



# The New Suburbanism

A REALIST'S GUIDE TO THE AMERICAN FUTURE

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A Report Produced By  
**THE PLANNING CENTER**

Author  
**Joel Kotkin**

Project Director  
**Colin Drukker**

Research Assistants  
**Rev. Karen (Speicher) Murata**  
**Sarah Priestnall**

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### The Planning Center

The Planning Center is a private consulting firm providing multidisciplinary services to both governmental agencies and the private sector. Since its founding in 1975, The Planning Center has been devoted to the development of viable planning solutions to the physical, social and environmental problems that arise from urbanization. We provide imaginative solutions to the challenges associated with urban growth and land development. Our mission is to create better places, in collaboration with our clients, for people to live, work, learn and enjoy their lives.

## CONTRIBUTORS

### Joel Kotkin, Author

Joel Kotkin is an Irvine Senior Fellow with the New America Foundation, based in Washington, D.C. His new book, *The City: A Global History*, was recently published and has appeared on the Los Angeles Times Best Seller list. The author of six books, Kotkin's titles include *Tribes: How Race, Religion and Identity Determine Success in the New Global Economy* and *The New Geography: How the Digital Revolution is Reshaping the American Landscape*. Mr. Kotkin also serves as a Senior Advisor to The Planning Center, as a Fellow with the Center for an Urban Future in New York, and as a teacher at SCI-Arc. Over the past two years Mr. Kotkin has written major reports on the future of New York, the Inland Empire region of southern California, St. Louis, the Great Plains, Los Angeles, and Phoenix. He is currently working on a major study on the impact of mobility on urban form for the Reason Foundation.

### Colin Drukker, Project Director

Colin Drukker is an Associate Planner and Project Manager at The Planning Center's Costa Mesa office. For the past six years, his career has focused on affordable housing development, general plans, specific plans, and regional planning. Recent projects that he has managed or worked on include the Carson Marketplace Specific Plan, the SCAG Compass 2% Strategy Implementation Project, several affordable housing feasibility studies, and the Dana Point General Plan and Residential Design Guide, which won the 2005 Orange County APA Award for Innovative Use of Technology.

### Steve PonTell, Strategic Advisor

Mr. PonTell is the Founder and President of the La Jolla Institute, a non-profit 501c3 think tank focusing on the future of communities from an economic perspective. Mr. PonTell is also a partner in a number of for-profit business interests ranging from mortgage lending to finish carpentry to recreational, office and residential development. Through these roles, as well as his past leadership in numerous non-profit business organizations, Mr. PonTell offers insights into the inner workings of communities.

### Rev. Karen (Speicher) Murata, Research Assistant

Rev. Karen (Speicher) Murata graduated with a Masters of Public Policy degree from Pepperdine University. Rev. Murata has worked on several projects with the Economic Alliance of The San Fernando Valley, including *Our Future Neighborhoods: Housing and Urban Villages in the San Fernando Valley*.

### Sarah Priestnall, Research Assistant

Sarah Priestnall graduated from the London School of Economics and attained an MBA and a Masters in Public Policy from Pepperdine University. She has consulted for the RAND Corporation and is working on a transit study for the Reason Foundation.

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# Executive Summary

For the better part of a half century, many of America's leading urbanists, planners and architects have railed against suburbia. Various, the suburbs have been labeled as racist, ugly, wasteful or just plain boring. Yet despite this, Americans—including many immigrants and minorities—continue to “vote with their feet” for suburban or exurban landscapes.

These areas, essentially the metropolis outside the traditional urban core, have also increasingly snagged the lion's share of new economic growth and jobs. Projections for expansion of the built environment—estimated to grow 50 percent by 2030—will be in the suburbs and exurbs, most particularly in sprawling, lower-density and auto-dependent cities of the South and West. The key challenge facing developers, builders, planners and public officials, will be how to accommodate this growth. This can best be done, not by rejecting the suburban ideal—which would violate the essential desires of most Americans—but by crafting ways to make it work in a better, more efficient and humane way.

This is the essence of what we define as “New Suburbanism.” We see New Suburbanism as a practical and beneficial way to address fundamental issues facing suburbia and support the nurturing and development of semiautonomous villages throughout the expanding periphery. In promoting the village concept, we share some common objectives with the new urbanists, notably the importance of public and open spaces as well as cultivating community. Yet at the same time we adopt what we see as a more flexible and practical design and policy agenda—one that we believe can be effectively implemented in suburban communities.



The core of our approach is that, in general, suburbs are good places for most people, and we need only to find ways to make them better. We reject the notion of the continued primacy of the city center held by many urbanists, and the widespread assertion that suburban life is, on principle, unaesthetic and wasteful. For example, our reading of contemporary literature does not suggest to us that suburbanites are by nature more alienated and less responsible citizens than urban residents.

**Hillsboro, Oregon. Orenco Station provides a diversity of housing types and densities alongside central open space areas and pedestrian-friendly streetscapes.**

Indeed, research suggests that suburbanites, particularly homeowners, are in fact more involved than their urban counterparts in their communities, as measured by voting, church attendance and neighborhood associations. And we believe it is wrong—and contrary to market realities—to constrict architectural forms to a narrow “neo-traditionalist” motif or to see suburban “sprawl” as fundamentally inimical to the aspirations of most Americans.

Fundamentally, New Suburbanism takes as its premise that the solution to the problems of sprawl lies not in trying to force people into ever denser cities, but in improving on the existing suburban or exurban reality. In historic terms, we may consider the amenity-limited traditional housing tract, the formula mall and even strip centers as a stage in suburban development from which we are now—slowly but inexorably—passing, in some measure due to pointed critiques by new urbanists. New Suburbanism looks to the next stage of suburban development, where often ignored values of community, family and nature are being reasserted. It is as if suburbia is moving from its rough “Deadwood” phase to a more hospitable form.



**Boca Raton, Florida.** Mizner Park incorporates mid-rise residential units placed over retail, while a linear plaza lines the street and provides highly utilized open space.

Like the new urbanists, our approach also draws on historical models, most particularly the early ideals of suburban development, such as the notion of “villages” or “garden cities” that emerged in Great Britain, the United States and other countries at the end of the last century. Popularized by the visionary planner Ebenezer Howard, these early suburban advocates imagined the evolution of semiautonomous villages or small cities, offering residents ample opportunities for local employment, open space, recreation and culture.

We also believe that there are some aspects of New Urbanism—such as the need for town centers, walking paths and open space—that can be successfully applied in the contemporary suburban and exurban setting. The forces are in place for the suburbs to be improved over time into more pleasant, humane and efficient places.

New Suburbanism does not represent an attempt to hark back to an unrealized, distant ideal. Instead, market and political forces are leading to the growth of suburban villages around the country. The signs of this movement are everywhere—in the rapid development of town centers, cultural facilities, places of worship and commercial cores throughout suburban America. New Suburbanism is a reflection both of the trends discussed above and the solutions now being developed in some places. Its basic tenets are highlighted on the opposite page.

This report will share some of the evidence—and some potential models—of this hopeful trend. It is important to understand that these examples are not commonplace, that innovative approaches to suburban development are still relatively rare. That makes it all the more crucial to assess and understand these unique examples.

As we see it, New Suburbanism has many faces, but three basic expressions:

- The evolution of older suburbs—such as Fullerton, California; Arlington, Virginia and Naperville, Illinois—whose traditional centers are becoming focal points for surrounding suburban communities.
- Changes in post-World War II “production” suburbs—think of places like Long Island, New York and Orange County, California—including attempts to build new village centers, sometimes in such unlikely places as malls or strip centers.

- Bold attempts to create entirely new suburban villages, usually in the outer periphery of metropolitan regions, in places like Houston, Texas and Salt Lake City, Utah.

Our goal is not to provide a complete handbook to the suburban future, but to begin a serious discussion about how we can make it better. Our hope is to bring these new, emerging alternatives to life through graphics; interviews with key developers, community leaders and planners; and an examination of case studies. We will also address the problems facing suburban communities and illustrate that these challenges cannot be met by returning to the urban past or by denying people the privacy, safety and opportunity represented by suburbia. The primary challenge for planners, architects and community leaders will not be to destroy suburbia but to develop ways to make better the places most of us have chosen to call home.

### IN BUILDING AN ALTERNATIVE VISION, THIS IS WHAT WE HAVE FOUND TO BE TRUE.

1. Suburbia represents America's future growth. How America copes with this growth—and how the suburbs evolve—will determine the future quality of life for the majority of our population.
2. To develop better suburbs, planners, policy makers, and developers must understand why most people prefer to live there and must seek to preserve those key characteristics. Suburban development has to be sensitive to the specific traits of an area's environment, topography, culture and sociology. There is no single model that fits all situations.
3. The future of suburbia appears to lie in focusing on the development of "villages" that provide cultural, economic, educational and religious sustenance. This will require the evolution of elements—social institutions, well-planned streets, open spaces, work spaces and housing—that function within the context of an existing or new community.
4. The suburbs can only be improved with the input and support of those who live there. Top-down solutions, no matter how enlightened, are frequently ineffective. Denser forms of village-like suburban areas must be cast as assets, not as threats to the surrounding communities of single-family homes.
5. Future suburbs will succeed by utilizing the land efficiently and by providing a complete range of alternatives to accommodate varying life stages. In this manner, individual suburbs can fill critical niches not only for individual cities, but entire regions.





# Part One

## The Origins and Evolution of Suburbia

For much of urban history, the suburbs have been regarded as second rate compared to central cities. In most places it was the poor and unfavored, the rejects of the city, who moved to the urban periphery, in effect exchanging longer commutes for lower rents. Even the word “suburb,” noted historian Kenneth Jackson, “suggested inferior manners, narrowness of view, and physical squalor.”<sup>1</sup>

As the industrial revolution drove crowding to unprecedented levels, accompanied by worsening crime and sanitation, more affluent residents begin to head toward the surrounding countryside.<sup>2</sup> This centrifugal movement was most marked in Great Britain, the homeland of the industrial revolution. As early as 1843, one observer noted that London “surrounds itself, suburb clinging to suburb, like onions fifty to a rope.”<sup>3</sup>

### THE SUBURBAN VISION

Like their countryman, many of Britain’s most brilliant minds saw in this pattern of dispersion the logical solution to long-standing urban ills. Instead of “massing” people in town centers, H. G. Wells foresaw the “centrifugal possibilities” of a dispersing population. He predicted that eventually all of southern England would become the domain of London, while the vast landscape between Albany and Washington, D.C., would provide the geographic base for New York and Philadelphia.<sup>4</sup>

British planner Ebenezer Howard emerged as perhaps the most influential advocate for dispersing the urban masses. Horrified by the disorder, disease and crime of the contemporary industrial metropolis, Howard advocated the creation of “garden cities” on the suburban periphery. Each self-contained town, with a population of roughly thirty thousand, would enjoy its own employment base and neighborhoods of pleasant cottages surrounded by rural areas. “Town and country must be married,” Howard preached, “and out of this joyous union will spring a new hope, a new life, a new civilization.”<sup>5</sup>

Determined to turn his theories into reality, Howard was the driving force behind two of England’s first planned towns, Letchworth in 1903 and Welwyn in 1912. His “garden city” model of development soon influenced planners around the world: in America, Germany, Australia, Japan and elsewhere.<sup>6</sup>

*“Town and country must be married and out of this joyous union will spring a new hope, a new life, a new civilization.”*

—Ebenezer Howard

### “THE UNIVERSAL ASPIRATION”

Americans, with ample room to expand, embraced the notion of garden cities early on. By the 1870s cities across the nation—from Philadelphia to Chicago—were spreading out to the surrounding countryside.<sup>7</sup> Although sophisticates of the time often disparaged the early suburbanites, the reasons seemed self-evident to those who joined the shift outward, like one Chicago meat-cutter who in the 1920s exchanged “a four-bedroom house on the second floor of an apartment house” for “a six-room house with a big yard” in Meadowdale in the far western suburbs.<sup>8</sup>

As early as 1923, noted *National Geographic*, Americans were “spreading out.”<sup>9</sup> The Great Depression temporarily slowed the outward migration but not the yearning among Americans. Following the end of World War II, the pace of suburbanization again accelerated, accounting for a remarkable 84 percent of the nation’s population increase during the 1950s.<sup>10</sup>



Levittown, New York. The approximately seven square-mile project of Levitt & Sons broke ground by offering many post World War II working families a first chance of homeownership.

