PART ONE
THE ARGUMENT

Chapter 1

Instant Architecture, Instant Cities, and Incremental Metropolitanism

INSTANT CITIES AND SUBURBAN RETROFITS

The goal of urbanizing suburbs calls into question many long-standing cultural stereotypes. If cities are conventionally understood as old places with new buildings versus suburbs as new places with simulations of older buildings, how do we make sense of suburban retrofits?[1] How do these projects challenge expectations of responsible urban design—both in terms of respect for the immediate context and reconfiguring metropolitan areas? How should we evaluate their success? This chapter situates the arguments for retrofitting suburbia within contemporary urban design polemics at three different scales: instant architecture, instant cities, and incremental metropolitanism.

In alignment with democratic ideals, professionals engaged in city making have come to share a pervasive enthusiasm for incremental urbanism—cities that evolve over time through gradual accretions and infill so that the collective form bears the imprint of a broad spectrum of interests. Much as case law is shaped by incremental judicial decisions to reflect both our past and our current values, urban form that has been continually added to and adjusted is generally perceived as an authentic representation of culture. Organic metaphors further reinforce our perception that urban growth naturally morphs not through the artifice of master plans and government policies but in response to ever-changing conditions.

There is no question that the world's great cities exemplify incremental urbanism and that sensitive interventions that both respect the existing urban structure and advance evolving cultures over time contribute to great places. Much of the motivation behind this book is to encourage more such interventions in suburban areas.

However, love of incremental urbanism can also lead to indiscriminate disdain for that which is perceived as inauthentic. Large new urbanist projects in particular are often derided as "instant cities" and "faux downtowns."[2] This kind of design critique applies to many suburban retrofits, but often fails to distinguish the detrimental effects of "instant architecture" from the potential benefits of "instant cities." At a time when climate change and peak oil prices call for vast swaths of existing suburban

areas to be retrofitted on a scale and at a speed that is beyond the capacity of incremental urbanism, it is worth recognizing when the kind of large-scale changes associated with "instant cities" might be welcomed rather than shunned.

The global urgency of reducing greenhouse gases provides the latest and most time-sensitive imperative for reshaping sprawl development patterns, for converting areas that now foster the largest per capita carbon footprints into more sustainable, less auto-dependent places.[3] The transforming of aging and underperforming shopping centers, office parks, garden apartment complexes, and other prototypical large suburban properties into more urban places allows new population growth to be redirected from metropolitan greenfield edges into more central, VMT-reducing, greyfield redevelopment.[4] It also allows for the development of an incremental metropolitanism at a scale far more capable of confronting the problems of sprawl than incremental urbanism is. This jump in scale is more relevant both to the realities of contemporary development practices and to the scope of the challenges confronting us. Ironically, at a time when well over 75% of U.S. construction is in the suburbs, the critiques of faux urbanism often betray more nostalgia for no-longer-as-tenable development practices than the projects' designs do.

Later chapters document the before and after transformations of these low-density, auto-dependent, single-use, suburban formats into urban places, and the roles of the public and private realms in effecting these changes. Some of the changes have in fact been incremental and indicative of both gradual demographic shifts and public efforts to induce change. For instance, every one of the original Levittowns has added not only countless additions to individual houses but also multiunit housing for seniors as inhabitants have aged. A decade after Boulder, Colorado, revised zoning and setback regulations along suburban arterials, new mixed-use buildings with sidewalk cafés appear cheek by jowl with older carpet-supply stores set behind large parking lots.

Across the country those older stand-alone retail buildings are also increasingly being adaptively reused for community-serving purposes. A dozen Wal-Mart stores were converted to churches between 2002 and 2005. As described in Chapter 4, La Grande Orange in Phoenix is a reborn strip mall whose locally owned restaurants and shops have become so popular that it has its own T-shirts and is regularly mentioned as a selling point in real estate ads for the neighborhood. Daly Genik Architects made an L-shaped mini-mall into an award-winning elementary school in Los Angeles. The addition of sidewalks and pervious public green space figured into both Meyer, Scherer, and Rockcastle's elegant transformation of a grocery store into a public library in Texas, and The Beck Group's award-winning conversion of a Super Kmart into a megachurch in Georgia. Many other vacant big-box stores have been converted to call centers and office space—including the headquarters for Hormel Foods, which includes the Spam Museum in a former Kmart in Minnesota. There are countless additional examples of this kind of recycling that show welcome but minor improvements to the physical and social infrastructure.[5]

