

REALTORS® & Smart Growth

on common ground

SUMMER 2012

Communities for All Generations

Active Living for Seniors

How Millennials Move

Building a New Suburbia



NATIONAL
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REALTORS®

Smart Growth for All Ages

As has been well documented, the housing and community choices being made by two major demographic groups — the just-starting-to-retire Baby Boomers, and the up-and-coming Millennials, who are now 14 to 32 years old — will be driving consumer demand in the upcoming decades.

In this issue of *On Common Ground*, we discuss the housing, community and transportation choices that will be made by these groups, as well as those of Generation X, that smaller generation of people now in their 40s and late 30s.

Communities will be faced with several challenges created by the demands of different generations. Older citizens primarily want to stay in their communities, but will need some accommodation to do so — such as transportation that better suits their needs and abilities, and increased services from government or community organizations. Millennials are manifesting a great shift in our drive-everywhere culture, showing a reluctance to spend much of their day in traffic and a welcoming attitude toward alternatives such as walking, biking and public transportation. Generation X shows the strongest desire for the typical suburban arrangement of larger, single-family homes in an automobile-dominated environment, but they will be demanding better environments for walking and biking and the opportunity to walk to some destinations.

Some communities will need to simultaneously address multiple generations as they plan for the future, accommodating existing older residents, while making their towns more attractive for



Photo courtesy of ACVB

younger folks looking for a place to call home. Attracting these younger people will be important for growing the local economy as well as for stabilizing or increasing housing values.

The real rewards come from the fact that when a community addresses the need of any one of these demographic groups, they are making it a better place for everyone. Providing more alternatives to driving will benefit seniors, but will also make a place more attractive for younger folks who don't want to adopt the live-in-the-car lifestyle. Retrofitting suburbs to be more walkable will benefit today's Gen X families, while making these areas more appealing to the younger generation when they are ready to make their next move. The best community is the one that works for people of all ages.

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Flickr photo by OldShoeWoman



HOUSING

for the Generations

By Brad Broberg

The housing market is the Mississippi River of the U.S. economy — a powerful force that historically carries the country out of recession.

But imagine if all the tributaries that feed the Mississippi River dried up at once. That's the story of the housing market for the past five years. Without streams of buyers, the market shriveled.

There are signs, however, that the waters are ready to rise. As buyers from three distinct generations — the baby boomers, generation X and the millennials — flow back into the market, they'll release a surge of pent-up demand. The question is what kind of housing will each generation want — and how might their preferences mirror smart growth.

An intriguing place to start is with the peer personalities of each generation. "I think there is a big distinction between them," said Carmen Multhauf, co-author of "Generational Housing: Myth or Mastery," which she wrote with her late husband, Lloyd. "We know more about it now because we have so much more information."

Each generation's peer personality helps paint a picture of where many will prefer to live in the coming years.

Multhauf's book, which preps REALTORS® to become generational housing specialists, compares each generation born between 1900 and 2000 — the G.I. generation (1900-1924), the silents (1925-45), the baby boomers (1946-64), generation X (1965-81) and the millennials (1982-2000).

The last three are the big three that will drive the housing market based on size and number of active years still ahead of them. The latest tally: 80 million boomers ages 46-66, 62 million generation Xers ages 32-45 and a whopping 85 million millennial ages 13-31, based on U.S. Census data compiled by RCLCO, a Washington, D.C. real estate consulting firm.

Baby boomers are postponing retirement and remaining in metro areas rather than moving to traditional retirement destinations.

Multhauf, a REALTOR® from Rancho Santa Fe, Calif., devotes a chapter apiece in her book to the peer personalities of each cohort and the forces that molded them. Among other traits, Boomers are idealistic, career-focused and feel entitled to the best. Gen Xers are pragmatic, time-conscious and put family and friends above their careers. Millennials — a.k.a. generation Y — are collaborative, inclusive/interracial and impatient about “paying their dues.”

Multhauf’s book came out in 2007, so some of her observations about peer personality and housing choices became instant casualties of the housing crash. For example, she noted that the “want-it-now” mindset of millennials helped make them the youngest first-time homebuyers of any generation — true enough until the crash turned that trend upside down. In the long run, though, each generation’s peer personality helps paint a picture of where many will prefer to live in the coming years, Multhauf said.

By choice or necessity, many workaholic baby boomers are postponing retirement and remaining in metro areas rather than moving to traditional retirement destinations. The family-first philosophy of gen X — a backlash against being the first latchkey kids — makes them conscious of balancing “space and time” as they wrestle with the large-home on large-lot versus short commute quandary. Although the peer personality of millennials is still a work in progress, their multicultural outlook attracts them to diverse urban neighborhoods more so than homogenous suburbs.

Gregg Logan, managing director at RCLCO, agrees that the era when people come of age factors into their housing preferences, but argues it’s risky to generalize about a cohort’s personality as if it were set in stone. Every generation’s personality is fluid, he says, and gauging it is like sticking your finger in a river. The temperature will be one thing upstream and another downstream according to changing ages, needs and resources.

“A lot of people want to say that these generations have totally different mindsets, but one of the greatest

Nearly twice as many people in the gen X age range moved last year compared to boomers or millennials.



Flickr photo by BenMcLeod



Flickr photo by MichiganMunicipalLeague



Millennials prefer to live in the city more than any other generation, but the greatest percentage of millennials want to live in the suburbs.

predictors of what people want ... is where they are in their life at a particular point in time,” says Logan, who recently wrote a series of reports examining the generational/lifestage influences that will drive the residential real estate market as it recovers over the next 10 years. “One way of gauging that is to look at what happened with previous generations.”

Take generation X, for example. As young singles and couples, they led a resurgence in urban living because they wanted to be near the action, but as they’ve started to raise families, many are migrating to the suburbs “because that’s where they are in life,” Logan says. Even the size of a generation takes a back seat to lifestage in terms of driving housing activity. Despite belonging to the smallest of the three generations, nearly twice as many people in the gen X age range moved last year compared to boomers or millennials — largely because of their lifestage needs.

Logan describes a traditional lifestage trajectory as single, couple no kids, young family, mature family, empty nest and retirement. Are millennials likely to behave dramatically differently than preceding generations — especially gen X — as they move through those stages? Probably not, says Logan. A good barometer is their propensity to rent. When the oldest millennial hit 30 last year, the difference between their propensity to rent (69 percent) and the propensity of gen X to rent at the same age (71 percent) were nearly identical based on U.S. Census figures, says Logan.

When surveys show millennials display a greater appetite for urban living than current gen Xers, it seems to indicate a fundamental shift in preference, but that doesn’t tell the whole story, says Logan. “In considering their current preferences,” he writes, “we should bear in mind where they are in their lifestage: young and single (and some couples) and largely pre-family.



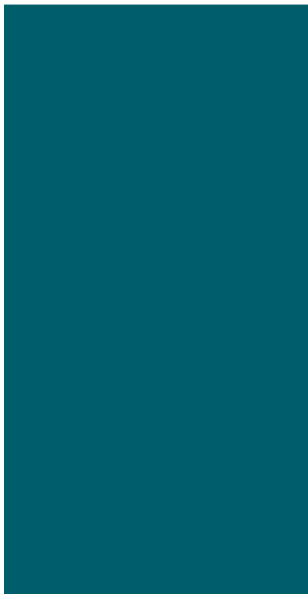
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They will get older, marry and some will have kids. They will obtain more resources, their needs will evolve, and they'll likely make different housing choices.”

The 2011 National Community Preference Survey by the NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS® paints an interesting picture of where people want to live by generation. Yes, millennials prefer to live in the city more than any other generation, but the greatest percentage of millennials want to live in the suburbs. The preferences for people 18-29 (millennials) were 42 percent suburban, 31 percent city and 25 percent small town/rural. The preferences of those ages 30-39 (gen X) were 47 percent suburban, 34 percent small town/rural and 18 percent city. The preferences of those ages 50-59 (boomers) and 40-49 (boomers and gen X) were in a virtual dead heat at 47 percent small town/rural, 38 percent suburban and 14-15 percent city.



Those numbers suggest that the preponderance of millennials — the largest generation in U.S. history — are choosing the suburbs as they form households and — if they follow the same trajectory as generation X — will do so at an even greater rate as their lifecycle changes. The catch is that the kind of suburbs they want — walkable, transit-oriented, mixed-use — are vastly outnumbered by the kind they don't — sprawling, single-use and far from employment and activity centers.

“Much of that product is locationally obsolete,” Logan says. “Convenience is the new amenity. What they're looking for is a more convenient suburb. That's the top choice of all generations.”

It's also an endorsement of smart growth. The Community Preference Survey bears that out. The survey asked people to choose between living in Community A — all single-family homes on large lots, no sidewalks, little public transportation — and Community B — a variety of housing and businesses, more sidewalks, nearby transportation. People preferred Community B — the smart growth option — by a 56 to 43 percent margin. Millennials and baby boomers — the nation's two largest demographic waves — showed the strongest preference



Millennials and baby boomers showed the strongest preference for the smart growth community.



Courtesy of Nashville Convention & Visitors Bureau

for the smart growth option as 62 percent of those between 18-29 and 58 percent of those 60-plus chose Community B.

The thing to keep in mind about the boomers and the millennials is that “they’re such big groups that even small shifts will have a big impact,” says John McIlwain, senior resident fellow and J. Ronald Terwilliger chair for housing at the Urban Land Institute.

The other thing to keep in mind is that they’ve been in suspended animation for various reasons — largely beyond their control. “Generation Y is held back because of the economy, lack of jobs and \$1 trillion in school debt,” says McIlwain. As a result, many are living with their parents, suppressing the rate of new household formation. Meanwhile, many boomers — especially the younger half of the cohort — are stuck where they’re at because their homes are underwater and the next generation of move-up buyers — gen X — is relatively small.

So what happens as market conditions change and those two groups become active in the housing market again? McIlwain, author of the 2010 report “Housing in America: The Next Decade,” concludes the demographic stars are aligned to reurbanize American suburbs. “Many factors are converging to shift housing markets from the traditional American cul-de-sac suburb to a more urban lifestyle,” he writes. “The coming decades will be the time of the great reurbanization as 24/7 central cities grow and suburbs around the country

Boomers and the millennials are such big groups that even small shifts will have a big impact.

Many factors are converging to shift housing markets from the traditional American cul-de-sac suburb to a more urban lifestyle.

are redeveloped with new or revived walkable suburban town centers.”

Arthur C. Nelson, director of the Metropolitan Research Center at the University of Utah, says the shrinking number of households with children is one of the most important trends related to generational housing preferences.

“The number of households with children is going to be coming down until it’s in the 20 percent range and stabilizes there for as far as my eye can see,” Nelson says. “If we’re building homes for families with children, we’re missing the boat.”

The share of households with children fell from 45 percent in 1970 to 33 percent in 2000 and is projected to dip to 29 percent by 2030, according to Nelson. While the total number of households is expected to grow by 20 percent to 140,456,000 between now and 2030, households with children will account for just 10 percent of that growth.

That means 90 percent of the growth is coming from households without children. At one end of the spectrum, millennials are having children later while boomers are increasingly becoming empty-nesters. That’s producing a disconnect between housing preferences and the housing supply.

Among homeowners, Nelson’s research shows that only

25 percent of Americans want a home on a large lot — often the leading choice for people raising families — yet that type of housing accounts for 43 percent of the supply. Meanwhile, 37 percent of Americans want to live on small lots, but that type of housing accounts for only 29 percent of supply. Another 38 percent want to live in attached housing, but that accounts for only 28 percent of supply.

Those numbers suggest there's little need to build more single-family housing on large lots — the traditional suburban pattern. Infill and redevelopment — cornerstones of smart growth — are Nelson's prescription. One of his pet strategies: Convert distressed suburban McMansions into multifamily housing to meet growing demand for rentals as homeownership rates continue to slide. Converting McMansions would also meet the rising need for multigenerational housing. "If we can find a way to retrofit the suburbs, that's how we'll meet demand," he says.

That could also be how the country shifts its economic engine back into high gear, says Christopher B. Leinberger, a land-use strategist and researcher. The convergence of two huge generations — the boomers and millennials — with similar appetites for compact, walkable, mixed-use communities creates an enormous rebuilding opportunity based on smart growth. "This could be the economic foundation of the country for the next 30 years," he says. ●

Brad Broberg is a Seattle-based freelance writer specializing in business and development issues. His work appears regularly in the Puget Sound Business Journal and the Seattle Daily Journal of Commerce.

Infill and redevelopment — cornerstones of smart growth — are the prescription to meet demand.



The Boomer Effect

New retirees are driving the demand for active retirement opportunities

By John Van Gieson

Writers and planners like to call the aging baby boomer generation a “Silver Tsunami,” but the delta of a mighty river where channels branch off as the water flows into the sea might be a better metaphor.

Boomers, who have been turning 65 since Jan. 1, 2011, get cranky if you call them seniors, but by whatever name, they are America’s second largest generation in terms of numbers. Never before has such a large group of graying Americans begun to retire. Never before has there been as diverse or as many potential options for active retiring adults. Some options may have to be deferred, however, until the economy and the housing market recover.

Many of the best-prepared boomers will be relocating to attractive southern and western cities to pursue active lifestyles or moving locally into the central city and suburban centers upgraded to meet their needs.

Florida? Not so much. Relocating boomers are focusing on sunny, progressive cities such as Raleigh, N.C., and Austin, Texas. Golf? Again, not so much. Older boomers like to get their exercise at the gym and adult adventure programs featuring ziplines and mountain bikes. They are likely to enroll in lifelong learning programs at prestigious universities, and they flock to plays and concerts.

Some Sun Belt cities, Chattanooga, Tenn., and Tallahassee, Fla., among them, view retirees as economic development drivers and are actively marketing their communities to retiring seniors looking for a good place to live.

Relocating boomers are focusing on sunny, progressive cities such as Raleigh, N.C., and Austin, Texas.



Visit Tallahassee



ACVB Photo



Some cities view retirees as economic development drivers.

Relocating, however, is not a feasible option for millions of boomers hit hard by the recession. Their only option in a down economy may be aging in place in older, value-submerged homes they cannot sell, pressuring local governments to expand services for retirees at a time when the recession has forced many of them to cut spending on senior services.

According to William Frey, senior fellow and manager of metropolitan policy research at The Brookings Institution, aging in place is a motivating factor of the senior population in most parts of the country.

The population of baby boomers entering retirement is projected to be 10,000 a day, for at least the next two decades. That daily rate is roughly equivalent to the population of Sedona, an upscale resort and retirement community in Arizona of approximately 12,000 residents.

The Census Bureau projects the senior population will increase by a whopping 55 percent, or more than 20 million people, to a total of 62 million Americans in this decade.

In a month, meanwhile, the number of retiring baby boomers roughly equals the population of Anaheim, Calif.; and in a year it will be about equal to the population of Connecticut.

Top Ten lists of the best places to retire are as common as graying boomers at a Bruce Springsteen concert. Sun Belt cities typically dominate the rankings, but the results can be startling. The Center for Secure Retirement's list of 10 "Best U.S. Cities for Seniors 2011" includes Pittsburgh, Cleveland and Newark.