Photo courtesy of Levittown Public Library (Levittown, NY)

Once a nation of farms and cities, America was being transformed into a primarily suburban country. No longer confined to old towns or “streetcar suburbs” near the urban core, suburbanites increasingly lived in new, ever-more spread-out developments such as Levittown, which arose on the Long Island flatlands in the late 1940s and early 1950s.<sup>11</sup> Behind this drive lay a fundamental reality that often escapes urban theorists: Compared to the option of living closely packed in apartment blocks, most human beings will opt for more space and privacy, and perhaps even a spot of lawn. Noted the prominent Los Angeles urbanist, the Italian immigrant Edgardo Contini:

*The suburban house is the idealization of every immigrant’s dream—the vassal’s dream of his own castle. Europeans who come here are delighted by our suburbs. Not to live in an apartment! It is a universal aspiration to own your own home.*<sup>12</sup>

As Contini noted, this preference for suburbia and the single-family home was not just for Americans. In places with ample land, such as Australia and Canada, the suburban impulse was widely adopted. Even less recognized, this decentralizing pattern has emerged even in some of the world’s oldest settled cities, such as London, Paris, Hamburg, Frankfurt and Tokyo. This has occurred despite often strong government incentives to keep people in the center, high energy costs and excellent transit.<sup>13</sup>

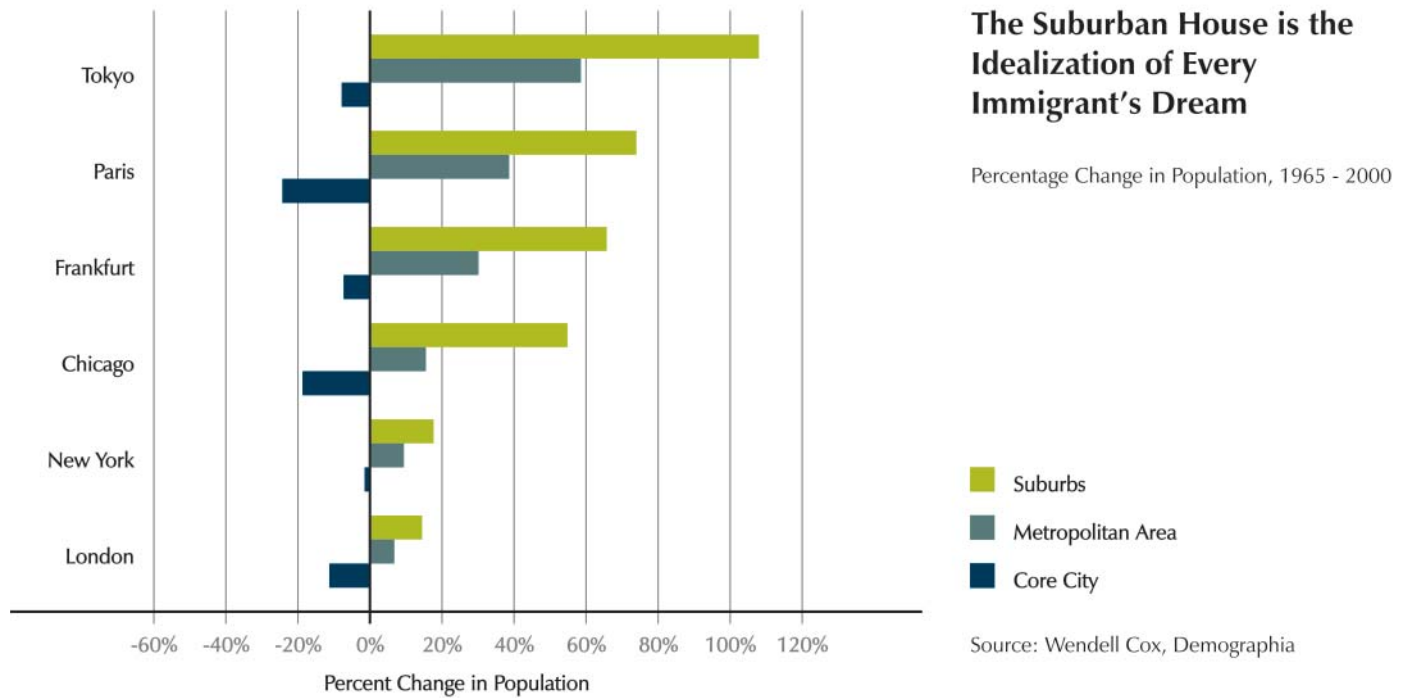
## SUBURBS AND THEIR DETRACTORS

Clearly the preference of millions, suburbs have won few admirers among sophisticated social critics and urban scholars. For decades suburbs have been described as “stupefied,” culturally barren and the homeland of racists.<sup>14</sup> More recently, they have been lambasted for turning America into “a placeless collection of subdivisions,” for splintering the nation’s identity and even helping to expand the nation’s waistlines.<sup>15</sup>

Suburbia also has been linked intimately both to global warming and America’s involvement with the Middle East.<sup>16</sup> Author James Howard Kunstler, a figure widely cited among some new urbanists, has predicated that suburban places “are liable to dry up and blow away” due to the rising energy prices. “Let the Gloating Begin,” he says, predicting a general catastrophe in the suburbs, and urges people to leave these places as soon as possible.<sup>17</sup>

Like some others in environmental and new urbanist circles, Kunstler sees suburbia and other aspects of contemporary American life much the way an early Christian might have viewed classical Rome: “I begin to come to the conclusion that we Americans are these days a wicked people who deserve to be punished.” The dismal collapse of suburbia serves this purpose for Kunstler and others who detest the places most Americans live.<sup>18</sup>

Others offer more thoughtful and restrained critiques. While praising the old-style suburbs, some new urbanists rightfully condemn more recent production suburbs for being architecturally sterile and uninteresting. We would argue that some of these suburbs—whatever their aesthetic shortcomings—may actually be far more successful as places for people and families than they get credit for, but certainly they can be improved.



Still, many condemn suburbs—particularly gated communities—as promoting antisocial tendencies and civic disengagement.<sup>19</sup> Some believe that the various negative qualities of suburbs will spark a gradual return back to the core cities. In 1999, for example, *The Economist* suggested as a fact that “more Americans . . . [are] abandoning their love affair with far flung suburbs and shopping malls.” “Empty nesters are abandoning sprawling suburbs for pedestrian-friendly cities,” enthused another report. The recovery in some downtowns, suggested Jonathan Fanton, president of the MacArthur Foundation, has heralded these developments as signs of hope for a new “urban renaissance.”<sup>20</sup>



# Part Two

## Suburbia Triumphant: Demographic and Economic Underpinnings

Assertions on the rebirth of the inner core, however well intentioned and compelling, are also greatly overstated. In reality, traditional cities are either shrinking or growing far more slowly than their suburbs almost everywhere. Such cities retain an important role and have much to teach the expanding periphery, but overall the future clearly belongs to the suburbs and exurbs.

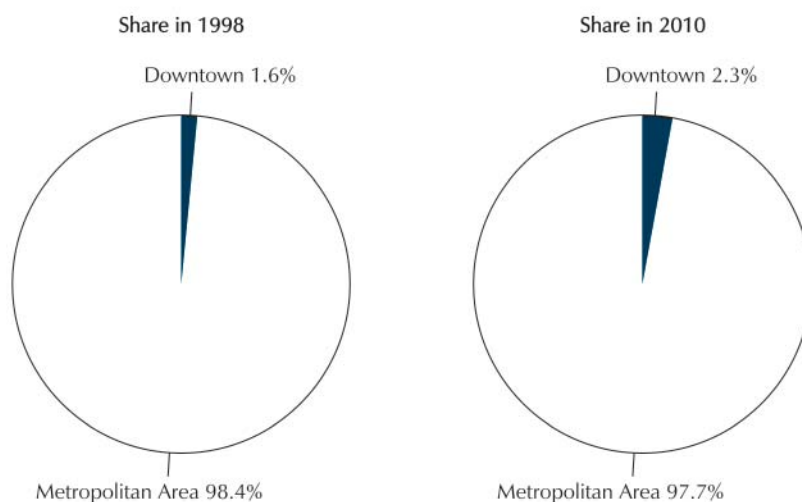
### DEMOGRAPHIC REALITIES

The historical record could not be clearer. Since 1950 more than 90 percent of all the growth in U.S. metropolitan areas has been in the suburbs. As a consequence, the percentage of people living in cities of over 500,000 people dropped from 17.5 percent in 1950 to barely 12 percent in 1990.<sup>21</sup> Such numbers understate the extent of suburbanization. Most of the fastest growing “cities” of the late twentieth century—Los Angeles, Atlanta, Orlando, Phoenix, Houston, Dallas and Charlotte—are primarily collections of suburbs, often with only marginal links to the traditional urban core.<sup>22</sup>

#### Downtown Delusions

Despite the much-ballyhooed accounts about a return of residents to the nation’s downtowns, this movement represents, as a 2001 report from the Brookings Institution and the Fannie Mae Foundation concluded, “more of a trickle than a rush.” Indeed, the total projected growth for all major downtowns until 2010 is less than the growth in the two California counties of San Bernardino and Riverside.<sup>23</sup>

**ONE.** Suburbia represents America’s future growth. How America copes with this growth—and how the suburbs evolve—will determine the future quality of life for the majority of our population.



While downtown residents as a percentage of total metro residents may increase (1998 - 2010), it will be a very small percentage increase and will not count for a large portion of the metro area residents.

#### Downtown Residents as a Proportion of the Metropolitan Area

Population for 1998 and 2010

□ Metropolitan Area  
■ Core City

Note: Calculations based on downtown population estimates for 1998 and 2010, and population estimates from 1996.

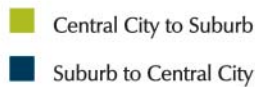
Source: U.S. Census Bureau data and downtown population estimates from the Center for Urban and Metropolitan Studies, Brookings Institution, and Fannie Mae Foundation, Washington, D.C.



Even in the late 1990s, a period in which some core cities enjoyed their first population gains in decades, for every three households that moved into central cities, five departed for the suburbs. Even among the 25–34 age group, considered the prime market for urban living, the ratio was two to one in favor of the periphery. Perhaps even more compelling, since 2000 this pattern seems to have accelerated, as indicated by the shrinking or slowing growth rates of even the healthiest core cities.<sup>24</sup> The population growth in many urban centers—including such relatively attractive places as Chicago, Minneapolis, San Francisco and Boston—has turned negative in the first half of the 2000s. Outmigration has accelerated in some other cities, with any signs of growth slowing considerably from pre-2000 levels.<sup>25</sup>

### Despite Some Back-to-the-City Movement, More People Are Still Leaving for the Suburbs

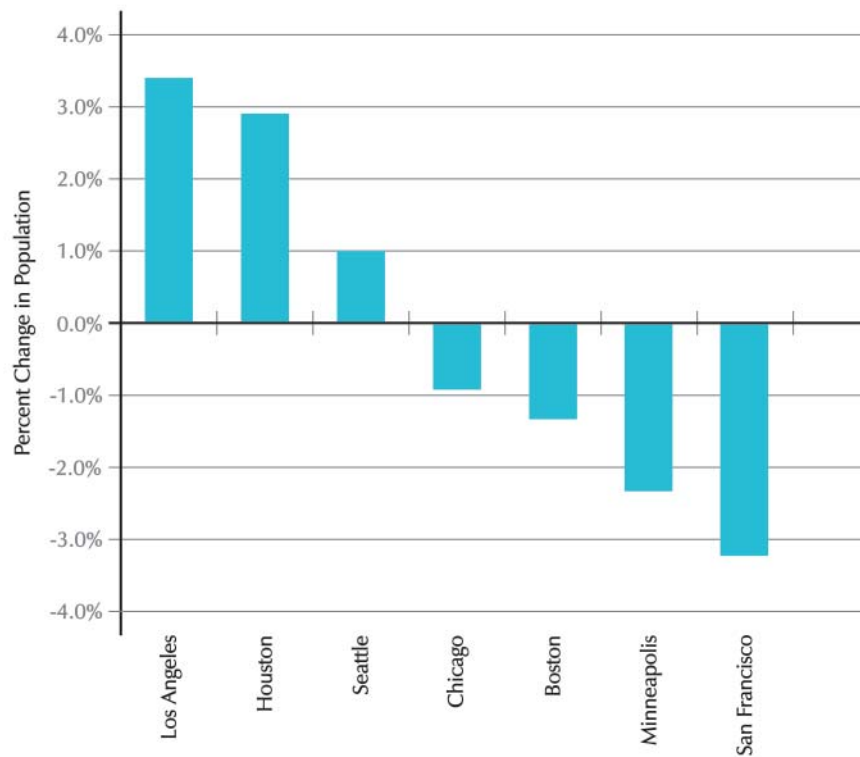
Thousands of Movers, 1998 - 1999



Source: Center for Housing Studies at Harvard University, 2001

**TWO.** To develop better suburbs, planners, policy makers and developers must understand why most people prefer to live there and must seek to preserve those key characteristics. Suburban development has to be sensitive to the specific traits of an area's environment, topography, culture and sociology. There is no single model that fits all situations.

