Course Description

What do we do in response to suburban sprawl? We are by now familiar with sprawl’s evils, and know that mixed-use density linked to transit is a more sustainable form of development. But while we infill and redevelop urban sites, and build transit-oriented development in urban areas, car-dependent low-density suburbs continue to grow and take up a vastly greater land area than cities and towns. At the same time, major demographic and economic shifts are reversing the traditional image of white, affluent suburbs and minority, lower-income inner-city neighborhoods. Cities with hot real estate markets are gentrifying from the center out, displacing poorer households to communities further and further away, with less or no public transit, fewer social services, and no sense of community.

Suburbs can be improved by increasing the density and mix of land uses, building transportation options and offering affordable housing choices. These interventions allow more people of different incomes, ages and ethnicities to live and work in the suburbs. They foster stronger social interactions and community building, while increasing municipal revenue for better public services. For public health and the environment, more compact and transit-served suburbs, reduce vehicle miles travelled and gas emissions (mitigating the impacts of climate change), preserve and create green open space, conserve and replenish water resources, and improve residents’ health and quality of life.

Failed shopping centers represent immediate opportunities for repurpose and redevelopment. Creating civic and commercial centers in residential subdivisions where none existed, making streets walkable and bikable, and introducing different housing types, are other avenues. Intervening in existing town centers to increase the mix and density of commercial uses, pedestrianize streetscapes, and allow housing above retail and accessory units in residential zones are other approaches currently being used by many municipalities.

The course looks at retrofitting strategies, and presents a planning assignment for Vinnin Square, a shopping area at the confluence of Swampscott, Marblehead and Salem, MA, where students propose some of the approaches learned.

Objectives

- Distinguish among varying components of suburbs the challenges and opportunities they present to their communities and to planners.
- Learn different strategies to improve suburbs, the goals to achieve, and the assumptions underlying these goals.
- Apply some of the methods learned through a planning exercise for a suburban commercial area in a town on the North Shore.

Requirements

- Keep current with readings.
- Post your observations on the readings, and comments on other students’ observations, by Tuesdays at 7 pm, on the course’s Trunk site at Forums.
- Write one short paper.
- Complete and present a planning assignment. Depending on class size, this can be done in groups of two or three students.
Grading
Class participation: 10%. Observations: 25%. Short paper: 25%. Planning assignment: 40%.

Instructor
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Office Hours
Office hours can be scheduled on Tuesdays and Thursdays, between 10am and 6 pm, at 72 Professors Row or at the Campus Center. Other days and locations can also be arranged.
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<th>Lectures</th>
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<tr>
<td>Sept 9</td>
<td>Introduction, course overview, readings, assignments. Suburbs: A Short History</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sept 16</td>
<td>Why the need to retrofit suburbs? What types, what parts, for whose benefit? Definitions. Suburbs and Sprawl.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sept 23</td>
<td>Components and consequences of suburban sprawl environments Strategies – Sprawl repair analysis and techniques; policy approaches</td>
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<td>Sept 30</td>
<td>Presentation of planning assignment: Vinnin Square, Swampscott/Marblehead/Salem, MA Planning proposal explained Pete Kane, Planner, Swampscott. Meet at Panera’s, 433 Paradise Road, Swampscott, at 9 am.</td>
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<td>Oct 7</td>
<td>Creating centers – nodes, civic space, third places, active open space. Increasing the mix and diversity of uses.</td>
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<td>Oct 14</td>
<td>Increasing transportation choices. Case studies: Mashpee Commons, Cape Cod, MA; Belmar, Lakewood, CO</td>
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<td>Oct 21</td>
<td>Student presentations. Planning proposal due</td>
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### Readings for each class, and assignments

