is what type of neighborhood you live in,” the report states. “This is especially interesting when you consider that: Many Americans would prefer to live in a different type of neighborhood than they do now.”

The biggest unmet desire in the housing market, according to the report called *Who’s On Board 2014*, is to live in a mixed-use neighborhood. TransitCenter surveyed more than 11,000 people in 46 metropolitan statistical areas spanning the US geographically. Thirty-nine percent of respondents currently live in mixed-use neighborhoods, but 58 percent would like to do so. If that sample is nationally representative, the gap in unmet demand approaches 60 million people.

The biggest dissatisfied group lives in suburban bedroom communities. Thirty percent of those surveyed currently live in residential-only, suburban areas. Only 16 percent of respondents pick this kind of living arrangement as their ideal.

This finding builds on the research of Arthur C. Nelson of the University of Utah and Christopher Leinberger of George Washington University. Nelson has found that America has a significant oversupply of large-lot single family houses—a market imbalance that will influence real estate for decades to come. Leinberger’s

SEE ‘TRANSIT STUDY’ ON PAGE 3

**Children and adults participate in a neighborhood arts activity. The nonprofit Creative Exchange was launched to promote creative placemaking—see page 9.**



## Multimodal station and plan spur town’s revival

**T**he multimodal Uptown Station in Normal, Illinois—the first federal TIGER project to break ground in 2010—spurred impressive growth in transit ridership and mixed-use private downtown investment, according to a new study.

The transportation center brings together Amtrak, intercity bus lines, local transit, cars, shuttles, taxis, bicycles, and pedestrians. It is the centerpiece of a LEED-ND certified downtown revitalization plan by Farr Associates of Chicago.

Based on the new urban plan, an oddly shaped intersection was converted into a major public space called Uptown Circle—fronted by a new children’s museum, town hall, the transportation center, and mixed-use buildings with shops and restaurants.

“Private spinoff development anchored by the transit center, totaling \$220 million, is already revitalizing Uptown Normal,” notes Washington DC-based Good Jobs First, which wrote the report funded by the Ford Foundation. “It’s a best-practice model of long-range neighborhood planning focused around transit investments.”

The regional transit system, called Connect Transit, operates 11 bus routes. Uptown Station serves as the central hub connecting these routes throughout the town. Ridership has increased by over 40 percent in the last three years—topping more than 2 million rides a year.

The \$49 million Uptown Station was built with a \$22 million TIGER grant matched by state, local, and Federal Transit Administration dollars.

The construction created 140,000 hours of work for workers in at least

SEE ‘NORMAL’ ON PAGE 4

## Going electronic

**B**etter Cities & Towns is now going fully online. We will no longer be sending out print issues—after more than 17 years (for many years the publication was called *New Urban News*.)

Ending the print publication was a difficult decision, but necessary due to changes in the publishing industry.

We want to thank all of our print subscribers, advertisers, and supporters over the years!

Please check [bettercities.net](http://bettercities.net) for new articles. For those who still have issues due, we intend to send a new publication called *Healthy Place*, focusing on healthy communities. ♦

## Better Cities & Towns

**Better! Cities & Towns** is dedicated to covering smart growth and New Urbanism.

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### COMMENTARY

## Small cities and towns are urban places, too

ROBERT STEUTEVILLE

**T**he *Washington Post* recently told the story of Drew Murphy, an educated young man living, like many in his generation, the walkable urban life—with a twist. He doesn't live in the city.

"Murphy, 31, lives the quintessential life of a young, successful professional in the District—except that he lives nowhere near the District. His walkable world is in downtown Frederick, Md., a thriving city 45 miles from the nation's capital with one-tenth of the population."

The *Post* reports on what it calls the "mini-DC" phenomenon: People living in small cities in the region, like Frederick, Alexandria, Annapolis, and Leesburg—some way outside the central city.

A similar trend is occurring across the nation in smaller cities like Pasadena CA, West Palm Beach FL, and Evanston IL, the *Post* reports.

This is not a new trend—all of these municipalities have been reviving for many years. But this has received less attention than big-city revival in DC, Portland, Seattle, San Francisco, and other major metros. The media usually frames this as city versus suburb—and revival in outlying cities and towns appears to run counter to the storyline.

### NO LESS URBAN

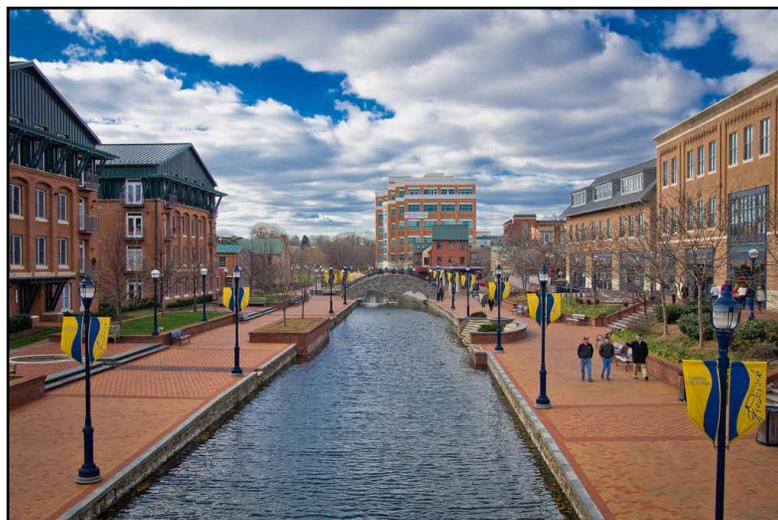
Urbanists have long recognized that downtowns and urban centers in the suburbs are urban places in the same way that, say, Greenwich Village is an urban place. The Manhattan neighborhood that launched the *Village Voice* is more intensely urban, sure, but small urban centers are mixed-use and walkable just the same. Even a small town will have an urban center and neighborhoods that follow the pattern of the urban-rural Transect. Such towns are not really rural. They are urban places surrounded by rural. That's an appealing juxtaposition for many people.

Likewise, urban centers surrounded by suburbs are appealing to many—for reasons of schools, safety (real or perceived), or proximity to jobs.

Why is this important? The same demographic and market trends that are driving a return to big cities can also boost the prospects of smaller cities and towns surrounded by suburbs and countryside.

A recent national survey by TransitCenter found a big, unmet desire for mixed-use, walkable neighborhoods. TransitCenter is interested, they report, because the

Riverwalk along Carroll Creek in downtown Frederick



kind of neighborhood a person lives in is the primary factor in who takes transit.

But mixed-use doesn't necessarily mean cities. About 18 million people—or six percent of the nation—would like to live in mixed-use suburban neighborhoods, but currently don't. About 10 percent of Americans would like to live in mixed-use small towns, but don't. That gap will create a flow of people moving to fulfill their unmet desires. Where do we find people most likely to make such a move? Probably from more than 40 million people—14 percent of the nation—that currently lives, but would rather not be living, in suburban neighborhoods with only housing.

