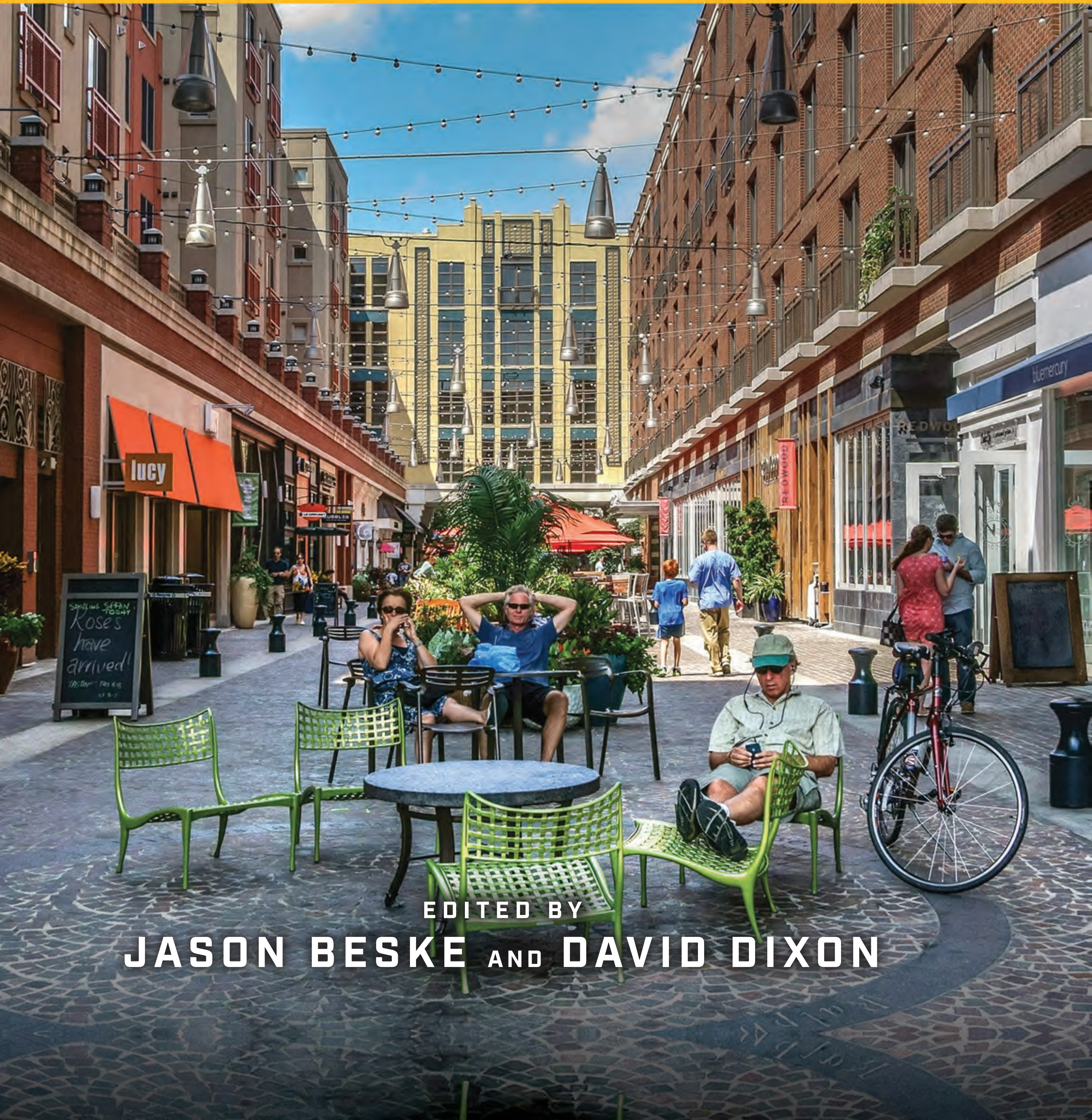
SUBURBAN REMIX

CREATING THE NEXT GENERATION OF URBAN PLACES



EDITED BY
JASON BESKE AND DAVID DIXON

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Several developers who have pioneered the field of walkable suburban places offered valuable reports. In particular, we thank Federal Realty Investment Trust for its willingness to provide photographs of its projects; Crawford Hoying for making so many materials from Bridge Park available to us; and the Reston Town Center Association for its insight, cooperation, and images.

Finally, we dedicate this book to Samuel, Benji, Giacomo, and all the other kids who will inherit the world we are creating.

Jason and David
May 2, 2017

SUBURBAN
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Figure 0.1. In the six decades after World War II, the classic suburban dream meant homogeneity, a growing middle class, two-parent families with children, and a single-family house. That era has ended. *Suburban Remix* describes how suburbs can invent and make real a suburban dream for today.

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From the Rise of Suburbs to the Great Reset

David Dixon

The story of American suburban development starts logically enough: America's earliest suburbs, spawned in the 1850s, made it possible for the wealthy to work by day in crowded, noisy commercial centers like Philadelphia, New York, and Boston, yet board a train to escape to new, semirural suburbs like Radnor, New Rochelle (see Figure 2.1), or Brookline. Equally important, these "garden suburbs" promised a return to the sense of community in the idealized small towns and English villages to which many affluent Americans aspired. Lively "downtowns" developed around suburban train stations and became the focus of small-town community life from Wellesley (outside Boston) to Evanston (outside Chicago).

As cars entered mainstream American life in the 1910s and 1920s, car-focused suburban schemes began to appear—often inspired by utopian ideals, such as those of England's Garden City movement, and drawn up on the assumption that suburbs would remain discrete, identifiable communities. The accessibility that the automobile promised meant that suburban communities could develop with no commercial district. The Depression and World War II suspended most suburban development, but during the era of rapid suburban growth that followed the war, the concept of a free-form suburb took root and flourished. The idea of a suburban downtown largely disappeared for more than 50 years. In these decades suburbs took on many of the qualities we recognize today. Prompted by prosperity, universal auto ownership, and racial fears, a rapidly expanding middle class pursued a new "American Dream" of mass-produced single-family houses on quarter-acre lots that offered an escape from work and the city. Suburban subdivisions brought assembly-line efficiency and market concentration (and limitations) to the housing market; in

Figure 2.2. In 1950 *Time* magazine estimated that Levitt and Sons was responsible for more than 10% of all housing produced in the United States.

1950 *Time* magazine estimated that Levitt and Sons was responsible for more than 10% of all housing produced in the United States (see Figure 2.2).[1]

From the 1960s through the 1980s Main Street merchants and the major downtown office tenants and retailers followed America's middle class to the suburbs. In response, developers began to broaden the palette of post–World War II suburban development beyond subdivisions and strip retail development to include new development forms that reproduced the traditional roles of Main Street and downtown. Strip retail centers appeared first, drawing shoppers from Main Street with convenient parking and the allure of "modernity." However, the 1950 opening of Southgate Center in suburban Detroit, the first enclosed shopping center, heralded a new trend. The mall itself soon included a movie theater and an office building. Malls like Old Villa Italia mall in Lakewood, outside of Denver (see Figure 2.3a, b), further undermined downtowns by drawing the

Figure 2.3a, b. The Belmar redevelopment replaced the once-thriving Old Villa Italia mall in Lakewood, outside of Denver. Opened in 2004, Belmar has served as a model for many walkable and higher-density suburban centers. Envisioned as roughly one million square feet of retail and office space, it has also attracted more than one million square feet of housing. (Villa Italia photo courtesy of the Lakewood Heritage Center, City of Lakewood)

Figure 2.4. Rosslyn in northern Virginia emerged as an early "edge city" in the 1970s and 1980s—and for many a safer alternative to downtown Washington, DC, just across the Potomac. (Brian Gratwicke under CC BY 2.0)

department stores that had long anchored Main Street. Suburban office parks began to proliferate, luring higher-income white collar jobs out of city centers and shifting the real estate tax burden increasingly to lower-income urban residents.

