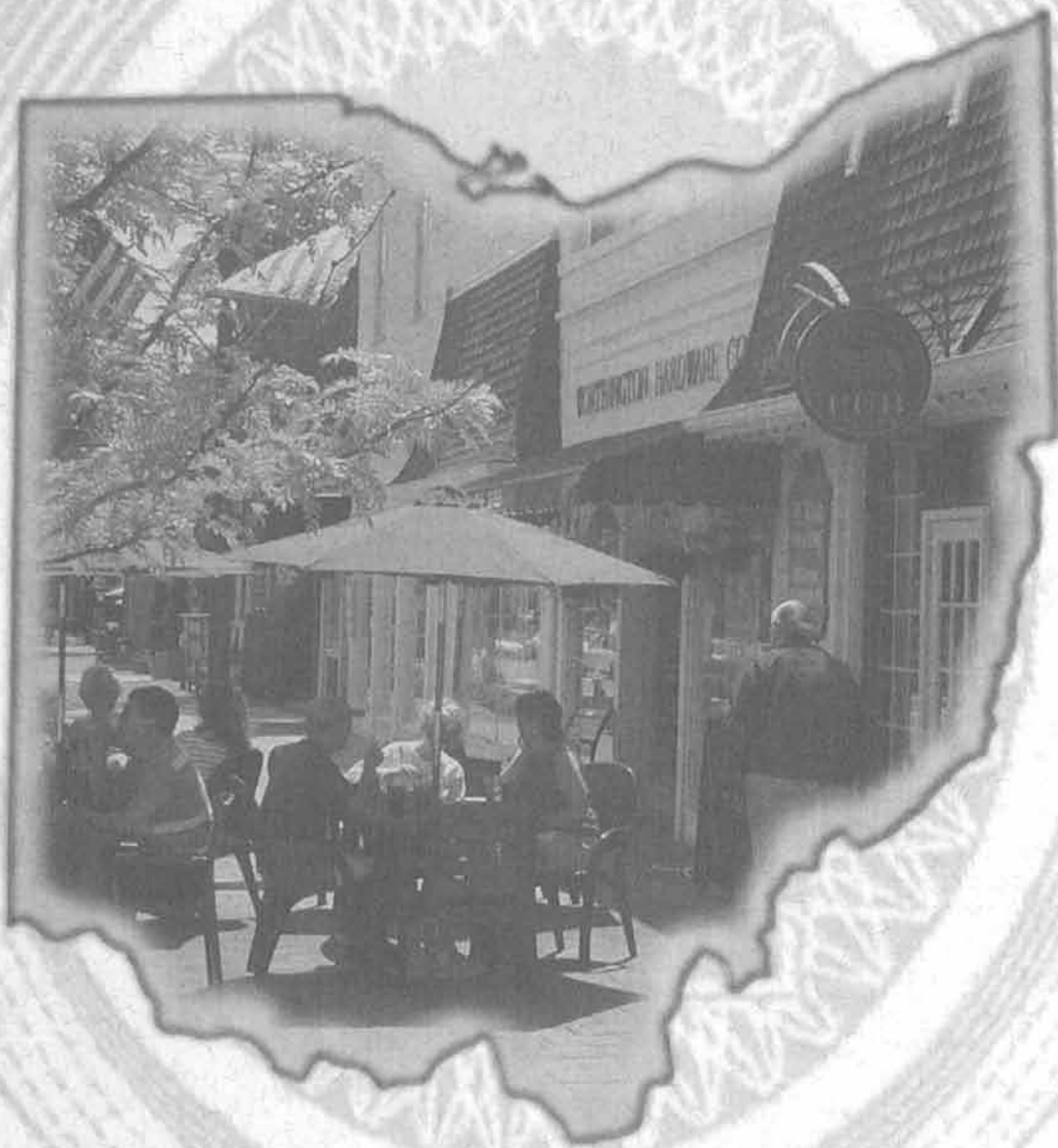


Ohio's First Suburbs



*Rethinking Investment Strategies
for a More Competitive Ohio*

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	2
Introduction	8
Ohio: Coming of Age	9
What are the First Suburbs?	12
The Historical Plight of the First Suburbs	13
Ohio: A State of Normalacy	14
The Changing Nature of the First Suburbs	16
The Assets of the First Suburbs	18
Averting Crises	19
The Challenges of First Suburbs	20
The Role of State and Federal Influences	24
Finding Vision for a Policy Blindspot	27
An Agenda for Regional Reform	28
Endnotes	30
Acknowledgements	31

Ohio's First Suburbs Mission Statement

The First Suburbs Consortium is the largest government-led advocacy organization in the country working to revitalize mature, developed communities and raise public and political awareness of the problems and inequities associated with urban sprawl and urban disinvestment.

“We are now in the “Re” century, when redevelopment displaces development, reconstruction outpaces construction, redesign is more common than design, reuse betters use, repaving keeps more people busy than does paving, reengineering dominates engineering, renew dethrones new, and revitalization supplants devitalization. We’re finally kicking our self-destructive addiction to sprawling growth and replacing it with healthy, sustainable regrowth.”

--- Storm Cunningham (*The Restoration Economy*, 2002)

Executive Summary

Ohioans may look around them wondering if the “Re” century has skipped over the Buckeye State. Actually, the “Re” century, as described above, is just now making its presence known around Ohio. As Ohio celebrates its 200th birthday, now is the time for state and economic development officials to recognize that the state’s future depends on how well Ohio “Re”-invents itself.



FIRST SUBURBS

CONSORTIUM

Author Storm Cunningham writes that “We’re reaching a ‘tipping point.’ We’re on the verge of the inevitable transition from an economy based on new development to one based on restorative development - as have most long-lived civilizations before us.” The report that follows does not tackle this issue in whole - although an abundance of supporting evidence suggests the “Re” century is alive and well in many places inside of Ohio. Instead, this report focuses on a set of important smaller places in Ohio. Inner-ring suburbs sprinkled around Ohio’s major metropolitan areas are where the “Re” century is taking shape and changing economic development dynamics. The Ohio First Suburbs Consortium is one reason why.

The First Suburbs Consortium was born in the mid-1990s by a coalition of inner-ring suburban elected officials and others in northeast Ohio concerned about the plight of their communities, struggling to compete with an array of disadvantages long ignored by policymakers. For these urban communities, the “Re” century is long overdue.

The First Suburbs are suburbs that were built, or mostly built, near central cities before 1960. These suburbs now are 40 to 80 years old, while many have begun to experience what had been exclusively central city challenges: deteriorating and obsolete real estate, problematic sewer and water systems, disinvestment, and the flight of residents with above average incomes. These suburbs were most often originally built as bedroom communities, linking workers, housing

"In large measure, the decline of cities can be attributed simply to the exodus of households with good incomes and successful businesses."

Thomas Bier, Cleveland State University

and consumers to support the central cities that powered the local economy. The relationship has at times been strained, but this symbiotic support system survives and has never been more important than it is now.

