

**Fixing Inner-ring Suburbs in the US:
A policy retrospective**

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Abstract

This paper examines broad policy initiatives aimed at addressing the problem of decline among inner-ring suburbs in the United States. This examination found that there is currently no national policy to curb suburban decline, and at the state level, initiatives to manage suburban growth indirectly impact older, inner-ring suburbs. Regional coalitions have emerged to address decline but their ability to ensure the redevelopment of inner-ring suburbs has yet to be determined. This paper suggests the need for federal government assistance to aid inner-ring suburbs, and determines that tackling the issues of affordable housing and a living wage would greatly benefit these declining areas.

After two centuries of development, U.S. suburbia has evolved into a new reality that includes, on the one hand, continued growth and prosperity and, on the other hand, decline and poverty. Gated communities, McMansions, and the supersized subdivision exist in conjunction with much poorer suburbs struggling with issues of blight, fiscal stress, income decline, increasing poverty and housing deterioration (Orfield, 2002). Inner-ring or older suburbs – those suburbs closer to the central city – are more likely to be in decline than suburbs much further out on the metropolitan fringe (Hanlon, 2008; Leigh and Lee, 2005). This paper aims to identify and discuss public policies that exist at different levels of government to address the problem of decline among inner-ring suburbs. Identifying specific planning options that address decline in what are in effect unique areas would take far more than just a paper to adequately address and is, in many respects, far better suited to case analysis. Therefore, in this paper I focus on critically assessing broad policy initiatives rather than determining the effectiveness of specific reinvestment programs or assessing solutions on a suburb-by-suburb basis. Broad types of policies related to decline among inner-ring suburbs exist at various levels of government in the U.S. In this paper, I explore these different policies that, often inadvertently and in most respects inadequately, deal with the issue of decline among inner-ring suburbs.

National policy

Currently, there is little in the way of national urban policy aimed specifically at curbing decline in U.S. metropolitan areas and, since the 1980s, federal assistance to declining cities has been greatly reduced (Dreier, Mollenkopf and Swanstrom, 2004). The few existing federal programs aimed at urban decline include such

initiatives as the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), Urban Action Grants, Empowerment Zone funding and Hope VI projects. These initiatives focus on revitalizing central cities. As they stand, they have little impact on most inner-ring suburbs since these areas often do not qualify for federal monies targeted to the most deprived metropolitan communities (Fitzgerald and Leigh, 2002; Puentes and Orfield, 2002).

For instance, the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program funds a variety of development projects benefiting low- and moderate-income areas. Municipalities with populations over 50,000 are entitled to an annual CDBG grant. Unfortunately, however, many suburban communities have fewer than 50,000 residents, and therefore they are not eligible for direct allocations. The Hope VI program focuses on redesigning public housing projects. Through Hope VI, federal monies have been used for large scale redevelopment or demolition of public housing. However, public housing projects are generally not located in inner-ring suburbs. Inner-ring suburbs are largely comprised of privately-owned single-family residences, and therefore Hope VI initiatives have little impact in these areas. The Empowerment Zone program offers tax incentives for businesses in designated communities. Beginning with eight cities in 1994, the Empowerment Zone program grew to include 15 more cities in 1999, followed by an additional nine cities in 2001. So far, empowerment zone communities are urban rather than suburban. In short, current federal programs to alleviate distress in communities do not cater to ailing inner-ring suburbs.

As far as any new federal level initiatives, there has only been one failed attempt to provide assistance specifically to inner-ring suburbs. In May 2005,

Senator Clinton introduced the *Suburban Core Opportunity Restoration and Enhancement (SCORE) Act* (S.1024) with a companion bill in the House of Representatives (H.R. 2347), which was co-sponsored by Representatives Peter King (R-NY) and Carolyn McCarthy (D-NY). The SCORE bill offers economic and tax incentives to revitalize older suburbs across the nation. The core of this bill provides \$250 million in a 'Reinvestment Fund,' a federal trust fund to provide grants to ailing suburban communities seeking reinvestment dollars. SCORE never passed to become law, rejected by the U.S. Senate and U.S. House of Congress. It is too early to say whether this bill will be reintroduced. As it stands, however, this bill provides a negligible amount of money to declining suburbs.

In many respects, SCORE, in its current form, is symbolic rather than substantive. Large-scale reinvestment to revitalize inner-ring suburbs requires a far greater fiscal commitment than the proposed \$250 million. Even Senator Clinton, main sponsor of the SCORE bill, acknowledged the lack of federal support. She stated:

“Because we identify suburb communities as archetypes of American prosperity, suburbia as a whole has not attracted much federal attention....So resources for development and investment, ideas of concern to suburbs, have really been on the back burner, if on any burner at all” (Clinton, 2006).