Ultimately a more significant development "product"— what journalist Joel Garreau labeled edge cities—accelerated the movement of the US economy from city to suburb. These higher-density but completely auto-oriented suburban centers, often built by a single developer, introduced office towers that outcompeted downtown as the center of economic activity in places like St. Louis (Clayton), Atlanta (Buckhead—outside downtown but still within the city limits), Tampa (West Shore), Columbus (Dublin—see Chapter 11), and Washington, DC (Rosslyn, Tysons Corner—see Chapter 12)[2,3] (see Figure 2.4). This exodus of employers from downtown to suburb also reinforced "white flight" from central residential neighborhoods, a development worth noting not just for historical accuracy but to underscore the change in circumstances today, in which demonstrating social and racial diversity has become a prerequisite for attracting knowledge workers.

Figure 2.5. Easton Town Center outside of Columbus is a highly successful lifestyle center, with retail lining re-created Main Streets and a town square.

Beginning in the 1980s and 1990s developers embraced still newer suburban development products that consciously mimicked qualities of traditional Main Streets and downtowns. Redevelopment transformed older malls into “lifestyle centers” that in effect turned malls inside out to face pseudo–Main Streets, often enclosing vast surface parking lots, and added cinemas and similar leisure attractions. Frequently cited examples include Mizner Park (Boca Raton, Florida), which replaced a dying mall, and Easton Town Center (suburban Columbus, Ohio), which today boasts roughly 2 million square feet of largely retail development (see Figure 2.5). At a still more ambitious level, major developers began to build de novo suburban downtowns—for example, Reston Town Center, outside of Washington, DC, and Belmar, outside of Denver.

Regional malls, edge cities, lifestyle centers, and de novo downtowns each broadened the forms of suburban development. They represented latter-day models of the suburban ethos that had predominated since World War II—new forms of commercial development shaped around economic and demographic homogeneity. They also represented

Figure 2.6. In 2015, New Rochelle, now a mature suburb of New York City, approved plans to redevelop the heart of its downtown as a high-density, contemporary urban center. (Courtesy of RXR Realty, master developer of downtown New Rochelle)

bold responses to changing office and retail markets, demonstrated ways to adapt to dramatic market changes, and recognized a yearning for a sense of intimate community that had inspired the first generation of American suburbs.

In fact the suburban boom that followed World War II drew not on nostalgia for community-rich small towns, but on a very different set of aspirations. The American Dream celebrated the individual, not community. Responding to the newfound freedom that near-universal auto ownership offered, it celebrated entry into the middle class and escape from the stresses of working-class urban life—no longer noise and smell so much as race and class. In the process, it replaced the traditional place-based (walkable) community that characterized urban Main Streets—the lifeblood for the "third places" (sociologist Ray Oldenburg's term for cafés, sidewalks, public parks[4]) that offer spontaneous opportunities for diverse interactions—with auto-oriented accesibility that ultimately proved to be isolating interaction with neighbors and unplanned activities. Ads for new subdivisions in the 1950s featured images of fathers happily mowing lawns, mothers showing off shiny new kitchens, and kids proudly standing with their parents in front of a two-car garage. These ads used language like "so up to date, so smart" and "live better in a home of your own"—and, of course, boasted about low prices made possible by mass-production efficiencies. They contained virtually no references to nostalgia for a sense of community found in earlier garden suburbs or small towns.

While some suburban communities are reinventing older downtowns as twenty-first-century mixed-use centers (e.g., the former garden suburb of New Rochelle; see Figure 2.6), most, predominantly single-use, auto-dependent suburbs, are ill prepared for a perfect storm of changing demographics, the rise of the knowledge economy, and rapidly shifting values.

The Great Reset: Demographics Are Destiny

The Great Reset, economist Richard Florida's term for the Great Recession of 2007–09, highlighted the impact of longer-term, structural changes laid bare by the recession that have come to dominate current thinking about urban and suburban growth and change.

The recession exposed a growing mismatch between North America's changing demographics, growing knowledge economy, shifting personal values, and spread of poverty from cities to suburbs on one side and the sprawl model that had defined suburban growth since World War II on the other. These trends emerged in the early 1990s, matured in the 2000s, and have since become the predominant forces shaping North American communities. Today suburbs have too much auto-dependent, single-family housing, for which

Figure 2.7. Fairfax County, which includes Lake Anne, one of five "villages" in Reston, is one of the most affluent counties in the United States and is widely admired for its schools and "family-friendly" services. (Jason Beske)

Figure 2.8. A food bank in Fairfax County, where poverty spiked 55% between 2008 and 2016, and the fastest-growing demographic group is people over 65. (Kona Gallagher under CC BY-SA 2.0)

demand is declining, and too little walkable, multifamily housing, for which demand is rising. Compounding this dynamic is the fact that North America's increasingly important knowledge economy is following its educated workforce to urban environments, whereas poverty is moving to suburbia.

An April 2016 *Washington Post* article captures the impact of these changes on one of America's most successful suburbs (see Figure 2.7): "For decades, Fairfax County has been a national model for suburban living [see Figure 2.7], a place of good governance and elite schools that educate children from some of the country's richest neighborhoods. But Virginia's largest municipality is fraying around the edges. A population that is growing older, poorer, and more diverse is sharpening the need for basic services in what is still the nation's second-wealthiest county, even as a sluggish local economy maintains a chokehold on the revenue stream."[5]

According to the *Post*, the number of people living in poverty in the county "spiked 55%" between 2008 and 2016.[6] Meanwhile, since 2000, more than one-third of the county's growth has consisted of people over 65 (see Figure 2.8) and 95% has consisted of people of color. Roughly two-thirds white in 2000, projections suggest Fairfax's population will have become roughly two-thirds nonwhite by 2030.

New Norm

There is a new norm for the general US population: society is growing younger and older—and raising fewer children. Year after year, decade after decade up to the early 2000s US population growth resembled a bell curve with a dramatic bulge of people between the ages of 35 and 65—prime years for living a life centered on kids, cars, and a house in the suburbs. But this pattern has reversed quickly and dramatically. Between 2010 and 2030, people younger than 35 and older than 65 will account for more than three-quarters of US population growth. During this period singles and couples will represent 75% or more of net new households (see Figure 2.9).

For suburbs, the baby boom of the mid-twentieth century has produced the senior boom of the early twenty-first century. Between 2010 and 2020 the number of people 65 and older living in suburbs will have increased by roughly 50%, making this group more than one-quarter of the total suburban population. Over the following 20 years, the fastest-growing suburban population segment will be people over 70.[7]

And while the share of US households with kids stood at 48% in1975, it had dropped to 37% by 2015 and is projected to fall to 25%, by 2025.[8] At the same time, the profile of family households has changed fundamentally; fewer than 10% were headed by a single parent in 1975, but that subset had grown to almost 50% by 2015 and is heading higher. Single-parent households are far more likely to prefer urban environments.[9] By 2025 two-parent households with children will represent only about 10% of all US households.