Today's central cities depend on these communities to provide a high quality of life for their residents and vice versa. Ohio's inner-ring suburbs are rediscovering the important ties to their inner cities and working to re-establish the special relationship that existed when these suburbs were Ohio's "first suburbs."

Ohio's 200th birthday is an opportunity for the state to help facilitate this process and make Ohio more competitive in the 21st century. Ohio's First Suburb communities are reflective of the same advantages and challenges that shape Ohio's future. Ohio's inner-ring suburbs sprung

up near Cleveland, Cincinnati, Columbus, Dayton, Toledo, Akron and elsewhere in the early and middle part of the 1900s principally as a reaction to the urban excesses of the day, but over time these First Suburbs have evolved into an established support network for the larger metropolitan region. Some of the First Suburbs are today economic forces in their own right. But those days are numbered.

Obsolete real estate, aging infrastructure, dying commercial areas, older housing stock and increasing social service costs are among the problems facing Ohio's fully-developed communities, especially the landlocked First Suburbs surrounding the state's major cities.

Cleveland State University's (CSU) Tom Bier has written that economic success drives movement from community to community. "Depending on who moves where, communities rise or fall," according to Bier. "In large measure, the decline of cities can be attributed simply to the exodus of households with good incomes and successful businesses."

Ohio State University Professor Hazel Morrow-Jones concurs. Outward population movement has been the norm in post-war urban America, as deed transfer records of homeowners consistently show. She refers to the psychological importance of home ownership in America, its implied social status and its economic benefits (including federal subsidy) as reasons why homeowners "trade up" from one home to another more expensive one. This leads almost





exclusively to movement outward from the metropolitan center.

The long decline of American inner cities has not stopped at jurisdictional borders. Instead, the characteristic stagnant population trends, dwindling commercial development and eroding tax base have crept into neighboring inner-ring cities. This has helped transform many Ohio's First Suburbs into little more than turnstiles for the upwardly and outwardly mobile. It also helps explain why urban researcher Myron Orfield has called inner-ring suburbs "the most fragile places in America".

Is this the inevitable result of free market forces or benevolently misguided public policies that encourage the outward exodus of households with good incomes and businesses? Ohio's First Suburbs are clearly casualties of friendly fire from federal and state policymakers, but municipal leaders also understand that they are home to outdated commercial and office space.

These communities often lack the fiscal resources to make the local investments needed to compete, yet are not "blighted" enough to compete for state or federal initiatives geared toward community improvement. As the Brookings Institution has described, the First Suburbs are in a "policy blindspot." State and federal policies (or, in many cases, the lack of policies) that could help level the playing field for these communities instead exacerbate the decline.

The Fannie Mae Foundation recently surveyed urban experts, asking them to list the top influences on the American metropolis over the past 50 years and what they thought were the most likely things to influence the next 50 years. Three of the top five influences that have shaped the urban landscape since 1950, according to these experts, were the direct result of government action. These include the 1956 Interstate Highway Act, FHA mortgage financing and subdivision regulation policies, and 1960s and '70s-era urban renewal that resulted in the large-scale demolition of older buildings. The 10 factors most likely to influence the next 50 years, according to these same experts, includes the deterioration of the "first-ring" post 1945-suburbs.

In Ohio, more than half a dozen state agencies routinely affect economic growth and where it may or may not occur. These agencies include the Ohio Department of Development, the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency, the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, the Ohio Department of Transportation, the Ohio Public Works Commission, the Ohio Department of Agriculture and the Ohio Water Development Authority. In addition, 132 state lawmakers normally introduce more than 1,000 legislative bills each two-year session of the Ohio General Assembly. Governors, judges and other governmental officials also wield significant power to direct where economic resources go throughout the state. Congress and federal agencies play an equally important role in determining where taxpayer-supported resources

The issue is not whether the federal and state government will continue to play a role in shaping Ohio's economic future. Rather, the issue is whether such intervention will continue to be driven by inconsistent, muddled political choices.

are allocated, as the Fannie Mae survey makes clear.

Undoubtedly, many of the forces that have hurt central cities and their inner-ring suburbs are not the work of a free market system, but a mixture of economic forces influenced largely by demographic changes, public education, racial strife and government action. The issue is not whether the federal and state government will continue to play a role in shaping Ohio's economic future. Rather, the issue is whether such intervention will continue to be driven by inconsistent, muddled political choices.

In recent years, many of Ohio's neighbors and other states across the country have adopted "smart growth" policies addressing many of the issues affecting inner-ring suburbs and other existing communities. Republican and Democratic governors alike have recently put forth policies promoting reinvestment in older communities. In October 2002, for instance, Rhode Island's Republican Governor Lincoln Almond and New Jersey's Democratic Governor James McGreevey both signed executive orders requiring their state's planning processes to stop subsidizing sprawl and instead promote redevelopment in strategic areas. Rhode Island is calling these areas - primarily Main Streets and downtowns - "growth centers."

Governors and state legislators in the Midwest have embraced the concept. Kentucky, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Wisconsin and Tennessee are all moving forward with significant initiatives.

Likewise, the National Governors' Association has given great attention to these issues in recent years.

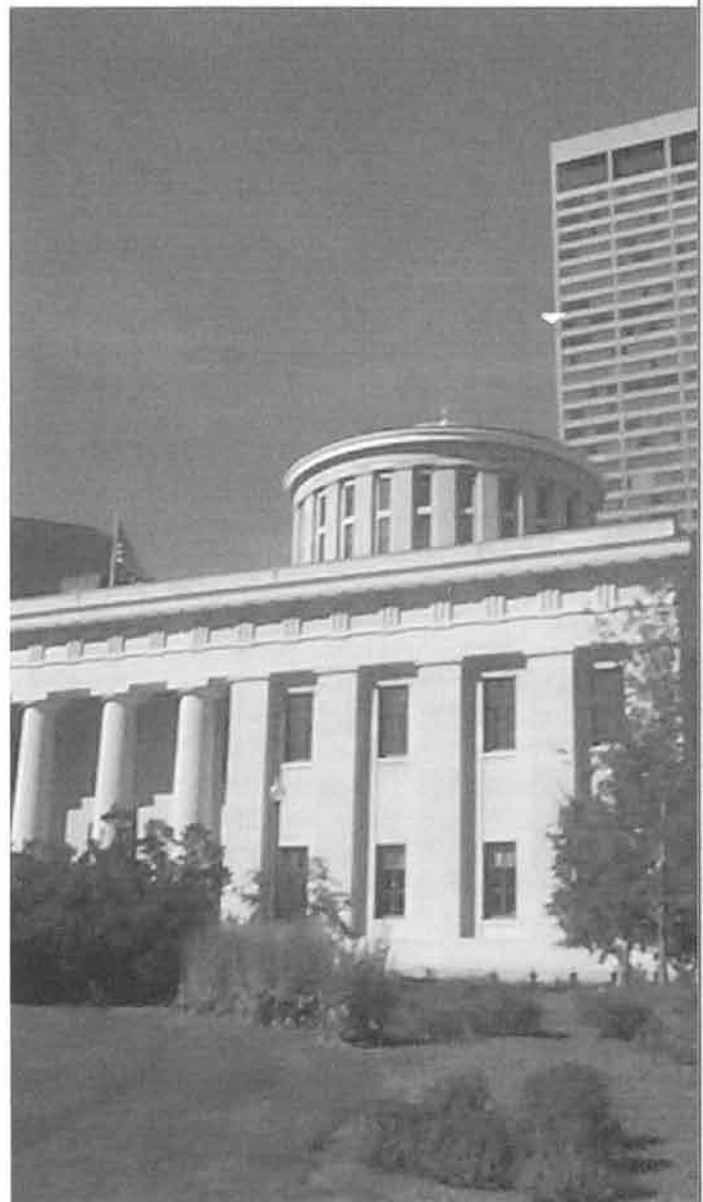
In Ohio, a working paper published in 1998 by EcoCity Cleveland and the American Planning Association presented a thoughtful analysis with recommendations for Ohio. The state has taken some steps forward in urban policy areas by creating an Office of Urban Development and a linked-deposit program that makes low-interest loans available to certain homeowners who want to make home improvements. However, an abundance of opportunities laid out in the working paper have yet to be considered by state officials.