This suburbanizing trend could be seen in virtually all the major regions of the country, particularly in those parts of the country, such as the South and West, that have been growing the fastest. For example, in 2004, Houston's inner ring, which has enjoyed a much celebrated resurgence, accounted for barely six percent of all new units, while the vast majority of growth took place at the farthest outward periphery.<sup>26</sup>



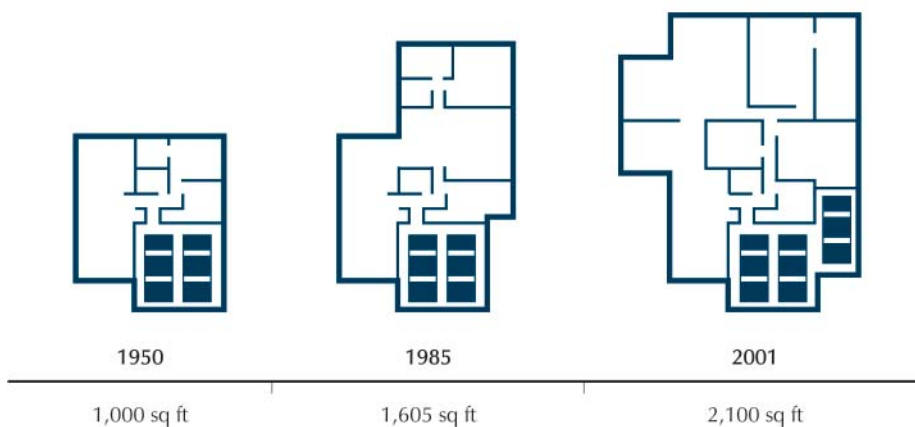
### Meeting People's Aspirations, "Sprawl" Cities Grow Faster than "Hot" Boutiques, 2000 - 2003

Source: William H. Frey, Brookings Institution, and U.S. Census

### The Persistence of the "Universal Aspiration"

One clear explanation for this trend lies in the persistence of the "universal aspiration" to move where one can purchase a single family home. This reflects a long-term trend that has surprised many forecasters and the U.S. Census Bureau itself. Instead of dropping with the aging of the baby boomers, single family home construction surged to levels not seen since the 1970s and 12 percent above levels in the 1980s.

Not only were there more homes being built than expected in the late 1990s, but the size of single family homes actually grew, with the median expanding from 1,605 square feet in 1985 to over 2,100 square feet in 2001. Analysts such as Al Ehrbar suggest that demographers underestimated the desire among baby boomers to buy homes, often later in life, and that aging Americans would prefer to remain homeowners.<sup>27</sup>



### Median Size of New Single Family Home Continues to Grow

In 1950, 1985 and 2001

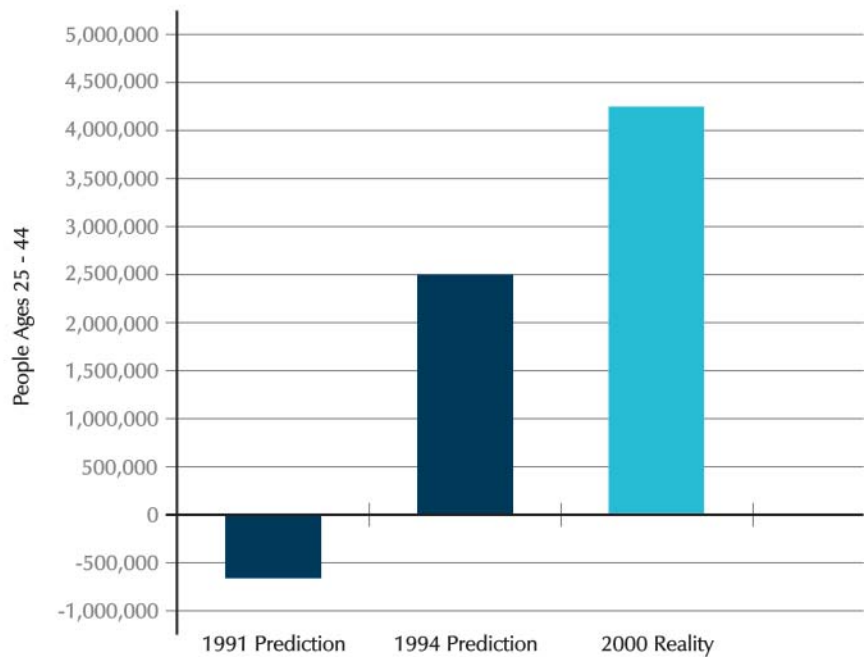
Source: Al Ehrbar, The Housing Boom

## Growth in Prime Home-Buying Cohort Predictions vs. Reality

People Ages 25 - 44, 1990 - 2000

Reality  
Prediction

Source: Al Ehrbar, The Housing Boom



*“If you look at the mathematics of our demand for housing, we are not going to do it in our urban areas . . . In our experience it’s almost all childless couples who are moving into our urban communities. When my children start having children, they are going to the suburbs.”*

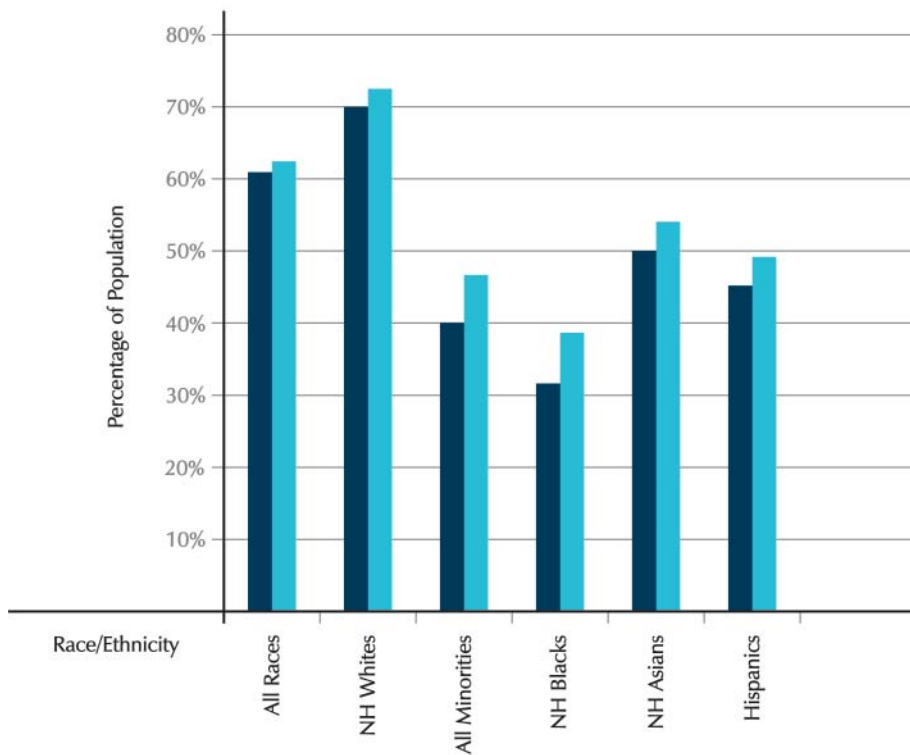
—Bob Santos, Executive Vice President,  
Lennar Communities  
Orange County Roundtable

## The Impact of Immigration

Perhaps the biggest spur to this largely suburban movement lies in immigration. By 2015 nearly one in three children in America will be an immigrant or child of an immigrant.<sup>28</sup> This group added substantially to the pool of 25-34-year-olds, a critical subset of first-time homebuyers. Overall the total percentage of immigrant households in America grew from 8.4 percent in 1980 to over 13 percent twenty years later. While the Census Bureau had predicted this group would shrink by 700,000 between 1990 and 2000, immigrants helped push this age cohort by over four million.

Once largely attracted to core cities, more immigrants today live in suburban locations than in core cities, particularly in the fast-growing sunbelt.<sup>29</sup> The new pattern of immigration can be seen in places like greater Washington, D.C., the most dynamic region along the eastern seaboard in economic and demographic terms. In contrast to older patterns in traditional immigrant hubs, noted a recent Brookings study, 87 percent of the D.C. area’s foreign migrants live in the suburbs, while less than 13 percent live in the district.<sup>30</sup>

Immigrants are clearly shaping the suburban future. Many suburban places—such as Fort Bend County, Texas, or Walnut, in the San Gabriel Valley east of Los Angeles—have the most diverse populations in the nation. “If a multiethnic society is working out in America,” suggests demographer James Allen, “it will be worked out in places like Walnut. The future of America is in the suburbs.”<sup>31</sup>



### More Immigrants Today Live in Suburbs than in Central Cities

Percentage of Population Residing in Suburbs by Race/Ethnicity, 1990 - 2000

2000  
1990

Source: William H. Frey, Brookings Institution, and U.S. Census



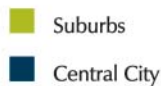
Huntington Beach, California. People from all walks of life live, work and shop at Plaza Almeria, a mixed-use project in the City's revitalized downtown.

### Singles and Nontraditional Families

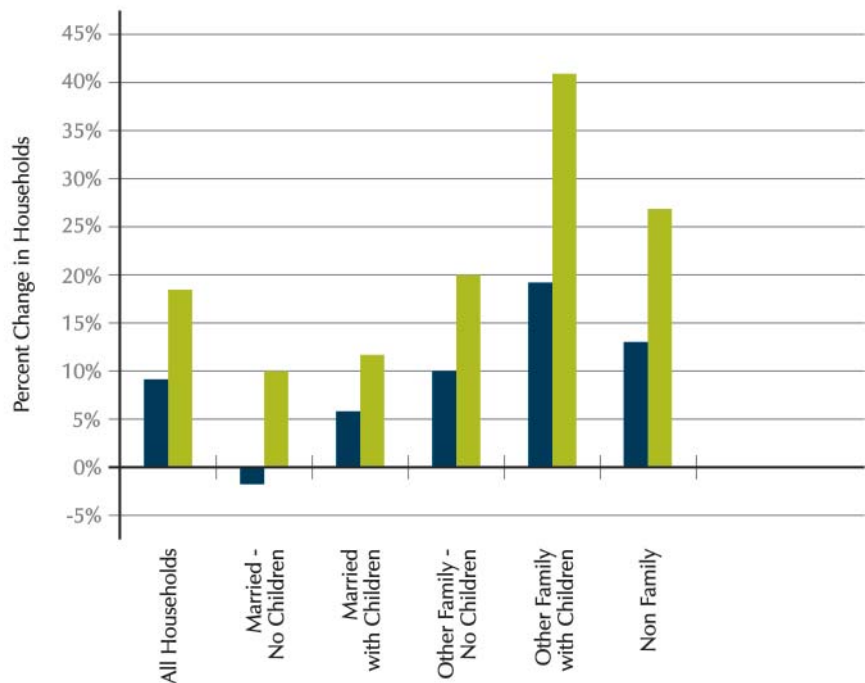
One of the most surprising sources for suburban growth comes from populations like singles, nontraditional families and empty nesters, contradicting the reports that these groups are moving from suburbs back to the inner city. Evidence from the 2000 census showed that the number of nonfamilies and married couples without children grew far more rapidly in the suburbs than in the cities. In fact, due largely to the growth of singles and aging parents, there are now more nonfamilies in the suburbs than traditional families.<sup>32</sup>

## All Types of Households - From Singles to Seniors - Call the Suburbs Home

Metro Areas with Population Over 500,000,  
1990 - 2000



Source: William H. Frey, Brookings Institution,  
and U.S. Census, 2002



## Downshifting Boomers

The other key demographic group headed to or staying in suburbia remains aging empty nesters. The baby boom generation far outnumbers its successor, Generation X, by roughly 76 million to 41 million. Due largely to this group, by 2030 more than one of five Americans will be over 65. Where these people—whom demographer Bill Frey calls “downshifting boomers”—end up will be critical in terms of new residential and commercial development.<sup>33</sup>

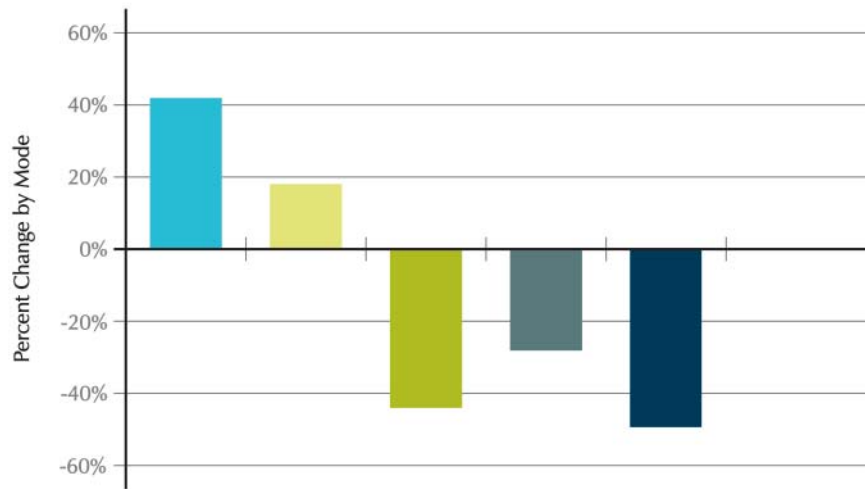
Roughly three-quarters of retirees in the first block of boomers, according to Sandi Rosenbloom, a professor of urban planning and gerontology at the University of Arizona, appear to be sticking pretty close to the suburbs, where the vast majority now reside. Those who do migrate, her studies suggests, tend to head farther out into the suburban periphery, not back toward the old downtown. Most continue to use single-occupancy vehicles; few rely on public transit.<sup>34</sup>