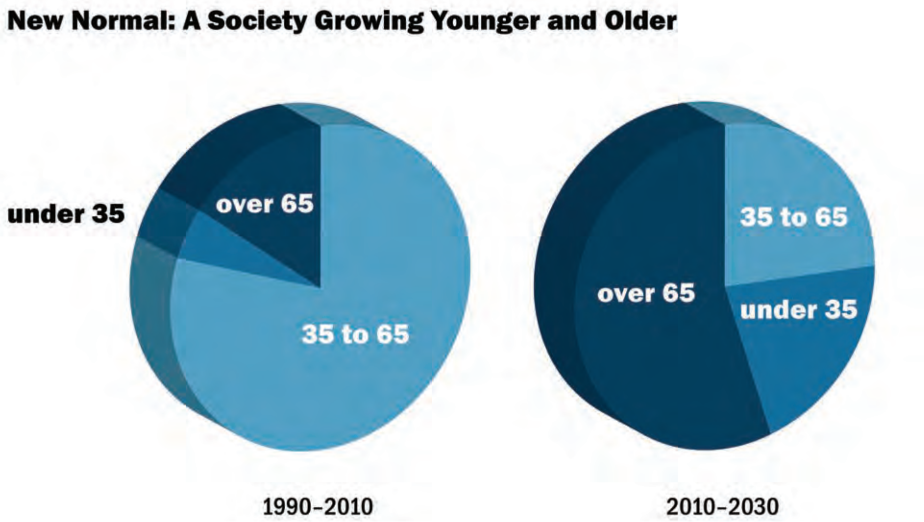

Figure 2.9. Roughly 75% of US population growth from 2010 to 2030 will be people younger than 35 and older than 65 and consist of singles and couples rather than families with kids. (Stantec graphic, based on data from Trulia.com)

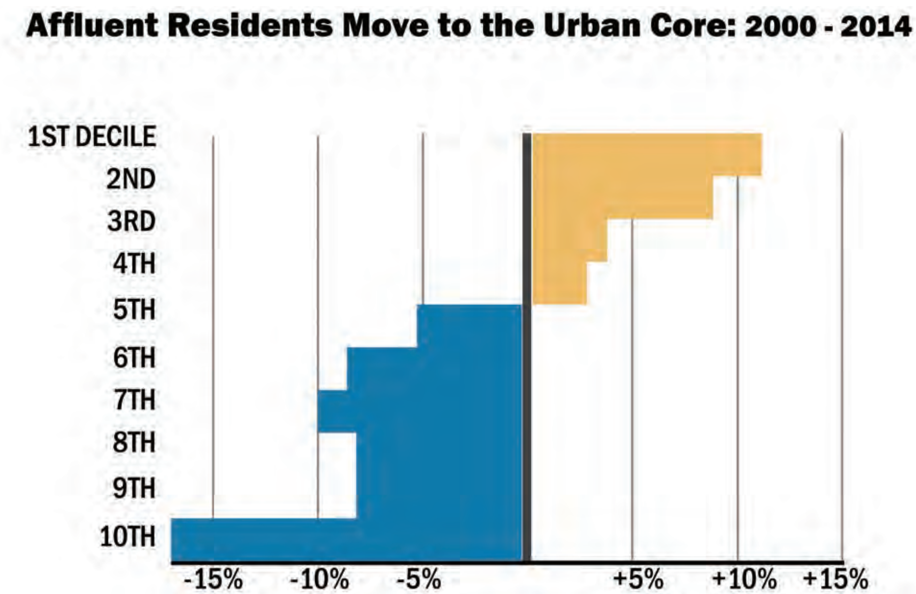

Figure 2.10. Urban cores are steadily becoming more affluent. Households with incomes in the bottom 60% are leaving because of rising housing costs, not a sudden desire to move somewhere else. (Stantec graphic, based on data for 2000–2014 from Trulia.com)

It's the Economy, Stupid

Writing for *Vox* in 2016, Matthew Yglesias noted that, on balance, people aged 25 to 49 (which includes millennials but also captures some of generation X) who have four or more years of higher education have been moving into "dense urban cores" since 2000, whereas those with less education had been moving out.[10] At the same time, looking across all ages, Yglesias noted that, "The top 20 percent of the population has become a lot more likely to live in a high-density urban neighborhood, and the next 20 percent is somewhat more likely. But the bottom 60 percent—and especially the bottom 10 percent—have become far less urbanized" (see Figure 2.10). These data do not suggest that lower-income households don't seek walkable lifestyles; instead they point to the rising costs of urban living.

Knowledge Jobs Follow Knowledge Workers

In addition to reshaping housing markets, younger, highly educated workers increasingly represent the key to growth in knowledge industries, which drive North American economic growth in most regions (see Figure 2.11). Demand for these workers outstrips supply at a time when growing numbers of aging knowledge workers are leaving the workforce. According to McKinsey & Company, in 2012 the United States already faced

Figure 2.11. Google's move into Bakery Square, in Pittsburgh's East End, reflects the importance tech companies place on following the knowledge workforce into reviving urban neighborhoods as well as booming downtowns. (Courtesy Walnut Capital)

a shortage of roughly 15 million knowledge workers[11] and the combination of an aging workforce and plateauing of students enrolled in higher education will exacerbate this shortage for two decades or more.

As a direct result, the real estate firm CBRE reported in 2016 that the top factor in selecting a new location for office users is "talent availability."[12] The knowledge economy that has taken over leadership in job creation and business investment is decamping to cities as employers calculate that the costs of high employee turnover outweigh higher rents and parking costs. According to McKinsey & Company knowledge workers (not just technology geeks but doctors, engineers, lawyers, managers, sales representatives) will account for most of the net US job growth over the last decade and today represent roughly 40% of all US jobs.[13]

Nor will telecommuting solve the problem. Companies point to the greater innovation and productivity that result from spontaneous, face-to-face communication.[14] Similarly, the more companies value innovation, the more they seek to cluster in higher-density,

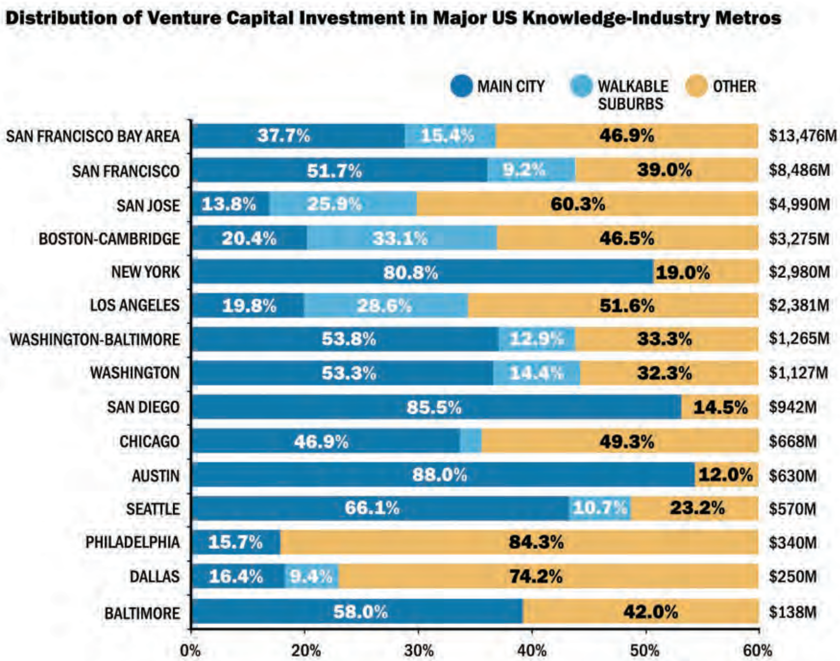

Figure 2.12. Venture capital is flowing to walkable urban places in suburbs in addition to urban cores. (Stantec graphic, based on 2015 data from CBRE Global Investors.com)

compact, walkable districts to promote interaction and shared discovery across industries. General Electric drew national attention in 2016 when it announced plans to move its headquarters from suburban Fairfield, Connecticut—an iconic midcentury suburb—to downtown Boston to be part of the innovation ecosystem there.

