Rightsizing Shrinking Cities: A new perspective on urban design for the U.S. city

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Abstract

Urban policymakers have begun to use 'rightsizing' as a term for the mismatch between shrinking city populations, physical plants, and budgets. Built for population often over twice as large as current exists, shrinking cities have increasingly found themselves with an unmanageable quantity of streets, utilities, and housing. 'Rightsizing' describes the yet-unproved process of bringing a city to a 'right' size proportionate to government's contemporary fiscal capacity. Detroit, the United States' largest shrinking city, has wrestled with rightsizing for several years (Economist 2010, Bloomberg 2012). Rightsizing is in reality a difficult proposition for shrinking cities, particularly in the United States where planning is decentralized and market-driven. Nor have scholars nor practitioners given enough thought to questions about rightsizing actually means, such as: What physical form and size should shrinking cities take? How do city officials decide who should live where, and whether relocation is necessary? Who will pay for rightsizing? Is there a long-term rightsizing vision, or will policymakers follow current imperatives? This paper argues that scholars and policymakers should consider urban design as an important part of any rightsizing vision for the shrinking city. Today's population and housing losses present designers and planners with an unparalleled opportunity better shape a built environment that also meets shrinking cities' economic and social needs. As the visual landscape of shrinking cities is, for many, their most disturbing feature (Vergara 2003, Moore and Levine 2010, Marchand and Meffre 2010), urban design seems an obvious means to reshape these cities not only for a post-decline existence, but to explore new neighborhood and even urban design ideals. This paper examines contemporary design ideals applied to the shrinking city, including New Urbanism, landscape urbanism, and everyday urbanism, before discussing a fourth urban design ideal, patchwork urbanism, derived in part from Lynch's (1960) idea of the polycentered net. I conclude by suggesting policy directions that might begin to implement patchwork urbanism in the shrinking city.

Introduction

Recently urban policymakers have made 'rightsizing' a watchword for the perceived mismatch between shrinking city populations, physical and infrastructural plants, and budgets. Built for a population in some cases over twice as large as that currently within the city limits, shrinking cities have found themselves, particularly since 2007's fiscal crisis, with an unmanageably large array of streets, utilities, public buildings, parks and housing. 'Rightsizing' has emerged as a word for the yet-unproved process of somehow bringing cities down to a 'right' size; in other words, to a size proportionate to city government's ability to pay for itself. Even Detroit, America's largest shrinking city, has been discussing rightsizing for several years (*Economist* 2010, *Detroit News* 2010).

On the surface, then, 'rightsizing' has been a difficult if not impossible proposition for shrinking cities in the United States, as citizens unsurprisingly resist compulsory relocation in cities like New Orleans (Campanella 2008, 344-350) and discussions over infrastructure shutdown in cities like Detroit are fraught with conflict as well (Bloomberg 2012). Nor have scholars or practitioners far given much thought as to what rightsizing actually means. What physical form and size should the city take after abandonment? Is there an ultimate vision of the city guiding rightsizing, or will policymakers guide rightsizing by following immediate imperatives?

This paper, part of a larger series of investigations of urban design in shrinking cities (Ryan 2012, Ryan 2013 forthcoming) proposes a dual argument; first, that urban design should be considered as a primary lens through which to view the physical future of the shrinking city. Given that many consider the visual landscape of shrinking cities to be their most striking and disturbing feature (Vergara 2003, Moore and Levine 2010, Marchand and Meffre 2010), urban design seems an obvious means by which planners and designers might reshape these cities for their lives after decline and by extension, explore new forms of the ideal urban neighborhood and, perhaps, the ideal city. Yet in the United States, physical visions for the shrinking city have been shaped as much by indirect strategies (e.g. demolition) as they have been by conscious

formal visions. The paper begins with a brief description of the nature of abandonment in shrinking cities, before discussing an agenda for urban design.

