

(re)urbanism



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Suburban Sprawl and the Healthy Alternative

Andres Dunay, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, and Jeff Speck

Illustration and Design by Daniel Chase McClure

PENGUIN BOOKS

We would like to dedicate this book to our parents.

PENGUIN BOOKS

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Welcome to the most important book ever written.

You're stuck in traffic again.

As you creep along a highway that was widened just three years ago, you pass that awful new billboard: COMING SOON, NEW HOMES! Already the bulldozers are plowing down pine trees, and a thin layer of mud is oozing onto the roadway. How could this be happening? Over the years, you've seen a lot of forest and farmland replaced by rooftops, but these one hundred acres had been left unscathed, at the whim of a wealthy owner. Now, it is said, the owner has passed on, the children have cashed out, and the property has fallen victim to the incessant pressures of growth.

These one hundred acres, where you hiked and sledged as a child, are now zoned for single-family housing. They have been bought and sold on that premise, and there is a strong demand for new houses. The developer is not about to go away. The anticipated buyers of these new homes, your future neighbors, are respectable professionals, families much like yours, people who could easily be your friends, relatives, or colleagues. These people are welcome to settle this land, to share your suburban dream—over your dead body.

Why, in this country in which growth is considered tantamount to well-being, in which economic health is measured in “housing starts,” is the prospect of these particular houses starting near yours so threatening? What has happened to our manner of growth, such that the thought of new growth makes your stomach turn?

It is not just sentimental attachment to an old sledding hill that has you upset. It is the expectation, based upon decades of experience, that what will be built here you will detest.

It will be sprawl: cookie-cutter houses, wide, treeless, sidewalk-free roadways, mindlessly curving cul-de-sacs, a streetscape of garage doors—a beige vinyl parody of *Leave It to Beaver*. Or, worse yet, a pretentious slew of McMansions, complete with the obligatory gatehouse. You will not be welcome there, not that you would ever have reason to visit its monotonous moonscape. Meanwhile, more cars will worsen your congested commute. The future residents will come in search of their American Dream and in so doing will compromise yours.

You are against growth, because you believe that it will make your life worse. And you are correct in that belief, because, for the past fifty years, we Americans have been building a national landscape that is largely devoid of places worth caring about. Soulless subdivisions, residential “communities” utterly lacking in communal life; strip shopping centers, “big box” chain stores, and artificially festive malls set within barren seas of parking; antiseptic office parks, ghost towns after 6 p.m.; and mile upon mile of clogged collector roads, the only fabric tying our disassociated lives back together—this is growth, and you can find little reason to support it. In fact, so far as your hectic daily schedule allows, you fight it. Once a citizen, you have now become a Nimby (Not In My Backyard), or what professional planners dismissively term a Banana (Build Absolutely Nothing Anywhere Near Anything). As such, you are hardly expected to be reasonable, or even polite. Still, it would be nice if there were a more constructive role to play—if only there were some third choice available other than bad growth and no growth, the former being difficult to stomach and

the latter being difficult to sustain for more than a few years at a time.

Obviously, that third choice is good growth, but is there really such a thing? Do there exist man-made places that are as valuable as the nature they displaced? How about your hometown Main Street? Or Charleston? San Francisco? Few would dispute that man has proved himself capable of producing wonderful places, environments that people cherish no less than the natural wilderness. They, too, are examples of growth, but they grew in a different way than the sprawl that threatens you in today's world.

The problem is that one cannot easily build Charleston anymore, because it is against the law. Similarly, Boston's Beacon Hill, Nantucket, Santa Fe, Carmel—all of these well-known places, many of which have become tourist destinations, exist in direct violation of current zoning ordinances. Even the classic American main street, with its mixed-use buildings right up against the sidewalk, is now illegal in most municipalities. Somewhere