In conclusion, it is fair to say that a national policy aimed specifically at alleviating decline among inner-ring suburbs is sorely lacking, although one could argue that SCORE, while limited, at least indicates there is recognition of the problem of suburban decline among some national leaders. Time will tell if the new administration headed by President Barack Obama will initiate federal policies to

address problems in the inner-ring. One policy area of focus for the new administration is infrastructure redevelopment. Obama has proposed the establishment of a National Infrastructure Reinvestment Bank which would spend \$60 billion over the next decade to rebuild deteriorating roads, bridges, ports, air, and train systems. Investing federal dollars to encourage infrastructure redevelopment within aging inner-ring suburbs has not been specifically mentioned but it seems that older parts of the metropolitan U.S. might benefit from this type of strategy. At this point, however, there are few specifics on how the National Infrastructure Reinvestment Bank would work and which communities in particular would be assisted.

State policy

With decline in federal aid, ailing cities have turned to states for much-needed funding. State government action to address urban problems has become increasingly important, especially with the devolution of U.S. federal government programs. However, with the loss of population, cities have at the same time witnessed a decline in their political strength in state legislatures (Weir, Wolman and Swanstrom, 2005). As a consequence, cities find it increasingly difficult to press their case for state initiatives directed specifically to decline within their jurisdictional boundaries. Inner-ring suburbs face similar challenges. In fact, compared to central cities, declining suburbs lack the political visibility and professional staff needed to successfully lobby for state funding.

There is at this time no specific state legislation aimed exclusively at the problem of decline among inner-ring suburbs. Decline among inner-ring suburbs is

not part of an explicit legislative agenda at the state level. It is not addressed in any direct manner by states but rather inadvertently emerges through three fairly broad policy areas: 1) growth management; 2) rehabilitation of the aging housing stock, and 3) community redevelopment. In the following sections, I critically assess relevant initiatives within these policy arenas.

Growth management

Policies addressing decline among inner-ring suburbs often exist in the framework of 'smart growth.' Definitions of 'smart growth' are varied (e.g. Smart Growth America, 2003; Vermont Forum on Sprawl, 2003). In their broadest sense, smart growth policies are characterized as strategies aimed at curbing another ill-defined concept, suburban sprawl. In the process of combating sprawl, smart growth policies encourage the redevelopment of inner-ring core areas, and the development of infill sites closer to the urban core area rather on the outer fringe (Downs, 2001). The American Planning Association (2002) report, *Planning for Smart Growth: 2002 State of the States* surveys various growth management policies across different states. According to this report, a quarter of states are implementing moderate to substantial smart growth planning reforms. These states include Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, New Jersey, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Vermont, Washington and Wisconsin.

Smart growth initiatives in these and other states advocate reinvestment in existing infrastructure in older communities rather than building anew. The use and repair of existing public infrastructure is one of the features for managing growth

and redeveloping older communities. Publicly supported infrastructure includes such features as transportation networks, sewer and water, schools, and parks.

In the case of Maryland, for instance, using this existing public infrastructure is explicitly stated in its Smart Growth legislation. At the core of Maryland's smart growth legislation is the 1997 Smart Growth Areas Act. This legislation designates parts of the traditional core of Maryland's urban development as 'priority funding areas' deemed appropriate for publicly-funded resources. Priority Funding Areas (PFA) are areas already developed and planned for growth. PFAs do not represent regulatory instruments that demand containment of development but instead they attempt to use the incentive of state funding to curb growth. Figure 1 illustrates the location of PFAs in Maryland. PFAs are, in part, composed of the older, inner-ring suburbs of the Baltimore and Washington metropolitan areas. Major state road, sewer, school and other related funds are steered towards these older communities where infrastructure is already in place.

<< Insert Figure 1 about here >>

Other states have similarly directed funding to existing communities in what are termed "fix-it-first" infrastructure policies. These strategies again aim to build upon and repair existing infrastructure rather than provide investment for creating new infrastructure. For example, Delaware, through the *Livable Delaware* initiative, guides growth to areas that are most prepared to accept it. Similar to Maryland's smart growth initiative, the goal is to encourage infill development and redevelopment in older places. *Livable Delaware* promotes school rehabilitation and

construction in areas that fall in line with the state's land use policy. A priority in terms of land use policy is the promotion of existing infrastructure above public investment in new infrastructure.