Small businesses and startups that generate a disproportionate share of better-paying new jobs and investment have led this trend. In June 2016, Richard Florida reported that "more than half of all startup neighborhoods are urban, with 57 percent of startup companies and 54 percent of venture-capital investments located in urban ZIP codes . . . [these] neighborhoods have considerably greater shares of commuters who walk, bike, or take transit to work."[15]

For several metros—notably San Francisco/Silicon Valley, Boston, Los Angeles, Dallas, Seattle, and Chicago—5% to as much as 33% of this investment is going to "walkable suburbs"[16] (see Figure 2.12). Suburban places ranging from the Research Triangle in Raleigh/Durham, North Carolina, to redeveloping Tysons Corner, Virginia (see Chapter 7), and communities such as Carmel, Indiana, and Dublin, Ohio (see Chapter 11), are creating walkable environments that compete for educated workers and venture capital—and demonstrating that the strategy works.

The Disappearing Middle

Rising demand from mid-twentieth-century households with children required an additional ingredient to support a suburban boom—a growing middle class (see Figure 2.13). Today the middle class is shrinking. Joshua Wright, who covers labor markets for *Forbes* magazine, explains how a knowledge economy has spurred this decline. In late 2013 he reported that 70 to 80% of all new US jobs created since 2000 had qualified either as "high-wage" or "low-wage" jobs.[17] Nor does this trend show any sign of reversing. In fact, 75% of all occupations projected to lose jobs support middle-class lifestyles. Wright noted that growth in knowledge industries also generates growth in "lower-paying service industries—more jobs for the baristas, cashiers, and retail clerks"—but shrinks the middle-class portion of the economic pie (see Figure 2.14). Even a much-discussed renaissance of US

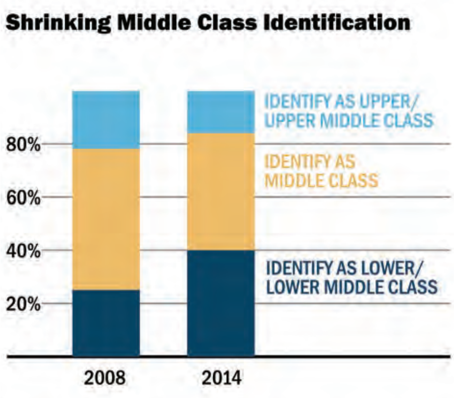

Figure 2.13. The share of Americans who identify as middle class has shrunk. (Stantec graphic based on data from billmoyers.com)

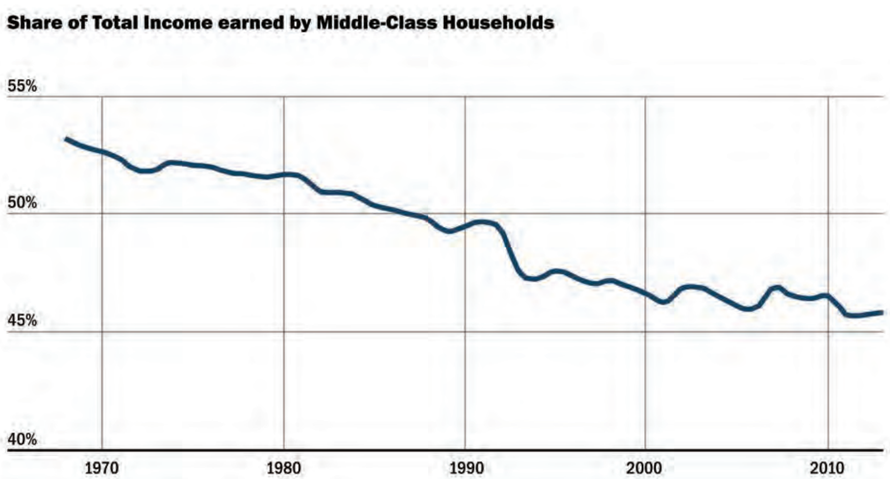

Figure 2.14. The middle 60% of households are earning a shrinking share of US income. (Stantec graphic based on data from U.S. Census Bureau)

manufacturing has tended to produce two categories of jobs—for highly educated, high-wage engineers and tech-savvy workers and for low-wage, nonunionized line workers.

The fastest growth in incomes has come at the higher end of the spectrum, whose economic power has ballooned. Between 1980 and 2017, real-dollar earnings growth for 90% of all Americans has risen roughly 15%. In contrast, real-dollar earnings for the top 10% of earners have shot up roughly 60%.[18] Meanwhile, as the knowledge economy has migrated into cities, lower-skill service jobs have increasingly moved to suburbs—and lower-income workers have followed.

Poverty Is Moving to the Suburbs

As the middle class shrinks, people living in poverty are moving to suburbs. As already noted, Fairfax County joins a surprisingly large group of suburbs across the United States whose perception as places of economic comfort masks a changing reality (see Figure 2.15). Data show that the number of people living in poverty in suburbs has

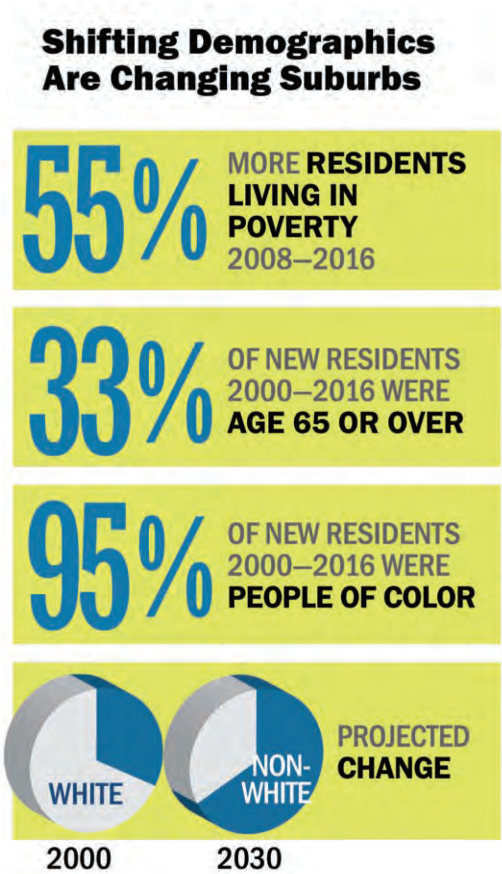

Figure 2.15. Poverty is growing much faster in suburbs than in cities. (Stantec graphic based on data from *The Washington Post*)

risen twice as fast as it has in cities since the 1970s, and this number jumped 64% between 2000 and 2010.[19] By 2013 more people in poverty lived in suburbs than in cities. Elizabeth Kneebone and Alan Berube capture the significance of this trend in *Confronting Suburban Poverty in America* (Brookings Institution, 2016): "For the first time, suburbs became home to not only the fastest-growing poor population in the country but also the largest."[20]