The reasons vary, Rosenbloom suggests. Some have to do with job commitments or the need to live close to children or grandchildren (according to one survey, roughly 40 percent of boomers expect their kids to move back in with them at some point). Perhaps most critically, the majority of boomers have spent most of their lives in suburban settings. For the most part, they are not acculturated to the density, congestion and noise of inner city life. If they do plan to move, they are attracted to the safety and predictability of planned communities.<sup>35</sup> “Everybody in this business wants to talk about the odd person who moves downtown, but it’s basically a ‘man bites dog story,’” Rosenbloom observes. “Most people retire in place. When they move, they don’t move downtown, they move to the fringes.”<sup>36</sup>

*“They [downshifting boomers] don’t want to move to Florida and they want to stay close to the kids. What they are looking for is a funky suburban development—funky but safe.”*

—Jeff Lee, President, Lee & Associates  
Washington, D.C. Roundtable





### Transportation Choices Favor the Suburbs

Journey to Work, 1980 - 2000

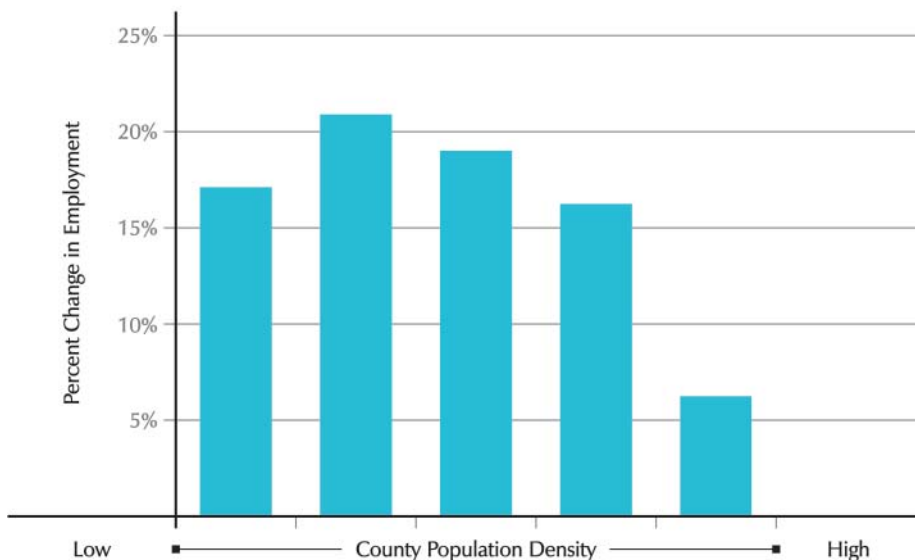
■ Work at Home  
■ SOV  
■ HOV  
■ Transit  
■ Walk

Source: U.S. Decennial Census

## BASIC ECONOMIC TRENDS

Suburbs may have had their start as places for living, but increasingly their ascendancy lies in their economic power and the diminishing dependence on the central cities.<sup>37</sup> By 2000, in the largest 100 metro areas, only 22 percent of people worked within three miles of the city center; in cities such as Chicago, Atlanta and Detroit, more than 60 percent of all regional employment now extends more than ten miles from the core.<sup>38</sup>

As was the case with demographics, claims of an urban economic recovery relative to the suburbs cannot be supported. Despite the claims of urban boosters that dense, traditional cities made a dramatic comeback in the 1990s, two prominent researchers at Harvard, on reviewing the data, recently concluded that there has been no “radical break” with the long-term pattern of growth shifting to the periphery and towards places like Phoenix, with dry climates and ample sun.<sup>39</sup>



### Declustering: U.S. Job Growth Remains Centered in Low- and Moderate-Density Areas

Average Employment Growth (%), 1990 - 1998

Source: Joint Center Tabulations of the Regional Economic Information System (REIS) Database

The most recent trends are, if anything, more dramatic. Comparisons between urban core areas and surrounding suburban communities almost always yield wide disparities. For example, post-2000 comparisons of Philadelphia and its south Jersey suburbs, Los Angeles and the Inland Empire area, and Miami/Dade and its surrounding counties all show an accelerating pattern of deconcentration of jobs from the urban cores.

### High-End Sectors

Perhaps most critically, suburbs have become the preferred location for the burgeoning new science- and information-based industries, a pattern that has accelerated since World War II. The history of high-tech development, for example, has been largely a tale of suburban growth, from Silicon Valley, Orange County and the San Fernando Valley to the outer rings of Boston, Dallas and other dominant technology hubs.<sup>40</sup>



**Reston, Virginia.** Located in the suburbs surrounding Washington, D.C., Reston Town Center contains two Class A 11-story twin office buildings. A second phase includes an 18-story Class A headquarters office building.

Perhaps most dramatically, these shifts apply particularly to high-wage sectors, such as financial and business services. Clearly, jobs are moving outwards, away from traditional centers like Boston and New York and towards more suburban locations. Indeed, a 2004 study by UCLA found that California's fastest rate of high-wage employment growth took place in the suburban Orange County, San Bernardino-Riverside Counties and Sacramento areas, while the largest losses were suffered in the state's most urbanized center, San Francisco.<sup>41</sup>

### Corporate Headquarters

The shift to the periphery can also be seen across virtually every size of company. For example, at the megafirm level in 1969, only 11 percent of the nation's largest companies were headquartered in the suburbs; a quarter-century later roughly half had migrated to the periphery.<sup>42</sup> Studies have shown this preference for suburbs also extends to a wider range of firms, including those with 2,500 employees and more during the 1990s.<sup>43</sup>

### The Future of Work

In the future the prospects for suburbs may be further enhanced by telecommuting, something that dovetails well with more spacious living. Between 1990 and 2000, the number of Americans working at home increased by 23 percent to over four million. An additional twenty million also work part-time at home.

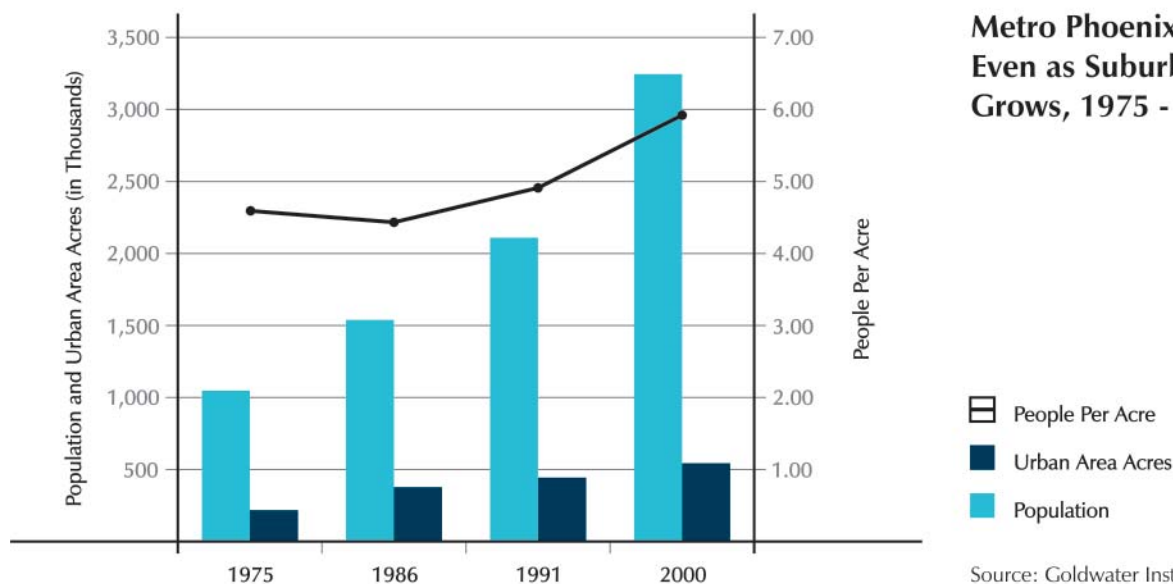
Clearly, the "extra room" critical for such businesses is far more likely to be found in a suburban setting, versus a more traditional dense urban setting. Indeed, some new suburban developments, such as Ladera Ranch in southern Orange County, have incorporated live-work mixed uses into their floor plans, with separate entrances for business clients. Suburban historian Tom Martinson believes the Ladera plan will "be in the history books in twenty years," because it anticipates "an incredible change in the way we live and work."<sup>44</sup>

*"The automobile got growth going and I think the Internet's merely going to accelerate it, acting as a catalyst to keep it going. So, growth is going to the smaller communities on the fringes. I think it's something we won't see go back the other way."*

—David Bombach, Saratoga Group CEO  
Chicago Roundtable

# Part Three The Rise of New Suburbanism

As suburbs develop their own economies, based overwhelmingly on automobiles for mobility, they will become less economically and culturally reliant on the metropolitan core. This in turn will lead to a greater demand for “place-making” and village environments to take over traditional urban functions such as culture, entertainment, religion and commerce.<sup>45</sup> This pattern will particularly apply to fast growing places. In contrast, the density of new development has actually dropped in regions around more traditional and slower-growing cities such as New York, Boston, Philadelphia and Chicago.<sup>46</sup>



**Metro Phoenix Density Grows, Even as Suburban Sphere Grows, 1975 - 2000**

Source: Goldwater Institute and U.S. Census

## SUBURBAN VILLAGES EMERGE

The original notion of the suburban village, as discussed in part one, has its origins in the earlier movement for “garden cities” espoused by Britain’s Ebenezer Howard.<sup>47</sup> After World War II, his notion of a decentralized metropolis emerged, but often in ways in conflict with the original vision of a more humane, efficient suburban system.

By the 1960s, however, some developers were beginning to consider a return to Howard’s principles. James Rouse, the developer of Columbia, Maryland, envisioned it as providing “a sense of place at each level of community in which a person can feel a sense of belonging.” Rouse’s goal was to produce a community with the small-town feel of Easton, Maryland, where he grew up.<sup>48</sup> Rouse and other pioneers hoped to find a way to balance environmental concerns, community needs, industry and retail with the demands of suburban development. The anonymity of the classic mass-production suburb was to be replaced with something more intimate. As the great urbanist Lewis Mumford told a Davis, California audience in 1962:

**THREE.** The future of suburbia appears to lie in focusing on the development of “villages” that provide cultural, economic, educational and religious sustenance. This will require the evolution of elements—social institutions, well-planned streets, open spaces, work spaces and housing—that function within the context of an existing or new community.

*Every housing development should have the virtues of both a village and a garden; the houses themselves should be a protective enclosure. So that the children can move about freely, among other children, and still be under the watchful eye of his mother, or, rather, a whole group of mothers.<sup>49</sup>*

## NEW URBANISM AND ITS LIMITATIONS

The rise of new urbanism—with its espousal of a greater reliance on walkways, mixed use and diverse levels of residential development—has added much to this debate. Yet many adherents of new urbanism are also fundamentally hostile to some of the basic aspects of suburban life, such as backyards and tracts of single-family houses. Contemporary auto-dependent suburbs are lambasted as unsustainable and essentially self-destructive. The inner-ring suburbs, in particular, are seen as a “new frontier of decline.”<sup>50</sup>

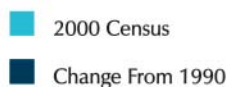
In its tone and tastes, suggests historian Tom Martinson, new urbanism necessarily sets the suburbanites on edge for its dismissive attitudes. New urbanism can overlook that, even as they evolve, “the suburb is not intended to be a city.” Instead, it is, and basically has been for over a century, “an alternative to the city.”<sup>51</sup>

Finally, antisuburban logic often falls against the weight of prevailing demographic, economic and social trends. For example, many older suburbs are not in decline; in fact, many have enjoyed robust economic growth. The same is true of the zealous commitment to mass transit shared by many new urbanist planners and developers. The focus on mass transit misses the essential reality of contemporary America, where over 85 percent of households own a car, and transit use, as a percentage of total riders, continues to decline.<sup>52</sup>

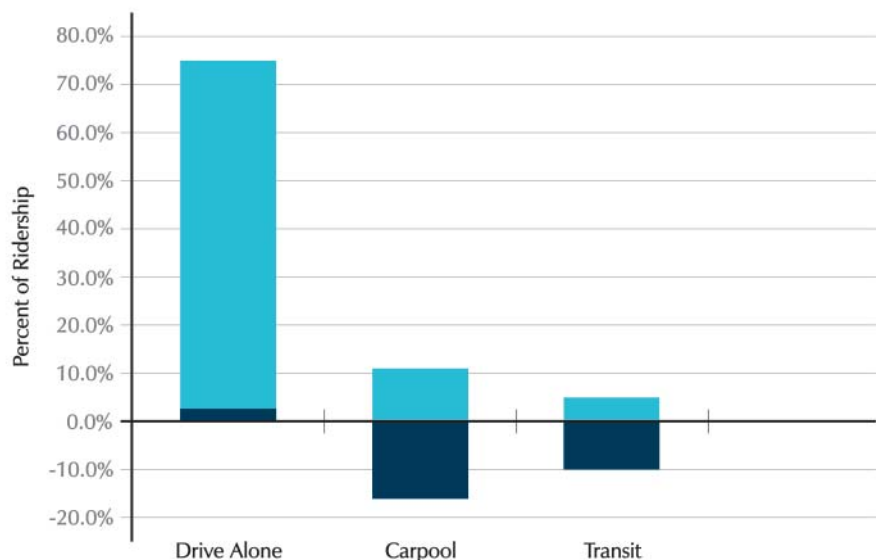
Even in Los Angeles, with its high density levels, the Red Line, which travels the most congested corridor in the city, has roughly one-third the number of riders today as was projected by its builders a decade ago. Similarly, Washington, D.C.’s, well-developed transit system is used at best by no more than nine percent of Washingtonians.<sup>53</sup>

### Transit is Not Leading People Out of Suburbs

Trends in Transit Ridership Nationally



Source: Innovation Briefs, 2000 Census “Long Form”



For most Americans, transit dependency simply does not work. Even higher energy prices are unlikely to change this pattern significantly. The cities with the best transit, such as New York and Chicago, now also average the longest commutes among the nation's largest cities.<sup>54</sup> In contrast, Houston, a less dense and highly unregulated metropolis, was one area that saw declines in its commute times. Two Harvard researchers have concluded that, contrary to conventional wisdom, shorter commutes are among “the biggest welfare effects of sprawling cities.”<sup>55</sup>

This is not to say that transit of some kind, perhaps in more cost-efficient and flexible, dedicated busways, cannot play a useful role in serving those who cannot or would rather not drive. Although its ability to reduce congestion must be seen as limited, intelligently planned transit could help provide a focus for existing and potential suburban villages.