Questions remain over how effective smart growth policies are in alleviating sprawl and encouraging redevelopment. There is much debate but in general, it has proven tremendously difficult to prevent continuing fringe development, and, while still an open question, one could argue that any redevelopment that occurred in older suburbs would have occurred regardless of smart growth policies. Jerry Anthony (2004) in a study of urban growth in 49 states found that many growth policies did not reduce sprawl. He points out that growth management plans are often voluntary at the local level, and therefore very few jurisdictions adopt such plans. He determined that there needs to be support from local governments for state-mandated measures to be effective.

In the last decade, Maryland has become the national leader in the smart growth movement (Burchell, Listokin and Galley, 2000). Maryland's smart growth initiatives aimed at encouraging redevelopment and infill development in older communities are incentive-based rather than regulatory (Cohen, 2001). In this sense, local governments are encouraged rather than mandated to implement smart growth policies. This is similarly the case with other state smart growth programs (Weitz, 1999). Smart growth, in general, continues to be largely ineffective as long as local governments maintain exclusive power over local zoning and land use. Smart growth preserves local autonomy over land use decisions. If local governments do not want to embrace smart growth initiatives, continuing development in the outer suburbs basically continues at the expense of inner-ring areas. In this sense, if local

government decisions continue to promote growth within certain jurisdictions, decline is likely to continue in those suburbs that lose out to these growing areas.

Rehabilitation of the aging housing stock

States recognize that the deterioration of the local housing stock in older areas is a problem. Statewide policies aimed at the rehabilitation of an aging housing stock typically come in the form of assistance to local governments and community groups, and tax breaks to local homeowners. In the case of Maryland for instance, the Community Legacy program is central to this initiative. Community Legacy provides local governments and community development organizations with funding to encourage, among other things, homeownership and housing rehabilitation in communities within priority funding areas. For instance, the older suburb of Dundalk, near Baltimore City has been the focus of local housing investment. Introduced in 2005, the state, through Community Legacy, provided Dundalk Renaissance Corporation (DRC), a local community development corporation, with funding to acquire residential properties in the area. DRC is using this money to rehabilitate older housing and, once rehabbed, the plans are to sell these houses to moderate income families. So far, six houses in the historic section of Dundalk have been acquired and renovated. As this suggests, the rehabilitation process is slow.

Other states have similarly focused on housing redevelopment initiatives, offering financial incentives for residents to renovate older housing. For instance, the state of Missouri offers tax credits to renovate historic developments as part of the 1999 Neighborhood Preservation Act. This provides tax incentives to homeowners who invest in the repair and improvement of older housing in the suburbs of St.

Louis. In Minnesota, the state legislature enacted the “This Old House” Program in 1993 to provide owners of older homes in suburbs around Minneapolis with an incentive to renovate their properties. In 2001, Rhode Island approved a bill providing tax credits to individuals or organizations that renovate historic buildings for residential use. Up to 30 percent of the rehabilitation costs of projects involving certified historic structures qualify for credit.

These state level housing programs recognize the need for rehabilitation of the aging housing stock, some of which exists in older suburban communities. Again, as with smart growth initiatives, these programs are typically incentive-based. Extensive use of these incentives by individual homeowners may occur in selected areas where there are employment opportunities and a reasonably healthy housing market. Unfortunately, in less popular locations, it is more difficult to encourage private reinvestment in an aging housing stock. Dundalk, a working class community outside Baltimore city, is a case in point. Residents can receive incentives but few take the offer and rehabilitation by the local community development corporation has practically come to a standstill in the current ‘soft’ housing market. The recent foreclosure crisis has greatly impacted housing rehabbing efforts. Market forces greatly outweigh any policy initiatives such as low interest loans or tax breaks.

Community redevelopment

States attempt to spur reinvestment particularly in underutilized commercial and industrial properties in cities and inner-ring suburbs. In the case of industrial properties, this often occurs under the rubric of brownfield redevelopment. Brownfields are underutilized industrial lands than are contaminated or perceived to

be contaminated. Redevelopment of contaminated land has historically been pursued as a means of revitalizing declining neighborhoods and creating jobs and more recently, as a way to discourage suburban sprawl (Greenberg, Lowrie, Mayer, Tyler Miller, and Solitare, 2001). States encourage the clean-up and redevelopment of these sites for economic, environmental, and growth management purposes. For instance, Pennsylvania, through implementation of its 1995 Land Recycling program encourages voluntary cleanup of contaminated industrial and commercial sites. Releasing property owners from future liability, this program offers grants and loans to encourage businesses to redevelop underutilized properties as a way to improve the environment and encourage economic growth in older communities.