Second, this paper proposes that contemporary, widely circulated urban design ideals for the shrinking city are inadequate, as they fail to confront and accommodate the distinct and peculiar physical realities of these places, and that an additional urban design vision is therefore needed. The paper briefly reviews four contemporary urban design ideals: New Urbanism (e.g. Duany et. al, 2003), landscape urbanism (e.g. Waldheim 2006), and everyday urbanism (e.g. Chase et. al. 2008), before proposing a fourth, patchwork urbanism, derived in part from Lynch's (1960) theory of the polycentered net. The paper concludes with some projections of potential implementation mechanisms for this urban design ideal.

A brief description of abandonment

The built environment of shrinking cities is first and foremost characterized by abandonment. Therefore any urban design strategy for these places will have to contend with abandonment before all else[*]. Abandonment in shrinking cities is problematic at multiple scales. While planners often consider abandonment at the individual scale of a single building or parcel, abandonment also occurs at the scale of the city block, neighborhood, and city as a whole, causing different problems at different scales. This section will consider these different scales before reviewing contemporary city- and neighborhood-scale urban design strategies to resolve the problems of abandonment.

In a shrinking city, abandoned structures and lots are serious problems, and confronting the abandonment of individual structures often demands a substantial amount of policymaker attention directed to shrinking areas. Recent citywide demolition programs such as Philadelphia's Neighborhood Transformation Initiative (Stern 2012) and Buffalo's "5 in 5" program (five thousand units demolished in five years) (Ryan et. al. 2010a) act on a citywide

[*] In this paper, 'abandonment' is considered to mean permanently vacant buildings as well as the vacant land that results from the demolition of such structures.

basis to clear derelict structures but use only individual dwelling criteria (unit condition) as a means of action. American city officials have thus far made larger-scale assessments of abandonment only in a reactive context, such as when a proposal was imminent, or as part of a larger, citywide statistical analysis (e.g. The Reinvestment Fund, 2001).

Shrinking-city abandonment is just as challenging as the policy-directed neighborhood demolition of the 1950s excoriated by Jacobs (1961), Anderson (1964) and other critics of urban renewal. This is because abandonment in shrinking cities occurs more or less on an undirected, piecemeal basis as individuals decide whether or not to remain in their homes. Understanding the piecemeal nature of abandonment in shrinking cities is essential to understanding the nature of urban design problems these places face.

Because decline is episodic and scattered rather than neat and organized, when and if each individual property will become abandoned is difficult to predict. Since the status and condition of properties can shift, adjoining homes are vulnerable as well. On a block where owners are abandoning property piecemeal, block-scale stability is difficult, for as abandonment continues, the collective benefit of more concentrated housing is lost, and each resident's individual incentive to abandon their property would seem to increase. As abandonment progresses, individual parcels are vacated in a generally scattered fashion. Ideally, up to fifty percent of parcels might be vacated without any two adjoining parcels being vacant together. But real abandonment patterns are different; a quick aerial survey of a place such as Flint, Michigan indicates that remaining houses sometimes cluster and sometimes do not. At high (above seventy percent) vacancy rates, remaining houses become islands in a sea of green. This pattern is most apparent at a large scale in places such as Detroit's eastside or the northern half of St. Louis.

Scattered parcel abandonment with interspersed remaining houses persists even at high levels of vacancy. In Buffalo for example, except in blocks purposefully cleared by public action or through demolition of large, single-lot industrial buildings, some housing always persists. At the

block group scale, no cluster of blocks in Buffalo was ever more than 71 percent vacant (Ryan et. al. 2010a). Even in a ninety percent vacant area, one resident wishing to remain in her home will require officials to condemn the property if they wish to make an entire block available for redevelopment.

At the citywide scale, piecemeal, house-by-house abandonment leads to patchiness, where large areas of the city may have high vacancy while other areas have only minimal vacancies. Again, our analysis of Buffalo showed 50 percent of the city's census block groups at least 10 percent vacant, and that about 20 percent of those parcels (about 10 percent of Buffalo's census block groups/total), were over 50 percent vacant (Ryan et. al. 2010a). In Buffalo and doubtless in other shrinking cities as well, vacancy ebbed and flowed across space in a pattern that was never neat, always irregular, always shifting, and always interrupted by remaining structures on a more or less random basis. Over time these piecemeal patches of abandonment tended to grow, spreading from high-vacancy areas into some but not all adjoining lower-vacancy areas (Ryan et. al. 2010a). This patchwork abandonment can be seen in schematic form in Figures 1 and 2 and at a smaller scale in Figures 5 and 6.

