

THE CITY IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

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THE CITY AFTER ABANDONMENT

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CHAPTER 12

Rightsizing Shrinking Cities: The Urban

Design Dimension

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Recently urban policy makers 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 that currently within the city limits, shrinking cities now have 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. Rightsizing has thus far come to little in shrinking cities. In the United States, decades of optimistic master plans 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 57 percent of their populations between 1950 and 2010. Even in New Orleans, a city that had good reasons to make deliberate decisions about where residents and others should not rebuild after Hurricane Katrina, political fears and widespread citizen opposition stymied rightsizing decisions.¹ 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 vague, as neither scholars nor practitioners have 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 policy makers follow immediate imperatives?

This chapter argues that scholars and policy makers should develop an urban design-based vision, centered on a projection of the city's future built environment, to guide rightsizing. Though many shrinking cities began as industrial centers designed with monotonous speculative grids,² population decline and housing loss today present designers and planners with an opportunity to shape a better physical environment in concert with these cities' economic and social needs. Given that many view the visual landscape of shrinking cities as their most striking and disturbing feature,³ urban design seems an obvious means by which planners and designers might reshape these cities after decline and explore new forms of the ideal urban neighborhood and the ideal city.

As abandonment of buildings and properties characterizes shrinking cities, an urban-design strategy for these places must contend with abandonment before all else.⁴ Abandonment in shrinking cities is problematic at the scale of a single building or property, the city block, neighborhood, and city as a whole, causing different problems at different scales. This section considers these problems before describing city and neighborhood urban design strategies that might help resolve the problems of abandonment.⁵

The Physical Consequences of Abandonment

In a shrinking city, abandoned structures and lots are problems, and confronting the abandonment of individual structures often demands a substantial amount of policy maker attention. In the first decade of the 2000s, citywide demolition programs such as Philadelphia's Neighborhood Transformation Initiative and Buffalo's "5 in 5" program (5,000 housing units demolished in five years) act to clear derelict structures but use only individual dwelling criteria (structure condition) as a means of action.⁶ In the absence of spatial planning for shrinking neighborhoods and cities, city officials may assess abandonment at a larger scale only when a development proposal is imminent.

Abandonment in shrinking cities is just as destructive as the policy-directed neighborhood demolition of the 1950s excoriated by Jacobs and other critics of urban renewal,⁷ but it is harder for policy makers to influence

because it occurs on an undirected, piecemeal basis as owners decide whether to walk away from their property. Understanding abandonment's piecemeal nature provides the basis for understanding the urban design problems these places face.

Because decline is episodic and scattered rather than neat and organized, a 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 a resident's house can shift, her home is vulnerable to losing value. Where owners abandon property piecemeal, blocks become unstable; 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 or landlord's incentive to keep investing in his or her property decreases.

As abandonment progresses, individual lots become vacant in a generally scattered fashion, but an aerial survey of a place such as Flint, Michigan, indicates that remaining houses sometimes cluster and sometimes do not. Above 50 percent vacancy, blocks assume a pattern of desolation that becomes more apparent as this percentage increases. At around 70 or 80 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 houses persists even at high levels of vacancy. In Buffalo, for example, except in blocks emptied by purposeful public clearance or through demolition of large, single-lot industrial buildings, some housing persists. At the scale of five to eight blocks, no cluster of blocks in Buffalo was more than 71 percent vacant as of 2010.⁸ The persistence of inhabited housing even in mostly vacant areas helped defeat New Orleans's nascent rightsizing proposals of 2006 and also confronted efforts in Detroit in 2010.⁹ Even in a 90 percent vacant area, one resident's wishing to remain in her home requires officials to condemn the property if they wish to make an entire block available for redevelopment and complicates their efforts to withdraw city services.

At a larger scale, piecemeal, house-by-house abandonment leads to patchiness, where large areas of the city may have varying levels of vacancy, while other areas have few vacancies or retain all their housing. In Buffalo, 50 percent of the city's census block groups were at least 10 percent vacant,

and about 20 percent of those block groups (about 10 percent of Buffalo's census block groups total) were over 50 percent vacant in 2010.¹⁰ Vacancy ebbed and flowed across space in a pattern that was never neat, always irregular, always shifting, and always interrupted by remaining structures. 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 not exact. Over time, piecemeal patches of abandonment grew, spreading from high-vacancy areas into some adjoining lower-vacancy areas.¹¹ The shift from an undifferentiated urban pattern to patchwork abandonment is evident in schematic form in Figures 12.1 and 12.2 and at a smaller scale in Figures 12.5 and 12.6.