Under any circumstances, it is unlikely that we will ever return to the kind of urban communities so beautifully evoked in the writings of Jane Jacobs and other new urbanist icons, a reality that barely existed in contemporary suburbs, not to mention newer places. “Brainwashing ourselves into believing that we can go back to a time before sprawl,” as urban critic Karrie Jacobs has put it, is fundamentally doomed. The day when Main Street was the primary shopping venue, or when extended networks of friends and family lived in the same neighborhood, has for the most part past, probably forever.<sup>56</sup>

## AFFORDABILITY AND DENSITY

In reality, two other factors are most likely to radically change the shape of suburbia in the decades ahead: declining affordability and growing density. Once characterized by single-family developments with large lots, more and more of suburbia is becoming “crammed.” This is due in part to environmental laws that stress open space preservation and increase land costs. As a result, apartments and townhouses, once associated with city living, now coexist with the traditional tracts, where they often offer the most affordable option to first-time buyers.<sup>57</sup>

Similarly, as commutes to both new and traditional employment centers lengthen, suburbs are increasingly forced to supply an ever-wider array of their basic needs, from cultural infrastructure to parks, shopping and business services. “In the San Fernando Valley, we have secession even though we lost,” quipped attorney David Fleming, a leader of the suburban area’s unsuccessful attempt to break away from Los Angeles. “We have achieved our own kind of secession. It’s called traffic.”<sup>58</sup>

Densification, ironically, may hold one of the potential solutions to the traffic quagmire. As Fleming suggests, the imperative for suburbanites is to cut down on travel time. According to recent studies, the clustering of services—shopping, recreation, schools, housing—in a definable town center reduces the need and duration of commuting in a suburban setting.<sup>59</sup>

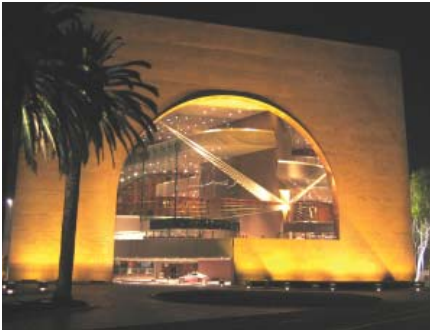
*“The suburban village is now the only entry-level housing that’s available here. The starter home is now a two-bedroom condo at \$300,000-\$400,000.”*

—Matthew E. Hurson, Development  
Manager, JBG Companies  
Washington, D.C. Roundtable



## THE DEVELOPMENT OF CULTURAL AND “SACRED SPACE”

New Suburbanism’s goals, however, go well beyond efficiency. They also speak to the growing need for communities on the periphery to develop a sense of purpose and identity separate from that of the traditional urban core. The religious dimension—one of the earliest functions of the city—stands as one of the critical linchpins of this new identity. At a time when churches are closing in the hearts of many major cities, new churches and other religious institutions—synagogues, Hindu temples and mosques, reflective of suburbia’s growing ethnic diversity—are rising in the outer periphery. Long safer and more prosperous than the city, the suburbs are now seeking to achieve their own version of sacred space.<sup>60</sup>



Costa Mesa, California. Opened in 1986, the Orange County Performing Arts Center hosts international, national and regional performances of music, dance, theatre and opera.

As suburbs mature, the quality of amenities such as sacred places and centers for the arts improve.

Equally promising has been the growth of cultural institutions in suburban areas. The evolution of 335 regional theaters able to stage Broadway plays—up eight percent since 2000—has brought high-level entertainment into some previously obscure areas. Increasingly, some of the largest new major cultural venues, such as the new \$100 million 2,000-seat Strathmore concert hall in northern Bethesda, are located in a suburban area. The new facility now serves as a second home to the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, which has been struggling with finding subscribers at its downtown venue.<sup>61</sup>

Similarly, suburbs outside Chicago, Atlanta and Los Angeles—such as Thousand Oaks, Orange County and Riverside—have either constructed new centers or are contemplating them. In scores of suburban towns, local orchestras, playhouses, restaurants and galleries have gone up in recent years, dispelling some of the conventional notion of suburbs as philistine strongholds.<sup>62</sup>

Neal Cuthbert, arts program manager for the Minneapolis-based McKnight Foundation, points to a “quiet arts revolution” taking place in the region’s hinterland, including major arts development in Anoka, Hopkins and Minnetonka, as well as new \$7.2 million arts project in suburban Bloomington, home to the massive Mall of America.<sup>63</sup> Mr. Cuthbert notes that many suburban political and economic leaders also see cultural development as the key to addressing the periphery’s lack of civic focus. “There’s a rush of amenity-raising in suburbia,” said Cuthbert. “They are trying to find an identity themselves.”<sup>64</sup>

# Part Four

## Three Expressions of New Suburban Villages

New Suburbanism makes sense, fundamentally, because both the market and the political imperatives already exist. This can be seen throughout the country in three basic forms that address the differences between suburban and urban communities: the restored village, the new town center and greenfield villages.

### THE RESTORED VILLAGE CONCEPT

Arguably the most proven concept of suburban villages exists in places where historic town centers already exist. Such areas have the advantage of a basic “bone structure,” which can be used to restore a village center. Suburban villages are being built or proposed in town centers in almost every part of the country from places like Clayton, outside St. Louis, to Bala Cynwyd near Philadelphia, or White Plains, New York.

One good example can be seen in the Orange County city of Fullerton, California. For much of its recent history, Fullerton remained, at least to the outside eye, just another part of ever-expanding southern California suburban sprawl. By the 1970s, the city’s once vibrant downtown had gone the way of so many others, deserted by shoppers who now flocked to the ubiquitous surrounding malls. “When the malls were built, our downtown died,” recalls Robert Zur Schmeide, Fullerton’s Executive Director for Redevelopment and Economic Development. “A lot of buildings needed seismic retrofit and a lot of stores were things like pawn shops.”

But since the 1990s, downtown Fullerton has enjoyed a remarkable rebirth, with scores of new housing units and a flourishing array of new shops and restaurants. Over the last several years roughly 700 units have been developed in the downtown core, while scores of historic older buildings have been retrofitted. Another 200–300 units are already either being built or on the drawing board, along with a proposed major restoration for the city’s historic Fox Theater.

A faceless suburb no longer, the downtown now serves as the acknowledged social and cultural center not only of this thriving community of 126,000 some 22 miles south of Los Angeles, but as a magnet for people from surrounding communities. Fullerton’s resurgence represents a new and increasing village-building dynamic that is occurring in many older suburban regions. These village centers often reconcile both a desire for space and security as well as an older quest for community and a sense of place.

A preexisting town center creates a rationale for denser development along with an architectural infrastructure that provides a sense of place and history. Similar efforts can be seen in older suburbs such as Naperville, Illinois. These places, notes Chicago area developer David Faganel, exist in scores of towns, particularly in older Midwestern and Northeastern cities. “All these villages are looking at their downtowns to create an identity and get away from the cookie-cutter look,” Faganel says. “You are trying to create a little piece of Chicago’s north side.”<sup>65</sup>

*“You don’t necessarily have to have all the things downtown Chicago has. But I think [in] the suburban village, you want to have some convenience, maybe some closeness to your grocery shopping. You want to have certain amenities in the downtown, like in our area, the Fox River is really an amenity.”*

—Rusty Erickson, Owner, Coldwell Banker Midwest Realty  
Chicago Roundtable



## **Downtown Fullerton, California**

### **Patience, Planning and Pride**

The City of Fullerton, in northwestern Orange County, California, provides an excellent case of study of an older suburb's success in reviving its history.

Fullerton's revamped downtown is a study in forward thinking and civic pride. Rather than gut its historic core, the City and its Redevelopment Agency, along with the citizen-based, nonprofit Fullerton Heritage, decided to preserve over 70 historic buildings, including the renovation and expansion of its 100-year-old Mission Revival train depot.

It has taken over twenty years for the project to reach its current level of success. Today the downtown has over 364 downtown apartments to support local retailers and offers 2,500 free parking spaces in the area. Instead of pawn shops and deserted façades, specialty retail, music venues, street fairs, walking tours and outdoor cafes grace the downtown. Cultural centers such as the Plummer Auditorium, Museum Center, and Downtown Plaza form the core of a fledgling arts district, Fullerton's "SOCO" (South of Commonwealth). These uses sparked new businesses, eateries, jazz clubs and art galleries west of the Transportation Center.

But Fullerton's evolving center remains a work in progress. The City is updating its Transportation Center Study, seeking ways to capitalize on having the largest train station in the County, and is also reevaluating its revitalization efforts downtown. Visioning exercises continue as residents debate the merit of downtown trees, wider sidewalks, and more family-friendly venues. Downtown enthusiasts differ as to exactly where the center begins and ends, and which areas should receive priority treatment. This community discussion reflects the degree to which Fullertonians are proud of their evolving, organic downtown village.

## Naperville, Illinois

### A Suburb Reinvents Itself

Like Fullerton, Naperville is a suburban town that decided not to give up its heart. Once an isolated country village, by the late 20th century the City was surrounded by the ever-expanding western suburbs of Chicago. Naperville's foresight is particularly impressive given its own rapid growth, which saw its population nearly quadruple in size between 1980 and 2000 to over 150,000 residents.

Critical in this case—as with other restored town centers—has been the decision to preserve the architecture and streetscape of the historic core. But Naperville has gone one better: it created new amenities to boost the attraction of the downtown, particularly its pleasant four-mile Riverwalk along the west branch of the DuPage River. Built with tremendous support by residents (both financial and political) in 1981, the expanded Riverwalk features pedestrian promenades, fountains, covered bridges, an amphitheater and other amenities within its 75 acres of open space.

Both the Riverwalk and the preserved buildings downtown—including some on the National Registry of Historical Places—provide Naperville with a unique sense of place tied both to its man-made past and its natural environment.

But equally important has been the strong involvement of citizens and the private sector. The Downtown Naperville Alliance, a nonprofit business promotion organization, designates “block captains” who offers assistance to the tenants along their street. Similarly, Naperville's largest citizen group—Community First—has created advisory guidelines in its Workbook for Successful Redevelopment after realizing that numeric formulas alone cannot preserve neighborhood character.

In the future, Naperville's problems may be an outgrowth of its success. The thriving downtown, with excellent schools and growing employment, has attracted many affluent people to the area. Mansionization and rising prices threaten to change the essentially middle-class, Middle American character of the area. Naperville's next challenge may be to prove that successful suburban villages can work for all segments of the community.





Faganel calls Naperville, a flourishing community of 138,000 some 30 miles from Chicago, “a slam dunk” for suburban village development. The area is close to some of the largest employers in the region, including Tellabs, Lucent, Con-Agra and Amoco, reflecting the general shift of jobs towards the periphery.

Largely populated by white-collar families, the City has worked assiduously to develop its old downtown, adding new apartments and stores. It also constructed an attractive Riverwalk along the winding west branch of the DuPage River adjacent to downtown. “Our downtown is what keeps us together,” observes Christine Jeffries, President of the Naperville Development Partnership. “All of us feel we are at home here. It gives us an identity.”<sup>66</sup>

**FOUR.** *The suburbs can only be improved with the input and support of those who live there. Top-down solutions, no matter how enlightened, are frequently ineffective. Denser forms of village-like suburban areas must be cast as assets, not as a threats to the surrounding communities of single-family homes.*

The downtown’s resurgence has made Naperville attractive to outsiders; almost half the visitors to downtown Naperville come from outside the City. No one would mistake the area for Chicago’s Loop, but for many people in the vast suburban expanses, for many of their needs, it seems to offer more than enough. Equally important, locating in or around the downtown has become attractive to a wide range of residents, including families, downshifting boomers and empty nesters, notes Rodney Zenner, a Naperville community planner. Much of this development, he says, has come from attending to the basics, not from city-financed development. “Most of this occurred naturally because we let the market work,” he says. “We just help create the right conditions.”<sup>67</sup>

## THE NEW TOWN CENTER

Not every suburban community has the luxury of a historic core that can be restored. Perhaps a greater challenge exists in the sprawling “production suburbs” of the postwar era. In these areas, the task is less to restore a faded center, than to create a new one, often using the preexisting suburban fabric.