The most significant move Ohio could make to enhance the competitiveness of Ohio and its First Suburbs would be to embrace a smart growth agenda acknowledging that current growth patterns are draining resources from established communities and are not protecting Ohio's long-term interests. An executive order from the governor would accomplish this. Such a state policy would reap benefits to more than Ohio's First Suburbs. It would enhance all of Ohio's established communities and neighborhoods, improving the quality of life for Ohioans and the state's long-term economic prospects.

The Ohio First Suburbs Consortium encourages policies that would:

- ❖ Create a tax credit for rehabilitation of homes more than 40 years old.
- ❖ Require state infrastructure funding to focus specifically on maintaining existing infrastructure.
- ❖ Replace the estate tax revenue local governments are losing as a result of federal and state legislation.
- ❖ Change the state's constitutional requirement that gas tax revenues be directed only toward highway spending.
- ❖ Revise Enterprise Zone program rules to restrict the zones to truly distressed areas.

These and other policy shifts could help transform Ohio's First Suburbs from the "most fragile places in America," to cities that act as stabilizing forces in Ohio's metropolitan regions.





Today's central cities depend on their "first suburbs" and vice versa.

Introduction

The formation and nurturing of economic clusters within a regional economy has won widespread praise from academics and economic development practitioners alike. The successful clustering of inter-related private firms and supporting public institutions within a region results in the desired "stickiness" that helps make a region's economy more productive and competitive, according to experts.

In economic development parlance, stickiness is good. A sticky region means that the economics of the region are clustered in mutually beneficial ways that well serve the local economy. A region that lacks this cohesiveness and instead consists of disparate independent economic players - primarily businesses - generally finds itself at a competitive disadvantage to "sticky" regional economies.

Such "sticky" clusters can take the form of hub-and-spoke districts described by economic development expert Ann Markusen as "regions where a number of key firms and/or facilities act as anchors or hubs to the regional economy, with suppliers and related activities spread out among them like spokes of a wheel." Seattle fits the contemporary model of such a region, or Detroit in its auto heyday.¹

Less celebrated than the power of regional economic development clusters is the everyday energy of clusters of smaller cities within a metropolitan region. In Ohio, the economic

drivers remain the state's major cities - Cincinnati, Columbus, Cleveland, Akron, Toledo and Dayton. But like the hub-and-spoke system, the success of these cities depends largely on the "stickiness" their inner-ring communities provide.

This dynamic is not new, but has long been taken for granted. In the early 20th century, these inner-ring suburbs began to form in Ohio around the inner cities of places like Cleveland and Cincinnati. These "streetcar suburbs" eventually sprung up around Dayton, Columbus, Toledo, Youngstown and Akron. These communities - Euclid, Shaker Heights, Worthington, Madeira, Mt. Healthy and others - helped link the workers, housing and consumers to support the central cities that power the region. This relationship has at times been strained, but this symbiotic support system survives and has never been more important than it is now. Today's central cities depend on its "first suburbs" and vice versa.

Ohio's urban cities - comprising both central cities and dozens of First Suburbs - are today faced with enormous challenges. The host of issues normally associated with inner cities is now quietly spilling over into Ohio's inner-ring communities. How Ohio responds to these challenges will help determine the success or failure of the state's competitiveness in the 21st century.

Ohio now finds itself struggling to shake off its rust belt image and compete in the 21st century.

Ohio: Coming of Age

Ohio is now celebrating its 200th birthday. It was the first entirely American state, carved out from the Northwest Territory and officially organized into statehood in 1803. Ohio has witnessed the true American experience. It developed into one of the great industrial states, launched the political careers of seven early presidents, became the birthplace of aviation and invention, and was even a pioneer in early 20th century land use planning and zoning that helped shape modern America. Since World War II, however, Ohio has been reluctant to shape its own future, taking a follower's path to America's murky middle.



Ohio now finds itself struggling to shake off its rust belt image and compete in the 21st century. Ohio's cities are also aging and increasingly in competition among themselves. The World War II generation has been admirably referred to as "the greatest generation," but the same generation of communities around Ohio are finding themselves casualties of friendly fire—from state and federal policies that undermine the urban core.

As it celebrates 200 years, Ohio faces difficult choices about shaping its future. The state's prospects depend on its leaders encouraging the right mix of economic development while making sound public policy decisions. The challenge is to make Ohio an attractive place to work, raise a family and call home. The same mix of public policy and economic forces that have hurt our inner cities are now threatening the next generation of cities, those now identified as Ohio's First Suburbs.

Generally, the First Suburbs communities throughout Ohio reflect the socio-economic conditions of the county in which they reside. More than 650,000 people live in established Ohio First Suburbs communities. These communities are, on average, more diverse (nearly 25 percent non-white), have higher median household incomes (nearly \$48,000) and are home to significantly more working-class professionals with 4-year degrees (nearly one in three) than the national and statewide averages.²

Ohio's First Suburbs include the following communities:

Northeast Ohio First Suburbs -- These communities are the birthplace of the First Suburbs movement that grew out of the demographic patterns first studied in the 1980s by CSU's Bier. These 14 suburbs: Bedford, Bedford Heights, Brook Park, Cleveland Heights, Euclid, Fairview Park, Garfield Heights, Lakewood, Maple Heights, Parma, Shaker Heights, South Euclid, University Heights and Warrensville Heights have formed a Council of Governments (COG) and have become a true political and economic force in northeast Ohio. The Consortium began operating an Economic Development Council in 2002, hiring a full-time director to coordinate economic development in the First Suburbs. The built-out communities have been particularly hindered by older housing and obsolete commercial and industrial facilities.