However, retrofitting's greater potential goes well beyond incremental adaptive reuse or renovation. By urbanizing larger suburban properties with a denser, walkable, synergistic mix of uses and housing types, more significant reductions in carbon emissions, gains in social capital, and changes to systemic growth patterns can be achieved. On emissions alone, new comprehensive research asserts that "it is realistic to assume a 30% cut in VMT with compact development."[6] The key to achieving this

target is the appropriate balancing of uses so that, once on-site, residents, shoppers, office workers, and others can accomplish multiple, everyday trips without getting back in their cars or back on the road. This allows mixed-use new urbanist greyfield retrofits to routinely achieve projections of 25% to 30% internal trip capture rates. In turn, this means that such projects will generate 25% to 30% fewer net external trips on nearby roads than a project of equivalent density but without the same urban qualities. Such capturing of internal trips is dependent upon achieving the critical mass associated with instant cities, not with incremental changes to the suburban pattern.

Are these projections to be trusted? Atlantic Station, an example of compact mixed-use development adjacent to midtown Atlanta on a former steel mill site, is generating far greater reductions in VMT than initial estimates projected. In a region where the average employed resident drives 66 miles per day, employees in Atlantic Station are driving an average of 10.7 miles per day and residents an average of 8 miles per day.[7]

The most dramatic and prevalent retrofits tend to be on dead mall sites, retrofits such as Belmar in Lakewood, Colorado; Mizner Park in Boca Raton; and Cottonwood outside Salt Lake City. The numerous examples have each replaced a typical low-rise enclosed shopping mall surrounded by parking lots with a more or less interconnected, walkable street grid, lushly planted public spaces, and ground-level retail topped by two to eight stories of offices and residences. In Denver alone, seven of the region's thirteen malls have closed to be retrofitted. There are also, however, significant retrofits on the land adjacent to thriving malls. Retrofits such as Downtown Kendall/Dadeland outside Miami incorporate a mall (the Dadeland Mall) and new twenty-plus-story residential towers, as does Perimeter Place adjacent to Perimeter Center Mall in Atlanta. Both are examples of how thirty-year-old "edge cities," even *bête noire* Tysons Corner, are being repositioned by infilling and urbanizing.

Suburban office and industrial parks are also being retrofitted. The parking lots of an Edward Durell Stone–designed office park of ten-story Kennedy Center–like buildings in Hyattsville, Maryland, are getting infilled with a new Main Street and mix of uses to become University Town Center. The owners of a low-rise industrial park in Westwood, Massachusetts, are taking advantage of its location on a commuter rail line to redevelop it as Westwood Station, a 4.5-million-square-foot, four-to-five-story live-work-shop TOD and the largest suburban development project ever in Massachusetts.

Golf courses, car dealerships, park-and-rides, garden apartment complexes, residential subdivisions, and entire commercial strip corridors are being retrofitted in ways that integrate rather than isolate uses and regenerate underperforming asphalt into urban neighborhoods.

What's driving all this? Several factors: reduced percentages of households with children and a growing market for multiunit housing in the suburbs,[8] continued growth in the percentage of jobs in suburban locations; regional growth patterns that are giving leapfrogged suburban areas a new centrality; rising gas prices making housing on the periphery less affordable; lengthening commutes making leapfrogged suburban locations more attractive; and local smart-growth policies and transit investments that are limiting sprawl and redirecting growth to existing infrastructure. Rising land values; the dearth of good, cheap, undeveloped sites in increasingly built-out suburban markets; and aging greyfield properties with an abundance of surface

parking lots are all factoring into a changed suburban market.

Collectively, these market forces and policies are enabling implementation of the principal benefit of projects like these: the retrofitting of the underlying settlement structure itself so as to change unhealthy suburban patterns and behaviors into more sustainable ones. Incremental infill within as-of-right zoning in most suburban municipalities is simply not a feasible path toward achieving diversification or densification. The larger, denser, and more urban the redevelopment, the more ability its designers have to change the existing development pattern and

- reduce vehicle miles traveled and improve public health by creating a transit-served or transit-ready mix of uses in a walkable street pattern connected to adjacent uses
- reduce land consumption and per capita costs of public investment by absorbing growth that without alternatives would otherwise expand in sprawl and edgeless cities
- increase the feasibility and efficiency of transit
- increase local interconnectivity
- increase permeable surfaces and green space
- increase public and civic space
- increase choice in housing type and affordability
- increase diversification of the tax base
- establish an urban node within a polycentric region

