



**Smart Infill: Creating more
Livable Communities in the
Bay Area (2002)**

**Stephen Wheeler, PhD, AICP
Greenbelt Alliance**

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CREATING MORE LIVABLE COMMUNITIES IN THE BAY AREA

Greenbelt Alliance

Smart Infill

CREATING MORE LIVABLE COMMUNITIES IN THE BAY AREA

A GUIDE FOR BAY AREA LEADERS

By
Stephen Wheeler, PhD, AICP

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PROTECTING OPEN SPACE AND PROMOTING LIVABLE COMMUNITIES

Smart Infill: Creating More Livable Communities in the Bay Area is a guide for local government officials, planners, and citizens concerned about how development within existing towns and cities—especially infill housing and mixed-use development—can help revitalize communities and accommodate the future growth of the Bay Area.

This Greenbelt Alliance report was researched and written by Stephen M. Wheeler, Ph.D., AICP, in collaboration with Greenbelt Alliance staff and the Greenbelt Alliance Livable Communities Board team. Team members include Roberta Borgonovo, Andrew Butler, Peter Cohen, Zach Cowan, Ignacio Dayrit, Marilyn Farley, Robert Johnson, Vivian Kahn, Trish Mulvey, Margaret Spaulding, Michele Stratton, and Michelle Yesney.

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Our mission is to make the nine county San Francisco Bay Area a better place to live by protecting the region's greenbelt and improving the livability of its cities and towns. We work through public policy development, advocacy and education, in partnership with diverse coalitions.

Tom Steinbach
Executive Director

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Livable Communities Program Director



executive summary

If the Bay Area is to meet the growth challenges of the twenty-first century, much more of the region's building will need to take place as "infill" development within existing cities and towns. Infill development can help the region save open space, improve housing options and affordability, reduce traffic congestion, make more efficient use of existing infrastructure, and create more livable communities. Given the region's housing crisis, residential or mixed-use infill is particularly important to create additional housing near jobs in many existing Bay Area communities.

Infill development faces many obstacles in the Bay Area. Impediments include land availability, fiscal disincentives for local governments to approve infill projects, outdated zoning requirements, excessive parking standards, financing difficulties, neighborhood opposition, lengthy permitting processes, toxic contamination of sites, and poor schools and a lack of amenities in older communities. These obstacles must be addressed if infill is to achieve its potential of accommodating a majority of future Bay Area development.

Local governments can play a central role in making infill happen. Local officials can take the lead by creating Specific Plans for areas with infill

potential, revising zoning and parking codes, adopting design guidelines, streamlining permitting processes, facilitating cleanup of contaminated sites, and coordinating involvement of neighbors and other local constituencies. It is particularly important for Bay Area cities and towns to encourage multiple infill projects in close proximity with new amenities such as parks, streetscape improvements, public plazas, child care centers, local shops, and restaurants.

Such infill would produce not just individual buildings, but revitalized communities that can meet the needs of a wide variety of residents. At the same time, cities and towns should adopt policies to protect existing low-income residents from displacement and to ensure that new housing units serve all income groups. Along with open space protection, improved transportation alternatives, and measures to promote regional equity, infill development can form the core of a regional Smart Growth strategy.

Some Bay Area communities have already taken leadership in creating a favorable context for infill. San Jose has adopted a city-wide strategy combining an Urban Growth Boundary with zoning changes, permit streamlining, financial incentives to developers, and creation of Specific Plans. Other communities such as Moun-

tain View, San Rafael, and San Francisco are also creating Specific Plans for infill locations. Emeryville has been a leader in cleaning up contaminated "brownfields" sites and in providing information and assistance to developers. Redwood City, Hayward, and Oakland have built new civic facilities to help leverage downtown infill. San Francisco's Mission Bay project creates an entire new infill neighborhood on former railyard lands. Infill around rail transit stations is underway in Pleasant Hill, Millbrae, El Cerrito, Walnut Creek, Richmond, Oakland's Fruitvale neighborhood, and other locations.

Creating a context that nurtures infill development in the Bay Area means putting in place mutually reinforcing programs at different levels of government. State and regional policy should promote local action. The active involvement of citizens, business groups, neighborhood associations, nonprofit organizations, elected officials, and the media is also crucial to building political support for infill. Together, all of us can help Bay Area cities and towns become more livable and sustainable through infill development.

*Together, all of us can
help Bay Area cities
and towns become
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infill development.*

contents

INTRODUCTION7

THE NEED FOR INFILL

What is Infill?	9
The Role of Infill in Addressing Bay Area's Growth Crisis	10
Varieties of Infill Housing	15
What Densities are Appropriate?	16
Making Infill Affordable	17
Avoiding Displacement	21

STRATEGIES FOR PRODUCING BAY AREA INFILL

1. Land Availability	23
2. Fiscal Disincentives	26
3. Specific Plans	27
4. Zoning Codes	29
5. Parking Requirements	32
6. Financing Options	35
7. Design Guidelines	36
8. Permitting Processes	38
9. Working with Neighbors	39
10. Brownfields Cleanup	41
11. Consistency and Completeness	42
12. Community Revitalization	43
Other Problems and Potential Solutions	45

EXAMPLES OF BAY AREA INFILL

San Jose	48
Emeryville	50
Redwood City	51
Mountain View	51
San Francisco	53
Oakland	54
San Rafael	56
Hayward	57
Berkeley	58
Pleasant Hill	59
Millbrae	61
Also Noteworthy	62

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REGIONAL AND STATE ACTION

The Regional Level	63
The State Level	64

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CITIZEN ACTION67

INTERVIEWEES68

ORGANIZATIONAL RESOURCES69

BIBLIOGRAPHY71

**Guidebook on Smart Growth:
Planning More Livable
Communities with Transit-
Oriented Development**

Metropolitan Council (2000)

www.metrocouncil.org

Guidebook on Smart Growth

Planning More Livable Communities With Transit-Oriented Development

Metropolitan Council
July 2000

USE OF THIS GUIDEBOOK

The designation of an existing or developing area, whether a large area around a rail station or a smaller area around a bus stop, as a Transit-Oriented Development can set in motion a process for marshalling funding and other resources to take maximum advantage of the opportunities to create a vibrant, compact, walkable, mixed-use community.

This *Guidebook* addresses a broad range of issues related to site selection, land use patterns, street configuration, and design details for creating transit-oriented development. Local planning departments, transit agencies, transportation departments, public works departments, and other public departments can use the *Guidebook* to:

- Determine where to establish transit-oriented communities;
- Begin revising their plans, zoning, and development guidelines to encourage or require that development be transit-oriented;
- Guide the design and alignment of new streets and the retrofitting of existing streets to be more friendly to the needs of pedestrians and cyclists;
- Form redevelopment districts and overlay zones;
- Develop joint venture projects in station areas; and
- Assist developers with design and planning in transit village areas.

This *Guidebook* also provides guidance to property owners, developers and builders for

- Site planning of transit villages or portions thereof; and
- Design of specific buildings, streets, parks, or other improvements.

While remaining adaptable to local conditions, the *Guidebook* establishes measurable standards to simplify the task of guiding development proposals and assessing their outcomes.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Metropolitan Council wishes to thank the individuals, local units of government, community development agencies and architectural/planning organizations that contributed their time and materials to assist in the preparation of this Transit-Oriented Development *Guidebook*.

This guidebook was originally prepared by Calthorpe Associates, Berkeley, California.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- A. Transit-oriented Development: A Tool for Smart Growth
- B. What Exactly is Transit-Oriented Development?
- C. Transit-Oriented Development in the Twin Cities

CHAPTER 2. PRINCIPLES AND APPLICATIONS OF TRANSIT-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT

- A. Principles of Transit-Oriented Development
- B. Applications of Transit-Oriented Development

CHAPTER 3. TRANSIT-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT GUIDELINES

- A. Configuration of Transit-Oriented Developments
- B. Parameters of Development in the TOD
- C. Surrounding Areas Outside the TOD
- D. Circulation in Transit-Oriented Developments
- E. Parking in Transit-Oriented Developments
- F. Transit Facilities in Transit-Oriented Developments

CHAPTER 4. MAKING THEORY A REALITY: TRANSIT-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT IMPLEMENTATION TOOLS

- A. Setting the Stage for Transit-Oriented Development
- B. Getting Transit-Oriented Development Guild: Creating Station Area Master Land Use Plans
- C. Financing Transit-Oriented Development: Financial Tools and Incentives

CHAPTER 5. APPENDIX

- A. Benefits of TOD
- B. Description of Parking Strategies from around the Country
- C. References

CHAPTER 1.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Summary.

Recent trends in development, suburban growth, and urban revitalization have led to the increasing use of "Transit-Oriented Development" as an effective land use planning tool to create livable communities. The Principles of Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) promote the coordination of land use and transportation planning and investment to develop a land use pattern that supports transit ridership and pedestrian activity.

A. REASONS FOR TRANSIT-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT

Across the country, communities are attaining efficient and livable patterns of growth by encouraging development that makes walking and transit use convenient — whether in shaping new suburban areas or in revitalizing older urban and suburban areas. These efforts challenge the standard model of growth, which for several decades has isolated and separated land uses and designed for the automobile, resulting in a host of unintended impacts to the greater health of our metropolitan areas.

Poor coordination between transportation investments and local land use patterns have contributed to congestion, air pollution, loss of open space and habitat, long commutes, socially-isolated communities, lack of affordable housing, and distressed cities and older suburbs. On the whole, people spend ever-increasing amounts of time in their cars and travel longer distances to places that do not support a vibrant community life. Many people must shuttle among dispersed

locations to meet daily needs, and those who cannot drive often face extraordinary challenges in getting around.

In response to this predicament, “smart growth” is becoming a household term. Consensus is mounting that lasting solutions must go beyond the construction of yet another lane on the freeway, and that we must reconstitute our fundamental patterns of development and the ways we travel — whether on foot, by car, or with transit. In regions as diverse as Madison WI, Salt Lake City UT, Orlando FL, Portland OR, and Washington, DC’s beltway, major initiatives are effectively integrating land use patterns and transportation systems to create sustainable regions and enhance daily lives.

At the federal level, a “Livability Agenda” was formed through cooperation of the Federal Highway Administration, Federal Transit Administration, Housing and Urban Development, and the Environmental Protection Agency to provide



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communities with tools to preserve green space, ease traffic congestion, and pursue regional “smart growth” policies. The Agenda’s programs address compact development and “smart investment” incentives, coordinated reinvestment in existing infrastructure, regional development strategies, and transit-oriented development.

In the Twin Cities, the Metropolitan Council’s *Regional Blueprint* and *Transportation Policy Plan* promote transit-oriented development through a more compact pattern of regional growth which makes effective use of infrastructure investment. These policies are described further below.

Transit-Oriented Development or “TOD” is a key component of smart growth and infrastructure investment. TOD is a return to the traditional components of neighborhoods, towns, and villages, in which a compact mix of complementary uses within a pedestrian-friendly environment is adjacent to transit stops or stations. TOD concepts can be applied to create new developments or transform existing areas.

The benefits of TOD include:

- Variety and choice in housing types, retail destinations, and office locations;
- Catalyst and framework for revitalization and redevelopment of central urban areas into vibrant communities;
- A structure for new growth in compact patterns, saving open space;
- A higher activity level at transit station areas, increasing pedestrian safety through numbers;
- Enhanced transit ridership, walking, and cycling, and reduced automobile dependence;
- Contribution to reduced levels of congestion and improved air quality;
- Efficient use of infrastructure due to the greater intensity of development, both in existing and new areas.

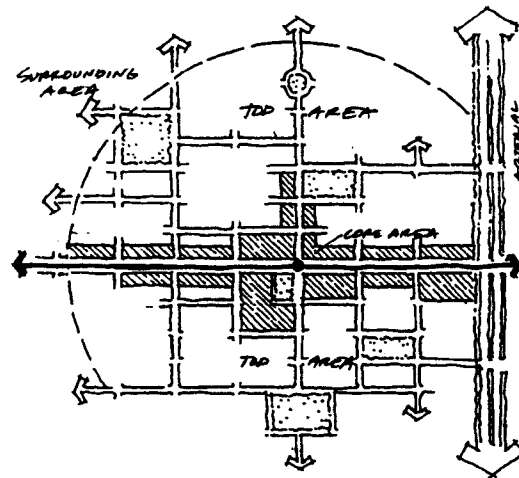
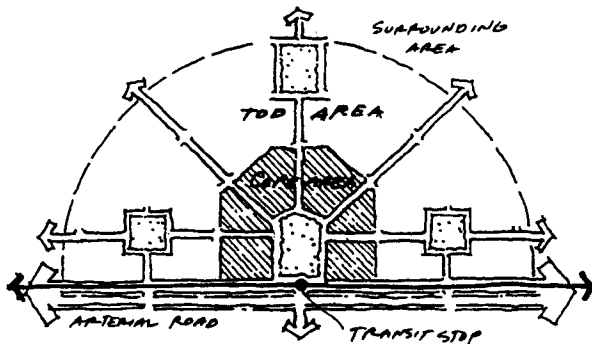


B. WHAT EXACTLY IS TRANSIT-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT?

The premise for transit-oriented development is simple: *if we concentrate more jobs and housing around transit and daily conveniences by developing land uses patterns that support transit, people will use their cars less and will walk and ride transit more* – assertions confirmed by research. While “TOD” is a broad concept or approach, the term is also used to refer to specific clusters around transit stops.

To succeed, a Transit-Oriented Development must:

- 1) Have a compact, higher density that is greater than auto-oriented sprawl,
- 2) Contain a diversity and mix of uses, with daily conveniences and transit at the center, and
- 3) Have a pedestrian-friendly physical design which encourages walking and bicycling.



TOD Diagrams. While their context and form can vary, Transit-Oriented Developments share the common elements of higher-intensity uses clustered within walking distance of a transit stop and core conveniences.

In new growth locations, TODs may need to be located on just one side of an arterial, as these streets are barriers to pedestrian movement (left). In older, more urbanized areas, transit routes running along major streets in a gridded network, combined with existing pedestrian-friendly mixed-use buildings, permit these major streets to be the “spine” of viable neighborhoods at the center of the TOD (right).

While the higher densities called for in TODs are not for everyone, many households and employers will trade off smaller-size backyards or campuses for the chance to walk to local parks, conveniences and transit, so long as the walk is safe, convenient and attractive.

The mix and diversity of complementary uses within walking distance of each other and the choice and flexibility in travel modes differentiate TODs from the hierarchically-segregated, automobile-centered land use pattern that has been prevalent in the last forty years. In fact, about three-quarters of all daily household travel trips are not commute-related; many of these trips can be “captured” within the TOD.

The interconnected streets and direct pedestrian connections are also important ingredients of a TOD. Interconnected streets offer multiple paths that minimize walking distances and distribute traffic so that every street is walkable.

Residents, workers and visitors can still get around in their cars, but the physical structure of the TOD makes walking, bicycling, and using transit pleasant and enjoyable alternatives. Blank walls and surface parking lots and garages are eschewed in favor of porch-front homes, street-facing retail and tree-lined streets – functional aspects of community design also associated with “Traditional Neighborhood Design” (TNDs), the “neo-traditional” or “New Urbanism” movement, and also the classic Midwestern town and neighborhood.



Traditional-style development at Grand and Victoria in St. Paul. The building shown was a conversion of an old dealership to retail and restaurant space. In the 1940's and 1950's, Grand Avenue was “dealership row.” Buildings are built up to the street with frequent windows and doors. On the other hand, the street is fairly wide compared to the building heights and there are few trees, making the street seem more like a place for cars than for pedestrians. In spite of this, the diversity of complementary mixed uses and pedestrian-friendly design has made it a popular destination area to shop and eat.

C. TRANSIT-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT IN THE TWIN CITIES

With an existing population of 2.5 million, the Twin Cities region is expected to experience substantial growth and new economic development over the next 25 years: nearly 650,000 new residents, about 400,000 new jobs, and almost 350,000 households. This growth brings an exciting opportunity to rethink development patterns, channel new growth to infill and redevelop existing areas, and improve transportation options by encouraging transit, bicycling and walking as alternatives to the automobile.

In 1994, the Metropolitan Council decided to rethink the regional transit system, which consists of fixed-route and dial-a-ride bus transit, in light of the increased likelihood of reduced or stabilized funding for transit. As a result, a *Transit Redesign* document (1996) defined a process and action plan to ensure the long-term viability of the transit system, and established guidelines for transit-oriented development.

In 1996, the Metropolitan Council produced a *Regional Blueprint* and a *Transportation Policy Plan*, which together seek to accommodate growth by revitalizing and promoting economic development in the core urban area and encouraging orderly suburban development.

Traditional pedestrian-friendly mixed-use development at Grand Avenue in St. Paul.



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As a framework for regional growth, the Council encourages higher densities along established transit routes as well as along planned transitways, busways, and light rail and commuter rail corridors. The existing and planned transit system will be improved as cities create more transit-oriented patterns of development.

The *Transportation Policy Plan* describes five "Transit Service Areas" throughout the region, which provide a framework for structuring transit service level according to land use intensity. The five Service Areas correspond to whether an area is more urban, suburban, or rural in character. The Service Area concept is useful for planning, prioritizing, and structuring higher-intensity pedestrian- and transit-friendly development. As such, many recommendations made in this document are keyed to the established Service Areas.

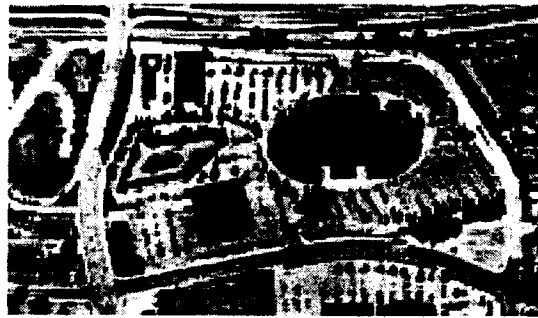
To implement the goals in the *Transportation Policy Plan*, *Regional Blueprint*, and *Livable Communities Demonstration Account* (see the sidebar in the Implementation Chapter), the Metropolitan Council also identified the need to provide communities and developers with strategies to encourage transit-oriented development. To this end, this Transit-Oriented Development Handbook identifies parameters and techniques for creating and sustaining transit-supportive and pedestrian-friendly districts along transit corridors and around bus and light rail stops. The concept of TOD can be used to revitalize struggling older urban areas; incrementally retrofit existing automobile-oriented suburban areas to improve pedestrian connections, use land more efficiently in new growth areas, and improve the market for transit ridership.



A retail center at 50th and France in Edina, showing street-facing buildings, wide sidewalks, street trees, and other pedestrian-friendly features.

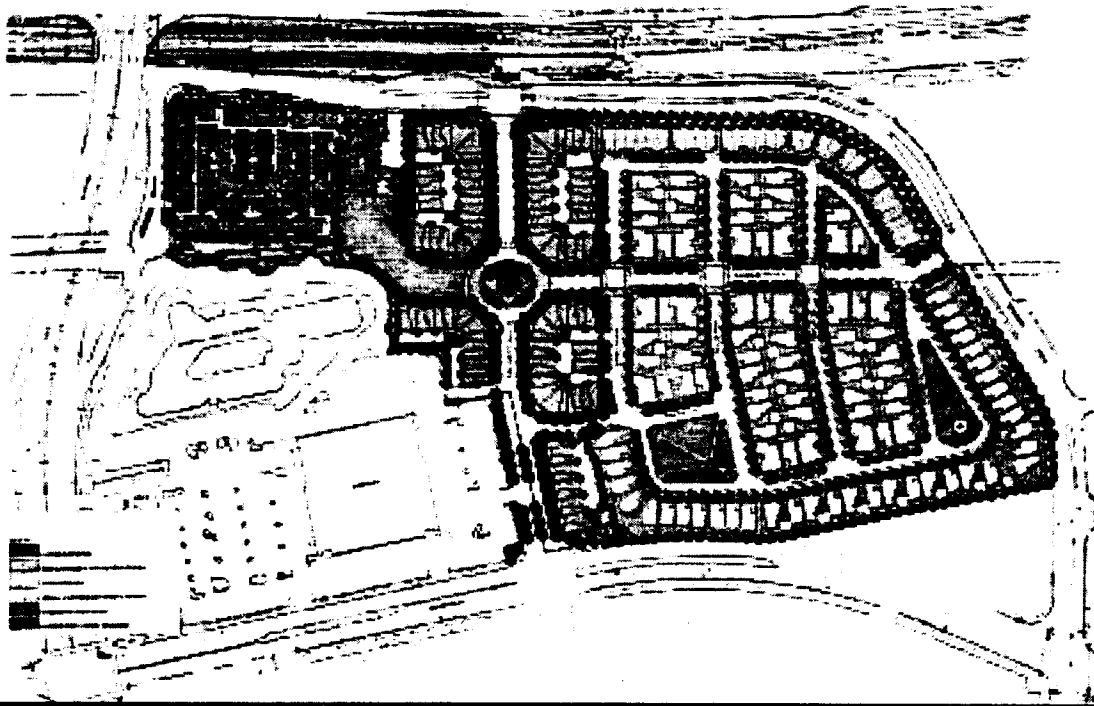
THE CROSSINGS, REDEVELOPMENT OF AN INNER-SUBURBAN STRIP MALL SITE

"The Crossings" infill and redevelopment project illustrates how the concept of transit-oriented development can be used to redevelop obsolete sites in older urban and inner suburban areas. The advent of a planned new CalTrain commuter rail transit station provided an impetus to rethink and replace an auto-oriented strip mall at the end of its "life cycle" with a vibrant pedestrian-oriented community, providing much-needed modest housing in this affluent, booming town.