An urban design social ideal: reconnecting design to social policy

Any move toward an urban design strategy for rightsizing shrinking cities will not be easy. A principal challenge is the need for such strategies to reconcile differences between socially-oriented planning and urban design that have existed for decades. While many theorists have argued that design must necessarily consider political, economic, and social function (Lynch 1981, Cuthbert 2006), integration has proven problematic. In planning, advocacy advocates like Davidoff (1965) signaled a theoretical shift toward values centered around social justice and economic efficiency. Ultimately, these shifts resulted in a profession divorced almost entirely from design (Dagenhart and Sawicki 1992). Similarly, architecture separated from social concerns (Tschumi 1975) as High Modernism wound down amidst skepticism of design. After

1975, urban redevelopment in the United States shifted from ambitious, modernist-inspired work promoted by the state to modest postmodern-styled projects (Ryan 2012, 8-16).

Yet one may also discern surviving links between innovative urban design and liberal social policies. Beginning in the 1970s community organizing generated the occasional innovative design such as Villa Victoria in Boston's South End that linked partially abstract Modernist architecture with social housing while respecting the urban design of its surroundings (Rowe 1993). In the 1990s Philadelphia's Office of Housing comprehensively redesigned Lower North Philadelphia with moderate-density, low-income housing (Kromer 2001, 2010, Ryan 2012, 147-161). Design was not a signal feature there, but Philadelphia's ambitious planning approach was reminiscent of such signal late Modern accomplishments such as the Yorktown houses constructed from 1960 to 1970 in Philadelphia (OHCD 1996) and the St. Lawrence development of Toronto from the 1970s (Gordon 1989, Klemek 2011).

The threads linking formally ambitious urban design to social action have become thin and frayed since the end of Modernism in the 1970s, but a renewed urban design agenda for rightsizing shrinking cities, if put into practice by committed policymakers, might begin to regenerate these threads. I propose that such an agenda be *interventionist*, *critical*, and *benevolent* in order to improve upon the modest and ineffective urban design strategies that shrinking cities are currently pursuing.

Interventionist urban design is committed to large-scale, comprehensive action across a wide area of space. Such large-scale action by and in the public interest characterized high-quality urban renewal efforts such as Yorktown in Philadelphia, but since the end of urban renewal interventionism in shrinking cities has been limited to occasional projects such as Philadelphia's Poplar Nehemiah. *Critical* urban design questions existing modes of practice, such as the nostalgic bent of neotraditional urbanism, and projects innovative formal and social strategies to address new or emerging social needs, as Boston's Villa Victoria (Rowe 1993) did so well. Critical urban design attempts to move beyond current-day conventional wisdoms to attain

different configurations of spaces, buildings, and activities. Lastly, *benevolent* urban design is committed to acting in the interest of disempowered or under-served city residents ranging from low-income renters to members of the middle class. Benevolent urban design recognizes the needs of the least powerful amidst more powerful urban residents while preventing the egregious stigmatization of the poor and "spatial pathology" of mid-20th century Modernist urban designs (Plunz 1990).

A renewed urban design agenda committed to critical and benevolent interventionism is more radical than it seems. Even Fainstein's (2000) call for a more "just" urban planning saw urban design as only a partial part of her agenda. But providing for society's less privileged should not be an invisible project, and the rebuilding of shrinking cities demands concern for the built environment. This condition therefore suggests that urban policymakers and designers use urban design to provide rebuilding with maximum public visibility. Innovative spatial solutions to these longstanding problems could occupy the foreground of American urbanism and restore the weakened connections between design and social policy.

Contemporary urban design ideals in the shrinking city

Designers will not find a rightsizing vision encapsulated in past ideals of city form such as neatly bounded garden or radiant cities, nor in contemporary ideals such as neotraditionalism, 'smart growth,' or landscape urbanism. These past and present urban ideals have little relationship to the novel and peculiar physical condition of shrinking cities. This section briefly discusses three contemporary ideals: New Urbanism, or neotraditionalism; landscape urbanism; and everyday urbanism, or bottom-up planning, and their relationship to the urban form of shrinking cities.