The key design challenge to altering the suburban settlement structure is internal and external integration of the parts over time and over multiple parcels. This research has yet to uncover built examples of connected culs-de-sac (a long-standing holy grail of suburban reform) or other perfectly seamless transitions between properties. But designers are producing innovative adaptations to zoning and subdivision regulations to overcome suburban fragmentation. Michael Gamble and Jude LeBlanc have proposed trading the right to build liner buildings within the front setback along arterials for giving up half the width of a new street on the side setback as a means to gradually establish a finer-grained street and pedestrian network on suburban superblocks. Similarly, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, Victor Dover, and Joseph Kohl have developed a unique strategy for linking open spaces within Downtown Kendall/Dadeland's 324 acres. Working for Miami-Dade County on new zoning across numerous parcels, they devised a system of points at the corners of property boundaries to which each owner's mandated 15% of open space had to connect. Their suggested, rather than mandated, shapes of public space have been substantially followed by property owners and are far more appropriately sized to the development as a whole than a series of uncoordinated 15% bits would have been.[9]

Internal integration of parts is indeed far easier to control on single-parcel sites—especially sites of 30 or more acres. Projects as small as 15 acres, such as San Diego's Uptown District on the site of a former Sears store, can transform the character of suburban areas and excite local imagination about further change. But larger parcels can more easily justify the inclusion of public space, decked parking, and a fine-grained street network on suburban superblocks.[10] Large sites are also more likely than small ones to be able and/or required to include housing for a mix of incomes. This has not been universally achieved—witness the exclusively high-end residences at Santana Row or exclusively lower-end apartments at CityCenter Englewood—but projects like Mizner Park, Belmar, and Perimeter Place provide a range of housing types, tenures, and costs. While they do not contain the social and physical diversity of incremental cities, the degree of internal integra-

tion, diversification, and densification of these "instant cities" deserves commendation.

Large, single-parcel projects also foster integration external to the property. By forcing municipalities to address rezoning and use tax-increment financing to provide infrastructure upgrades for the new density, larger projects are gradually reforming the regulations and financing practices that otherwise continue to favor sprawl. Large projects in particular increase a municipality's experience with and capability to further permit mixed use, mixed incomes, shared parking, form-based codes, context-sensitive street standards, transfer-of-development rights, and other tools, standards, and regulations that foster urban development patterns. As a result, one successful retrofit tends to breed another.

At the same time, the financing and development communities are gaining experience with evaluating mixed-use public-private deals. Gradually, the financial performances of large projects are providing the predictable metrics that lenders require to offer the most competitive rates not only to conventional suburban development but also to urbanizing redevelopment (increasing the feasibility of including affordable housing). Evidence of the magnitude of change in the rules of the game is that the big players have now stepped onto the field.

As detailed in Chapter 7, General Growth Properties, the second-largest mall owner in the country and the second-largest U.S.-based publicly traded REIT, is retrofitting the Cottonwood Mall outside Salt Lake City as a test case for repositioning its underperforming and/or redundant properties into mixed-use town centers. Recognition of the changed market has also led many of the country's high-production single-family home residential builders over the past two years to start "urban" divisions offering lofts, yoga studios, and billiards lounges.[11] It should not be surprising that these divisions have been the best performers when the rest of the housing market has tanked.[12]

INSTANT ARCHITECTURE, INSTANT PUBLIC SPACE

On the one hand, the urban divisions by K. Hovnanian Homes, KB Homes, Toll Brothers, and Centex Homes, along with smaller "urban" retail formats by Wal-Mart, Target, and Home Depot (their "neighborhood format" is approximately 30,000 square feet in two stories instead of 115,000 square feet on 10 acres, and it incorporates more "do it for me" than "do it yourself" home decor) are a promising indication that even the big guns are recognizing both the market for and the benefits of urbanism.[13] The impact could be enormous if the new divisions perform well enough to shift these companies' focus away from spreading unwalkable, single-use suburban formats across the country. Combining affordability with urbanism in new construction, whether in new developments or redevelopments, has been difficult, and the expertise of these companies in providing affordable products should be welcomed.