An analysis of suburban poverty data for America's 100 largest metros by Scott W. Allard and Sarah Charnes Paisner shows that poverty surged three times faster in suburban areas than in urban cores between 1990 and 2014. These 100 metros represent an excellent marker of how the United States and North America are growing and changing: they contain roughly two-thirds of the US population, a larger share of the US economy, and a still larger share of economic growth. By 2014 the suburban poor in these metros outnumbered those in the core by roughly 25%.[21] And while advocates have long championed the suburbs as an escape from the concentrated poverty and attendant crime, since the mid-2000s the concentration of poverty in suburbs has risen roughly twice as fast as in cities.[22] One result, reported by the Brookings Institution in 2011 is that, "In 90 of the 100 largest metro areas, the gap between city and suburban property crime rates narrowed from 1990 to 2008."[23]

Equal Opportunity Challenge

Dramatically rising suburban poverty has not been confined to specific types of suburbs, regions, or areas with especially strong or weak economies. According to Brookings's *Confronting Suburban Poverty in America*, "In prior decades, suburban poverty grew primarily in next-door 'inner suburbs' experiencing economic decline, particularly in struggling regions of the Midwest and Northeast. In contrast, poverty rose during the 2000s in fast-growing suburbs of booming regions like Phoenix as well as economically stagnant regions like Chicago. It could also be found in slow-growing and shrinking suburbs south of strong market cities like Seattle, and east and west of weak market cities like Cleveland."[24]

Much of the media attention has focused on growing poverty in mature, generally closer-in suburbs with an older housing stock. Indeed, the impacts on mature suburbs have been significant—Allard and Paisner's analysis of the 100 largest metros reported people living in poverty represented all the net population growth in these suburbs between 1990 and 2014 (see Figure 2.16). Yet faster-growing, newer, and generally farther-out suburbs are also experiencing a rapid increase in poverty, drawn by lower housing costs farther from the urban core.[25] The number of people living in poverty in these new suburbs grew by 135%, four times faster than poverty grew in urban cores and more than twice as fast as in mature suburbs (see Figure 2.17).

Figure 2.16. Between 1990 and 2014 all the net growth in mature suburbs (developed before 1970) in America's 100 largest metros consisted of people living in poverty, resulting in a new suburban sight—vacant and abandoned houses. (Richard Elzey under CC BY 2.0)

Figure 2.17. Between 1990 and 2014 the number of people living in poverty in newer suburbs (post-1970) more than doubled, increasing the volume of suburban foreclosures, particularly during the housing crash that began in 2007.

Regime Change: Shifting Perceptions of "Urban" and "Suburban"

Robert Campbell, the Pulitzer Prize–winning architecture critic of the *Boston Globe*, was one of the first observers to note a dramatic shift in perceptions of cities (see Figure 2.18). In the early 1990s Campbell noted the changing connotations that "urban" carried in popular culture. Pointing to headlines from the 1980s in which "urban" was used to describe particularly horrific crime, excessive crowding, and grim neighborhoods, he pointed to the new reality that in the early 1990s "urban" had taken on new associations like "cool," "edgy," and, increasingly, "upscale," and that most successful new network TV comedies of the period had urban, rather than suburban, settings.

The demographic and economic trends described earlier would have had less impact if they hadn't coincided with dramatic reversals in popular conceptions of cities and suburbs. Cities have come to be seen as healthier places to live; "urban," rather than "suburban," means more sustainable; and car ownership appears, for many, to limit rather than expand personal independence.

Figure 2.18. A derogatory term for much of the period after 1960, the word "urban" evoked images like this adult cinema in Boston, shown in the 1970s. Today "urban" suggests amenity and expensive housing. An upscale restaurant now occupies this historic theater building; its peep-show neighbors have given way to high-end apartments and condominiums, including a Ritz-Carlton Hotel. (City of Boston Archives under CC BY 2.0)

Urban Is Healthy

In 2004 *The New Yorker* published a much-discussed article (expanded into a book published in 2009[26]) that challenged traditional views on the connection between health and place. What got "Green Manhattan" noticed was writer David Owen's argument that Manhattan was a healthier place to live than its suburbs—because its residents walked. That assertion flew in the face of conventional wisdom. The belief that suburbs promoted health was a key argument for the first garden suburbs and was probably correct at the time. However, the perception has outlasted evolving urban reality.

Owen's article may not have exploded that perception by itself, but it reflected an emerging understanding, reinforced by subsequent studies linking the greater walkability of urban environments with better public health outcomes[27] than in typical suburban neighborhoods. University of Utah researchers found that men who lived in walkable neighborhoods weighed 10 pounds less than men in low-density neighborhoods. Another study found that auto fatalities—the leading cause of accidental deaths in the United States—rise roughly 400% along a continuum of density that extends from a city's center to its outer edges.[28] A European study reports a direct correlation between higher densities and fewer sick days at work.[29] More ominously, in 2015 the American Heart Association reported that between 1960 and 2015 the share of "physically active" jobs shrank from half to 20% of all US jobs.[30] Today Owen's article would surprise few readers. Walkable urban environments are considered healthier places to live.

Walkable Is Green

Owen's *New Yorker* article also exploded another popular myth—that suburbs were better for the environment than cities—going so far as to assert that Manhattanites had a smaller carbon footprint than residents of rural Vermont (and by a considerable margin). University of California at Berkeley researchers project that, primarily due to increased driving, "The average carbon footprint of households living in the center of large, population-dense urban cities is about 50 percent below [the US] average, while households in distant suburbs are up to twice the [US] average."[31]

When housing economists Laurie Volk and Todd Zimmerman (see Chapter 3) describe housing priorities today as reflected in market demand, sustainability ranks near the top; big yards and easy highway access no longer do. Developers compete to make sustainability claims, increasingly making their case by pursuing LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) gold- or even platinum-level certifications.[32]

Auto Dependence Is Expensive

Auto dependence and associated low-density development also impose increasingly recognized burdens on individuals and their communities. Making the case that lower transportation costs were a factor favoring urban housing markets, Christopher B. Leinberger (see Chapter 1) reported in 2010 that, "Households in drivable suburban neighborhoods devote on average 24 percent of their income to transportation; those in walkable neighborhoods spend about 12 percent . . . nationally, that amounts to $700 billion a year."[33] If anything, this gap has increased in subsequent years.[34]

Even before awareness of the economic costs of auto dependence took hold widely, North Americans had begun expressing concern about the costs of auto dependence. The Urban Land Institute's *America in 2015* study reported that "63% of Millennials prefer living in a 'car-optional' neighborhood."[35] For many decades roadway construction kept pace with increases in total miles driven in many regions. However, in the 1990s adding lanes became increasingly difficult due to environmental and cost constraints. The result? A spike in congestion, with measures of hours lost to congestion shooting up as traffic continued to increase. Analyzing the 2015 Brookings Institution report, *The Growing Distance between People and Jobs in Metropolitan America,* City Observatory reported that, "In the 50 largest metro areas, sprawl costs commuters [an additional] 3.9 billion hours per year—or the equivalent of almost 100 million work weeks.[36]

How Walkable Urban Centers Help Suburbs Adapt to Change

The adage "drive 'til you qualify" has a hollow ring today, as people contemplate the complex trade-offs posed by the health, environmental, and economic costs of auto dependence—along with their own preference for walkable, mixed-use places that promote a sense of community. Bringing the benefits of urban density to suburbs increasingly looks like a pragmatic response to the ills of suburbia. As one leader in Sandy Springs, an

Figure 2.19. In Sandy Springs, a suburb of Atlanta, residents developed a shared vision for City Springs, a new mixed-use downtown centered around a performing arts center and a town green. (City of Sandy Springs)

affluent Atlanta suburb known for its staunch defense of traditional suburban qualities, proclaimed at a meeting to discuss a new downtown, “Today, this is the right thing to do” (see Figure 2.19).