Reconnecting Urban Design with Social Policy

Any move toward an urban design strategy for rightsizing shrinking cities will be difficult. Designers will not find a rightsizing vision in past ideals of city form such as garden or radiant cities, nor in contemporary ideals such as neotraditionalism, "smart growth," or landscape urbanism.¹² These ideals 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. While theorists have argued that urban design must necessarily consider political, economic, and social function,¹³ integration of these disparate elements within the field has proven problematic.

In planning, beginning with urban policy initiatives in the 1960s such as conservation, community renewal requirements, and the Model Cities program, and conceptually backed by Davidoff's advocacy strategy,¹⁴ academics shifted toward grounding in social science research, while traditional practitioners continued to address land use and urban redevelopment. The profession distanced itself from design.¹⁵ At the same time, architecture became divorced from social concerns as the Nixon administration canceled Great Society urban policies and as theorists questioned architecture's relevance to social problems.¹⁶ 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 non-profit or developer-driven projects.¹⁷

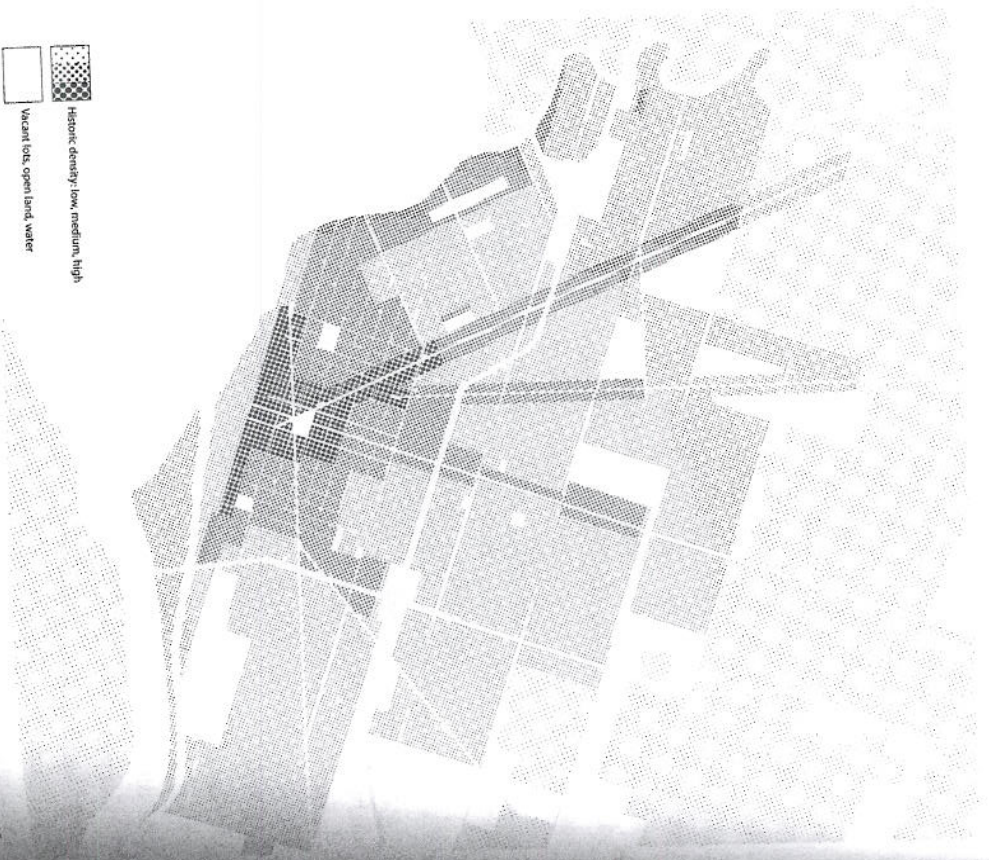


Figure 12.1. The industrial American city around 1950. Brent Ryan and Allison Hu.

Yet some links remain between innovative urban design and liberal social policies. These have persisted primarily through the works of committed practitioners and policy makers. In the 1970s, community organizing generated occasional innovative designs such as Villa Victoria in Boston's South End that linked partially abstract modernist architecture with subsidized housing while respecting the urban design of its surroundings.¹⁸ In similar fashion, in the 1990s Philadelphia's Office of Housing comprehensively redesigned the disinvested neighborhood of Lower North Philadelphia with the



Figure 12.2. Patchwork appearance of shrinking cities. Brent Ryan and Allison Hu.