A city like DC or San Francisco is too big, too intense, for many people's tastes. But tens of millions of households who don't want city life still want the walkable urban life.

Put all of this together and we are like to see a huge migration from single-family, isolated, suburban subdivisions toward smaller mixed-use urban centers. The media may be surprised

at this trend. Want a walkable urban place? Depending on your preference, you can find it in Manhattan or Philadelphia. Or you can find it in the suburbs. Or you can also find it in the Adirondack Mountains or the middle of Iowa if you look.

The mixed-use small town environment that many are seeking can be found in hundreds of small cities across the US—like Ithaca, New York, where I live, for example. With a population of 30,000, Ithaca is not a small town—but it feels like one. Ithaca has walkable neighborhoods and many amenities associated with cities, like good restaurants and a music and arts scene. Yet it also has the intimacy of a small town where you bump into friends and neighbors at any time. Two miles out of town the night stars shine brightly. Building is booming in downtown Ithaca.

This other walkable urban trend—apart from the revival of central cities—will be as powerful as any shaping real estate and geography in the coming decades. ♦

residential, leads to a powerful conclusion: it is not transportation policy per se but, rather, land-use and housing policies designed to encourage mixed-use development that have the potential to draw large numbers of people out of cars and onto transit."

Mixed-use development doesn't necessarily mean a return to the city, TransitCenter finds. It could be in a suburb or town. People want mixed-use neighborhoods, but they don't always want the intensity of urban life that is found in the city, the survey finds.

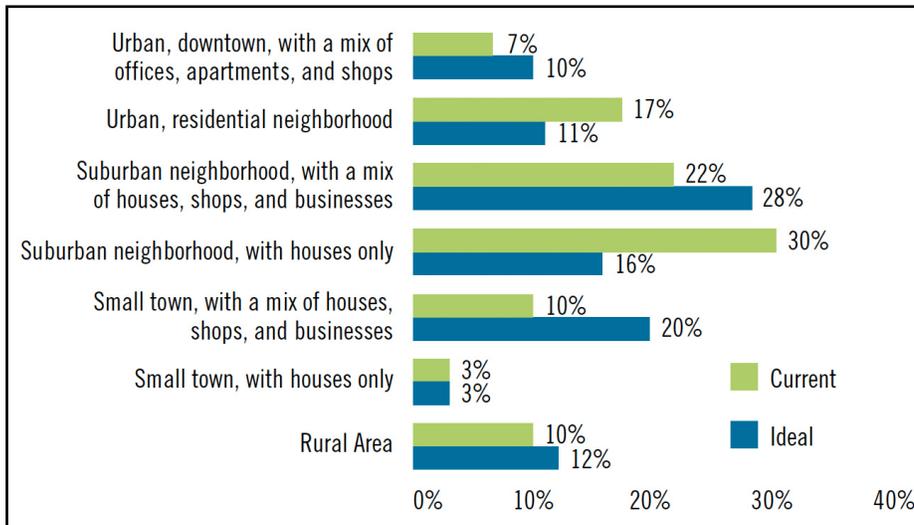
While city centers are reviving—most major US cities are now growing faster than they have in decades—the mixed-use trend is likely to be just as strong in suburbs, small cities, and towns. The ideal neighborhood types most lacking are small town or suburbs "with a mix of houses, shops, and businesses." The small town desire is tempered by a lack of jobs—but people could retire to these locations. Small cities offer job opportunities, especially within larger metro areas, and also may offer the small-town feel (see "Small cities and towns are urban places, too," on page 2).

The urban-to-rural Transect diagram makes clear that small cities and towns represent pockets of urban place, even when the surrounding context is suburban or rural. Towns and suburbs with pockets of mixed-use urban neighborhoods and centers are likely to benefit from this demand identified in the TransitCenter survey.

The preference for mixed-use is not likely to fade—it is strongest among young adults. Seventy-four percent, nearly three quarters, of those up to age 30 want mixed-use or urban neighborhoods. The Millennial generation is more prone to use transit in general, even accounting for the bias toward transit among the young. "Parents of school-age children who are under 30 are, it appears, more likely than parents of school-age children over 30 to use public transit, even when controlling for income," the authors note.

The survey offers hope for boosting transit use outside of major cities.

"We draw the conclusion that land-use and housing policy would better serve Americans if it were to favor mixed-use development," the authors say. ♦



Graph from *Who's On Board* show the gap between current community (green) and ideal (blue).

## Transit study

FROM PAGE 1

research indicates that the desire for walkable urban neighborhoods is the most powerful force in commercial real estate investment.

### IMPACT ON RIDERS

"We've observed that it's not how people feel about transportation modes so much as neighborhoods that is driving transportation choices," note the authors of *Who's On Board*. "This observation, along with the knowledge that many Americans would be happier in neighborhoods that are not exclusively

## Normal

FROM PAGE 1

13 different trade crafts, who were then suffering from high unemployment at the depth of the recession, according to authors Thomas Cafcas and Greg LeRoy. Road-building projects tend to only involve three crafts, Cafcas and LeRoy explain.

Amtrak boardings in Normal have risen higher than much larger cities like Minneapolis-St. Paul, Indianapolis, and Kansas City, and ridership should grow as track improvements are implemented between Chicago and St. Louis. "Even before high-speed rail service arrives, the station has become Amtrak's second-busiest in Illinois and fourth-busiest in the entire Midwest," the report says.

### STRUGGLING DOWNTOWN

Not so long ago, the mid-sized municipality (population about 54,000) faced many problems. The growth of suburban strip malls drew retail spending away from downtown. Business turnover was high. Establishments tended to cater to the students at nearby Illinois State University. Buildings were poorly maintained, and the area generally lacked significant reinvestment. The downtown was not very appealing to bicyclists and



PHOTO CREDIT: BRAD BASHAM PHOTOGRAPHY

Uptown Circle with Uptown Station at upper right and the children's museum at upper left

pedestrians. "In looking to develop a brighter future, the town hearkened back to its past," the authors note.

The town hired Farr in 1999, and council officially adopted the plan in 2001. It emphasizes sustainability, pedestrian- and transit-oriented design, increased housing density, mixed uses, and more diverse hotel and retail options. The central roundabout was designed to tie the transportation and placemaking

elements together.

The city began implementation by adopting the US Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design (LEED) standards and rebranding the area Uptown Normal. A tax-increment financing (TIF) district was created to fund public amenities. The design of the multimodal transit center was refined in the years leading up to the recession.