Above, the original shopping mall on the site.

Below, the site transformed into a walkable community through redevelopment with housing, parks, and retail, centered on a new commuter rail station.



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Located in Mountain View, a town in the San Francisco Bay Area's Silicon Valley, the Crossings provides a range of housing and retail opportunities. There are about 400 units of housing, including single-family homes, townhouses, rowhouses, and apartments built over a level of commuter parking. The 18-acre site has an average density of 22 units per acre, allowing all units to be a short walk from the station. Adjacent to the station are a civic plaza and mixed-use buildings with housing over ground-floor commuter-oriented retail.

An interconnected network of tree-lined streets and pedestrian paths knits this new mixed-use neighborhood together. The street network provides important connections to an existing Safeway grocery store. The site contains two neighborhood parks and a larger community park with community center and pool. Bandstands and tot lots provide areas for neighborhood gatherings. The shopping mall which the project replaced was demolished and recycled as foundations for the new homes.

Source: Calthorpe Associates, Berkeley, California.

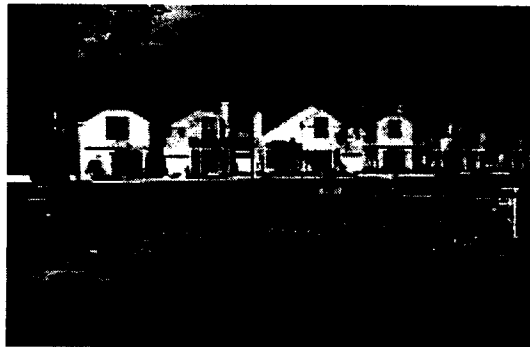


Left Top: Townhouses at about 30 units to the acre.



Left bottom: Single family homes at about 12 units to the acre.

Bottom: Modest-sized, small-lot single-family homes clustered around a neighborhood park provide "eyes on the street" and a safe and pleasant place for children to play.



WHEN THE ENTIRE TWIN CITIES REGION WAS TRANSIT-ORIENTED

There was a time when transit was the primary mode for travel and, as a consequence, most new development was transit-oriented. From the late 19th century through the 1940s, the streetcar was the most common means of getting to work, going shopping, or getting to a movie.

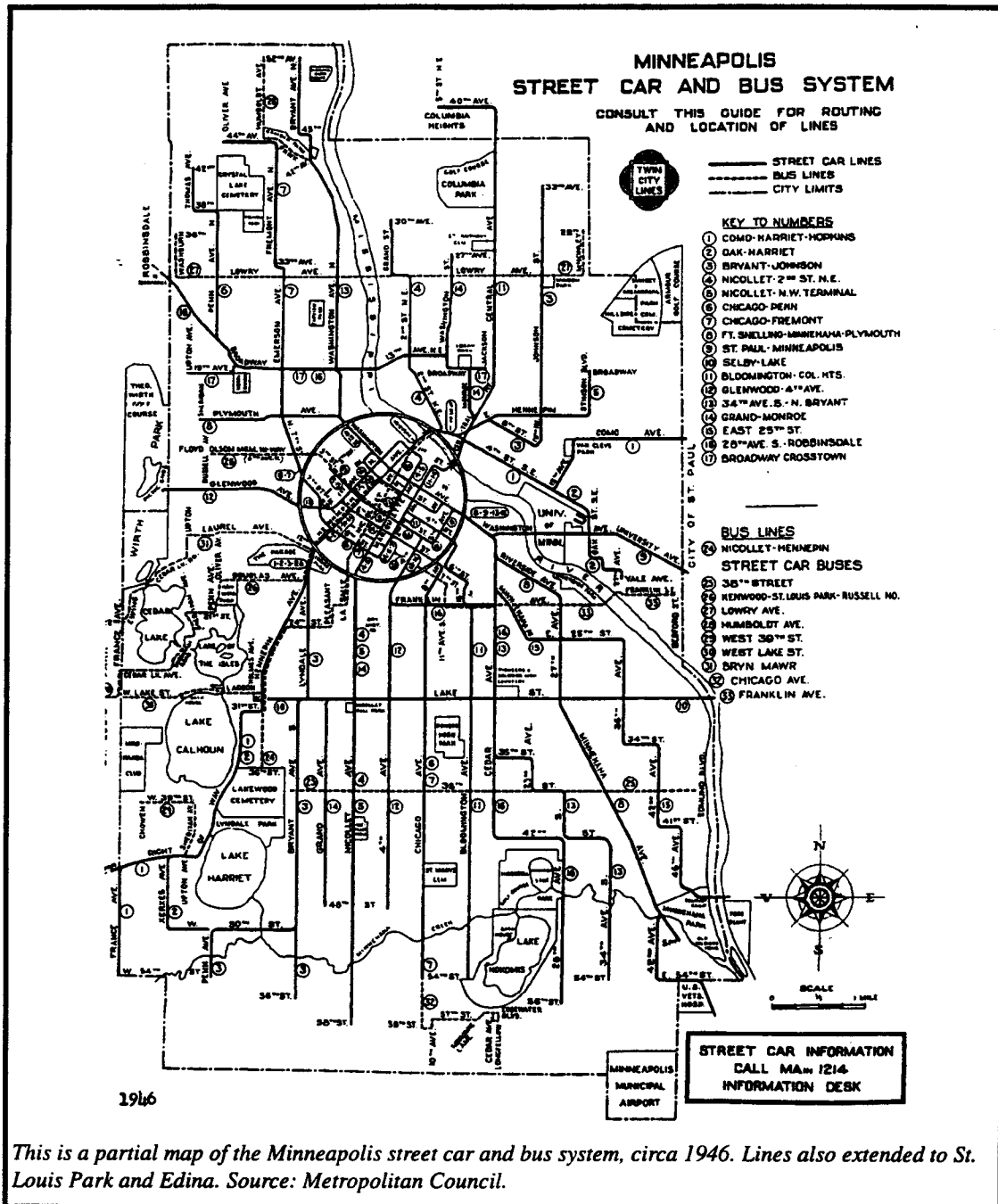
At that time, the Twin Cities meant Minneapolis and St. Paul and little else. Freeways did not exist, and there were no suburban shopping malls, subdivisions, or office parks. Instead the metropolis was an assemblage of neighborhoods built around the street car system. More often than not, shops sprung up around the trolley stops. Since most people needed to use transit to get somewhere, most homes were constructed within walking distance of the transit line, usually with apartment buildings being closest.

Streetcar routes often became mixed-use boulevards, framed by taller buildings with ornament typical of the period. Today, many remain popular places to go for urban ambience and amenity. Streets such as Lake Street, Grand Avenue and places such as Wabasha and Edina are examples.

With the mass production of the car, transit use gradually declined from its annual peak of 238 million riders and 530 miles of track in 1920. However, even as recently as 1949, 36 percent of all trips occurred by transit compared with less than 5% today. Whether today's concerns over congestion, air quality, neighborhood livability, and equitable access for individuals without cars will spur public decision makers to help reverse this trend remains to be seen.

Source: Aaron Isaacs, editor, "Twin Cities Lines: the 1940's," The Minnesota Transportation Museum, 1995.





This is a partial map of the Minneapolis street car and bus system, circa 1946. Lines also extended to St. Louis Park and Edina. Source: Metropolitan Council.

PLANNING FOR TRANSIT-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT AT STATIONS ON THE HIAWATHA LRT CORRIDOR

The Twin Cities' first light rail transit (LRT) line will connect downtown Minneapolis, the International Airport, the Mall of America and a number of other neighborhoods and activity centers. The alignment follows Hiawatha Avenue in a corridor which is expected to see significant increases in housing and employment, particularly around the downtown Minneapolis and Bloomington stations. A number of the stations have potential to integrate directly into development, including Nicollet Mall, Downtown East (Metrodome), Lake Street, and the Bloomington Stations.

Land use planning is under way to optimize the public investment in LRT and ensure that the areas within 1/2 mile of stations attract additional transit-supportive development. Significant station area planning and development activities and funding initiatives targeted at the corridor include:

Station Area Development Coordinators. *Appointed development coordinators oversee planning for each of the stations. The coordinators work with city planning staff on station area plans, monitor land sales and development transactions, coordinate development-related public participation activities and negotiate public/private development partnerships.*

Targeting of Funding Resources for Development: *Minneapolis Community Development Agency (MCDA) and the Metropolitan Council are working together to target \$9 million in funding for TOD in the Hiawatha corridor. These funds would provide gap financing for major TOD developments and pay for land acquisition and assembly, site preparation, and infrastructure enhancements.*

Market Study. *A market study is under way to assess the long-term market potential for TOD and recommend the types of public tools and incentives necessary to maximize development potential, thereby enhancing transit ridership in the corridor.*

Interim Zoning Ordinance. *In November 1998, Minneapolis adopted an interim ordinance regulating development of commercial/industrial land in the vicinity of the stations beyond downtown. The ordinance prohibits new construction anywhere within 1/4 mile of stations. New construction within 1/2 mile of stations is allowed only if it improves the pedestrian environment. Auto-oriented uses such as commercial parking lots, new and used car dealerships, drive-through establishments, automobile convenience facilities, service stations, auto repair garages, and auto washes are also prohibited*

within a certain distance of stations. Amendments to the final zoning code to meet Minneapolis' transit-supportive development goals will be based upon a land use study and station area master planning.

***Public Involvement in Integrating Art & Aesthetic Treatments into Station & Corridor Design.** A series of workshops will provide an opportunity for communities to get involved with designers in enhancing the corridor and stations. A "Public Art Opportunities Inventory" and an "Aesthetic Design Guide" will inform the design of the stations and corridor.*

***Parking Provisions/Limitations.** The City of Minneapolis prohibits additional parking lots downtown, as well as in neighborhoods around all stations, to encourage transit use and preserve historic buildings. Draft zoning offers "bonuses" of reductions in required parking to businesses located within 200 feet of a transit stop. Bloomington's zoning ordinance allows for a reduction in required parking spaces based upon transit service availability, pedestrian orientation and shared parking arrangements.*

Hiawatha LRT Station Area Land Use Planning Timeline

1998 ➡ 1999 ➡ 2000 ➡ 2001 ➡ 2002 ➡ 2003

**Preliminary
Station
Area Land
Use Plans**

**Master
Station
Area Land
Use Plans**

**Site-Specific
Station Area
Development
Plans**

LRT Opening

- | | | | |
|---|---|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development & redevelopment opportunities • Broad land use concepts • Community amenities to preserve & enhance • Access improvements & enhancements to pedestrian environment • Methods of addressing impacts on adjacent properties • Transit-oriented design guidelines | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical plan (circulation, access, public facilities, utilities, mitigation, community enhancements) • Land use plan with refined development concepts • Station area urban design guidelines • Station area development strategy • Capital improvements plan & financial plan | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land acquisition and assembly • Plan for completion of public infrastructure & enhancements • Real estate appraisals and financial/fiscal analyses • Issuance of development Request For Proposals • Negotiation of site plan agreements & design reviews • Financial packaging | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development • Implementation |
|---|---|--|---|

** Timelines and lists identify activities occurring within a given year. Generally, tasks will be completed within the year identified. However, some may overlap years.*

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SUSTAINABLE CITIES

by Judith Maxwell

Summary

A sustainable city strives for harmony in the development of civil society, economy, environment, culture and political institutions. Canadian cities, large and small, are facing challenges that are working against sustainability. For example, spatial segregation of poor residents is growing; the new economy wage structure is creating not only great wealth but also low-paid work; and new social policies are creating a poverty trap for the working poor. To meet these and other challenges, cities need to improve their problem-solving capacity by mobilizing talent across business, education, governments and civil society and by thinking in three dimensions: inclusively, regionally and from the bottom up. Many Canadian communities are now launched on this kind of problem solving, but they cannot succeed without responsive participation from senior governments.

Sommaire

Une ville durable vise le développement harmonisé de la société civile, de l'économie, de l'environnement, de la culture et des institutions politiques. Les villes du Canada, grandes comme petites, sont confrontées à des difficultés qui s'opposent au développement durable. Ainsi, la ségrégation physique des citoyens pauvres s'exacerbe, la nouvelle économie basée sur les salaires engendre une grande richesse, mais aussi des emplois faiblement rémunérés, et les nouvelles politiques sociales enchâssent les petits salariés dans la pauvreté. Pour parer à ces difficultés, entre autres, les villes doivent améliorer leurs capacités à résoudre les problèmes en mobilisant les éléments de talent dans le milieu des affaires, dans l'enseignement, dans les gouvernements et au sein de la société civile et en adoptant un mode de réflexion tridimensionnel : inclusif, régional et ascendant. Maintes collectivités canadiennes se sont déjà engagées dans cette voie, mais elles ne peuvent parvenir à leurs fins sans une participation judicieuse des échelons gouvernementaux supérieurs.

Cities, large and small, must now have their turn as the centre of policy attention in Canada, for at least three reasons. First, cities are facing economic challenges flowing from the industrial restructuring driven by globalization and new technologies. Second, they have inherited major new responsibilities as both provinces and the federal government have adjusted the scope of their activities. Third, they have welcomed an influx of new and diverse residents from rural areas and outside of Canada. As they search for options, city leaders find themselves handicapped by constitutional constraints and limited taxing powers. These are both challenging issues, but in this keynote presentation, I want to focus on two sets of issues that are more directly relevant to the themes of this conference: building capacity and building connections.

The first issue is to explore the forces working against the sustainability of our cities. The second is to summarize for you insights from Canadian Policy Research Networks' research on how innovative cities solve problems.¹

What Is Sustainability?

To begin, however, let me define what I mean by sustainable cities. To me, it means striving for harmony in the development of civil society, economy, environment, culture and political institutions.² The principal challenge facing leaders in cities and communities is how to weave together progress on all these fronts. It takes a breadth of thinking and citizen involvement that far surpasses traditional approaches to urban issues in this country. I regret to say, the evidence from our case studies is that Canadian communities are only now getting started along this road.

To build the necessary connections, civil society organizations, business, educational institutions and governments require a sense of shared responsibility for what happens in their community and a shared commitment to solving problems.

The Productivity Dimension

It is important to emphasize that this notion of sustainability is not soft and fuzzy. It has a direct productivity connection. Everything we now know

about the new economy points to the success of economic clusters, and we know that successful clusters depend upon a complex web of informal relationships. We know, for example, that:

- > a high quality of life attracts and retains a highly skilled work force;
- > informal networks among businesses, research and educational institutions, and governments are important drivers of innovation;³
- > cost competitiveness is deeply affected by the efficiency of transportation within and between cities so that both people and goods can move quickly and at reasonable cost;
- > informal networks strengthen neighbourhoods and communities, helping people to find jobs and obtain the training opportunities they need; and
- > strong public education and effective community health services are an essential underpinning for working people and employers.

Out of these basic facts, it is possible to visualize the kind of cities (large and

small) we want: cities where quality of life is part of the overall planning process. The trouble is that powerful market and policy forces stand in the way. I want to highlight three trends that are taking us in the wrong direction. They are spatial segregation, a new wage structure and a new social policy structure.

Spatial Segregation

In the post-war years, Canadian cities were noted for their lack of spatial segregation compared to that in other countries, especially the United States. In fact, we bragged about our lack of inner city problems. However, since 1980, poverty has tended to be concentrated in our cities (the average rate of low income in all cities was 22 percent in 1995 versus 16 percent for people living in rural areas) in particular neighborhoods or census tracts.^{4,5} John Myles⁶ and his colleagues at Statistics Canada have also documented the extreme polarization of income by neighborhood. Our cities demonstrate far greater disparity between high- and low-income groups than we see in either the provincial or national data. The other important dimension to this "ghettoization" is the tendency for visible minorities, Aborigines, lone parent families and disabled people to cluster in these poor areas.

Needless to say, this segregation of poor people goes against the whole notion of inclusive societies and will create a new Canadian underclass, if it continues: not what we are aiming for in sustainable cities. The way to prevent this social exclusion is to create well-paid jobs, affordable housing, good public transit, access to child care and adult training, excellent education and health services, and so on. More on this below.

A New Wage Structure

The new economy has produced a new wage structure that explains the income polarization I just mentioned. The new economy has created opportunities for many and generated a lot of wealth. For example, it produces more millionaires: a newspaper report last year suggested we now have 160,000 of them. However, real minimum wages have fallen by 15 to 20 percent since 1975, depending on the province. Furthermore, one in six adult Canadians now works for less than \$10 an hour.⁷ Even if these people work full-time, all year, they can only

earn a maximum of \$21,000, which falls well short of the income required to support a family.

These working Canadians are extremely vulnerable, but they look remarkably like the rest of the population. One third of them have post secondary education and another one third have completed high school. About 35 percent of them are the only earners in their families. Two thirds are women. They are the working poor, and their biggest challenges are to find affordable housing, reliable transportation, access to child care, recreation and so on; yet, as a society, we assume that anyone who has a job can be self-reliant.

A New Social Policy

Compounding the problem of low wages are the changes that have taken place in federal, provincial and municipal social programs over the past 15 years, which have affected both income transfers and social services. Most of them are now aimed expressly at poor people, families or, in the case of health services, specific health conditions. Thus, qualifying for social supports becomes much more difficult and, once you do qualify, it becomes very easy to lose them. For example, a person earning \$25,000 a year who is offered a promotion may face a marginal effective tax rate of 80 or 90 percent, because the income and every social benefit they receive will be "taxed". When you add to this the fact that federal and provincial governments stopped investing in social housing in the early 1990s, you begin to see that the cards are stacked against these vulnerable people. In effect, there is a poverty trap for the working poor.⁷

Sustainability Matters to Everyone

These three trends are creating a new Canadian divide between poor people and everyone else. This matters, because it means that a large number of Canadians are being left behind, and growing swaths of our urban space are becoming "distressed" communities. It becomes increasingly difficult for these people to participate in work and civic life. So there are two kinds of cost: the first is the loss of human capital in an economy where brains really matter; and the second are the costs of policing, social transfers and health care for a

segment of the population that is so vulnerable.

The sustainability of our cities matters enormously to these people. If they have the good fortune to live in a community that offers efficient public transit, affordable housing, high quality and affordable child care, recreation and sport without user fees, and other essential services, their quality of life will be far higher than their low incomes would suggest. Of course, sustainability also matters enormously to the middle class, still the largest segment of our population. Good transit, a diverse housing stock, good child care and recreation mean a lot to these people as well. It makes them value their community; it enables them to feel like real citizens and encourages them to be engaged in sustaining that community. These are the foundations for the sustainable community that I described earlier.