In their writings on retirement trends, Frey and John K. McIlwain, Senior Resident Fellow/J. Ronald Terwilliger Chair for Housing at the Urban Land Institute, have spotlighted Raleigh and Austin as new meccas for retirees where senior populations grew at the fastest rate in the last decade. Raleigh's senior population grew by 60 percent; Austin's by 53 percent.

"One of the things a lot of seniors are doing is moving to places where they see a lot of services," McIlwain said. "They just want to be close to all that educational opportunity, cultural events and sports activity."

Raleigh and Austin feature topnotch universities: North Carolina State is located in Raleigh and Duke and the University of North Carolina are just down Tobacco Road, I-40, actually. Austin is home to the University of Texas. Both cities have strong technology sectors that attracted younger boomers who are now moving into retirement.

"The word is out in New York and New Jersey that the Carolinas have become the new Florida," said Mitchell Silver, planning director for the city of Raleigh. "The weather is better, taxes are better and you can really get an affordable house here and a better quality of life."

One of the things a lot of seniors are doing is moving to places where they see a lot of services.

The Carolinas, North and South, are centers of the “half-back” movement — retirees who move to Florida from the North, decide it’s not for them and move halfway back.

“We see it all the time here,” said Ray Larcher, executive vice president of the Raleigh Regional Association of REALTORS®. “A lot of them go to the western part of our state, which is mountainous and cooler than Florida.”

“To me, Austin’s rapid growth in seniors is indicative of a sea change in the fundamental drivers of where seniors move,” said Ryan Robinson, planning director for the city of Austin. “Today, seniors want to live in vibrant urban communities, close to universities and libraries and entertainment, and maybe close to grandchildren, too.”

In 2010, Money Magazine ranked Durham, Raleigh’s smaller sister city, as the Best Place to Retire in the Country. Austin ranked ninth. The ratings were based in large part on lifelong learning programs for seniors. Duke and Texas have two of the largest and most prestigious Osher

Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) programs in the country. The Bernard Osher Foundation supports 117 lifelong learning programs for 50 plus adults at 117 colleges and universities all over the country.

“We typically get 150 to 200 new members a year,” said Gary Crites, director of the Duke OLLI program. “By far and away the majority of people in our program are transplants from the North and in many cases the Northeast and people moving down here to be near their kids who are employed at Research Triangle Park or one of the universities.”

The world-class teaching hospitals at Duke and UNC are another attraction for baby boomers retiring to the Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill area. In a Consumer Federation of the Southeast poll of boomers aged 47 to 65, 96 percent said Quality of Healthcare was their most important issue in making decisions about where to retire. Interestingly, only 47 percent said Educational Opportunities.

Retiring boomers are a generation apart from anything the country has ever experienced before. They are, after all, the gray-haired versions of the long-haired kids whose mantras in the 60s were “Sex, Drugs and Rock ‘n Roll” and “Never Trust Anyone Over 30.”



Today, seniors want to live in vibrant urban communities, close to universities and libraries and entertainment.



Raleigh Parks and Recreation Department

“There’s still the Woodstock aspect for a lot of these people,” Frey said. “They never think of themselves as being like their parents.”

The boomer difference is evident in the Raleigh Parks and Recreation Department’s senior programs. Raleigh’s program comprises 48 service clubs bringing seniors together at 22 locations to engage in mutual interests. Older silent generation seniors born during the Depression and World War II may be content to play bridge — not the younger boomers.

Steve White, manager of the Raleigh Parks Senior Adult Program, said the boomers favor the Senior Adventure Program, which takes them on ziplining, indoor sky diving and road biking excursions.

Two new centers exclusively for people aged 50 plus are under construction in Raleigh. “Younger boomers do not

Younger boomers do not want to go to senior centers.



want to go to senior centers, so we don’t call these two centers senior centers, we call them active adult centers,” White said.

Chattanooga has been marketing itself to boomers as both a great place to retire and a great place to ease into retirement for about eight years. Its program, called Choose Chattanooga, works closely with Retire Tennessee, a state program. Between 2006 and 2009 about 5,500 boomers moved to Chattanooga, said Choose Chattanooga Director Linda Bennett.

Pre-retirement boomers Mike and Beth Harrell moved from Clearwater, Fla. to Chattanooga in 2006. They got to know the area when their daughter played soccer at Covenant College, located just outside Chattanooga on Lookout Mountain near the site of a bloody Civil War battle.

“Every time we would get in that car to go home we would just say, ‘Wow! Something’s going on here,’” Beth said. “There was just something totally different about Chattanooga that totally gripped us.”

The Harrells live in a downtown home two blocks from the Tennessee River. The owner of an advertising agency in Florida, Beth got her REALTORS® license in Chattanooga. Her husband became a business consultant.

“We just reinvented ourselves,” she said. “We just love it here.”

Retirees are hoping to walk to the grocery store, entertainment and activities.



Last year, *Where to Retire* magazine profiled Chattanooga as a Top Retirement Town, calling it “a clean, green city pulsating with energy. Retirees are finding Chattanooga is walkable, affordable and fun.” Retirees are hoping to walk to the grocery store, entertainment and activities; not get into their cars and drive to be active. Walkable neighborhoods, urban centers and active living communities are appealing to this generation.

A group of community leaders in Florida’s capital is launching Choose Tallahassee, an initiative based on internet ads recruiting active boomers. The Consumer Federation of the Southeast poll was a marketing tool for Choose Tallahassee. Conducted in November, 2011, the poll surveyed 1,100 boomers who lived in the eastern U.S. outside Florida and said they were considering moving to another state when they retire.

The three most important factors in deciding where to retire, according to the Choose Tallahassee poll, were climate, cost of housing and quality of health care.

In the National Association of REALTORS® survey “Profile of Home Buyers and Sellers 2011,” the No. 1 reason

boomers ages 55 to 64 gave for moving was to be closer to family and friends at 18 percent; followed by retirement, 15 percent; and job relocation, 15 percent.

“Especially among the older edge of baby boomers, what we’ve been seeing is that they have been staying in their homes a little longer than they did five years ago,” said NAR Economist Paul Bishop.

Marty Merzer, a Brooklyn native who was a star *Miami Herald* reporter for 30 years, is the Choose Tallahassee poster boy. He would be happy to be the last boomer to choose Tallahassee.

“We frankly wanted out of the rat race of being in a big urban area,” Merzer said. “Now that the family has

The older edge of baby boomers have been staying in their homes a little longer than they did five years ago.

Many cities have worked hard to persuade retirees to move downtown.

brought us here, we really enjoy being here. Now that I've found this place I want to put up a gate, but you can't do that."

Merzer and his wife Marion chose Tallahassee because their grandson Solly, their daughter and son-in-law live here. Moving to a new city to be near family, especially grandchildren, is one of the most common reasons for retirement relocation.

"When our grandson was born that changed everything," Merzer said. "He was a magnet."

The Merzers are typical of the new breed of boomers who "retire," but not really. He continues to work as a freelance writer; she got a job in Tallahassee as a policy analyst for the agency that oversees Florida's state universities.

David Bruns, AARP Florida spokesman, said an estimated 18 million boomers are expected to relocate in retirement before the generation's bubble bursts in 2029. "That's a huge, huge potential economic force for any state or any city that attracts relocating boomers," he said.

Some retirement analysts have identified a trend of suburban retirees moving out of their big empty nests into condos and apartments in the central city or suburban town centers offering them an array of services in compact, walkable neighborhoods. Many cities, including Milwaukee and Albany, N.Y., have worked hard to persuade retirees to move downtown.

Kyle Ezell, a planning professor at Ohio State University, noted in his book "Retire Downtown" that "ruppies" — retired urban people — live more active and healthier lives than suburban contemporaries, stimulated by the large number of choices available to them in downtown settings.

"Much has been written about the growing number of seniors who have moved from the suburbs to the cities; much of this is true and some of it is hyperbole," McIlwain said. "The 'empty nester phenomenon' — the couple who sells their suburban home after the kids have moved out and buys a condo in the city is real and has been occurring though it is hard to quantify."



Retired urban people live more active and healthier lives than suburban contemporaries.

As a result of economic stress, Bishop said, older boomers are staying in place a few years longer than people who retired before the recession scrambled retirement nest eggs. One option for a number of them, he said, is buying smaller second homes in vacation areas assuming those will be their ultimate retirement destinations.

Despite the economic uncertainty clouding the future for the vanguard of the "Silver Tsunami" boomers, Frey and Ezell are optimistic.

"I do think there's a positive aspect to all this, even though the economy is down," Frey said. "They're going to be a real plus for a lot of communities." ●

John Van Gieson is a freelance writer based in Tallahassee, Fla. He owns and runs Van Gieson Media Relations, Inc.

COHOUSING: Sharing Space

From collaborative decision making to neighbors who truly care, cohousing is emerging as a viable living arrangement for aging adults.



By Tracey C. Velt

Steve Pretl was ready to live in a place where he could have his independence yet still have support nearby. After all, he was 61 years old and living in a home in downtown Washington, D.C., which just wasn't practical for him as he aged. "I read about sustainable living, and it mentioned cohousing," he says. "It really appealed to me to live where people were on the same wavelength as me, a true community." That's when Pretl moved to Takoma Village, a Washington, D.C.-based cohousing community. "I went to a couple meetings and was impressed with the people. Residents were part of the design team, working with the architect, making decisions on everything from unit layout to colors to appliances," he says.

Eleven years later, Pretl (now 72 years old) is a member of the Takoma Village Cohousing Board and actively touting the benefits of the co-housing lifestyle to others.

The Cohousing Model

The cohousing model is a type of residential development designed to emphasize community interaction while still retaining a certain level of individual privacy. Cohousing communities are typically small — under 40 units — and have units with shared common spaces. Different from a condominium, cohousing is self-managed. There's no main office and each resident is involved in everything from decision making (designing pet policies, choosing lawn care) to physical work maintaining the property.

The cohousing model is a type of residential development designed to emphasize community interaction.

Pioneered in Denmark in the early 1970s, according to “Co-Housing for Older Adults,” by the AARP Public Policy Institute, cohousing didn’t arrive in the United States until two decades later. Although each community is unique, most cohousing communities share a set of principles: resident involvement in the planning process; a common house and other facilities and land owned jointly; a physical layout that encourages interaction (e.g. individual homes clustered around a common house); and collaborative community management, says the AARP paper.

“If we look at basic demographics, the population of those ages 65 and up will increase 120 percent between 2012 and 2015,” says Jeffrey Lubell, executive director of the Center for Housing Policy (CHP). “There’s a real need for housing that can accommodate this group.”

Currently, there are about 115 cohousing communities made up of nearly 2,700 households in 23 states, according to Rodney Harrell, Ph.D., senior strategic policy advisor for housing issues for the AARP and the AARP Public Policy Institute in Washington, D.C. “We [the AARP] believe that there must be a range of housing options for older adults at different price points,” says Harrell. “Cohousing creates another option that has some cost and benefits but appeals to a certain group of older adults and gives them the ability to age in place.”

Benefits for Seniors

For Pretl that’s the key to cohousing: It allows him to age in place with support. “I can easily live independently. But, just knowing my neighbors are available to help as I get older is comforting,” he says.

In fact, most cohousing developments are intergenerational, not just for seniors, so the living arrangement is perfect for seniors who need the extra support but are able to live alone. Neighbors are always available to run an errand, drive to a doctor’s appointment or fix a leaky faucet, and weekly group dinners mean healthy living for seniors who don’t cook anymore.

“One of the great qualities is the physical build of the community,” says Rebecca Lane, executive director of the Co-Housing Association of the United States (Coho/ U.S.). “Houses face each other around a common area, so lots of eyes are on the neighborhood. In fact, an elderly widow who moved to a cohousing community from a

Most cohousing developments are intergenerational, not just for seniors.





rural area recently choked on a bone and was able to run out of her house and get help. Her neighbors saved her. Had she stayed at her rural home, she wouldn't still be with us." The AARP's Harrell adds, "By sharing common space, it reduces isolation, a common malady of aging."

According to a survey sponsored by Coho/U.S., a sense of community was one of the most frequently mentioned strengths by cohousers who were interviewed. Interviewees wrote positively about a feeling of village life and their sense of belonging. They felt emotional support from the interconnectedness of their lives, and having good friends nearby who offered opportunities for easy socialization and an antidote to the fact that, for many, family may live far away.

Not only that, says Lane, but also seniors with mobility impairments aren't sequestered in their homes alone each day. "The shared meal program, which is pretty typical in each cohousing community, is incredible. The nutrition levels are high and the options varied, so seniors don't have to cook for themselves, have people with whom to share meals and maintain a healthier lifestyle because of it," says Lane.

Sustainable Living

However, some of the biggest benefits of cohousing come from the environmental aspects. Says Lane, "The Coho/U.S. survey drew some interesting conclusions that

Because most of these neighborhoods are tightly clustered they use less land and use it more efficiently.

people who live in cohousing have lower energy, food and transportation costs. For someone on a fixed income, this is huge." Most neighborhoods are close to urban centers or within walking distance to grocery stores and other shopping.

Says Zev Paiss, COO of Abraham Paiss & Associates, Inc., a marketing and communications company catering to sustainable businesses, "Because most of these neighborhoods are tightly clustered and built with the oversight of the residents, they use less land and use it more efficiently." While not a senior, Paiss chose to live in a cohousing community for this very reason. "Homes are energy efficient. I find that people attracted to these neighborhoods tend to be concerned about the environment and want features that use renewable energy and green construction." He says they make good use of insulation, bamboo flooring, energy-efficient fixtures and HVAC systems as well as positioning the homes so they stay cooler in summer. Many are using Photovoltaic systems, which use solar panels to convert sunlight into electricity.

Lane agrees. “One of the trends I’m seeing is taking existing neighborhoods and retrofitting them to build a cohousing community.” In fact, in 1999 a group of five families developed Temescal Creek Cohousing, a retrofit cohousing neighborhood in Oakland, Calif. They transformed an existing neighborhood into a cohousing community, making it more cost effective for residents and rehabilitating a community suffering from a large inventory of vacant and distressed homes.

Lane is also seeing a big push for community gardens. “They’re reaping a lot of food from these gardens, and they’re even bringing in livestock such as chickens and goats.”

Affordable Housing?

As always, with the good comes the bad. A major downfall of cohousing for seniors is that it just isn’t affordable. According to a recent survey, “Housing an Aging Population: Are We Prepared?” by the Center for Housing Policy,

20 percent of those ages 65 to 74 are spending more than half of their income on housing. “A consequence of that is we’ll see an increase in housing affordability problems in this country — incomes are low for this population,” says the CHP’s Lubell. “One of the challenges we have with cohousing is that it’s not designed to be affordable.”

But, Lubell and others are researching alternatives. “I’ve been urging the cohousing folks to link their efforts with community land trusts and other like-minded organizations to provide affordable options for aging seniors,” says Lubell.