Changes in retail tastes and competition from newer malls have made many of these areas superfluous and ripe for new village development. By 2001, according to a study from Price Waterhouse Coopers, nearly 20 percent of the nation’s regional malls were in severe financial distress; they seem a primary opportunity for building pockets of higher density.<sup>68</sup>

Some of these malls are being converted to a newer generation of “lifestyle centers,” now numbering over 130, which, if not exactly traditionalist downtowns, represent a step in that direction. Lifestyle centers often include many smaller, specialized shops and tend to be outdoors with their own walking paths. Such centers, suggest developers like Terry McEwen, President of Memphis-based Lifestyle Centers, are particularly attractive to the “lifestyle expectations” of both aging boomers and their children, who are seeking more entertainment with their shopping experience.<sup>69</sup>

Such centers are part of a broader movement to reshape postwar suburbs into places with a core and an identity.<sup>70</sup> Some cities dominated by this kind of development, such as Anaheim, have already taken steps to encourage “village-like” infill development, with greater densities, and often at prices that make them affordable to young families.<sup>71</sup>

In many cases, the greatest opportunities come from abandoned industrial and other discarded facilities. One of the most spectacular and ambitious projects is taking shape around the former Stapleton Airport on the outskirts of Denver. This bold move seeks to create a mixture of single-family and multi-family homes, with schools, shopping and other “village” facilities. Similar moves in the same region are taking place in suburbs farther out, such as Englewood and Lakewood, where discarded shopping malls are being converted into downtowns.<sup>72</sup>

*“There has been some very wasteful development in the past, particularly the overbuilding of retail commercial, and it’s failing. The suburban village offers opportunities to fix the mistakes we have made, rather than just jumping out to the next planned community or the next subdivision someplace.”*

—Richard Ramella, Consulting Principal,  
The Planning Center  
Orange County Roundtable

**Many suburbs are developing their core and are generating a unique identity.**



To move forward on such developments, architect John Kaliski argues, the planning and architecture communities must move against “the elite culture’s rejection of these kinds of postwar production suburbs.” They need to see that many of these communities, despite their architectural limitations, also enjoy many of the characteristics celebrated in Jane Jacobs’ *The Death and Life of American Cities*, such as diversity, locally-owned businesses, and buildings of differing styles and ages.<sup>73</sup>

The Market Common at Clarendon in Arlington, Virginia, is a prime example of an extremely compact infill village. The project includes almost a quarter of a million square feet of retail and nearly 400 homes, all on just ten acres. Local conditions—a booming economy and a well-designed mass transit system—have contributed to its success in creating a vibrant meeting place amid an older suburban community. The Market Common has proven the existence of a strong demand for this kind of living, with 100 percent of the residential units preleased.

The builders of these places are not so different than those who built great cities in the past—people with a vision of a renewed suburbia. Most importantly, unlike those targeting inner cities, developers such as those at Stapleton remain committed to building places for middle-class families.

The key to success in creating town centers lies in sensitivity to suburban realities. This can be seen in differing models. In denser places, like Arlington, more closely packed, transit-oriented development may work better. In other places—such as Orenco Station Town Center—developers have had to adjust to the primacy of the automobile.

The success of Orenco Station is broad. Resale values, retail sales and occupancy rates are outstanding and residents rated their community very high in terms of “social cohesion.” Additionally, with a highly utilized light-rail station incorporated into the project, Orenco Station clearly qualifies as a “transit-oriented” development. However, the rail station is one-third of a mile north of the Town Center. The Town Center itself is located along an arterial highway, reflecting the fact that most town centers are not regional destinations and that such developments still rely upon the automobile for success.

*“We’re trying to decide where do we want to be when we grow up. Many people in the communities envision you need two-acre lots, more expensive homes. And that does not always work.”*

—Roger Burrell, Senior Vice President,  
Harris Bank  
Chicago Roundtable

**Successful suburban town centers are true to the history and nature of the community.**



**Highland Park, Illinois. Renaissance Place is a large mixed-use development in downtown Highland Park. A component of the agreement between the developer and the City is that a good faith effort be made to have at least 30 percent of retail tenants be local in nature, an attempt to keep the project unique to its location.**



## **THE MARKET COMMON - Arlington, Virginia**

### **Small Site, Major Results**

The Market Common at Clarendon, a 10-acre infill project in Arlington, Virginia, demonstrates the success of mixing retail, office and residential in an attractive urban plan and a powerful demographic setting. Organized around a U-shaped street surrounding a high-amenity park, this high-density project includes 240,000 square feet of retail, 300 apartments, 87 townhomes, and over 1,500 parking spaces. The Market Common has been so successful that its Phases II and III were 100 percent preleased, and adjacent office and residential projects have enjoyed extremely high demand. Townhome prices have more than doubled in two years.

The quick success of the project shows the potential for “lifestyle villages”—destinations for shopping, eating, living and relaxing—within suburban environments. Tenants and visitors alike are attracted to an urban design plan that provides a sense of enclosure and safety while maintaining important lines of sight along and between both sides of the street. As with all successful suburban and urban enclaves, there is a lot to do and see. Familiar national and regional retail tenants attract shoppers, while the central park and playground afford families with space to relax and play. The townhome residents also have access to their own adjacent park. Passageways from surrounding neighborhoods, high pedestrian traffic, and transit connections guarantee day and night use.

The Market Common shows that a vibrant suburban village can be created on a relatively small site. Consider that on a site of only ten acres, almost 400 residential units are placed above or near 250,000 square feet of retail uses, oriented around a multi-use plaza park. Such a residential density alone is fairly high; combine this with the other uses, and you have a very tight and impressive use of space. Clearly, the number of dense, mixed-use projects in the D.C. area and elsewhere have mushroomed over the last decade. The presence of a highly developed mass transit system in the region is also seen as a major catalyst.

Successful town centers and suburban villages would do well to stay compact. Truly great places will stimulate surrounding development in time, but the lesson to be learned at Clarendon is that integrating high quality land uses around attractive streetscapes and comfortable spaces will create a powerful market and a vibrant gathering place.

## ORENCO STATION TOWN CENTER - Hillsboro, Oregon

### Combining Arterial Access with Light Rail

The success of Orenco Station Town Center in the Portland suburb of Hillsboro proves that being flexible and considering maximum access make all the difference. Rather than simply accepting the notion that high-density, mixed-use development should be located immediately adjacent to a light rail stop, the developers took a careful look at the site and decided to locate the Town Center one-third of a mile north, along a busy arterial. This arterial, N.W. Cornell Road, sees 25,000 cars pass daily and is a major factor in the success and visibility of the Town Center and its Main Street. In this way, residents and visitors can access the project by car or rail; the 1,800 units on site also make biking and walking a strong option.

The developers made other intelligent moves. After surveying potential residents who expressed a strong desire for a traditional main street and community focus, the developers decided to build the Town Center early in the phasing plan. Its impact on adjacent home prices was quick and positive. At the same time, Pacific Realty Trust built in some “slam-dunk” components to the project: a conventional big-box center and an adjacent 600-unit apartment complex. This enabled complementary rather than competitive retail planning. The Town Center features more specialty shopping and professional services, giving it a lively, neighborhood atmosphere. And, of course, it’s anchored on the corner by a Starbucks’s.

From a design perspective, Orenco Station is a prime example of traditional neighborhood development. Its Main Street creates great urban space with three-story mixed-use buildings lined with wide sidewalks and generous pedestrian amenities. A distinct sense of place is created with a rich, vernacular architecture featuring bay windows, balconies, wrought-iron railing, and brick and wood facades. Further along Main Street, three-story live-work townhouses feature split entries: the upper stairs lead to the main living area, the lower to the work space. These brownstone-style units lend a decidedly urban, but less dense, feel to the street as it transitions to a central park fronted by alley-loaded single-family homes.

The lessons of Orenco Station are many, but perhaps the most important is the issue of access. A beautiful design alone doesn’t guarantee success - it must be complemented with plenty of potential customers, many of whom arrive by car. This doesn’t mean that a suburban village’s main street has to be wide. In fact, the Town Center’s is only two lanes wide, but the arterial that fronts it is four lanes, providing secondary visual access and lots of attention. Transit villages, therefore, should not ignore but build upon their suburban context.





## GREENFIELD VILLAGES

The most rapid rates of demographic and economic growth now take place, not in the prewar suburbs or even the “production” suburbs of the 1950s and 1960s, but further out on the periphery. This trend can be seen in virtually every area of the country, from the sunbelt to Midwestern regions such as that around Minneapolis.<sup>74</sup>

*“We’ve created so many soulless communities in the past. If you’re a land developer, you’ve gone to some of our suburban sprawls we have developed in Atlanta, Houston, Orlando, Seattle, Sacramento and other areas. You see that we had developed streets with a sea of garage doors. And five years after it, maybe you don’t feel good about it. So what we wanted to do is turn that around and [create] a responsible development.”*

—John Potts, Vice President Land Development,  
Kennecott Development Company  
Utah Roundtable

This may be where many of the largest and potentially most important expressions of New Suburbanism are taking place. Building off the experience of early experiments like Reston, Virginia and Columbia, Maryland, there has been a rapid development of such new communities from Mission Viejo, California to the Woodlands outside Houston. These areas have been constructed for the most part amid wide-ranging single-family homes, but with a definite sense of a planned center.

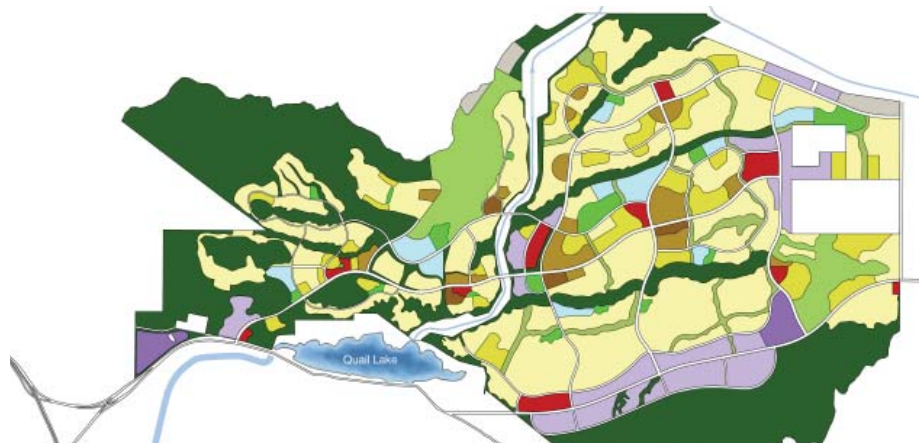
In contrast to postwar production suburbs, these communities often already see the need to mix uses, with commercial, recreation and cultural facilities in a defined town center. Some of the largest—including Sugarland and Woodlands in Texas and Irvine in southern California—are currently developing a dense downtown core. In addition to existing retail and office complexes, there is an increased emphasis on apartments, townhouses and, in some places, even lofts.<sup>75</sup>

**FIVE.** Future suburbs will succeed by utilizing the land efficiently and by providing a complete range of alternatives to accommodate varying life stages. In this manner, individual suburbs can fill critical niches not only for individual cities, but entire regions.

Perhaps the most exciting new frontier for village development can be seen in southwest Florida, one of the nation’s fastest growing regions. Rather than simply follow traditional suburban patterns, some developers and public officials are making conscious attempts to develop villages surrounded by protected rural and natural areas.<sup>76</sup> This can be seen in new plans for the vast Collier properties west of Naples, which are surrounded by the Everglades. The Collier properties established a system that transfers development potential from acres with the greatest environmental carrying capacity to those acres with the lowest capacity. This ensures that the land is developed in a manner that preserves key environmental resources while allowing for concentrated development. At the core lies a major village center, anchored by a major new Catholic university.<sup>77</sup>

Similar approaches are being used elsewhere, notably with the new Centennial development outside Los Angeles and the new Kennecott/Sahara venture outside Salt Lake City. The Utah project, constructed on 93,000 acres, seeks to mix employment centers with a varied array of housing options in a pedestrian-friendly environment. Importantly, like the Stapleton project in Denver, this kind of project is also being tailored for families, with new elementary schools being developed for the area.<sup>78</sup>

Centennial, California. Spanning 11,676 acres, Centennial is a new self-contained town that will set high standards of walkability when the first phase gets underway in early 2007.