Mobilizing for Sustainability

How then do we make our cities and communities become sustainable in the face of these perverse trends? The main challenge here is that the problems are broad while the perspectives of all the key players in the community are narrow. No one, working alone, has the levers to make change. As planners, you are in touch with all these domains—governments, business, developers, educational institutions, civil society organizations and others. You have the opportunity to propose new ideas and to help bridge the gaps across the "solitudes" described below:

- > Senior governments have a mandate to serve all citizens, urban and rural. As a result, they are not comfortable serving local needs and cannot provide local leadership.
- > Municipal governments are often fragmented because special purpose agencies or geographic boundaries give them only half of the problem. In addition, most have weak policy capacity to cope with their expanding mandates.
- > Businesses are preoccupied with costs of doing business and the quality of infrastructure, especially for transportation. They also worry about attracting skilled workers and ensuring amenities for their staff.

- > Educational institutions in Canada are under resourced and tend to be focused inwardly, although some colleges and universities already see themselves as major players in urban progress.
- > Civil society institutions like the United Way can often bridge solitudes in pursuit of their goals to promote social equity and social inclusion.

Each of these sectors has important strengths, but they do not naturally collaborate with each other to create shared problems. As Neil Bradford¹ says, a community that knows how to engage all these actors in planning for the future is a learning community. In addition, if they are going to collaborate, then they must be prepared to think in three dimensions:

- > regionally—to see the full scope of the economic, environmental and infrastructure needs and possibilities;
- > inclusively—to see that people from different walks of life and socioeconomic status are all part of the solution; and
- > from the bottom up—to ensure that needs are defined locally, based on neighborhood and family needs.

Whether you wish to reverse economic decline, improve competitiveness or deal with social blight, the higher order goal is to make the community a better place for the people who will live there tomorrow. How then do we get started?

Ingredients for Success

Bradford¹ reports that communities are rising to this challenge across the industrialized world from Denmark to Spain to the United States and, more recently, here in Canada. Here is his list of the ingredients for success, based on 11 case studies:

- > a local champion to provide the leadership;
- > institutional intermediaries to connect with senior governments;
- > equitable participation to engage local stakeholders;
- > a civic culture of creativity (doing things differently and better);
- > adequate financial and technical resources (money, land, regulatory skills, etc.); and

- > strong accountability mechanisms, including an agreed set of indicators to track progress.

Overall, however, what Bradford finds in these innovative cities is connectedness. Connectedness in two directions: horizontally, involving the sectors in society (the solitudes, as I called them earlier), and vertically, engaging senior governments.

Many Canadian communities are now launched on this voyage of collaboration: big ones like Toronto and lots of smaller ones like Kelowna, Kitchener-Waterloo, Halifax, Saskatoon and the Beauce. The initiative invariably comes from the community itself, but it cannot succeed without responsive participation from provincial and federal governments. Unfortunately, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development tells us that senior governments in Canada have been slow to get their act together.⁸

Conclusion

The voyage to sustainability is not easy. There are many roadblocks. Innovative cities begin with a single project. Agreeing on a common goal and how to achieve it together is the first important step. Typically, the experience of working together begins to build a sense of mutual trust. Cities can then build on their success to set even more ambitious goals for the future. In the new economy, a city achieves economic success by meeting the social and economic needs of all its citizens—rich and poor. That is sustainability. ■

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DISINVESTMENT AND THE DECLINE OF URBAN NEIGHBORHOODS

Introduction

Disinvestment and decline occur in inner city neighborhoods throughout North America. The process is often associated with poverty, high levels of crime, conversion of single family to multi-family housing units, abandonment of the housing stock, and out-migration (movement of the middle class from inner city neighborhoods to the suburbs). Other features of neighborhood disinvestment and decline are mortgage redlining, exit of retail business, conversion to lower forms of non-residential land uses such as marginal business operations and specialized services for the poor, decline in relative or absolute land values, and in migration by economically marginalized populations.

This research examined the processes of urban disinvestment and decline with four objectives:

- To develop an understanding of forces and factors that trigger and accelerate decline;
- To create a framework for action that can stem and reverse decline;
- To examine the role of investment in housing as a primer of regeneration; and
- To identify opportunities for concrete action involving partnerships.

The research aims to inform the development of public policy, primarily at the local and municipal levels, by articulating a range of policies that can work to prevent or reverse inner city decline.

Methodology

The research comprises four main sources of information:

- A literature review anchors research in current understanding of the dynamics of urban growth and decline.
- Key informant interviews in six cities allow deeper insights into the processes of urban disinvestment and decline, and shed light on possible policy responses.
- Group interviews in two cities permit a more extensive exploration of urban disinvestment and decline.
- Analysis of Statistics Canada data helps characterize the nature and causes of decline in three major case study cities.

Together, the case studies: examine the extent to which the experience of the six selected cities conforms to the literature; identify the range of responses to urban decline being implemented in the Canadian context and evaluate them; and identify best practices in urban revitalization and renewal.



Figure 1: Characteristics of declining neighborhoods

- Population loss
- Lower population density
- Lower resident socioeconomic status
- Welfare dependency
- Increase of elderly and non-family households
- High ratio of single-parent families
- Changing ethnic composition
- Deterioration of housing stock
- Aging housing stock
- Deterioration of real estate market
- Falling property and rent values
- Falling rates of homeownership
- Increase in absentee landlords
- Increased tax delinquency
- Declining private investment
- Decline in public servicing and investment
- Pessimistic attitudes toward neighborhood
- Weak community organizations

What is Disinvestment?

The disinvestment process is triggered when a community offers lower returns to the investor. As incomes fall and families leave a community, prices and rents in that community decline in comparison to other areas. This typically occurs because other communities gain relative amenities and advantages.

As prices and rents decline, owners become less interested in maintenance. Disinvestment is therefore initially manifested in delayed home improvements and discretionary repairs. With continued under-maintenance, buildings are condemned, abandoned, and destroyed. This is the culmination of the disinvestment process.

Precipitating factors in urban decline: findings from the literature

The cycle of disinvestment and urban decline is complex. Many theories contribute to an understanding of these processes, but none dominate the literature, possibly because of inadequacies in the data needed for testing hypotheses.

Characteristics of declining neighborhoods are well understood and ways to measure them are conceptually clear, although not always empirically available. Nonetheless, important indicators have been proposed to identify neighborhoods experiencing decline and to measure the level of this decline. It may be also possible to identify thresholds or levels beyond which decline reaches a "point of no return." Because of their predictive value, threshold indicators may prove useful as planning tools.

The broad macro and micro level processes that lead to or accelerate neighborhood decline are well understood. Most important at the macro level are structural change in the economy, and income levels. Important processes at the micro level are an aging population and public policies, that encourage suburban flight, such as municipal taxation inequities. The relative significance of these factors has yet to be determined.

At the core of the disinvestment process in many urban areas is the **"market gap" problem**, which arises when the cost of renovation and property acquisition exceeds the market value of the renovated home. When circumstances in a neighborhood begin to induce declines in property values and these values drop below the cost of new construction and/or renovation, conventional financing by private capital becomes impossible. In these circumstances, work that would prevent further deterioration and eventual abandonment of residential units and business premises is not done. This has often been a signal to lenders and insurance companies, particularly in the US to either "redline" the area and cease operations completely, or at least to raise interest rates, premiums, and equity requirements to cover the increased risks.

The market gap problem illustrates the self-reinforcing nature of the decline and disinvestment process: the development of one symptom often leads to the emergence or aggravation of other symptoms, thus exacerbating neighborhood distress. The market gap problem also illustrates why the private sector cannot, on its own, reverse disinvestment once it reaches an

advanced stage; the risk and possibility of loss are simply too great. Under such circumstances, effective intervention to reverse decline will require public funds reduce risk.

Perhaps the most important lesson from the literature is the difficulty of pinpointing a specific trigger that initiates neighborhood decline. Indeed, **urban decline does not have a readily identifiable starting point or single isolated cause.** Instead, decline is triggered by a set of circumstances that is specific to particular cities. Once underway, decline and disinvestment tend to be evolutionary and accretive. Indeed, urban decline is a complex, self-reinforcing phenomenon in which *symptoms* of decline themselves become *causes*. These features of the decline process render the articulation of a reversal strategy extremely challenging.

Clear implications for public policy emerge from the literature review. Because decline is triggered by the coincidence of several precipitating factors, single interventions or interventions that target a single factor will not have measurable effects on decline. Instead, successfully creating the conditions for urban renewal requires specifying a package of complementary interventions tailored to the circumstance of particular cities. Just as certain processes accumulate to trigger decline, a variety of policies must be assembled to facilitate its reversal.

The literature makes clear that disinvestment is the result of decline, and not its initial trigger. Nonetheless, if public policy can moderate the risk associated with investing in property and homes in inner city areas, renewed investment can be an important element of a revitalization program.

Lessons from the case studies

Six cities were included in the case studies: Winnipeg, Montréal and Saint John were studied in more depth while Edmonton, Kitchener and Halifax provided supplementary lessons.

Halifax is exceptional among the six case studies because it has no easily defined areas where disinvestment has occurred on a large scale. The city certainly has its share of low income residents, but they have tended to be dispersed rather than concentrated in specific neighborhoods. Within the context of a strong, diversified economy, Halifax has successfully maintained a vibrant inner city and central business district by maintaining key

institutions in the downtown, and by taking advantage of heritage development and the natural attractions of the harbour.

In the other five cities, specific areas of decline are readily identifiable, and efforts to revitalize these areas have met with mixed success. Taken together, the case studies offer some important lessons for municipal officials and urban planners.

First, they show that when restructuring or stagnating economies produce large numbers of low income households, local interventions to halt and reverse decline achieve only limited success. This is perhaps most clearly demonstrated by the Winnipeg case. Because of the extent and depth of the decline and the particular circumstances precipitating it, urban renewal requires not only local action, but substantial intervention by regional and senior governments.

The case studies also show that the experience of each city is unique. The influx of a large, marginalized population, a large proportion of which are Aboriginal people, into Winnipeg's core is a critical part of the explanation for decline in that city, whereas in Kitchener, a weak economy and the proximity of attractive alternative communities are the main factors in decline. The upshot is that each city needs to develop its own portfolio of interventions tackling its unique problems.

Finally, the case studies show that the potential for urban renewal can vary within a single city. For instance, urban areas where buildings of architectural and historical significance present opportunities for tourism and gentrification will have greater success at revitalization than areas without such assets. This has certainly been the case in Halifax, and is also true of Saint John's South Peninsula neighborhood. In both instances, heritage designations have helped to attract private investment. Urban areas that lack architectural or historical assets will require more substantial intervention, by all levels of government.

A framework for action

This research generated a framework for action that offers planners a set of interventions to consider as potential ways of addressing urban decline and disinvestment. Altogether, any combination of policies to reverse decline must reduce the real and perceived barriers to private sector investment in declining urban areas.

Policies that seek to promote economic growth and increase prosperity are fundamental to reversing decline and disinvestment. Indeed, inner city deterioration is frequently a reflection of incomes and relative wealth. Although senior orders of government exert primary influence on the overall state of the economy and the distribution of wealth through fiscal, monetary, and tax policy, local and regional governments can exert some influence by adopting a pro-economic growth stance, by providing subsidies for job creation in distressed areas, and by sponsoring employment and training programs.

Tax equalization between inner city areas and the suburbs help stem inner city decline. Persistent taxation inequities between inner city areas and the suburbs that pull residents away from the city and could be addressed by municipal and provincial governments. A provincial program to review tax levels could, for instance, be a first step in this direction. Rather than raising taxes in ex-urban municipalities, a better strategy may be using grants to lower cities' revenue requirements. The objective of such an approach is to adjust the relative rate of return on housing and land investment in the inner city.

Subsidies to encourage businesses to locate in inner city areas can also help to stem neighborhood decline. For example, tax rebates, grants, and wage subsidies can be used to induce employers to locate in low income areas. Locating public institutions such as government departments, hospitals, universities, and Crown corporations in inner city areas can also have significant positive neighborhood effects. A third option – introducing land-use controls to force retail and commercial development closer to inner city areas – is possible, but may produce adverse outcomes; governments that require employers to accept lower profits risk losing those employers entirely.

Crime prevention is an important aspect of initiatives to address urban decline. Inner city neighborhoods are frequently viewed as unsafe, although they are often no less safe than other areas. A first step is to establish the degree to which crime is actually a problem. If crime is not higher in inner city areas, this fact should be publicized. On the other hand, if safety is an issue, crime prevention and reduction strategies should be implemented.

Infrastructure improvements and improvements in institutional services can greatly enhance the livability of inner city areas. Improvements to infrastructure such as roads, street lighting, parks, recreational facilities, and other similar "cosmetic" changes are highly appreciated by inner city residents and enhance the quality of life in declining areas. Similarly, improvements in institutional services, such as schools and health care, also contribute to better quality of life and more positive perceptions of declining areas on the part of both residents and non-residents.

In addition to the general policies outlined above, specific **housing investment policies** may also be implemented to address urban decline and disinvestment. These include municipal tax rebates for owners who repair, renovate, and replace homes.

Home ownership programs, for instance, can lead to neighborhood stability, improved property values, and fewer social problems. However, such programs have limitations. First, few low income households qualify as potential owners, due to the difficulty of raising the mortgage and maintaining a monthly payment; when they qualify their capacity for payment may be transient. Second, these programs typically work at the fringe of deteriorating areas where blight has not completely eroded the economics of home ownership. Home ownership programs work well if integrated with training for residents. However, the programs typically only benefit households at the top of the low income pool, who can reasonably manage the mortgage and withstand interest rate fluctuations. Lower income households would need alternative means of accessing suitable housing.

Housing repair subsidization can help arrest physical deterioration and slow decline. The impact of such subsidies is directly proportional to the budgets involved. Important elements of such subsidies are audited statements to establish legitimacy of need, and a sufficiently well-developed building inspection process to verify that the funds have been used as promised.

Social housing initiatives have potential to help address the needs of low income residents in declining neighborhoods. Because it is clear that the private sector alone cannot respond to the housing needs of low income households, government mediation in the provision of social housing becomes necessary. Non-profit low income rental housing can reduce

perceptions of risk about investing in deteriorating areas by instilling confidence in the private sector and encouraging private sector investment. Private sector investment, in turn, helps to create the income mix that is so important to neighborhood revitalization. In general, the rental sector suffers by either maintaining rent controls (which constrains overall supply and/or reduces quality of the stock), or by the absence of support for programs to create low income rental housing. The Saint John experience with non-profit housing leading the way in a severely deteriorated neighborhood shows how this strategy contributes to the recovery process.

Heritage designations reduce perceptions of risk and communicate an intent to maintain a neighborhood, thereby increasing its stability. These policies can therefore be an important part of a neighborhood renewal strategy. However, their use is limited to neighborhoods with buildings of historical or architectural significance. Some areas may have few or none. Ironically, heritage designations may often trigger gentrification and displace low income residents. Although gentrification may revitalize inner city areas, it moves a key element of urban decline around the urban map.

Finally, **building and zoning codes** are important policies to reverse decline. A building and zoning code process is often associated with heritage designations; this may entail a relaxation of codes to allow heritage buildings to preserve essential features and still be economically viable. Building and zoning codes can also be used to reverse the "patchwork" of unattractive land uses often develops in inner city areas. However, this is a difficult process. Strict land use policies can exacerbate the economic plight of residents, while uncontrolled land planning can contribute to the ongoing deterioration of the neighborhood. Policies to coordinate land uses can help to reverse deterioration, but planners need to micro-manage this process and proceed incrementally.

Opportunities for partnerships

One of the really difficult problems in revitalizing a poor area is that programs that make the area more attractive for investors simultaneously make it less affordable for residents. This paradox is at the heart of the policy problem in dealing with urban decline and disinvestment. Policies that alter the risk profile of a neighborhood, need to be complemented with the provision of housing options for all incomes. Community-level organization and partnerships are critical in order to effect long-term change.

The term **community capacity** refers to the ability of residents to create viable community organizations to advance the interests of the neighborhood. Low income neighborhoods are especially in need of cooperative action, unlike higher income areas where individual owners can more easily unite to advance the interests of the community. Low income areas are characterized by high transiency, and by residents who lack the leadership skills and education necessary to advance their interests.

Partnerships among local community organizations such as churches, street level clubs, ethnic organizations, banks and credit unions, private businesses, community housing groups, etc. play a very useful role. The Montréal experience illustrates the benefits of such partnerships. However, partnerships are unlikely to develop without a sense of community, the shared vision of a group of people and agencies, and effective leadership. Residents need to develop leadership and the capacity to organize around issues of crime, social services to assist families, and lobbying to increase funding for infrastructure.

Nurturing community organizations and partnerships is a long process. The fact that community organizations in Montréal are now beginning to show effect must be seen in the context of twenty years of programming and consistency of focus.

Conclusion

Perhaps the most important lesson from this research is the ineffectiveness of single sector approaches to revitalization. Instead, comprehensive approaches comprised of a selection of policies tailored to suit the specific circumstances of individual cities are required. All orders of government as well as the private and non-governmental sectors must cooperate in the recovery plan. Furthermore, fostering the capacity of local organizations and residents to act on behalf of their communities can help revitalization become self-sustaining.

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Smart Growth

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The following article is the first in a series designed to highlight some of the key planning issues and questions being discussed today. This article focuses on the emerging phenomenon of "smart growth."

It seems that "smart growth" is sweeping the nation. Virtually every organization in the country remotely interested in community planning issues has a smart growth policy or program, and every media account of planning issues seems to use the term.

The first thing to understand about smart growth is that it means different things to different people and organizations. It is a catchy phrase that has been used as a rallying cry and an endorsement for an array of positions and perspectives on community growth and planning issues.

An internet search yields over 200,000 hits for "smart growth." Numerous organizations such as the Smart Growth Network and Smart Growth America exist solely to promote smart growth principles. Thousands of other agencies and organizations have their own smart growth programs, including the federal government, virtually every state, countless regional and local governments, and private organizations.

A quick review of the literature on smart growth reveals a large diversity of issues that are brought under its umbrella: urban sprawl, farmland preservation, mixed land uses, big box retail, light rail, brown fields, green fields, grey fields, the "evils" of cul-de-sacs, the elimination of urban blight, first ring suburbs, pedestrian orientation, battlefield preservation, open space, traffic congestion, traffic calming, town centers, Main Street ... the list goes on and on.

With all of this diversity of perspective, what then is smart growth? Is it

helpful for planning commissioners? Or, has it become so broad and diluted as to be meaningless?

In my opinion, the answer to these questions is that smart growth can offer valuable guidance and serve as a rallying cry for good planning. On the other hand, when you hear other people use the term smart growth, you need to understand what they mean by it. Likewise, if you are going to discuss smart growth, you should have a basic understanding of what it means to you.

SMART GROWTH
 PROVIDES A COHERENT
 FRAMEWORK FOR
 PULLING TOGETHER
 A RANGE OF GOOD
 PLANNING PRACTICES.

A good encapsulation of the mainstream consensus of smart growth is offered by the United States Environmental Protection Agency. Their ten smart growth principles seem to embody the ideas that have the most commonality among the array of smart growth ideas promoted by various organizations.¹ The following are those principles, along with my observations.

1. Mix land uses.

There are many in the planning community who believe that the 20th century trend of segregating and separating land uses has created many of our current planning problems, not the least of which is the over-reliance on the automobile. Many of the reasons for original separating land uses (i.e., maintaining

separate zones for residential, commercial, and industrial uses), such as protecting residents from noxious industrial fumes of early industrial processes, no longer apply. Many planners believe that careful design of a mixture of residential and commercial uses can create more livable communities with less reliance upon the automobile.

2. Take advantage of compact building design.

This is essentially the "anti-sprawl" position. By promoting a more compact regional development pattern, with new development clustered tightly at higher densities around existing development and infrastructure service areas, we can create more efficient infrastructure and service delivery patterns, while minimizing urban sprawl and loss of open space. One big plus: cost savings to government (and taxpayers) in having to build fewer roads, water and sewer lines, and other public facilities. The down side: many people object to higher densities and prefer the prevailing low-density suburban pattern.

3. Create a range of housing opportunities and choices.

There is concern that too much of our new residential growth, particularly in high growth areas, is limited to single-family detached residences. With changing demographics, including an aging population, there is legitimate concern that we need to provide more housing diversity and affordability to offer a range of opportunities for all persons. Some argue that removing exclusionary zoning practices and developing a more mixed land use pattern (see Principle 1) will promote increased housing diversity.