New Urbanism is perhaps the best known of contemporary urban design ideals in the United States, based as it is in a neohistoricist vision that views the ideal city of today as embodying the "best of" (Calthorpe 2009) historic urban features such as small-scale buildings, pedestrian-oriented urban environments, and familiar architectural features (at least in the US small town)

such as pitched roofs, brick or wooden construction, and small-scale windows "punched" into the building façade. The resulting environments are immediately familiar and have garnered substantial appeal both in suburbia, where endless automobile-oriented environments are both monotonous and uninteresting, and, more surprisingly, in national low-income housing policy, where New Urbanism has provided guiding design principles for the rebuilding of public housing. Yet despite this relationship, new urbanism's relationship to social justice is questionable. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's HOPE VI program of 1995 onward (Cisneros and Engdahl 2009), dramatically reduced the number of low-income housing units even as it rebuilt problematic complexes. HOPE VI's New Urbanist design did reduce the stigma associated with the highly distinctive High Modernist towers of public housing, but it did so by accepting a substantial reduction in the amount of units provided to house the very poor. At the same time, New Urbanism projects physical futures hardly compatible with the reality of shrinking cities. New Urbanism's favors street networks with relatively high-density housing, but in shrinking cities the restoration of the fabric is only possible in small quantities. The weak real-estate markets of shrinking cities prevent a full-scale reconstruction of the vanished fabric. Full-scale rebuilding along New Urbanist lines is also conceptually illogical as historic fabrics often lacked many contemporary amenities such as public space and diverse housing types.

Landscape urbanism, a recent design movement with very different ideals than New Urbanism (Waldheim 2006), is motivated by the somewhat paradoxical desire to combine natural ecologies, or landscapes, with precise, avant-garde design. This strategy generally operates best in large, discrete parcels of land with few structures. But the vacant areas of shrinking cities are rarely large and discrete; instead they are more often small and scattered, with many parcels, many owners, and many structures remaining. In time landscape urbanism may better confront the property conditions of shrinking cities; in the meantime, landscape urbanism is a very compelling strategy for large deindustrialized areas such as the "monumental wilderness" of abandoned grain elevators along the Buffalo River (Ryan et. al. 2010a) but not for the patchwork of vacant and settled areas that characterize partly abandoned areas. As a citywide

strategy, landscape urbanism has even less traction, for any large-scale open space strategy would doubtless face skepticism from political leaders interested in increasing economic development and fearful of alienating voters with threats of widespread condemnation for open space.

A third urban design ideal, perhaps best encapsulated by the term “everyday urbanism” (Chase et. al. 2008), finds its theoretical basis as well as justification, both in philosophical concepts of the meaning of everyday experience, particularly in cities, and in the libertarian approach to land use and political control of development that characterizes the American city. The combination of the two, in conjunction with the relative lack of design attention paid to most contemporary American urban environments, has given the appreciation of “everyday” activities like informal food and merchandise sales, or low-cost, locally motivated housing or commercial construction, a certain imprimatur of individual character and even cultural distinctiveness amidst the otherwise primarily homogenous American urban landscape. Most notable in sprawling, immigrant-heavy metropolises like Los Angeles where entrepreneurialism is rife and much ‘formal’ development particularly large-scale, auto-oriented, and often inhumane, everyday urbanism has come to stand for the urban, pedestrian, local character that most cities arguably historically possessed, but now lack. Critics deride the ideal for its “anti-design” character (Speaks 2005), but fail to acknowledge the previously mentioned qualities of individualism and informality that the movement appreciates. Everyday urbanism, in fact, can be seen as a reaction to the very forces of homogenization and “bigness” (Koolhaas 1995) that have made cities around the world more similar, less pleasant for the individual to walk in, and visually less interesting.