Central Ohio First Suburbs -- A smaller group of five communities make up this consortium, all wholly contained within Columbus' I-270 outerbelt. Bexley, Grandview Heights, Whitehall, Worthington and Upper Arlington are comparatively healthier than their counterparts in northeast and southwest Ohio. Whitehall's municipal struggles emerged well before those of its neighboring First Suburbs. Despite healthy schools and above average residential property values, these communities are faced with small tax bases and stagnant population growth.

Southwest Ohio First Suburbs -- The inner-ring suburbs are a mix of former industrial cities and bedroom developing communities. Deer Park, Fairfax, Forest Park, Greenhills, Harrison, Lincoln Heights, Madeira, Mariemont, Montgomery, Mt. Healthy, Newport (Kentucky), North College Hill, Silverton, Springdale, St. Bernard and Wyoming are all losing their tax bases to urban disinvestment. The Cincinnati region has been hit hard by the effects of sprawl, earning itself the dubious distinction of being named by the Sierra Club as the fourth "most sprawling" metro area.

The challenges working against the First Suburbs and their inner cities are complex. Obsolete real estate, aging infrastructure, dying commercial areas, older housing stock and increasing social service costs are among the problems facing Ohio's fully developed communities. Is this the inevitable result of free market forces or benevolently misguided public policies that encourage the outward exodus of

By partnering with the State of Ohio, with their regions and with the business community, Ohio's First Suburbs can become more competitive in the 21st century. For these communities, the future is now.

households with good incomes and businesses? State and federal policies have erected significant barriers, but there are broader socio-economic factors that must also be closely examined.



The decentralization of the U.S. economy has increasingly made Americans more mobile than ever before. Upwardly mobile workers and consumers are less tied to geography than ever before and are finding opportunities outside of the Buckeye State. Trends indicate that Ohio's economy may not be modernizing rapidly enough to keep pace.³ As a result, Ohio's population has grown slower than the nation, losing congressional representation as well.⁴ Employment in Ohio from 1990 - 2000 also lagged behind the national average.⁵ These trends are shared by some other nearby states like West Virginia and Pennsylvania. But Ohio will not illustrate its competitive advantages by reflecting the problems of nearby places. Making Ohio a more attractive place for younger, college-educated people whose upward mobility has largely determined the big winners in economic growth (places like Portland, Seattle, Minneapolis, Boston and Toronto) will determine Ohio's long-term success or failure.

Ohio's bicentennial should coincide with a new focus on the state's First Suburbs and older communities. Aging Ohioans are offered the Golden Buckeye Card discount program, but our aging communities are largely neglected. Fortunately, it is not too late to restore these communities to the health they once enjoyed. By partnering with the State of Ohio, with their regions and with the business community, Ohio's First Suburbs can become more competitive in the 21st century. For these communities, the future is now.

First Suburbs offer advantages such as proximity to their central cities, access to affordable housing and established quality of life amenities such as pedestrian-oriented town centers or downtowns.

What Are The First Suburbs?

The First Suburbs are suburbs that were built, or mostly built, near central cities before 1960. In the Midwest, suburban development began around 1900 and progressed slowly until halted by the Great Depression and World War II. In the 25 years following the War, suburban growth accelerated dramatically. Those "first" suburbs now are 40 to 80 years old, and with age, many have begun to experience what had been exclusively central city challenges: deteriorating and obsolete real estate, problematic sewer and water systems, disinvestment, and residents with modest or low incomes.⁶ First suburbs are not unique to Ohio, but the Buckeye State is the birthplace of the First Suburbs movement that has begun resonating elsewhere.

First Suburbs offer advantages such as proximity to their central cities, access to affordable housing and established quality of life amenities such as pedestrian-oriented town centers or downtowns. These communities also offer older, distinctive housing in traditional neighborhoods complete with features like bicycle routes, sidewalks and neighborhood parks.

However, this group of cities is the generation of communities that is finding itself built out with little or no additional land for development and often a lower tax base per capita than central cities. The fast-growing exurban communities farther out are now attracting the economic development that once found its home

in Ohio's urban centers and inner-ring suburbs intensifying regional competition and the debate over sprawl.

Today's First Suburbs are faced with five major challenges:

- ◇ Inadequate housing stock
- ◇ Aging infrastructure
- ◇ Small, shrinking tax bases
- ◇ Obsolete commercial and industrial property
- ◇ Increasing social service costs

Underlying these challenges is the fact that many First Suburbs communities are also experiencing no population growth and increased poverty levels among their residents. These conditions are exacerbated by urban sprawl, where newer communities are attracting businesses and residents from inner-ring suburbs.





State and federal policies have long encouraged growth outside of existing urban communities with the promise of lower taxes and cheaper land.

The Historical Plight of the First Suburbs

The midway point of the last century was the pinnacle for many of America's inner-ring suburban communities like Whitehall, east of Columbus. Home to the first regional shopping center in the United States, Whitehall's population boomed through the 1950s, increasing from 4,077 in 1950 to 20,818 in 1960. Returning World War II veterans fueled the boom in residential housing in Whitehall 50 years ago making it the fastest growing city in all the United States.

Today, Whitehall's population of 19,201 has fallen below its 1960 level. The city struggles to compete. It sits atop aging infrastructure. Its commercial district is disjointed and functionally obsolete. Longtime Whitehall residents like Lynn Ochsendorf have watched as residents and investment leave Whitehall for greener pastures farther out from this historically blue-collar community. Ochsendorf is Whitehall's city council president and she knows Whitehall's experience is not unique.

Numerous other inner-ring cities around Ohio and elsewhere have witnessed similar disinvestments take place in their own communities. As community leaders in these inner-ring cities know all too well, the decline of these communities did not simply occur overnight. State and federal policies have long encouraged growth outside of existing urban communities with the promise of lower taxes and cheaper land. Many of Ohio's inner-ring

communities are faced with the prospect of continuing down a path of no population growth and continued economic decline similar to what inner cities faced in our recent past, but without a broad tax base to help support the community and fund vital services.

Ohio's First Suburbs once served as the original suburbs to thriving central cities. Today, they increasingly find themselves in what the Brookings Institution has called a "public policy blindspot" – not poor enough to compete for state investments and too landlocked to accommodate much private investment. Ohio's First Suburbs and developers have learned that it is more expensive to repair existing infrastructure than to build new infrastructure on undeveloped land farther out from the core. And while central cities receive the bulk of state funding for urban programs, newer communities take advantage of undeveloped land and economic development incentives to grow. Meanwhile, tax-burdened inner-ring communities struggle to find new revenues to support themselves.