Shifting Markets

Virginia’s Fairfax County is revising its planning and development policies to adapt to changing circumstances. A fundamental challenge the county shares with most suburbs is the growing imbalance between the supply and demand for detached single-family houses. As the number of aging Americans begins to far outnumber new households with children, Chris Nelson calculates that the United States already had more single-family suburban housing in 2010 than it would need to meet projected demand in 2030. Not surprisingly, Fairfax County is planning for a future in which 85% of all new housing built by 2035 will be multifamily.[37]

Reporting on a study by Nelson for *The Atlantic*’s CityLab website, Emily Badger likens the bulge in baby boomers moving through the demographic cycle to the proverbial very large (and hard-to-digest) mammal that, having been swallowed, is making its way through a python: “In the 20 years between 1990 and 2010, [baby boomers] were at their peak family size and peak income. And suddenly, there was massive demand in America from the same kinds of people for the same kinds of housing: big, large-lot single-family homes (often in suburbia). In those two decades . . . 77 percent of demand for new housing construction in America was driven by this trend.”[38] Nelson translates this metaphor into numbers: “If there’s 1.5 to 2 million homes coming on the market every year at the end of this decade from senior households’ selling off, who’s behind them to buy? My guess is not enough [buyers].” Nelson quantifies the imbalance—suggesting an annual surplus of 200,000 houses by 2020 that rises to 500,000 by 2030, a significant impact, given that the total of all houses sold in the US between 2010 and 2016 averaged around 5.5 million annually (see Figure 2.20).

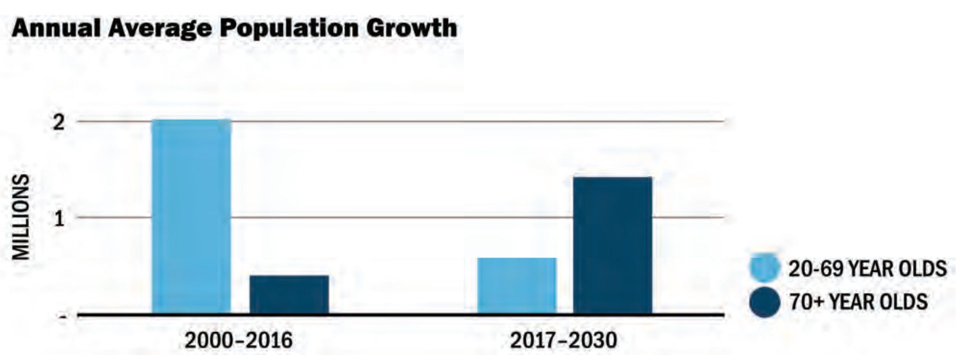

Figure 2.20. Aging suburban populations raise the specter of too many older sellers chasing too few younger buyers when they decide to sell their homes. (Stantec graphic, based on data from ZeroHedge.com)

Fairfax County sees opportunities in change. It is adapting its policies to guide growth to higher-density, higher-value, mixed-use urban centers like Tysons (see Chapter 7)—responding to good news in Nelson's study that indicates that the large majority of aging boomers won't seek to abandon suburbs for cities or rural communities (see Figure 2.21). Instead, they prefer places that combine the perceived safety, relative affordability, and welcome familiarity of suburbs with the walkability, amenities, and convenience of urban lifestyles.[39] A Freddie Mac survey of 6,000 baby boomer homeowners over age 55 backs up this perspective and suggests that more than 70% of older homeowners want to rent once they sell their house—and that this shift from owning to renting could result in five million boomers moving from owned to rented housing by 2020.[40] These boomers may depress suburban real estate tax bases by selling millions of houses over a relatively short period, but they also represent a potent market for higher-density, higher-value redevelopment of outmoded, low-density strip retail and office parks.

Ellen Dunham-Jones, leader of the urban design program at Georgia Tech and co-author with June Williamson of the influential *Retrofitting Suburbia*, sheds more light on senior housing preferences, reporting that more than two-thirds of aging baby boomers say they would prefer to live within walking distance of transit—generally defined as

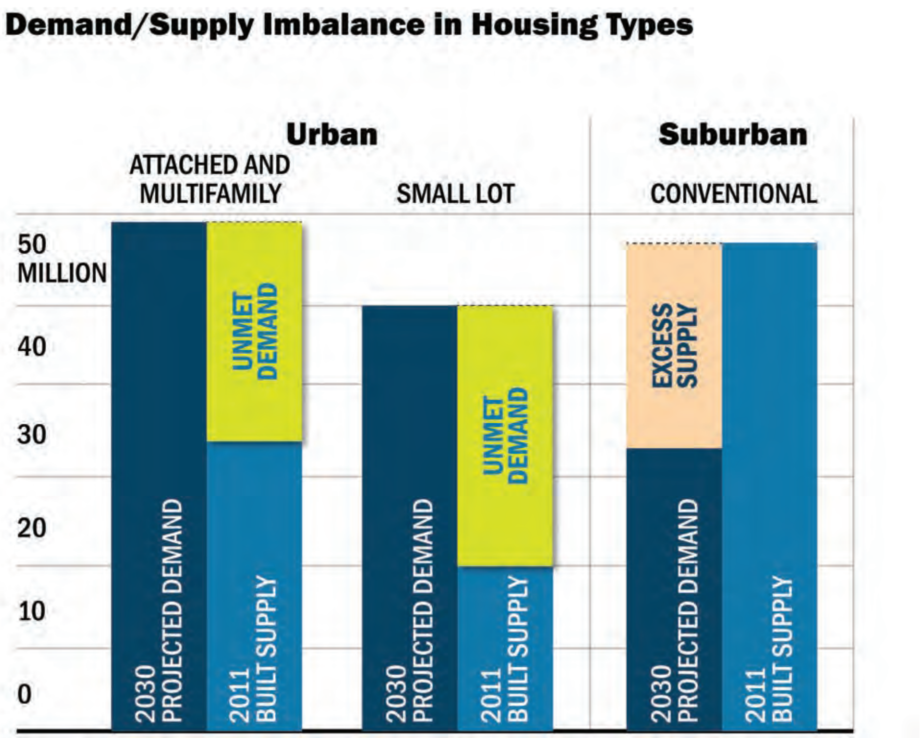

Figure 2.21. Demographic shifts have produced a shortfall of "urban" housing types in cities and suburbs alike.