Toward patchwork urbanism

Photographs of historic industrial cities such as Detroit, Michigan or Buffalo, New York show a surprisingly uniform carpet of nearly identical houses stretching toward the horizon. With the onset of population loss and housing abandonment, the formerly homogenous development

pattern of shrinking cities has become a frayed and tattered urban fabric. Today, the cityscapes of shrinking cities, particularly those with very substantial amounts of abandonment like Detroit or St. Louis, MO might best be characterized as a *patchwork* of intact areas interspersed with declining areas with growing abandonment and with heavily abandoned areas. Current planning policies comprise a parallel patchwork of small-scale nonprofit-driven housing, market-rate housing in higher-income areas, and little or nothing at all in those areas with very high vacancy. In other words, shrinking cities lack a comprehensive urban design strategy to shape either their shrinkage or their growth. This problematic combination of individual building demolition, market avoidance of low-income areas, scattered nonprofit development, and lack of overall spatial planning in shrinking cities was recognized almost twenty years ago by Philadelphia's Office of Housing and Community Development (OHCD 1993).

The patchwork nature of decline with vacant areas of different sizes and housing in various states of habitation frustrates conventional urban design approaches such as new urbanism or landscape urbanism that require large cleared areas of land in which to operate. Such sites are rarely available even in highly deteriorated areas of shrinking cities. Shrinking cities therefore present urban designers and planners with a physical condition that current urban design ideals do not fully confront. Urban design has always projected visions of the city as a complete, idealized entity, from the symmetrical avenues of Baroque cities like Rome to Brasilia's bird-in-flight form (Evenson 1973) right through picturesque New Urbanist villages like Seaside, Florida or Kentlands, Maryland (Krieger and Lennertz 1991).

Precisely the opposite conditions, however, characterize shrinking cities. These places, due to their seemingly uncontrollable population loss and currently scattershot, ineffective rebuilding strategies, possess an incompleteness and imperfection that make the attainment of an ideal urban form a seeming impossibility. Urban designers tend to dislike imperfection and incompleteness, but any urban design theory and approach to the shrinking city ideal will, by necessity, have to value and incorporate these attributes.

Few urban designers have acknowledged and appreciated urban incompleteness as a formal ideal. Among them is Kevin Lynch (1960) who described an ideal metropolitan form that he called "the polycentered net." Such a net would possess both "intensive peaks" of density and "extensive regions of low density" within a "dispersed urban sheet" or urban grid. This grid would consist both of streets and of "belts and tongues of open land." This pattern would not be static, but would "specialize and grow, perhaps in a rhythmically pulsating fashion." Lynch's recommendation captured many of the characteristics that he felt were typical of the modern metropolis; generally low densities resulting from automobile use and a desire for pastoral settings; dynamism resulting in part from rapid technological and lifestyle advances; choice resulting from the increased desire of different types of people for different experiences at different times; and physical differentiation resulting from the presence of both historic and modern structures and urban patterns across any given area.

Lynch's polycentered net was a somewhat odd idea – he did not wholeheartedly explore it again nor has any other urban designer expanded upon it. It certainly has little resemblance to New Urbanism's "transect", which though derived from ecological sections of valley territories, as an urban strategy offers little more than a 1920s vision of a dense central city and low-density suburbs (Duany and Talen 2002). Fifty years later the polycentered net remains an apt ideal for the American city, accepting both suburban sprawl and urban centrality with neither nostalgia nor cynicism. This was precisely Lynch's intention: in a peculiar symmetry to his career, one of his last writings, *Good City Form* (1981, 293-317) described a "place utopia" which more or less realized in greater detail the same ideal of the polycentered net that he had proposed twenty years earlier.

At a smaller scale, the polycentered net is also a helpful spatial concept to apply to shrinking cities. Historically structured around speculative grids developed with a relatively homogenous pattern of housing and other buildings, shrinking cities have in their decline shifted toward a differentiated, if unorganized, pattern of lower and higher (i.e. historic) building densities. The differentiated grid of shrinking cities, with areas that are becoming denser and other, larger

areas with increasing abandonment, is analogous to the dynamic patterns of density and openness of Lynch's concept.