## THE WOODLANDS - Woodlands, Texas

### Master Planning with Nature

Along with Reston, Virginia; Columbia, Maryland; and Irvine, California, The Woodlands, a 25,000-acre community located 27 miles north of downtown Houston, has become one of the nation's premier planned communities. Begun in 1972, it currently has developed 17,000 acres. But perhaps more than any other new town of its era, its major theme is working with and incorporating nature. By preserving 25 percent of its land area as open space and giving trees prime locations, it casts itself as an "ecologically enhanced new town."

The design team of The Woodlands, assembled by town founder George Mitchell, incorporates environmental factors as critical elements in its basic planning. Ian McHarg, distinguished professor and author of the seminal book *Design with Nature*, was the strongest voice for a different and more sustainable approach to the development. His approach involves layer-by-layer mapping of the environmental opportunities and constraints. Although not all of his ideas were followed, the community's open space, tree preservation, drainage and site planning reflect the powerful role nature has been given in this development.

The Woodlands' team has followed through with its early goal of preserving 25 percent of the site as forest. Property deed restrictions not only preserve trees but their undergrowth as well. Amazingly, roadside vegetation easements gave prime curb space to trees rather than retailers. Despite the temptation to "lawn-up," many homeowners are now pleased with the more natural look.

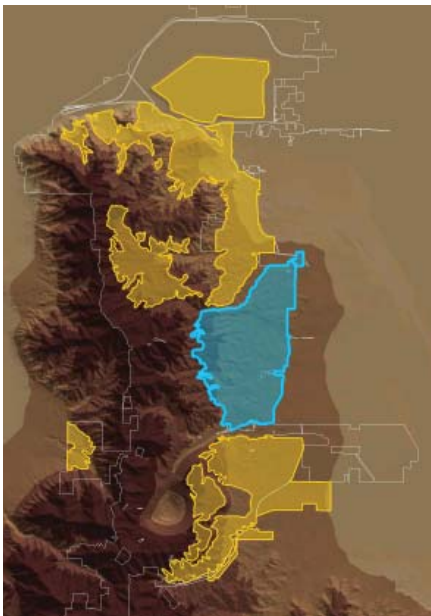
The Woodlands' other prized amenity, an extensive path network, illustrates how much open space has been preserved. Rather than following a roadway or park as in many planned communities, these paths often diverge from the neighborhoods and enter the adjoining forest. Hikers, joggers and cyclists can find themselves deep in the forest and out of sight from any development.

As The Woodlands has matured and approaches build-out, it has evolved into more of a self-sufficient community. The 1,000-acre Woodlands Town Center contains over 900 businesses, and its new 1.3-mile Riverwalk, The Woodlands Waterway®, provides a vibrant public space that brings residents, workers and visitors together in a mixed-use setting.



Photographs courtesy of Town Center Improvement District.





## Kennecott, Utah

### Building a Greenfield Over a Brownfield

Like other progressive master builders before them, Kennecott Land—with over 93,000 acres in Utah—has chosen to follow a forward-looking development model in one of the nation’s fastest-growing areas. By 2020 the Salt Lake Valley is expected to accommodate another million residents.

Concern for accommodating this future growth led to the formation of the state’s first regional planning agency, Envision Utah. This public/private partnership has developed guiding principles that call for “more walkable communities, preservation of critical lands, region-wide transit systems, transit-oriented developments, and conservation of water.”

The first test of these planning efforts is Daybreak, a 4,216-acre community of 13,000 homes, currently beginning its second phase of development. Built on the “West Bench” area of the valley floor east of the Oquirrh Mountains and within easy distance of Salt Lake City, this master planned development is designed as a series of intimate, largely self-contained villages close to both jobs, retail centers and open space. As its promotional website says, “the country world—the world of hiking and biking trails and wide open spaces—this world is much closer to hand. And that’s the world you’d probably rather be in anyway.”

Architectural styles take their inspiration from vernacular elements, resulting in homes rich in facade detailing and quality materials. Each village retail center is designed to be pedestrian friendly with large sidewalks and storefronts sited close to the street. Street patterns in these areas and the future Town Center favor the grid, creating more of an urban feel. Higher-density residential and mixed use will be located in and around the Town Center.

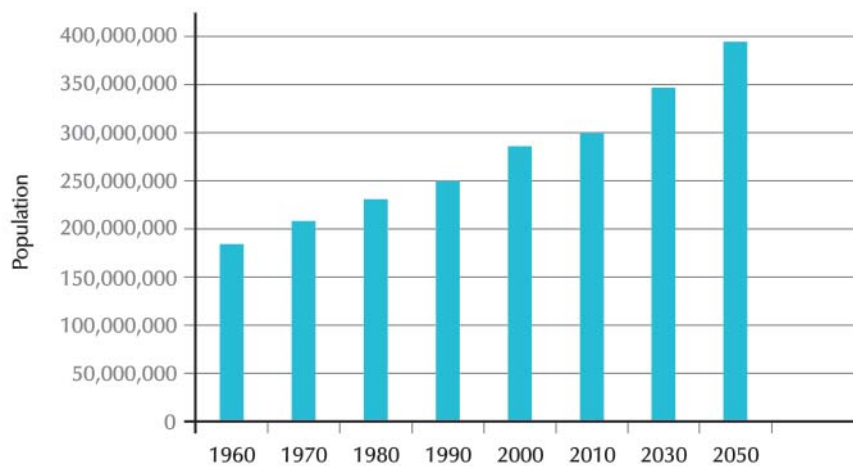
Daybreak’s environmental planning is impressive in its ambitious attempts to mitigate the “brownfield” left behind by decades of mining. Builder waste is recycled, and a heating and cooling system for public buildings conserves energy by drawing heat from the soil.

Daybreak is amenity-rich with 1,200 acres of parks, trails, meadows, sports fields and a community garden. Also included is the 85-acre Oquirrh Lake, featuring boating, fishing, picnicking and hiking and serving as the major water source for public landscaping. When complete, Daybreak will offer over eight million square feet of retail, office and flexible industrial space, aiming to reduce long commutes and making good on the promise of a balanced community.

Daybreak shows that well-planned development on the suburban fringe can combine the best of both worlds—an urban atmosphere in village and town centers combined with the country feel of open space, recreation and parkland. As the development builds out, issues of affordability, self-sufficiency and community environment will arise. But one thing is plain—Utah’s suburban landscape will never be quite the same.

# Conclusion The Road to the Suburban Village

New Suburbanism will flourish in large part because it responds to the demographic and economic trends likely to shape 21st century America. By 2050 the Census predicts the American population will likely reach 400 million people. Virtually every projection of new population, housing demand and job creation suggests that the vast majority of this new growth will be in suburban and exurban areas, most notably in the West and the South.



## We Must Accommodate Future Generations in Quality Communities

More Crowding to Come: U.S. Population Growth, 1960 - 2050

Source: Bureau of the Census, CensusScope

## THE “NEW SUBURBIA”

With the demographic wind at their backs, as well as growing economic and political power, suburbs—whether in the inner ring or outer periphery—will define the future of the American metropolis. Yet as they become more predominant, suburbs will need to evolve into more self-contained, culturally rich and diverse communities.

Tom Suozzi, Nassau County Executive, describes this village-building activity as part of what he calls “the new suburbia.” To Suozzi, whose constituency includes nearly two million New York-area suburbanites, this means blending the traditional “sprawl” with pockets of denser development with entertainment venues, bicycle paths and parks. He sees it not as a way to change the area as much as a measure that “protects our suburban dream.”<sup>79</sup>

This presents the fundamental political and conceptual challenge facing New Suburbanism. Growth towards the periphery will continue, but in many suburban places, like Long Island, traditional development patterns are simply limited by the lack of available land. As “suburban frontiers close,” suggests author D. J. Waldie, it will be necessary “to evolve a new consensus of place-making” throughout the vast suburban landscape.<sup>80</sup>



Naples, Florida. Fifth Avenue South served as Naples’ Main Street from the 1950s to the 1970s. However, when malls developed, Fifth Avenue deteriorated. The City, its businesses and residents responded by generating a redevelopment agency and master plan. Today, Fifth Avenue boasts over a dozen new buildings, including a theater, community art center, and public parking garage, as well as residential units and dozens of restaurants, nearly all of which host outdoor seating.

*“I still think there is a perception of people [that they] want to have their quarter-acre lot, anything less is building a ghetto . . . I’ve heard the argument so many times.”*

—Cal Schneller, Former Planning and Development Services Director, Salt Lake County Utah Roundtable

*“It’s always the tyranny of the twenty people who show up and drive public policy by screaming at their county commissioners that they don’t want their quality of life impacted by nonresidential uses.”*

—David Crawford, Senior Planner, Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council Florida Roundtable

## POLITICAL CHALLENGES

These efforts, however, must be undertaken with great care. Many suburbanites rightly fear the negative aspects of urbanization, such as greater risk of crime, crowding and increased traffic. Suburbanites’ preferences need to be respected if their environment is to be changed. In a city like Webster Groves, Missouri, for example, a four-story apartment development may seem out of scale to local residents who wish to protect their lifestyle.<sup>81</sup>

Perceptive advocates of New Suburbanism, like Anaheim Mayor Curt Pringle, take great pains to make clear that new, denser development will not come at the expense of existing single-family zones. “You have to respect the single family neighborhoods,” Pringle states.

Yet despite the political challenges, New Suburbanism is clearly on the forefront of metropolitan change. Places as diverse as San Diego, California and Concord, New Hampshire have envisioned themselves as neither 70s-style suburbs nor dense urban places but more akin to an archipelago of villages.<sup>82</sup> There also remains strong and growing support for more open space, something that encourages the development of villages by placing rural or wild land between settlements.<sup>83</sup>

## MARKET CHALLENGES

At the same time, New Suburbanism will also face continued market challenges. Developers and local officials, like Fullerton’s Zur Schmeide, see retail development as a particular challenge. Even the best-planned suburban downtown may not be attractive to large chain stores, such as Costco or Target, which often prefer large lots with ample parking. This leaves the villages forced to depend on notoriously unstable entertainment venues, specialty stores and restaurants. “In the end you still have to figure out how to give the users the amenities they want,” Chicago developer David Faganel explains. “You have to have the right commercial to go with the residential.”

Another danger, Faganel suggests, may be the temptation by some developers to spend too heavily on design elements, in part to make architectural “statements.” In the process, he believes, they tend to force rental prices too high to sustain retailers, particularly coffee shops, dry cleaners and small food stores, and drive away middle-income consumers.

Certainly, like any cutting-edge movement, developers of suburban villages will face many risks. Start-up costs, environmental mitigation, and shifts in market conditions can undermine the profitability of even the best-conceived developments. After all, both Columbia, Maryland and Reston, Virginia ended up slipping from the hands of their visionary developers.

Developers will continue to find themselves caught in the dilemma between the best and the good. Some urban critics will continue to attack village-like developments as inadequate departures from “sprawl,” auto-dependency, backyards and the domination of the single-family house.<sup>84</sup> Others will point out that these new places have an inevitable degree of artifice. *San Francisco Chronicle* urban critic John King rightly points out that some places do not measure up to traditional city settings, but produce only an “artificial urbanity, a faux town.”<sup>85</sup>

Yet throughout history new developments have been critiqued as inauthentic. Nineteenth century European visitors to America’s booming cities like Chicago or



Cincinnati saw them as hopelessly inauthentic and fake. Much of what is now “classic” Los Angeles—Hollywood, Los Feliz, Echo Park—engendered snickers from East Coast and British observers a generation ago. As Joel Garreau, author of *Edge Cities*, has pointed out, new developments take time, both to develop their foliage and find their character.

## THE ROAD FROM DEADWOOD

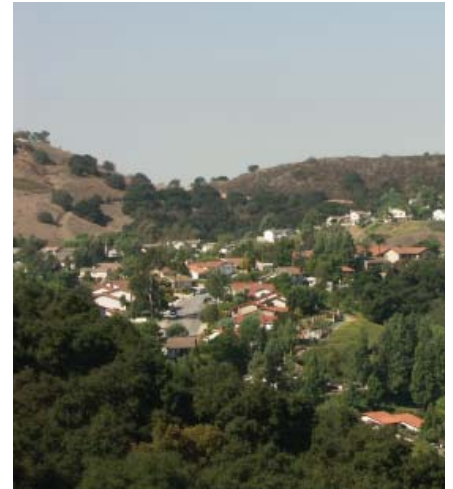
Yet for all the criticisms and market challenges, we should emphasize that New Suburbanism, indeed the entire experiment with dispersed metropolitan life, is only in its early stages. As Chicago architectural historian Robert Bruegmann has pointed out, “most of the criticism made of sprawl today, that it is disordered, privatized, congested and ugly, are the same ones used by critics of Chicago in the late nineteenth century and of London in the early twentieth century.”<sup>86</sup>

In other words, the suburban experiment, launched in earnest in the 1950s, should be seen as essentially in its Deadwood phase, referring to the rough-and-ready mining town on the Dakota frontier. It is a period that calls for experimentation, and sometimes experiments fail. We must look not only to the models of the past, but also understand how the new realities, most particularly the digital revolution, will fundamentally alter the role of place and geography. We need to acknowledge that, due to changes in the possibilities of dispersion, the tie between the traditional core city and its hinterlands will never be the same.