4. Create walkable neighborhoods.

Many planners, as well as a growing number of public health advocates, want

continued on page 4

¹ EPA's smart growth principles are listed at: www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/about_sg.htm

Smart Growth

continued from page 3

to encourage more walking, bike-riding, and outdoor exercise. The connection to land use planning is that many of our neighborhoods and business districts do not lend themselves to pleasant or safe pedestrian use, and too many pedestrian systems do not connect to areas outside of their particular development. The answer, according to smart growth advocates, is to pay more attention to providing linked networks of sidewalks, paths, and trails.

5. Foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place.

This is a more difficult concept to come to grips with, because it involves the aesthetics of design and subjective judgment. However, many people are concerned that new development looks the same, regardless of where it occurs in the country. The widespread use of standardized development practices and franchise architecture, in this view, has led to the loss of individual community identity.

6. Preserve open space, farmland, and natural beauty in critical environmental areas.

Farmland preservation is often linked to strengthening regional and local economic self-sufficiency, as well preserving an area's traditional character (a benefit also being promoted in a number of regional tourism efforts). Open space and natural area protection is connected to the goal of maintaining an area's character and beauty, while affording recreational opportunities such as hiking, biking, and skiing. Smart growth proponents also often speak of the need to preserve our natural environment for the benefit of future generations.

7. Strengthen and direct development toward existing communities.

This issue is related to the compact building design principle discussed above (Principle 2) with a focus on encouraging "infill" development and redevelopment. It is particularly concerned with utilizing existing infrastruc-

ture and expanding that infrastructure in a rational, gradual way, rather than promoting leapfrog, sprawling development patterns.

8. Provide a variety of transportation choices.

The vast majority of our modern "transportation" occurs via the automobile. The use of the personal automobile has increased at a dramatically greater rate than the growth of population. Many people feel that we have become too dependent on the automobile, and on the imported oil essential to its use. Our low-density, segregated land use pattern, however, makes reduction of auto use difficult. This smart growth principle looks at ways of shifting to a less auto-dominated environment, by promoting transportation alternatives such as public transit, light rail, bicycle, and walking. Again, achievement of this principle is closely tied to several of the other smart growth principles.

9. Make development decisions predictable, fair, and cost effective.

There is concern that too often the pursuit of better quality planning and development brings with it increased bureaucracy and less certainty in the development process. This principle embodies the idea that smart growth principles should be encouraged within the framework of reasonable and predictable outcomes for the development community. Smart growth advocates, including many developers, also argue that adherence to smart growth principles (such as more compact development patterns) will result in lowering the overall costs of development.

10. Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration in development decisions.

Decisions that affect the community ought to be made in an open, inclusive, and participatory process. Citizen participation continues to be important in any planning process, as is the input from major stakeholders. A variety of ways to gain public input should be encouraged to get all perspectives. While this

principle is not unique to smart growth, it is a consistent part of the agenda of those advocating smart growth.

With an understanding of these principles, what can smart growth achieve for communities and regions? The following are some of the potential positive results:

- *Less traffic congestion*
- *A cleaner environment*
- *More preserved open space*
- *Healthier urban cores*
- *Efficient expenditure of tax dollars for infrastructure*
- *Stronger community character and sense of place*
- *Preserved farmland*
- *More affordable and diverse housing opportunities*
- *Better public and individual health*

SUMMING UP:

Many planners will argue that "smart growth" is nothing more than the kind of good community planning that has long been advocated. However, one of the reasons smart growth has taken off as an idea is that it provides a coherent framework for pulling together a range of good planning practices. This has allowed not just planners, but residents of cities and towns across the country, to better see the connections between planning and development policies, and the future of their individual communities. But remember: "smart growth" can mean different things to different people. Make sure your planning commission clearly articulates what smart growth means to your community. ♦

C. Gregory Dale is a Principal with the planning and zoning firm of McBride Dale Clarion in Cincinnati, Ohio. Dale manages planning projects and also regularly conducts training for planning officials throughout the country. He is also a former President of the Ohio Chapter of the American Planning Association.



Smart Growth

continued from page 3

to encourage more walking, bike-riding, and outdoor exercise. The connection to land use planning is that many of our neighborhoods and business districts do not lend themselves to pleasant or safe pedestrian use, and too many pedestrian systems do not connect to areas outside of their particular development. The answer, according to smart growth advocates, is to pay more attention to providing linked networks of sidewalks, paths, and trails.

5. Foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place.

This is a more difficult concept to come to grips with, because it involves the aesthetics of design and subjective judgment. However, many people are concerned that new development looks the same, regardless of where it occurs in the country. The widespread use of standardized development practices and franchise architecture, in this view, has led to the loss of individual community identity.

6. Preserve open space, farmland, and natural beauty in critical environmental areas.

Farmland preservation is often linked to strengthening regional and local economic self-sufficiency, as well preserving an area's traditional character (a benefit also being promoted in a number of regional tourism efforts). Open space and natural area protection is connected to the goal of maintaining an area's character and beauty, while affording recreational opportunities such as hiking, biking, and skiing. Smart growth proponents also often speak of the need to preserve our natural environment for the benefit of future generations.

7. Strengthen and direct development toward existing communities.

This issue is related to the compact building design principle discussed above (Principle 2) with a focus on encouraging "infill" development and redevelopment. It is particularly concerned with utilizing existing infrastruc-

ture and expanding that infrastructure in a rational, gradual way, rather than promoting leapfrog, sprawling development patterns.

8. Provide a variety of transportation choices.

The vast majority of our modern "transportation" occurs via the automobile. The use of the personal automobile has increased at a dramatically greater rate than the growth of population. Many people feel that we have become too dependent on the automobile, and on the imported oil essential to its use. Our low-density, segregated land use pattern, however, makes reduction of auto use difficult. This smart growth principle looks at ways of shifting to a less auto-dominated environment, by promoting transportation alternatives such as public transit, light rail, bicycle, and walking. Again, achievement of this principle is closely tied to several of the other smart growth principles.

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URBAN SPRAWL

The term "urban sprawl" commonly denotes a condition of unplanned, uncoordinated, and generally low density development spreading outward from the city center.

Sprawl is not just a modern phenomenon. In a sense, American sprawl began with the horse drawn omnibus of the 1830s, which permitted the more well-to-do to escape the center city for more country-like surroundings, where they could reside in detached homes bounded by small grass plots and gardens. This outward dispersion accelerated with the widespread arrival of the steam railroad in the 1850s. Suburban villages sprang up along the rail lines. The introduction of the electric trolley car in the 1880s permitted an even larger segment of the population to leave the center city behind, as trolley car lines followed major streets to the edges of the city.

The suburban expansions of the late 19th century, however, did not totally encircle the city. Being rail-based, the overall pattern was one of a few routes radiating out from the city center (where commerce and industry were still located), with residential development focused within a few blocks of either side of the transit line. This left huge swaths of open space between the rail lines.

The nature of American sprawl changed radically with the coming of the inexpensive automobile in the 1920s. No longer limited to close proximity to major streets and trolley lines, low density development expanded to previously inaccessible areas, often "leapfrogging" over undeveloped areas to more distant locations. Independent suburban villages, with their own land subdivision, planning, and zoning authorities, grew rapidly.

Land speculation drove the engine of regional development. Lacking regional government planning and controls, each of the plethora of small units of local government legislated as it saw fit to meet its own interests. Often this

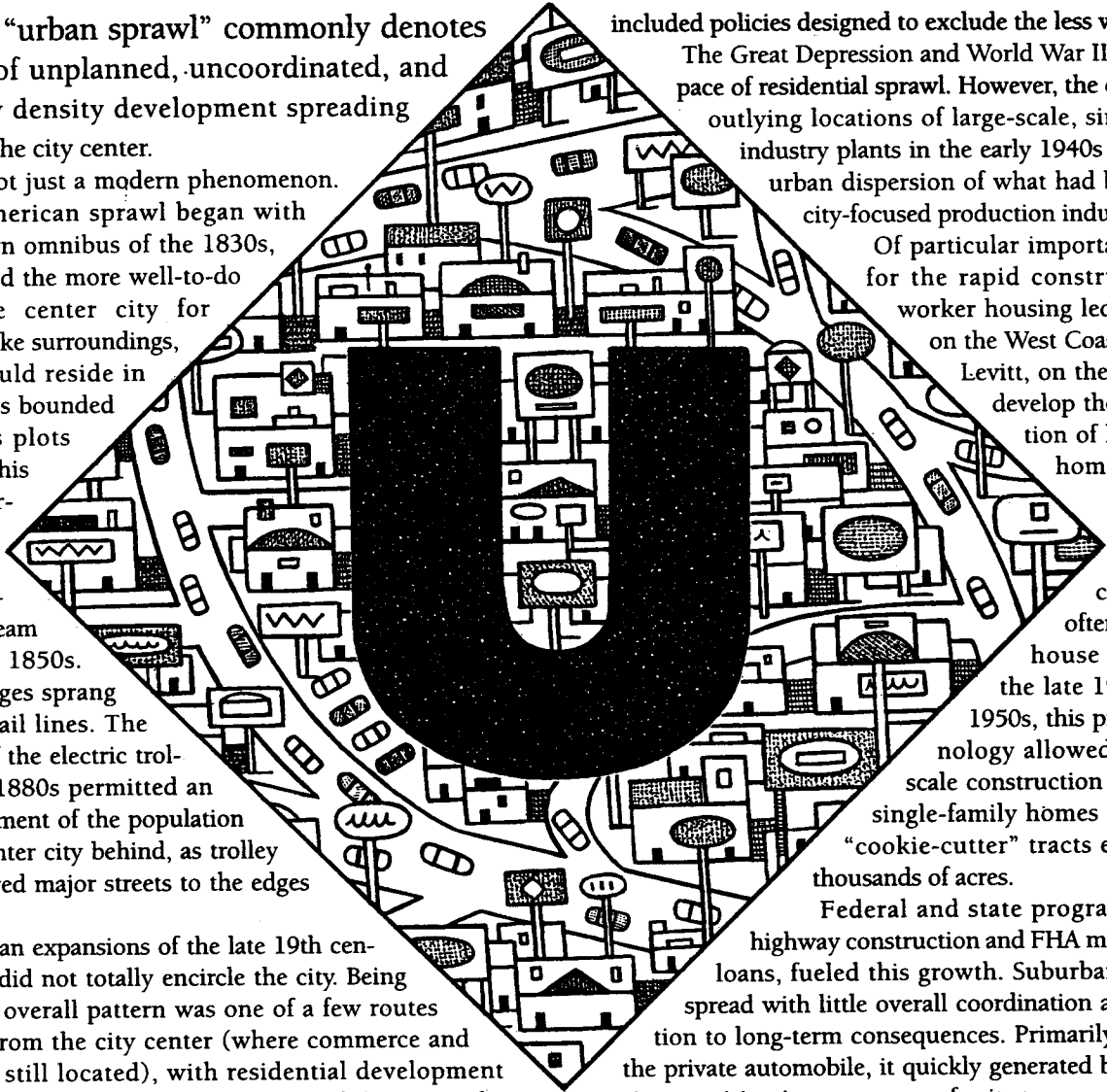
included policies designed to exclude the less well-to-do.

The Great Depression and World War II dampened the pace of residential sprawl. However, the construction in outlying locations of large-scale, single-story war industry plants in the early 1940s led to the suburban dispersion of what had been a central-city-focused production industry.

Of particular importance, the need for the rapid construction of war worker housing led Edgar Kaiser, on the West Coast, and William Levitt, on the East Coast, to develop the mass production of homes (before, home construction had been in the hands of individual craftsmen, and often produced one house at a time). By the late 1940s and early 1950s, this production technology allowed for the large-scale construction of hundreds of single-family homes at a time, with "cookie-cutter" tracts extending over thousands of acres.

Federal and state programs, especially highway construction and FHA mortgage-insured loans, fueled this growth. Suburban development spread with little overall coordination and scant attention to long-term consequences. Primarily dependent on the private automobile, it quickly generated both traffic congestion requiring immense sums for its temporary amelioration and perimeter regional shopping centers accessible only by car.

By the end of the 20th century, sprawl had reshaped metropolitan areas across America. While central cities still remained a focal point for government, financial, and large corporation daytime office workers (and nighttime theatergoers), they had been drained of newer production industries, and of middle- and upper-income residents. As development continued to disperse, a new demarcation even emerged: inner suburbs versus outer suburbs, with inner suburbs starting to face a loss of economic vitality as commerce and population relocated to even more peripheral locations. Ominously, America's entire sprawling, auto-centric development pattern remained precariously dependent on foreign oil.



The electric trolley helped open the way for rapid suburban expansion. Ironically, trolleys (and light rail) are making a comeback today in strengthening urban cores.

The Urban Sprawl Debate:

Myths, Realities and Hidden Agendas

by Larry S. Bourne, MCIP RPP

The Urban Sprawl Debate:
Myths, Realities and Hidden
Agendas

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EVERYONE IS AGAINST urban sprawl. Judging by recent attention in professional journals and the popular media, the issue is high on political agendas. Unfortunately, few agree on what the term means, and thus discussions of its causes, consequences and potential solutions are at best confused, and at worst counterproductive.

To some observers, sprawl applies to any extension of the suburban margin; to others it is synonymous with the spread of development onto sensitive greenlands and agricultural soils, increases in highway congestion, or the proliferation of new subdivisions of homogeneous and low-density, single-family housing. The traditional definition of sprawl, however, is much more specific: it refers to suburban development that is "haphazard, disorganized, poorly serviced, and largely unplanned." By this rather strict standard, urban Canada has relatively little sprawl. Instead, the larger urban regions, notably Toronto, Calgary and Vancouver, exhibit extremely rapid growth, most of which inevitably occurs on the outer suburban margin, typically at lower densities. Does such growth constitute sprawl? Does suburbia's negative image reflect poor planning or media hype?

In the following attempt to clarify the underlying elements of this debate, I pay particular attention to the current expression of that debate in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), to the merits of tighter regulation of residential uses and densities, and to the implicit agendas that have shaped the debate.

On density, suburbanization and intensification

What is myth and what reality with respect to urban densities and suburbanization? It may surprise some readers to learn that the densities of new residential developments in Toronto's outer suburbs are, on average, the highest on the continent. These densities have also been increasing over the last two decades because of market demand and the rising

price of land, and despite higher standards for public space and servicing. With a few exceptions, most new suburban single-family housing features thirty- to forty-foot lot frontages, contrasting sharply with the fifty- to 100-foot frontages typical of the 1950s and 1960s.

The media also frequently gives the impression that all new housing is built in the new suburbs. In fact, many cities, particularly Toronto and Vancouver, have been remarkably successful at encouraging high proportions of new construction as residential in-fill within the existing urban envelope. That proportion is now estimated at between 20 and 25 per cent of all housing starts in the GTA, compared to less than 10 per cent in most U.S. metropolitan areas.

Would further intensification significantly reduce the extent and impact of suburban expansion? Of course, we could do more to increase residential densities by facilitating in-fill and reusing older brownfield sites. Providing physical infrastructure for housing on streets with thirty-foot lots is less expensive per dwelling unit than it is for streets with sixty-foot lots.¹ Yet these costs are a relatively small proportion of the costs of new housing and services, particularly in rapidly growing regions. Other local costs, such as those for schools, open space and community facilities, are essentially fixed. The largest and most variable costs are on the regional scale: in the arrangement of uses, the rapid growth of non-residential uses, and specifically in the disjuncture between residential and commercial-industrial activities.

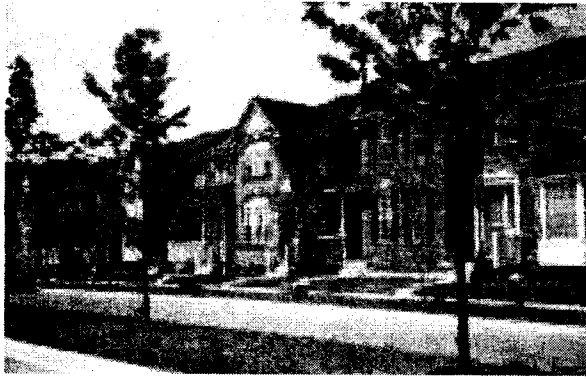
An additional source of confusion, over and above the question of spatial scale, involves the measurement of density. Typically, densities are calculated using simple population numbers as the numerator in the density ratio. This ignores, among other factors, the impact of demographic change, as well as revisions in living arrangements on suburban forms in general and density ratios in particular. Average household size has declined by over 35 per cent since 1961, which translates into a requirement for 35 per cent more dwelling units to house the same

total population. Smaller households usually result in a thinning of the population of all neighbourhoods, old and new, at least those with a fixed housing stock. Nevertheless, smaller lot sizes and a wider mix of dwelling types have combined to reverse past declines in population density. In parallel, densities of the residential built environment (e.g., dwelling units and capital investment) have increased even faster in most new suburban areas.

Even so, anti-sprawl advocates argue that we could shift many of these new units to brownfield sites. Is this realistic? There is certainly considerable potential for further residential intensification, but there are also real limits to the capacity of the in-fill process, and existing built-up areas, to absorb new growth in the volume required. The in-fill process is administratively complicated, politically sensitive, subject to liability risks, regulatory barriers and widespread "NIMBYism," and is constrained in the longer term by limited effective demand and high costs.

Even in an ideal world, where all of the various stakeholders, including conservative ratepayer groups, agreed with the objective of intensification, it would be a major achievement to maintain the exist-





ing proportion of brownfield construction, let alone increase that proportion to 40 or 50 per cent over the next decade, as is widely proposed. This suggests that most units will have to be built in the new suburbs on formerly rural lands. This is not sprawl, by conventional definition, but rather demand-driven suburbanization. It can be improved, but it cannot be wished away.

What, then, is the problem?

Given that low-density unplanned residential sprawl is not widespread, if suburban growth is as inevitable as expected population growth suggests, what is the primary problem? Three issues seem to be more important. One is the challenge, indeed the obligation, to provide sufficient space to accommodate anticipated growth while minimizing its negative side effects. Rapid growth does tend to overwhelm the ability of municipalities to plan and deliver appropriate social services (schools, for example) and to finance new infrastructure (such as sewers, roads, and transit). It also adds to feelings of unease among residents that their current life styles and living conditions are at risk.

One common response to this sense of risk, and to the negative images of sprawl, is to recommend slower population growth. But how? Growth in the Toronto region is driven overwhelmingly by immigration (75 per cent), and secondarily by natural increase (25 per cent), not by domestic in-migrants. Thus, reducing the overall growth rate is largely a question of changing immigration policies, which is beyond local control. In the absence of lower immigration levels, governments must plan for anticipated levels of growth in ways that are efficient, equitable, and sensitive to social and environmental issues. The paranoia regarding sprawl tends to divert attention from addressing these genuine concerns.

Second, the main contributors to low-density suburban development are not residential uses but non-residential activities (commercial, industrial, distributional uses, hobby farms, golf courses, and so forth). While suburban residential (net) densities have been increasing in most areas, measured both in population and

dwelling units, the densities of other users of urban space, including public-sector uses, have been decreasing. Surprisingly, no one seems to notice. Why, we might ask, is so little attention paid to the increasing rates of land consumption among non-residential uses? Is it because these uses provide play space for the well-to-do, or generate substantial tax revenues for cash-starved local governments?

The third problem is lack of regional coordination. The overwhelming source of our suburban problems is not residential sprawl but the weakness of regional integration of transportation, infrastructure provision and land use, and specifically of housing and extensive non-residential uses. There are, for instance, few examples in Toronto's outer suburbs of employment and living spaces being carefully coordinated, or of new developments being closely linked either to the GO system or to local transit.

Frequent calls to increase residential densities still further, as reflected (incorrectly it seems) in the design of "new urbanism" communities, serve no useful purpose if the contribution of commercial-industrial uses and the issue of coordination are not addressed. Indeed, such policies may aggravate certain problems (affordability and access to jobs, for example), especially if these policies are implemented in stark isolation from other actions.

Why the anti-sprawl rhetoric? Hidden agendas?

Why is the confusion over density and the nature of sprawl so entrenched in the media and in the public mind? One explanation is that the current anti-sprawl rhetoric serves as a protective "all-reason" umbrella under which special-interest groups and politicians can cluster in order to advance their own political agendas, and in so doing shield themselves from potential criticism over those agendas. Such agendas, however rational for individuals, are often unrelated to broader issues of the form and quality of suburban development. Since no one openly advocates sprawl as such, taking a position against sprawl is safe. Residential uses are also the largest consumer of suburban land and thus represent an easy target. For politicians, an anti-sprawl posture often offers the benefit of appearing concerned for the quality of urban life while not having to make hard choices on other problems.