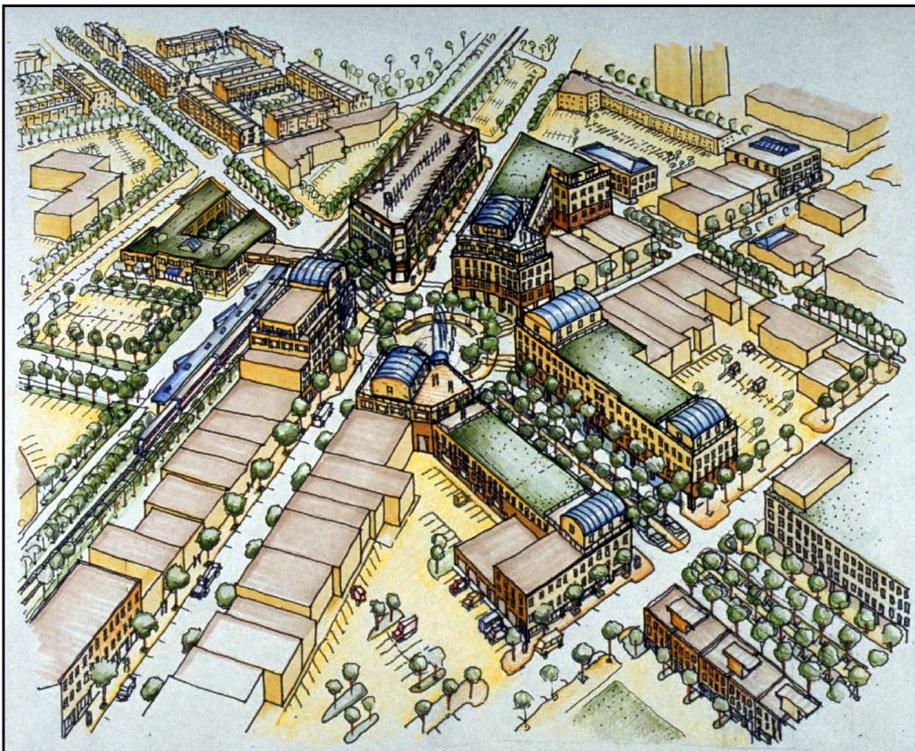
When TIGER was put in place to spur economic recovery in 2009, Normal's plan was "shovel-ready" and attractive to federal officials. Uptown Station's construction was a spark that ignited the downtown revitalization in the last five years.

Simultaneously, Normal's Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan set non-motorized transportation priorities, which tied in with the transit hub. "Over 30 miles of bicycle trails connect to Uptown Station. Sheltered bicycle parking is available inside next to the Connect Transit stop," the authors note.

Good Jobs First cautiously endorses Normal's TIF district, which diverts "some property tax revenues through 2026 to pay for property assembly costs, public parking attached to and nearby the Uptown Station, public infrastructure such as roads, plazas, and utilities, the Children's Discovery Museum, professional planning services, a small amount of grants and loans, and other public improvements.

"While Good Jobs First frequently ex-

### The downtown plan, which is backed up by a form-based code



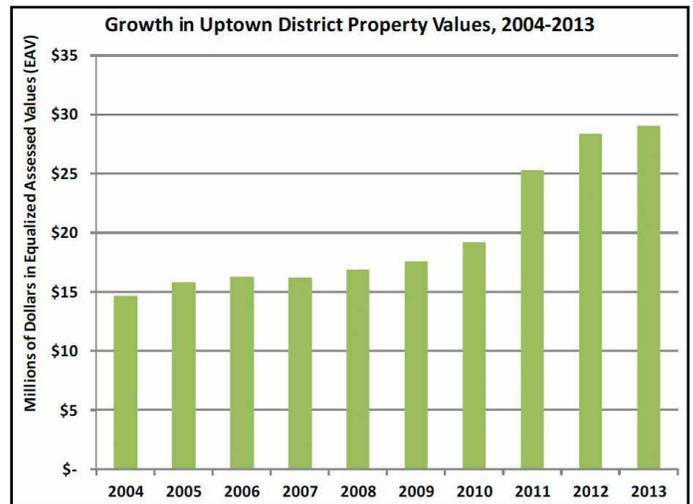
FARR ASSOCIATES

presses skepticism towards TIF, the use of limited TIF spending in Uptown as a part of a long-term strategic redevelopment plan stands apart. Tying TIF spending to public infrastructure investments and transit-oriented development aligns with many best practices.”

The report recommends that the municipality take “the foot off the pedal” and ramp down the TIF as Uptown Normal’s resurgence is firmly established-- so that the private sector does not become overly reliant on public sector subsidies. “Limiting the use of TIF after revitalization has taken place is a Good Jobs First best practice,” the authors note.

The recent investment notwithstanding, substantial underutilized sites remain in the center of Normal and redevelopment could go on for many years to come.

The progress so far has been remarkable, according to Good Jobs First. “Uptown Normal should serve as a model on how small- and medium-sized cities can rekindle excitement around Main Street America,” notes Cafcas. ♦



Rise in bus transit in Normal from 2005 to 2013

## Philly walks on water

Connection to nature is one of four primary qualities that generate a strong sense of place in a city or town, according to urbanist Richard Florida. The other qualities are: Walkable urban form; history and historic preservation; and culture and arts.

The first quality is why beach and mountain towns are so appealing. But some of the most dramatic juxtapositions with nature are possible in big cities. The High Line in New York City, where people stroll through high-rises buildings on a raised linear park, is one dramatic example. In Philadelphia, a city that has turned itself around in the last decade after 50 years of decline, the Schuylkill Banks Boardwalk has a similar impact. This facility allows residents and visitors to view the city in a new way: On a bike-walk trail that hovers over the Schuylkill River, connecting nature trails to the south and north.

Those who traverse the trail find a peaceful place, apart from the city, yet under the glittering skyline, reports Inga Saffron, *The Philadelphia Inquirer’s* architecture critic.

“The new 15-foot-wide walkway dives into the river at Locust Street, and doesn’t crawl back onto dry land until it reaches the South Street Bridge, a joyous journey more than 2,000 feet long. Along the way, you’re borne over the water like Huck and Jim on their raft, simultaneously a part of the world and temporarily removed from it,” she says.

Compared to the famous High Line—an expensive, high-design, architectural creation—the Schuylkill Banks Boardwalk is utilitarian. It was designed and built by engineers. The cost is less than a third of the High Line per linear foot—despite the High Line using existing infrastructure while the boardwalk was built from scratch. The engineering, using caissons to drill 40 feet down to reach bedrock, is impressive. The walkway hovers six to 12 feet above the river, depending on the tides, and follows the bank about 50 feet off-shore. It is built to withstand frequent river floods.

Prior to the boardwalk’s opening, the nature trails stopped at this Center City stretch because the CSX railroad tracks



Joggers on the Schuylkill Banks Boardwalk approach the South Street Bridge.

are too close to the banks. The Schuylkill River Development Corp., which maintains the trail, and the engineering firm URS debated various solutions before settling on the meandering,

PHOTO CREDIT ©2014 SANDY SORLIEN

15-foot-wide walkway that includes wider parts for sitting and fishing.

Just prior to opening in Mid-October, Saffron predicted crowds of users. "Because it is so exciting to be out on the

boardwalk, we know that it will immediately be packed with joggers, cyclists, and slow-moving pedestrians, all competing for space. The main path (on shore) is already so crowded, it is nearly impossible to ride a bicycle there most times of the day." ♦

## Young and educated flocking to close-in neighborhoods

Talented young adults are continuing to choose urban cores, fueling economic growth and urban revitalization, according to a study.