Many states have similarly structured programs, and, in many instances, these programs are part of the overall smart growth package of initiatives. In the case of Maryland's 1997 Smart Growth legislation, the Brownfields Voluntary Cleanup and Revitalization Incentive program was established to stimulate the reuse of contaminated properties in older areas of the state. Loans and grants are offered to owners for site cleanup. Once becoming part of the program, owners are relieved of liability. Based on conversations with local officials, to date, there has been little utilization of this program to redevelop sites in the older suburbs of Baltimore. Owners are not taking advantage of available funding or loans for redevelopment because they do not want to stigmatize their property as a contaminated site. Local government officials suspect that the fear of liability among property owners and potential purchasers of old industrial sites is a strong barrier to brownfield redevelopment (Klots, 2005). In a study of brownfield redevelopment in New Jersey, scholars interviewed a number of local officials and found they had a similar

perception (Greenberg, Lowrie, Solitare, and Duncan, 2000). These scholars suggest that brownfield redevelopment is a daunting task. Successful brownfield redevelopment is highly contingent on the site being in a good location with limited contamination. This is not always the case with old industrial areas of declining, working-class inner-ring suburbs.

Aside from industrial sites, Maryland, through its Community Legacy program, also encourages the redevelopment of commercial properties in older areas. Operated by the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), the Community Legacy Program is designed to assist established “at risk” communities where decline and disinvestment occurs, and offers assistance to these communities if they are located in the priority funding areas. The program provided \$10 million statewide for fiscal year 2002 (Puentes and Orfield, 2002). Funding is used to support a variety of capital and non-capital projects including public infrastructure for redevelopment projects, land acquisition, streetscape improvements and the development of mixed-use ventures. The older suburb of Takoma Park for instance, was awarded \$28,000 through the Community Legacy program to improve the façade of various businesses along the New Hampshire Avenue corridor heading into Washington DC. Not a lot of money, but at least a start.

However, the effects of such streetscape improvements and other community level redevelopment projects within older suburbs on the community and population outcomes are currently unknown (Vicino, 2008). Lucy and Phillips (2000a; 2006) suggest that Arlington and Alexandria, both older suburbs of Washington DC, have greatly benefited from strategies that stimulated high-density mixed-use

development near transit stations, emphasized the preservation of historic buildings, and stressed walkability (Lucy and Phillips, 2000b). There is a definite role for state-funded community conservation efforts but knowledge on the specifics on what works and does not work is currently unavailable, and, more importantly, the impacts on the local population have yet to be determined.

Regional Coalitions

The U.S. metropolis is highly politically fragmented. It is composed of central cities surrounded by separate suburban municipalities, each with their own local government services and structures, and each making their own land use planning decisions. In *The American Suburb*, Jon Teaford (2008: x) states that

“because of the strong tradition of local self-rule in the United States, [the] political distinction between suburb and central city has been vital to discussions of suburban development, lifestyle and policy. American suburbs are not simply peripheral areas with larger lawns and more trees than districts nearer the historic hub. They are governmentally independent political units that can employ the powers of the state to distinguish them from the city.”

In his study of different U.S. suburbs, Orfield (2002) argues that ailing inner-ring suburbs share problems similar to those of central cities, and therefore cities and suburbs should cooperate politically to confront decline. He advocates city-suburban coalitions as a means of tackling socioeconomic problems within both cities and suburbs. Weir, Wolman and Swanstrom (2005) conducted a study, in part, to determine whether cities and suburbs are involved in such coalition-building. Based on a series of interviews with lobbyists, legislators and other knowledgeable

informants in four different states, they found a lack of political cooperation between cities and suburbs. They state:

This article has shown that big city mayors, preoccupied with autonomy and the immediate fiscal condition of city government, are unlikely to lead the way in metropolitan reform. The mayors we studied were preoccupied with the immediate fiscal condition of city government. Moreover, when mayors did reach out politically to suburbs, the suburbs were often reluctant to join or fear of being dominated by city interests (2005: 741).

Building partnerships among local jurisdictions is a difficult task. According to Weir, Wolman and Swanstrom (2005), one area of promise is the recent development of new coalitions among suburbs. They suggest that suburban coalitions such as the Ohio “first-tier” suburbs consortia in the metropolitan areas of Cleveland, Cincinnati and Columbus offer new possibilities of political collaboration among suburbs with similar problems and interests. These coalitions “.... join more than 34 inner suburban municipalities, representing a total population of about 750,000, making them a formidable force the state legislature cannot afford to ignore” (Weir, Wolman and Swanstrom, 2005: 755).