Yet the city, in its five-thousand-year evolution, still has much to teach the suburbs. Sprawl worked as a brilliant antidote to urban dysfunction like antibusiness governments, unworkable schools, and excessive crowding. But the suburban paradigm still has not fully met the challenges traditional cities have addressed for millennia—promoting community identity, the creation of “sacred space” and a closer relationship between workplace and home life.

Helping foster the qualities that made cities great in the past constitutes one of the fundamental challenges of New Suburbanism. The demands of greater density, changing patterns of work and a desire to restore balance in family or personal life will force suburbia to change in the next decade. The status quo—that is, building as we have for over forty years—increasingly will not meet the needs of the consumer or the dictates imposed by the environment, changing demographics and technology.

Yet we must understand that these challenges cannot be met by returning to the urban past or by denying people the privacy, safety and opportunity represented by suburbia. **The primary challenge for planners, architects and community leaders will not be to destroy suburbia—but to develop ways to make better the places most of us have chosen to call home.**



Chino Hills, California. A system of development rights transfer built into the land use designations sought to focus development where it made the most sense in the community's eight villages. The result is a community where permanent open space enhances virtually every neighborhood.



City of Chino, California. The Preserve Specific Plan provides the guidance for the development of a diverse, 5,472-acre residential community focused around a lively community core. In The Preserve, the greatest concentration of residential uses is focused near the community core to create a walkable, and accessible village. The community core provides a rich mixture of entertainment, commercial, civic, cultural, educational, religious, and residential uses.

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# Acknowledgments



As part of our study, it was important to speak with the real players involved in shaping the growth and evolution of our communities. We invited key experts to attend a series of multidisciplinary roundtables in five regions of the country: Orange County, California; Salt Lake City, Utah; Chicago, Illinois; Washington D.C.; and Naples, Florida.

Through these roundtable discussions, we were able to deepen our understanding of the challenges and opportunities involved in housing and development trends across the United States.

We would especially like to thank the participants of these roundtables. The meetings generated great discussion and revealed questions and issues that may otherwise have been overlooked. Without their participation, much of this study would not have been possible.

## Orange County Roundtable

Bob Santos  
Lennar Communities

Brian Judd  
The Planning Center

Helen Brown  
Civic Center Barrio Housing Corporation

Daniel Yi  
Los Angeles Times

Dr. Daniel Silver  
Endangered Habitats League

Joel Fick  
City of Anaheim

Randal Jackson  
The Planning Center

Richard Ramella  
The Planning Center

## Utah Roundtable

Brian Judd  
The Planning Center

Bryan D. Holladay  
City of West Jordan

Cal Schneller  
Salt Lake County, Retired

David Beecher  
Utah Transit Authority

David Eckhoff  
Psomas

Gregory Haws  
The Planning Center

John Potts  
Kennecott Development Company

Karen Wikstrom  
Wikstrom Economic & Planning Consultants, Inc.

Robert Grow  
Envision Utah / O'Melveny & Meyers LLP

Scott Roche  
Psomas

Ted Knowlton  
Envision Utah

## Chicago Roundtable

David Bombach  
Saratoga Group

David Faganel  
R.A. Faganel Builders

Jeffrey Schielke  
City of Batavia, Illinois

Lance Ramella  
Keystone Builder Research, LLC

Ngyuen Ngyuen  
Gensler

Roger Burrell  
Harris Bank

Rusty Erickson  
Coldwell Banker Midwest Realty

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Amy Liu  
Metropolitan Policy Program

David Delsom  
Gensler

Jeff Lee  
Lee & Associates

Matthew E. Hurson  
The JBG Companies

Nancy Booth  
Gensler

Rachelle Levitt  
The Urban Land Institute

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Alan Reynolds  
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Alice J. Carlson  
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Fifth Third Bank

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SW Florida Regional Planning Council

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# Further Research

*Contact The Planning Center for additional information on New Suburbanism Research, Roundtable Discussions and Case Studies. Full text versions of the following case studies can be found at [www.planningcenter.com](http://www.planningcenter.com).*

## **The Planning Center**

1580 Metro Drive  
Costa Mesa, CA 92626  
Tel: 714-966-9220  
Fax: 714-966-9221  
[www.planningcenter.com](http://www.planningcenter.com)  
**Colin Drukker**  
**Project Director**

## **SUBURBAN CASE STUDIES QUICK SUMMARY**

### **SANTANA ROW - San Jose, California** **The Boutique Suburban Village**

EXCERPT: Santana Row represents the ultimate in high quality, mixed-use placemaking. It combines beautiful architecture, intimate public spaces, and vertically integrated retail and residential uses. With meticulous attention to detail, color and space, it delights the senses, entertains the visitor and provides convenience for its residents. Yet such design comes at a hefty price, both literally and figuratively. The huge start-up costs were almost too much for its developer, especially after an initial fire and an economic downturn. Now that rents and income are up, the economic complications give way to acclaim for the project's design.



### **THE MARKET COMMON AT CLARENDON - Arlington, Virginia** **Small Site, Major Results**

EXCERPT: The Market Common shows that a vibrant suburban village can be created on a relatively small site. Consider that on a site of only ten acres, almost 400 residential units are placed above or near 250,000 square feet of retail uses, oriented around a multi-use plaza park. Such a residential density alone is fairly high; combine this with the other uses, and you have a very tight and impressive use of space. Clearly, the number of dense, mixed-use projects in the D.C. area and elsewhere have mushroomed over the last decade. The presence of a highly-developed mass transit system in the region is also seen as a major catalyst.







Photo courtesy of Calthorpe & Associates.

### **HIGHLAND'S GARDEN VILLAGE - Denver, Colorado** **Urban Infill with a Look to the Past and a Green Twist**

EXCERPT: Highland's Garden Village, located on a 27-acre infill site three miles northwest of downtown Denver, provides an innovative model by integrating aspects of the site's history and incorporating environmentally responsible development. Built on the site of the City's century-old Elitch Garden Amusement Park, the project preserved the original octagonal, two-story theatre and entrance gardens, featuring a 1926 carousel pavilion. Extensive landscaping, use of recycled materials in construction and wind-generated electricity for some of the project's uses have attracted national attention. The Village's wide variety of residential types also gives the project a socioeconomic diversity not found in many mixed-use developments.



### **MASHPEE COMMONS - Mashpee, Massachusetts** **Back to the Future of the New England Town Center**

EXCERPT: The original 1985 plan benefited from being located on a single large parcel. Thus, private roads were not subject to setbacks and side yards; the resulting design flexibility is apparent in the project's dense layout. Development of the adjoining neighborhoods will occur under special permits, but they are yet to be developed. The issue of housing affordability, of extreme concern here as in many areas, can also exert a powerful influence. Under the State's Chapter 40B code, projects which provide a mix of 25 percent affordable units can receive exemptions from local zoning codes, including higher densities. Housing advocates are pushing for this exemption, which might turn out to be a major stimulus to development.

Preservation of open space, another key concern in the Cape, could be provided by the city's transfer of development rights, channeling development to village centers. The tool has not been used, however, perhaps because denser uses could be approved under the affordability mandates.



### **ADDISON CIRCLE - Addison, Texas** **Unique Financing Techniques & Public/Private Partnership**

EXCERPT: One of the more unique characteristics of Addison Circle was the strong public/private partnership developed between Post Properties and the town of Addison. The partnership began early in the planning process and included the formation of a new zoning district for the mixed-use area.

This public/private partnership also generated critical project financing. Without financial support, Post Properties could not afford to build the required infrastructure and street improvements. The town of Addison designated the site as a tax increment financing (TIF) district and provided phased public improvements from their general fund. The provision of public sector improvements, however, was linked to the production of housing units.

### **DOWNTOWN FULLERTON & AMERIGE HEIGHTS - Fullerton, California** **Patience, Planning and Pride**

EXCERPT: The City of Fullerton, in northwestern Orange County, California, offers important lessons in the area of suburban villages. The first is about preserving the established core. It teaches us that enhancing older suburban downtowns requires pride, patience, comprehensive planning strategies and solid public and private partnerships. The second is about creating new suburban villages that devote more and more outdoor space to social interaction. This is true not only in developments such as Amerige Heights, just five minutes from Fullerton's downtown, but also in more conventional retail centers as well. Both trends make for a more interesting and comfortable center and are important pieces in the American suburban renaissance of the late 20th and early 21st centuries.



### **DOWNTOWN NAPERVILLE - Naperville, Illinois** **A Suburb Reinvents Itself**

EXCERPT: A key to Naperville's success is its downtown revitalization, anchored by its famous 4-mile Riverwalk along the west branch of the DuPage River. Built by residents in 1981, Riverwalk features pedestrian promenades, fountains, covered bridges, an amphitheater and other amenities within its seventy-five acres of open space. The City's downtown includes specialty retail along with national chains. The area's success is again cemented through private sector initiative, in this case the Downtown Naperville Alliance, a nonprofit business promotion organization that designates "block captains" who provide assistance to the tenants along their street. Another key is Naperville's recognition of its roots; many structures appear on the National Register of Historic Places.



### **ORENCO STATION TOWN CENTER - Hillsboro, Oregon** **Combining Arterial Access with Light Rail**

EXCERPT: The success of Orenco Station Town Center in the Portland suburb of Hillsboro proves that being flexible and considering maximum access make all the difference. Rather than simply accepting the notion that high density, mixed-use development should be located immediately adjacent to a light rail stop, the developers took a careful look at the site and decided to locate the Town Center one-third of a mile north, along a busy arterial. This arterial, N.W. Cornell Road, sees 25,000 cars pass daily and is a major factor in the success and visibility of the Town Center and its Main Street. In this way, residents and visitors can access the project by car or rail; the 1,800 units on site also make biking and walking a strong option.





### **FIFTH AVENUE SOUTH – Naples, Florida** **The Streetscape’s the Thing**

EXCERPT: The resulting design is a classic study in how to create a vibrant, distinct street identity. The street is narrow and its space well defined by adjoining buildings. The architecture is richly detailed with modulating planar surfaces. The color palette strengthens the street’s identity, and the regular placement of palm trees and street lights provides visual continuity. The generous provision of courtyards, wide sidewalks and outdoor cafes invite use. An impressive variety of shopping, restaurants, cultural centers and public space make visiting the street a stimulating experience.



### **DAYBREAK – Kennecott, Utah** **Building a Greenfield Over a Brownfield**

EXCERPT: Master-planned development has come to Utah’s Salt Lake Valley in a very big way, and from an unlikely source—the landholdings of the second biggest copper mining company in the U.S. Mining operations are not normally associated with careful land stewardship, but times and opportunities have changed. The Kennecott Land, created in 2001 from its parent copper mining corporation, Kennecott Utah Copper, has embarked on a landmark community-building journey on its immense 93,000-acre holdings. Several factors make the effort notable: it is both a green- and brownfield development; its design principles are relatively new to the region; its principles of environmental sustainability are comprehensive; and its sheer size dwarfs any other community development project in the region.



### **THE WOODLANDS – Woodlands, Texas** **Master Planning with Nature**

EXCERPT: Much has been written about master-planned communities, and each has their story to tell. The tale of The Woodlands, a 25,000-acre community located twenty-seven miles north of downtown Houston, is one of an “ecologically enhanced new town.” Along with Reston, Virginia; Columbia, Maryland; and Irvine, California, it is one of the nation’s most famous planned communities. Begun in 1972, it currently has developed 17,000 acres. But perhaps more than any other new town of its era, its major theme is working with and incorporating nature. By preserving 25 percent of its land area as open space and giving trees prime locations, its lush woodlands are much more than a marketing ruse.





## IN BUILDING AN ALTERNATIVE VISION, THIS IS WHAT WE HAVE FOUND TO BE TRUE.

1. Suburbia represents America's future growth. How America copes with this growth—and how the suburbs evolve—will determine the future quality of life for the majority of our population.
2. To develop better suburbs, planners, policy makers, and developers must understand why most people prefer to live there and must seek to preserve those key characteristics. Suburban development has to be sensitive to the specific traits of an area's environment, topography, culture and sociology. There is no single model that fits all situations.
3. The future of suburbia appears to lie in focusing on the development of "villages" that provide cultural, economic, educational and religious sustenance. This will require the evolution of elements—social institutions, well-planned streets, open spaces, work spaces and housing—that function within the context of an existing or new community.
4. The suburbs can only be improved with the input and support of those who live there. Top-down solutions, no matter how enlightened, are frequently ineffective. Denser forms of village-like suburban areas must be cast as assets, not as threats to the surrounding communities of single-family homes.
5. Future suburbs will succeed by utilizing the land efficiently and by providing a complete range of alternatives to accommodate varying life stages. In this manner, individual suburbs can fill critical niches not only for individual cities, but entire regions.



1580 METRO DRIVE, COSTA MESA, CA 92626  
(714) 966-9220 [WWW.PLANNINGCENTER.COM](http://WWW.PLANNINGCENTER.COM)

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