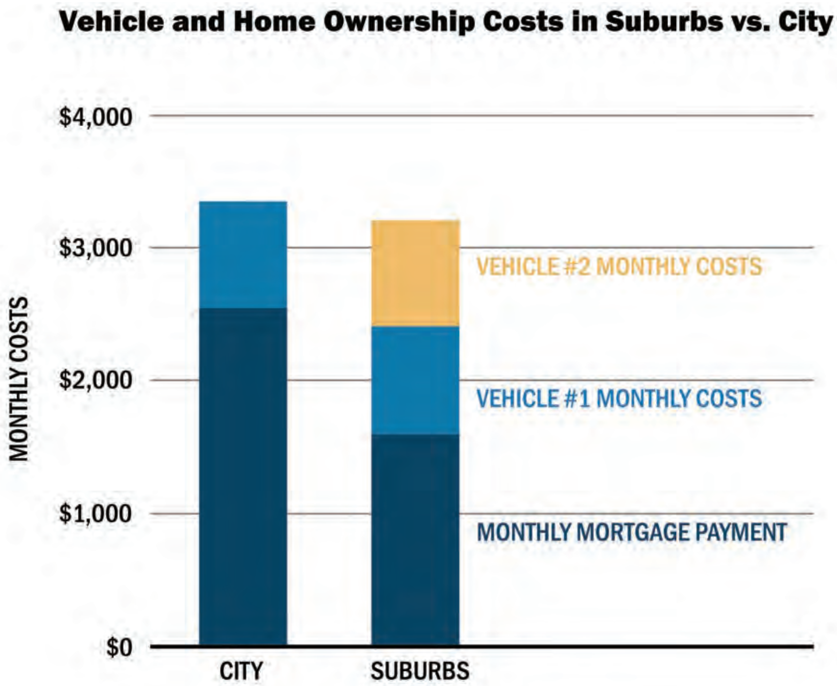

Figure 2.22. Urban densities support walking, public transit, and other mobility choices that significantly reduce household transportation costs. (Stantec graphic, based on data from Money After Graduation.com)

within a quarter mile.[41] Putting Nelson, Freddie Mac, and Dunham-Jones's observations together suggests a sizable market foundation for higher-density, mixed-use urban centers, particularly in light of the relative scarcity of high-quality suburban rental housing in walkable settings. This market should reach several hundred thousand units per year by the early 2020s. Christopher B. Leinberger (see Chapter 1) notes growing support in suburban communities for walkable centers because they prop up property values. CEOs for Cities research backs Leinberger's observation, concluding that higher WalkScores (a measure of the relative number of destinations within walkable distance of each other) correlate with higher housing prices (see Figure 2.22).[42]

Fiscal Challenges

Affluent Fairfax County faces fiscal challenges as it positions itself to address the impacts of growing poverty, an aging population, and increasing racial and ethnic diversity. The County's $3 billion annual budget faces a $300 million shortfall. Driven in large part by the costs of meeting the needs of a much more economically, racially, and ethnically diverse student body, County funding for schools shot up from $1.4 billion in 2005 to $2 billion in 2015 (see Figure 2.23).[43]

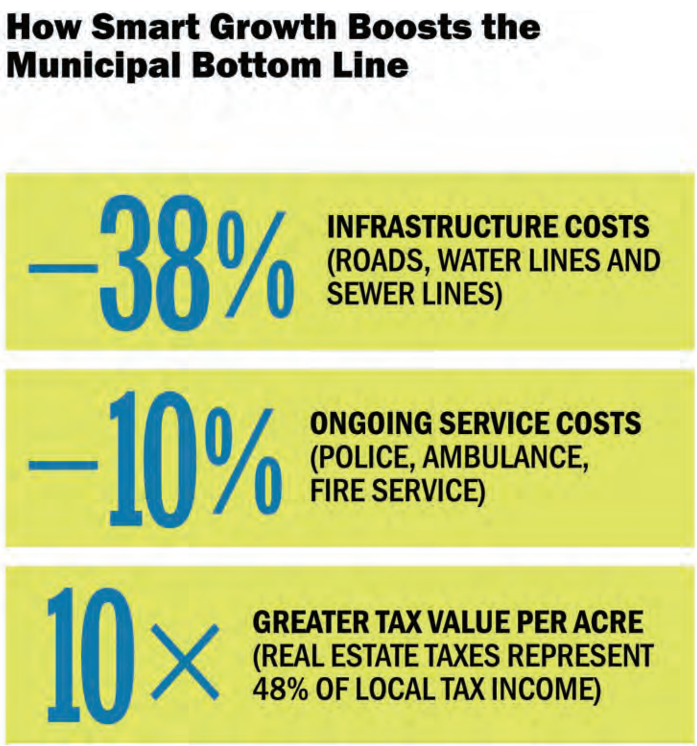

Figure 2.23. Walkable urban centers create significant fiscal benefits for suburbs. (Stantec graphic, based on data from Building Better Budgets by Smart Growth America)

For decades suburbs balanced relatively high fiscal costs of serving low-density, spread-out communities with lower service costs associated with their more affluent, younger populations. Today aging and poor populations are tipping that balance—in the wrong direction. Seventy percent of people who reach age 65 (or roughly 20% of the total suburban population by 2020) will experience the kinds of disabilities that generate demand for wellness and social services.[44] People living in poverty require a broad range of job training, wellness, family support, and similar services. Both groups are heavily dependent on suburban public transit, which generally is not up to the task. A study by the Rockefeller Foundation found that for lower-income suburbs across the United States, limited bus services means transit provides access to only 4% of the jobs within a 45-minute drive.[45]

For suburbs facing growing fiscal strains, walkable urban places can produce significant fiscal benefits. Joe Minicozzi, principal and founder of Urban 3 consultants, has done pioneering work in helping communities evaluate the fiscal trade-offs in shifting from traditional auto-oriented, low-density development to higher-density, walkable development models. He studied 36 communities across the United States and found that replacing a Walmart or retail strip with a three- to six-story, mixed-use development increased taxes per acre by a factor of roughly 8 to 25 or more.[46] These fiscal benefits far outweigh any added infrastructure and service costs. Minicozzi notes that, "More and more suburbs cannot afford the land use and development patterns today that they approved forty years ago. To pay for the services, transportation, and education systems that their 21st-century constituents need, these suburbs need to tap the latent value buried under outmoded malls and office parks by turning them into lively, walkable urban places that are worth ten to twenty-times as much in today's real estate economy."[47]

Moving Past Melting Pots to Become Multicultural

As they trade a self-perception of racial and economic homogeneity for an appreciation of newfound diversity, Fairfax County's leaders express growing interest in creating places in which different kinds of people don't just live side by side, but also come together, interact, and build a sense of shared community. Higher-density, walkable, mixed-use urban centers can generate the critical mass of activity to support sociologist Ray Oldenburg's third places—the diverse restaurants, cafés, and coffee shops; libraries; cinemas and other entertainment venues; stores; cultural venues; a city hall; social service agencies,[48] and other activities—that invite people to cross lines of race, ethnicity, income, and other distinctions.

Reese Fayde, former president of Living Cities, a consortium of some of America's largest foundations working to invest more than $1 billion in revitalizing US cities, talks about the specific role that density plays in transforming diversity into community:

"One of the greatest challenges we had was making diversity work. Community came naturally when you looked like each other or were related to many of your neighbors—but those days are gone in cities and suburbs. One advantage cities have today . . . and suburbs can build the same advantage . . . is what I call 'the fog of density'—urban places where no one stands out and everyone is on a sort of equal footing because there are lots of people of different ages, races, ethnicities, lifestyles—you name it—living, working, playing, shopping . . . no one 'owns' these places. They can be everyone's community."[49]

"Disruptive" Change in Mobility

Computers, cell phones, and social media launched disruptive changes in how we live, work, and play. Over the next decade autonomous mobility will launch another round of disruption, with profound—but on balance distinctly positive—implications for walkable urban places in cities and suburbs alike. Although individually owned autonomous vehicles (AVs) will likely promote sprawl as commuters read, work, or nap unencumbered by driving, the real story will be the rapid growth of shared autonomous vehicles (SAVs). Over the next five years SAVs will become familiar sights in compact, dense urban places that support a critical mass of people and trips. More important, they will outcompete private cars based on cost, convenience, and environmental benefits.

