Rightsizing Shrinking Cities: The urban design dimension

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Recently urban policymakers have begun to make ”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 are now left with an unmanageably large array of streets, utilities, public buildings, parks, and housing. “Rightsizing” refers to the yet-unproved process of bringing cities down to a “right” size, meaning a size proportionate to city government’s ability to pay for itself. In practice, rightsizing has yet come to little in shrinking cities. In fact, no city in history has ever attained a fixed size, with unchecked growth the general pattern for cities from Victorian London to most of the developing world today. In the United States, decades of optimistic master plans have had little or no effect in reducing rates of population loss in deindustrializing cities such as Cleveland, Baltimore, or Philadelphia, all of which lost 25 to 60 percent of their populations between 1950 and 2010. Even in New Orleans, a city that had very good reasons to make deliberate decisions about where the city should and should not rebuild after Hurricane Katrina, political fears and widespread citizen opposition stymied rightsizing decisions.[i] Just as suburban developers resent planners’ proclaiming that they may not develop a parcel of farmland, residents of New Orleans resented that planners might transform their property or even their neighborhood into swampland.

On the surface, then, “rightsizing” appears difficult if not impossible for shrinking cities in the United States. The term also remains somewhat meaningless, as neither scholars nor practitioners have

thus far defined it exactly. What physical form and size should the city take after abandonment? What decisions should city officials make, concerning which aspects of the city should survive and who should live where? How much would rightsizing cost, and who would pay? Does an ultimate vision of the city guide rightsizing, or will policymakers simply follow immediate imperatives?

This chapter will argue that scholars and policymakers should consider using an urban design vision, at least in part, as they plan for rightsizing. Though many shrinking cities began as unregulated industrial centers with little urban design, population decline and housing loss today present designers and planners with a new opportunity to shape a better physical environment in concert with these cities' present economic and social needs. Given that many view the visual landscape of shrinking cities as their most striking and disturbing feature,[ii] urban design seems an obvious means by which planners and designers might reshape these cities after decline and, by extension, explore new forms of the ideal urban neighborhood and, perhaps, the ideal city.

As abandonment of buildings and properties characterize shrinking cities, any urban design strategy for these places must contend with abandonment before all else.[iii] Abandonment in shrinking cities is problematic at multiple scales. While planners and others often consider abandonment at the individual scale of a single building or property, 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 each of these scales before describing city- and neighborhood-scale urban design strategies that might help resolve the problems of abandonment.[iv]

The Physical Consequences 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 and Buffalo's "5 in 5" program (5000 housing units demolished in five years) act to clear derelict structures but use only individual dwelling criteria (structure condition) as a means of action. In the absence of spatial planning for shrinking neighborhoods and cities, city officials may make larger-scale assessments of abandonment only in a development-driven context, as when a proposal is imminent.

Abandonment in shrinking cities could be just as frustrating as the policy-directed neighborhood demolition of the 1950s excoriated by Jacobs and other critics of urban renewal.[v] Abandonment in shrinking cities occurs on an undirected, piecemeal basis as individuals decide whether or not to remain in their homes. Understanding the piecemeal nature of the process provides the basis for understanding the urban design problems these places face.

Because decline is episodic and scattered rather than neat and organized, a given shrinking-city resident in a deteriorating neighborhood may have only partial information about when and if an adjoining property will become abandoned. Episodic abandonment confronts individual residents with a pressing problem: since the status and condition of properties adjoining her house can shift, her home is vulnerable as well. On a block where owners abandon property piecemeal, block-scale stability becomes difficult, for once abandonment has progressed the majority of houses will adjoin an empty house or lot. As abandonment continues, the neighborhood loses the collective benefit of more concentrated housing, and each resident's individual incentive to stop investing in his or her property increases.

As abandonment progresses, individual lots become vacant in a generally scattered fashion. With a checkerboard pattern, up to fifty percent of properties might become vacant lots without any two adjoining ones becoming vacant. But real abandonment patterns do not mimic a checkerboard; a quick aerial survey of a place such as Flint, Michigan, indicates that remaining houses sometimes cluster and sometimes do not. Above fifty percent vacancy, blocks assume a pattern of desolation that becomes more apparent as this percentage increases. At around seventy or eighty percent vacancy, remaining

houses become islands in a sea of green. This pattern is most apparent at a large scale in places such as Detroit's east side or the northern half of St. Louis.

A scattered pattern of property 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 scale of five to eight blocks, no cluster of blocks in Buffalo was more than 71 percent vacant as of 2010.[vi] The persistence of inhabited housing even in mostly vacant areas helped defeat New Orleans's nascent rightsizing proposals of 2006 and also confronts more recent efforts in Detroit.[vii] Even in a 90 percent vacant area, one resident's wishing to remain in her home will require officials to condemn the property if they wish to make an entire block available for redevelopment and will complicate their efforts to withdraw city services.