The Housing Trust of Santa Fe did just that when developing Eldergrace, a cohousing community in Santa Fe, N.M. “There was an elder support group in town that had been ruminating over an idea to create a community to live together and support each other but was different from an assisted living facility,” says Spencer Haynsworth, the housing development program manager for the Housing Trust of Santa Fe.” Haynsworth worked



Cohousing gives seniors a voice at a time when they're often not heard in the community.



Baby boomers are looking for housing alternatives where they can age in place.

as the liaison between the Housing Trust and the Eldergrace developer. The key to making it affordable, she says, is the land. “Oftentimes we’ll bank land when we can get it for discounted prices. We had a piece of land that was oddly shaped, and we saw that as a potential fit. We hired an architect and worked with the Eldergrace residents to make it work,” she says. The best part is that Eldergrace is close to an urban center and backs up to a natural area that connects to a nature trail and community center.

However, most cohousing communities trend on the costly side. “It’s an expensive model because it’s new,” says Lane. “Right now we’re seeing early adopters, but as more research is done and more developments are built, the prices will drop.”

Notable Negatives

Another clear challenge, of course, is that you must like to interact with people to enjoy living in cohousing. “It’s a lot of interaction with people and for some it’s hard,” says Pretl. “It’s tough making decisions with so many people involved, and even something as simple as developing a pet policy can take a long time. You generally have some very strong personalities who try to dominate. It may not be simple living, but it does make your life richer and fuller,” he says.

Says Harrell, “It’s an interesting mix. You must live independently but think communally. You have to be the type who wants to share space and make group decisions.”

Alternatives

Overall, the fact remains: “Baby boomers are looking for housing alternatives where they can age in place, feel safe and know they’re in a location that has good amenities,” says Paiss. “There’s an opportunity for REALTORS® to learn about this alternative housing. Real estate professionals can talk to developers who have been foreclosed on or who have had to stop a project. Cohousing may be a way to bring in a group of buyers and reduce developer risk since 70 to 75 percent of the development is presold before the project even begins,” says Paiss.

“Cohousing gives seniors a voice at a time when they’re often not heard in the community,” says Haynsworth. “It brings people together, young helping old; old helping young. What could be better than that?” ●

Tracey C. Velt is an Orlando-based freelance writer specializing in business and real estate.



SURVEY OF COHOUSING COMMUNITIES

Cohousing creates a sustainable life, according to “Report on Survey of Cohousing Communities 2011” by the Cohousing Association of the United States. The survey touted cohousing benefits such as sharing resources, borrowing and lending possessions and living lighter on the earth by consuming less. Not only that, but talents can be shared as well. In the survey, cohousers wrote about “access to many types of resources, tools, skills and information that one would not have in a traditional neighborhood.” They appreciated the energy savings, efficient design, clustered housing, and walkability of their communities.

Facts About Cohousing:

- A cohousing community is generally between 15 to 40 units.
- Most housing units average 1,250 square feet.
- The top five states in completed cohousing communities are California, Washington, Colorado, Massachusetts and North Carolina.
- Most cohousing communities have a shared meal program vital to healthy living for seniors.
- Most cohousing communities are intergenerational, but there are several senior-only developments.
- Cohousing developments are self-managed.
- A key tribute of cohousing is the shared space. Residents give up square footage and other amenities so that they have more shared services.



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Aging Places:

How some local communities are preparing for a surging population of seniors

By David Goldberg

To hear demographers and journalists talk, the rapidly rising tide of retiring baby boomers is akin to a natural disaster of oceanic proportions: look out for The Age Wave!

It's true, aging is natural enough. But whether communities experience it as a disaster or not will depend entirely on man-made factors, experts on aging say.

The aging scenario is one that invites hyperbole: The largest generation of Americans with the longest life expectancy ever, will be the first massive age cohort to grow old in suburban settings geared far more toward child-rearing than to retirement.



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The number of Americans 65 or older will nearly double between now and 2030, and the share of the population that is 85 and older will increase by 52 percent.

Today, the “oldest” city in America is Scottsdale City, Ariz., with one in five residents 65 or older. By 2030, the entire country will look like today’s oldest city. Those with the largest elder populations, including Florida and nine other states, will have more Medicare-eligible seniors than school-age children in 2030, according to the AARP.

Roughly three in four Americans over 50 today live in stand-alone houses in suburban settings built with the expectation that every adult resident will drive cars for their every need. And every indication is that they will stay there.

Roughly three in four Americans over 50 today live in stand-alone houses in suburban settings.

“What’s happened is that age-segregated retirement communities are not attractive to a majority today,” said Amy Levner, manager for home and family at AARP. “People are not moving to Florida or Arizona in droves like they used to. They are working longer, they are staying engaged in their local community and they are staying in their homes.” Since 1990, about 90 percent of retirees have stayed put in the same county they had lived in previously, and the majority of them remained in the same homes. “The challenge is that their homes and neighborhoods were geared toward family raising and aren’t structured as well for aging in place.”

“Aging in place” has come to denote the desire of most older Americans to remain living independently in the homes and neighborhoods where they have social ties for as long as they can. Supporting this desire requires much more than merely supplying in-home nursing care and the like, experts say. According to the AARP, “Policies to promote aging in place [also must address] the physical design and accessibility of the home, as well as community features such as the availability of nearby services and amenities, affordable housing and transportation options.”

Of all those needs, providing transportation options could prove especially challenging in the automobile-oriented suburbs where most seniors will age in place. By 2015, more than 15.5 million Americans 65 and older will live in communities where public transportation service is poor or nonexistent, according to data reported in “Aging in Place, Stuck without Options.” Research shows without access to affordable travel options, seniors age 65 and older who no longer drive make 15 percent fewer trips to the doctor, 59 percent fewer trips to shop or eat out and 65 percent fewer trips to visit friends and family, than drivers of the same age. As the cost of owning and fueling a vehicle rises, many older Americans who can still drive nonetheless will be looking for lower-cost options.



The “Aging and Stuck” report ranked metro areas by the percentage of seniors with poor access to public transportation, now and in the coming years. Among large metro areas, metro Atlanta ranked the worst, with fully 90 percent of residents over 65 expected to be living without any option but to drive, or be driven by friends or relatives. To its credit, however, the Atlanta region is responding to such critiques with some groundbreaking steps.

“It’s true that many of our suburban neighborhoods were built without considering the needs of an aging population,” said Cathie Berger, division chief of the Area Agency on Aging in Atlanta, in response to the transportation ranking. “But many of the steps we could take to fix that — improving public transportation service, retrofitting our streets to be safer for walking — will improve quality of life for the entire community.”

Without access to affordable travel options, seniors age 65 and older who no longer drive make 15 percent fewer trips to the doctor.





Retrofitting our streets to be safer for walking will improve quality of life for the entire community.

Three years ago, the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) — metro Atlanta’s planning agency — launched an initiative called Lifelong Communities that looked at steps local governments could take to support aging in place. After hearing from many older residents and stakeholders about their needs, the ARC focused on three key areas: expanding housing and transportation options, encouraging healthy lifestyles and expanding awareness of and access to services.

In 2009, ARC invited the noted urban design firm, DPZ, to conduct a 10-day charrette, or participatory design workshop, examining challenges and possibilities for older residents in five locations around the metro area. The resulting report gave local governments guidance on how to ensure that newly built homes contain access features, such as a “no-step entrance” and wider doorways and turn-around areas for those in wheelchairs, and how to incentivize new development to be less car dependent and more walkable, with a range of housing types in close proximity to daily needs and public transportation.

One of the case study locations, the unincorporated community of Mableton in Cobb County, took the recommendations to heart, and then some. Mableton was briefly its own city in the early 1900s, getting as far as laying out a small downtown street grid before a flood bankrupted the town, which then surrendered its charter to the county. During the “white-flight” era of the

1960s and 1970s, the area around Mableton exploded with conventional suburban development. As its housing stock and residents have aged, the area is now looking for redevelopment that can both serve an older population and bring new vitality, said Dana Johnson, planning division manager for Cobb County.

“The Lifelong Communities charrette was just the kick start we needed,” Johnson said.

The design workshop had focused on how to turn the last large, undeveloped parcel in the heart of Mableton into the walkable town center that was missing from the area. As it happened, the land belonged to the family of former Gov. Roy Barnes, who liked the idea and agreed to support it.

“Cobb County has been ahead in preparing for the aging population in Atlanta,” said Johnson. “We have had a senior living code in place for some time that accommodates ... retirement communities that allow people to start in independent living and transition to assisted living. But we noticed that these required people to move to places that are kind of cut off. We wanted to make the whole community senior friendly, rather than make them move to a separate development that is senior friendly.”

The county hired DPZ to come back in 2010 and conduct a community-wide charrette to get citizen input that ultimately led to a design for the Mableton town

center and creation of new zoning and design standards to encourage it to happen. The county “looked at transportation infrastructure to make sure we have sidewalks and they are wide enough,” said Johnson. “We are changing traffic signal timing for older pedestrians. We put some ‘easy living’ standards in place, such as wider doorways and having one no-step entrance. The plan for the Barnes land will create a mixed-use center where people can get services and activities all in one place.”

While the impetus for a new Mableton came from the concern about aging, the plans are intended to be multigenerational. The Cobb school system agreed to locate a new school in the area. But rather than build it in conventional suburban style — on one long, spread-out level surrounded by parking — they built it in the two-story style of traditional, walkable schools. Some of the land that did not become parking will instead become an intergenerational community garden, where older residents will mentor youngsters in cultivating plant life. The county also has devoted funds from a transportation-funding measure to begin creating new street connections that will make the area more walkable.

“The community buy-in is the most critical aspect of all of this,” Johnson said.

“Mableton is one of the most comprehensive and thoughtful responses we’ve seen,” said Scott Ball, who was on the DPZ planning team and is author of a forthcoming book, “Livable Communities for Aging Populations: Urban Design for Longevity.”

While aging in place provides one set of challenges in growing metro areas, it provides different ones in rural and Rust Belt communities, Ball said, and some communities are responding in creative ways.

“These communities are losing population, and they are losing the young educated folks,” Ball said. “At the same time, they are seeing people build retirement communities on green fields just outside the town’s urban area. These places need to keep people in town, to keep the lights on and remain viable in attracting younger adults. Older adults can play a significant role in revitalizing these Main Streets.”

In recognition of both the challenge and the potential for these communities, the Indiana State Legislature recently authorized a program called “Communities for a Lifetime,” that will offer planning grants to help a series of



Photo by Zachary Benedict



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Older adults can play a significant role in revitalizing Main Streets.

communities plan for retaining and supporting their aging populations. Plans are meant to “include determining their local need and walkability to food, medical care, and amenities [as well as] setting safety standards, finding ways to locally promote intergenerational interactions and civic engagement, and maximizing independence for their residents,” according to the Indiana Housing and Community Development Authority. Successful communities are expected to be eligible for future grants for age-friendly infrastructure.

“The one thing most small and rural communities have is an outsized share of older residents,” said Zachary Benedict, a planner and architect with the Indiana urban design firm of Morrison Kattman Menze, Inc. “Those communities in Indiana have 90 percent more seniors than the national average, and if the trends continue they’ll have three times that.

Benedict’s firm has been working with some of these towns to help lure senior-friendly housing and amenities to their downtowns, “to turn a ghost town of a Main Street into a vital, walking downtown,” he said. “If you can use the aging population as a catalyst for renewal you can kill two birds with one stone.”

Arlington County adopted an Elder Readiness Plan that addressed a wide range of issues and initiatives.



Benedict points to the example of the Mather’s Café Plus operations in the Chicago area. Created by a nonprofit organization, Mather Lifeways, the cafés look like any coffee shop or café, but they are “designed to attract active, older adults (50+) and to keep them coming back for more by providing fun, educational, and wellness programs and activities. And, of course, delicious food.” Forward-looking local governments or nonprofits can partner with local entrepreneurs to open similar enterprises, Benedict said. “Retirees really do have disposable income — even if fixed — and they have time to engage and to participate. You need to take advantage of the asset.”

Arlington County, Va., just outside the District of Columbia, is another community that has tried to get ahead of the “age wave.” In 2006, the county adopted an Elder Readiness Plan that addressed a wide range of issues and initiatives. The once-prototypical suburban city has been working since the 1970s to create more walkable, mixed-use corridors. The Elder Readiness Plan aimed to go even farther. In transportation, the county has begun converting all transit buses to wheelchair accessible, low-floor vehicles; introduced a bus loop that takes seniors to activities several times a week; expanded paratransit service; and offers discount taxi vouchers for times when bus service won’t work.

The county also tried to expand options for seniors to live with family members in garage apartments, outbuildings or attached suites, but because the requirements are “tight” there have been relatively few takers, said Chris Zimmerman, a member of the Arlington County Board since 1996. The plan also nudged into existence a “vertical village” pilot, where residents of a high-rise with a large number of seniors are provided a “concierge” who can help them with various needs and services.

“The idea is that you can have a continuum of care and support within your community, without having to go to a special facility before you absolutely have to,” Zimmerman said.

To help spawn more Arlingtons and Mabletons, the AARP in April announced creation of a Network of Age-Friendly Communities, based on an effort begun by the World Health Organization (WHO). The WHO program, according to promotional materials, “helps cities and communities become more supportive of older people by addressing their needs across eight dimensions: the built environment, transport, housing, social participation,

The idea is that you can have a continuum of care and support within your community, without having to go to a special facility before you absolutely have to.



respect and social inclusion, civic participation and employment, communication, and community support and health services.” Seven states so far have joined the AARP network: Georgia, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, New York, Oregon, and Pennsylvania, as well as the District of Columbia.

Ball noted that the last time there was a national conversation about aging, it was the 1960s, and many older Americans were literally wasting away in poverty and isolation, with limited health care and few services. “We have many more adults suffering from obesity than malnutrition, thanks to Medicare and the 1960s Agency on Aging programs. We’re no longer dealing with this marginalized, starving, un-empowered cohort.” Today’s baby

Local governments need to get beyond the idea that what the aging population needs is just more social services.

boomers will expect to thrive and participate well into their dotage; all they need is help removing potential impediments, Ball said.

“Local governments need to get beyond the idea that what the aging population needs is just more social services,” he said. “They need to encourage cooperative responses rather than mere provision of services. But this cooperative approach is different from the suburban mode of existence, which is each to his own, taking care of your own house, lawn, et cetera, and chauffeuring the kids where they need to go. ... One beautiful thing about dealing with aging populations is that it happens to everybody, so it can unify a community across many demographics.” ●

David A. Goldberg is the communications director for Transportation for America, a nationwide coalition based in Washington, D.C. that advocates for transportation policy reform. In 2002, Mr. Goldberg was awarded a Loeb Fellowship at Harvard University, where he studied urban policy.

SENIOR TRANSPORTATION CHOICES

Crucial for Independence

By Brian Clark



Photo Courtesy of AAA



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Without accessible and safe travel options, seniors face isolation and a reduced quality of life.