For special interest groups on the urban fringe, the anti-sprawl umbrella serves a variety of other purposes. For some, it is a means of preserving semi-rural habitats. For individuals, such a stance may be understandable; in a collective sense, however, it is inequitable and socially exclusionary. Those residents generally do not pay the full costs of their choice of

location, and their actions implicitly limit the rights of others, including the next generation, to live there. For others, sprawl represents an environmental crusade with undeniably valid objectives, but one which is often one-dimensional and whose remedial costs are seldom specified. Typically, those costs are also unevenly distributed across communities and social classes. Their anti-sprawl rhetoric may also reflect their concerns over the increasing social and ethno-cultural diversity of the suburbs.

What might be done?

An initial step in clarifying the issues would be to separate myth from reality. First, as a precondition for action, we must accept the simple fact that suburban growth is likely to continue as long as populations continue to grow and a significant proportion of households express a desire for single-family housing. This is not an excuse for suburbanization, but rather a statement that lamenting sprawl is not a recipe for effective action.

Our challenge is to design objectives that more accurately reflect the development trajectory of large and growing urban regions. These should not be pie-in-the-sky objectives or pious statements against sprawl, which are comforting to some but largely useless as guidelines for policy decisions. Nor should they be objectives that benefit one special-interest use or user in isolation from, or at the expense of, the needs of others. Instead, they should provide concrete goals and targets that recognize the difficult trade-offs involved in satisfying the often conflicting demands for economic spaces and environmental conservation. They should also recognize the uneven costs and benefits that flow from those decisions, and identify the needs of the next generation for affordable housing and living space. The fourth challenge is to address the excessive use of space by non-residential uses, and to insist that such activities pay the true spillover costs of their developments.

Misleading positions

Residential density, then, is not the crucial question (although it is obviously relevant) in planning new suburban areas. Rather, the issues are the mix of uses, declining non-residential densities, and the lack of strategic coordination between housing and other land uses in ways that facilitate service provision, conservation and transit use. Despite the anti-sprawl rhetoric, tighter restrictions on residential uses alone are not the answer. These will only force up the price of land and housing, and thus increase the affordability problems facing current renters and the next generation of homeowners, as Portland's experience has demonstrated. The argument here is simple: much of the anti-sprawl rhetoric focused on residential uses and densities in isolation is misdirected, counter-productive and socially

inequitable. It is underpinned by political and social agendas that often have little or nothing to do with the density or quality of suburban spaces. Politicians currently in power owe it to the next generation to avoid increasing prices by restricting suburban housing based on some fuzzy concept of sprawl, while ignoring non-residential uses and public infrastructure standards.

What we can do is to address directly the social, inter-generational and environmental costs of the current form and density of development, particularly those imposed by commercial-industrial and other non-residential uses. Planners should insist that those uses are linked, wherever possible, to both regional and local transit systems. Further, governments should remove tax inequities and reduce or eliminate subsidies that discourage the efficient use of land—especially for low-density commercial, industrial and transportation uses. Specifically, these initiatives require the creation of a regional authority that has, first, the resources and responsibility to influence all forms of suburban uses, and second, the mandate to shape the linkages between such uses, especially those that cross municipal boundaries.

Some might argue that the battle for a more rational, functionally integrated, and transit-friendly suburban form was lost decades ago; that the mould is cast, and everyone must live with the results and their social costs. I disagree. Given the massive growth anticipated in the Toronto region over the next twenty years, we still have the opportunity to remake the suburban landscape, and to integrate the new with the old. It will, however, take effective leadership, clear visions, and strategic investments.

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Summary

This paper argues that the intense anti-sprawl rhetoric focused on suburban residential growth, especially in Toronto, is misplaced, and is driven largely by implicit agendas other than the effective management of urban development. The paper makes three points. First, by conventional definitions we have little sprawl, but rather extremely rapid population growth, which we have a collective obligation to accommodate. Second, the principal source of decreasing suburban densities is not the residential sector but low-density, non-residential uses. Residential densities, in contrast, have been increasing, especially dwelling-unit density. Third, the other major problems are the lack of coordination between residential and non-residential activities, and the weak integration of both with transit provision.

Sommaire

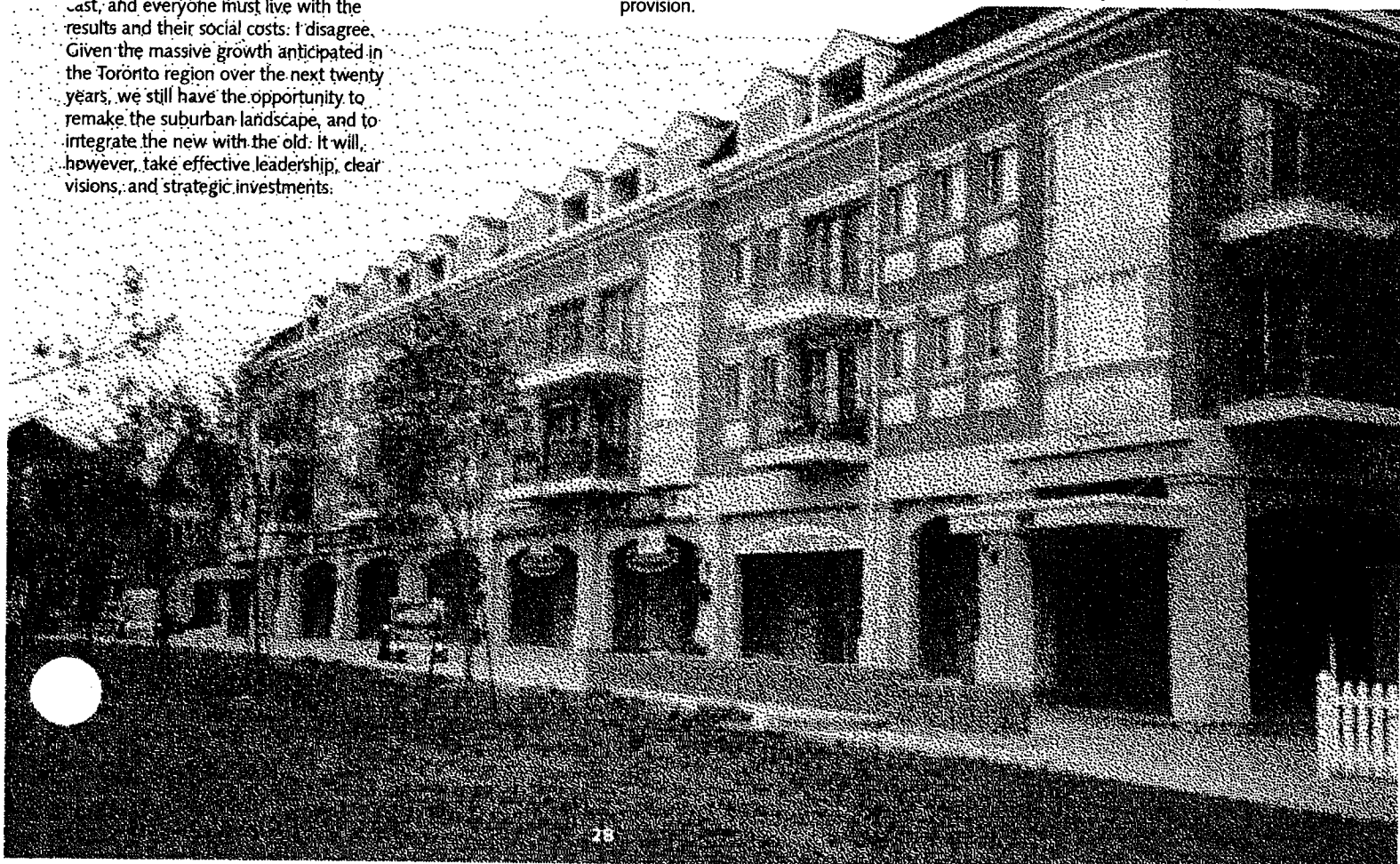
Le discours alarmiste concernant l'expansion des banlieues, particulièrement dans la région de Toronto, est le résultat de préoccupations ambiguës plutôt que d'un souci d'efficacité en gestion urbaine. Tout d'abord, dans le sens strict, il s'agit d'une croissance très rapide de la population, que la collectivité doit assumer, plutôt que d'une expansion tentaculaire urbaine. Ensuite, le secteur résidentiel n'est pas un facteur d'une suburbanisation décroissante autant qu'une utilisation non résidentielle, à faible densité, des espaces disponibles. La densité des secteurs résidentiels, plus particulièrement des unités résidentielles, a pour sa part augmenté. Enfin, la faible intégration des activités résidentielles et non résidentielles et les lacunes en ce qui concerne le transport urbain représentent des obstacles majeurs.

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Note

- 1 See Pamela Blais, *Inching Toward Sustainability: The Evolving Structure of the GTA* (Toronto: University of Toronto and Metropole Consultants, 2000).



BERNARD ZYSCOVICH

Density generates opportunity
and evolution, producing
new life . . . and further density.

INFILL DENSITY

Cities offer a broader and closer range of activities than any other social context. Those who choose city living tend to prefer the kinetic over the pastoral, the animated environment over the subdued. In addition to its innate attractions, urban life represents a viable means of preventing suburban sprawl and preserving natural resources. Planners, developers, and environmentalists, among others, have come to recognize that density can play a key role in successful urbanism, as well as serve as a prime way of developing economic opportunity.

A dense urban core can accommodate varied approaches to living, working, and playing; it can stimulate a vast range of activities; it can compel interaction and promote both purposeful and unexpected possibilities. In short, density can provide

cultural, psychological, and economic nourishment for its residents. With density recognized as essential to vital city life, the challenge then becomes one of stimulating density without introducing congestion, crime, and massive building into the urban core.

The quality of urban life can continue to get better as long as cities maintain systems that suitably address the evolution of density. Paramount among these systems is traffic. Density becomes problematic when a city does not accommodate walking, biking, and other modes of moving about comfortably without a car. Traffic congestion means driving will take longer than walking or riding public transportation—which is especially evident when large numbers of the population spend more time in their cars than in their residences. For those who live close enough to their work to walk, or who use public transit, traffic congestion is not as much of an issue. In cities where traffic issues are resolved in favor of pedestrian street life, it is even possible to remove traffic lanes and to widen sidewalks.

With efficient mass transportation and effective traffic patterning, pedestrian activity can flourish. The greater the number of people on the streets, the safer they feel. Fear of crime can diminish when people experience safety in numbers and high visibility. Also, the presence of a vital, civil urban core of humanity, architecture, and parks can create a sense of shelter.

The sizable buildings that are needed to accommodate urban density should not generate criticism and conflict as long as the architecture is of high quality. Large-scale buildings can decimate the quality of urban life when they are unattractive and poorly designed and when they fail to relate to life at the street level. High-rise buildings can be particularly offensive when they are badly designed, especially if their form dominates the skyline or obliterates city views. However, with the use of design controls and incentives, the evolutionary changes spurred by density can be appropriately addressed. For example, the height of a structure can be used as an alternative to uninterrupted mass: a tall, slim building affords greater light and air penetration than the continuous wall of a medium-sized building.

In addition, sizable buildings, punctuated with features that provide visual and spatial rhythm, can help to vitalize urban life. A mixed-use plan, with office/retail/restaurant opportunities at street level, can play a part in stimulating commercial and pedestrian activity. Street life can be further enhanced when a building provides parking that is both abundant and concealed; in fact, the parking facility itself often can be wrapped around residential or retail units.

Density-generating infill development can produce profit for the developer and benefit the residents in direct relation to the value that it adds to a neighborhood. Planners and developers need to explore how an urban infill solution can sustain or develop contexts; how it can create urban connections within that context; and how, in disinvested neighborhoods, it could catalyze renovation and/or restoration. These infill solutions present a diverse range of forms that extend from high-end townhouses, apartments, condominiums, and their ancillary services, to affordable housing for

the working class, and subsidized or other cost-diminishing programs that introduce housing into market-rate environments.

Regardless of form, however, all successful urban infill solutions begin with appropriate responses to the existing context. In some cases, the approach may be entirely internal—for example, to add resident amenities and update interiors of existing buildings. In other cases, the best approach may be to convert a building to different types of ownership, such as condominium, hotel, and/or timeshare. For still others, the effort may require conceptual regeneration of a vast area involving varying degrees of master planning and architectural design and redesign.

These varied options do not require massive building nor do they necessarily stimulate congestion and crime. All are capable of providing the fundamental requirements for urban vitality:

- pedestrian-friendly streets;
- a humanely scaled environment;
- mixed commercial, business, and market activity;
- neighborhood schools;
- daytime and nighttime activity;
- cultural and civic activity;
- economically suitable amenities that preserve a city's or neighborhood's distinct architectural and cultural character, honoring the location's origins; and
- urban diversity.

The process of identifying the optimal infill solution begins with uncovering a neighborhood's story and examining its present context. Historic significance often points to opportunities for regeneration, either of its original culture or to activities that derive from it. The geography, culture, ethnic background, job access, and transportation issues of the development area are equally relevant. An urban infill density solution should address a neighborhood's level of existing services and amenities by supplying the highest density the population needs or that the neighborhood will support, and it should also introduce those services and amenities that are lacking. Less dense projects should be built in environments where retail and office vacancies prevail. Finally, a study of the neighborhood's demands would help clarify the needs that are not currently being satisfied. For example, would an abundance of new, larger apartments stimulate the market or would a greater density of smaller units? Is there a new population—perhaps empty nesters or an entry-level workforce—with a pent-up, unsatisfied need for urban proximity that could be enticed into moving into the neighborhood? Is a lack of accessible transit making the neighborhood inconvenient or unreachable?

Often the clues to creating optimal infill density exist outside the development area. Therefore, the next step is to look beyond a neighborhood's boundaries and envision a bigger picture. Nearby neighborhoods, for example, may be saturated in terms of housing, office, or recreational space. Their building types may be moded. The development area might flourish with the right catalyzing projects. A study of outlying areas should include an

Under a new plan in south Florida, several multiethnic neighborhoods along the historic East Coast railroad corridor would be assigned to a series of districts specific to each neighborhood's nature. Low-rise, edge water development would be included along the nearby bay as well as mixed-use, high-rise development on one side of a bordering main thoroughfare. Various neighborhoods would be linked through a revival and extension of the original trolley route along the high-density edge of the corridor.

inventory of the existing building stock and identification of needs and appropriate amenities, including parks. What exists beyond the development area's boundaries that does not exist within? This kind of broader view can both inform and stimulate the creative process.

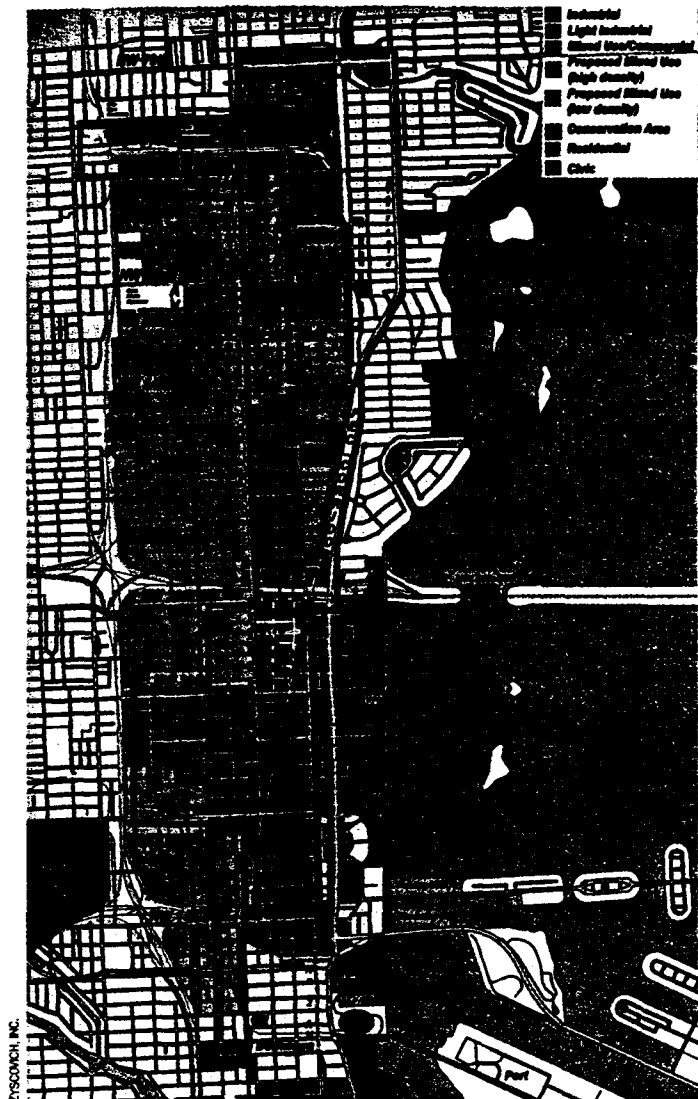
In addition, examining regional connections can offer the missing pieces for creating a higher quality of life, for providing services that establish jobs, and for establishing alternative lifestyles. Transportation often can provide the link that joins the environment to existing resources.

Density can sustain business. In researching potential locations, retailers look first at demographics. They want to know how many people live within a certain distance from a proposed site and what their income levels are. Without sufficient density, commercial and market activity cannot flourish. In all approaches to creating successful density infill, the ability to offer affordable market rates is paramount. Funding sources exist in numerous forms, such as municipalities, private developers, and public/private partnerships. In the case of municipalities, developers must ask what kinds of projects the city itself could support or would endorse. For private developers, the questions revolve around the type of product that will be of greatest interest to a specific population. The financial demands of rental units versus condominiums, for example, are significantly different. Therefore, developers need to determine which products will be the most appealing and, thereby, the most profitable. Public/private partnerships require knowledge of the types of joint efforts that would not be achievable by one source alone. In other cases, developers may wish to investigate the kinds of reuses possible for disinvested land. Taxation issues further fortify the case for urban infill density. As property values increase, a higher tax level accrues to the government, which, in turn, provides more money for urban improvement.

Urban scenarios throughout south Florida, for example, illustrate a number of these approaches:

The Florida East Coast Railroad Corridor. An urban study addressed the regeneration and redevelopment of several multiethnic neighborhoods—among Florida's oldest and most dissimilar—linked along this historic transportation artery. The initial organizing principles of the plan centered on each neighborhood's history, its current economic and cultural status, as well as the hindrances to each neighborhood's growth and vitality.

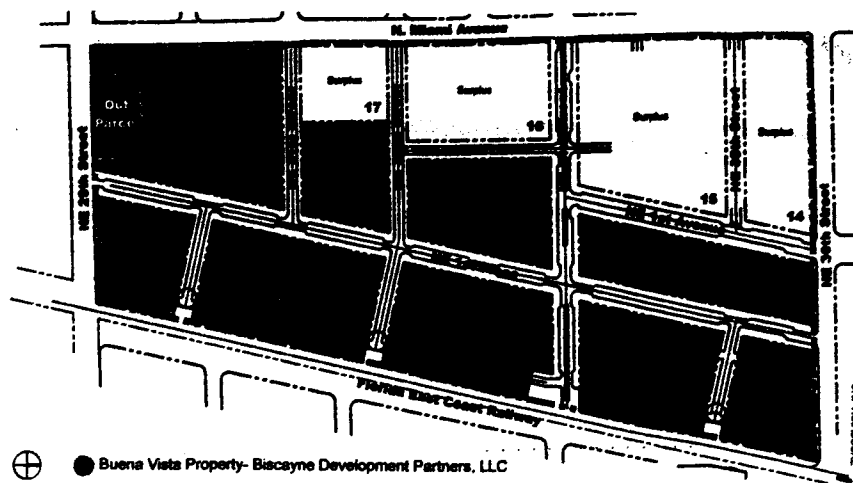
The plan defines and creates a series of districts specific to each neighborhood's nature and links them together in an urban context. It elucidates exactly what is needed in areas that require regeneration along with solutions that will provide the quickest and most effective opportunities for change. The study also includes recommendations for interim plans to generate land for public/



private partnership. It calls for low-rise, edge water development along the nearby bay as well as for mixed-use, high-rise development on one side of a bordering main thoroughfare. It asserts that the revival of and addition to the original trolley route along the high-density edge of the corridor would link the various urban neighborhoods. Foremost among the plan's intentions is the protection, enhancement, and provision of jobs.