At a larger level, piecemeal, house-by-house abandonment leads to patchiness, where large areas of the city may have varying levels of vacancy, while other areas have only minimal vacancies or retain all their housing. Analysis of Buffalo showed that 50 percent of the city's census block groups were at least 10 percent vacant, and that about 20 percent of those block groups (about 10 percent of Buffalo's census block groups/total), were over 50 percent vacant.[viii] 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. Factors such as the presence of other vacant areas, stable or desirable areas of the city, historic industrial or low-income concentrations, and ethnic and racial patterns influenced vacancy patterns in Buffalo, but this relationship was never exact and was difficult to prove. Over time these piecemeal patches of abandonment tended to grow, spreading from high-vacancy areas into some but not all adjoining lower-vacancy areas.[ix] The shift from an undifferentiated urban pattern to patchwork abandonment is evident in schematic form in Figures 1 and 2 and at a smaller scale in Figures 5 and 6.

(Figure 1 [historic shrinking city] about here)

(Figure 2 [current-day shrinking city] about here)

Reconnecting Urban Design with Social Policy

Any move toward an urban design strategy for rightsizing shrinking cities will not be easy. 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 have little relationship to the novel physical condition of shrinking cities. Another challenge lies in the need for an urban design-based rightsizing strategy 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,[x] integration has proven problematic in both urban planning and urban design.

In planning--arguably beginning with urban policy initiatives in the 1960s such as conservation, community renewal requirements, and the Model Cities program, and conceptually advocated by Davidoff's advocacy strategy[xi] -- a shift toward practice based in social science research and paralleled by traditional practitioners' retention of land-use and urban redevelopment practice resulted in a profession more divorced from design than ever before.[xii] Similarly, architecture separated from social concerns in a close coincidence with the Nixon administration's cancellation of Great Society urban policies.[xiii] After 1975, urban redevelopment in the United States consequently shifted from ambitious, modernist-inspired large-scale work promoted by the state to a more modest mix of postmodern design and nonprofit- or developer-driven projects.[xiv]

Yet one may discern surviving links between innovative urban design and liberal social policies. These links have persisted since the end of the Great Society primarily through the works of committed

practitioners and policymakers. 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.[xv] In similar fashion, in the 1990s Philadelphia's Office of Housing comprehensively redesigned the disinvested neighborhood of Lower North Philadelphia with moderate-density, low-income housing.[xvi] While design was not a signal feature of this project, Philadelphia's ambitious planning approach was reminiscent of such signal accomplishments of the late Modern and early post-Modern eras as the Yorktown houses constructed from 1960 to 1970 in Philadelphia[xvii] and the St. Lawrence development of Toronto from the 1970s.[xviii] A recent urban design studio for the city of Buffalo replicated these combinations of innovative design and social planning.[xix] This studio showed that the city had sufficient Community Development Block Grant funding to construct large numbers of housing if city officials chose to prioritize construction over demolition and that urban designers had a range of design options available to relieve many of the physical problems afflicting shrinking cities, assuming a continued demand for new housing by low- and moderate-income households.

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. Poplar's chief planner John Kromer believed that only large-scale action could simultaneously demonstrate a

political commitment to improving disinvested urban neighborhoods and achieve the public visibility to convince politicians of what Kromer called "neighborhood recovery."[xx]

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 and Alvaro Siza's Quinta Malagueira in Evora, Portugal, did well,[xxi] and as late Modernist projects such as the New York Urban Development Corporation's scattered-site Twin Parks Houses achieved a decade previous.[xxii] Critical urban design moves beyond 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 amid more powerful urban residents. At the same time, a benevolent urban design philosophy needs to prevent the egregious stigmatization of the poor that occurred in Modernist urban designs such as mid-twentieth century public housing with large-scale, *tabula rasa* developments lacking any relationship to their surroundings.[xxiii]

A renewed urban design agenda committed to critical and benevolent interventionism is more radical than it seems. Its "benevolence" frankly evokes the need for social justice, not always well-connected to discussions of urban design. Fainstein's call for a more "just" urban planning identifies only New Urbanism as a planning and design paradigm with potential for increased justice in the city.[xxiv] Yet New Urbanism's relationship to social justice is questionable. New Urbanism's most well-known involvement in low-income housing, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's HOPE VI program beginning in the mid-1990s, dramatically reduced the number of low-income housing units.[xxv] HOPE VI's New Urbanist design reduced the stigma associated with the distinctive High Modernist

towers of public housing, but it did so by accepting a substantial reduction in the number of units to house the very poor.

Providing for society's less privileged should not be an invisible project. Urban policymakers and designers should therefore use urban design as a vehicle to provide the rightsizing of shrinking cities with greater public visibility. Innovative spatial solutions to the longstanding problems of shrinking cities could help restore the weakened connections between urban design and social policy.