Chuck Gehring — who runs the Life-Care Alliance in central Ohio — calls it the “pig in the python” phenomenon, a not-so-flattering reference to the 60-million-plus, post-WWII baby boomers who will soon be turning 65.

Their needs, as they continue to age, will be enormous, he says.

And in order for them to stay in their homes — as nearly all older Americans say they want to do — transportation options for them need to be improved. Especially since surveys show 600,000 drivers are now hanging up their keys each year after hitting age 70.

“There is a huge and growing need for low-cost transportation,” says Gehring, whose nonprofit agency is based in Columbus, Ohio.

Without accessible and safe travel options, seniors face isolation and a reduced quality of life. Moreover, seniors who can’t drive make fewer trips to their doctors and to see friends and family than their motoring counterparts.

“If older folks don’t have transportation, they spend more days a year in the hospital than the national average than those who do,” he says. “And a day in the hospital can be very expensive.”

The same thing is true for nursing homes and assisted-living institutions.

“The AARP calculates that in this state [Ohio], we save \$62,000 per client, per year for each client we keep independent and in their own home,” Gehring explains. “And in central Ohio, nursing home costs average about \$5,500 a month. So there is a huge ROI (return on investment) for programs, because it is the taxpayer who covers the cost for low-income seniors being in the hospital or an institution. We have 15,000 clients, so our little agency is saving taxpayers \$500 million a year.”



A large number of seniors in the United States are stranded in their homes because of poor access to public transportation.

But experts agree, more needs to be done around the country to improve senior access to transportation.

According to a Transportation for America report published last year, a large number of seniors in the United States are stranded in their homes because of poor access to public transportation. Entitled “Aging in Place, Stuck Without Options,” the report says that by 2015, more than 15.5 million Americans 65 and older will dwell in communities where transportation is poor or even non-existent.

The study estimates those numbers will increase rapidly as the baby boomer generation ‘ages in place’ in suburbs and exurbs where often there are few mobility options for those who do not drive.

The report gives sprawling Atlanta the worst grade among metropolitan areas of 3 million or more for having poor transit access for seniors ages 65 to 79. San Bernardino, Detroit and Dallas were also graded poorly in the survey. The study defined poor transit access for seniors in terms of the average number of bus, rail or ferry routes within walking distance of their homes.

Henry Cisneros, secretary of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development in the Clinton administration, says his mother is 88 and still lives in the San

City streets and sidewalks need improvements to make them safer for seniors.

Antonio, Texas, home where he and his siblings grew up. (He visits her several times a week.)

Cisneros — a former mayor of San Antonio and executive chairman of CityView, an institutional investment firm geared to urban real estate — says surveys show one of the things seniors fear most is isolation.

“With no car, they worry they won’t be able to get places and will be cut off from family, friends and lose connections to their communities,” Cisneros says. “That’s one of the major reasons transportation is so important.”

Cisneros, who edited the recently released University of Texas book “Independent for Life,” says city streets and sidewalks need improvements to make them safer for seniors. In addition, homes and apartments often require retrofitting so seniors can safely age in place.

Mary Leary, assistant vice president for the Easter Seals Transportation Group, calls planning around the country for senior transportation needs a “mixed bag.”

Many communities are not doing enough, she says, noting examples of homeowners’ or condominium owners’ associations that have blocked the construction of bus shelters because they believed they were “unsightly” or attracted “the wrong type of person.” Worse, she cites one city that allowed the construction of a senior development marketed to people 55 and older that had a nursing home, but no sidewalks, so residents — including those in wheelchairs — had to use the streets.

On the positive side, communities that have strong leadership by organizations or individuals who understand

the need of senior transportation are staying ahead of the curve and doing a good job of planning for the future. “These efforts benefit everyone,” she says. “This is an issue unlike any we’ve ever faced before as a country because we have so many people who are aging in place. This is an opportunity to improve our communities and the lives of those who live in them.”

Communities that are meeting senior transit needs tend to be places where there is a naturally occurring retirement community, an active Area Agency on Aging or even one individual who can champion the changing mobility needs of older residents. Typically, it’s simply a matter of education and communication to make positive changes. “Most of the time, when groups like homeowners associations are approached, they become supportive,” she says. “Often, they don’t understand why some of these infrastructure issues are so important.”

Likewise, navigating the regulatory mazes that deal with housing developments and transportation issues can be complicated. That’s where the National Center on Senior Transportation can help. The Center, jointly operated between Easter Seals and the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (NAAAA), offers training and technical assistance.

The challenges are increasing every year with the growing number of older people and those with disabilities.



It’s important to teach seniors how to use public transportation and other modes of transit as they turn in their keys. “We have a robust program — sometimes using mobility mentors or travel buddies — to train people about what’s available,” Leary adds. “Usually, seniors have driven all their lives and don’t know what their options are.”

Virginia Dize, co-director of NAAAA and the National Center on Senior Transportation, says fewer than half the cities it surveyed in 2005 were preparing to meet the transportation needs of older residents.

“Seniors tend to self-regulate by stopping driving, many of them at age 80. The impact will be profound with all the baby boomers coming on,” says Dize. “Communities are struggling, and leaders should be aware that this will be a big, big issue.”

“Some are doing well, but others, not so much. Transportation is an increasing concern overall and ranked second in the 2010 (NAAAA) survey — in 2005, that wasn’t even in the top 10. Seniors really do want to stay in their own homes. But without adequate transportation, people might not be able to get to the doctor, go to the grocery store or participate in social activities. In other words, they’ll become isolated.”

Dize, who lives in downtown Washington, D.C., says she and her older neighbors are lucky because they have access to numerous public transportation options. But, she adds, public transportation is not always an easy fit for some older people, depending on their mobility level and where they live.

“Certainly, most Americans like to be in their cars to go when and where they want,” she says. “And that is how suburbia, for the most part, was built.” But that will become more problematic as more and more seniors stop driving.





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With the baby boomer bubble, we are going to need to handle the demand on our senior and paratransit service.



Flickr photo by OldShoeWoman

Transportation resources for seniors are “even more abysmal” in rural areas, which she calls one of the greatest challenges to older Americans’ independence. And, due to the recession, many state and local governments have not kept up with growing senior transportation needs.

“The challenges are increasing every year with the growing number of older people and those with disabilities,” she says. “How the country and individual communities deal with those transit requirements will be a real test.”

New Carrollton, Md., a small (pop. 12,000) suburb of Washington D.C., offers many options other communities can emulate. The town’s Call-A-Bus program offers free, lift-equipped, door-to-door transportation for seniors and the disabled for medical appointments, hospital visits, shopping and some social activities within a five-mile radius of New Carrollton. The service is funded by Prince George’s County and is available Monday through Friday with a 24-hour advanced reservation required.

In addition, the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) provides curb-to-curb service for people with disabilities who can’t use regular public transportation. Another option for residents is the Senior Transportation Services (STS) program, which provides free rides to county nutrition sites and medical appointments.

In the San Francisco Bay Area, Contra Costa County is a model of public funding for senior transportation needs. In 2004, 71 percent of voters approved Measure J, which includes money for senior and paratransit services.

“It’s high on our radar,” says Peter Engel the Lifeline Transportation Program manager for the Contra Costa County Transportation Authority. “We realized, even back then, that with the baby boomer bubble coming up we were going to need some way to handle the demand on our senior and paratransit service.

Engel says transportation programs for seniors and the disabled have a lot of support in the region.

“We have a very active senior advocacy population, especially when it comes to mobility, so these measures poll very well,” he says. “Even if people aren’t riding the buses, they might know an older or disabled person who does. Or they think their parents, or they themselves will be using these services in the not-too-distant future. They want to know there is that transportation option out there for them, too.”

In 2008, the first year the measure took effect, 3.5 percent of a countywide half-cent sales tax went for senior and paratransit services. It goes up one-tenth of a percent annually until the measure expires, so by the end of the



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program, 5.9 percent will go for transporting seniors and the disabled. The tax dollars fund a wide range of transit providers in the county.

“So for the 2011-2012 fiscal year, nearly \$2.4 million was allocated,” explains Engel. “Ultimately, it helps seniors age in place and not have to go into institutions. They want to stay in their homes and this helps them get to doctors’ appointments, socialize and shop.”

Engel says the timing was right for the passage of Measure J because the economy was going “gangbusters” back in 2004.

“Would it pass now?” he muses. “I can’t say. But we were fortunate that we are able to fund it ahead of the curve. Other Bay Area counties have done the same thing.”

Now, Engel says, the transit authority is hoping to coordinate a “mobility management” program that coordinates all senior and disabled transportation programs in the area, including those run by nonprofits and faith-based organizations.

“We have a countywide volunteer driver program where senior drivers help other seniors with shopping trips and things like that,” he explains. “We’re trying to get arms around that and make people aware of what’s available

so all the demand doesn’t fall on the shoulders of the public system.”

On the Front Range of the Rockies, the nonprofit Denver Regional Mobility and Access Council (DRMAC) has been doing just that since 2005.

“Our group helps connect older adults to all transportation resources in our area, in part by producing a ‘Getting There’ guide,” says Angela Schreffler, the DRMAC executive director.

In addition, the group has an online database called “Transit Options” that walks users through a series of questions to help them narrow down their transportation options. Plus it’s getting ready to launch a transportation information and assistance center this summer so that people can get further help by having someone who they can talk to about transportation resources.

The organization receives grants from government agencies, corporations, individuals and foundations. DRMAC also earns some money by running workshops for other human services agencies so they can better understand the transportation resources available to them. The impetus for the council was to better coordinate the numerous services out there, to make it more efficient and effective so that it then can provide even more transport for the people who need it.

“Our mission statement is mobility and access for all,” Schreffler says. “But in reality, most of those trying to find information are typically older adults or people with disabilities, including veterans.”

Schreffler believes that, overall, the Denver area is doing a good job helping older residents stay in their homes.

“There are some improvements we could make and gaps we need to fill,” she says. “But we know what we need to focus on. One example is long-distance or cross-county transit, so we’re working with our partners to help people who need to get from Parker (southeast of Denver) to medical appointments in Boulder (northwest of Denver.)”

“We don’t run any transportation programs ourselves; we just coordinate them, and we work with 53 different groups, including transit providers, human service agencies and local municipalities,” says Schreffler. “We partner closely with the Area Agency on Aging here, which is run by the Denver Regional Council of Governments. And we all are very aware of what’s coming in terms of older adults who will need these services.”

Schreffler's advice to communities that want to do more for senior transportation needs now and in the future is to start building relationships.

Schreffler's advice to communities that want to do more for senior transportation needs now and in the future is to start building relationships.

"For some reason, it's not an easy conversation to have," she says. "There are so many people working on transportation issues, but it is really important that all of them are at the table. It takes a while to build those relationships, so the sooner you can start the better. It took us a couple of years to get to a point that we were comfortable with what we were doing and people were really talking to each other and sharing resources."

Back in Columbus, Gehring says his agency is constantly seeking volunteers to help with programs and seeking new sources of funding to deal with cuts in government support and the loss of some funding from United Way due to the recession.

"Companies help us out in different ways," he says. "In fact, we have several REALTOR® groups with employees that deliver Meals On Wheels. They're not just taking food to seniors, they are also checking in on them and making sure they're OK. It's a great way to give back to their communities."

As traditional money sources such as government and United Way grants have dwindled, the LifeCare Alliance has managed to maintain its \$15 million revenue by increasing fundraisers and social entrepreneurship efforts, which also include a corporate wellness program.

"If we are going to continue to accept clients, we have to find a way to support our growing efforts," Gehring says. "The number of seniors in our area is growing rapidly. Even people who have moved to places like Florida are coming back to be with family and because services for the elderly are better here."

Gehring says he would give the Columbus area an "A" for the support it gives his agency and its programs. "We'll

always need more volunteers and have to do more with fundraising and social entrepreneurship, but Columbus is a great place in terms of volunteers. College students help out a lot."

"And did I tell you that we even offer a pet care component?" he asked. "Why, we have volunteers who even transport dogs and cats to clinics for check-ups and deliver pet food. I guess that falls under 'senior transit' services. In any case, it's easy and simple and helps people stay in their homes," he concludes. ●

Brian E. Clark is a Wisconsin-based journalist and a former staff writer on the business desk of The San Diego Union-Tribune. He is a contributor to the Los Angeles Times, Chicago Sun-Times, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, Dallas Morning News and other publications.



We need to focus on long-distance or cross-county transit.

Safe driving programs can aid seniors

Catherine Sinclair-Williams is 78. She has no plans to give up driving anytime soon, thank you very much.

“I’m not considering retiring from that part of my life,” she said tartly. “I am more comfortable behind the wheel of my car than I am in my den.”

She has, however, made at least one concession to advancing age.

“I’ve found lately that I’ve developed glaucoma, so I have given up driving at night,” said Sinclair-Williams, who lives in the Long Island, N.Y., community of Elmont.

“The optometrist says if I’m away from home and it’s getting dark, I can drive back ... but I’m not to leave home at night. So I guess that’s one thing I’ve done,” she acknowledged.

Sinclair-Williams said she has driven to North Carolina in recent years and may do it again this summer.

“Eventually, I may have to give up driving,” she mused. “Then I might have to get a younger companion to take me places. That would be my ideal way to get around. Using the Long Island Railroad is easy and convenient, but the idea of getting on a bus terrifies me.”

Fortunately, she lives within several blocks of her beauty parlor, pharmacy and other shops. But no large grocery store is close by. For that, she might have to take a cab.

“And yes, I plan on staying healthy and living in my home for as long as I can,” she said.

Meanwhile, says the American Automobile Association’s Jack Nelson, Sinclair-Williams is an ideal candidate for AAA’s senior motoring efforts, which include everything from brochures with safe driving tips to the proper sizing of vehicles to drivers — dubbed Car Fit — to a senior driving expo with numerous booths about driving and other programs for older adults.

(AARP and other advocacy groups also offer senior driver safety programs. See <http://www.aarp.org/home-garden/transportation/info-05-2010/why-take-a-driver-safety-course.html>.)

Nelson advises senior drivers who find they are getting honked at by other motorists, have experienced minor accidents, have trouble seeing after dusk or get lost in familiar places should participate in a screening program.

“These are reasons to dig a little deeper and perhaps see an occupational therapist for a formal evaluation,” he said. “Often, there are interventions available to keep you driving without the discomfort.”

Nelson noted that seniors also might want to avoid driving during high-volume periods.

“That can be stressful, so you might want to complete your activities of daily living, like running errands and that kind of thing when there are fewer drivers on the road,” he said.

Nelson said studies have shown that left hand turns can be especially problematic for older drivers.

“If you look at fatal crash data in which older drivers are over-represented, accidents that occur involving left-hand turns are most common,” he said. “That has a lot to do with reaction time and being able to perceive how fast an oncoming vehicle is approaching.

“Usually when a crash occurs at an intersection and someone is making a left-hand turn, it’s almost always at a non-signalized intersection or an intersection that doesn’t have a designated left-hand turn. Without those things, there is a lot of pressure from motorists behind you to go ahead and turn.”