City Observatory, a research-oriented website focused on cities, released "The Young and Restless and the Nation's Cities" in late October, which details the impacts of the growing numbers of educated young adults choosing to live in cities.

Based in Portland, Oregon, City Observatory is run by economist Joe Cortright and funded by the Knight Foundation.

The Young and Restless are defined as 25- to 34-year-olds with a bachelor's degree or higher level of education. This group is increasingly moving to the close-in neighborhoods of the nation's large metropolitan areas, fueling economic growth and urban revitalization.

Over the past two decades, research has documented the links between a well-educated population and an area's economic success, showing that having a highly skilled population is the key to higher wages and productivity.

"These talented young people are driving the renaissance in urban living currently underway in America's cities," said Cortright. "Having a well-educat-



The young and educated population has risen more within three miles of downtown

ed, highly skilled population is key to higher wages and productivity. Policy makers would be wise to figure out ways to attract—and keep—these young people."

More than a million talented young adults move to a different state each year. Where they settle has a major impact on the economic outlook for the places they choose.

The report's findings include:

**Choosing bigger cities.** Well-educated young adults are disproportionately found in a few metropolitan areas. Two-thirds of the nation's 25 to 34-year-olds with a Bachelor's degree live in the nation's 51 largest metropolitan areas, (those with a million or more population).

**Moving to the center.** Young college-educated adults are much more likely to choose close-in urban neighborhoods, within 3 miles of downtown. In

the aggregate, they are more than twice as likely to live in these neighborhoods, and 49 of the nation's 51 largest metro areas saw increases in 25- to 34-year-olds with college degrees in these close-in neighborhoods.

**Businesses are following.** Businesses are increasingly locating in or near urban centers to better tap into the growing pool of well-educated young workers, and because these central city locations enable firms to better compete for talent locally and recruit talent from elsewhere.

**Startups want them.** The availability of talented young workers also plays a key role in the formation and growth of new firms. Startups and young firms employ disproportionately large numbers of young, well-educated workers.

**Driving revitalization.** Talented young adults are playing a key role in driving urban revitalization. In the 25 large metropolitan areas whose close in urban neighborhoods have experienced population growth since 2000, the increase in the number of 25- to 34-year-olds with a four-year degree has accounted for a majority of the net increase in population in 19 cities, and all of the net increase in population in 7 cities.

Launched October 10, City Observatory is a "virtual think tank" that covers urban policy topics such as transportation, housing, gentrification, place making, economic opportunity and industry clusters.

Cortright has been researching the migration patterns of young workers

Table 1: Characteristics of Young Adults in the United States in 2000 and 2012

Characteristic	2000	2012
Age Group	25-34	25-34
Birth Years	1966-1975	1978-1987*
Name	"GenX"	"Millennials"
Total Number	39.6 million	42.1 million
With 4-year degree or higher	10.9 million	13.6 million
Four-year attainment rate	27.5%	32.2%
Data Source	Decennial Census 2000	American Community Survey, 2012 Annual Data*

\* Other portions of this report (Part 4) uses geographically detailed data from the five year sample of the American Community Survey covering the years 2008 through 2012. The annual and five year data are not directly comparable. See text for explanation.

for more than a decade. This work has examined the attitudes and location preferences of educated young adults and documented that 25- to 34-year-olds, especially those with a four-year degree or higher level of education, were systematically moving away from

some metropolitan areas and toward others.

Close-in neighborhoods have always attracted more than their share of young adults, but that share has increased tremendously in the last two decades: ♦

with their parking lots barely half full.

## SOON WATERED DOWN

As with many idealized concepts in design, it doesn't take long for the mundane "merchant builders" to water down the original concept into buildings designed by accountants to maximize floor area and minimize costs. Of course, this actually translated into lower internal costs but higher externalized costs in the form of highways, long utility lines, widespread destruction of forests, farmlands and wetlands, and the slathering of suburban subdivisions across the landscape. It was the equivalent of pouring library paste across a bed of delicate lichen. That is, essentially, the story of the country over the last 60 years.

I once had a long conversation with a local elected official whose mission was to protect his beloved suburban community from what he saw as an

# The death of the suburban corporate campus

MARK HINSHAW

*Weyerhaeuser is moving from an iconic suburban office park to downtown Seattle—part of a nationwide trend (see table).*

Political and economic shock waves rippled through two Puget Sound cities when Weyerhaeuser, the multi-national giant, announced in late August that it was moving its corporate headquarters from Federal Way to Pioneer Square in Seattle. Much has been made of the "game changing" impact this decision will have on Seattle's First Neighborhood. The significance is not only economic, but cultural and architectural.

After many decades spent next to a grimy, undulating patch of asphalt, Occidental Square will soon be bordered along its east side by a contemporary symbol of global commerce. Designed by The Mithun Architects, the new Weyerhaeuser headquarters will undoubtedly stand as a testament to state-of-the-art sustainability and urbanity.

Just as momentous as its arrival in Seattle is the significance of Weyerhaeuser's exit from the bucolic campus it has occupied for more than 40 years. Its iconic, terraced headquarters, deftly spanning a gentle valley and nestled alongside a reflective lake, was the subject of photographs and articles in scores of books and journals on design. It represents the apogee of the idea to insert a corporate symbol into the Arcadian ideal of American suburbia. The design was a collaborative effort between architects Skidmore Owings and Merrill (SOM) and landscape architects Sasaki Walker Associates (SWA).

Not long after the building was finished in 1972, this bit of architectural

mythmaking devolved into what we have since seen replicated all over the country: hundreds of soul-less "office parks" whose generic glass-walled or concrete tilt-up buildings could be anywhere. Office parks built along I-90 in Bellevue could just as easily been seen in the outskirts of Kansas City or Atlanta. When I travel around the country now, I see many of these buildings