Poplar Nehemiah moderate-density, low-income housing development.¹⁹ While design was not a signal feature of this project, Philadelphia's ambitious planning approach directly recalled accomplishments of the late modern and early postmodern eras such as the Yorktown houses constructed from 1960 to 1970 in Philadelphia²⁰ and the St. Lawrence development of Toronto from the 1970s.²¹ Urban design studios in 2010 and 2011 for Buffalo and Baltimore replicated these combinations of innovative design and social planning.²² The Buffalo studio showed that the city had sufficient Community

Development Block Grant funding to construct large numbers of houses if city officials chose to prioritize construction over demolition, and both studios showed that urban designers have a range of design options to relieve 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 became thin and frayed after the end of modernism in the 1970s, but a renewed urban design agenda for rightsizing shrinking cities, if put into practice by committed policy makers and designers, might begin to regenerate these threads. I propose an *interventionist, critical, benevolent* agenda to improve on the modest and ineffective urban design strategies shrinking cities have pursued for almost forty years.

Interventionist urban design is committed to large-scale, comprehensive action across a wide area of space. Such 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 cities. Poplar's chief planner John Kromer believed that only large-scale action could demonstrate a political commitment to improving disinvested urban neighborhoods and achieve the public visibility to convince politicians of what Kromer called "neighborhood recovery."²³

Critical urban design questions contemporary practice, such as the nostalgic bent of neotraditional urbanism, and projects innovative strategies to address social needs. Boston's Villa Victoria and other projects like Alvaro Siza's Quinta Malagueira in Évora, Portugal,²⁴ and the New York Urban Development Corporation's scattered-site Twin Parks Houses achieved this a decade previous.²⁵ Critical urban design moves beyond conventional wisdoms to project novel configurations of spaces, buildings, and activities.

Last, *benevolent* urban design acts in the interest of disempowered or underserved 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 must not repeat the stigmatization of the poor by modernist, mid-twentieth-century public housing whose large-scale, *habula rasa* developments lacked any relationship to their surroundings.²⁶

A renewed urban design agenda committed to critical and benevolent interventionism is more radical than it seems. Its "benevolence" evokes the need for social justice, not always part 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,²⁷ yet its contribution to social justice is questionable. New urbanism's best-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.²⁸ HOPE VI's new urbanist design reduced the stigma associated with the distinctive modernist towers of public housing but did so by building a substantially smaller number of units to house the very poor.

Providing for society's less privileged should be a collective mandate. Policy makers 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 problems of shrinking cities could also help renew connections between urban design and social policy.

Toward Patchwork Urbanism

Photographs from the first half of the twentieth century show industrial cities such as Detroit or Buffalo with a uniform carpet of nearly identical houses stretching toward the horizon. With the onset of population loss and housing abandonment, this homogeneous pattern (Figures 12.1 and 12.5) became a frayed and tattered urban fabric. Today, the cityscapes of shrinking cities resemble a patchwork of intact areas interspersed with areas of growing abandonment and with heavily abandoned areas (Figures 12.2 and 12.6). Contemporary rebuilding policies comprise a parallel patchwork of small-scale nonprofit-driven housing, market-rate housing in higher-income areas, and little or no new housing in those areas with very high vacancy (Figure 12.3). In other words, shrinking cities lack a comprehensive urban design strategy to shape either their continued shrinkage or their potential for areas of growth. In the early 1990s, 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.²⁹

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. In shrinking cities, such sites are rarely available.