But Nelson stressed that while older drivers are often over-represented in fatal crashes, it is often these motorists themselves and their equally old passengers who die — not other motorists.



Photo courtesy of AAA



“Seniors remain among the safest drivers on the road,” he said. “Even more so than folks in the 25- to 55-age group. It is teens who are still the most dangerous.”

Nelson said AAA’s Roadwise Review is a free online tool that helps seniors measure mental and physical abilities important for safe driving. In as little as 30 minutes, drivers can identify and get further guidance on their physical and mental skills that might need improvement.

“It’s a great predictor of letting older folks know if they should contact a health care professional to get a more comprehensive and formal assessment of their safe driving skills important for safe driving,” he said.

Nelson said AAA is opposed to aged-based testing that would force older drivers who fail a test off the road.

“We support age-based screening once you hit, say, 75,” he said. “This wouldn’t affect your license, but would trigger additional assessment.

“Research tells us age-based licensing tests do not work and can be harmful. They can force people to stop driving before they need to. We don’t think it’s a bad thing to require people beyond a certain age to have vision screened for safe driving. And generally speaking, vision starts to decline around 40.

So obviously, by the time you are 75 or 85, your vision won’t be what it used to be.”

Before seniors decide to hang up the car keys, Nelson suggests finding out what resources are available in their communities — so they can stay in their homes as long as they wish.

These could include public buses, taxis, paratransit offerings and supplemental transportation programs that — in best-case scenarios — might even include a driver who shows up at your door, waits while you shop and then helps you carry your bags into your home.

Usually a decision about ceasing to drive will involve many people, Nelson said.

“Often it is a spouse, a health care provider or adult children. It’s not an easy decision, but sometimes it’s the best option for the driver’s safety and others on the road.

“People now live seven to 10 years beyond their ability to drive safely,” he said. “That wasn’t always the case. But it’s a challenge that a lot of us will eventually have to face.

“Most of us take great care to plan for our financial retirement. But we should be planning for our retirement from driving, too.”

For more information on AAA’s senior driving programs, see www.seniordrivingAAA.com. ●

How Millennials Move

THE CAR-LESS TRENDS



Flickr photo by MustafaKhayat

By G.M. Filisko

Millennials own fewer cars and drive less than their predecessors. They'd rather walk, bike, car-share, and use public transportation — and want to live where that's all easy.

Jarret Izzo senses his views on transportation are common among his compatriots in the millennial generation. "There's definitely a continuum, and I probably bike more than most," says the 26-year-old Boston marketer. "But for a lot of people, some combination of biking, walking, using a car-sharing service,

Millennials are transforming communities and the developments that shape them.

and public transit is very doable. Many of my lifestyle decisions are based on not having a car any time soon.”

With drastically different views of transportation from those of the generations that came before them, millennials like Izzo are transforming communities and the developments that shape them. The still-unanswered question is whether that’s a short-term or a permanent transformation.

Commuting: Less, please!

Who are millennials? Also dubbed Generation Y, some demographers peg millennials’ birth years as early as 1975, while others say the generation began in the 1980s (hence another name: “eighties babies”). On the back end, some set their last birth year as 2001.

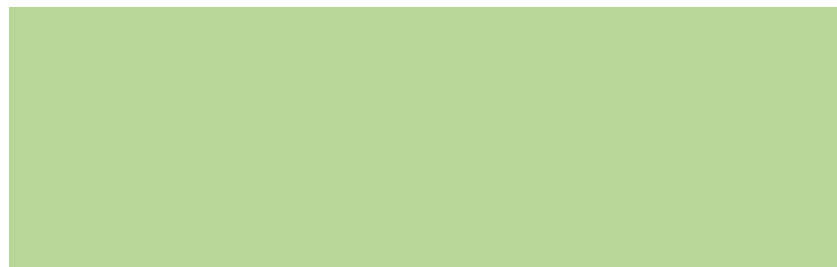
While birth years may vary, it’s similar behaviors and mindsets that define generations, says Jason Dorsey, a millennial himself and chief strategy officer for The Center for Generational Kinetics in Austin, Texas. “When those start to change,” he says, “that’s when you have a new generation.”

Dorsey pegs the millennial generation as today’s 17-35-year-olds and defines them based on unique events that have shaped their views. “The first defining moment for millennials was the space shuttle Challenger explosion in 1986, because we all watched it in school,” he explains. “The end defining moment was Sept. 11, 2011. For an event to be influential, you have to have an emotional connection to it.”

So if these shared experiences and attitudes define generations, is there a shared mindset among millennials on commuting? Absolutely. They want to spend as little time as possible doing it unless they can simultaneously do things they value, like texting, exercising or socializing.

Another shared perception: Cars are a hassle. In 2008, only 31 percent of 16-year-olds and 77 percent of 19-year-olds had a driver’s license — numbers dramatically lower than the 1978 numbers of 50 percent and 92 percent, respectively,

Even as millennials age, they’re driving less than prior generations.



according to the U.S. Department of Transportation. Even as millennials age, they're driving less than prior generations. In 1995, 20.8 percent of autos were driven by 21-30-year-olds, according to the Federal Highway Administration's 2010 Household Travel Survey. By 2009, that number had dropped to 13.7 percent.

"For baby boomers, owning a car was a coming-of-age, life-stage thing," explains Rebecca Ryan, founder of Next Generation Consulting in Madison, Wis. "The coming-of-age toy for the next generation is the smart phone."

Several factors contribute to millennials' negative perceptions of cars. "One is the expense," says Ryan. "Millennials are the most unemployed generation, and their college debt compared to that of their baby boomer counterparts is exponentially higher. Millennials also believe cars are ecobombs — that they're inheriting a planet that's totally

messed up, and they don't want to contribute to it. The final kiss of death for cars? You can't text and drive. All these things together create a perfect storm against cars."

The sharing generation

Instead of driving, many millennials prefer to hoof it, bike, use a car-sharing service, and hop on public transportation.

"I hadn't ridden a bike too much while growing up, but now it's transportation," says Izzo. "I'm glad for the exercise, but that's how we get places, along with public transit and a car-sharing service. Those three things triangulate to make it doable."

Fifty-three percent of millennials say they'd participate in a car-sharing service, reports Zipcar's 2011 study of millennials. Michael Lander knows that first-hand.



Instead of driving, millennials prefer to hoof it, bike, use a car-sharing service, and hop on public transportation.

Transit may capture even more millennials — and keep them as they age — as agencies tap into millennials' smart phone addictions.



“We’re adding a car-share membership program as an amenity in our apartment buildings,” says the president of Lander Group, a Minneapolis development company.

Millennials also drive public transit use, which tends to be highest among younger adults, according to the American Public Transportation Association. There’s high use among 20-24-year-olds, and use remains fairly consistent among the 25-34 and 35-44 age groups.

Where transit is expanding, so is housing. “The Washington, D.C., Metro’s green line was completed in 1999, and during the 2000s we saw the green line corridor capture one-third of all growth in the district between 18-24-year-olds,” explains Darnell Grisby, director of policy development and research at the American Public Transportation Association in Washington, D.C. “More than 5,000 multifamily home units were added to the green line corridor in the 10 years after it opened.”

Public transportation is “huge” among millennials, agrees Rhonda Hayden, a team leader at ZipRealty Inc. in McLean, Va. “The first thing people say is, ‘I want a place near the Metro,’” she says. “A neighborhood’s walkability score is also a big issue. They’re not as tolerant of commute times as other generations.”

Transit may capture even more millennials — and keep them as they age — as agencies tap into millennials’ smart phone addictions. “Today, there’s an expectation you’ll have Wi-Fi on your commuter train,” says

Marnie Primmer, executive director of Mobility 21, an Irvine-based Southern California transportation advocacy coalition. “It’s a nonstarter for people to consider using transit if they can’t be productive. We’re also seeing private companies, like RideAmigos.com, which has a carpooling, ridesharing, and taxi-sharing phone app, and others develop apps to pay for on-street parking with your cell phone. That instantaneous access to information that people carry around in their pockets will change how they approach transportation.”

Grisby agrees. “Transit authorities around the country have started to use smart phone apps,” he says. “Young people love this. It helps demystify the ridership experience by making it easier and more attractive to use.”

In 2011, the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority earned APTA’s innovation award by exposing its technology to allow independent software developers to create real-time transit apps; they enable users to check routes and learn when the next bus or train will arrive at their stop. “We’re seeing very fast movement in this area,” says Grisby. “In some of the largest and even moderate-sized cities, it’s driving ridership. Boston had a 5 percent increase in the last quarter of 2011, and the MBTA attributes that to the use of these real-time apps.”

Real-time transit apps are driving ridership.

Millennials say they prefer urban living.



Flickr photos by RichardMasonerCyclelicious



Millennials are also contributing to a surge in biking.

Millennials are also contributing to a surge in biking. “What I find interesting is the proliferation of bike use over the past few years,” says Laurie Volk, co-managing director of Zimmerman/Volk Associates in Clinton, N.J., which provides housing market analysis for municipalities, cities, nonprofits, and builders and developers. “I was on an assignment in Oklahoma City, Okla., — the heart of the open west with broad streets and no transit to speak of. There were a number of bike stores, and they have bike lanes all over the downtown. I talked to bike-store owners, and they said biking is the new golf for the older generation. There I think biking is being propelled by both millennials and older men. In most other cities, it’s propelled by millennials.”

Cities and developers are doing everything they can to accommodate millennials’ commuting preferences. “Some cities — like Buffalo, N.Y., — are requiring bike racks to be in all public parking garages, and others give building owners bike racks to place outside their buildings,” explains George Grasser, a real estate attorney, developer, and head of Partners for a Livable Western New York. “Many cities are also redrawing street lines to allow bike lanes. We tell cities that even if they don’t have room for a bike lane, they should restripe driving lanes to 10 instead of 12 feet wide. Drivers drive to the road’s geometry, not the speed limit. We also tell them they can increase biking by requiring bike racks on public buses so people can bike to and from bus stops.”

Where millennials live now and in the future

Based on these mobility preferences, millennials say they prefer urban living. Seventy-seven percent want to live in an urban core, according to a 2012 study by RCLCO, a land-use economics firm in Washington, D.C. The question is whether, after a downtown fling, millennials will follow in their parents’ footsteps and purchase homes in the suburbs.

“The choice to buy a single-family home and move to the suburbs will be the dominant position — no question,” explains Lander. “But in the past, we might have seen the number of people staying in core cities in the low single digits. Now we’re moving to maybe 15-30 percent. Is a single-family home in the suburbs dead? No. But when a number is growing like that, it’s a trend, and the trend is away from the single-family suburban home.”

Millennials are trending away from the single-family suburban home.

Visit Milwaukee



If you add the cost of transportation, the furthest places out become the most expensive.

Lander believes that will continue as long as commuting remains costly. “We’ve always thought the most affordable housing has been further from the core,” he says. “However, a new study says if you add the cost of transportation, that calculation flips, and the furthest places out become the most expensive. That’s one reason people are moving closer in.”

Lander’s referring to the Housing + Transportation Affordability Index — which claims to capture the true affordability of housing based on its location — released in February 2012 by the Center for Neighborhood Technology in Chicago. According to the index, people living in neighborhoods with access to transit, jobs and amenities shouldered a smaller annual increase (about \$1,400) in transportation costs from 2000-2009 than those living in car-dependent places (about \$3,900).

Hayden’s seeing that preference play out. “Eighties babies who are starting to think about having a family will move further outside of Washington, D.C., but they still want to be on public transportation, and they’re willing to drive to get to that Metro station,” she explains. “If they do buy out in the exurbs, the more frustrated they are with the commute, the faster they want to resell and move closer in. Especially now that it’s more affordable, they’re sacrificing the bigger house so they don’t have to deal with the commute.”

Ultimately, knowing where millennials will land on the housing spectrum will be a waiting game. “People typically make that house purchase when they have big events like marriage and kids,” says Dorsey. “Because of the economy and credit markets, millennials are delaying those decisions.” We’ll have to see which trends hold steady as the economy improves. ●

G.M. Filisko is an attorney and freelance writer who writes frequently on real estate, business and legal issues. Ms. Filisko served as an editor at NAR’s REALTOR® Magazine for 10 years.

The Gen X Factor

Suburban choices are plentiful
for the smallest generation

By Brad Broberg

The end of World War II brought the start of the baby boom and the beginning of a housing pattern that is burned as deeply into the American psyche as baseball and apple pie. “When I grew up, there was no question that when people had a family, they moved to the suburbs,” says Arthur C. Nelson, director of the Metropolitan Research Center at the University of Utah.

By most accounts, suburbia remains a popular choice of people once they enter the child-raising stage of their life. “We all know that when you have kids, life changes,” says John McIlwain, senior resident fellow and J. Ronald Terwilliger chair for housing at the Urban Land Institute.

The 2009 American Housing Survey from the U.S. Census showed that more than half of all households with children under the age of 18 live in metropolitan suburbs. The 2011 National Community Preference Survey by the NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS® showed people ages 30-39 years old have a stronger preference for the suburbs — compared to the city or small towns/rural areas — than any other age group at 47 percent. And a 2011 survey by John Burns Real Estate Consulting of Irvine, Calif., showed 46 percent of homebuyers and potential buyers ages 31-45 preferred a home in a large-lot, suburban development.

Today, many suburbs are even more attractive to people with kids — or at least more affordable — because that’s where home prices fell hardest during the housing crash. Buoyed by low prices, low

Today, many suburbs are
more affordable.



www.pedbikeimages.org / Dan Burden

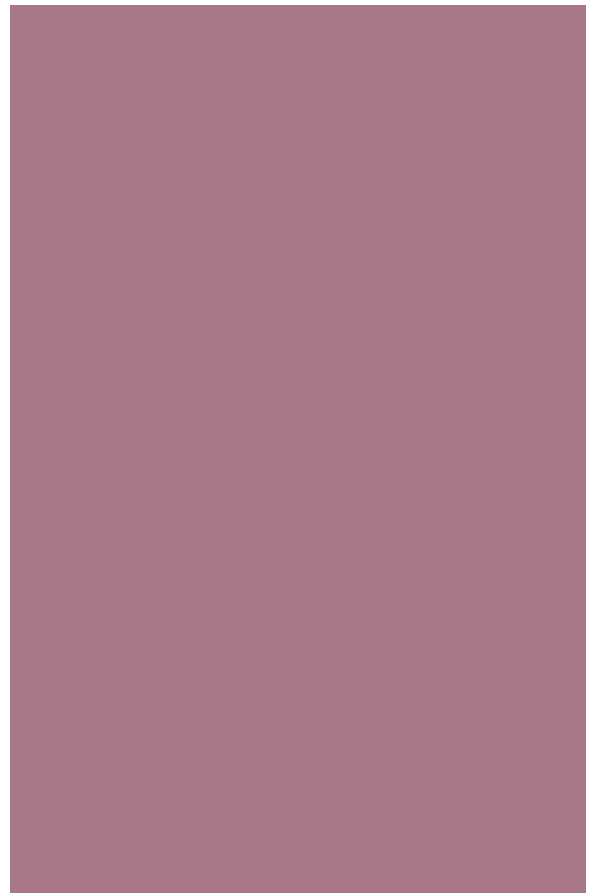
interest rates and plenty of inventory, the suburban dream of better schools, safer neighborhoods and larger homes on larger lots has never been more obtainable.