Urban researcher Myron Orfield has called inner-ring suburbs "the most fragile places in America." Recent census data back up Orfield's assertion. The long decline of American inner cities has not stopped at jurisdictional borders. Instead, the characteristic stagnant population growth, dwindling commercial development and eroding tax base have crept into neighboring inner-ring cities, putting them "at risk."

Ohio's land is urbanizing quickly. Between 1992 and 1997, only Texas converted more prime farmland to development than Ohio... Meanwhile, Ohio's population growth has not kept pace. Ohio added 1.44 urban acres for each additional person between 1992-1997, a higher rate than in any state except Pennsylvania.

Ohio: A State of Normalcy

Ohio's economic future depends heavily on the attractiveness of its major cities and inner-ring suburbs. Why? Richard Florida has published a thoughtful book postulating that the places that attract the "creative class" are the neighborhoods, cities and regions that will succeed in today's current economic environment.⁷ The creative class largely consists of younger, technology-savvy entrepreneurs, writers, artists and musicians.

Today Ohio struggles to attract significant numbers of people, creative or otherwise. The state has long been considered a benchmark for American normalcy—hardly the selling point for the creative class or the middle-class families that strengthen Ohio's economy.

The nation looks to Ohio to see itself. The Buckeye State features a distinctive mix of both urban and rural pieces that reflect the complicated American puzzle. The 2000 Census, however, points to trends that should give Ohio policymakers pause. Ohio in the 21st century may have a harder time keeping up with the Jones's—or in this case, the Michigans and Wisconsin.

Ohio's land is urbanizing quickly. Between 1992 and 1997, only Texas converted more prime farmland to development than Ohio, according to a report published in 2002 by the Ohio State University Extension. Meanwhile, Ohio's population growth has not kept pace. Ohio added

1.44 urban acres for each additional person between 1992-1997, a higher rate than in any state except Pennsylvania.⁸

Ohio still largely identifies with its rural roots, but its economy has been in transition from rural to urban for decades. Ohio communities, also, are changing from longtime rural towns to faster-growing urban centers. This transition has a rippling effect that reverberates around the state. As noted, Ohio is now 200 years old and many of its communities are showing their age. Ohio's urban centers have been chronic patients for decades and many of their inner-ring suburbs are increasingly in need of physical rehabilitation.

Public officials are going back downtown today with the task of fixing what has been broken for 50 years. The systemic destruction of America's urban areas is well documented and is evident to anyone who has visited our nation's largest metropolitan areas.

Ohio's inner cities, typical of those found in the Midwest, were strong economic engines throughout the industrial era of the late 1800s continuing through World War II. During those years, many of the workers who provided the factory muscle lived in the small cities that sprang up along the edge of the inner cities and commuted to work via trolley car. This symbiotic relationship between the inner city and inner-ring suburb thrived in the days before interstate highways and other public investments lured homeowners and employers to the edge of the established urban areas.

Now the inner suburbs are following in the footsteps of the central cities and are at risk of serious decline, without the local tax base or state and federal support that the central cities have enjoyed. Since 1948, the percentage of community wealth in Ohio's inner-ring suburbs has risen less than 2 percent, while the

percentage in Ohio's outer-ring suburbs has nearly doubled. The outer-ring suburbs are now home to more than 60 percent of the urban regions' wealth.⁹



The Changing Nature of the First Suburbs

Cleveland Magazine in June 2002 featured a cover story entitled, "Rating the Suburbs," a periodic feature the magazine began publishing in 1993. The article ranked the Cleveland area communities on a variety of "desirable" criteria based on the perspective of a homeowner. Some of the ranked criteria included safety, education,

median home-sale value, property taxes, population, environmental, fire services, recreation, housing appreciation rates and diversity. Acknowledging the decades-long growth patterns, the magazine editors declared that "this year, for the first time, a suburb from outside Cuyahoga County earns our top spot (Hudson, a Summit County suburb closer to Akron). And as we continue to move further



...many inner-ring communities began prior to World War II as "streetcar suburbs" whose growth followed the major rail routes into the inner city...Now, migration patterns favor suburb-to-suburb movement, a pattern that has not favored inner-ring communities.

from the central city, what we define as Cleveland is expanding as well."

The notion that the suburbs are homogenous, white-collar, Republican bastions home to two-car garages and families with six-figure incomes no longer applies. Today there are inner-ring suburbs, middle suburbs, outer suburbs and the commercial high-tax-capacity developing suburbs.

Located on the outer fringe of our metropolitan areas, many of the newest ring of suburbs are the result of highway interchange investments that spurred dramatic growth and the office parks and sprawling commercial and office facilities situated along freeway exits. While rapidly expanding office and commercial development brings rapidly expanding tax revenues to the newest suburbs, it also brings rapidly expanding school enrollment, infrastructure costs and traffic congestion.

By comparison, many inner-ring communities began prior to World War II as "streetcar suburbs" whose growth followed the major rail routes into the inner city. Initially, these inner-ring suburban residents migrated from the central city. Now, migration patterns favor suburb-to-suburb movement, a pattern that has not favored inner-ring communities.

Tom Bier has written that economic success drives movement from community to community. "Depending on who moves where, communities rise or fall. In large measure, the decline of

cities can be attributed simply to the exodus of households with good incomes and successful businesses."¹⁰

Outward population movement has been the norm in post-war urban America, as Ohio State University Professor Hazel Morrow-Jones points out. She refers to the psychological importance of home ownership in America, its implied social status and its economic benefits (including federal subsidy) as reasons why homeowners "trade up" from one home to another more expensive one. This leads almost exclusively to movement outward from the metropolitan center. This, of course, goes a long way toward explaining the decline of urban America.

First, homeowners fled the cities. Second, commercial business followed the more affluent citizens to the suburbs. This was followed more recently by corporate job centers that have relocated to the outlying areas. While the continued outward migration from urban areas has been devastating to many central cities, it would be vastly overstated to similarly characterize this pattern's effects on inner-ring communities. Many of these communities were bedroom communities from the start with few employment centers. Now they face challenges as a result of demographic changes as well as being landlocked with a fixed, and relatively small, tax base.

Inner-ring communities sprang up generations ago to help support the busy inner cities and to house the workers. These inner-ring cities today largely serve the same purpose and remain linked to the urban core through an established network of roadways and other infrastructure.

The Assets of the First Suburbs

Perhaps the most potent amenities Ohio's inner-ring suburbs offer are their rich histories and their strong sense of community. The suburbs surrounding Cleveland have a particularly storied past. Euclid, for instance, dates back nearly 200 years to a time when it rivaled Cleveland for economic supremacy in northeast Ohio. In 1926, the city helped usher in a new era of municipal zoning following the lawsuit *Village of Euclid v. Ambler Realty Co.*, in which the U.S. Supreme Court validated the right of cities to provide comprehensive zoning guidelines. Other inner-ring suburbs such as Whitehall, Kettering, Greenhills offer varied and interesting historical perspectives.