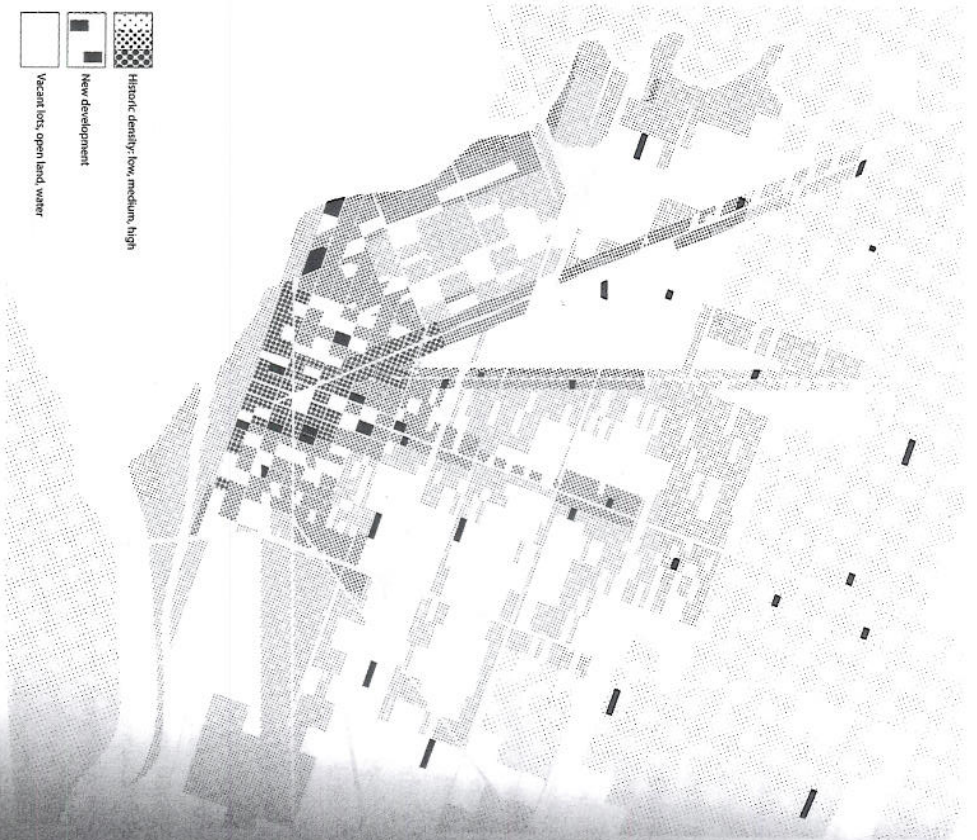


Figure 12.3. Conventional redevelopment strategies in shrinking cities: subsidized private development around downtown and in high-income neighborhoods, and nonprofits' scattered developments in lower-value, higher-vacancy areas. Brent Ryan and Allison Hu.

Conventional urban design also projects physical futures hardly compatible with the reality of shrinking cities. New urbanism favors restored street networks with high-density housing, but in shrinking cities, weak real estate markets prevent all but a small quantity of street and block fabric restoration. Full-scale rebuilding along new urbanist lines is also conceptually illogical, as working-class areas of industrial cities often lacked amenities such as

public space and diverse housing types. A related proposal, Hollander's "reverse transect"³⁰ argues that regulations can guide neighborhood abandonment in an orderly progression of dedensification. But the piecemeal abandonment of shrinking cities is very far from orderly, and it is unconnected to planning regulations.

Landscape urbanism, a recent design movement with very different ideals than new urbanism, promotes the paradoxical combination of natural landscapes with precise, avant-garde design.³¹ This strategy 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. Landscape urbanism is an excellent strategy for large previously industrial areas such as Buffalo's "monumental wilderness" of empty grain elevators along the Buffalo River but not for the patchwork of vacant and settled areas that characterize most partly abandoned neighborhoods.³² 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 reluctant to alienate voters by widespread property 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 baroque³³ to Brasilia's bird-in-flight form,³⁴ to the picturesque new urbanist village of Seaside, Florida.³⁵ The optimistic conditions characterize shrinking cities: their incompleteness and imperfection make the attainment of an ideal city form seem impossible. Urban designers may dislike imperfection and incompleteness, but any urban design theory for the shrinking city ideal will have to value and incorporate these attributes.

The shrinking city should become neither new urbanism's ideal restored cityscape of historicist homes nor landscape urbanism's landscape of returned nature, but rather a patchwork of differentiated areas containing settlements of varied densities and form, interspersed with open areas of various sizes, programs, and uses. At the citywide scale, a large-scale pattern of *interwoven growth and shrinkage* characterizes this "patchwork urbanism." At the neighborhood scale, interwoven growth and shrinkage comprise three smaller patterns: areas with *extensive shrinkage*, *growth in isolation*, and

growth in connection. The following sections describe patchwork urbanism's patterns at the citywide and neighborhood scale (see Figures 12.4 and 12.7 for illustrations in a hypothetical city and neighborhood).

Interwoven Growth and Shrinkage

Few urban designers have acknowledged and appreciated urban incompleteness as a formal ideal. Among them is Kevin Lynch, who in 1960 described an ideal metropolitan form that he called "the polycentered net."³⁶ 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 of streets and of "belts and tongues of open land." This pattern would "specialize and grow, perhaps in a rhythmically pulsating fashion." Lynch's recommendation captured many of the characteristics that he felt characterized the metropolis: 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 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 an odd idea; he did not explore it extensively, nor has any other urban designer expanded on it. It has little resemblance to new urbanism's "transect," which offers a 1920s vision of a dense central city and low-density suburbs.³⁷ Fifty years later, the polycentered net remains an apt ideal for the American city, accepting both suburban sprawl and urban density 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 12.1), shrinking cities have in their decline shifted toward a differentiated, unorganized pattern of lower and higher (that is, historic) building densities (Figure 12.2). The differentiated grid of shrinking cities, with some areas becoming denser and others 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 prevalent at the time. In similar fashion, rightsizing's urban design dimension should accommodate rather than

reject the shrinking city's inevitable housing loss within its established 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 will continue to generate piecemeal vacancies. Even if unplanned building loss continues, rebuilding decisions for abandoned areas should be deliberate and designed. Location and design should be critical elements of publicly and privately driven redevelopment of shrinking cities.

