



High Point Redevelopment
Credit: SvR Engineering

Build a Better Burb

SPRAWL RETROFIT TOOL

INFRASTRUCTURE DESIGN

Infrastructure Design

This document is one of a series of created for Build a Better Burb, CNU's Online Journal of Suburban Design. The series emerged from the Build a Better Burb Sprawl Retrofit Council in Miami, Florida, in March, 2016—an event aimed at expanding transportation choice, sense of place, and sustainability of the Suburbs.

The Problem

Building infrastructure to support a Better Burb can overwhelm the first phase of a walkable, mixed-use development. Not only does infrastructure have to be transformed, but costs are often imposed that are larger than actual impacts.

Discussion

Like urban locations, sustainable retrofits require a multi-generational fiscal dynamic depicted in the virtuous circle of reinvestment diagram, shown on next page of this document. This economic structure enables the attraction and capture of public tax revenues and private investment back into the reinvented neighborhood for multiple generations. In a suburban context, this structure can enable the municipality or county to justify—politically and economically—participating in the redesign and reconstruction of streets, public spaces and drainage utility infrastructure through public funding so that walkable urban development patterns can be realized across privately owned parcels.

But increased infrastructure utility capacity needs in aging suburban locations for new walkable communities

typically face larger imposed costs (politically and through unquestioned engineering practices) relative to actual impacts. This is often due to the fact that the reinvention of the infrastructure is more costly in the early years. Moreover, density is viewed as negatively in suburban locations. For example, greenspace requirements (or fee in lieu payments) are typically based on the number of residential units rather than qualitative urban design.

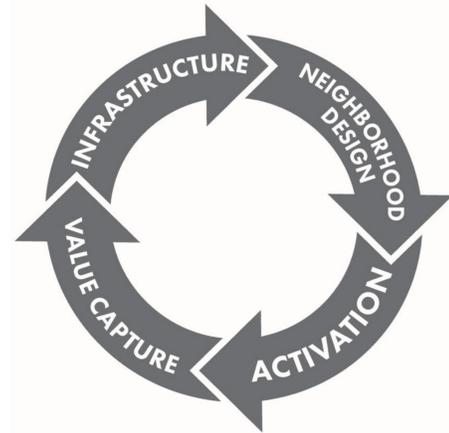
A Solution

Develop a policy and implementation protocol for Better Burb Retrofits that:

- Recognize that public spaces create contextual and spatial value based on character and design rather than a set increment of acreage per person;
- Allow for “workarounds” for infrastructure at the early activation stages for a new urban neighborhood or center in suburban locations so that “temporary” infrastructure is allowed such as a gravel base rather than asphalt for parking, and deferred impact fees are allowed until sufficient development has occurred to for positive cash flow under the development pro forma;

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- Encourage special districts (through state law reform or local practice) that enable the sharing of early core costs of reinvented infrastructure through the alignment of multiple ownerships based on revenue potential (i.e., land sale values, rent potential);
- Use Parking Management Districts or other similar mechanisms to monetize parking through the trading of parking needs with parking assets so that the spatial context is driven by neighborhood vision rather than mobility alone, and;
- Reinvent watershed and reclamation areas to open up suburban infill opportunities in “gravel-fields”— places often located in low-lying lands used historically as industrial areas or sand and gravel mines.



Sustainable Better Burb Retrofits require a multi-generational fiscal dynamic depicted in the reinvestment cycle (pictured above).

More Information

Many resources are available for suburban communities seeking revitalization and diversity in their built environments, including the websites for Build a Better Burb (buildabetterburb.org) and CNU (www.cnu.org), in addition to books such as *Retrofitting Suburbia and Sprawl Repair Manual*.

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