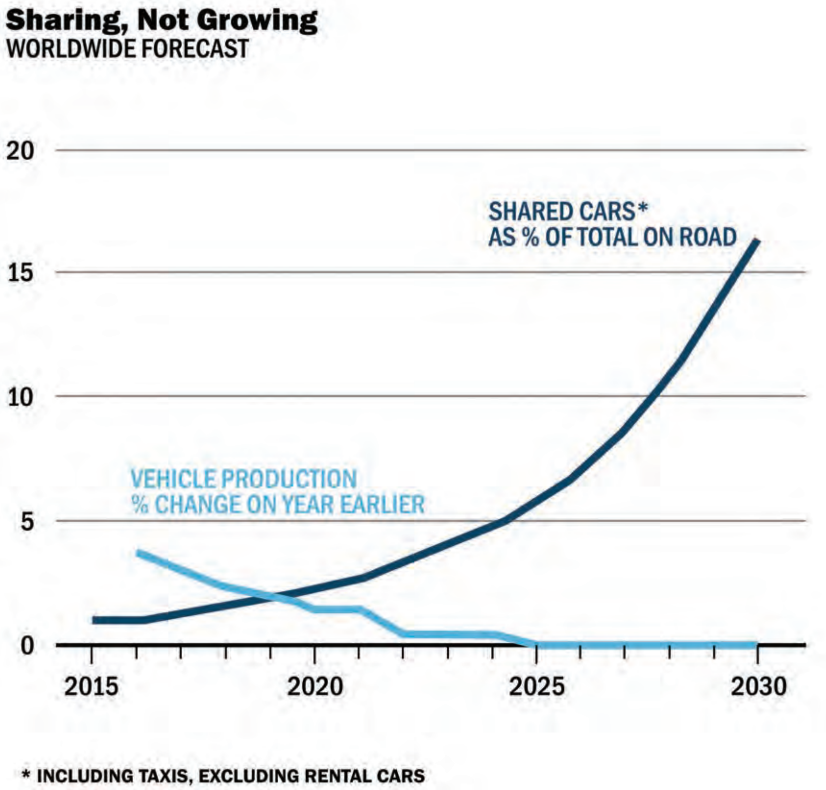

Figure 2.24. By the mid-2020s, shared autonomous vehicles will represent all of the growth in global auto production. (Stantec graphic, based on data from Morgan Stanley)

In turn, SAVs will reduce development costs by removing much of the demand for parking (as much as 25% in initial stages, as SAVs magnify the impact of ride-sharing services, and up to 80% by the late 2030s), increase development (and fiscal) values by offering convenient connections to transit and other destinations, and enhance livability by making mobility more convenient. Perhaps most compelling, Rod Schebesch, leader of Stantec Consulting's autonomous vehicles research program, notes, "Looking across North America, switching from owning one car to using SAVs would save the average household roughly $5,000 every year—and this is before taking advantage of the fact that SAVs drop you off and you don't have to pay for parking."[50]

SAVs will play the same synergistic role for North America's twenty-first-century demographics and knowledge economy that universal automobile ownership played for baby boomers and a growing industrial economy more than a half century ago. SAVs will reinforce a pro-urban lifestyle and market preferences and provide a catalyst for expanded compact, walkable development in cities and suburbs alike. A 2017 advisory bulletin by Morgan Stanley to its investors, "Car of the Future Is Shared, Autonomous, Electric," emphasized how close and dominant this mobility revolution will be. Among its projections, Morgan Stanley advised clients that by 2025 electric SAVs would dominate growth in global auto production (see Figure 2.24).

A Cautionary Note

Roughly 60% of US suburbanites live in communities where the median household income equals or surpasses $66,000 per year, meaning household incomes exceed the nationwide median by 20% or more. These suburbs are not only more likely to be able to afford the initial infrastructure investments (e.g., a new street grid) often required to launch a new urban center and attract private investment, but they are also more likely to be in regions with real estate markets that can support development of higher-density, mixed-use, walkable urban places. These suburbs can capitalize on surging real estate markets for high-quality multifamily housing (Dublin, outside of Columbus, see Chapter 11); draw on a strong knowledge economy (Bellevue—see Chapter 13), or pursue transit-oriented development (Tysons, outside of Washington, DC, see Chapter 7) to create higher-density, mixed-use urban places. These urban places in turn attract higher-income, educated residents who pump energy and dollars into their communities. Real estate recessions are inevitable, but the underlying demographic and economic logic of creating new urban environments in suburbs will remain compelling well into the 2030s.

Roughly 25% of suburbanites live in communities with median household incomes close to the nationwide US median of around $56,000 per year. These suburbs may have fewer resources to invest in initial infrastructure and at the same time may need to offer tax or other incentives to attract private investment. However, many of them may be able to tap unmet regional demand to help create vibrant new walkable urban places.

The remaining 15% of suburban residents live in communities where household incomes lag the nationwide US median. They face much greater challenges. Without significant public investment in new transit or a regionally significant educational or medical facility or similar draw, these suburbs risk losing aging residents downsizing from single-family houses and with no prospect of relocating to an urban environment in the same community. Miami Township, outside of Dayton (see Chapter 8), demonstrates that strong local leadership can help such communities figure out ways to benefit from demographic and economic trends and negotiate the transition from sprawl to new urban Main Streets, but they will face a tougher path than their more affluent peers.

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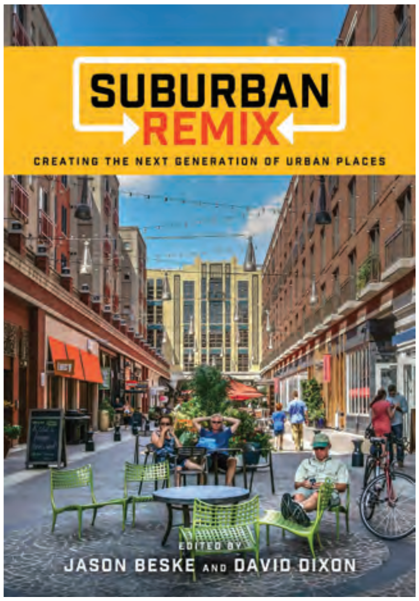

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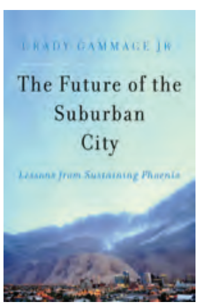

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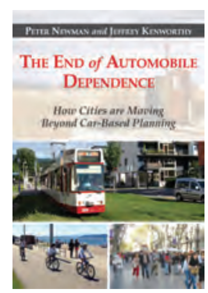

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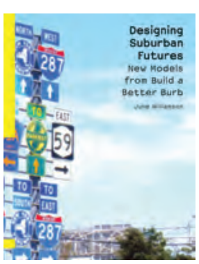

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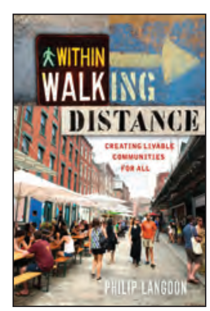

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