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 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 low-density areas to higher (though not historic) densities. Government-driven redevelopment could construct these new neighborhoods, even as private developers continue to construct scattered, smaller-scale projects along major corridors (Figures 12.4 and 12.7). 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 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.

Extensive Shrinkage

The fate of open, vacant areas in shrinking cities constitutes much of the dialogue about shrinkage. From "blots" of vacant lots that adjoining homeowners annex in Detroit³⁸ to corridors of abandoned infrastructure, urban farms, and wildlife habitat, open spaces in shrinking cities provoke those who wish for regenerated historic urban fabrics and suggest promise for those who long for more nature in cities. In the absence of planning or design, open spaces in shrinking cities have grown and evolved, offering a palette for exploration and cultivation of diverse activities. Policy makers and urban designers should first see abundant vacant areas as "open territory" for whatever gestures residents or outsiders wish to make there.

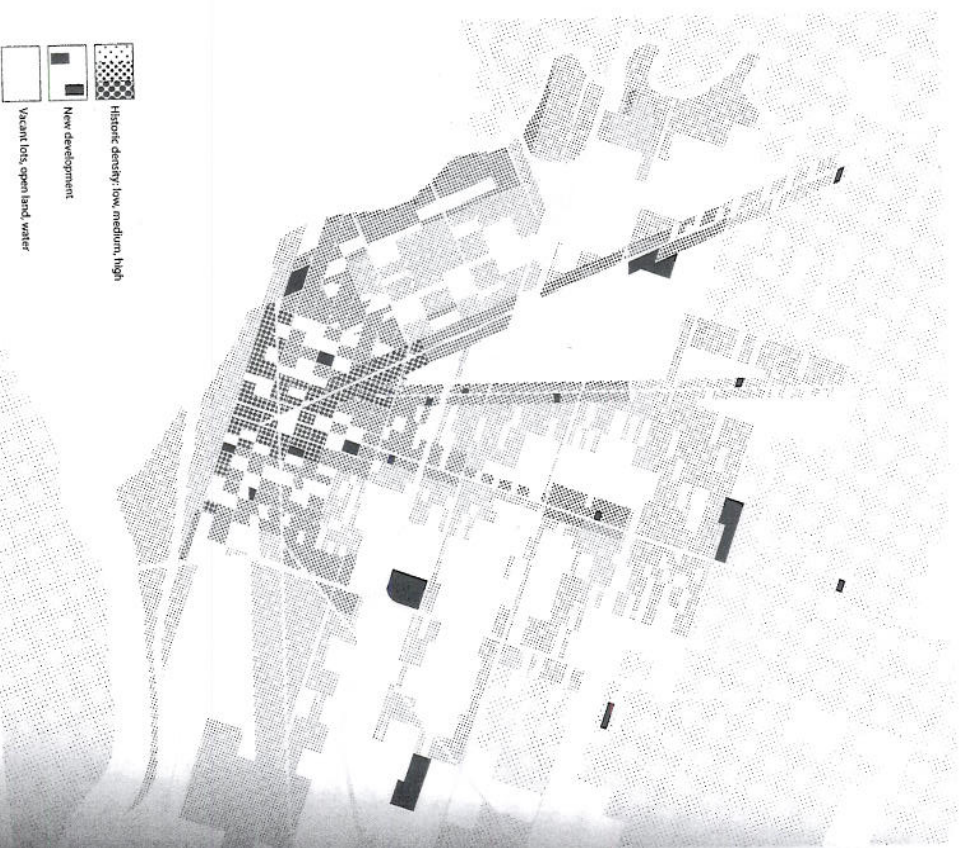


Figure 12.4. Strategic interventions: new neighborhoods in "isolated" and "connected" areas. Brent Ryan and Allison Hu.