Smart Locations

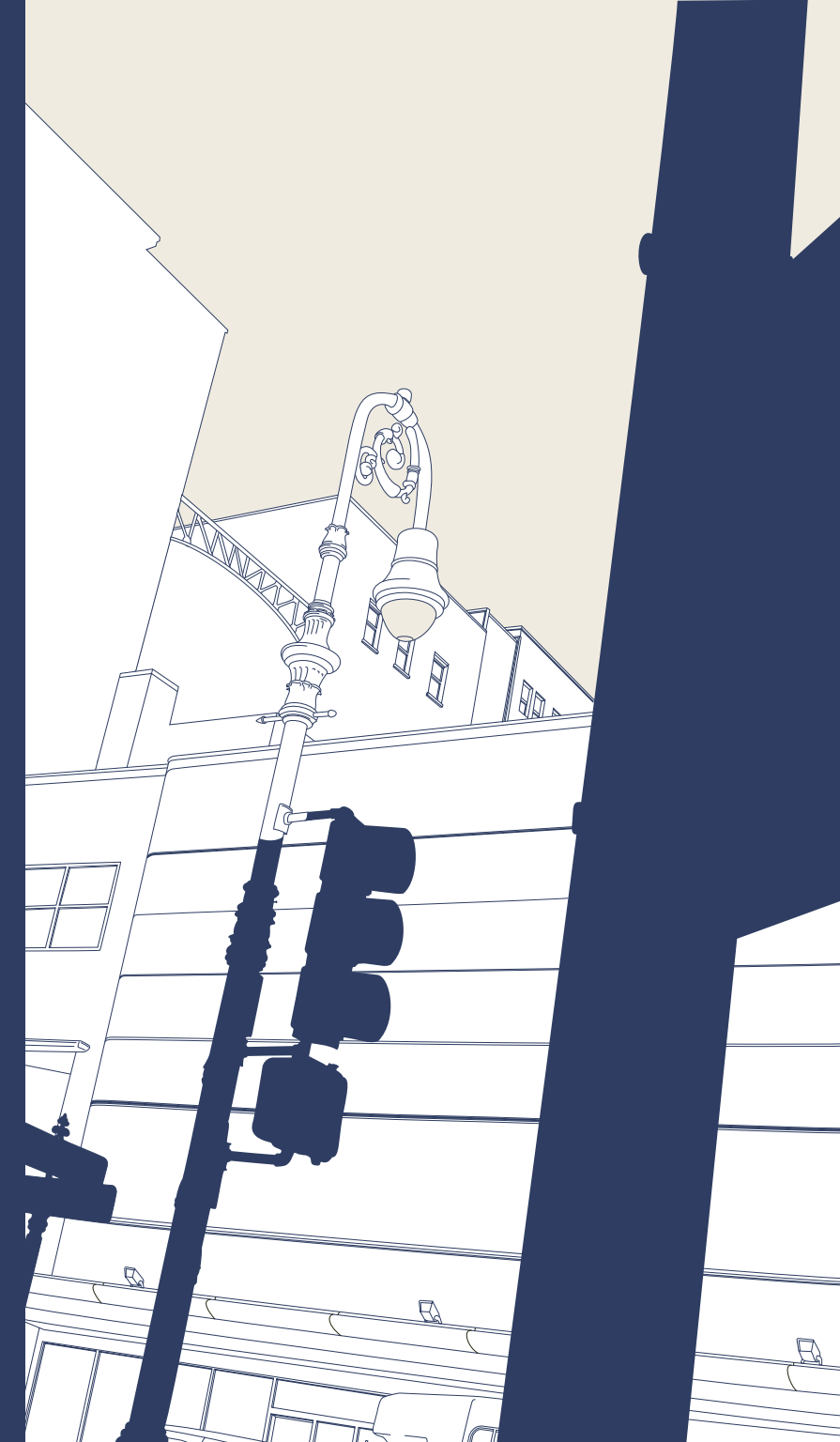
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(re)urbanism promotes the creation and restoration of diverse, walkable, compact, vibrant, mixed-use communities composed of the same components as conventional development, but are assembled in a more integrated fashion, in the form of complete communities. These contain housing, the work place, shops, schools, parks, entertainment, and civic facilities essential to the daily lives of the residents, all within easy walking distance of each other. New Urbanism promotes the increased use of trains and light rail, instead of more highways and roads. Urban living is now rapidly becoming the new hip and modern way to live for people of all ages. Currently, there are over 500 new urban projects planned or under construction in the United States alone, and over half of those are in historic urban centers.

New urbanism is one of the most important planning movement this century, and is about creating a better future for us all. This is an international movement to reform the design of the built environment, and is about raising our quality of life and standard of living by creating better places to live. New Urbanism is the revival of our lost art of place-making, and it is essentially a reordering of the built environment into the form of a complete city, town, village, or neighborhood; the way communities have been built for centuries around the world. New Urbanism involves fixing and infilling cities, as well as the creation of compact new towns and villages.

Around the United States, there are a handful of locations keeping up with the growth of their respective region. These locations have done what was required to create a high value of life its many citizen, while remaining respectful to its nature.



Arlington, Virginia

It is in Arlington's urban villages, centered around Metro stations, public transport hubs and shopping, that we find the unique character of Arlington's distinct neighborhoods.

Arlington is home to both booming business districts with towering skyscrapers and quaint residential neighborhoods with a small-town feel, teeming with shopping centers and lively nightlife, Arlington has a little bit of everything for every person. Couple this urban diversity with planned development centered around one of the best public transportation systems in the country, and you have a community where one can live, work, shop and play, no car required.

Arlington attracts millions of visitors every year, due in part to its proximity to our nation's capital. But Arlington is also an address known around the globe in its own right, thanks to landmarks such as Arlington National Cemetery, Iwo Jima Memorial and the Pentagon, to name a few. The area has also become a vibrant business center, boasting US Airways, Hecht's, and Nordstrom's among the companies operating headquarters here. In addition, it is a telecommunications hub, as both Verizon, WorldCom and Qwest operate large workforces in the County.

Despite its presence as an international destination and bustling commercial location, this unique area also features quality residential neighborhoods. Within walking distance of the corporate centers, tourist attractions and transportation centers are neighborhoods where moms push strollers, kids play in front yards, and parks line the streets. Somewhere between the laid-back pace of small town life and the busy urban buzz of the 21st

century, some 40,000 families (187,000 residents) call Arlington their relaxing home sweet home.

Arlington is also a dynamic community and the managed growth here has served as a model for other municipalities. Yes, Arlington is growing (its population increased 11% in the last decade), but it is growing more diverse as well, as people with increasingly varied backgrounds come to call the County home. However, this growth in size is also well-planned and strongly supported by a robust sense of community – Arlington has more than 60 civic associations and over 100 community and service organizations.

These contribute to what is probably the most striking characteristic of Arlington - the diversity in its landscape. Within the space of a few miles, we can find the business centers of Crystal City, Rosslyn or Ballston, the liveliness of Clarendon, nationally recognized monuments, and many neighborhoods dominated by single-family homes and tree-lined streets. All these different areas co-exist within Arlington County, and public transportation makes it all accessible to everyone.

And it is in these urban villages, centered around Metro stations, public transport hubs and great shopping, that we find the unique character of Arlington's distinct neighborhoods. Each of these urban villages is a distinctive community with jobs, housing, and recreation all within a few blocks of each other. Did we mention Washington D.C.?