Toward Patchwork Urbanism

Historic photographs of industrial cities such as Detroit or Buffalo show a uniform carpet of nearly identical houses stretching toward the horizon. With the onset of population loss and housing abandonment, this formerly homogenous pattern (Figures 1, 5) has become a frayed and tattered urban fabric. Today, the cityscapes of shrinking cities resemble a patchwork of intact areas interspersed with declining areas of growing abandonment and with heavily abandoned areas (Figure 2, 6). Current de facto policies comprise a parallel patchwork of small-scale nonprofit-driven housing, market-rate housing in higher-income areas, and little or nothing in those areas with very high vacancy (Figure 3). In other words, shrinking cities lack a comprehensive urban design strategy to shape either their shrinkage or their growth. Almost twenty years ago, Philadelphia's Office of Housing and Community Development recognized 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.[xxvi]

(Figure 3 [conventional redevelopment patterns] about here)

The patchwork nature of decline with vacant areas of different sizes and housing in various states of occupancy frustrates conventional urban design approaches such as New Urbanism or landscape urbanism that require large cleared areas of land. Such sites are rarely available even in deteriorated areas of shrinking cities. Conventional urban design also projects physical futures hardly compatible with the reality of shrinking cities. New Urbanism favors restored street networks with relatively high-density housing. In shrinking cities the restoration of the street and block fabric is possible in small quantities, but the weak real estate markets prevent a full-scale reconstruction of the past fabric. Full-scale rebuilding along New Urbanist lines is also conceptually illogical as historic fabrics in working class areas of industrial cities 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, promotes the somewhat paradoxical call to combine natural landscapes with precise, avant-garde design.[xxvii] This strategy generally operates best in large, discrete parcels of land with few structures, such as vacant industrial sites. But the vacant areas of shrinking cities are rarely large and discrete; instead they are more often small and scattered, with many properties, 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 compelling strategy for large previously industrial areas such as the "monumental wilderness" of empty grain elevators along the Buffalo River but not for the patchwork of vacant and settled areas that characterize partly abandoned neighborhoods.[xxviii] As a citywide strategy, landscape urbanism has even less traction, for any large-scale open space strategy would face skepticism from political leaders interested in increasing economic development and fearful of alienating voters with threats of widespread condemnation for open space.

Shrinking cities present urban designers and planners with a physical condition that current urban design ideals do not fully address. Urban design has always projected visions of the city as a complete, idealized entity, from the symmetrical avenues of the Baroque[xxix] to Brasilia's bird-in-flight form[xxx] to the picturesque New Urbanist village of Seaside.[xxxi] Precisely the opposite conditions, however, characterize shrinking cities: an incompleteness and imperfection that make the attainment of an ideal form a seeming impossibility. Urban designers tend to dislike imperfection and incompleteness, but any urban design theory for the shrinking city ideal will, by necessity, have to value and incorporate these attributes.

The future shrinking city should be neither New Urbanism's ideal restored cityscape of historicist homes nor landscape urbanism's successional landscape of returned nature, but rather a patchwork of differentiated areas containing settlements of multiple densities and form, interspersed with open areas of various sizes, programs, and levels of use. Four spatial patterns should characterize the shrinking city's "patchwork urbanism": 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 describe each of these principles in detail (see Figures 4 and 7 for illustrations in a hypothetical city and neighborhood). Below, I describe the components of the patchwork urbanism that both describe the existing shrinking cityscape and provide a framework for a new urban design approach to improve these environments.

Interwoven Growth and Shrinkage

Few urban designers have acknowledged and appreciated urban incompleteness as a formal ideal. Among them is Kevin Lynch, who described an ideal metropolitan form that he called "the polycentered net."[xxxii] 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 characterized 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, and 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 offers a 1920s vision of a dense central city and low-density suburbs.[xxxiii] 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. 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 homogenous pattern of housing and other buildings (Figure 1), shrinking cities have in their decline shifted toward a differentiated, if unorganized, pattern of lower and higher (i.e. historic) building densities (Figure 2). The differentiated grid of shrinking cities, with areas that are still becoming denser and other 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, an urban design approach should accommodate rather than reject the shrinking city's inevitable housing loss within the historic street network. Attempting to stop 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.

Gradually increasing areas of lower density will continue to characterize shrinking cities as city officials and private owners demolish structures on a piecemeal basis year by year. These shrinking, increasingly empty areas will intermingle with remaining, surviving areas of historic building stock and densities. While 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 continue to construct scattered, smaller-scale projects along major corridors (Figures 4, 7). The overall city would continue to shrink, but certain areas of the city would grow within this declining fabric. Thus, today's pattern of patchwork shrinkage with concentrated growth in higher-income areas would under this plan shift to a more balanced pattern of shrinkage and growth across both high- and low-income areas of the city. This new growth pattern would stabilize parts of the shrinking city fabric, while allowing loss to continue elsewhere in the city.