Probably the least practical transformation is to turn these areas into formal city parks. Conventional recreation equipment, maintained athletic fields, and pastoral landscapes would be 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 by residents who remain and who value these adjacent parcels

as amenities for their homes. But "blotting" is likely to be a limited strategy and may decrease in frequency as residents of scattered homes continue to leave the city and as new developments incorporate open space into their designs. No blotting can exist without homes. By the same token, this everyday urbanism-based³⁹ practice holds substantial continued promise in cities with dense row houses, where outdoor private space is both absent and needed, such as Philadelphia or Baltimore. City officials should strongly encourage blotting in these cities, perhaps with low fences or walls to provide continuation of the former street wall.

The open areas of shrinking cities will eventually 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—and poorly maintained city- or privately owned parcels, with larger areas of land undesignated for any use. All these open areas, designed or not, will intermix with remaining homes. No single vacancy strategy is likely to dominate these areas of continued shrinkage. New development may in time occupy some open areas; if these open areas are well used, 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 reoccupying open areas will not encounter resistance, except from speculators. And new development will likely never occur in most open areas: given shrinking cities' weak markets and limited funding, they will remain open for the foreseeable future.

The most contentious aspect of dialogues over the fate of open areas has concerned residents in scattered houses throughout these areas. The ghost of 1960s era urban renewal's involuntary displacement 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 facing enormous budget shortfalls should also consider reducing city services to isolated, nearly vacant areas; city officials might officially abandon streets and their underground infrastructure where only one or two houses remain and deed maintenance responsibility for that street to the residents. Such areas are much less than those that residents of rural areas own and maintain. Residents of isolated,

sparsely populated open areas will need to accept that living in abandoned areas requires 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 retail establishments and privately developed housing. Disinvestment has occurred for so long and to such an extent that surviving intact blocks are "isolated" by larger patches of abandonment. In Buffalo, patchwork abandonment in the city's central declining area is almost two miles in diameter.⁴⁰ Isolated areas are poor prospects for conventional, privately financed housing development. Residents or visitors unfamiliar with the areas tend to avoid them, and most city residents never see them. Since most residents are 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 more pedestrian oriented, are also remote from major arterials, making them inconvenient for automobile and public transportation access. The result, seen in Figure 12.3, is that 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 continues.

Physical isolation imposes a cost on residents of these areas and on the city as a whole. For residents, physical isolation means disconnection from everyday amenities in denser areas, much as "social isolation" isolates residents from socioeconomic role models.⁴¹ Large stretches of the poor neighborhoods in Newark, Camden, Detroit, Chicago, and a few other cities pictured in Camilo Jose Vergara's photos feature nearly a grocery store or restaurant.⁴² Other parts of the city suffer in turn from physically isolated areas' failure to develop, because abandonment in isolated areas and adjoining neighborhoods is related. Buffalo's growing abandonment shows this phenomenon.⁴³

Creating new neighborhoods in shrinking cities' most isolated areas is, thus, an important strategy. The strongest argument in favor of new neighborhood development in such areas is based on equity; all citizens merit a decent living environment with access to public facilities, regardless of where they live. Isolated area residents' deprivation of access to amenities common in denser areas can thus reduce 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 remove negative influences in the lives of residents, but they will increase their exposure to benefits such as new parks, streets, stable neighborhoods, improved city services, and increased public order in surrounding areas. Current shrinking city redevelopment policies that emphasize new housing in areas adjacent to high-value areas exclude residents of isolated areas from receiving spillover benefits of new development such as improved public services or police protection. An isolated-area new neighborhood strategy would be radical; recent developments like Philadelphia's Poplar Nehemiah were constructed adjacent to active areas to encourage market development and buffer healthy areas from decline. This strategy is legitimate, but the lack of development in isolated areas diminishes equity for residents of these areas.

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. A new neighborhood adjoining a mid-sized arterial offers a better market for retail development. (Figure 12.4 shows this adjacency to arterial streets.)

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 grids with monotonous, dense housing. New residents, many of whom long for suburban housing amenities, will desire both distinction and protection from deteriorated surroundings, as well as amenities such as private open space and off-street parking routine in new development elsewhere. Developers often provide amenities in cities through the construction of suburban-style housing providing private parking and cul-de-sacs, but urban designers have a responsibility to do more than imitate suburbs.⁴⁴ Instead, they should design housing that provides expected private amenities but that also provides 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. Middle- and upper-income residents will likely prefer other locations, and some metropolitan-area residents' racial fears prevent them from considering a location that they consider "inner-city." However,