On the other hand, their mass-produced "instant architecture," seemingly dropped from a catalog onto land scraped and flattened of distinguishing features, is highly unwelcome. Nor is this a problem limited to the big production builders. The retail and residential buildings of many retrofits are engineered to optimize sales and parking rather than designed to facilitate synergistic interaction between uses and respond to the nuances of place or the complexities of mixed-use building. The time and energy that goes into coordinating the highly varied ground floor footprints for different retailers and restaurateurs with

Figure 1–1 A comparison of Morningside Heights in Manhattan from 1897 and 1915 illustrates the astonishing pace of development in the neighborhood. In 1897, when the development of the adjacent Upper West Side had just been completed, the only buildings in Morningside Heights were institutional: colleges, a cathedral, and a hospital. Less than two decades later, the building fabric was entirely filled in with residential buildings, designed and constructed by interconnected groups of investors, architects, and builders. (Source: Bromley Atlas of the City of New York, Manhattan Island.)

a mix of residential unit types above, surrounding a deck of dedicated, shared, and public parking, is far from "instant." But the complexity, especially in the hurried atmosphere of a charrette, tends to default to the formulaic. Despite occasional instructions such as Columbia Pike's "Keep the Pike Funky," form-based codes risk dumbing down design when they are overly prescriptive about style. In their efforts to raise the bar on the design's relationship to the urban context, they can also lower the bar on the designer's ability to incrementally improve the architecture of the place. Designers sometimes self-deprecatingly refer to their "wallpaper" facades. Too much of this uniformity, even in relatively high-density retrofits, results in a pervasive air of predictability and control that is more suburban than urban—at least at first.

Do instant cities age well? How many great urban neighborhoods rolled out repetitive examples of the "instant architecture" of their day? A surprising number: the brick bow fronts of Boston's South End, Brooklyn's brownstones, and countless others. The entire Upper West Side of Manhattan was graded and rebuilt in one decade, 1885 to 1895. In 1886, the *New York Times* noted, "Thousands of carpenters and masons are engaged in rearing substantial buildings where a year ago nothing was to be seen but market gardens or barren rocky fields." The rapid urbanization of Morningside Heights was next, and so on up the island of Manhattan.[14] (See Figure 1–1.) However, in contrast to contemporary suburban construction, these earlier examples tended to have much better workmanship, materials, and detailing. This is especially important in an urban context, where good detailing contributes to walkability by rewarding up-close pedestrian viewing. At the larger scale, the good bones of these neighborhoods have provided

an accommodating urban structure for ensuing generations, allowing improvement and adaptation over time. The trees have matured, adding varied light, shade, and scale to streets that might have initially appeared stark, monotonous, even "faux." Individual stoop gardens, corner shops, paint choices, additions, repairs, and other responses to needs and opportunities further differentiate the urban experience and its patina of inhabitant participation.[15]

One could argue that many postwar suburban subdivisions have similarly improved. Mature plantings, house additions, and surface treatments have differentiated what were initially mass-produced, repetitive products. In fact, less than 1% of the houses in Levittown, New York, remain in their original state, without additions or remodeling. (The most public part of Levittown, the retail strips on Hempstead Turnpike, is, however, badly decayed.)

While it is extremely difficult to reproduce either the character of individuated inhabitation or high-quality detailing in affordable new construction, retrofits such as Addison Circle and Legacy Town Center outside Dallas (described in Chapter 9) are taking the more urban route by investing in generous, high-quality public spaces. (See Figures 1-3 and 9-11.) Especially in suburban contexts, the parks, amphitheaters, cafés, and street life compensate for the lack of private outdoor space in urban housing. Some

Figures 1-2 & 1-3 The building of Legacy Town Center outside Dallas in the summer of 2007 (below left) looks much like the building of the then middle-class area at 116th Street and Lenox Avenue in Manhattan in 1893 (above left), except that in Dallas the displaced cattle have been sentimentally memorialized in bronze. We may feel sympathy for the shanty dwellers displaced in New York during the rapid urbanization of upper Manhattan, but given the huge disconnect between their makeshift wooden dwellings and the high-density apartments that replaced them, there was never any suggestion that the development might be gradual.

critics scoff at the "pseudo-civilizing" effect of sanitized streetscapes that reference "real" urban places but lack the diversity of urban people. We agree that the diversity of people within public space is a useful measure of urbanity and nurtures the creativity of Richard Florida's "creative class." However, the establishment of public space where none previously existed is the first step. And again, if we look to history, the population of Morningside Heights diversified over time as the buildings aged and their markets differentiated. As its inhabitants and buildings mature, Addison Circle's wide, tree-lined sidewalks and art-filled common green may well accommodate a broader range of incomes and ages. In the meantime, the streetscapes of suburban retrofits accommodate the socializing activities of their many young professionals and shift the focus of suburban outdoor space from playgrounds and ball fields to more urban and public, and less family-centered, spaces. Belmar's avant-garde Laboratory of Arts and Ideas and the museums of CityCenter Englewood and Mizner Park further enhance public life in these "instant cities."