First-tier suburbs consortia highlight recent attempts to take a regional approach to encouraging redevelopment in declining inner-ring suburbs (Puentes, 2006). This has been a particular strategy in metropolitan areas that are politically fragmented. A recent survey of metropolitan areas in the Midwest of the United States identified first suburban coalitions in eight metropolitan areas: Chicago, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Detroit, Kansas City, Minneapolis and Wisconsin (Puentes, 2006). Table 1 provides a list of these coalitions. As this table indicates, many were formed in recent years. The Northeast Ohio First Suburbs Consortium in

the Cleveland metropolitan area offers a telling example. This is an association of local government officials that represent mature, suburban communities outside Cleveland, Ohio. The consortium's goals are to acquire funding to maintain and develop local infrastructure needs in these communities, and promote incentives to encourage economic development. The local governments of the Northeast Ohio First Suburbs Consortium contend that, by banding together rather than competing, they can best alleviate decline in their communities. According to Puentes (2006), Midwestern first suburban coalitions in general each have five core issues around which they are engaged. These include (1) redevelopment and reinvestment; (2) transportation; (3) municipal revenues; (4) outreach; and (5) implementation of eminent domain.

<<Insert Table 1 about here>>

Redevelopment and reinvestment are the primary goals of each coalition. Most coalitions are also focused on seeking funding for transit projects they feel will directly benefit their needs. First suburban officials believe that public transportation is central to the needs of their local residents. The fiscal health of first suburban communities is also of grave concern. Many are concerned about state revenue cuts, school funding and local government funding assistance.

These coalitions are also heavily involved in increasing attention to the particular needs and challenges of first or inner-ring suburbs. They outreach to state legislatures and to similar suburbs in other metropolitan areas. Finally, these organizations are concerned about initiatives that attempt to undermine their

powers of eminent domain. They see these condemnation powers as important for economic development purposes.

The formation of inner-ring suburban coalitions is new, and they are in the early stages of development. Therefore, it is difficult to fully determine their effectiveness in alleviating decline within their jurisdictional boundaries. At this point, there is little research that compares the effectiveness of coalition strategies versus strategies being implemented by lone first suburban governments. A central question is whether these consortia of first suburbs can succeed without input and support from outer suburbs and state government. Keating and Bier (2008) suggest that it will take more than the coming together of first-tier suburbs to successfully implement revitalization efforts and fully offset continuing inner suburban decline. The state must be part of the overall strategy. In their examination of a first suburbs consortium in Cleveland, they argue (2008: 474):

“...the first suburbs must play the outside game, mainly aimed at changing state policies that keep them at a disadvantage. While there has been little tangible change so far, the very existence of [a coalition] and the presence of its representatives and those of other similar inner-ring suburbs in the state capital have raised awareness of their concerns and the hope that a more responsive state government will eventually act accordingly.”

The goal of alleviating suburban decline requires the engagement of all suburbs, inner and outer. Yet, instituting a funding mechanism where wealthier outer suburbs aid decaying inner-ring suburbs is difficult to achieve. In the case of the U.S., the Minneapolis metropolitan area successfully established a tax base-sharing program to redistribute funds to aid declining areas. U.S. metropolitan

areas, however, traditionally resist attempts to shift local public funding from wealthier to poorer jurisdictions. As Norris (2001:565) states:

“It is simply not in the interests of local jurisdictions to give away tax advantage. Thus, the idea of entering into regional arrangements that might threaten the ability to maximize the generation of local taxes is anathema. Similarly, local governments are not inclined to support proposals for such things as regional tax base sharing (mainly to assist ailing center cities) because nearly everyone sees them as a zero sum game in which the suburbs subsidize the central city”.

Or in this case, the newer, outer suburbs subsidize the inner-ring suburbs. This makes it all the more difficult to proceed with a regional solution to the problem of decline among older suburban communities.

What is clear is that inner-ring or first suburbs need additional resources from federal and state governments since, on their own it is difficult for them to guard against decline. This difficulty is heightened by widespread political fragmentation. In political fragmented regions, the population is divided among small municipalities that, without a strong tax base, struggle to provide local residents with adequate public amenities and services. If income decline occurs, the tax base in these jurisdictions is further reduced and public services subsequently suffer. Very quickly, decline can spiral, making it virtually impossible for suburban municipalities to bounce back. Additional resources from federal and state governments can offset a loss of fiscal stability. First-tier suburban coalitions arose out of the need of inner-ring suburbs to improve their ability to petition for additional state funding. Suburbs, by coming together, can at least build their political strength to lobby for state and federal assistance.