The fluidity and dynamism of Lynch's concepts constituted a sea change from the static urban design ideals of the past. In similar fashion, the shrinking city's housing loss within the historic street network is an inevitable change that any urban design approach in this environment should accommodate rather than reject. Stopping this shrinkage in the future is likely to be as fruitless as in the past, for individual abandonment and demolition of abandoned buildings motivated by safety concerns and neighborhood complaints will continue to generate piecemeal vacancies. Even if building loss in shrinking areas continues to be unplanned, decisions about growth or reconstruction of abandoned areas need not be; location should be as critical for state-driven redevelopment as it is for private developers building in shrinking cities.

We might call a future urban design approach for the shrinking city *patchwork urbanism*, reflecting both the existing patchwork of built and unbuilt areas that exist already, as well as the patchwork approach to design obliged by the shrinking-city condition, where the designer can operate only at intervals, with other areas either outside of control or undesirable for the same. Patchwork urbanism, in other words, both describes the existing shrinking cityscape and provides a framework for a new urban design approach to improve these environments. Another such episodic approach to design, in which architectural interventions collectively shape a form of urbanism, was described by architect Oswalt Ungers in his West Berlin study of the 1970s as an archipelago (Aureli 2011). Neither new urbanism's ideal restored cityscape of historicist homes, nor landscape urbanism's successional landscape of returned nature, nor even the informal and essentially uncontrolled environment of everyday urbanism, the shrinking city is instead a patchwork of differentiated areas containing settlements of different densities and form, interspersed with open areas of various size, program, and levels of use. This patchwork might be thought of as four interrelated scales: a large-scale pattern of interwoven growth and shrinkage, and its three components: areas with extensive shrinkage,

growth in isolation, and growth in connection. The following sections briefly describe each of these principles in detail, and I conclude by representing these principles in a hypothetical city and neighborhood.

At the largest scale, interwoven growth and shrinkage will continue to characterize shrinking cities as city officials demolish structures on a piecemeal basis year by year through demolition programs, and as areas with a stronger market experience episodic construction driven by the private sector. Shrinking, increasingly empty areas will intermingle with remaining, surviving areas of historic building stock and areas with building densities that may even be increasing. This pattern, currently affected on an area-wide level only by episodic, publicly financed demolition, might be shifted through purposeful, coordinated new construction as well. Even if overall shrinkage continues, urban design policy can reverse shrinkage in selected locations by constructing new large-scale, mostly residential neighborhoods that return certain low-density areas to a higher (if not historic) density level.

Government-driven redevelopment could construct these new neighborhoods even as private developers will continue to construct scattered, smaller-scale projects along major corridors in stronger market areas of the city. In other words, the overall city will continue to shrink, but certain areas of the city will grow within this declining fabric. Thus, today's pattern of patchwork shrinkage with concentrated growth in higher-income areas might shift to a more balanced pattern of shrinkage and growth across both high- and low-income areas of the city. This new growth pattern will stabilize parts of the shrinking city fabric, while allowing loss to continue elsewhere in the city. Interwoven growth and shrinkage acknowledges the overall inevitability of population and building stock loss while improving the quality of life in selected areas whose distributed geography offers opportunity for more citizens to benefit from new construction and activity there.

Almost all shrinking cities have areas of extensive vacant land or vacant buildings. The more buildings are demolished through demolition programs such as Philadelphia's Neighborhood

Transformation Initiative, active from 2001 to 2008 (Stern 2012), the more vacant land there will be. The fate of open, vacant areas in shrinking cities makes up much of the dialogue, both positive and problematic, about shrinkage. These open spaces both provoke those who wish for regenerated historic urban fabrics and provide promise to those who long for a fuller expression of nature in cities (Desimini 2012). Open spaces in shrinking cities are growing and evolving and will continue to do so, offering a rich palette for exploration and cultivation of diverse activities. Vacant areas are abundant, and they should be seen by urban policymakers and urban designers as 'open territory' for whatever gestures residents or outsiders wish to make there.