(Figure 4 [patchwork urbanism redevelopment pattern] about here)

(Figures 5, 6, and 7 can go anywhere in the next sections)

Extensive Shrinkage

The fate of open, vacant areas in shrinking cities makes up much of the dialogue about shrinkage. From "blots" of vacant lots annexed by adjoining homeowners in Detroit[xxxiv] to corridors of abandoned infrastructure, urban farms, and wildlife habitat, open spaces in shrinking cities both

provoke those who wish for regenerated historic urban fabrics and suggest promise for those who long for a fuller expression of nature in cities. 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 urban policymakers and urban designers should see them as 'open territory' for whatever gestures residents or outsiders wish to make there.

Probably the least practical transformation for these areas is to turn them into formal city parks. Conventional recreation equipment, maintained athletic fields, and pastoral Olmstedian landscapes would be impossibly expensive, and these facilities already exist in overabundance from past eras. The most practical transformations have already been occurring, such as the piecemeal, everyday annexation of empty parcels, whether formal or informal, by residents who have chosen to remain and who value these parcels as amenities for their own home. But "blotting" is likely to be a limited-scale strategy, and one that may itself ultimately decrease in frequency as residents of scattered homes continue to leave the city and as new developments with more fixed form incorporate open space into their designs. No blotting can exist without homes. By the same token this everyday urbanism-related practice holds substantial continued promise in cities with dense rowhouses, where outdoor private space is both entirely absent and badly needed, such as Philadelphia or Baltimore. City officials should strongly encourage blotting in these cities, perhaps with low fences or walls to provide some continuation of the former streetwall.

Ultimately the open areas of shrinking cities will themselves resemble a patchwork, a green microcosm of the city at large, with a mix of consciously designed space--maintained small blots, larger areas cultivated as urban farms, and designated natural habitat areas-- with the unconscious, meaning badly maintained city- or privately-owned parcels, and larger areas of land undesignated for any use whatsoever. All of these open areas, designed or not, will intermix with remaining homes. No one vacancy strategy is likely to dominate these areas of continued shrinkage, nor should one, for open area

strategies will evolve as shrinkage continues. New development may in time occupy some open areas; if these are designed areas, their reuse will likely engender resistance in the same way that community garden "owners" have fought redevelopment in New York and Chicago. But most new development, if and when it reoccupies open areas, will not encounter much resistance, except from speculators. New development will likely never occur in most open areas, which will remain open for the foreseeable future.

Perhaps the most contentious aspect of dialogues over the fate of open areas has concerned residents who remain in isolated houses scattered throughout these areas. Involuntary displacement was the Achilles' heel of urban renewal, and its ghost haunts dialogues about rightsizing. Urban citizens who have persisted through decades of decline and abandonment and who may enjoy their isolation and spaciousness are rightly incensed at prospects that city officials may displace them simply for open space or wildlife habitat. Residents of mostly open areas who wish to remain there, surrounded by memories and a pastoral landscape, should do so. At the same time, city officials should establish service provision standards reduction of city services to isolated, nearly vacant areas; one might imagine the city formally abandoning street blocks where only one or two houses remain and deeding maintenance responsibility for that street to the residents. Such distances are much less than those owned and maintained by residents of rural areas. But 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, as the reach of municipal services recedes to the nearest street intersection.

Growth in Isolation

In cities such as Detroit, abandonment has progressed to the point where some neighborhoods may be a mile or more from retailing establishments and market-rate housing. Vacancy has occurred for

so long and to such an extent that surviving intact blocks are "isolated" by larger patches of abandonment. In Buffalo, for example, patchwork abandonment in the city's central declining area is almost two miles in diameter.[xxxv] Isolated areas are poor prospects for conventional, privately-financed housing development. Residents or visitors unfamiliar with the areas tend to avoid them, so most city residents do not see them. Since they are inhabited almost entirely by people in poverty, services, police protection, and other municipal benefits are less than in other parts of the city. 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, seen in Figure 3, is what one might expect: isolated areas receive little redevelopment except for scattered nonprofit housing. Out of sight and out of mind to other residents of the city, isolated areas tend to remain isolated, and their decline tends to continue.