With the boomers, ages 46-66, concluding their child-rearing years and the millennials, ages 13-31, either too young or postponing parenthood, this is primarily a bonanza for generation X, ages 32-45. The smallest of the three generations at 62 million, gen Xers — at least those not caught in the crash themselves — would appear to have plenty of opportunity to move up as the 80 million baby boomers begin to move out. “They’re in luck,” says Christopher B. Leinberger, a land-use strategist and researcher.

But that doesn’t mean they’re guaranteed a winning roll of the dice. “Gen Xers have a lot of choice, but they should be careful before they leap,” says Leinberger. “They shouldn’t get seduced by the low cost of a home, because they could be jumping into a downward spiral.”

While rising gas prices didn’t cause the housing crash, they fanned the flames by putting additional heat on household budgets — especially in fringe suburbs where the increased cost of commuting more than wiped out the savings of buying a home for less. It’s no coincidence that the degree to which home prices eroded in the crash corresponded to the distance they were from urban centers where people work and obtain needed services.

Gen Xers have a lot of choice, but they should be careful before they leap.





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Homebuyers are integrating the price of gasoline into their home-buying decisions.

The irony is that prices dropped so far that even with gas pushing \$4 a gallon, the tradeoff between high transportation costs and low housing costs in fringe suburbs suddenly seems worth considering again — or does it? Gasoline prices have climbed in a mostly straight line from around \$1.50 a gallon in 2002 to around \$4 a gallon in 2012 — a compound annual increase of nearly 10 percent, according to Nelson. Based on that trajectory, gas prices will hit \$8 a gallon by 2020.

Driven by visions of triple-figure fill-ups, people are starting to do the math. “For the first time in my life,” Nelson says, “I’ve seen home buyers integrating the ever-increasing price of gasoline into their home-buying decisions.”

That’s good because a 2012 report from the Center for Neighborhood Technology reveals that nearly three out of four American communities are already unaffordable when transportation costs — the second largest expense in a family budget — are considered along with housing.

According to the center’s Housing and Transportation Affordability Index, combined housing and transportation costs should consume no more than 45 percent of a household’s budget based on the area’s median income. If only housing is considered, 76 percent of U.S. communities are considered affordable based on spending 30 percent of household income on housing. However, when transportation costs are factored in, the number of affordable communities plummets to 28 percent based on spending 15 percent on transportation.



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If the next decade is anything like the last, the affordability gap will only get worse. Data from the index, which covers 180,000 neighborhoods and 89 percent of the U.S. population, revealed that housing and transportation costs — up 37 percent and 39 percent respectively — dramatically outpaced incomes — up 22 percent — between 2000 and 2009. At the same time, less than 1 percent of the 6 million households added in that timeframe were in location efficient neighborhoods.

No wonder the fringe suburbs are bearing the brunt of the foreclosure epidemic. “A lot of those homes are vacant and they’re going to stay vacant for a long time,” says McIlwain. A study by Nelson estimates there will be 22 million unwanted large-lot suburban homes by 2025.

That’s why Leinberger warns gen X homebuyers against being “seduced” by the low cost of suburban fringe

housing and foresees a “downward spiral” in many fringe suburbs. A 2011 study of census data by the Brookings Institute showed that the suburban poor population grew by 53 percent between 2000 and 2010 compared to 23 percent in cities — with much of the growth occurring between 2007 and 2010 as the housing bubble burst.

Perhaps the biggest potential casualty is one of suburbia’s biggest draws — the public schools. With declining property values come declining property tax collections, an important source of school funding. Plus, when families move out of foreclosed homes, they often leave that particular school district, triggering a cascade of declining enrollment, diminished state support and possible school closures. And it’s not just the schools that suffer from foreclosures. Cities, counties and other local governments can also lose revenue and be forced to slash services.



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The fringe suburbs are bearing the brunt of the foreclosure epidemic.

Families should look in the area around the core of a great urban place.



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Schools can feel the squeeze even in stable suburbs. Many baby boomers are staying in their suburban homes longer because they're working longer, they like where they live and/or they can't move because their home is underwater. That can mean more homes without kids, which can mean fewer kids attending the neighborhood school, which can mean the school closes. Overall, the number of households without children is expected to climb to 71 percent by 2030, according to Nelson.

Add it all up and today's young parents have more to think about than their parents did when deciding where to raise their children. The vision of a larger home on a larger lot still tugs at them, but so does the fear that suburban property values — especially on the fringe — may remain depressed for a long time while those in or near the city are showing signs of recovery. They realize that child-rearing is just one phase of a long life during which their housing preferences will change more than once. Nelson recalls a conversation with a former student living in a bungalow in the city and starting a family. She argued,

“Why would I want to buy a house in the suburbs that I might not be able to sell after my children are grown and sell a house in the city that I might not be able to afford after I'm ready to move back?”

Leinberger suggests the answer for families lies somewhere in between. “If they're looking for a single-family home, they should look in the penumbra — the area around the core — of a great urban place,” Leinberger says. “That way they get the best of two worlds. [Property] values go up because the quality of life goes up. That's what the research is showing.”

Gregg Logan, managing director at the real estate consulting firm RCLCO based in Washington D.C., sees plenty of overlap between meeting the housing preferences of people with children and smart growth. “There are two great opportunities,” he says. One is for infill development “to make suburbs more convenient and function in some ways like a city where people can live close to jobs and services.” The challenges are a limited supply of sites and resistance from existing residents to increased



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Gen X represents the greatest share of the market for master planned communities that blend the benefits of city and suburban living.



density. “People will accept it if there’s something in it for them” such as greater retail, transit or entertainment options, Logan says.

The other opportunity is to create entirely new communities near job centers or that include job centers. Despite being the smallest generation, gen X represents the greatest share of the market for master planned communities that blend the benefits of city and suburban living, says Logan.

Right now, there is a growing glut of existing housing that people don’t want — suburban fringe — and a swelling need for what Logan calls convenient suburban housing that incorporates energy efficiency. Logan says new homebuilders should take their cue from Apple Computer,

which continually manages to sell new products because constant innovation makes the old products obsolete. When planning what and where to build next for gen X as well as the other generations, builders needs to ask themselves “What can I do to hasten the obsolescence [of existing housing stock] so I can get back to selling more product?” Logan says. ●

Brad Broberg is a Seattle-based freelance writer specializing in business and development issues. His work appears regularly in the Puget Sound Business Journal and the Seattle Daily Journal of Commerce.

Calling All Millennials ...

Urban areas lure Gen Y with placemaking programs

By Christine Jordan Sexton

Motown is a city with soul, but it's short on people.

There are efforts to change that, though. With social media giant Twitter opening offices in downtown Detroit, an edgy “Imported from Detroit” Super Bowl ad campaign and a write up in the New York Times, it's no wonder that a program called Challenge Detroit drew 900 applicants with an entrepreneurial spirit who are willing to test the waters of innovation and see what downtown Detroit has to offer.

The applicants, mostly millennials, and all college educated, competed for grants that will allow them to live, work and play in — and, perhaps, most importantly, contribute to — Detroit, which lost 25 percent of its population between 2000 and 2010 and has struggled with blight, economic decline and political scandal.



Flickr photo by Becky Johns



Flickr photo by Patricia Drury

Challenge Detroit is about attracting and retaining innovative thinkers and doers.



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Placemaking is all about living and embracing a city's culture.

“Challenge Detroit is about attracting and retaining innovative thinkers and doers to counter the brain drain and make a difference in Detroit’s revitalization efforts ... to make this place better than the way we found it,” said Challenge Detroit Executive Director Deirdre Greene Groves, in describing the program.

To that end, 30 host companies, including Quicken Loans, have signed on to the initiative. Each company agreed to provide one job for one year. Challenge Detroit grantees also will receive a \$500 per month stipend for living expenses.

Challenge Detroit winners will live near one another and be required to work on 10 community projects, which could range from working on the development of after-school programs to developing an environmental sustainability strategy for the city. The grantees will have to participate in 10 team challenges over the course of a year.

The program helps to create a sense of community in Detroit by building the underpinning required to make it a success: a strong business, civic and entrepreneurial environment.

“Placemaking is all about living and embracing a city’s culture; working and delving head first into the business of a community; playing in a city by experiencing it 365 days per year; and giving one’s intellectual capital to contribute to bettering that place,” said Greene Groves.

The 900 initial Challenge Detroit applicants were whittled down to 60 with the assistance of public voting on the social media site Facebook, where the Challenge Detroit page has nearly 20,000 “likes.” Videos from an array of 20-somethings who are meeting planners, educators, city planners and interior designers are on display for public viewing. Vetting will be completed by Challenge Detroit judges in the next several weeks and the recipients will be in place and on the job in September.

The decision to participate by Quicken Loans, one of the host employers in Challenge Detroit, is not surprising given the company's commitment to the area. Quicken Loans moved its headquarters and 3,700 of its more than 5,000 employees to downtown Detroit in 2011 and another 1,000 will relocate there before the end of the year.

Quicken Loans also is one of five companies in downtown Detroit that is offering its employees economic incentives to move downtown as part of another placemaking initiative called Live Downtown. Along with Quicken, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan, Compuware Corporation, DET Energy and Strategic Staff Solutions launched a five-year, \$4 million program that provides cash incentives to employees who want to move downtown.

New homeowners can receive a \$20,000 forgivable loan toward the purchase of a residence, while new renters can receive a \$2,500 allowance for rent the first year and another \$1,000 in rental incentives the following year. There also are incentives for those employees who already live downtown.

As of April, said Jennifer Rass, senior communications manager at Quicken Loans, a total of 297 applications for participation in the program had been submitted by employees at the five companies, about half of which have closed. The majority of those applying are choosing the rental option.

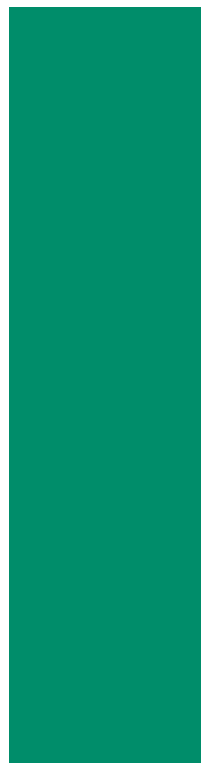
Challenge Detroit and Live Downtown are two of a handful of placemaking programs across the nation that are hoping to lure entrepreneurs and creative types back to urban areas with jobs and financial incentives.

A little more than 600 miles south of Michigan in Chattanooga, Tenn., there's a program called "Geek Move" that offers a \$10,000, five-year, forgivable second mortgage to entrepreneurs who are willing to move to one of eight Southside neighborhoods. It also offers to pay people willing to make the trek to Chattanooga \$1,250 in moving costs.

While the money isn't enough to cement a lifetime guarantee from the mobile Generation Y, Sarah Morgan who oversees grants involving downtown development and urban revitalization



Placemaking programs lure entrepreneurs and creative types back to urban areas with jobs and financial incentives.



for the Lyndhurst Foundation, says the built environments in Southside Chattanooga, including emerging urban attractions, a thriving arts community and the area's natural beauty may be enough to make them fall in love and want to stay for the long term.

"Don't you know we are going to sell the heck out of Chattanooga while they are here," Morgan said.

One person already has signed up for the program, said Chattanooga Neighborhood Enterprises Director of Strategy Abby Studer Garrison, adding that another seven grants will be awarded before the end of 2012. Chattanooga Neighborhood Enterprises is a nonprofit housing organization dedicated to building sustainable communities.

Chattanooga is hoping to capitalize on the fact that the area has the nation's fastest fiber optic network, which offers lightning-quick speeds of up to 1 Gigabit per second. While that speed may be lost on the average Internet user, Chattanooga is banking that it will be irresistible to those with the next "best technology" idea.

The city's Geek Move is being funded in part by Chattanooga Neighborhood Enterprises, as well as the Lyndhurst Foundation, whose mission is to revitalize the Chattanooga area and the conservation of the surrounding region.

Chattanooga is hoping to capitalize on the fact that the area has the nation's fastest fiber optic network.



Flickr photo by Ed Yourdon



Flickr photo by AmericanVirus



Chattanooga Area Convention & Visitors Bureau

The Company Lab, a Chattanooga-based business accelerator, and its founder, Sheldon Grizzle, also is helping administer the program. While a traditional business incubator works with start-up companies, business accelerators set out to nurture nearly mature businesses over a shorter time frame, he said.

Grizzle maintains that the sophisticated fiber optic infrastructure available in Chattanooga and the surrounding 600-square-mile area around it puts the city 15 years ahead of its competitors in terms of technological infrastructure. Now is the time to leverage that advantage, he said, and import the people who can do just that.

“If we have a 10- to 15-year head start [on other cities], the question is what do we do with that head start,” Grizzle said. “If Chattanooga grows at the rate which we think it can grow, we need to have more technical talent.”

To help make that happen, Lyndhurst and others are sponsoring a 14-week “accelerator” for students and entrepreneurs to dovetail with Geek Move. It’s called “Gig Tank,” and it is reaching out to both students and young professionals.

Gig Tank will pit 10 entrepreneurial teams against each other for a \$100,000 cash prize. The teams will be guided by “angel” investors. Students, meanwhile, will compete against each other for a \$50,000 cash prize and the opportunity to pitch their idea to an angel network of investors.

While there is no requirement that the winners of Gig Tank develop the business in Chattanooga, Grizzle is confident that they will. “There is no rule or string attached, but with the band width, it might make sense for them to start in Chattanooga,” he said.



The sophisticated fiber optic infrastructure available in Chattanooga puts the city 15 years ahead of its competitors.

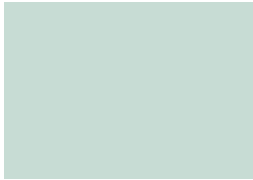


Chattanooga Area Convention & Visitors Bureau

Geek Move and Gig Tank are the latest placemaking initiatives.



Flickr photo by Jason Staten



Flickr photo by John Loo



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Lyndhurst's Morgan predicts that the natural beauty and the built environment also will make them want to stay.

Geek Move and Gig Tank are the latest placemaking initiatives that the Lyndhurst Foundation and Chattanooga Neighborhood Enterprises have partnered on. Geek Move is modeled after a similar Chattanooga program, Arts-Move, which provided 26 artists willing to live in one of eight neighborhoods in Southside and the surrounding area a five-year, \$15,000 forgivable second mortgage to help make housing more affordable.

Many of the benefactors of the Southside housing initiatives have worked with REALTOR® Donna C. Williams, who returned to Chattanooga 11 years ago from Atlanta to be closer to her mother. Williams is a REALTOR® with the Keller William Realty downtown and is publisher of an online community blog for urban neighborhoods called LiveUrban.com.

Money, alone, won't convince millennials to move.