While the most practicable transformations are those such as the annexation of empty parcels by residents who have chosen to remain and who value these parcels as amenities for their own home, this 'strategy' may ultimately decrease as residents of scattered homes continue to leave the city. Ultimately the open areas of shrinking cities will themselves resemble a patchwork, with a mix of carefully maintained small 'blots' (Interboro 2008), larger areas cultivated as urban farms, and designated natural habitat areas, together with badly maintained city- or privately-owned parcels, and larger areas of land simply undesignated for any use whatsoever. New development will likely never occur in most open areas due to the lack of a strong development market. Still, scattered homes are likely to remain. Residents of mostly open areas who wish to remain there, surrounded by memories and a pastoral landscape, should do so. At the same time, minimal service provision standards need to be established to permit removal of city services to isolated, heavily vacant areas. Residents of isolated, sparsely populated open areas will need to come to grips with the reality that living in abandoned areas will require them to assume additional responsibilities. Detroit's recent proposal to extinguish streetlights in heavily abandoned areas (Bloomberg 2012) is only one of many service 'shutdowns' that will need to occur in vacant areas in the future

Given shrinking cities' extensive abandoned areas, some areas of the city can be considered 'isolated', in that they may be relatively far from strong-market, active areas of the city. In cities

like Detroit, abandonment has progressed to the point where some neighborhoods may be a mile or more away from areas with active retailing environments and market-rate housing. In Buffalo, for example, patchwork abandonment in the city's central declining area is almost two miles in diameter (Ryan et. al. 2010a). Isolated areas are poor prospects for conventional, privately-financed housing development. Many isolated areas, built in an era when cities were denser and pedestrian-oriented, are also remote from major arterials, making them inconvenient for automobile access. The result is that isolated areas receive little redevelopment except for the previously mentioned scattered nonprofit housing. For residents, physical isolation means disconnection from everyday amenities found in denser areas, much as "social isolation" (Wilson 1987, 57) isolates residents from socioeconomic role models. Large stretches of the inner cities pictured in Camilo Jose Vergara's photos (1997) feature nary a grocery store or restaurant in sight, a sign of physical isolation's cost. Abandonment in adjoining areas may also grow as abandonment in isolated areas increases and is not reversed. Our work in Buffalo has clearly showed this phenomenon (Ryan et. al. 2010a).

There is thus a strong case to be made for creating new neighborhoods in shrinking cities' most isolated areas. Perhaps the strongest argument in favor of new neighborhood development in such areas is based on equity; in a democracy, all citizens merit a decent living environment with equal access to public facilities, regardless of where they happen to live. The current-day lack of development in isolated areas diminishes rather than enhances equity for residents of these areas. Certain factors that influence private-sector development in shrinking cities, particularly visibility and access from major arterial roads, should also guide selection of new neighborhood sites within isolated areas. Any new neighborhood should adjoin at least a mid-sized arterial street to both enhance auto access, increase the probability of mass transit access, and offer a better market for retail development.

An isolated-area new neighborhood strategy would be a radical one for shrinking cities; recent development including Philadelphia's Poplar Nehemiah has been sited adjacent to active areas in the hope of incentivizing market development and buffering healthy areas from decline. This

strategy is legitimate (see below) but it ignored the arguably stronger equity motive for building in isolated areas. Urban design arguments for new neighborhoods in isolated areas are also strong, for there is little reason to replicate the long-gone pattern of speculative grids developed with monotonous, dense housing. Developers have often provided contemporary spatial amenities in inner cities, largely through the construction of suburban-style housing providing private parking, culs-de-sac, and closure from surrounding streets (Ryan 2012, 120-125), but urban designers have a responsibility to do more than merely imitate suburbs. Instead, they must supply housing that provides expected private amenities, but that also provides some of the activity, security, and visual and experiential interest of urban neighborhoods.

Constructing new neighborhoods will be costly and will demand significant time and capacity from city agencies. In Buffalo, however, reduced federal funding is not the limiting factor in constructing new neighborhoods. Rather, political commitment is lacking. With a ten-year time horizon, ample Federal and state funds were available to construct hundreds of new houses at densities of around 15 units per acre at a cost of up to $200,000 per housing unit (Ryan et. al. 2010c). The construction of new neighborhoods in abandoned areas of shrinking cities would seem feasible, at least on paper. Whether shrinking-city administrations are up to the task is another question.