Physical isolation confers a significant, direct cost on residents of these areas and less directly confers costs on the city as a whole. For residents, physical isolation means disconnection from everyday amenities found in denser areas, much as "social isolation" isolates residents from socioeconomic role models.[xxxvi] Large stretches of the inner cities pictured in Camilo Jose Vergara's photos feature nary a grocery store or restaurant, a sign of physical isolation's cost.[xxxvii] Other parts of the city suffer in turn from physically isolated areas' failure to redevelop, because abandonment in adjoining areas may grow as abandonment in isolated areas increases. Work in Buffalo has clearly showed this phenomenon.[xxxviii]

Creating new neighborhoods in shrinking cities' most isolated areas thus could be an important strategy. 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 access to public facilities, regardless of where they happen to live. Isolated area residents' continued deprivation of access to amenities common in denser areas can thus reduce if not violate their civil rights, just as children citywide should have the right of access to the best available public education. New

neighborhoods in isolated areas may not reverse or remove negative influences present in the lives of area residents, but they will certainly increase their exposure to benefits such as new parks, streets, or stable neighborhoods, and indirect benefits such as improved city services and increased public order in surrounding areas. Current redevelopment policies that emphasize new housing in areas adjacent to high-value areas of the city tacitly exclude citizens of isolated areas from receiving the spillover benefits of new development such as improved public services or police protection. The lack of development in isolated areas thus 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 site should adjoin at least a mid-sized arterial street to enhance auto access and increase the probability of mass transit access. Additionally, a new neighborhood adjoining a mid-sized arterial offers a better market for retail development constructed either with or following housing construction. (Figure 4 shows this adjacency to arterial streets).

Equity arguments are sufficient reason to locate new neighborhoods within isolated areas to the extent practicable as long as these developments are accessible from arterial roadways. An isolated-area new neighborhood strategy would be a radical one for shrinking cities; recent developments including Philadelphia's Poplar Nehemiah have been sited adjacent to active areas in the hope of incentivizing market development and buffering healthy areas from decline. This strategy is legitimate, but it ignores the arguably stronger equity motive for building in isolated areas.

Urban design arguments for new neighborhoods in isolated areas are also strong. With high levels of vacancy and poor social and economic conditions, isolated areas require innovative design to reimagine neighborhood patterns. In isolated, abandoned areas, little reason exists to replicate the long-gone pattern of speculative grids developed with monotonous, dense housing. New residents, many of whom may be coming from or may be considering the suburbs, will doubtless desire both distinction

and protection from deteriorated surroundings, as well as amenities such as private open space and off-street parking routine in contemporary development elsewhere. Developers have often provided contemporary amenities in inner cities through the construction of suburban-style housing providing private parking and culs-de-sac, but urban designers have a responsibility to do more than merely imitate suburbs.[xxxix] 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.

Residents of new neighborhoods in isolated areas are likely to have low or moderate incomes. Upper-income residents have choices that enable them to consider other locations, and some metropolitan-area residents' racial fears prevent them from considering a location that they consider "inner-city." However, low- and moderate-income city residents may find isolated locations desirable. Amenities such as spacious homes and private space would be available at a low cost, making isolated areas competitive locations for homeowners conscious of costs and tolerant of urban locations. Such homeowners, often African-American, are precisely the demographic that has purchased new for-sale homes in redeveloped areas of Detroit such as Victoria Park.[xl] Such residents also made up the new neighborhoods of Yorktown, North Philadelphia's most stable neighborhood, as Kromer noted.[xli] Lower-middle-class households may represent the best hope for preventing housing abandonment in isolated areas, but they will require well-designed new neighborhoods to attract and house them.

Little or no prospect exists for private-sector developer financing of new neighborhood construction in isolated areas. For-profit development in shrinking cities is risky even in the best of times and locations,[xlii] and to expect developer financing in isolated locations is surely to ask too much. Only city governments, fiscally constrained as they are, possess the means to finance new housing in isolated locations, but they should not do so outside of the framework of a spatial plan that fairly balances different neighborhoods' needs for rebuilding.

Constructing new neighborhoods would be costly and would demand significant time and capacity from city agencies. Philadelphia, for example, was able to afford only a few sizable publicly-financed new neighborhoods in the prosperous 1990s. In Buffalo, however, reduced federal funding is not the limiting factor in constructing new neighborhoods. 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.[xliii] Given that land costs are low in most shrinking-city neighborhoods, the construction of new neighborhoods in abandoned areas of shrinking cities would seem feasible. Whether shrinking-city agencies are up to the task is another question.

Growth in Connection

While abandoned, isolated areas are perhaps shrinking cities' most striking and troubling environments, many other areas of these cities have brighter prospects. Every shrinking city has healthy neighborhoods where residents choose to live and remain, forgoing the suburbs in favor of a distinctive living experience in the city. These healthy neighborhoods are little different than their better-known cousins in "creative-class" cities such as Portland or Boston, and their prices are often lower. Entrepreneurial real estate developers see these sites as excellent locations for new housing, and city administrations are happy to subsidize them.