The Miami Beach Convention Center District. This master plan grew out of an assignment to identify appropriate uses for two central blocks of Miami Beach's Convention Center District, currently used only for surface parking. Due to the strategic significance and future development alternatives of the 5.86-acre site, the study was expanded into a comprehensive ten-year master plan that will transform the Convention Center District—the cultural, recreational, and commercial urban core of South Beach—into a global destination. Included in the plan are the expansion needs of the local symphony, which will build a state-of-the-art facility for teaching, performance, broadcasting, rehearsal, special performance, and related events on one of the two city-owned parking lots.

The new concept centers on the creation of a 21st-century town center, a Central Park-like or Bryant Park-like civic space to be built



A 55-acre inner-city container staging facility, Buena Vista Yard, is to be transformed into a new urban setting with residential, commercial, light industrial, and retail uses, including live/work space for artists, ground-level shops and services, dining and entertainment venues, a new trolley line, and a park on a right-of-way along road tracks.

it will include live/work space for designers, artists, or architects, for example, or allow them to be within walking distance from their offices. Pedestrian-friendly shops and services are planned to occupy the ground-floor levels of the buildings; dining and entertainment venues are planned to help sustain activity at night and on weekends.

in the parking lot location. It also includes a provision to build the city's symphony "soundspace," a 65-foot-high, 35,000-square-foot, \$30 million state-of-the-art broadcast facility with outdoor audio and video projection.

This preliminary concept not only reflects updated conditions in the area since the inception of the original City Center Redevelopment Plan in 1993, but also continues to provide a working document to finalize outstanding urban planning issues essential to the plan's completion. As part of the process, the many numerous city-sponsored planning documents generated by previous studies on the Convention Center District were evaluated and integrated into one comprehensible plan with explicit direction.

Urban issues addressed include streetscape improvements for Convention Center Drive; streetscape improvements for an east-west corridor; potential rezoning of a major traffic artery; analysis of the local community center; establishment of boulevard traffic circles; determination of the location and phasing of a garage and charging facility for the electric shuttle; development of preferred lots for specialized meeting/exhibition space and parking for the convention center; and site development analyses relative to the symphony (expansion plans; concept plan development for adjoining garage facade retail; resolution of an adjoining street closing; resolution of primary commercial boulevard streetscape issues; and streetscape design changes related to the bus route changes).

The master plan also provides for the regeneration of commercial activity on nearby derelict blocks and the elimination of traffic congestion, as well as for links among the oceanfront hotels, retail, and tourist streets, the convention center, the Cultural Campus, and the performing arts venues. The plan further identifies opportunities for gateway entrance features, evaluates the need and location of an intermodal center, and makes provisions that complement the adjacent urban and historic neighborhoods.

The Buena Vista Yard. This master plan transforms a 55-acre inner-city container staging facility into an entirely new "city." The new urban setting will include residential, commercial, light industrial, and retail uses. The plan calls for a new zoning category that would provide for mixed use not only within Buena Vista Yard, but also within the buildings themselves. Capitalizing on urban elements such as medium density, operational 24/7, and green space,

Traditionally, such enterprises as the Buena Vista Yard require an extensive time for development of regional impact (DRI) approval. To avoid such a costly delay, the master plan calls for 2,999 residential units and 240,000 square feet of commercial space, the latter number of which falls below the DRI requirement. The master plan explicates specific zoning codes and design guidelines for governing the construction process, further expediting the approval process and averting the need for public hearings. The tightly governed guidelines cover limitations on architectural bulk and height and on the character of the street at the pedestrian level. They include requirements for minimum fenestration and the concealment of parking garages, for example, but they do not include proscriptions on design style(s). The two principal criteria for permissible activities in Buena Vista Yard are that they not generate noise or toxic fumes. The mix of retail in Buena Vista Yard will be divided between national retailers at 60 to 65 percent and local retailers at 30 to 35 percent. Residential developments will range from real estate investment trusts (REITs) to boutique rentals, and from high-end to moderately priced condominiums and lofts.

The Buena Vista master plan also includes a new trolley line along the main avenue and a park built on the 100-foot right-of-way along the railroad tracks. The green space will include walkways, bikeways, jogging paths, and passive park areas for off-the-street recreation, and it can be tied into the city's overall park system. The urban composition of the site will be dense with vertical buildings and diverse architectural styles, and it will be oriented to the pedestrian with restaurants, shops, and showroom windows opening on to the streets.

Successful urban infill design requires an understanding of urban vitality. Planners and developers need to be prepared to create environments that accommodate jobs and stimulate cultural pursuits. The approach that they take will be based on the degree to which the public and private sectors can work together to establish the amenities that will attract people to the city. Most important, it should be made clear that density need not increase congestion or the incidence of crime, nor should it in any way lower the quality of urban life.

BERNARD ZYSCOVICH IS THE FOUNDING PRINCIPAL OF ZYSCOVICH, INC., AN ARCHITECTURE, URBAN DESIGN, AND INTERIOR DESIGN FIRM BASED IN MIAMI, FLORIDA.

Rail Yard Infill

As railroads consolidate their lines, large parcels of land are becoming available at or near the urban core of several cities in the western United States. Denver and Portland already are reaping the rewards of major rail yard conversions, with similar projects in process or on the horizon in numerous other locales, including Salt Lake City, Sacramento, Las Vegas, Albuquerque, Kansas City, and Fort Worth.

"Because they're big doughnut holes in the middle of urban areas, there's no lack of ideas about what to do with them," says Michael Casey, director of special properties for Union Pacific Railroad, based in Omaha, Nebraska. "Everything's grown up around them. Every interest group sees opportunities."

While the possibilities may seem endless, experience with rail yard conversions suggests that developers and cities can achieve maximum value only by reconnecting the land to its surroundings in a way that honors urban values and does not subvert the power of the city center. Such parcels give cities the opportunity to revitalize their downtown cores by developing new mixed-use urban villages that function as distinct neighborhoods but also connect to adjoining districts, creating a new synergy within the city's core.

Because their historic function was to promote commerce and industry, rail yards are well suited to redevelopment. They are surrounded by assets that reflect the growth of cities: historic buildings and warehouse districts that lend themselves to renovation, as well as city attractions, such as cultural facilities, sports venues, educational institutions, and restaurants. At the same time, however, rail yards present specific challenges: environmental remediation, obstacles to financing, a dearth of infrastructure, complicated entitlement processes, and, sometimes, controversy in the community.

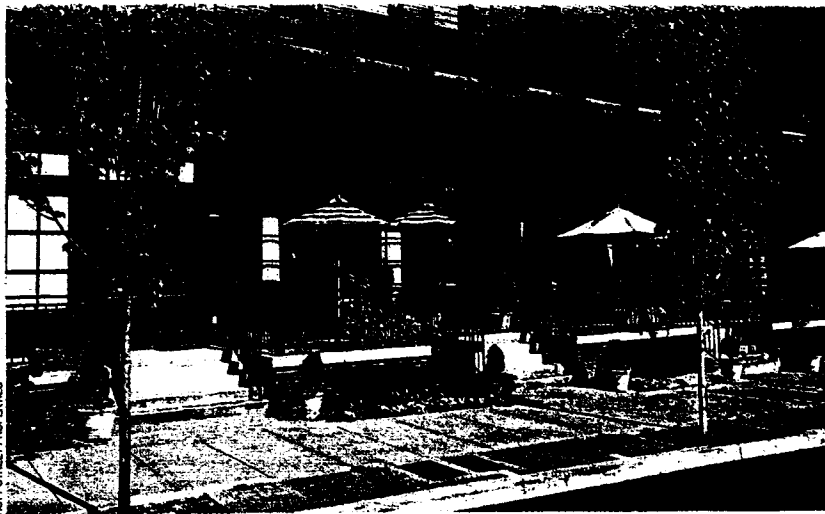
The rewards of rail yard conversions can be impressive, not only in the return on investment but also in terms of significantly revitalizing cities. "To be able to get a 20-city-block area in a downtown, start over from scratch and master-plan it consistently throughout is a rare opportunity," comments Jim Hill, a partner in East West Partners, based in Denver, Colorado, which is currently developing Denver's former rail yard.

Railroads, which made possible the westward expansion and settlement of

the United States in the 19th century, came with an interesting set of constraints. Because steam-powered trains needed water to operate, the gentle gradients of floodplains along rivers became rail corridors where settlements flourished. The passenger station and attendant rail yards were the dispatch points for people and goods, and cities expanded around these points to create market hubs. Railroad stations became the doorsteps or gateways to cities. On the front side, they connected people to the cities' assets: hotels, restaurants, and commercial districts. On the back side, they connected raw materials to manufacturers, creating industrial swaths near stations and along rail lines. After reaching their peak in the 1920s and 1930s, railroads began to fade in prominence as other modes of transportation—air and automobile—grew in popularity. Ultimately, this shift left large unused areas in key downtown districts.

An apt use for these large parcels is in the revitalization of the downtown core with projects that can include

JOY STREET PROPERTIES



In Portland, Oregon, the historic buildings that formerly housed the offices for the Burlington Northern Railroad have been renovated to create townhomes.

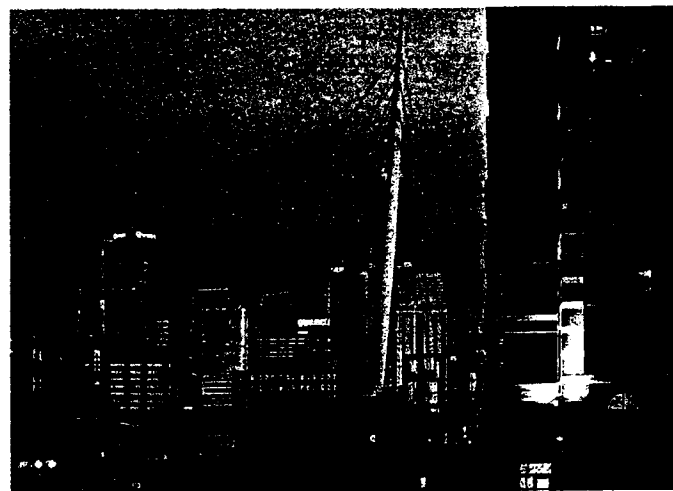
residential components, mass transit options, and office and retail space. Portland developer Homer Williams, one of the forces behind the transformation of Portland's rail yard into the trendy Pearl District, says he saw the trend coming. "Baby boomers were aging and leaving their houses. We felt this was a real evolution and that it was going to open up a lot of opportunities, not just in Portland but in a lot of other cities as well."

"It's a peculiarity of this type of work, people's hunger for something new," comments Dallas-based developer Ken Hughes. He likens former rail yards to

Port Melbourne, the transformed industrial harbor he saw last summer on a visit to Melbourne, Australia. "People love it," says Hughes. "They get home from work and they go out on their terrace and have a drink and watch the boats." He sees the same phenomenon in the often transit-oriented development of rail yard conversions to light rail. "It's kinetic activity. It's a lot of fun to have the train come by, as long as it's not too noisy," he notes.

Empty nesters and young professionals are the main pioneers in these new urban infill projects. They "want to

Denver's Union Station (top left) is becoming a multimodal transit hub served by light rail, passenger rail, buses, and the 16th Street Mall shuttle—and, possibly, in time, by a proposed commuter rail and airport rail. The Millennium Bridge over Denver's South Platte River extends the downtown's main axis—the 16th Street Mall—into the new mixed-use redevelopment area, which includes ground-level retail with residential units above (left).



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go away for the weekend and not have to worry about maintenance," explains Bob Gardner, Los Angeles managing director for the developer market-research firm Robert Charles Lesser & Co., based in Rockville, Maryland. "Or they'd rather be in an interesting urban environment than in the suburbs."

Constantine Doxiadis, a 20th-century Greek architect and city planner, observed how the wealth of choice at the center of cities decreases proportionately as one moves toward the edge. He regarded this pattern, which has prevailed over the 6,000-year history of cities, as something inevitable. It is possible to subvert the pattern, to build important buildings away from the central urban hub, but the consequence is to diminish the dynamism of the city overall. Doxiadis believed that to optimize the energy of the city, one must recognize the worth and hold the value of its pieces at the center. With former rail yards, the optimizing process can be accelerated as developers and planners take stock of a city's assets and invent ways to capitalize on them. The key is to connect the empty land with the city around it. This can be done in four steps:

Formulate a framework. Developers need to identify organizing elements that distinguish the developments and that make them accessible. These may include streets, open-space networks, and transit corridors. A hierarchy of streets, walkways, and plazas will define a project's scale and create visibility for businesses, while open-space functions as a lifestyle amenity. Transit strategies are essential to the ambience of the street and to the convenience of the urban village. Light rail, bus rapid transit, and circulation

systems combine to make sites accessible without automobiles. In Denver, the highest access priority was to connect the parcel to Interstate 25 and to downtown, both by vehicle and pedestrian access. The area is walkable via the 16th Street Mall and the Millennium Bridge over the existing main line, with connections to the valley's three sports venues; pedestrian bridges to a residential neighborhood west of the river; and open-space trails. Portland's Pearl District created similar connections with its new streetcar, which runs from the Northwest 23rd Avenue area to downtown Portland south of the project.

Create an urban village. In Denver, the slow buildup to critical mass began with the rejuvenation of Larimer Square in the 1960s, and was followed by a much larger redevelopment of the historic warehouse district, now called Lower Downtown or LoDo, east of Union Station. LoDo has evolved into a fashionable urban area, whose qualities have now been implemented in a new development west of the station. Portland's rail yard conversion was built on a similar piecemeal renovation of the surrounding warehouse district, which had become an informal arts district. Other cities hope to achieve the same vitality. At 240 acres, Sacramento's rail yard is one of the largest parcels, which southern California-based Millennia Associates is negotiating to purchase and develop. Officials expect the project to include a sports arena and an expanded railroad museum, as well as development of the Sacramento waterfront. "The downtown shuts down at 5:00 or 6:00 p.m.," says Suheil Totah, a land use attorney representing Millennia. "We're hoping to change that." In Las Vegas, the is-

sue is simpler. "The goal of redeveloping the area affectionately called 'downtown,' is to create one," says Dick Oglesby, a real estate consultant to the city. "The community has grown away from downtown and has not supported its businesses." Officials hope that a high-quality redevelopment will bring residential, retail, and commercial uses back to the center of Las Vegas after 30 years of development elsewhere.

Reuse depots. Historic railroad terminals can serve as focal points for development. "Without these monumental buildings, it's hard to imagine the land would be nearly as appealing," says Hughes. Yet, sometimes train depots can be reactivated as light-rail hubs, as has been done in Denver and San Diego. Sometimes, they find new life in other uses. The St. Louis depot became a hotel and specialty retail and entertainment complex and the two Salt Lake City depots were also converted: one to a restaurant and museum, the other to a community center, after developers convinced the city council to build an intermodal transit hub farther away from residential redevelopment.

Resolve uncertainties. Those seeking to invigorate these parcels and make them not just ready, but compelling, for development need to address the challenges as well, including:

■ **Infrastructure.** Because of the complete lack of infrastructure, rail yard conversions almost by definition require public/private partnerships. Portland, Denver, and Salt Lake City paid to demolish aging viaducts over rail yards, added interstate highway connections, and helped finance pedestrian connections and urban parks that add lifestyle appeal. At the same time, de-

COMPARISON OF MIXED-USE RAIL YARD CONVERSIONS (all figures approximate)

CITY	PROJECT	SITE	PLANNING COMPLETION	ORIGINAL LAND COST	LAND VALUE AFTER DEVELOPMENT	PRIMARY USE	ANTICIPATED COMMERCIAL	ANTICIPATED HOUSING UNITS	ANTICIPATED AFFORDABLE HOUSING	ANTICIPATED PERCENT OPEN SPACE	MASS TRANSIT
Portland	The Pearl District	60 acres	1988 (ongoing)	\$9.50	\$75	housing	300,000	6,000	45 percent	18 percent	streetcar, proposed high-speed rail
Denver	Riverfront/Commons	65 acres	1992 (ongoing)	\$1.50	\$75-\$150	mixed	4.2 million	3,500	10 percent	25 percent	intermodal hub with light rail, bus, proposed commuter rail and airport train
San Francisco	Mission Bay	303 acres	1995 (ongoing)	N/A	N/A	mixed	6 million	6,000	28 percent	18 percent	commuter rail from San Jose, light rail in construction
Salt Lake City	The Gateway Project	30 acres (of 650 acres total)	1995/2001	\$2	\$20-\$60	retail	1 million	500	33 percent	20 percent	intermodal hub with light-rail, bus, proposed commuter rail
Sacramento	UP Raiyards District	240 acres	2005 (anticipated start)	\$7 (anticipated)	\$120-\$140	office	9.6 million	2,800	52 percent	10 percent	intermodal hub with intercity/commuter/light rail/high-speed rail, bus
Las Vegas	City Parkway	61 acres	TBD	\$9	TBD	academic/medical	4 million	TBD	TBD	TBD	trolley, buses, monorail to be extended

Sources: Denver Community Planning and Development Agency, Las Vegas Office of Business Development, Portland Development Commission, Sacramento Economic Development Department, Salt Lake City Redevelopment Agency, San Francisco Community Planning and Development Agency.

velopers paid for such items as utilities, sewers, and even streets.

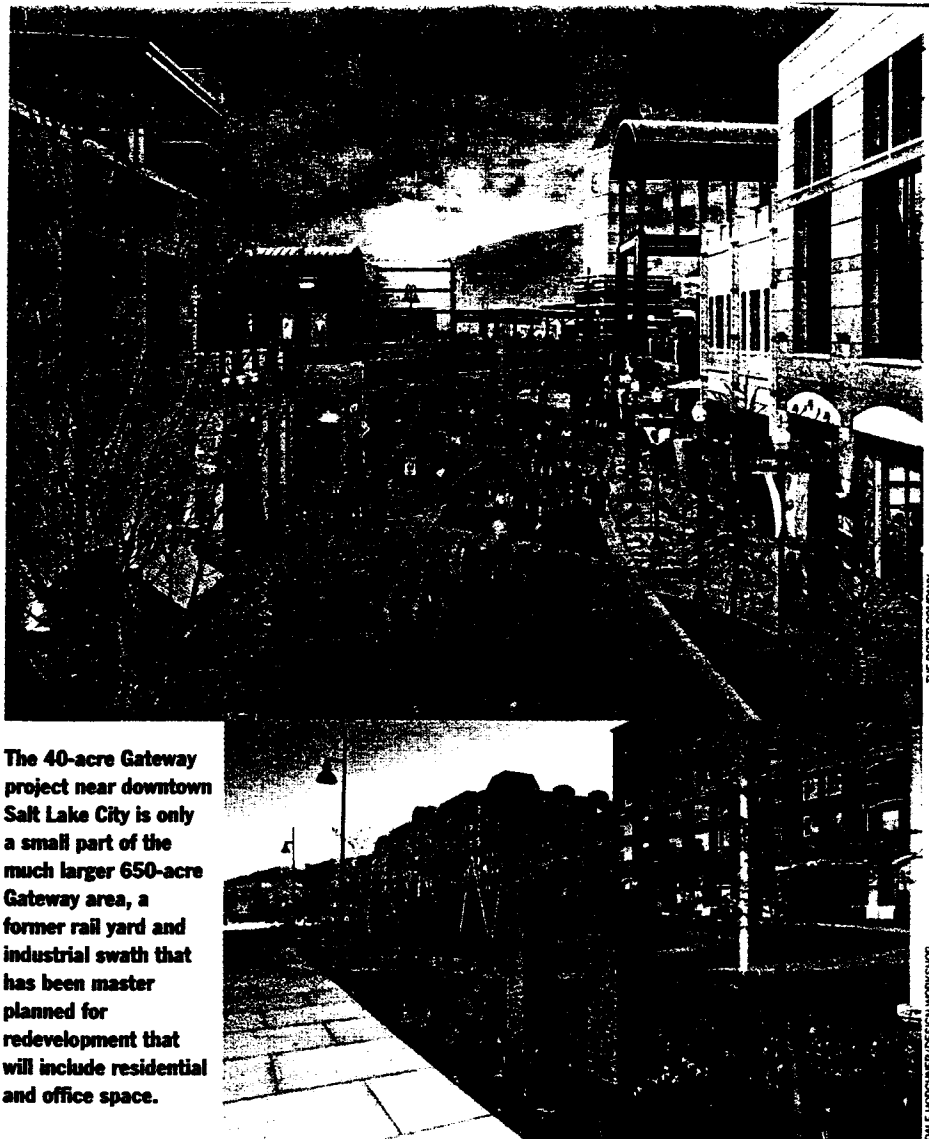
■ **Environmental remediation.** This can be accelerated w techniques, and by remediation specialists equity backing, who can use their financial strength to secure sites at reasonable prices and protect former and future owners from contamination liability. While "it can be challenging to navigate the regulatory environment," government can and should help, maintains Paul Blumberg, senior management analyst for Sacramento's department of economic development. As an example, he cites the new state-approved process for dealing with contaminants found in the course of construction, a protocol that has helped Sacramento seriously reduce the risk of delays in rail yard work.