## Besides Weyerhaeuser, many firms have moved or are moving operations to downtown sites

Company	City	Description	Citation
Amazon	Seattle	Employs an estimated 10,000 in downtown Seattle. "Amazon uses their urban campus and the in-city lifestyle as an effective recruiting tool," says Dean Jones of brokerage Realogics Sotheby's International Realty."	Pryne, 2012
Archer Daniels Midland	Chicago	Moving headquarters from suburban Decatur, Illinois to downtown Chicago	Weber, 2013
Biogen/IDEC	Boston	Moved headquarters from suburban Weston, MA to Cambridge.	Weintraub, 2013
Cirrus Logic	Austin	Moved its headquarters and 500 employs from suburbs to downtown Austin in 2012	Novak, 2013
Coca Cola	Atlanta	Opening a new 2,000 person IT office in downtown Atlanta	Weber, 2013
Hillshire Brands	Chicago	The former Sara Lee is moving from suburban Downers Grove to downtown Chicago. "In the city, Hillshire is finding "the type of employees we wanted—externally focused and agile" with a "refuse to lose" attitude," said Mary Oleksiuk, Hillshire's head of HR."	Weber, 2013
Motorola Mobility	Chicago	Smart phone maker Motorola Mobility is moving 3,000 jobs from suburban Libertyville to the Merchandise Mart in Chicago.	Wong & Bergen, 2012
Pinterest	San Francisco	Moving from Palo Alto to San Francisco "The pull is the desire for talent of all sorts—engineers, designers, and dealmakers alike—to live in San Francisco."	Thomas, 2012
Quicken Loans	Detroit	Moved from suburban Livonia to downtown Detroit in 2010. Now have 7,000 employees in downtown.	Vanderkam, 2011
UBS	New York	Relocating trading floor from Connecticut to Manhattan	Bagli, 2011
United	Chicago	United moved 4,600 employees from suburban Elk Grove to the Willis tower in downtown Chicago; "corporate giants [are] abandoning vast suburban campuses for urban offices nearer to the young, educated and hyper-connected workers who will lead their businesses into the digital age."	Weber, 2013
VISA	San Francisco	"Visa is heading back to the city to help with the recruitment of the young urban engineers who are increasingly unwilling to commute to a generic suburban office park devoid of culture or street life."	Dineen, 2013
Yahoo	San Francisco	"Silicon Valley giant Yahoo Inc signed a big lease this year to expand its San Francisco offices so it can recruit top engineers unwilling to make the long commute on Highway 101."	Weber, 2013

SOURCE: THE YOUNG AND RESTLESS, CITY OBSERVATORY

onslaught of undesirable change: apartments occupied by “transient renters,” buildings higher than two stories and, of course, low-income minorities. He ended his monologue by exclaiming that suburbia was America’s gift to the world. Indeed, one can see that pernicious present playing itself out in the exurbs of Paris and London and, now, in Chinese cities.

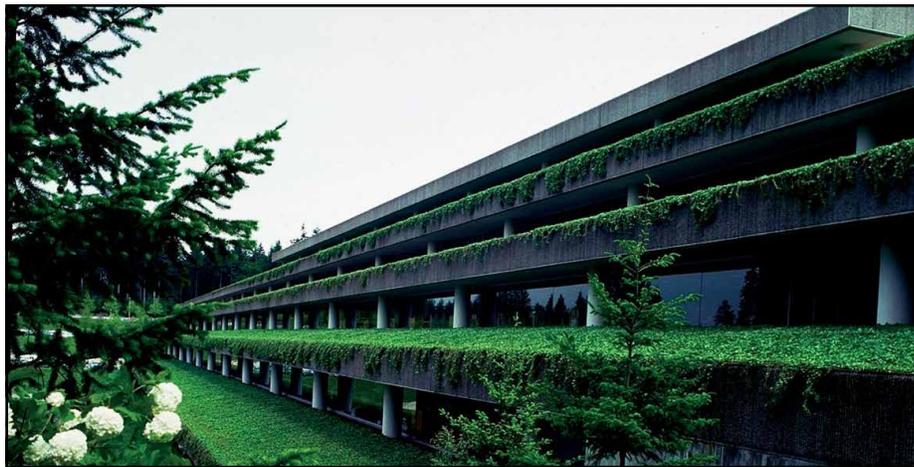
Concurrent with the rush to build Levittowns and their countless carbon copies in the years following World War II, another trend was quietly taking place. In 1957, the Connecticut General Life Insurance Company built its new headquarters in Bloomfield, Connecticut. The building was designed by Gordan Bunshaft, a star architect of the time who was with the New York office of Skidmore Owings and Merrill.

Three years earlier, SOM had designed the Lever Building on Park Avenue. Much more than merely a symbol of the soap company, the building came to represent a distinct departure for the ziggurat-shaped office buildings erected in the previous decades. (A year later, Mies Van der Rohe added his own riff on this with the nearby Seagram Building.) The Lever Building was a tailored, taught and tightly composed assembly of boxes sheathed in a gorgeous, green glass curtain wall.

### SKYSCRAPER ON ITS SIDE

For Connecticut General, SOM did something quite startling. It transported the same crisp, rectilinear box-like forms used in the urban Lever Building to the verdant countryside. This was the original “skyscraper on its side,” a phrase attached to the Weyerhaeuser headquarters 15 years later. The glass structure was not rooted in an urban streetscape in Manhattan but instead appeared to levitate above a pristine landscape. This was the idea of commerce separated from social space. The setting was merely a set piece for an enormous, free-standing, three-dimensional sign.

Decades ago, Willam H. Whyte memorialized this new social ethic in a major book titled “The Organization Man.” Smartly clad structures perfectly reflected their pinstripe suited, clean-cut occupants. It was a near perfect match of sociology and architecture. The male breadwinner toiling all day



Weyerhaeuser current headquarters in Federal Way, WA

inside a glass box, coming home to the American Dream: a detached “Colonial style” house with a manicured lawn. The Betty Crocker cookbook of that era advised housewives to have a mixed drink ready for their husband’s eagerly expected return, along with tips on how to set a table when the domestic help had the day off. We all know how that dream turned out.

It took a few years for the SOM building to fully command the attention of other corporations. Perhaps some companies did not initially embrace the idea that they didn’t need to be downtown to conduct commerce. But a few more did.

In 1963 John Deere commissioned Eero Saarinen, another star architect of the time, to design its headquarters in the verdant countryside. Saarinen tucked horizontal stacks of steel and glass into a lush landscape. Several other major corporations followed suit. Then came the urban “race riots” of the late 60s. That was excuse enough to decamp to the hinterlands and the story of white flight to American suburbia began.

But we are in another century now. One with its own very different cultural and economic imperatives. The entire country, not just the big cities, is much more racially and ethnically diverse. We have exhausted the benefits of relentless horizontal expansion; economists even have a term for this: “diminishing returns.” And most importantly Millennials don’t buy into that American Dream. They were raised in it, and they had enough of its boredom and anomie.

Some Boomers smugly claim that

Millennials will fall back into line as soon as they have children. Well, guess what? They aren’t having kids. They aren’t even marrying. Nor are they buying cars. And not because they can’t afford them. They don’t *want* them.

The folks who run Weyerhaeuser are a smart bunch. I’m sure they started projecting out how long it would be before they would have a difficult time recruiting younger workers to reverse commute. Silicon Valley firms are already seeing this kind of rebellion and are building office space in San Francisco.

### AMAZON, TOO

In Seattle, Amazon saw it coming, and chose to headquarter in South Lake Union rather than some outlying location. Microsoft has already occupied a number of towers in downtown Bellevue. I wouldn’t be surprised to learn that it was eyeing the soon-to-be-vacated Amgen Campus, near downtown, for its next big move. Imagine Microsoft on the Beach, with its Redmond campus converted to research and training for global employees.

The dramatic move by the Big W represents the end of an era. ♦

*Mark Hinshaw, FAIA, is an architect and urban planner at a Seattle architecture firm. He was an architecture critic for The Seattle Times and is the author of many articles and books, including “Citistate Seattle” (1999). He can be reached at editor@crosscut.com.*

# Creative Exchange focuses on arts and placemaking

Cities across the country are collaborating with artists in innovative economic and community development projects—from turning massive public construction projects into opportunities for temporary and permanent public art in St. Paul, Minnesota, to hosting pop-up museums in parking lots across Santa Cruz County, California, to establishing Community Support Art in St. Louis.