Strategies to consider

Forces impacting inner-ring suburbs are deep-rooted and complex. Issues of deindustrialization, suburban sprawl, racial and ethnic change, housing market dynamics, and metropolitan political fragmentation are systemic, large scale forces impacting the stability of inner-ring suburbs. As separate municipalities, suburbs range in social status and compete with each other for investment resources. Each suburban jurisdiction strives to increase its tax base – hence, the desire for high-income residents. Suburban local governments are under immense pressure to provide high quality services at low tax rates (Dreier, Mollenkopf and Swanstrom, 2004). Poor, declining inner-ring suburbs are in an inescapable dilemma. Their ability to generate revenue is weakened by a drop in local income levels, property values and, in some instances, a loss in population. Yet, these suburbs also have increased service provision costs because their proportion of low-income residents has increased. The overall result is a lack of fiscal strength.

This lack of capacity impacts local tax rates. A poor tax base typically demands higher local taxes to generate enough revenue¹. Also poor fiscal health results in a decline in the quality of local service provision. Take for instance Robbins, an inner-ring suburb of Chicago. This poor, declining suburb went completely bankrupt and was forced to lay off its entire workforce for a few weeks or more in 1987 just to replenish the government coffers. Local services were provided by volunteers who received token vouchers for free meals in local restaurants as small compensation. Robbins is an extreme example of the effects of acute poverty in a small, inner-ring

¹ In the case of the Baltimore region, for instance, Baltimore city, the jurisdiction with the highest rate of low-income residents among the five counties in the region, had also the highest property tax rate in 2006.

suburb. But it still holds true that with less tax revenue, schools and overall local services in declining inner-ring suburbs suffer as does the suburb's competitiveness within its metropolitan region. Declining inner-ring suburbs become less and less attractive as places to live. The 'push factors' of deteriorating schools and poor services combined with relatively high tax rates encourages further population loss, particularly of any remaining high-income families. This is a major dilemma for declining inner-ring suburbs.

Developing broad-based policies to reconstruct healthy suburbs are greatly needed but tricky to achieve and even trickier to know if they will work. In the following section, I put forth a few ideas on some broad courses of action that can be taken to alleviate decline among inner-ring suburbs.

Federal assistance

First, there needs to be federal level involvement. Decline among inner-ring suburbs is a nationwide problem not confined to specific metropolitan areas or regions of the U.S. Therefore, a federal level response is needed for what is a national scale problem. Comprehensive legislation at the federal level is a necessary course of action. The federal government played a vital role in the development of the postwar suburbs. It can surely play a similarly critical role in their revitalization.

Yet, so far, federal level policy offers little in the way of additional resources for declining inner-ring suburbs. These areas often do not qualify for federal level funding aimed at alleviating metropolitan decline. Federal assistance specifically aimed at inner-ring suburbs is lacking but needed, and so is a mechanism to funnel additional funding. Clearly there are affluent inner-ring suburbs that do not need

federal assistance but poor, struggling inner-ring communities right now have few places to turn for additional resources. Federal funding is particularly important because many suburbs currently rely on their own local funding stream to deal with problems within their jurisdictions. Outside sources of funding are needed. The SCORE bill was a step in the right direction, although more money than the initial \$250 million suggested by legislation is necessary.

Lobbying and agenda setting

In order to obtain a greater fiscal commitment, lobbying and advocating the needs of inner-ring suburbs is necessary. Puentes (2006) suggests the establishment of a super-regional authority for this purpose. This organization could, he argues, represent the interests of inner-ring suburbs in state and regional debates on suburban growth and decline. He suggests that a small staff consisting primarily of an executive director could administer this organization. In addition, an advisory board consisting of representatives from older suburban local jurisdictions could provide advice to the super-regional entity. In short, this entity could, according to Puentes (2006: 62) “assist in the development of local revitalization strategies...help form regional coalitions ... pursue statewide reforms, and.... heighten awareness on the national level”.

Providing a national and state level voice for inner-ring suburbs is crucial, and a regional or super-regional coalition can put suburban decline on the policy agenda at the state and national level. Examinations of the policy process note the importance of agenda-setting for policy formation, and the mobilization of public support is necessary for an issue to reach the institutional or formal agenda (Cobb

and Elder, 1972). In some instances, decision-makers are part of the mobilization process, especially those that lack the resources or institutional framework to implement the necessary policies to solve a problem (Cobb, Ross and Ross, 1976). This is the case with leaders of inner-ring suburban jurisdictions that, alone, do not have the means to fully address decline. Therefore, an additional structural mechanism (e.g. a super-regional or regional coalition) can help generate the necessary support and advocate for funding from state or national government.

Managing growth

It is essential to manage suburban growth if we wish to address suburban decline. Continuing outward movement to newer suburbs on the metropolitan fringe is detrimental to the stability of inner-ring suburban areas. By restraining the growth of new suburban communities, the abandonment of the older suburbs can be prevented. In their current form, however, many state and metropolitan initiatives struggle to deter continuing suburban expansion.