One way to enhance the character and diversity of the public realm of retrofits is to take advantage of the unique adaptive reuse opportunities in redevelopment. Although most aging low-rise suburban buildings lack the systems or construction quality to merit restoration, the most distinctive retrofits tend to creatively retain at least some buildings. Surrey Central City, discussed in Chapter 6, revived a mall by grafting a new five-story galleria of university classrooms on top. The multistory department store buildings of several dead mall retrofits have been converted to housing, offices, and city halls. As counters to "instant architecture," these legacies contribute a sense of history, diversity, affordability (renting for less than new construction), and a reduction of waste.[16] They also force the master plan to engage with existing conditions rather than lay down an entirely pre-engineered template of formulaic block-sizes based on optimum building footprints for wrapped deck housing.[17] The resulting quirks contribute enormously to the creativity and quality of the placemaking. They can also insert a cool factor to suburban places and help recruit the anticubicle, anticorporate digerati. Upper Rock in Rockville, Maryland, and Cloud 9 Sky Flats in Minnetonka, Minnesota, incorporate modern loft conversions of suburban office buildings. These are but some examples of how retrofitted sites formerly associated with office-park-dads and moms-in-minivans are now also bustling with hipsters, divorcees, and empty nesters.

INCREMENTAL METROPOLITANISM

Bit by bit, beneath the static image of uniform tract houses, many suburbs are undergoing significant physical, social, and cultural change. For the first time in history, suburban municipalities now house more people living in poverty than central cities do.[18] This trend is attributed in part to the increased immigrant populations in "first-ring suburbs" built shortly after World War II. Maps in 2008 showing mortgage foreclosures concentrated in the newer outermost suburbs indicate the likelihood of further decentralization of poverty and an ever-shifting terrain. Suburban retrofits have also contributed to rising property prices. Entire subdivisions in suburban Washington, DC, and Atlanta have been bought up house by house, and as discussed in Chapter 2, one subdivision in Atlanta even self-organized and put itself up for sale for redevelopment. New transit systems, infrastructure improvements, programs to

fund planning studies, and new overlay zoning district designations are further incentivizing suburban urbanization.

But all this is not happening everywhere. It is happening at specific nodes and along specific corridors, generally where the transportation infrastructure (usually with some improvements) can support it. The outer rings of new exurban expansion continue to be low density overall, but the densified retrofits and countless revitalized small-town Main Streets are joining the edge cities as increasingly significant suburban activity centers. Arthur C. Nelson, coordinator of the Metropolitan Institute at Virginia Tech, estimates that 2.8 million acres of greyfields will become available in the next fifteen years. If only one quarter is redeveloped into mixed-use centers, they have the potential to supply half the housing required by 2030. As a result, the regional pattern emerging and likely to become more prominent is increasingly polycentric. While we are indeed still decentralizing away from central cities, we are also recentralizing around new and existing suburban centers—and becoming more sustainable in the process. More bottom-up than top-down, these new instant cities are demonstrations of an incremental metropolitanism.[19] And, while it is fair to fault instant cities when their replication of incremental urbanism is unsatisfying, the more relevant issue today is how well each contributes to retrofitting the larger systems of sprawl.

One of the first steps is to recognize the inefficiencies of sprawl development. Most lower-priced houses are at the outer edges but come with higher transportation costs. Jobs and retail are located along arterials, but typically with little transit access. Thoroughfares designed for high-speed travel between centers have become so lined with uses that they do not work well for either access or mobility. And all is designed in isolated pods. Even larger retrofits run the risk of becoming stand-alone fragments unless their urban structure integrates them into both local networks and larger sustainable systems. Only as nodes of a polycentric metropolis can they contribute to regional efficiencies in transit and other civil infrastructure, per capita land and energy conservation, shorter commute distances, lower housing and transportation costs, a jobs-housing balance, and specialized labor agglomeration.

The inclusion of increasingly significant amounts of office space within mixed-use retrofits is particularly important for balancing polycentric growth and reducing VMT. Twinbrook Station in Rockville, Maryland, and Lindbergh City Center in Atlanta are integrating twelve- and fourteen-story corporate office buildings onto the sites of former park-and-ride lots. SkySong in Phoenix and Surrey Central City outside Vancouver are building incubator office space for Arizona State University and Simon Fraser University, respectively, on the site of a dead shopping center and a mall's parking lot.