■ **Financing.** After Portland's Hoyt Street Properties established that there was a market and that remediation was doable, the lender still wanted reassurance about the project's affordable housing component—only 150 units out of a total of 2,500. "At that time [mid-1990s], affordable housing wasn't being done," notes Hoyt Street's Tiffany Sweitzer. "Now we have three projects [of almost 400 additional affordable units] under construction." Officials in Ogden, Utah, are getting around lending difficulties by self-financing the renaissance of the downtown. This includes the redevelopment of a seven-acre parcel out of approximately 1,500 acres of rail yards to create an intermodal transit hub, using complex rent-back arrangements involving such places as an old federal depot and a consolidation of offices for the U.S. Internal Revenue Service.

■ **Minimizing freight-rail impact.** Denver still supports one main line freight rail. "It generated the most distinctive landmark of the area, the Millennium Bridge, which goes over the rails," points out Tyler Gibbs, urban design director for the city and county of Denver. "More people have asked about the development because they've seen the bridge," he adds. "We decided to embrace the trains," says Hill. "We use it as a view corridor so that the trains are part of the urban show, if you will." Freight rail also will remain a part of the Sacramento project, though Blumberg emphasizes that freight noise has been successfully mitigated or buffered from sensitive uses, such as residential, on many projects around the West.

■ **Community opposition.** San Francisco's Mission Bay project endured a long government approval process and the Sacramento project has suffered numerous delays and changes of plans over the years, the latest of which resolved opposition by transit adding to a new intermodal hub that would not reuse historic terminal. Opposition also can crop up after completion. The time pressures behind the Olympics gave Salt Lake City's Gateway project cer-

The 40-acre Gateway project near downtown Salt Lake City is only a small part of the much larger 650-acre Gateway area, a former rail yard and industrial swath that has been master planned for redevelopment that will include residential and office space.



THE BOYER COMPANY

DALE HORNBY/DESIGN WORKSHOP

tain advantages, like federal funding, but also forced the project to be completed all at once. "We couldn't phase it," says developer Jake Boyer of the Salt Lake City-based Boyer Company. "We had to create a critical mass." Located four blocks from the city's traditional downtown, the project has created conflict with Main Street. The net effect, some say, has been to abruptly move the city's downtown several blocks west. The tension has been aggravated by a recent bid to draw Nordstrom away from downtown and into Gateway, an issue that will be settled over the next few months.

■ **"Survival" retail.** The absence of amenities like grocery stores and filling stations can be frustrating. "Even an extra five- or ten-minute drive [to a grocery store] can deter potential homebuyers," says Hughes. "You usually need the rooftops first [before a grocer will build]." Denver's Gibbs agrees that it is hard to bring retail without the population to patronize it. "But if you have other things," says Gibbs, "other amenities—a healthy downtown, parks, high-quality development—then people will be pioneers and you can hope and presume that those things will follow."

Remuneration on rail yard conversions can be substantial. In Denver, land values went from \$1.50 a square foot to \$150 a square foot. In Salt Lake City, land values at Gateway have risen from \$2 a square foot to \$20 to \$60 a square foot, according to Bob Farrington, head of the Downtown Alliance. But there are other gains as well. Cities get rid of large swaths of industrial land in exchange for residents who live near their downtowns, reclaiming tens of thousands of people who were lost to the suburbs over the past three decades. These households can help energize retail—giving cities sales tax revenue—and can create vibrant 24/7 urban communities.

The convenience and benefits of mixed-use redevelopment on these asset-rich sites is starting to be recognized. Totah and others will be building on the experience of planners and developers who have already gone forward with rail yard conversions. "What's true about Portland and Denver," says Gardner, "is that they had a vision. Now we know there is a market. Downtown redevelopment is working. It's taking ten, 20 or 30 years, but it's working." —Todd Johnson, partner in Design Workshop's Denver office

Getting to Smart Growth: 100
Policies for Implementation
(2002) Chapter 5

Smart Growth Network

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Getting to Smart Growth

100 POLICIES FOR IMPLEMENTATION





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Cover Credit

Peter Calthorpe Associates. Watercolor image of The Crossings development in Mt. View, California.

About the Smart Growth Network

The Smart Growth Network is a network of private sector, public sector, and non-governmental partner organizations seeking to create smart growth in neighborhoods, communities, and regions across the United States. Partners in the network include the American Farmland Trust, American Planning Association, Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations, Center for Neighborhood Technology, Congress for the New Urbanism, Conservation Fund, Environmental Law Institute, George Washington University Law School's Center for Sustainability and Regional Growth, Institute of Transportation Engineers, International City/County Management Association, Local Government Commission, Local Initiatives Support Coalition, National Association of Counties/United States Conference of Mayors Joint Center for Sustainable Communities, State of Maryland, Multi-Family Housing Association, National Association of Counties, National Association of Local Government Environmental Professionals, National Association of Realtors, National Growth Management Leadership Project, National Neighborhood Coalition, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Trust for Historic Preservation, National Wildlife Federation, Natural Resources Defense Council, Northeast-Midwest Institute, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, Scenic America, Surface Transportation Policy Project, Sustainable Communities Network, Trust for Public Land, Urban Land Institute, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Individual membership information, publications and information about smart growth are available online at www.smartgrowth.org.





Photo: Joe Schilling



Chapter Five

Foster Distinctive, Attractive Communities with a Strong Sense of Place

Conventional development patterns have helped to create a predominance of strip shopping centers and large suburban tract home developments that are, with the exception of small cosmetic variations, largely indistinguishable from one another. While such an approach may conserve costs initially and make development more profitable for some, it does little to stimulate civic pride or contribute to a strong sense of place with which community residents can identify.

Smart growth supports the idea that development should not only respond to basic commercial or housing needs, for example, but should also help create communities that are distinctive and unique. Smart growth seeks to



PRACTICE TIP:

In the state of Maryland, where Governor Parris Glendening has made smart growth a key focus of his administration, existing schools now receive funding priority over new schools. Long-neglected, older public schools in existing neighborhoods now receive 80 percent of new state school construction funds, up from 38 percent a decade ago. In 2000, the school construction investment exceeded \$300 million, with over 80 percent of the funding being used to renovate and modernize existing schools in established communities.¹

foster the types of physical environments that create a sense of civic pride, and therefore support a more cohesive community fabric. As a result, economic benefits accrue as well; high-quality communities with architectural and natural elements that reflect the interests of all residents are more likely to retain their economic vitality and value over time.

A great deal can be learned from some of America's most distinctive and interesting neighborhoods, such as San Francisco's Japantown, the French Quarter in New Orleans, or New England's small towns. Communities that have a strong sense of place represent the values of their residents and reflect the unique historical, cultural, economic, and geographical context of the area. They use natural and man-made boundaries and landmarks to create a sense of defined neighborhoods, urban communities, and regions. These communities encourage the construction and preservation of buildings, which prove to be assets over time, not only because of the services provided, but also because of the unique contribution they make to the look and feel of a community. Beyond the construction of buildings, these communities reflect their unique characteristics in myriad details—such as landscaping, signs, and awnings—that help to further distinguish the area for passers-by and visitors. Guided by their own vision of how and where to grow, communities that have adopted smart growth principles can direct investment and development into areas that already reflect a strong sense of place. Moreover, these communities can encourage new fringe development to make a better effort to create distinctive, unique civic assets.

I.

Modify state funding processes and school siting standards to preserve neighborhood schools and build new schools to a "community level."

Neighborhood schools are those that serve the educational needs of nearby residents and that contribute to the social and physical environment of the community. Moreover, they function as community gathering places for adult education programs, evening civic events, or weekend sports competitions. They may serve as landmarks in a community or as examples of monumental architecture or historical significance within a region. Schools built at a community level are constructed to complement existing neighborhoods and provide improved walking or bicycle access to the school by students and community members. Most importantly, these schools serve as critical civic anchors in a community, often acting as the center of districts or neighborhoods with which residents can identify.

However, siting standards and funding criteria common in many states present significant obstacles to communities wishing to support neighborhood schools. Current standards typical in most states require vast tracts of land for new construction—equivalent to 14 acres for an elementary school with 400 students, or 50 acres for a high school with 2,000 students. Because of these standards, communities are often left with little choice but to build these large schools on available land on the urban fringe. These schools are then forced to accommodate the great number of vehicles which students require to get there. State standards may also require new construction if renovation costs to existing schools exceed a threshold amount (e.g., two-thirds of the cost of new construction).

Providing for schools in a manner that fosters their incorporation into the surrounding neighborhood is an important aspect of smart growth. Through modified siting and funding criteria, states can better support localities that want to maintain existing schools and ensure the responsible placement of new schools. Other strategies, such as the use of shared-risk insurance plans, can help overcome the liability obstacles that often prevent schools from more fully serving as community gathering points for other activities and events after hours.

2.

Create a state tax credit to encourage adaptive reuse of historic or architecturally significant buildings.

Well-maintained historic, culturally, or architecturally significant buildings are often regarded as some of the most valued civic treasures in a community. These buildings remind residents and visitors of an area's unique history and provide a visible link to it. While historic buildings often do not retain their original use, their adaptive renovation and reuse can create unique, interesting, innovative spaces for modern services. When clustered in close geographic proximity, these buildings can create the basis for a specially designated zone or district that may attract tourism and other appropriate economic development activities. Finally, the very existence of historic or architecturally significant buildings may provide the basic building blocks for recreating the pedestrian-oriented development typical of the pre-World War II era.

The community value associated with historic properties, however, is not always fully represented in the building's market value. As a result, building owners may not find it cost-effective to maintain or renovate these buildings in a way that preserves their unique features, while allowing for modern uses. State tax credits,

modeled after the federal program (see practice tip) constitute one possible action for states to support historic preservation.² Through state tax credits, incentives can be created for localities and developers to engage in public-private partnerships, when appropriate, to convert these buildings to new uses. Tax credits would allow owners, for example, to claim up to 20 percent of the cost of renovation on state income taxes, thereby effectively reducing the cost of renovation. With creative thinking, effective partnerships can turn historic theaters into arts centers or retail spaces, and can renovate small factories as loft apartments or business incubators. In so doing, not only are valuable and distinctive community treasures preserved, but new opportunities for development in neighborhoods already served by infrastructure are also created.

3.

Plant trees throughout communities and preserve existing trees during new construction.

Trees play important environmental, aesthetic, and economic roles in creating distinctive and healthy places to live. Trees along



Photo: Bowman Development Group

PRACTICE TIP:

A 2001 report released by the National Park Service cited a 25-year old federal program designed to preserve historic properties as "one of the most successful revitalization programs ever created." The Tax Reform Act of 1976 created the first federal tax incentives for the preservation of historic buildings, renovating 3,000 historic buildings that represented more than \$4.5 billion worth of investments in the last five years alone. The Federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit is a dollar for dollar reduction of federal income tax liability, which permits anyone who rehabilitates a historic building to claim a tax credit of 20 percent of the cost of the renovation. For more information see the press release on www.nthp.org.

New and mature trees combine to give this new development in Huntersville, North Carolina, a distinct character, and preserve opportunities for recreation and natural habitat.

PRACTICE TIP:

American Forests, an organization dedicated to forestry issues, has determined that in three study areas—Atlanta, Puget Sound, and the Chesapeake Bay region—development over the last 25 years has helped to reduce the heavy tree canopy by more than one-third. In each of these areas, the tree canopy cover falls short of American Forests' recommended 40 percent average cover for the metropolitan area. For more information, go to www.americanforests.org. Scenic America, a nonprofit technical and advocacy organization, has a number of resources to aid communities in increasing their tree canopy, including a model tree ordinance. For more information, go to www.scenic.org.

medians, sidewalks, and embankments serve to filter noise and pollution from nearby vehicular traffic, as well as mitigate erosion that causes damage to and raises maintenance costs of adjacent roadways. Along commercial and residential zones, trees provide a canopy of shade and shelter from the elements, and soften and frame the streetscape for the passerby. Large trees along a retail strip make the strip more inviting, which generates more business, thereby serving as an economic stimulus for the community. By cooling homes and communities, trees reduce energy costs and create a more comfortable climate for outdoor activities. By slowing stormwater runoff and helping to protect wetlands, trees can reduce the costs associated with water treatment for local jurisdictions. They help the environment by cooling temperatures and by consuming excess carbon dioxide (primarily the result of pollution), thus reducing the amount of carbon dioxide that contributes to global warming. In short, trees add to the beauty, distinctiveness, and material value of neighborhoods by incorporating the natural environment into the built environment.

Through collaborative efforts, neighborhoods and the public and private sectors can be engaged to preserve and add to the tree stock in a community. In existing communities, tree planting programs undertaken by schools and civic associations can increase the presence of trees on residential streets and commercial thoroughfares. Other incentives, such as a community grant fund for tree planting or reduced zoning requirements, can encourage property owners to preserve existing trees or plant new ones. Localities can put into place ordinances or incentives that encourage landowners to preserve a portion of *in-situ* trees or replace trees that could not be preserved. When enacted in concert with a community's own plan for increasing the supply of trees and tree canopy cover, these actions can provide an additional way to create distinctive, healthy communities.

4.

Create active and secure open spaces.

Open spaces, whether built or natural, active or passive, help create distinctive communities. Pocket parks, playgrounds, plazas, squares, social gathering places, and other publicly accessible open spaces contribute to the aesthetic quality of the surrounding area and to the feeling of “community” that fosters a strong sense of place. Open spaces may also provide environmental benefits as hosts to trees and penetrable ground surfaces that filter air and water, respectively, and mitigate stormwater runoff. These spaces must be managed and designed in a way that ensures the safety of their users so that the public spaces remain viable and desirable over time.

Many opportunities exist to foster open space in a community (see Principle 6 for a full discussion of these issues). For example, open spaces can be created through incentives to developers, through direct construction by local governments, or through other public-private partnerships. In new developments, open spaces should be incorporated into the design process and placed in a manner that ensures maximum access and use by area residents. In existing neighborhoods, street ends, abandoned lots, brownfields, or deteriorated houses may provide opportunities for small, scattered parks or community gardens. In bustling commercial centers, plazas, parks, and public squares can serve as prominent visual cues for business districts, provide amenities for employees and shoppers, and add value to nearby buildings. Finally, each of these settings can serve as a venue for engaging the public in festivals, community gardening activities, sports events, or other civic activities that help to galvanize the sense of community among members, and that create places in which people have a vested interest to preserve and protect.

5.

Simplify and expedite permitting regulations to allow vendors to offer sidewalk service.

Facilitating sidewalk service (e.g., walk-up window purchases, retail displays, dining, and kiosks) is perhaps the easiest way to provide support for expanded business along pedestrian-oriented commercial thoroughfares. By allowing vendors to sell their goods and wares at walk-up windows or at kiosks placed along the sidewalk, local governments make it easier for entrepreneurs to connect with their customers, and sidewalk service creates a magnet for strolling shoppers who seek an alternative to the local enclosed mall. The increased foot traffic that results will spur more business investment and create a vital neighborhood shopping area from which the entire community can benefit.

In many cases, permits for sidewalk service are either difficult to obtain from local governments, or the permits require a complicated approval process. Local governments, in cooperation with local business leaders, can target neighborhood shopping districts, identify the type of retail activity that would complement existing businesses, and then simplify and expedite the permitting process

accordingly. Communities that are seeking to expand sidewalk service should also ensure that

Sidewalk dining helps make Bethesda Row in Bethesda, Maryland, a vibrant neighborhood center day and night.



the designated sidewalks are wide enough to accommodate a higher level of activity.

By coordinating efforts among zoning, licensing, and public works officials, potential vendors benefit from an expedited approval process, and the jurisdiction benefits from growth in sales tax receipts and permitting fees associated with new business start-ups. Most importantly, communities benefit from a vibrant, strong, pedestrian-oriented shopping district that can provide a focal point for activity and neighborhood identity.

6.

Create special improvement districts for focused investment.

The designation of special districts is a convenient means to organize and focus investment in a particular area to achieve a range of outcomes, such as historic preservation, business improvement, or economic revitalization. It provides an opportunity for local or other special purpose governments to establish clear boundaries and names for geographic areas with which residents and businesses can better identify. By strengthening the sense of community in these areas, citizens can become more involved in development decisions about their own district and the region of which it is a part.

Creating fixed boundaries around neighborhoods in which tax incentives, regulatory flexibility, or other

PRACTICE TIP:

Main Streets are found in nearly every American community and represent one of the most common approaches to the use of special improvement districts. With an emphasis on historic preservation and economic development, the Main Street program supports commercial district revitalization as a means to benefit all members of the surrounding community. Nationally, Main Street communities have had more than \$12.8 billion of new public and private investment in their downtowns. In North Carolina alone, the state Main Street program has seen more than \$540 million of new investment and has experienced a net gain of 8,400 jobs in downtown areas since the program began in 1980. The Main Street Center at the National Trust for Historic Preservation provides tools and technical assistance to communities to establish and revitalize these vital commercial district centers. Learn more at www.mainstreet.org.

financial benefits are made available can help channel targeted investment to support strong, vibrant communities. In central business districts, for example, business improvement districts coordinate shared responsibility among businesses and building owners to support entertainment, services, or other amenities that can attract customers and improve the business climate. Historic districts are used to help protect tracts of historic buildings through the provision of tax incentives or grants for restoration and preservation. Support to designated art corridors may help attract a critical mass of artists, art suppliers, and vendors, which would constitute a destination in itself for art lovers. Neighborhood centers often benefit from a clear determination of the service area around the center in order to better identify potential customers and recruit businesses and service providers accordingly. In these and other cases, creating smaller-scale zones within a larger urban or suburban context can help residents, visitors, and businesses better identify communities by their stronger sense of place.

Unique lightposts, signs, and sidewalk treatments help identify this Brea, California, retail corridor.



7.

Define communities and neighborhoods with visual cues.

Just as the ancient city wall once indicated to people the beginning of a town, visual cues are an important means to help visitors and residents distinguish areas from one another. Often subtle, sometimes blatant, these cues act as either focal points or way-finding aids to attract and direct pedestrian and automobile flow to commercial or entertainment activities. In so doing, cues create virtual borders around districts for special uses, give shape and definition to neighborhoods, and contribute to the unique look and feel of a given community. Communities that are well defined and easy to navigate not only attract new activity and investment, but they help create neighborhoods and amenities that are worth preserving.

Cues can be explicit, such as signs directing visitors to important locations or monumental-type architecture, which contributes to the vista at street ends or along blocks. The decorative gate in Chinatown, San Francisco, is a clear example of this sort of physical introduction to a unique and distinct community. Visual cues can be more subtle, as well, and include elements such as unique lightposts, novel street signs, variegated materials for streets or sidewalks, distinct landscaping styles, or complimentary awnings or overhangs above businesses. Open space and natural features, such as greenbelts, creeks, or other prominent natural features, can also be used to introduce or signal the transition from one zone to another.

As with other policies to achieve distinctive communities, visual cues can be incorporated into new and existing communities through the combined efforts of the public and private sectors. The preferences articulated by communities for aesthetic details are codified and enforced in building codes and design standards,

and preferences for the placement and orientation of open space and monumental buildings are represented in master plans. Innovative public-private partnerships, which call on the strengths of each sector to enhance the physical environment for all, will implement these community preferences.