Far from being composed solely of isolated, abandoned areas with little remaining inhabited housing, every shrinking city has healthy neighborhoods where middle-class residents choose to live and remain. However, abandoned neighborhoods often adjoin these healthy areas. In Buffalo, for example, the shrinking neighborhood of Masten Park, a low-income, African-American neighborhood with approximately 50 percent vacant land, directly adjoins the busy Main Street area (Ryan et. al. 2010b). Other shrinking cities possess many such “connected” shrinking neighborhoods, adjacent to prosperous areas but nevertheless badly deteriorated. New neighborhoods in connected areas offer different benefits both to residents and to the city as a whole. Since these locations are already adjacent to intact and higher-income residential

and retail areas, residents of new neighborhoods enjoy immediate access to these amenities. The success of healthy areas is also reinforced by adjacent new neighborhoods as additional residents are placed within walking or short driving distance of these places, which supports existing activities.

At a larger scale, construction of new neighborhoods at the frontier of decline can check abandonment's apparent spread across deteriorating neighborhoods. New neighborhoods on borderlands between healthy and vacant neighborhoods indicate that 'abandonment stops here'; risk to healthy neighborhoods is reduced, and formerly at-risk shrinking neighborhoods are revived. Constructing new neighborhoods in 'at-risk', connected areas promises to arrest or stabilize decline's spread and to reverse abandonment in areas where it has not yet fully taken hold, even if it offers little promise to areas elsewhere with deeper abandonment problems where a gradual leveraging of private-sector activity may take years or decades to spread. However, connected areas are generally less extensively abandoned than isolated areas, and latitude for major urban design intervention is correspondingly less. At vacancy rates of below 50 percent, street, block, and settlement reconfiguration is difficult barring extensive relocation of existing residents (Ryan et. al. 2010b). Urban design at moderate levels of abandonment is thus limited to small new clusters of homes, closure of occasional streets, and provision of new open spaces or community facilities on scattered sites.

Towards a new shrinking city, and a new perspective on urban design

This chapter has argued that a benevolent, interventionist, critical urban design approach can begin to project a future for shrinking cities that goes beyond the piecemeal abandonment and demolition that currently exists. Such an urban design approach might address each of the different landscapes of the shrinking city- areas with extensive shrinkage, new neighborhoods in isolated areas, and new neighborhoods in connected areas- with strategies that mix new construction in some areas with the acceptance of continued abandonment and decline in other areas. Ideally, the future shrinking city would be a 'patchwork city' of new, old, vanished,

and vanishing neighborhoods, intermingled within the bounds of the historic city. Such cities will not be perfectly preserved historic monuments, but neither will they be ruined wastelands. Ultimately, shrinking cities might become a lively combination of different types of environments, a central-city realization of Kevin Lynch's "polycentered net."

Current urban design ideals have dual shortcomings. Formally, they are ill equipped to confront the peculiar and distinct built environment condition of the shrinking city. New Urbanism is predicated upon restoration of the physical fabric, but such restoration is impossible given the housing loss that has afflicted most shrinking cities. Landscape urbanism, on the other hand, accommodates postindustrial sites ill-suited for habitation, but has little to offer semivacant residential neighborhoods except a sophisticated form of vacant-lot greening, leaving the problems of housing, commerce, and other urban functions unaddressed. Finally, everyday urbanism accentuates individual efforts but can make little allowance for the larger-scale formal issues like the loss of thousands of houses or businesses except to recommend bottom-up, incremental action. But the problems of shrinking cities are too small to leave to individual action alone.

At the same time, the realization of patchwork urbanism will require shifts, if not wholesale revisions, of the current incrementalist, demolition-focused political economy of most shrinking cities. is subject to the same challenges and opportunities as all other urban policies. Political leadership in shrinking cities is not necessarily strong; agencies have lost capacity over years of budget cuts. Federal and state funding is not generous, but it can achieve substantial aims if applied in large quantities to a single site. Constructing concentrated and innovative new neighborhoods, and deciding where those new neighborhoods should be amidst much larger landscapes of decline, will change urban development as usual and place new demands on nonprofit and public agencies accustomed to decentralized action. But the problem of shrinking cities is too large to be left to chance, to the market, or to scattered and ineffective actors. Rightsizing shrinking cities represents an opportunity to explore new frontiers in urban design even as it holds promise for addressing and improving the lives of shrinking-city residents.

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