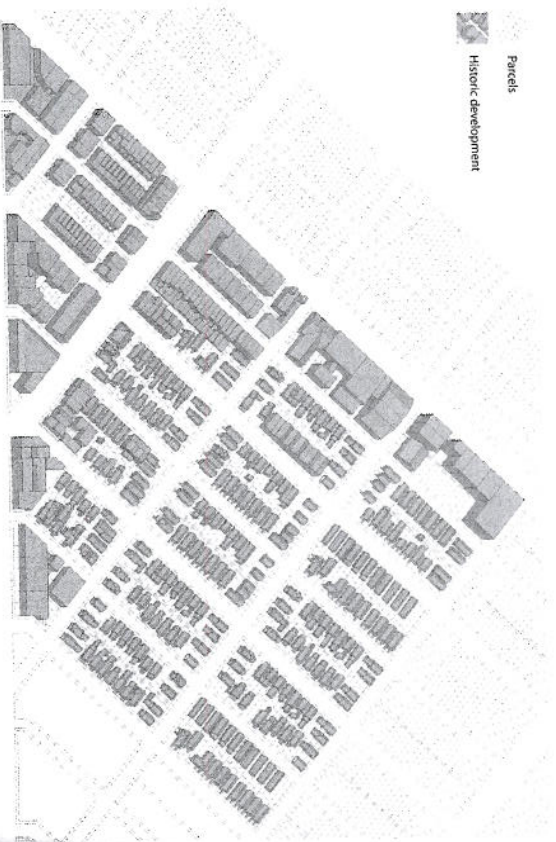


Figure 12.5. Typical neighborhood prior to decline. Brent Ryan and Allison Hu.



Figure 12.6. Semi-abandoned neighborhood. Brent Ryan and Allison Hu.

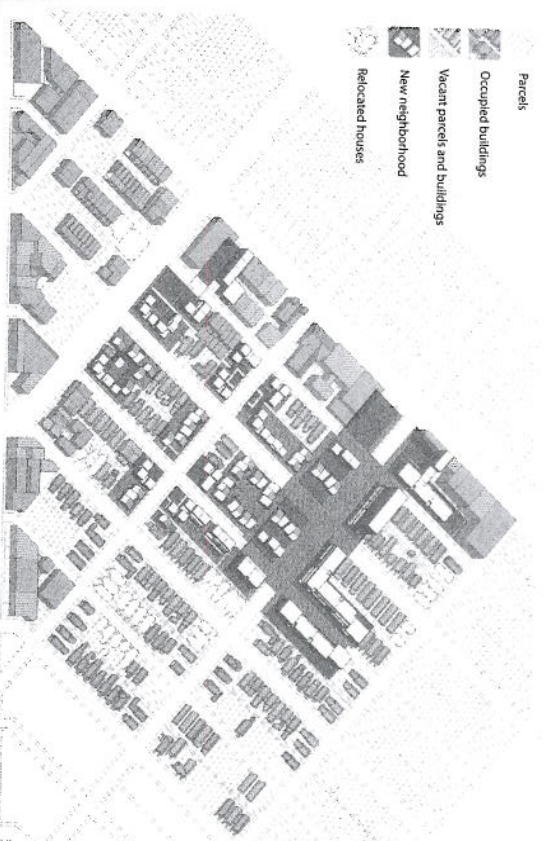


Figure 12.7. Reconstructing a semi-abandoned neighborhood with more open space and changed street patterns. Brent Ryan and Allison Hu.

low- and moderate-income city residents may find isolated locations desirable. Spacious homes and private space would be available at low cost, making isolated areas competitive locations for homeowners conscious of costs and tolerant of abandoned areas nearby. Such moderate-income homeowners, often African American, are the demographic that has purchased new for-sale homes in redeveloped areas of Detroit such as Victoria Park.⁴⁵ Such residents also made up the new neighborhoods of Yorktown, North Philadelphia's most stable neighborhood, as Kromer noted.⁴⁶ 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 retain them.

Little 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.⁴⁷ Only city and state governments, fiscally constrained as they are, possess the means to finance new housing in isolated locations, but they should not do so outside 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, could afford only a few sizable publicly financed new neighborhoods in the prosperous 1990s. But in Buffalo ten years of federal funding at the level of the early 2000s would permit construction of hundreds of new houses at densities around fifteen units per acre at a cost of up to \$200,000 per unit.⁴⁸ Given low land costs in shrinking city neighborhoods, construction of new neighborhoods in abandoned areas of shrinking cities would seem feasible if shrinking city agencies are up to the task.