The nonprofit Creative Exchange launched in October to help cities replicate such programs with toolkits, resources, and consultation. Created by Springboard for the Arts, an artist-led economic and community development organization based in St. Paul, Creative Exchange is launched in partnership with the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

Free toolkits provide a step-by-step guide for replicating programs—from sample budgets and fundraising plans to templates for legal contracts and press releases. Creative Exchange also offers experts to assist artists and communities in implementing replication projects.

The inspiration for Creative Exchange is rooted in the success of the Community Supported Art program, which Springboard for the Arts launched in St. Paul in 2010. The program sells shares in exchange for artwork yet to be created by local artists.

Other toolkits include:

- Artists Health Fairs for helping artists and other independent workers connect with existing healthcare resources.
- Pop-Up Museums, which are temporary exhibits created by choosing a theme and venue and then inviting people to bring an object on-topic to share.
- Neighborhood Postcard Projects that collect personal stories from residents in marginalized communities and send them out to random people in the same city to break down stereotypes and foster connection.
- Irrigate, which mobilizes artists to turn disruptions caused by public construction, natural disaster and other challenges into unexpected opportunities for creative community development.
- Unlocking the Community Potential of Vacant Storefronts. ◆



SOURCE: CREATIVE EXCHANGE

Creating art from a chain link fence during a construction project

## NYC passes tax-free transit benefits

New Yorkers already spend less money on transportation by driving less and using transit more—now more of them will get a tax break for commuting via transit.

New York City Council unanimously approved expanding the program that allows commuters to use pre-tax dollars for transit.

Transit benefits make riding the subway and bus more affordable by allowing workers to set aside up to \$130 per month in pre-tax earnings to pay for public transit—just like people pay for health care or retirement contributions. But according to federal tax law, workers aren't allowed to take the tax break if their employer doesn't offer it as an option. The law will require all businesses with 20 or more employees to take part, expanding the benefit to 450,000 more New Yorkers.

According to an analysis by the Riders Alliance, the average worker in New York City making the median wage could save as much as \$443 annually if he or she uses the transit benefit tax break. Multiplying those numbers gets a total potential tax savings for commuters of close to \$200 million.

As a consultant in the 1980s, Richard Oram, now Chairman of the Oram foundation, helped design and launch New York's TransitChek program and popularized the program nationally by

founding Commuter Check Corp. "For New Urbanism, this is important because, as the transit benefit requirement spreads outside New York, it will enable cities and towns to see alternatives to requiring the amount of parking now required at developments or in downtowns overall," Oram says. "The New York ordinance will underscore the role transit benefits have had as an alternative and offset to free parking."

This program has a small cost, yet it is popular with businesses because they realize a net savings, says Stuart Baker, vice president of business development for Edenred, one of many firms that offers transit benefit services for employers and their employees. "The employer saves on payroll taxes, because they don't pay on taxes set aside. The rest of us save because there is one less person on the road."

Edenred is a "third party administrator" that handles enrollment, administration, and customer service that enable employees in participating firms nationwide to take part.

The Riders Alliance, a nonprofit advocate for transit in New York, estimates that businesses will save about \$100 per year per employee.

Baker adds: "The reason it's important is that you create incentives to ride transit, you make it cheaper, get people out

SEE 'TRANSIT BENEFITS' ON PAGE 14

# ‘Deadwood City’ no more, thanks to code

**W**ith the help of a form-based code (FBC), Redwood City, California, has become the new Silicon Valley hot spot—a few years ago the city of 76,000 wasn’t even on the radar screen of tech companies. Box Inc., a cloud storage company, has signed a lease to relocate to Redwood City and will fill an entire 334,000 square foot new office building.

The code has opened the floodgates to downtown residential and commercial development, most of which will contribute to a sense of place because new projects must adhere to a code that focuses on placemaking.

Within days of Box Inc. signing its lease in September, a bundle of new office projects were announced. Most recently, Google is eyeing a site in Redwood City. The city’s downtown vacancy rate is 2-3 percent, compared to the regional figure of 8-10 percent, *The Daily Journal* reported. The city has so many new office projects coming forward that the numbers exceed the maximums proposed in a plan adopted three years ago.

This is a good problem for Redwood City, which had very little downtown development from the 1960s through the first decade of this millennium. Since the 1980s, almost all new projects downtown had been publicly assisted by the redevelopment agency. This decade, the development is all private. “Since the downtown precise plan was adopted, nine developments have been approved totaling more than 1,200 housing units and 300,000 square feet of office space that have



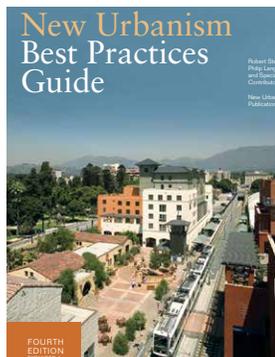
SOURCE: HUNTERS/STORM

Rendering of new Box Inc. headquarters, Redwood City

either been built or are under construction,” according to the *San Jose Mercury-News*. Now six more projects are proposed—one residential and five with office space. Many of the projects have first-floor retail. Although Google is not looking to occupy a downtown site, its interest reflects Redwood City’s new status as a tech hub with easy rail access to San Francisco and the talented workforce that resides there.

Here’s how Redwood City went from also-ran to Silicon Valley tech center. Before adopting a FBC in 2011, the city’s entitlement process was much like other cities in the valley—expensive and time-consuming. With the new code, based on a community vision, all that is changing. “Redwood City promises quick approval, no hassle, if they meet the code,” says Dan Zack, who recently left his position as Downtown

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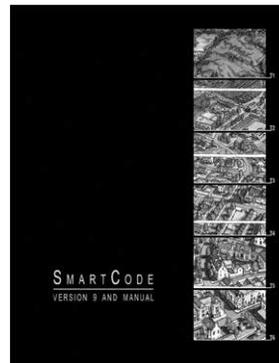


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Development Coordinator for a job with the City of Fresno. "It's a tough code, but the developers would much rather have that certainty. Once a couple of projects went through and the code lived up to its promise, the flood gates opened up."

Redwood City followed a three-step process:

- Create great public spaces and bring "activity generators" to enliven the downtown—an effort punctuated by the construction of a fantastic new

courthouse square in the last decade.

- Reform the zoning to make the entitlement process more transparent, ensuring that whatever is built takes an urban form based on a community vision.

- Let the private development move forward, which is what is currently happening.

Zack notes the city previously was ridiculed as "Deadwood City," for its lackluster downtown. Those days are over. ♦

ing blocks of communities with a strong sense of place.

The market pendulum has swung towards communities that generate a sense of place. Although placemaking is attractive to a broad range of socio-economic groups, young adults, college educated people, and relocating Boomers are particularly drawn to walkable places. Businesses who want to attract talent are looking to communities with a sense of place. That goes for cities, suburbs, and towns of all sizes.