Ohio's inner-ring communities also serve as great homes to businesses of all shapes and sizes. These communities sprang up generations ago to help support the busy inner cities and to house the workers. These inner-ring cities today largely serve the same purpose and remain linked to the urban core through an established network of roadways and other infrastructure. Those who do not live in the inner-ring suburbs often travel through them on their way to and from work. Although large employment centers are seldom located in today's inner-ring suburban community, smaller businesses have long found the inner ring to be a stable job center with access to an educated workforce, good schools and a strong customer base.

Few issues resonate with families, homeowners and voters more than schooling. While the effects of urban sprawl and "white flight" have certainly affected public schools in the inner ring, many of these Ohio school districts remain strong, if not vibrant. Central Ohio's Upper Arlington, for instance, consistently ranks at or near the top of the region's school systems as well as producing top-notch athletic programs, among these a recent state football championship. Numerous other inner-ring communities boast public schools among the state's best, with schools rated as "excellent" in the Ohio Department of Education's report card for 2002. Among these are Bexley, Grandview Heights, Upper Arlington, Worthington, Centerville, Oakwood, Madeira, Mariemont and Wyoming.

The problems associated with stagnant or declining populations in the inner-rings are the inevitable result of being landlocked and homebuyers' ability to either build or purchase houses on the urban fringe that are newer, larger and typically more accommodating to families.

Averting Crises

What hinders the Ohio First Suburbs movement in addressing issues they face is the lack of crisis. Ohio faces several obvious crises – budgetary, public education, health care – and the neglect of its inner-ring suburban communities is not yet one of them. Community leaders in Ohio's First Suburbs realize this and are working today to ensure their communities are not tomorrow's problems. These leaders also realize that the time to address issues is before the crisis hits. For these communities, the future starts now.

The problems associated with stagnant or declining populations in the inner rings are the inevitable result of being landlocked and homebuyers' ability to either build or purchase houses on the urban fringe that are newer, larger and typically more accommodating to families. Population loss, in and of itself, is much less of a problem to the First Suburbs than the loss of families with wealthier incomes that help stabilize the community. A very common homebuying pattern is to begin with a "starter" home near the urban core. Then, middle-class homebuyers over the years move outward at least once or twice to larger, more expensive homes.

Rarely is this pattern moving in the other direction, leaving urban neighborhoods populated largely with a mix of empty-nesters, college-aged students, gay professionals and the underclass. When housing growth is limited by

a lack of available land and population growth is similarly stunted, businesses are challenged to find new growth opportunities. Often, those opportunities are located farther out from the urban core.

Since 1983, the inflation-adjusted growth of the commercial property tax base in the First Suburb communities in northeast and central Ohio has grown at only 1 percent annually. Comparatively, the commercial property tax base in First Suburbs in southwest Ohio has been growing at a stronger 2 -1/2 percent annual clip.

The Challenges of First Suburbs

Ohio's First Suburbs communities have much older housing stock than the regional average. More than 63 percent of the housing stock in the typical Ohio First Suburb community was built before 1960, a much higher percentage than the national (35 percent) and Ohio (47.1 percent) averages.¹¹ These figures on housing stock closely reflect the county in which they reside (except Franklin County), but are somewhat lower than the age of housing in the inner cities they surround (except Columbus).

Housing in Franklin County's inner-ring suburbs is much older than the rest of the county. Older homes are also nearly always smaller than today's contemporary new homes. Homes built before 1960 are typically between 1,000 to 1,300 square feet in size. The 2000 Census reports that one in five new homes now being built is greater than 3,000 square feet. Newer homes also come with twice as many bathrooms, two-car garages, central air conditioning and much larger rooms. Not surprisingly, families looking for more elbow room are certain to find homes in the newer subdivisions farther out more accommodating. This works against both established inner cities and their older suburbs.

More striking is the decline of the commercial and industrial tax base of Ohio's inner-ring suburbs. Many inner-ring communities have commercial corridors that have long been suffering as tenants and customers alike are lured outward to newer shopping destinations.

This pattern has resulted in these communities becoming more dependent than ever on residential properties to maintain their tax base. Cuyahoga County, for instance, receives two-thirds of its property tax dollars from residential properties.¹²

Since 1983, the inflation-adjusted growth of the commercial property tax base in the First Suburb communities in northeast and central Ohio has grown at only 1 percent annually. Comparatively, the commercial property tax base in First Suburbs in southwest Ohio has been growing at a stronger 2 -1/2 percent annual clip. Meanwhile, great disparities exist between the tax base expansion in the inner rings compared to the outer suburbs. In northeast Ohio, the outer suburbs' commercial property tax base grew over this same period six times faster. In other words, with every additional dollar invested in an inner-ring community, \$6 went to the outer suburbs. Much of that \$6 chunk was not new economic development, but the result of a



Typical inner-ring shopping

business relocation from Cleveland or an inner-ring suburb to an outer suburb. The disparity is even more pronounced in central Ohio where the outer suburbs grew their commercial tax base at more than nine times the rate of Franklin County's inner-ring suburbs. Columbus' commercial tax base grew nearly four times faster than the growth in its inner-ring communities.

Ohio's experience in this regard is not unique. From 1979 to 1999, the share of office space in central cities in the United States dropped from an average of 74 percent to 58 percent, while the share of office space in outlying areas grew from 26 percent to 42 percent.¹³



Typical outer-ring shopping

The 2000 Census makes it abundantly clear that "life in the suburbs" in the 21st Century will not fit the public's stereotypical perception of suburban bliss. In fact, more than a third of all suburban communities either lost population or experienced no gain between 1990 and 2000.¹⁴

Another common disadvantage facing nearly all older communities is finding ways to fix aging infrastructure. The U.S. EPA estimates the cost of repairing or replacing water and wastewater infrastructure to be between \$745 billion and \$1 trillion over the next 20 years. Based on current investments in water and wastewater infrastructure, an annual shortfall of \$23 billion will accumulate over those 20 years, according to the Washington, D.C.-based Water Infrastructure Network (WIN), a coalition of water infrastructure professionals and other officials.

The prevailing notion toward infrastructure assistance in most "home rule" states like Ohio is that "once you've built it, you're on your own." The State of Ohio directs some resources toward infrastructure improvement, but only enough for local governments to compete for what amounts to 2-3 percent of total statewide infrastructure spending each year.¹⁵ Much more is spent subsidizing new infrastructure to accommodate growth on undeveloped land, fueling criticism of state actions promoting urban sprawl.

Demographics are also working against Ohio's First Suburb communities. Central Ohio remains

In the 1990s, Hamilton, Montgomery, Cuyahoga and Lucas counties all lost population to outlying suburbs in neighboring counties. This is a pattern reflective of metropolitan sprawl that negatively affects the inner city and impacts inner-ring communities.

the only metropolitan region in the state that is attracting substantially more people. Ohio's central cities have been losing population to its suburbs. This population takes with it higher disposable incomes and the promise of future growth. In the 1990s, Hamilton, Montgomery, Cuyahoga and Lucas counties all lost population to outlying suburbs in neighboring counties. This is a pattern reflective of metropolitan sprawl that negatively affects the inner city and impacts inner-ring communities.