Growth in Connection

While abandoned, isolated areas are perhaps shrinking cities' most striking and troubling environments, many areas of these cities have brighter prospects. Every shrinking city has healthy neighborhoods where residents choose to live, forgoing the suburbs in favor of a distinctive living experience in the city (see Figure 12.5). These healthy neighborhoods differ little from their better-known cousins in "creative class" cities such as Portland, Oregon, or Boston, and their housing prices are often lower. Entrepreneurial real estate developers see these sites as excellent locations for new housing, and city administrations are willing to subsidize them.

Unlike, say, Boston or Portland, shrinking cities often possess partly abandoned neighborhoods close to these healthy areas. Buffalonians who take the short walk across Main Street from prosperous Delaware Avenue find themselves in the shrinking neighborhood of Masten Park, a low-income, African American neighborhood where half the properties are vacant lots.⁴⁹ Buffalo, Cleveland, and other shrinking cities possess many such "connected" shrinking neighborhoods, adjacent to prosperous areas but nevertheless badly deteriorated (see Figure 12.6).

New neighborhoods in connected areas offer benefits to residents and to the city as a whole. Since these locations are adjacent to intact and higher-income residential and retail areas, residents of new neighborhoods enjoy access to these amenities. Adjacent new neighborhoods also reinforce the success of healthy areas, as additional new residents locate within a short distance of these places and can support existing retail. Proximity to active neighborhoods also gives lower-income residents access to these amenities. Development in connected neighborhoods also may attract a greater range of incomes and populations than that in isolated areas, generating increased social and income diversity. Neighborhoods adjacent to high-priced areas

have risked gentrification in more prosperous cities, but risks are low in shrinking cities. Demand for housing is low, and prices are affordable even in intact neighborhoods.

At a larger scale, construction of new neighborhoods at the frontier of decline can check abandonment's spread. New neighborhoods on borders between intact and vacant neighborhoods indicate that "abandonment stops here," reduce risk to healthy neighborhoods, and help to revive at-risk shrinking neighborhoods. Helping those who are not yet beyond hope is widespread practice: medicine has triage; in crime prevention, fixing "broken windows" 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 where it has not yet taken hold, even if it offers little promise to areas elsewhere with deeper abandonment problems.

Connected areas are less extensively abandoned than isolated areas, so latitude for major urban design intervention is less. At vacancy rates below 50 percent, street, block, and settlement reconfiguration is difficult barring extensive relocation of residents.⁵⁰ 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 (see Figure 12.7). Such strategies have been pursued in moderately vacant neighborhoods such as Corktown in Detroit or Buffalo's Near West Side by private developers and nonprofit organizations like PUSH Buffalo.

Conclusion

In the 1970s, the United States abandoned the enterprise of state-driven urban redevelopment in favor of decentralization and private initiative.⁵¹ The neoliberal economics that have dominated since that time have driven planning and urban design, particularly in the United States and 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.⁵² Yet this very strategy has also cast shrinking cities adrift, leading them to spend hundreds of

millions of dollars on downtown megaprojects⁵³ and subsidizing developers to construct housing in connected areas, while ignoring the challenge of improving conditions in the isolated, abandoned areas that grow larger as decline continues. The shrinkage of historically industrial cities represents the failure of neoliberal planning and the planners that advocate it, for shrinking cities' reliance on the market has not improved the quality of the built environment in their most abandoned areas, nor the quality of these areas' inhabitants' lives. 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 half century 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 landscape 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 in others. 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 other urban policies. Political leadership in shrinking cities may be weak, and 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 distinctive urban environments. The need to rightsize is critical, the potential to rightsize is tremendous, and the time to rightsize is now.

CHAPTER 13

Planning for Better, Smaller Places After Population Loss: Lessons from Youngstown and Flint

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Urban planning focuses on growth. Although many planners work in places with extensive disinvestment, they mainly focus on encouraging and responding to development projects. Much research exists on the causes of decline and abandonment but little on what planners should do when development does not occur.¹ Urban planning as a field has had little to say about what cities should become following decline—population and employment loss, property disinvestment, and property abandonment. The most recent edition of the “Green Book,” a handbook of local planning, addressed ways to encourage citizen participation, reuse surplus property, and leverage assets where population has declined, nearly always with the aim of redeveloping.² Several chapters addressed revitalization of blighted neighborhoods but not what to do without revitalization.³ A search of the American Planning Association’s Planners’ Bookstore in 2010 identified two publications that a planner working in an abandoned area of a city would find quite useful if the planner could not redevelop.⁴ The American Planning Association commissioned a Planning Advisory Service report on “cities in transition” in fall 2011, which will offer another resource when complete. Nevertheless, if a planner newly arrived in a city with high levels of abandonment wanted to plan in ways consistent with major loss of population, without focusing on development, he or she could not readily find materials.