## UNDERSUPPLIED MIXED-USE NEIGHBORHOODS

We used to build mixed-use places routinely. But for three generations after World War II, we primarily built low-density single-family houses and single-use commercial areas. We designed infrastructure to support this kind of development and mandated it through zoning. Now, compact, mixed-use neighborhoods are in short supply (they make up 4-8 percent of metro areas by land)—and regions are oversupplied

## Placemaking is critical to the local economy

*So many arguments support investing in a sense of place.*

ROBERT STEUTEVILLE

The strongest arguments for placemaking focus on the market, attracting talent, and the creation of value. Other strong cases can be made on the basis of

household economics, health, and the environment.

Mark Wyckoff of Michigan State University defines placemaking as "the process of creating quality places that people want to live, work, play, and learn in." Mixed-use, compact, walkable neighborhoods are fundamental build-

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with large-lot, single-family housing, especially in residential-only areas. The TransitCenter study (see page 1) reports that tens of millions of people living in such housing would prefer mixed-use neighborhoods.

The market will seek to create neighborhoods with “place” in the coming two or three decades to rebalance the supply and meet a growing demand.

As placemaking drives the real estate economy, it is key for economic development. Developers of commercial properties, particularly office and multifamily, are seeking walkable urban places.

## WHY TOWNS SHOULD REMOVE BARRIERS TO PLACE

Aside from attracting talent and promoting economic development, placemaking creates a stronger tax base. Mixed-use, downtown development generates, on average, 10 times the land values per acre of spread-out development. Land is a municipality’s most enduring asset, and maximizing the economic value of that land is the



SOURCE: PROJECT FOR PUBLIC SPACES

Families enjoy a public space in Providence, Rhode Island.

key to generating revenues to provide public services. Without revenue-generating downtowns and urban centers, municipalities will have a hard time maintaining spread-out infrastructure over multiple life cycles—when the

infrastructure has to be repaired and rebuilt.

Placemaking adds to the tax base because it provides a setting for more economic activity in a given area. In a compact, mixed-use neighborhood, peo-

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ple live, work, shop, and recreate in close proximity, 24 hours a day. A study in the Nashville area showed that a new urban infill development, The Gulch, generated 1,150 times more income per acre to the city than the average suburban development.

## HOUSEHOLD ECONOMICS

On an individual level, households save *a lot of money* by living in places where they don't have to drive as much. HUD's Location Affordability Portal demonstrates that combined housing and transportation costs are lower in walkable neighborhoods in every metro area.

In Kevin Klinkenberg's recent book *Why I Walk*, planner Stu Sirota reports on his family's move to Baltimore. "The move from suburb to city allowed me to trade in my 50-minute daily driving commute for a 20-minute walking commute," he says. "The move also made owning two cars completely unnecessary, so we downsized to one without any sacrifice in convenience. In the process, we found that this change was saving us over \$8,000 annually."

After moving to a more walkable city, Klinkenberg reduced his driving from 15,000 to 5,000 miles a year—eliminating car payments and cutting other costs. "I have an extra five to six thousand dollars per year in my pocket compared to the average American. Not too shabby," he writes.

## OTHER ADVANTAGES

Placemaking offers many other advantages that, for some people, will be as important or more important than economics.

One such issue is **health**. As health care puts a progressively larger burden on the economy, our nation is looking for ways to minimize these costs while improving health.

While automobile accidents have dropped in recent years, they remain the largest cause of death in the precious childhood and young adult years between ages 5 and 34.

In a 2009 study of 24 California municipalities using data from 1997 to 2005, cities built primarily after 1950 suffered 200-plus percent (three times) higher rates of death from automotive accidents. The cities built prior to 1950 benefit from compact networks of streets and neighborhoods where residents drive slower and shorter distances.

A 2014 study of these same cities shows that a more compact street networks leads to lower levels of high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes, and obesity.

The **environment** is another issue that is important to a large

segment of citizens. As Kaid Benfield argues, cities are important to nature because they are places suited to people "but do not permanently infringe upon those extraordinary places where humans remain secondary to other parts of nature."

One infringement is carbon footprint. People in compact, urban places produce fewer carbon emissions because their community enables them to drive less. From a public policy perspective, reducing greenhouse gas emissions in a way that is consistent with the market—i.e. through placemaking—makes sense.

Protection of open space is a key concern for many. Generations of Americans have seen their golden valleys and fruited plains disappear—at least in proximity to their homes. The argument that placemaking preserves open land is easy—development chews up land much quicker at 2 units per acre than at 10 units per acre, especially if the compact development is primarily infill.

Placemaking appears to foster **social mobility** and **social activity**. For some people, a desire to reduce isolation will be the motivation to seek communities with a sense of place. Tom Low, an architect in Charlotte, North Carolina, is quoted in the current *Farmer's Almanac*. "Aging baby boomers are interested in reconnecting," Low said. "They're gravitating to the kind of communities that have neighborhoods and porches."

The concept of placemaking itself is relatively easy to communicate, because it is intuitively understandable. People have a sense of place and they react to a finely crafted main street or well-designed public space. ♦

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# Transit benefits

FROM PAGE 9

of cars, and you improve the environment.”

Riders Alliance member Jeanmarie Theobalds says, “I work for a small company and we get transit benefits through our employer. For me, the savings make a difference. The money I save on transit helps me pay for health care and other necessities. I haven’t always been offered the transit benefit, and now I’m fortunate to work for a company that provides it. Everyone in New York City should have access to these savings.”

Prior to New York City, San Francisco adopted a similar requirement. ♦

## BOOKS

### Urban Acupuncture

By Jaime Lerner

Island Press, hardcover 160 pp., 2014, \$19.99

REVIEW BY ROBERT STEUTEVILLE

Jaime Lerner is a three-time former mayor of Curitiba, Brazil, and also former governor of the Brazilian state of Parana. He trained as an architect and founded an urban planning and research institute in the 1960s. He is something

## BOOKS

of an urban planning legend for implementing successful and innovative Bus Rapid Transit, creating an extensive flood-control park system and employing sheep to cut the grass, and other initiatives as mayor.

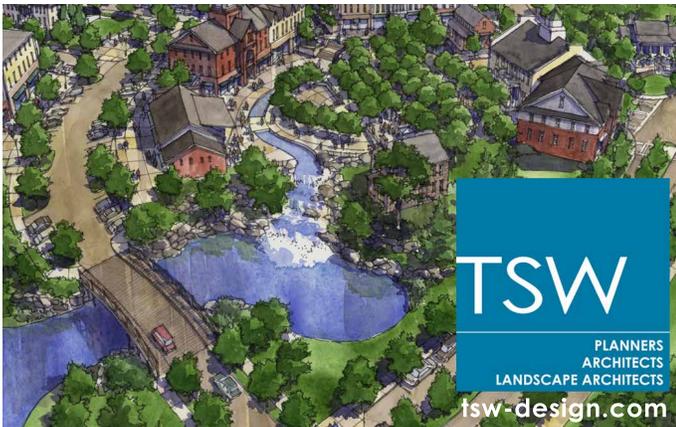
Lerner offers his views of urban planning worldwide in simple, evocative language. He must be one of the most knowledgeable people in the world on urban geography. *Urban Acupuncture* leaps dizzyingly from cities in North America to Asia, South America, Europe, the Middle East, and Africa—sometimes without a transition.