Far from serving as self-contained villages, today's retrofits simultaneously serve as gathering spaces for the immediate residents, who use the public spaces as extensions of their private space; immediate and nearby office workers for their coffee breaks, lunches, and after-work drinks; nearby suburban parents combining get-togethers with errands; teens and singles seeking friendship and entertainment; and more. In other words, they serve a greater diversity of people than did single-group places like sports bars. They may not yet be as urban as "real cities," but they *are* relatively vibrant nodes.

These efficiencies are not always immediately apparent. A map of contemporary retrofits around Washington, DC, drawn in the same manner as Joel Garreau's maps of "edge cities," reveals a similar peripheral pattern. (See Figure 1–4.) However, whereas edge cities are predominantly located at suburban spoke-and-hub highway intersections, retrofits are

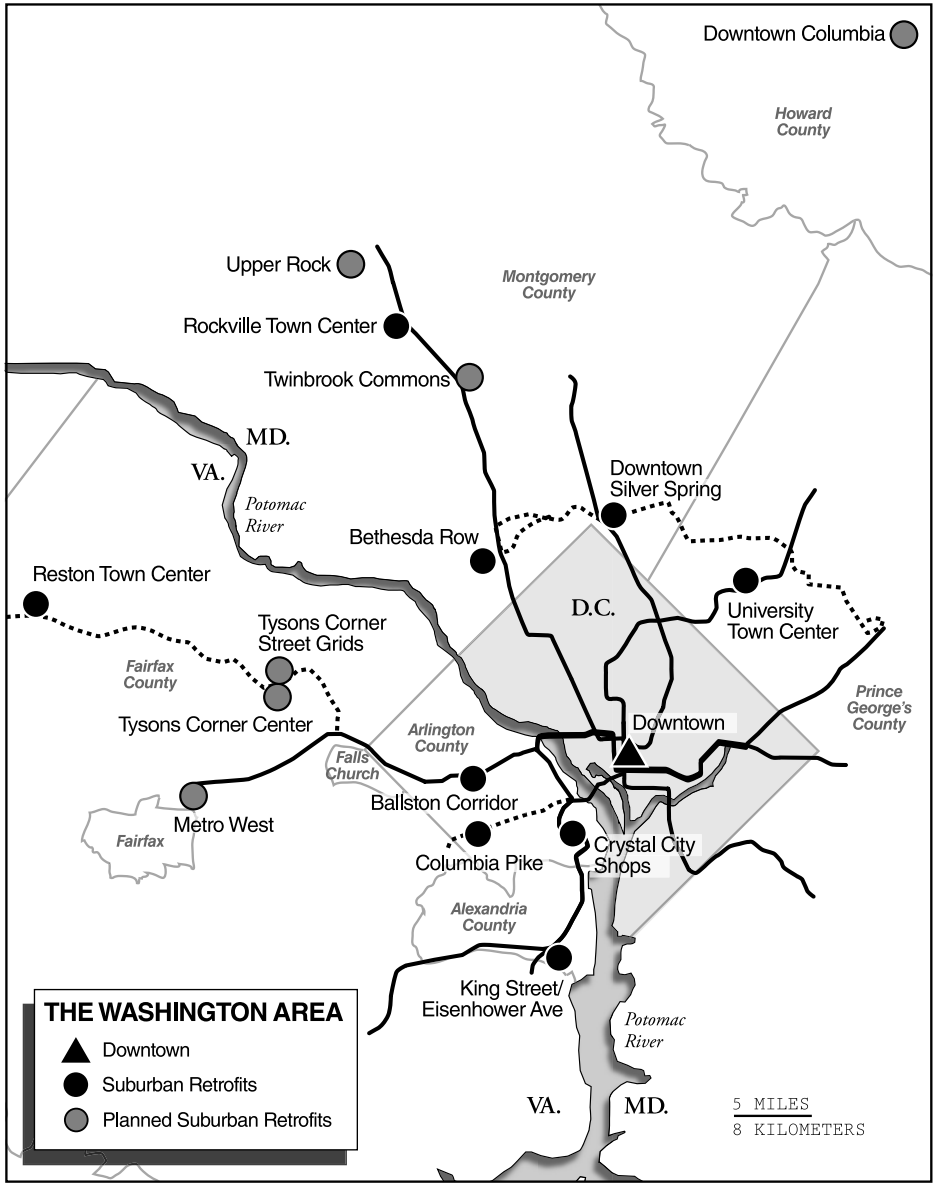

Figure 1–4 Washington, DC, is one of the most prolific markets for suburban retrofits as shown here, where they are mapped in relation to the Metro system. The presence or promise of mass transit, rather than new highways, is a significant trigger for higher-density redevelopment.