Growth management practices in the Portland metropolitan area offer a notable exception. In 1973, Oregon established a mandatory planning program administered by the Land Conservation and Development Commission (LCDC). This program requires every city and county in Oregon to develop comprehensive land use plans that are tied to specific statewide goals. LCDC can force local planning agencies to revise plans if necessary. The statewide goals are specifically aimed at curbing metropolitan growth and preventing the loss of farmland and open space. They also provide access to affordable housing in local jurisdictions, and statewide land use control is similarly linked to metropolitan-wide transportation planning,

deemphasizing the use of the automobile and embracing public transit and transit-oriented development. As Carl Abbot (1997: 28) states in his examination of the politics of Portland's growth management:

“Oregon...operates with a system of strong local planning carried on within enforceable state guidelines that express a vision of the public interest.”

The ability of the state to force local jurisdictions to comply with measures that alleviate sprawl and ensure the stability of older areas is a key element of success.

A central aspect of Portland's growth management is the Urban Growth Boundary (UGB) restricting development in rural and open land while targeting development in denser, urban parts of the metropolitan area. In 1979, the UGB was adopted by Metro, the regional planning agency that has jurisdiction over the urbanized areas within the Portland metropolitan region. Metro is the only regional government in the U.S. with a legislative council elected directly by regional voters. Metro is responsible for, among other things, land use and regional transportation planning. This regional government has the authority to require the local implementation of regional plans, another important element to the success of Portland's growth management. Between statewide and regional planning, local jurisdictions in the Portland metropolitan area are mandated to comply with policies that prevent sprawl and assist older areas.

If there is to be a policy solution to the problem of suburban decline, states must take a more active role in managing growth. Land use planning at the local level must comply with well-established statewide goals that prevent suburban sprawl and suburban decline. Many states provide incentives to local jurisdictions

for this purpose but incentives are not enough. To ensure success at curbing growth and reestablishing older areas, statewide mandatory policies are necessary.

Regional planning in Portland demonstrates the role that regional government plays in alleviating sprawl. Unfortunately, establishment of regional governments is a difficult, if not impossible, task in most U.S. metropolitan areas (Norris, 2001). Portland is a unique exception. However, mandating local jurisdictions within a metropolitan area to comply with regional land use plans will benefit declining, older suburbs. While we are far from establishing such mandates at this time, this ought to be a goal in the search for solutions to the growing problem of suburban decline.

Affordable housing

Suburbs with housing built between 1950 and 1969 are of particular concern. Lucy and Phillips (2006) determined that decline is most prevalent in these 'middle-age suburbs.' Innovative and highly desirable when first built, the housing stock of these postwar suburbs represents a bygone era. Expensive upgrading of this housing only occurs in metropolitan regions where there is a 'hot' housing market or many employment opportunities. Elsewhere in less popular locations, small postwar suburban housing is rarely upgraded and is often left to deteriorate. In such instances, this housing becomes the only affordable option for low-income households wishing to live in the suburbs. What occurs as a result is a concentration of low-income, poor and often minority households in declining, postwar suburbs. Meanwhile, if affordable housing is more evenly distributed across suburbia, this spatial concentration of poorer households can be avoided.

One of the most recognized suburban affordable housing schemes is in Montgomery County, Maryland. Montgomery County's moderately priced dwelling unit (MPDU) program requires developers to set aside 15 percent of new housing developments as affordable. As compensation, developers receive a density bonus that allows them to build 20 percent more units than the zoning ordinance permitted. This program has worked well in Montgomery County and may not be applicable to other jurisdictions. However, to avoid a concentration of low-income households in certain suburbs it is important for local and state governments to consider these types of policy options to address the problem of affordable suburban housing.

A Living Wage

One important initiative that will help raise the poor to a better standard of living is the people-based policy of a living wage. The state of Maryland recently passed living wage legislation that sets wages at a higher than the federal standard. This legislation currently applies to those businesses that receive government contracts. This is typically the case with many living wage ordinances. Baltimore City, one of the first U.S. cities to pass a living wage law, successfully pushed for legislation that ensures higher wages for low-skilled workers involved in city contracts. State and local governments are stepping in where the federal government has been lacking.

Expanding the living wage to move beyond just businesses that receive city or state contracts is important. A living wage for the workforce of older, inner-ring suburbs would help lift poorly paid workers out of poverty. In 2007, the City Council

of Los Angeles extended its living wage laws to include those workers employed in hotels along Century Boulevard, a large thoroughfare near the Los Angeles International airport. This initiative, while newly implemented, includes inner-ring suburbs around the airport. Still in early stages, this living wage legislation should help improve the standard of living for many workers living in these suburbs. Similar legislation for other older suburbs would help alleviate decline.