This book is not a particularly well-organized or logical. Lerner hops from one subject to the next without explaining what topics or ideas have to do with each other. He admires the genius of modern architects in one section, and then rips into modern buildings in another chapter, comparing the poverty of their public expressions to the grandeur of historic buildings. These views aren’t reconciled: Lerner does not feel compelled to wrap things up into a neat package.

For an architect and politician, Lerner is refreshingly free of ideology, and that is a relief. He simply says what he thinks, and most of the time his views ring true. I never thought of Korean-American shopkeepers in urban planning terms, but he makes a reasonable case that they have added tremendous vitality to New York City by staying open 24 hours a day.

As a reformer who has initiated sweeping changes to a city,

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Lerner argues that doing nothing can be a virtue. “Sometimes when a city faces decisions about public works that could do more harm than good, doing nothing is the most urgent priority,” he explains. Truer words have never been spoken.

In the introduction, Lerner speaks of Gehry’s Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain, the Removal of San Francisco’s Central Freeway, and the restoration of Grand Central Station and creation of tiny Paley Park in New York City as examples of urban acupuncture. I wanted to learn how they relate to one another.

Lerner never ties these projects coherently together. He defines urban acupuncture as “a simple healing touch that has everything to do with revitalizing not only that specific area but also the entire district that surrounds it.” He says, “the essence of urban acupuncture is that it needs to be precise and quick.”

He then takes the reader on a world tour of his favorite places and urban planning projects, with personal commentary in his unique voice. Lerner offers no grand theories or how-to lessons. But the book contains wisdom and the writing is concise and entertaining. After reading *Urban Acupuncture*, I feel like I know how Jaime Lerner speaks. He would be an excellent dinner companion—especially if you love cities.

### The Economics of Place The Art of Building Great Communities

By Elizabeth Philips Foley, Colleen Layton, and Daniel Gilmartin

Michigan Municipal League, 2014, \$19.95

**T**he Michigan Municipal League (MML) has published a follow-up book to its 2011 *The Economics of Place: The Value of Building Communities Around People*.

The League, a nonprofit that represents many of the state’s more than 1,500 municipalities, has been a leader in Michigan’s innovative placemaking efforts.

The 2011 book was mostly theoretical: It made the case for placemaking as an economic driver at the macro scale and in local urban centers.

This new book is all about implementation.

“We drew inspiration from places as diverse as Detroit, Baroda, Marquette, Flint, Grand Rapids and Traverse City in an effort to chronicle the amazing work that is already under-

way and provide a blueprint for others moving forward. We believe that the book is equally important for those outside of Michigan as it is for those who reside in the Great Lakes State,” says Gilmartin.

The stories “run the gamut from marketing campaigns and municipal projects to special events and recreational opportunities.”

MML explains that “Central to attracting these important commodities is the concept of *PLACE*. To be successful communities must effectively develop and leverage their key human, natural, cultural and structural assets and nurture them through enacting effective public policy.”

### City Building

By Josef Stubben

Design for Planning, 2014, free download

REVIEW BY ROBERT STEUTEVILLE

**J**ulia Koschinsky and Emily Talen of Arizona State University have transcribed, reformatted, and officially published the first English translation of Josef Stubben’s influential 1911 urban planning work *City Building*.

Just a quick skimming of this book reveals Stubben’s magnificent, timeless knowledge and mastery of organizing cities

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## BOOKS

and their parts—downtowns, neighborhoods, thoroughfares, and public space.

The book is divided into three parts: The Fundamental Principles of City Building; Component Parts of a City Building Plan; and The Complete Plan. As Talen notes, *City Building* has both historical importance and ongoing usefulness “as a still-relevant manual of town planning practice.”

If we could recover a small part of the beauty and simplicity of Stubben’s approach in day-to-day planning practice, our cities and towns would be much better off. Planners and urbanist should take two minutes to download this book and glance through it—they are soon likely to become immersed.

Download *City Building* here: [www.design4planning.org](http://www.design4planning.org). ♦

## UPDATE

■ Urban planner and author **Jeff Speck** wrote that transportation engineers in cities, suburbs, and towns should get busy replacing 12-foot travel lanes with 10-foot lanes in high-volume streets. This change would save thousands of lives, prevent even more injuries, and make our cities and towns more livable, he says.

Speck supported his case with detailed studies, and challenged engineers to provide evidence to the contrary. The article on *City Lab* generated nearly 600 comments—a huge amount for any blog on urban planning. If you wade into the comments, many were supportive, even more were outraged, and few if any presented any serious refutation based upon science.

Speck urged supporters of cities, complete streets, transit, placemaking, walkability, bicycling, and healthy communities to adopt a simple slogan: “**Ten not Twelve!**”

■ **Todd Zimmerman and Laurie Volk**, co-principals-in-charge of the market research firm Zimmerman/Volk Associates (ZVA), will be the recipients of the 2015 Seaside Prize.

■ *Urbanful*, a publication of Smart Growth America, partly blames low voter turnout among Millennials for the **defeat of light rail lines in Florida and Texas** on November 4.

Meanwhile, on Smart Growth America’s website, the headline was “Voters strongly support smart growth measures on election day 2014.” This article uses a broad definition of smart growth: A number of statewide ballot measures passed, SGA reports—many having to do with purchasing and protection of open space.

■ The second annual New Urbanism Film Festival took place on November 6-9 at the ACME Theater in Los Angeles.

It was described as “a four-day immersive experience of documentary films, events, tours, workshops and conversations opening a meaningful dialogue, about revitalizing neighborhoods and cities into walkable, healthy, diverse, thriving places, between planners, developers, architects, engineers, public officials, investors, community activists and the general public.”

Films screened included: *American Makeover*; *Transforming America*; *Power To The Pedals*; and *Plant This Movie*.

■ Since the mid-1980s, **Providence**, Rhode Island, has seen a slow, but steady, resurgence. Downcity (the city’s downtown) was virtually abandoned as a place to live through the 1990s. The urban center of a few hundred acres “almost doubled in population between 2000 and 2010 — from 2,678 people to 4,569.

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## UPDATE

At least six buildings have been renovated into mixed-use developments and apartments since 2010, and they are practically full,” notes *The Providence Journal*. A series of new urban plans for Downcity, many by Duany Plater-Zyberk & Company and sponsored by developer Buff Chace, have guided revitalization.

■ After six decades of steep decline, **Detroit** may be ready for a turnaround, Kaid Benfield writes. The central city gained population from 2012 to 2013. “Housing prices are up this year, too, and many crime-rate indicators are trending down” he writes, adding, “perhaps even more telling is that the downtown business climate appears to be showing new signs of life.” ♦

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