A decade ago, she said, there were few housing options in Southside. Today, there are eight neighborhoods that grant recipients can choose from.

Like Lyndhurst's Morgan, Williams maintains that money, alone, won't convince millennials to move to Chattanooga. "But once they get here, and they get to look around the neighborhoods in Southside, they will consider Chattanooga more carefully." ●

Christine Jordan Sexton is a Tallahassee-based freelance reporter who has done correspondent work for the Associated Press, the New York Times, Florida Medical Business and a variety of trade magazines, including Florida Lawyer and National Underwriter.



BUILDING A NEW SUBURBIA

for All Generations

Northgate Mall redevelopment plan in El Paso, Texas.

By David Goldberg

Today's suburbs aren't what they used to be. And they're only just beginning to show signs of what they will be tomorrow.

You know the story: After World War II, government and private industry teamed up to promote the spread of an entirely new type of development — suburbs made up of vast zones of stand-alone houses with big yards, set well away from commercial and office districts, all connected only by automobiles running on cheap gasoline. The yards and quiet streets would be the perfect setting for a burgeoning middle class to bring up the largest generation of babies ever.

Fast forward to 2012. Those babies are starting to retire; yet the majority of them will continue to live in those houses and neighborhoods built for baby raising. In the older suburbs, they are being joined at a rapid clip by low-wage workers and the poor; as of the 2010 census, suburbs had a larger share of those in poverty than did central cities. The once-bustling commercial corridors

Suburbs need to attract the young knowledge workers and the creative class, key to today's economy.

are in dingy decline, taking the local tax base down with them. Between the high cost of gas, lower earning power and an aging population, fewer residents are able to drive for everything, yet few options exist.

In order to rebuild the tax revenues needed to meet the needs of this changed population, suburbs need to reclaim their economic mojo. To do that, economic developers advise, they need to attract the young knowledge workers and the creative class, key to today's economy, as well as the updated housing, walkable neighborhoods, urban amenities and transportation options, which they are looking for. All while making the area more livable for their growing number of seniors and less-affluent families.

As we begin to reclaim these areas as walkable neighborhoods the tax base improves and they will attract all ages.

It's a heavy lift, but the older suburbs start with the advantages of location, existing infrastructure and institutions, said Victor Dover, an urban planner and designer whose firm is helping a number of such places plan their recovery. "In every metro area we are going to find that the inner suburbs are the greatest locations, for young workers as well as retirees," Dover said. "As we begin to reclaim these areas as walkable neighborhoods, as streetcar suburbs and new economic centers, the tax base improves and they will attract all ages."

The long real estate recession has meant that relatively few of the anticipated, developer-driven suburban retrofit projects have broken ground, except in economically healthy regions such as Washington, D.C. But the slowdown has given local governments and institutions time to make plans for such redevelopment, and many are doing so. Ellen Dunham-Jones, who co-wrote, "Retrofitting Suburbia: Urban Design Solutions for Redesigning Suburbs" with June Williamson, maintains a database of suburban retrofit projects. When they finished the book in 2008 there were 85 projects in the database. "Today there are more than 200," she said.

Below we will examine four examples, at four different scales, of efforts to retrofit suburban-style, automobile-oriented places to accommodate a wider range of ages and incomes. They include redesigning a suburban hospital campus to become a mixed-use town center;

transforming the area around a mall into an urbane downtown; re-imagining a typical commercial highway corridor as a string of walkable neighborhoods connected by streetcar; and, finally, a plan to remake a large, sprawling city into one of the most walkable, age-friendly cities in the country.

St. Francis Medical Center, Chesterfield County, VA

Chesterfield County in suburban Richmond is the prototypical "bedroom community," a region of subdivisions and scattered commercial developments with no real center or civic focal point. Likewise, St. Francis Medical Center is a conventional suburban hospital campus, with low buildings surrounded by parking.

In 2009 the hospital's parent company, the Catholic Bon Secours Health System, decided that there must be a better way to make economic use of its land while expanding its service to the community. The network hired the urban design firm DPZ to create a master plan for the area around St. Francis, as well as three other hospitals in the Richmond area.

"We saw the hospital as the economic engine for this birth of a future downtown," said Xavier Iglesias, senior project manager for DPZ. As such, the plan covers an area twice the size of the hospital campus, in order to create a broader plan for a town center.



The DPZ designed neighborhood will be built around the existing hospital, daycare-office building, and cancer center of the St. Francis Medical Center in Midlothian, Va.

The hospital is the economic engine for this birth of a future downtown.



www.pedbikeimages.org / Dan Burden

Northgate Mall redevelopment TOD plan for a Rapid Transit Station in El Paso.

The resulting plan envisions developing new (mostly medical) office buildings and some housing on the parking lots and existing land. A new pattern of streets and blocks will be introduced to the campus, supplementing or replacing the long drives and curving roadways, to create a pattern similar to Richmond's traditional Fan District. That will make the emerging village more walkable as new uses arrive, Iglesias said.

Because the county consists mostly of upper-end, single-family houses, "They don't have the housing stock for the young families or for the nurses and other workers," Iglesias said. "The local participants talked about providing housing so they don't all have to commute." Similarly, there are few low-maintenance dwellings for aging residents who want to continue living independently. The plan, developed in consultation with surrounding officials and residents, calls for low-rise apartments, and mansion-style, six-plex apartment houses, totaling 872 units, and a number of the row houses traditional to Virginia.

"With this plan, St. Francis is becoming the kernel of what should have been downtown Chesterfield," Iglesias said.

Downtown Bellevue, WA

Although Bellevue by 1946 had enough residents to support one of the earliest malls in the country, Bellevue Square, it was primarily an amorphous bedroom community eight miles east of Seattle, across Lake Washington. It incorporated as a city in 1953, and exploded in population after a new bridge across the lake opened in 1963.

Twenty years later, city leaders decided they wanted a real downtown and set about turning the superblocks around a redeveloped mall into just such an urban center, said Leslie Lloyd, president of today's Bellevue Downtown Association.

"It's a real live city now," Lloyd said. "Our resident population in 2000 was 2,500 and now it's more than 10,000. Downtown is the fastest growing residential neighborhood in the city of Bellevue, [which has a total population of 122,000]. We have the bookends of the housing spectrum, primarily baby boomers and young millennials." With 7,000 Microsoft employees and the headquarters of other tech and telecomm companies, such as Expedia, in downtown Bellevue, the area has proved a huge magnet for the younger knowledge workers. The median age downtown dropped from 57 in 2000 to 34, she said. That is aided in part by the arrival of families to downtown. "We now have 544 school-age children in downtown, and that's a change." If the trend continues, the neighborhood could eventually get its first school.

"The affordability of housing continues to be a challenge," Lloyd said. "Our rents are not affordable to entry-level wages. Only about 15-20 percent is available at a level the service workers could afford."

Many of those workers are arriving from outside the area via a transit network that is second only to downtown Seattle. Thanks to a ballot measure approved in 2008, that service will get even better when light rail arrives from across the lake in a few years. In the meantime,

People who want to live downtown — whether retired or still working — want a vibrant, walkable, safe environment.

downtown Bellevue will work on continuing to evolve from a car-oriented place to one that is friendlier to people on foot or bicycle. “We have a continuing challenge to make it more walkable,” Lloyd said. “We have wider than normal streets, and a superblock lay-out with 600-foot long blocks,” meaning there are fewer intersections where pedestrians may cross safely, she added. “We are implementing mid-block crossings in a handful of places on the streets that are less high-traffic.”

“People who want to live downtown — whether retired or still working — want a vibrant, walkable, safe environment,” Lloyd said. “Downtown Bellevue gives you that option without having to live with the urban ills. And for our single-family neighborhoods, it puts the amenities of a city within easy reach.”

Plan El Paso, El Paso, TX

Lodged in Southwest Texas at the border with Mexico and slathered with the kind of sprawling development typical of Sun Belt cities, El Paso probably never made any prognosticator’s list of places most likely to adopt “America’s best smart growth plan.” But in March, by a unanimous vote, the El Paso City Council adopted a plan that earned that very accolade from urban observers such as blogger Kaid Benfield.

Plan El Paso makes a very clear and conscious choice to retrofit and redevelop for what city leaders see as the needs of a 21st century population. The local economy is strong, thanks in part to international trade. Nearby Fort Bliss has been booming since the Base Realignment and Closure Commission recommended moving significant numbers of troops and jobs to the Army post.

The plan envisions a future El Paso that works well for people of all ages and incomes, as the document’s language notes:

“The young and the elderly of El Paso, especially, have been left behind by urban forms that necessitate driving long distances. The plan proposes strategies to bring more of the activities of daily living within walking distance and a framework of transportation alternatives including transit and bicycle systems. ... The City of El Paso wishes to become the least car-dependent city in the Southwest through meaningful travel options and land use patterns that support walkability, livability, and sustainability. Over time, El Paso will join the ranks of the most walkable and transit-rich metropolitan areas in the country.”



Flickr photo by Dolanh



www.pedbikeimages.org / Julia Diana

El Paso will join the ranks of the most walkable and transit-rich metropolitan areas in the country.

To get there, the city intends to redevelop five or so major corridors around a new system of bus rapid transit lines. New zoning codes and incentives are being put in place to start redeveloping some underperforming commercial properties into new mixed-use, walkable neighborhoods. “There is a lot of drivable suburbia that will not change, but many corridors of ‘70s, 80s and 90s will be redeveloped,” said Dover, whose firm worked on the plan. “The plan includes detailed master plans for development or redevelopment of 40 square miles of the city.” Dover said the first enhanced bus line is being built now with strictly local money, although the city intends to use federal and other sources for future lines.

Dover predicted that downtown El Paso will be one of the early beneficiaries of the plan. “El Paso has a vast market for young professionals and empty nesters who will be willing to live in old El Paso. They have great old buildings and one of the most pregnant downtowns I’ve ever seen.”



Columbia Pike in Arlington County, Va.

Dunham-Jones said Plan El Paso is by far the most sweeping effort at suburban retrofits she has seen. “It’s very ambitious, but I think they’re also trying to be very realistic.”

Columbia Pike, Arlington County, VA

The discussion on suburban retrofitting wouldn’t be complete without mentioning the progress of Arlington, Va. Over the last several years, the D.C. suburb has sought to replicate along the Pike the success it had in creating a string of walkable neighborhoods around Metro Rail stations in the Rosslyn-Ballston corridor. The concept was to redevelop the shopping centers and office parks — and their parking lots — at key intersections into higher-density nodes with apartments, condominiums and townhouses located above or adjacent to stores, restaurants and offices. The single family neighborhoods on the borders would be untouched, but would have access to the new amenities, said Chris Zimmerman, a member of Arlington’s governing board since 1996.

“We are still very early in an extended process,” Zimmerman said. “The plan was for a generation, to transform from this auto-oriented strip into a Main Street as oriented to pedestrians as to through vehicles. And we’re starting to see that emerge.”

New development has to conform to form-based zoning codes that require buildings to be built to the street, rather than across parking lots. They also must provide wide sidewalks with a street furniture zone and street lamps. Some travel lanes are being converted to on-street parking to create a buffer for pedestrians and convenience parking for retail. The county has built “a lot of brand new sidewalk, in some places where there was none, in others where it was too narrow and hard against traffic lane,” Zimmerman said. “We went ahead and invested in the public realm, even though the development hasn’t all come yet.” The next big investment is the streetcar that will ply the Pike, creating another zone in the county — in addition to the Rosslyn-Ballston Metro corridor — where it will be eminently possible to live without using a car every day.

The concept was to redevelop the shopping centers and office parks into higher-density nodes.

Flickr photo by MichiganMunicipalLeague



People are looking to find a place in their hometown where they don't have to maintain a lawn.

Senior living component for a planned Jamestown Mall redevelopment in St. Louis County, Mo.



Recently, the county has begun to see a change in demographics along the Pike that in many respects is exactly what they were looking for, but in others will require careful management, Zimmerman said. The area has many older homeowners and a large number of aging garden apartment complexes with lower-income residents. It did not have the younger professionals and knowledge workers until recently; now that they are coming, the county is concerned that the affordable housing stock will not be replaced without some intervention and direction.

“Rents are rising faster than incomes along the Pike,” in anticipation of the streetcar and other amenities, Dover said. “Now that development is resuming, the supply is going up so that will level off somewhat. But we are trying to plan ahead to keep it a mixed-income community. A lot of seniors are, or anticipate being, on a fixed income, so their rent can't keep rising, or they have to find a new place to live. The affordable units on the Pike now are affordable because they are old or not substantially renovated or don't meet modern expectations. Landlords are slowly overhauling the units and raising the rents.” Dover

and the county are working on creating incentives for below market-rate units and measures to preserve some of the existing affordable units.

Communities should take a close look at Arlington's successes, actions and changing demographics as they plan for their own retrofits. “We talk all the time to people who live in places like Arlington and have raised a family in a house and the kids are grown and gone and they are looking for locations like Columbia Pike where they can find a place in their hometown where they don't have to maintain a lawn. They don't want to leave their friends or their congregation or favorite coffee shop, but they want a low-maintenance place to live,” Dover concludes. ●

David A. Goldberg is the communications director for Transportation for America, a nationwide coalition based in Washington, D.C. that advocates for transportation policy reform. In 2002, Mr. Goldberg was awarded a Loeb Fellowship at Harvard University, where he studied urban policy.

Active Living

Smart growth communities
are good for your physical
and mental health

By Brian Clark

When Jane Finger thought about where she wanted to spend her retirement years, the community she envisioned had to be walkable. She found that place — and more — in Fairhope, Ala., population 17,000, on the east side of Mobile Bay. And she couldn't be happier.

"I live a few blocks from our thriving downtown," said Finger, who moved from Connecticut.

"Would you believe I can walk to the grocery store, bank, post office, library, drug store, a good book store or two, several restaurants, coffee and ice cream shops, city hall, our community theater, the Bay Park and public pier, farmers' market, my beauty salon, a day spa for massages once a month, numerous art galleries, retail shops, a playground for grandchildren, our film series theater, the community garden where I have a plot, the community college auditorium, a church with public meeting rooms and more?" she asked rhetorically.

"The longest walk is to the hospital, which is only about 20 minutes away," added Finger, who is 68. "So this has been great for my health and peace of mind in many ways. There is a great sense of community here. I see my neighbors out and about all the time. I want to walk, and not just for recreation."

Finger acknowledges that Fairhope is not typical of most communities in this country, which has been dominated by suburban design since 1950. That means many neighborhoods — some without sidewalks — are often miles from shopping and other services.

Fairhope was founded in the late 1800s by a Utopian group from Des Moines, Iowa, that purchased 4,000 acres



I can walk to just about everything I need and feel safe about it.

of rolling farmland studded with oaks. It has long been popular with writers, teachers and artists, who are drawn by the lifestyle and wonderful sunsets on Mobile Bay.

“Fairhope looked like a good place for me as an active, single woman,” she said. “Though it’s a ways down the road, the thing that bothered me most about aging was the idea of not having a car. I didn’t want to be isolated and dependent on others to take me places.