Conclusion

There is currently no national policy to curb suburban decline. At the state level, initiatives to manage suburban growth indirectly impact older suburbs. These initiatives typically offer incentives to local suburban jurisdictions to encourage the reuse of existing infrastructure in older communities rather than build anew. They also offer funding for brownfield redevelopment in older areas, and seek to rehabilitate the aging housing stock.

In the metropolitan areas of the Midwest in particular, the local governments of older suburbs have banded together to increase their strength and ability to alleviate the decline of their communities. These regional coalitions are new and their effectiveness at encouraging suburban redevelopment has yet to be determined. However, regional coalitions do offer some promise to declining suburban communities, and their main contribution is as a lobbying group that can advocate for additional state and federal funding.

Local governments alone cannot solve the problem of suburban decline. Federal and state level involvement is also greatly needed. At the national level, legislation similar to the SCORE bill could provide financial assistance as well as the

establishment of a funding mechanism specifically targeted to declining suburban communities. On a state level, it is important to manage suburban growth to alleviate decline among inner-ring suburbs. Other areas to focus on are affordable housing and the living wage. In some instances, postwar suburbs are the most affordable. This can lead to a concentration of poorer households in these areas, something that must be avoided if we are to address their decline. Also, many low-skilled and poorly paid workers struggle in declining inner-ring suburbs. Providing this workforce with a living wage can lift the standard of living of local residents and reduce poverty in these areas.

Figure 1

Priority Funding Areas in Maryland

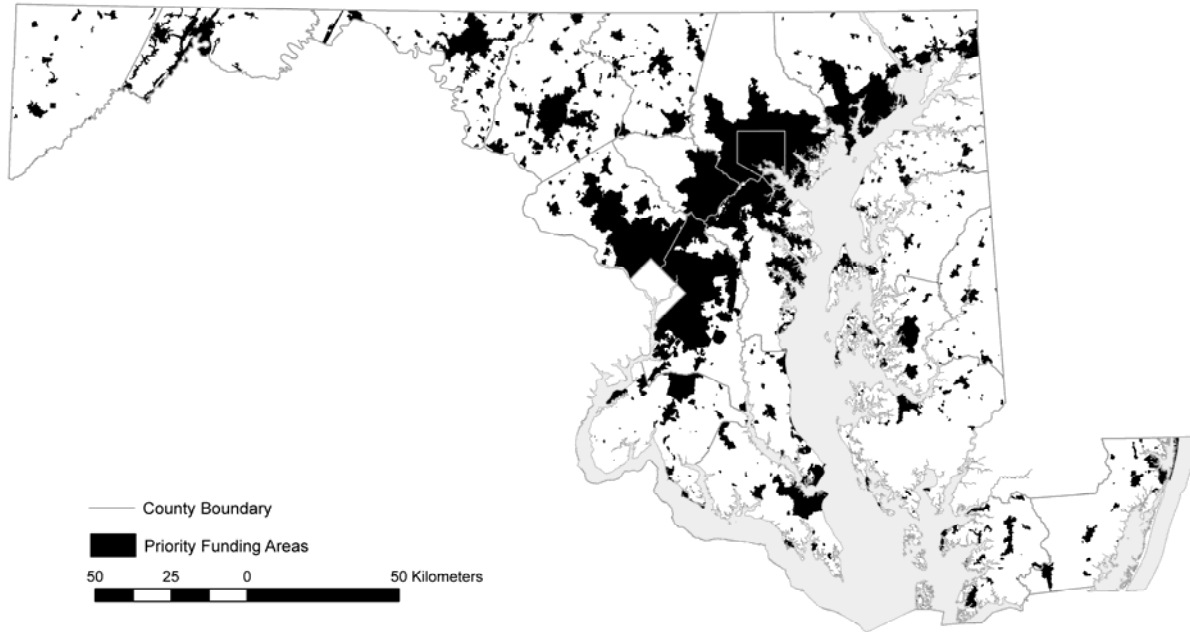


Table 1

Inner-ring suburban coalitions in the Midwest region of the United States

Metro Area	Coalition	Year formed	Number of Municipalities represented
Chicago	South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association	1978	42
Cincinnati	First Suburbs Consortium of Southwest Ohio	2003	13
Cleveland	Northeast Ohio First Suburbs Consortium	1996	16
Columbus	Central Ohio First Suburbs Consortium	1999	5
Detroit	Michigan Suburbs Alliance	2002	23
Kansas City	First Suburbs Coalition	2002	19
Minneapolis	North Metro Mayors Association	1987	22
Wisconsin	Wisconsin Alliance of Cities	1969	38

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