Unlike in Boston or Portland, however, shrinking cities often possess partially abandoned neighborhoods close to these healthy areas. Buffalonians who take the short walk across Main Street away from prosperous Delaware Avenue find themselves in the shrinking neighborhood of Masten Park, a low-income, African-American neighborhood with approximately 50 percent of its properties vacant lots.[xliv] Buffalo, Cleveland, and 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. Adjacent new neighborhoods also reinforce the success of healthy areas as additional new residents locate within walking or short driving distance of these places, a trend that supports existing activities. Proximity to active neighborhoods is beneficial to lower-income residents. Development in connected neighborhoods also holds promise of attracting a potentially greater range of incomes and populations than is possible for isolated areas. Neighborhoods adjacent to high-priced areas have historically been at risk of gentrification in more prosperous cities, but gentrification risks are low in shrinking cities. Demand for housing is low, and prices are affordable even in healthy neighborhoods.

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," reduce risk to healthy neighborhoods, and help to revive formerly at-risk shrinking neighborhoods. This metaphor, of helping those who are not yet beyond hope, is widespread: medicine has the practice of triage; in crime prevention, fixing 'broken windows" quickly avoids more serious problems, and many social programs direct aid toward "at-risk" children. 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.[xlv] 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. Since even small-scale actions may require home relocation, significant numbers of remaining houses make an infill urban design approach stronger in connected areas. Such strategies have been pursued in moderately vacant neighborhoods such as Corktown in Detroit or Buffalo's Near West Side.

Towards a New Shrinking City

Almost forty years ago, the United States abandoned the enterprise of state-driven urban redevelopment in favor of decentralization and private initiative.[xlvi] The neoliberal economics that have dominated since that time have driven planning and urban design, particularly in the United States but increasingly in Europe, to follow the lead of private-sector developers in rebuilding cities. Some theorists believe that such a strategy is ideal, that obeying the market's wishes is the best path forward for building cities.[xlvii] Yet this very strategy has also cast shrinking cities adrift, guiding them to spend hundreds of millions of dollars on downtown megaprojects[xlviii] and subsidizing developers to construct housing in connected areas, while ignoring the even larger challenge of improving conditions in the isolated, abandoned areas that grow larger as economic decline continues. The shrinkage of historically industrial cities represents the signal failure of neoliberal planning and of the planners that advocate it, for shrinking cities' reliance on the market has clearly done little to improve the quality of the built environment in their most abandoned areas. This chapter has argued that a benevolent, interventionist, critical urban design approach can begin to undo the neglect of the laissez-faire planning of the past forty years and begin to project a future for shrinking cities that goes beyond the piecemeal abandonment and demolition they currently experience.

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. Funds are likely to be scarce and political capacity episodic, but a robust urban design approach has the potential to transcend these constraints. 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 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."

Rightsizing will be an urban policy 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 to shrinking cities is not generous, but it can achieve substantial aims if applied in large quantities to a single site. Constructing concentrated and innovative new neighborhoods 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 a new opportunity for urban design and planning to take the lead in shaping the future of some of the United States' most distinctive and meaningful urban environments. The need to rightsize is critical, the potential to rightsize is tremendous, and the time to rightsize is now.

Figures. All illustrations are by the author and Allison Hu.