“In Fairhope, I can walk to just about everything I need and feel safe about it,” she said. “That is huge for me. It is a pleasant place to walk, too. You don’t have to walk down streets with cars zooming by at 40 mph. The streets are manageable for walking.

“And as for biking, we’re working on improving that now,” said Finger, who is a member of a group called “Complete the Streets.” She also is working to improve the public transit system in her area, which she calls “spotty.”

This year, when the city got ready to repave a lot of streets, she said the planners and the AARP called in a national consultant to improve some street crossings for pedestrians and to add bike-lane striping for cyclists.

“Improved transit is also part of that planning, too,” she said.

Finger said she is doing everything she can to stay healthy so she can walk to town for years to come.

“A neighbor of mine who died last year was 92 and was walking and riding his bike up to the end,” she mused. “I want to be like him.”

Finger said another advantage is that her grown children and their kids like visiting her.

“They enjoy walking and biking to parks, restaurants and the bay, too,” she said.

“I really like not having to spend time in the car,” she said. “And I figure if I run low on money, I won’t need to own a vehicle. In addition, I believe I’ve made an investment that will be attractive to buyers who like this lifestyle.”

Oh, and one other thing: Finger met her life partner in Fairhope. He, too, likes to walk.

James Sallis, a professor of family and preventive medicine at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD),



Destination DC

I’ve made an investment
that will be attractive to buyers
who like this lifestyle.



Photo by Laura Sandt



www.pedbikeimages.org / xAdam Darin

People who live in walkable neighborhoods are trimmer.

said a number of studies have shown that while most Americans live in car-dependent suburbs, many wish they lived in more walkable communities.

In large part, that's because walking equates to health, he said, noting the rise in obesity in this country over the past few decades as Americans spent more time in their cars commuting.

"With our modern suburbs, you have to drive to get most places," he said. "Over time, zoning laws became more prescriptive about suburban-styles that made neighborhoods become ever-less walkable."

But he said there has been pushback in the past decade to change zoning codes to promote communities that take the needs of pedestrians and cyclists into consideration.

"Unfortunately, there isn't a lot of good data on this trend," he said. "The Congress for New Urbanism tried to track these types of walkable developments and couldn't keep up. That's an indication there are a lot more being built."

Many surveys show people who live in walkable neighborhoods are trimmer, said Sallis, who heads UCSD's Active Living Research program.

One study he did showed that people who lived in walkable neighborhoods were 12 percent less likely to be obese, he said. In the low-walkable area, 60 percent of the

adults were overweight compared to only 48 percent in communities where residents could walk to services.

Sallis said urban design plays a big role in walking.

"If you live in a neighborhood where shops are right on the sidewalk, people are more likely to be active there as opposed to having more suburban-type of design where there is a giant parking lot you have to walk across to get to the stores," he said.

Sallis said other studies have shown that the demand for walkable neighborhoods is strong among both young people and those of retirement age.

"Many don't want to live in the suburbs," he said. "They don't want to have to drive everywhere. They want to be closer to the action and have a lively street life. Those demographics are pushing the housing market."

"Even if we built only walkable neighborhoods, it would take a couple of decades to meet the demand," he said.

Kelly Morphy of the Walkable and Livable Communities (WALC) Institute, said just as activities like walking and biking have been engineered out of most Americans' daily lives, they can be engineered back in.

"And it's nothing that is being forced on people," she said. "Communities are requesting assistance with this. If we look at this in the most basic way, we are building to accommodate people having choice."



The demand for walkable neighborhoods is strong among both young people and those of retirement age.





Walkable and Livable Communities (WALC) Institute:
Morrow, GA: (Left) Existing Conditions; (Right) A Vision for Active Living

If we are going to restore our public and community health, we also need to think about how the built environment supports using active modes of transportation.

Morphy said this country will always need to have roads designed for cars and trucks.

“But we need these choices as a matter of public health, economic development and social health. We see that connectivity improves people’s lives — especially those of older Americans — when they have the ability to walk to their daily services and they can socialize with their neighbors and friends without having to drive to do that.”

Morphy said there are opportunities to retrofit streets to promote walkability when roads are being resurfaced or when there is infill in suburban areas.

“We need to be thinking 20 to 30 years down the road about how we want land to be developed,” she said.

“If we want to make streets safe for kids to cross to get to school, or to make them amenable to the corner grocery store and all those things that America grew to love decades ago, then we need to get the streets right to support that kind of development,” she said.

Morphy said there are many traffic-calming tools available, including curb extensions and modern roundabouts

that are designed to slow entering cars enough so they will yield to pedestrians.

Another option is putting streets on a “road diet” that calms traffic by reducing the width of lanes, adding turn pockets and bike lanes, while maintaining traffic flow.

“If we are going to restore our public and community health, we also need to think about how the built environment either supports or discourages us in using active modes of transportation to actually get places.

“We strongly believe if we get the streets right, if we get the built environment right ... then the infill development and the other amenities will come in a more appropriate way.” ●

Brian E. Clark is a Wisconsin-based journalist and a former staff writer on the business desk of The San Diego Union-Tribune. He is a contributor to the Los Angeles Times, Chicago Sun-Times, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, Dallas Morning News and other publications.

REALTORS® Take Action

Making Smart Growth Happen

A Force for Making Smart Growth Reality

Smart growth, which emphasizes walkability, higher density, and transportation access as ways to more effectively use land, is not a new concept. Yet, the significant impact that smart growth can have on commercial property demand and values is often overlooked by many commercial practitioners. In Atlanta, the Atlanta Commercial Board of REALTORS® Community Growth Committee set out to create a common approach to examining the benefits of higher density mixed-use and transit-oriented development (TOD).

Many of the Atlanta Commercial Board of REALTORS® (ACBR) early smart growth initiatives focused on education and liaison with fellow commercial REALTORS® and public officials. But in 2011, the ACBR had the opportunity to take the next step — to actively participate in turning a smart growth plan into a viable commercial/residential development. The property in question was the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA) station at Edgewood/Candler Park. Located in Edgewood, an older suburb of mostly single-family homes southeast of downtown, the 1979-vintage station offered a prime opportunity for redevelopment, according to Dan Reuter, land use chief for the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC).

“There is a lot of unrealized potential near many of our rail stations, and with the growing market of Atlanta buyers and renters who want to live in urban, walkable places,

many of the stations offer a great place to provide more TOD real estate,” Reuter explained.

In Edgewood’s case, the biggest unrealized asset was a large, but underutilized, parking lot on the seven-acre site. Even at rush hour, the lot was never more than 35 percent full since many of the 1,200 to 1,400 weekday riders walked, came by bus, or were dropped off. The fenced parking lots and deteriorating sidewalks also created a barrier between the station and an adjacent park and isolated the station from nearby multifamily and retail sites.

A stroke of good fortune helped move the project forward. ARC, along with other Atlanta community groups including Southface Energy Institute, were working with Bill Lennertz, executive director of the National Charrette Institute, to learn how to conduct charrettes. As part of the training, Lennertz proposed working on a real project. ARC suggested Edgewood.

A charrette, a collaborative process that allows a variety of project stakeholders to participate in local planning and design decisions, is “very well-suited to complicated projects like transit-oriented development because it allows for collaborative solutions,” said Lennertz.

Reuter agrees, saying charrettes are “a great way to focus on the actionable steps that can lead to real development.”

The charrette was possible, in part, because of a \$10,000 NAR Smart Growth Action Grant that was awarded to ACBR. ACBR was also involved in the charrette and provided important market data information.

“Part of the concept of a charrette is that you reach out to as many constituencies as possible and the real estate and building community is a big piece of that,” said Robert Reed, sustainable communities design director for the nonprofit Southface Energy Institute and one of the



driving forces behind the Edgewood charrette. “Markets are shifting as more millennials want to live in urban, walkable places, and real estate professionals understand those market realities.”

Reuter explained that the market data helped direct design decisions during the Edgewood charrette.

“We require a market analysis as part of our smart growth planning process because we want the community to understand what the market potential is for a site and not anticipate uses that aren’t feasible,” said Reuter.

Data provided by ACBR supported the proximity to transit as an important piece of the diverse, affordable housing the Edgewood residents wanted.

“Housing expenses in our region are affordable, averaging 23.7 percent of personal income, according to the Center for Neighborhood Technology,” said Robert Broome, government affairs director for the Atlanta Commercial Board of REALTORS®. But he went on to explain that when factoring in transportation costs, suburban counties that lack public transit exceed the 45 percent of income range for housing and transit that it generally considered affordable.

Two design variations emerged from the charrette process. Each called for three-to-four story residential buildings incorporating approximately 300 rental units. Between 10,000 and 16,000 square feet of restaurants and other retail and between 5,700 to 7,100 square feet of office spaced rounded out the designs. The site would become a destination for home, work and play instead of a concrete island.

Both designs also reflected the community’s desire for green space and civic areas. One final concept called for a large central commons, ideal for farmers markets and concerts. The second approach reduced the size of the commons and added two pocket parks and more street front green space. Both consolidated transit parking into



a garage structure and kept bus access lanes unchanged, a major concern for MARTA. A more complete summary of the Edgewood design and the entire charrette process can be found on the Atlanta Regional Commission website: http://documents.atlantaregional.com/land%20use/lu_edgewood_charette_final_report_06.30.2011.pdf

While ACBR’s role in conducting the Edgewood charrette was important, its activities after the fact were even more critical in moving the smart growth initiative forward.

“We didn’t want to just complete the design and have it sit on a shelf,” explains Broome. The board lobbied to ensure that the Edgewood final report was incorporated into the city’s comprehensive development plan.”

Now, with an Edgewood transit-oriented project securely part of Atlanta’s future, MARTA is negotiating with an active local developer, Columbia Residential, to acquire and develop the site through a public/private partnership with the Atlanta Development Authority. In a few years time, Atlanta’s commercial REALTORS® may be taking on a new role at Edgewood — that of leasing brokers. ●

This article was edited from an original version, which was published in Commercial Connection, NAR’s commercial real estate newsletter, and written by Mariwyn Evans.

REALTORS® Take Action

Making Smart Growth Happen

Nashville REALTORS® Help Fuel the Future of Mass Transit

There is a popular saying that people in the South love their cars. That isn't likely to change, but the Greater Nashville Association of REALTORS® (GNAR), together with the Transit Alliance of Middle Tennessee, are working to ensure Nashville-area residents have more options when it comes to getting where they want to go. At the heart of those transportation options is the development of long-term, viable mass transit choices for people who live and work in Nashville and the adjacent 10-county Middle Tennessee region.

To help fuel Nashville's public transit discussion, GNAR was recently awarded a \$10,000 Smart Growth Grant from the NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS® to help fund the Transit Citizen Leadership Academy, a joint effort of the Transit Alliance of Middle Tennessee and the Nelson and Sue Andrews Institute for Civic Leadership at Lipscomb University. The Transit Citizen Leadership Academy is educating community leaders about current mass transit challenges and opportunities and empowering them to help the area move beyond conversation to application. The first class of approximately 35 participants, comprised of mayors or their designees from the 10-county Middle Tennessee region, graduated from the Academy late last year. Those graduates then nominated the next set of community leaders as participants in the second session class. When completed, the Transit Citizen Leadership Academy will have graduated an estimated 150 to 200 residents and community leaders.

"The Transit Academy is a powerful process by virtue of the people involved in it," said Don Klein, chief executive officer of the Greater Nashville Association of REALTORS® and frequent Academy presenter. "It provides a good foundation of understanding so that we can confront urban

myths about cost and viability and broaden our knowledge of transit options, related costs and funding sources. Graduates are equipped to provide leadership in the community as transit decisions are made."

To provide a foundation of understanding, academy program materials cover a wide range of transportation issues and transit choices being explored by the Nashville Metro Planning Department, the area's Regional Transportation Authority and the Transit Alliance of Middle Tennessee. Each session is made up of a series of seven meetings, with topics that include:

- Scanning the landscape — the historical, economic and social impact of transportation in the United States and in Tennessee
- Understanding current reality — an exploration of Middle Tennessee's transit system and regional challenges
- Identifying models of success — an analysis of the transit successes and failures in other communities
- Evaluating the options — an examination weighing value and cost of options for Middle Tennessee, informed by global best practices
- Engaging the community — identification and activation of community resources to support transit conversations
- Creating the conversation — a design for facilitating conversations on transit options and opportunities
- Moving transit options forward — an individual leadership plan to educate others

As part of the examination of best practices, officials from the Japanese consulate located in Nashville provide Academy members with an inside look at Japan's highly acclaimed mass transit system. A number of Academy members will



participate in an upcoming Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce trip to Portland, Ore., that will, among other things, examine the city's mass transit system.

The Transit Alliance of Middle Tennessee, a nonprofit organization connecting public and private sectors and encouraging new investments in mass transit, focuses Academy curriculum on education, motivation and consensus building to develop a visionary mass transit plan. Ed Cole, former deputy director for the Tennessee Department of Transportation, is executive director of the Alliance and developed the vision, program direction and course materials for the Academy.

“As has been said on many occasions,” Cole writes in a letter to Academy participants, “support for investments in mass transit across Middle Tennessee will depend on the understanding citizens have of both the need for mass transit and the choices that we can make to invest in mass transit. With this base understanding, together we can then discuss mass transit options that are appropriate for our area and how such options can be financed and implemented.”

Among the transit options being examined are light rail, rapid transit within the northeast corridor, commuter rail, heavy rail, monorail, a Broadway/West End streetcar,

regional express bus service and bus rapid transit. Options would serve the urban core, regional corridors, as well as suburban and rural areas.

One issue has already risen to the surface. Late last year Nashville Mayor Karl Dean announced plans to move forward with a bus rapid transit system (BRT) for the east-west corridor. The proposed BRT, using dedicated lanes and fixed stations, would alleviate projected traffic congestion in an area between White Bridge Road in West Nashville and Five Points in East Nashville.

At the presentation of the \$10,000 Smart Growth Grant, Mayor Dean praised Academy partners, including GNAR, for their commitment to the continued growth and prosperity of Nashville and its recognition of the integral part public transit plays in the city's future.

“GNAR consistently supports issues important to our city's future growth and success, and as we plan how we're going to grow as a region in the decades to come, mass transit is absolutely critical,” said Mayor Dean. “Educating the public on this issues is step one, and so I commend GNAR for their contribution to the startup of the Citizen Transit Academy.”

Don Klein adds that a clear understanding of the issues paired with local leadership and engagement are critical to successful change. “Nashville is sensitive to issues like increased traffic, gas prices and air quality, and locally we recognize that rapid transit is part of the answer. This \$10,000 Smart Growth Grant provides an important resource. NAR empowers local associations. It respects the insights of local leadership.”

Local leadership, spearheaded by current and future graduates of the Transit Citizen Leadership Academy, will help Nashville and Middle Tennessee residents benefit from a mass transit plan that will provide choice and convenience, save energy, protect the environment and enhance the quality of life throughout the region. ●



REALTORS® & Smart Growth

on common ground



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