predominantly located at the intersection of existing or proposed DC Metrorail stations and suburban arterial corridors. While Garreau's maps of edge cities promised the benefits of a polycentric metropolis, their extreme auto dependency and lack of local or larger interconnectivity other than highways resulted in lengthened commute times, overcrowded roads, reduced access to jobs by those most in need, and a suburban privileging of private space.

Washington, DC's retrofits are far better positioned to deliver on that original promise. Their internal urban structure minimizes auto dependency and values public space and shared commitments to the common good. As important (if not more), their location on transit vastly improves the metropolis's efficiencies. Transit systems also benefit: those in single-center regions are far less efficient than those in polycentric regions, where suburban stations are destinations throughout the day, not only for the evening commute.

Unfortunately, most potential suburban retrofit sites are not on transit lines. And while they can still enhance local conditions, many dots remain to be connected if they are to achieve the benefits of a more sustainable metropolis. There are two principal strategies on the horizon. The first is to add transit to improve access, encourage even greater differentiation between nodes, and reduce VMT. The planned extensions of DC Metrorail through Tysons Corner is an example of this strategy and reveals the high cost and design difficulties of inserting stations and TODs into an edge city not planned for them. The hope is that densification of enough retrofitted sites will make suburban transit feasible. However, the track record so far indicates that more often transit in the suburbs is what makes densification feasible. In fact, examination of over eighty retrofits reveals that the arrival of a rail system is one of the strongest triggers for

large-scale suburban redevelopment. In addition to the examples of Washington, DC, and Denver, the availability (or construction) of rail transit in Boston, Dallas, Los Angeles, and Phoenix has stimulated suburban retrofitting at existing and proposed rail stations.[20]

The second strategy for connecting the dots is to retrofit corridors themselves. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4. The general argument is that if commercial strip corridors are made more attractive and safer to pedestrians, they can better attract redevelopment. Where nodal development is preferred, transfer of development rights can be used to downzone thoroughfares between intersections and concentrate development at intersections. While this strategy is not in practice yet, there are several examples of public agencies retrofitting corridors either through rezoning or through new streetscaping. In the most ambitious examples, commercial strip corridors are reconstructed as urban boulevards capable of both handling high traffic volume, including streetcars or buses, and attracting dense urban housing, offices, and retail stores.[21] Cathedral City, California, converted four blocks of what had become a commercial strip corridor back into its downtown by retrofitting it into a multiway boulevard. Palm-lined medians separate the high-speed traffic from slower local traffic and wide sidewalks. Now serving as the town's Main Street, the retrofitted corridor has attracted upscale hotels, shops, and housing to join the new city hall on a site that would not previously have been considered attractive.

The more incremental approach for retrofitting corridors is to use form-based codes to require more urban sidewalks, build-to-lines, and pedestrian-oriented treatment of ground floors. As discussed in Chapter 4, Arlington County, Virginia, is using form-based codes, fast permitting, and the promise of a streetcar as incentives for its ongoing redevelopment of low-rise supermarkets and strip malls on Columbia Pike into six- to ten-story mixed-use buildings.

HOW SUSTAINABLE? HOW URBAN?

So how well do instant cities and suburban retrofits live up to their sustainable aspirations? While we are optimistic, each case is unique and merits consideration of at least the following questions.

- At metropolitan and regional scales, does the project make it easier for people to have access to jobs, affordable housing, and affordable transportation while simultaneously reducing VMT and carbon footprints? Or is it gentrifying an important remnant of an affordable landscape and/or draining an existing downtown?
- Are there tangible means, such as transfer of development rights, to link densification at targeted nodes with equally targeted land conservation elsewhere? Or are developers getting a free ride as local communities get overburdened with traffic and displacement and the region as a whole benefits little?
- At the local scale, does the settlement have an urban structure that supports interconnectivity, density, transit, and walkability? Has it triggered further redevelopment?
- Will its design and mix of uses improve with age and endure, or will it remain a fragment of drive-to walkable "product" with a life span driven by its retail and limited to the fashionability of its scenography?