Author David Rusk, a former mayor of Albuquerque, New Mexico, has extensively researched this phenomenon throughout the United States. Rusk has concluded that the largest indicator of the success or failure of cities to address sprawl depends on if the city is "elastic" or "inelastic." Elastic cities have strategically expanded their boundaries and captured much of the growth that would have otherwise gone to the suburbs while inelastic cities have largely kept their boundaries intact and focused on non-growth issues. In Ohio, Columbus has shown efforts toward elasticity while Ohio's other metropolitan regions have not. Rusk would argue that Columbus' comparative success, while attributable to a range of economic factors, has much to do with its growth-capturing annexation policies over the years. The success of Columbus has made the central Ohio region an attractive magnet to workers and businesses alike, keeping inner-ring suburbs relatively stable and pouring substantial growth into outlying communities.

Despite the healthier regional atmosphere, central Ohio's First Suburbs can see the writing on the wall. The key to sustained vitality is a healthy tax base that can support strong schools and maintain a high quality of life for their residents. Older, land-locked communities like those found in Franklin County with little or no undeveloped land are thus dependent upon economic re-development. As noted earlier, the disparity in commercial tax base is most pronounced in Franklin County where the outer suburbs generate more than nine times the revenue of Franklin County's inner-ring suburbs.

Economic re-development has not proven to be a simple assignment for municipalities to pursue. However, despite the challenges associated with brownfield and greyfield redevelopment, some encouraging progress is underway in First Suburbs communities. For instance, the City of Upper Arlington is aggressively taking control of the future of the Kingsdale Shopping Center by purchasing the 14-acre core of the property. The Center is a declining strip center whose most prominent feature is its mostly vacant asphalt parking lot. A developer will be selected through a competitive process to purchase and redevelop the property into a mix of office, retail and residential uses - a town center situated along the otherwise residential street front. The City's 2001 Master Plan calls for the property to be redeveloped with higher development densities doubling the existing square footage with 35 percent retail, 47 percent office, 17 percent residential and some civic component. The

project will represent nearly \$100 million in new investment and will create an estimated 1,500 job opportunities, according to city officials.

In Cleveland's inner-ring, the City of Fairview Park has invested in the revitalization of a nine-acre site just east of its city hall on Lorain Road. The City utilized \$1.2 million in brownfield renovation money from Cuyahoga County and \$1.4 million from bonds to transform three heavily blighted 1950s-era motels into more than 90,000 square feet of new office space generating six times the tax revenue of the previous land owners. The City investment went toward land acquisition, remediation, a blight study and other costs to prepare the land for construction. One major corporate client is now utilizing the site and another is expected to move in by mid-2003. "What we did," said Jim Kennedy, the city's economic development director, "is try to create a level playing field with the outer suburbs." The project is expected to be completed by June 2003.

The City of Kettering, an inner-ring suburb south of Dayton, has also focused on re-development projects in recent years. The City is nearing completion of its most ambitious re-development initiative to date. The Hills and Dales Shopping Center located on the city's west side was a flourishing regional shopping center when it was first developed in the 1950s, but had been in sharp decline since the 1970s. The city decided to buy the site in 1999 - at the request of a previous owner - and quickly began work to develop a plan for the site, demolishing

the shopping center and selling off parcels of land. While most of the funding for the \$3.65 million project came from the city's general revenue fund, Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) and Tax Increment Financing (TIF) funding were also used to pay for the re-development. The site is being converted into up to 150,000 square feet of office space, including additional retail space. All of the parcels to the site sold ahead of schedule.



The Role of State and Federal Influences

The Fannie Mae Foundation surveyed 149 urban experts at the close of the 20th Century and asked them to list the top influences on the American metropolis over the past 50 years and what they thought were the most likely things to influence the next 50 years. Three of the top five influences that have shaped the urban landscape since 1950, according to these experts, were the direct result of government action. First on the list was the 1956 Interstate Highway Act and the dominance of the automobile. Second was the FHA mortgage financing and subdivision

regulation. Fourth on the list was "urban renewal," a 1960s and '70s-era public policy that resulted in the large-scale demolition of older buildings. Whether these government actions were good or bad is a debate we'll not tackle here. Suffice it to say, the actions of all three branches of government at the national or state level work to initiate or impede substantial change to the built environment, sometimes as anticipated and sometimes not.

The list of the 10 factors most likely to influence the next 50 years, according to these same experts, includes the deterioration of the

Fannie Mae Foundation Survey¹⁶

Top 10 Influences on the American Metropolis of the Past 50 Years

- ❖ 1956 Interstate Highway Act and dominance of cars
- ❖ Federal Housing Administration mortgage financing and subdivision regulation
- ❖ De-industrialization of central cities
- ❖ Urban renewal: downtown redevelopment and public housing projects
- ❖ Mass-produced suburban tract housing
- ❖ Racial segregation and job discrimination in cities and suburbs
- ❖ Enclosed shopping malls
- ❖ Sunbelt-style sprawl
- ❖ Air conditioning
- ❖ Urban riots of the 1960's

Ten Most Likely Influences on the American Metropolis for the Next 50 Years

- ❖ Growing disparities of wealth
- ❖ Suburban political majority
- ❖ Aging baby boomers
- ❖ Perpetual "underclass" in central cities and inner-ring suburbs
- ❖ "Smart growth"
- ❖ Internet
- ❖ **Deterioration of "first-ring" suburbs**
- ❖ Shrinking household size
- ❖ Expanded superhighway systems – "outer beltways" to serve new edge cities
- ❖ Racial integration – increasing diversity in cities and suburbs

Governmental actions like tax incentives, public school busing policies, highway subsidization, home-buying programs, state land-use laws and environmental regulation all help dictate how and where our economy grows. Those same public policy consequences are now quietly spilling into the inner-ring suburbs.

"first-ring" post 1945-suburbs. Listed just below the influence of the Internet at number seven, the deterioration of the inner-ring suburbs as a policy concern cannot be overstated.

At the dawn of the 21st century, many of Ohio's First Suburbs communities are often categorized now as "at risk" or "in transition." The collapse of America's inner cities in the latter half of the 20th century was not pre-ordained, but unavoidable given the decentralization and suburbanization of the American economy. Presidential policies, governors, legislators and judges all contributed in a myriad of ways to help determine where growth would occur. Governmental actions like tax incentives, public school busing policies, highway subsidization, home-buying programs, state land-use laws and environmental regulation all help dictate how and where our economy grows. Those same public policy consequences are now quietly spilling into the inner-ring suburbs.