8.

Preserve scenic vistas through the appropriate location of telecommunication towers, and through improved control of billboards.

Extending high above rooftops and trees, telecommunication towers and billboards often dramatically affect the appearance of communities. They may clutter the view of an otherwise scenic roadway or streetscape or obscure the natural or physical features of a community altogether. Many creative alternatives exist for the placement of wireless towers, for example, such placing them on rooftops, where they can be concealed by high-reaching building details. However, communities that are pressured into creating full and fast access for telecommunications infrastructure may not fully consider these options. Communities can regulate the placement and use of towers by working with private industry to generate ideas on how to locate towers and monopoles unobtrusively. Joint public-private efforts may include agreements to keep tower height equal to the nearby tree canopy, to locate towers on downslopes rather than summits to reduce visual impact, to limit towers along ridgelines, or to incorporate them into existing features such as water tanks, electric-transmission towers, or church spires. Documenting these guidelines in ordinances that clearly spell out the community's requirements for tower location, appearance, and design can improve the process of expanding telecommunication networks for all involved.

Billboards, too, present an opportunity for improved management. Communities seeking to preserve their scenic vistas can begin by instituting a moratorium on all new billboards and then encouraging the gradual phase-out of existing billboards upon expiration of leases. Incentives may be created in the form of tax abatements or scenic easements to reward landowners who require removal of billboards from their property upon lease expiration, and who keep their property free of billboards. Communities that have been successful in limiting or eradicating billboards in favor of logo signs and tourist-oriented directional signs have created a higher quality of life for their residents and have continued to grow their economies based on their enhanced visual appeal to visitors.

9.

Create opportunities for community interaction.

Communities are defined by more than the physical and natural elements that comprise them. The most well-designed street in the world will fail to evoke a sense of community if there are no opportunities for interaction or vibrant exchange among neighbors. Public places of all sorts can provide the venue for these sorts of interactions: sidewalks become hosts to outside shopping or art displays, closed-off streets become havens for block parties or markets, and parks and plazas become open-air theaters for music or performances. Offered on a regular basis, festivals that celebrate local produce, historical events, or cultural traditions can become a vibrant and ongoing reminder of the unique nature of a given community, and can create opportunities for distinctive traditions from which all residents and visitors can derive enjoyment.

PRACTICE TIP:

The organization Scenic America has created a range of tools that communities can use to protect scenic vistas, including model ordinances that have been promoted by states and are currently being used successfully to address unsightly placement of towers and billboards. These and other resources are available through the organization's Web site, www.scenic.org.

PRACTICE TIP:

The city of Santa Fe, New Mexico, has adopted design guidelines that ensure that new construction complements the traditional architectural style of the area, such as the use of light earth tone colors and traditional stucco finish materials. Its *Architectural Design Review Handbook* parallels the city's zoning code and building permit process and provides a checklist for builders so that they can avoid delays in the approval process.

Broad constituencies benefit from such events and can be tapped to support farmers' markets, art and music festivals, or even block parties. Business owners benefit from the increased flow of people attracted by these events. Schools may support such activities because of the learning opportunities they present to students and as a means to share with the broader community the skills and talents of their children. Local farmers, artisans, and musicians are likely to play a critical role in supporting such events, because these events provide outlets for performances and sales that would otherwise be unavailable to them. In many communities, nonprofit organizations are formed with the support of local government and civic leaders to manage and promote these events. Chambers of commerce, economic development agencies, civic associations, and other local organizations can play an important role in bringing together the diverse parties that are necessary to make these events vital parts of the community landscape.

IO.

Enact clear design guidelines so that streets, buildings, and public spaces work together to create a sense of place.

Beyond basic requirements for safety and accessibility, buildings are often subject to little regulation of how they look, how they are constructed, or how they relate to the street. In the absence of such requirements, few developers find it in their financial best interest to invest in architectural detail or decorative features, which would enhance the look of buildings and would contribute to a more distinctive and appealing community. The same could be said of public officials who, in the construction of civic buildings, sidewalks, streets, and public parks, are motivated primarily by the desire to deliver the necessary product at the lowest possible cost and in the

Strict design criteria help create Civano's unique look in Phoenix, Arizona – one that evokes traditional Southwest architecture.

shortest possible time. Yet, it is precisely the cumulative effect of these numerous individual development and design decisions that create the look and feel of our built environments.

Communities that include well-designed buildings, attractive signage, well-maintained facades, and a positive orientation of buildings to the street are often the most distinctive. Other opportunities for improved design guidelines pertain to the placement of bus shelters and benches, the design of sidewalks and bike paths, the introduction of landscaping and street trees, and the incorporation of community parks and public gathering spaces. With improved attentiveness to these aspects, communities are more valued for their uniqueness, better able to attract new businesses and residents, and therefore less likely to suffer disinvestment and neglect. This ongoing vitality of neighborhoods is both an outgrowth of and a contributor to smart growth.

As the community establishes its own definition of a desirable look, an opportunity arises to create a unique, memorable streetscape to attract future development. These preferences can



Photo: Local Government Commission

form the basis for the creation of clear design guidelines that regulate building setback, street and sidewalk design, architectural styles, signage practices, and building materials. The guidelines can be prescriptive and detailed, regulating everything down to the size and color of signs, or they can set broad parameters for design to allow for maximum diversity among users. In either case, when they are applied in a clear and consistent fashion, these design considerations add value to the community and provide guidance for developers who, in turn, can create higher quality projects by being attentive to their end design from the early stages.

¹ State of Maryland, Office of Smart Growth.

² Other state activities to support renovation include: (1) the establishment of a state-level “Main Street” office to support local affiliates, (2) priority allocation of transportation or infrastructure funding for communities committed to preserving historic structures, (3) grants to local nonprofit organizations to carry out rehabilitation and restoration activities, and (4) efforts to inform local government officials on the economic and cultural value of preserving historic structures.



Does It Pay to Maintain New Infrastructure? A Fiscal Co Alternative Community Forms

by Kent Munro

Summary

As the debate about New Urbanism shifts from its core principles to the implications of its application, many planners wonder about the public costs of a new community design paradigm. Research has indicated that total public infrastructure costs in a New Urbanist community are higher than they would be in a more conventional form of development. But costs are just one side of any fiscal analysis. From a municipal perspective, are the revenues generated from property taxes also higher? This case study analysis indicates that not only do higher taxation revenues offset the increased costs, but it also suggests that New Urbanism is actually better for a municipality's bottom line.

Sommaire

Alors que le débat sur l'urbanisme nouveau se détourne de ses principes fondamentaux pour s'intéresser aux conséquences de son application, bien des urbanistes s'interrogent sur les coûts publics d'un nouveau paradigme de développement des collectivités. La recherche révèle que le coût public total des infrastructures dans une collectivité développée selon le modèle de l'urbanisme nouveau est supérieur à ce qu'il serait suivant un mode de développement plus conventionnel. Cependant, les coûts ne représentent qu'un côté de la médaille de l'analyse fiscale. Du point de vue des administrations municipales, il faut se demander si les recettes rapportées par les taxes foncières sont elles aussi plus élevées. Cette étude de cas indique non seulement que les recettes fiscales accrues compensent l'augmentation des coûts, mais aussi que l'urbanisme nouveau est en fait plus sain pour le résultat net des municipalités.

If one is to believe the mainstream media, a revolution may be unfolding in the way new communities are designed. For many, however, skepticism rages not only about the physical form that new community building ought to take, but also about the comparative merits—economic, social, aesthetic, environmental—of various approaches. Simply stated, the goal of the community design paradigm called New Urbanism is to reformulate a vision of community based on a village concept. Generally, New Urbanist design can be distinguished from more conventional development approaches by distinctive physical characteristics that include compact and contiguous community form, a more complete mix of land uses, interconnected street patterns, strategic placement of parking facilities, inclusion of rear lanes and pedestrian-conscious detailing.



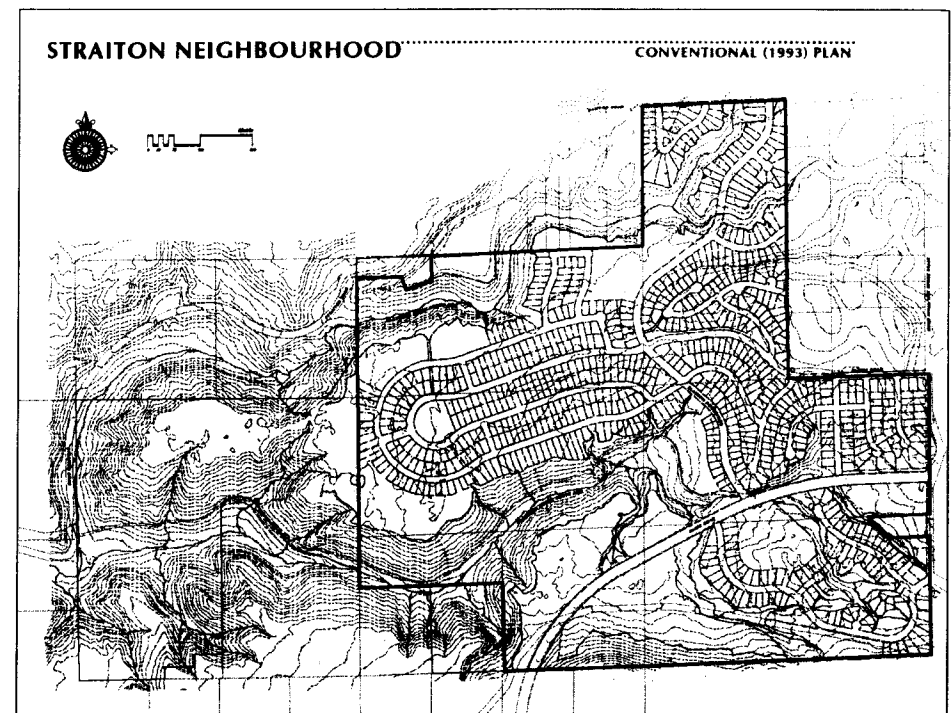
Straiton Streetscape

Given that this research focuses on the fiscal implications of New Urbanism, only a brief overview of its main elements is presented here. For details, see the *Charter of the New Urbanism*.¹ Fundamentally, New Urbanism incorporates a different “package” of municipal infrastructure that is intended to support a set of broad community planning objectives.

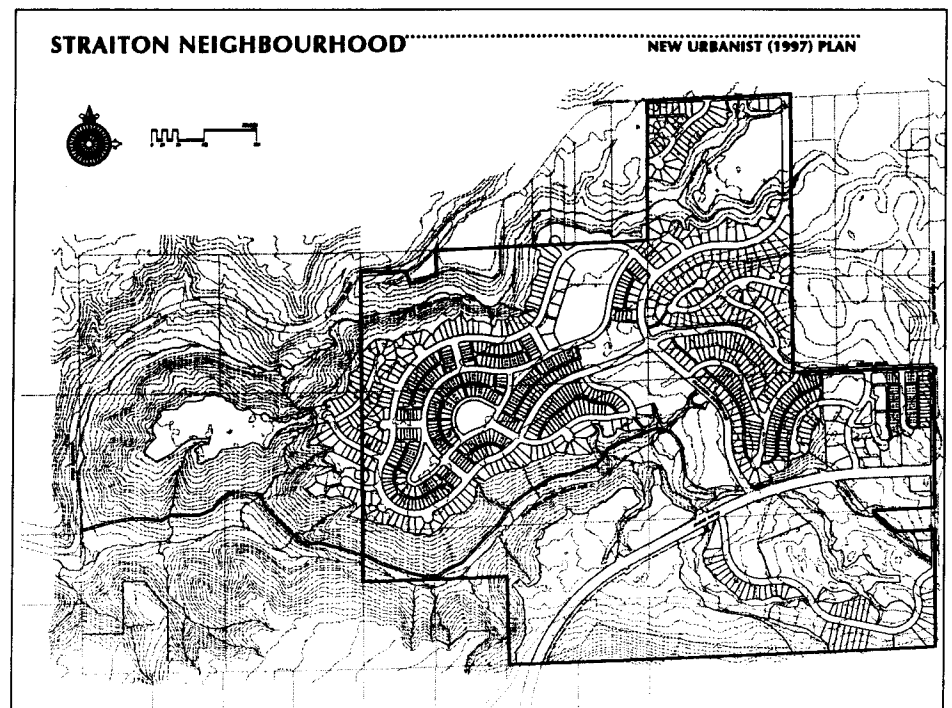
The critical New Urbanist objective for a more compact and complete form of community typically results in higher average residential densities and, accordingly, more units to share in the costs of services. It is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that comparative studies have concluded that per unit infrastructure emplacement costs and long-term operating and maintenance expenditures are lower with New Urbanist designs.² Nevertheless, most New Urbanist designs result in higher total infrastructure costs within a given land area because of greater lengths of roads and sidewalks, incorporation of rear lanes and the addition of enhanced design details such as custom street lamps, grassed boulevards with street trees, pinched roadways and rear lanes. A key issue that has not been addressed in the literature, however, is whether a New Urbanist community generates higher municipal property tax revenues that would tend to offset the increase in total infrastructure costs.

To address this aspect, a comparative study of projected infrastructure costs and municipal revenues associated with alternative approaches to community design was undertaken using empirical data derived from two actual development plans, each of which was not only produced but also approved in the mid-1990s for a site in Abbotsford, British Columbia. In the end, the New Urbanist plan was implemented. Construction of the “Auguston” community began in 1997 and, to date, approximately 100 homes, local parks and a community school have been constructed.³

Although beyond the scope of the present study, it is important to recognize that the costs and benefits of a New Urbanist planning approach are best considered holistically. Significant benefits relating to environment, resource consumption, aesthetics,



Straiton Conventional (1993) Plan



Straiton New Urbanist (1997) Plan

housing affordability, travel behaviour, transit viability and public safety might otherwise be sufficient to argue in favour of New Urbanist design. Yet the critical question remains: is a New Urbanist community better able to fiscally support its infrastructure?

Straiton Neighbourhood—Comparison of Alternative Plans

The 184-hectare Straiton neighbourhood site is located in the City of Abbotsford. A conventional development plan, approved in 1993, would have produced 1,490 dwelling units and a limited number of ancillary facilities. In 1997, however, an alternative concept founded

on the principles of New Urbanism was prepared, approved and is now under construction. That plan accommodates 2,316 housing units. In addition to the 55 percent increase in residential yield, the New Urbanist plan provides a vast increase in housing variety and a significant improvement to the "completeness" of the community. It includes sites for a recreation and social complex (athletic facilities, art studios, business centre, day-care), 5,100 square metres of commercial space, a place of worship and an ice arena complex. Both plans incorporate nearly 60 hectares of public parkland and open space.

Capital or emplacement costs of infrastructure for a new community are significant; however, these are typically borne by the developer and do not result in any direct financial burden on the municipality. Nevertheless, to set this study within a broader research context, detailed capital cost estimates were produced for the two alternative plans to assess the magnitude of the difference in infrastructure emplacement costs. *Emplacement costs* are the total construction costs to build the infrastructure and include underground services (sanitary, water, storm, shallow utilities) and aboveground right-of-way amenities such as pavement, sidewalks and street lighting. For this research, costs were based on actual construction costs experienced in similar projects in southwestern British Columbia.⁴

The analyses indicated that total emplacement costs for the New Urbanist plan for Straiton would be about \$1.9 million more than the conventional plan (\$15.6 million versus \$13.7 million). However, on a per dwelling-unit basis, the New Urbanist plan is 27 percent less costly. For the purposes of validation, it is noted that such results are notably similar to those of the 1995 Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) study² that concluded it would be 33 percent cheaper per dwelling unit to construct the infrastructure in a more compact, mixed-use community. It can be noted that the CMHC study tabulated a more comprehensive list of infrastructure items than this study. For this analysis of Straiton, only physical engineering infrastructure² (table 8, items 1-5.) was considered.

Fiscal Analysis—Cost Side

The purpose of this study is to assess and compare the ability of the two alternative community designs to be fiscally self-supportive on an annual basis. Specifically, to what degree do the total municipal tax revenues generated offset the annual costs of operating and maintaining the community's infrastructure? To address the cost side of the question, detailed maintenance costs were developed for each of the road types in the two alternative plans. Since a variety of road right-of-way configurations are present in the two alternatives, disaggregated maintenance costs were used to differentiate costs among road types. Recorded costs from the District of Chilliwack (1996)⁵ were used. Chilliwack, a municipality adjacent to Abbotsford, tracks its operating costs using a computerized maintenance management system. That data source is considered highly transferable to the Abbotsford context given the similar geographic and climatic conditions and the standards of maintenance.

To establish infrastructure maintenance costs, base costs for a "standard" metre of serviced street were derived for five service components: water, storm sewers, sanitary sewers, roads and snow operations. Component costs were derived for all road types and were applied to the two alternative designs for Straiton to project the total annual infrastructure maintenance costs. A comparative analysis concluded that projected total annual maintenance is \$65,500 higher for the New Urbanist plan. This represents maintenance costs of 36 percent more than the total for the conventional plan.

Fiscal Analysis—Revenue Side

To address the revenue side of the fiscal analysis, detailed projections of municipal property tax revenues were prepared. Since only a portion of the municipal property taxes collected support general municipal purposes (including operation and maintenance expenditures), only that component of the tax rates was used in the analysis. A significant portion of annual property taxes is collected by the municipality on behalf of other levels of government or outside agencies for services such as schools, hospitals, regional libraries and specific

capital projects. Such an approach enables one to directly relate revenues to the expenditures associated with the municipal operation and maintenance of infrastructure.

Actual municipal tax "mill" rates (1996) from the City of Abbotsford were applied to the assessment values of all development within the two alternatives. Housing market data from the same year were used to estimate the assessed lot values of all residential land uses in both of the alternative plans. Permitted floor space ratios established the amount of constructed floor space, and that was subsequently used to estimate assessed building values. A consistent methodology was employed for each of the alternative plans to ensure an equitable derivation of taxable property values.

The results of the analysis indicate that the annual municipal property tax revenue generated from the conventional plan would be about \$1.6 million while that from the New Urbanist plan would be \$2 million. More specifically, the New Urbanist plan generates \$438,000 more tax revenue annually than the conventional plan. This translates into a 28 percent increase in total tax revenues over the conventional plan. It is interesting to note that all but about \$100,000 of the increase in revenue comes from the New Urbanist plan's more diverse residential land-use base.

Conclusions

The comparative analyses of conventional and New Urbanist plans for the Straiton site result in a significant conclusion: a New Urbanist community is, in fact, better able to fiscally support its infrastructure on an annual basis. To arrive at this conclusion, both sides of the fiscal equation—municipal expenditures and revenues—have been analyzed. The approach has been to establish and compare total community costs and revenues to demonstrate the fiscal benefits of a more compact mixed-use form of community development. To summarize, the following findings result from this analysis:

- Total annual municipal expenditures to operate and maintain the capital infrastructure are \$65,500 more (increase of 36 percent) in the New Urbanist plan.

- Total annual municipal tax revenues generated by the New Urbanist plan are \$438,000 more (increase of 28 percent) than they are under the conventional plan.

Admittedly, one could question whether these two alternative community plans appropriately reflect the principles of each design paradigm, or whether they are merely hypothetical or unfeasible. If such doubts exist, this fiscal comparison could be legitimately dismissed. Nevertheless, given that both community plans were prepared under generally accepted municipal planning precepts, each was considered acceptable by the developer, and both were approved by the municipality, it is reasonable to accept that they represent realistic alternatives.

When considered from a municipal fiscal perspective, the New Urbanist plan generates significantly more revenue than it does expenditures. Although total public expenditures would be higher to maintain its infrastructure, a New Urbanist plan results in significantly more tax revenue than the conventional plan. Stated another way, for each additional dollar spent on maintaining the New Urbanist plan, the municipality would receive \$6.69 in return in the form of additional tax revenue. These results are significant. It would be helpful for others to corroborate these findings or to refine the methodology. In the meantime, planners might want to consider this comparative analysis in the context of their municipality's bottom line. ■

References and Notes

1. Congress for the New Urbanism. Charter of the new urbanism. New York: McGraw-Hill; 2000. Also available at: www.cnu.org
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3. See: www.auguston.com
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5. District of Chilliwack; 1996.

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