- At the building scale, does it offer a variety of housing choices to accommodate a diverse population with varied needs and ideas about public and private space, or are the choices too similar and the expectations of behavior too conformist?

These are difficult to answer, but they will be at the heart of local and metropolitan politics as we move beyond debates of sprawl versus smart growth and tackle the thorny specifics of implementing real change.

In many respects, the even more difficult assessment is determining how well instant cities and suburban retrofits live up to their urban aspirations. It is easy to compare them to "real" cities and find them lacking the culture, excitement, diversity, conflict, grit, and suffering that coexist in core cities. But this misses the point. Instant cities and suburban retrofits are not core cities. They are urban nodes within a new polycentric metropolis that simultaneously complement the core city's downtown and serve a predominantly suburban population. They are hybrids and reflect aspects of both centeredness and decentralization.

This hybridity is revealed in many ways, including the following:

- suburban parking ratios and urban streetscapes
- ambiguous "public" spaces developed in public-private partnerships and privately owned or leased
- urban building types filled mostly with suburban chain retail outlets
- new, single-ownership parcels deliberately masked to look old and multiparceled
- urban qualities delivered at suburban costs
- transit orientation *and* automobile dependency
- the appearance of self-contained village/town centers *and* reliance on larger networks of shoppers, workers, and visitors
- *local* placemaking by *national* developers and designers

Hybrid network nodes are neither suburban nor urban. As a result, they are prone to critique from the advocates of both better understood categories. But are cities and suburbs really so different in the polycentric metropolis? The old dichotomy of suburb versus city as the separation of home and work was always oversimplified.[22] Today it is further complicated by continued metropolitan decentralization, new forces of recentralization, the replication of national retailers throughout, and the extended networks afforded by global communications. Over 40% of U.S. office space is now in the suburbs,[23] but many of the same metropolitan regions seeing the most retrofitting in suburban contexts are also seeing population growth in their central cities.[24] Postwar suburbs originally built at the edges of the metropolis have been so surpassed by new growth (often losing property value in the process) that they now enjoy relatively central locations. New instant cities exploit those centralities and activate them as metropolitan nodes in a network increasingly reinforced by mass transit. Retrofitting ushers in networked urbanity in which living, working, shopping, and playing are no longer separated (but neither are they entirely conjoined). The networked urbanity of metropolitanism reinterprets the Aristotelian ideal of the city—living together well—at the larger scale. This bodes well for confronting the challenges of economic and environmental sustainability but is less promising for dealing with entrenched social inequity.

Although instant cities and suburban retrofits are neither as sustainable nor as urban as older established cities, they are more sustainable and more urban than the conditions they have replaced and, as such, have great potential to shape the metropolis. They also have many challenges, not the least of which are constructing the infrastructure to support them and addressing gentrification. Perhaps most important, they need to recognize the significance of their leadership in the new metropolis and the accompanying expectation of representing larger cultural aspirations.

Today, instant cities and suburban retrofits are for the most part more exciting programmatically than architecturally. Serving as conventional background buildings to the outdoor public rooms of the streets they foreground, their buildings express a far greater valuation of placemaking and public space than did the private object buildings they replaced. This is a good thing, but too often, as at Perimeter Place near Atlanta, banal contemporary buildings are aggregated into quasi-urbanistic configurations but are utterly lacking in meaningful architectural expression. At other times, as in many of the projects featured in the pages to come, instead of being instant architecture, the buildings are very well detailed, even within tight budgets, and thoughtfully scaled to transition from the existing context to greater density with careful attention to sustainability.

While many critics fault traditional styling as nostalgic, it should be respected when it is done well and converts a community's fear of change into aspirations for urbanism. Some of us would like to see more stylistic diversity and experimentation exploring hybridity in the architecture of suburban retrofits. And this may come as retrofits become more common and communities less fearful of change. But discussions of architectural style miss the point. *The point is urbanism*.

Americans have an opportunity to retrofit the suburbs into more urban places that reduce VMT, expand public space, diversify housing choices, and conserve undeveloped land at the periphery. We need *both* incremental changes *and* instant cities in order to reshape socially and environmentally destructive sprawling patterns into healthier, polycentric metropolises. We need to better understand the myriad dynamic systems of more sustainable regions, places, and buildings. Above all, we need informed imaginations that can look at entrenched patterns and question alternative possibilities—while working with communities. This is an exciting agenda for all of the professions involved with the built environment. We would do well to heed Michael Sorkin's wise advice to see "the good city as an evolving project."[25]