Figure 14.1. The Historic Industrial American City around 1950

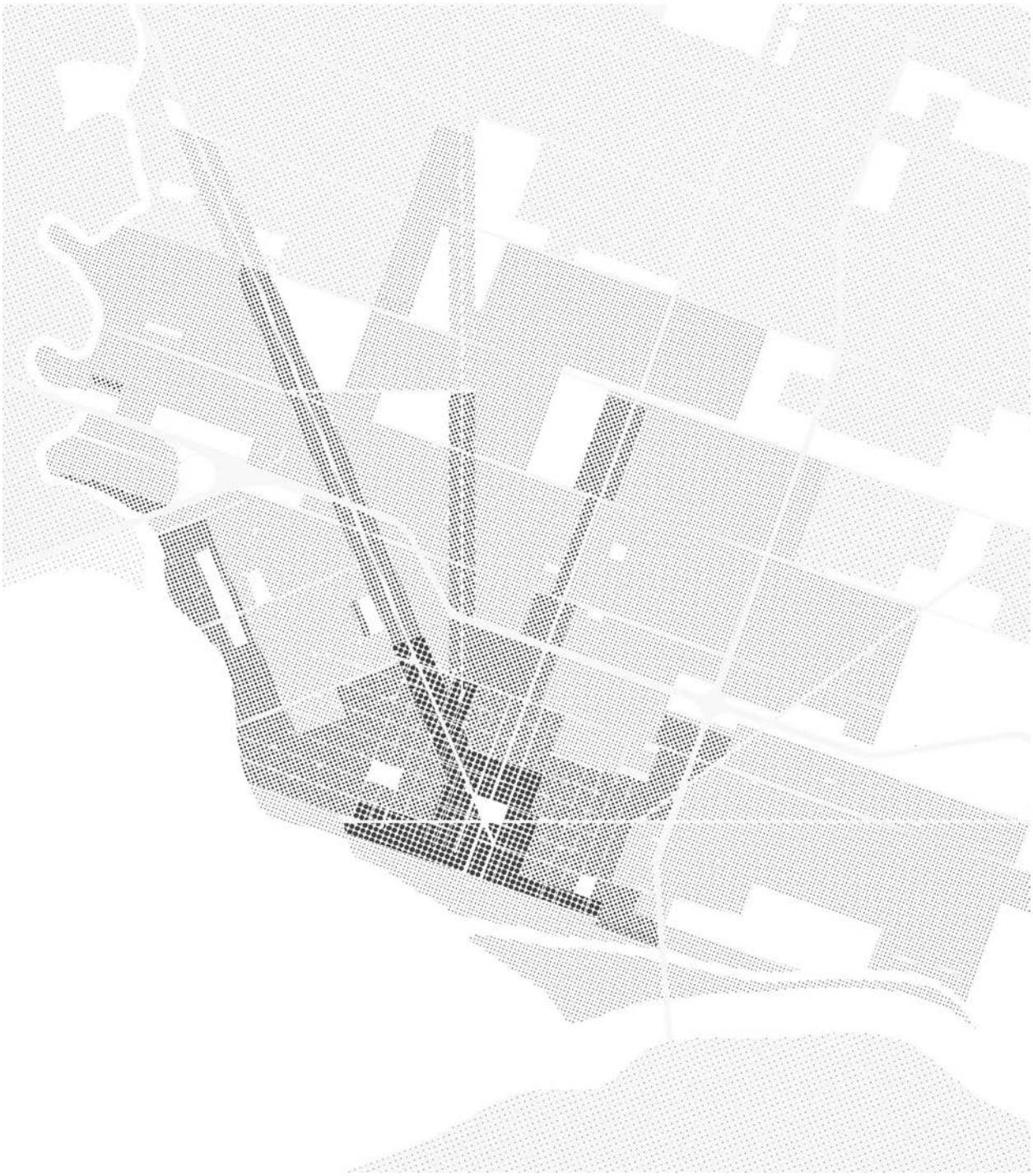

Figure 14.2. Patchwork Appearance of Shrinking Cities

Figure 14.3. Conventional Redevelopment Strategies in Shrinking Cities: Subsidized Private Development Around Downtown and in High-Income Neighborhoods and Nonprofits' Scattered Developments in Lower-Value, Higher-Vacancy Areas

Figure 14.4. Strategic Interventions: New Neighborhoods in "Isolated" and "Connected" Areas