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<td><strong>Sept 9</strong></td>
<td>Introduction, course overview, readings, assignments.</td>
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<td><strong>Sept 16</strong></td>
<td>9 am - 10:10 am</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Why the need to retrofit suburbs? What types, what parts, for whose benefit?</td>
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</table>
| | Ehrenhalt, Alan. 2012. *The Great Inversion*  
| | Prologue, pp. 3-21 |
| | Dunham-Jones, Ellen and June Williamson. 2011. *Retrofitting Suburbia*  
| | Preface and Introduction, pp. xiii-xxx  
| | Part One – The Argument, pp. 2-14 |
| | Williamson, June. 2013. *Designing Suburban Futures*  
| | Preface, Foreword and Introduction, pp. pp. x-xviii |
| | 10:20 am-11:30 am | Definitions. Suburbs and Sprawl. |
| | *Designing Suburban Futures*, Vision, pp. 1-23 |
| | Jackson, Kenneth T. 1987. *Crabgrass Frontier*  
| | Ch. 6  The Time of the Trolley, pp. 103-115  
| | Ch. 7  Affordable Homes for the Common Man, pp. 116-137 |
| | Fishman, Fishman, Robert. 1987. *Bourgeois Utopias*  
| | Ch. 5  The Classic Suburb: The Railroad Suburbs of Philadelphia, pp. 134 – 154  
| | Ch. 6  Los Angeles: Suburban Metropolis, pp. 155-181 |
| **Sept 23** | 9 am – 10:10 am | Components and consequences of suburban sprawl environments. |
| | Ch. 1  What is Sprawl, and Why? Pp. pp. 3-20 |
| | Ch. 2  Counting Costs and Benefits. Is Sprawl Efficient? pp. 57-84  
| | Ch. 7  You Can’t March on a Strip Mall, pp. 217-248  
| | Ch. 8  Sprawl, the Environment and Climate Change, pp. 249-265 |
10:20 am – 11:30 am

**Strategies: sprawl repair model and techniques**

*Designing Suburban Futures*
Better Suburban Futures, pp. 38-49

*Sprawl, Justice and Citizenship*
Ch. 9 Reforming Sprawl, and Beyond

Ch. 1 From Sprawl to Complete Communities, pp. 1-15
Ch. 2 The Sprawl Repair Method, pp. 16-31

### Set 30

**Pete Kane, Planner, Town of Swampscott**

**Paper due**

Need for retrofitting Vinnin Square, in Swampscott, Marblehead and Salem

Opportunities and challenges

Meet at Panera Bread, 433 Paradise Rd, Swampscott, at 9 am

**Planning assignment explained**

Reading:

MPO report on Vinnin Square: Swampscott-Marblehead Livable Community Workshop

### Oct 7

9 am -10:10 am

Creating centers – nodes, civic space, third places, active open space.

*Retrofitting Suburbia*

Ch. 4 Retrofitting Social Life Along Commercial Strips, pp. 59-94

*Sprawl Repair Manual*

Shopping Center, pp. 111-128
Shopping Mall, pp. 129-149
Commercial Strip, pp. 151-161

10:20 am- 11:30 am

Increasing the mix and diversity of uses.

*Retrofitting Suburbia*

Ch. 6 From Regional Malls to New Downtowns through Mixed-Use and Public Space, pp. 108-139

*Sprawl Repair Manual*

Business Park, pp. 163-177

### Oct 14

9 am – 10:10 am

Increasing transportation choices.

*Sprawl Repair Manual*

Connect and repair thoroughfares
Single-family and multi-family subdivisions, p. 84-97; p. 99
Rationalize parking, p. 100
Ch. 5  Repair of Thoroughfares and Parking, pp. 216-233

10:20 am – 11:30 am
Case Studies: Mashpee Commons, Cape Cod, Belmar, Lakewood, CO.

*The Great Inversion*
Ch. 9  Urbanizing the Suburbs, pp. 204-226

*Retrofitting Suburbia*
Ch. 5  Strips Case Study: Mashpee Commons, Cape Cod, pp. 95-107
Ch. 8  Mall Case Study: Belmar, Lakewood, CO, pp. 154-171

| Oct 21 | Student presentations | Planning proposal due |
Bibliography

Boxed books are main sources for the course