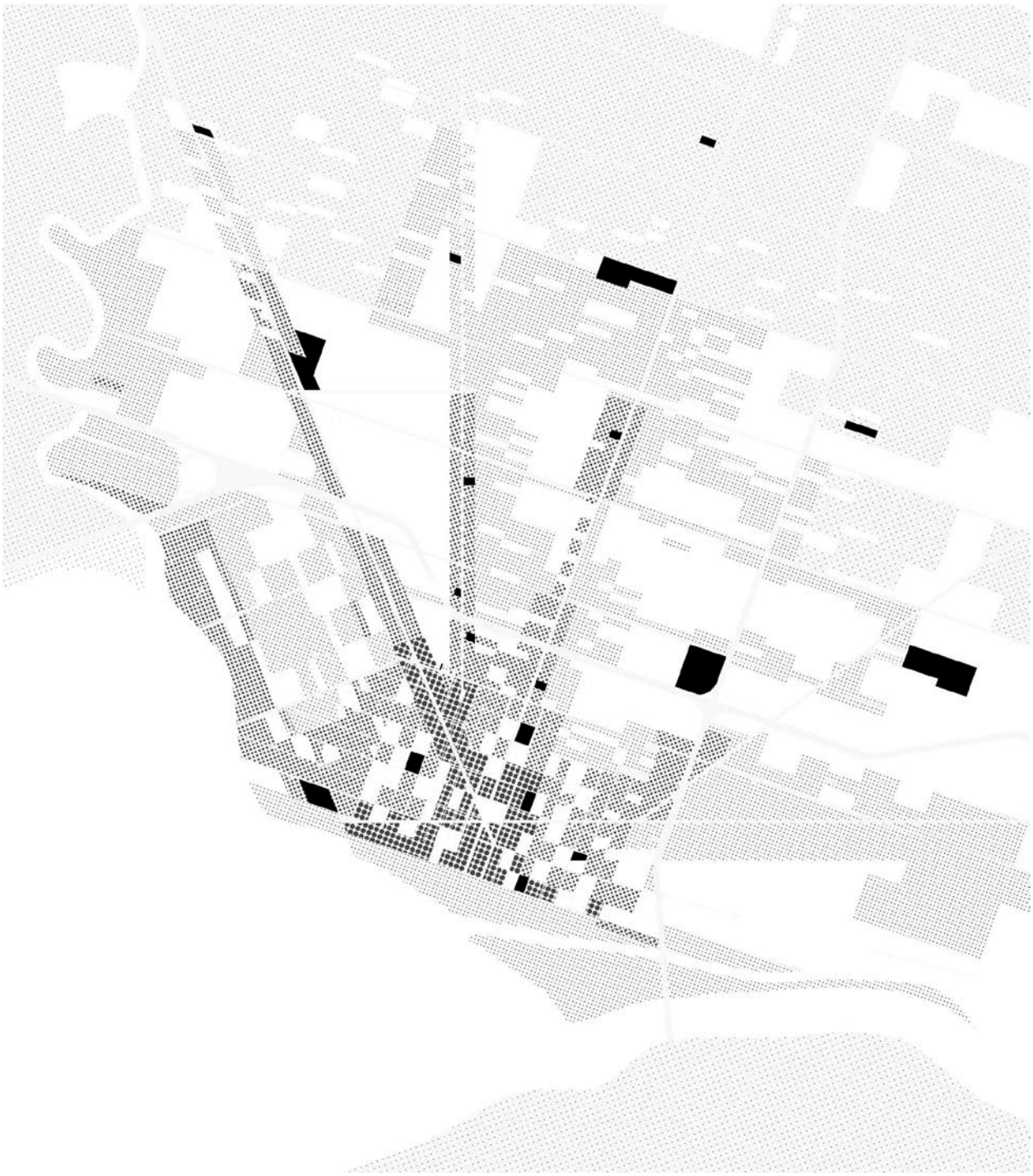

Figure 14.5. Typical Neighborhood Prior to Decline

Figure 14.6. Semi-Abandoned Neighborhood

Figure 14.7. Reconstructing a Semi-Abandoned Neighborhood with Improved Housing, Additional Open Space and Changed Street Patterns

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[ii] Camilo Vergara, *American Ruins* (New York: Monacelli Press, 2003); Andrew Moore and Philip Levine, *Detroit Disassembled* (Akron, OH: Akron Art Museum, 2010); Yves Marchand and Roland Meffre, *The Ruins of Detroit* (London: Steidl, 2010).

[iii] For the purposes of this chapter, "abandonment" means permanently vacant buildings as well as the vacant land that results from the demolition of such structures.

[iv] In this chapter, diagrams of a hypothetical city illustrate problems and solutions at both the city scale (Figures 1 through 4) and neighborhood scale (Figures 5 through 7). This hypothetical city contains

elements of several different shrinking cities in the American Rust Belt, but it does not purport to represent real conditions in any one city.

[v] Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Vintage, 1961).

[vi] Brent Ryan, Julie Stein, Jessica Fain, and Eva Strobel, "Project 1," *Shrinking City Buffalo Urban Design Studio*, Massachusetts Institute of Technology School of Architecture and Planning, Cambridge, MA, 2010, available at http://shrinkingcitystudio.wordpress.com/.

[vii] Christine MacDonald and Darren A. Nichols, "Bing moves to jump-start plans to reshape Detroit," *Detroit News*, August 18, 2010.

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[x] Kevin Lynch, *Good City Form* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981); Alexander Cuthbert, *The Form of Cities: Political economy and urban design* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006).

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[xiv] Brent Ryan, *Design After Decline: How America rebuilds shrinking cities* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, forthcoming).

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[xvi] John Kromer, *Neighborhood Recovery: Reinvestment policy for the new hometown* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001); John Kromer, *Fixing Broken Cities: The implementation of urban redevelopment strategies* (New York: Routledge, 2010); Ryan, *Design After Decline*.

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[xix] Brent Ryan, *Shrinking City Buffalo Urban Design Studio*, Massachusetts Institute of Technology School of Architecture and Planning, Cambridge, MA, 2010, available at http://shrinkingcitystudio.wordpress.com/.

[xx] Philadelphia Office of Housing and Community Development (OHCD), "Home in North Philadelphia," Philadelphia, PA, 1993; Kromer, *Neighborhood Recovery*; Ryan, *Design After Decline*.

[xxi] Rowe, *Modernity and Housing*.

[xxii] Jonathan Barnett, *Urban Design as Public Policy* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974).

[xxiii] Richard Plunz, *A History of Housing in New York City* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990).

[xxiv] Susan Fainstein, "New Directions in Planning Theory," *Urban Affairs Review* 35, no. 4 (2000): 451-478.

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[xxviii] Ryan et al, "Project 1."

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