In Ohio, more than half a dozen state agencies routinely affect economic growth and where it may or may not occur. These agencies include the Ohio Department of Development, the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency, the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, the Ohio Department of Transportation, the Ohio Public Works Commission, the Ohio Department of Agriculture and the Ohio Water Development Authority. In addition, 132 state lawmakers normally introduce more than 1,000 legislative bills each two-year session of the Ohio General

Assembly. Governors, judges and other governmental officials also wield significant power to direct where economic resources go throughout the state. Congress and federal agencies play an equally important role in determining where taxpayer-supported resources are allocated, as the Fannie Mae survey makes clear.

It should be abundantly clear that many of the forces that have hurt central cities and their inner-ring suburbs are not the work of a free market system, but a mixture of economic forces influenced largely by demographic changes, public education, racial strife and government action. The issue is not whether the federal and state government will continue to play a role in shaping Ohio's economic future. Rather, the issue is whether such intervention will continue to be driven by inconsistent, muddled political choices.

Not all government interventions have been bad. Frequently, well-intentioned federal and state efforts have resulted in unintended consequences that have created winners and losers. Decades-long trends indicate that nearly all communities eventually win and subsequently lose—the "favored quarter" keeps marching outward over time.

Marching farther outward with each election are the voting majorities electing Ohio's officeholders. Republican voters, in particular, are leapfrogging farther away from the urban centers that were long the voting base for both

parties. The suburbs have supplanted large central cities as the places where majorities are made. However, many political observers are mistaken when they lump all suburban voters into one homogenous category. The inner-ring First Suburb communities have demonstrated that they are pivotal voting blocs, despite the perception that they fit into the larger "suburban" profile. Shrewd political observers know what winning candidates do—the First Suburbs are electorally competitive and becoming aware of policy issues that affect them specifically.

The major political parties may not be as cognizant of this because of the impact of gerrymandered congressional and state legislative districts that lump as many Republicans or Democrats into what might best be described as voting districts that vote in predictable patterns. In Ohio and most other places, urban districts are expected to vote Democrat and rural districts Republican. Suburban districts throughout most of the state are expected to vote Republican, if only because GOP officeholders who control the redistricting process have ensured this. However, it is in these shifting inner-ring suburban communities that the balance of power can be transformed.



First Suburbs are caught in a policy blind spot. Unlike central cities, they are not poor enough to qualify for many federal and state reinvestment programs and not large enough to receive federal and state funds directly. Unlike newer suburbs, they are ill suited to federal and state programs that focus on building new infrastructure and housing rather than maintaining, preserving and renovating what is already built. In general, first suburbs are undermined by large federal and state policies that, on balance, facilitate sprawl and concentrate poverty. These policies set the dominant "rules of the game" that ultimately shape metropolitan growth in ways that undermine older communities.

*Valuing America's First Suburbs
A Policy Agenda for Older Suburbs in the Midwest
Brookings Institution*

Finding Vision for a Policy Blindspot

Many inner-ring suburbs lack the fiscal resources to make the local investments needed to compete, yet are not "blighted" enough to compete for state or federal initiatives geared toward community improvement. As the Brookings Institution has described, the First Suburbs are in a "policy blindspot."¹⁷ Nevertheless, Ohio has moved forward on some important community stabilizing initiatives that should help Ohio's First Suburbs.

Ohio recently established a housing linked-deposit program, following a model created in Cuyahoga County. These loans are popular because the interest rate is typically 3 percent below the market rate and homeowners may make a variety of home renovations without excessive restrictions.¹⁸ Now, a growing number of the state's urban counties offer this low-interest loan program to many of their residents as a way to encourage home improvement investments in communities generally perceived

to be "at risk." The participating local governments also benefit from the rise in home value that helps pad the local real estate tax base. Building on this housing linked-deposit program may prove to be among the best tools that local governments like the First Suburbs have at their disposal to encourage citizens to strengthen their neighborhoods and stay put.

Tax-revenue sharing is a policy option that receives a fair amount of discussion, but few regions have seriously considered adopting anything resembling the sharing of tax revenues. One Ohio county that has is Montgomery County. The Economic Development / Government Equity (ED/GE) program is a voluntary agreement among local governments to share income tax revenue and other tax revenue, including commercial and industrial. Under the ED/GE program, Montgomery County ties local governmental participation in the revenue-sharing program to a pool of \$5 million a year for economic development grants. Local governments pool a percentage of the growth in their property and income tax revenues to be redistributed in inverse proportion to the amount of growth in each participating community. Although the revenue-sharing has been mostly symbolic, some significant accomplishments have been attributed to the ED/GE program. Among these are the new Dayton Dragons minor league ballpark, the downtown Riverscape project, a new port authority, a regional marketing effort and other regional initiatives. The merits of the ED/GE program are no longer in doubt after 10 years—all 28 of the county's jurisdictions have chosen to participate.



The most significant move Ohio could make to enhance the competitiveness of Ohio and its First Suburbs would be to embrace a smart growth agenda acknowledging that current growth patterns are draining resources from established communities and are not protecting Ohio's long-term interests.

An Agenda for Regional Reform

In recent years, many of Ohio's neighbors and other states have adopted "smart growth" policies addressing many of the issues affecting inner-ring suburbs and other existing communities. Republican and Democratic governors alike have recently put forth policies promoting reinvestment in older communities. In October 2002, for instance, Rhode Island's Republican Governor Lincoln Almond and New Jersey's Democratic Governor James McGreevey both signed executive orders requiring their state's planning processes to stop subsidizing sprawl and instead promote redevelopment in strategic areas. Rhode Island is calling these areas - primarily Main Streets and downtowns - "growth centers."

Governors and state legislators in the Midwest have embraced the concept. Kentucky, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Wisconsin and Tennessee are all moving forward with significant initiatives. Likewise, the National Governors' Association has given great attention to these issues in recent years.

In Ohio, a working paper published in 1998 by EcoCity Cleveland and the American Planning Association presented a thoughtful analysis with recommendations for Ohio.¹⁹ While the state has taken some steps forward by creating an Office of Urban Development and the linked deposit program, the opportunities laid out in the working paper have yet to be considered by state officials.

The most significant move Ohio could make to enhance the competitiveness of Ohio and its First Suburbs would be to embrace a smart growth agenda acknowledging that current growth patterns are draining resources from established communities and are not protecting Ohio's long-term interests. An executive order from the governor would accomplish this. Such a state policy would reap benefits to more than Ohio's First Suburbs. It would enhance all of Ohio's established communities and neighborhoods, improving the quality of life for Ohioans and the state's long-term economic prospects.

Ultimately, regional cooperation is the most important and underutilized tool each community has at its disposal. The Ohio First Suburbs Consortium is perhaps the state's most significant coalition of local governments created since the Ohio Municipal League in 1951. "First suburbs need to understand the market and demographic trends in their localities and regions to understand the context in which they exist," the Brookings Institution has asserted. "An accurate understanding of their condition—both individually and collectively—will help drive policy decisions on the state and federal levels."

Ohio's inner-ring suburbs are coming to understand their role in their regions. The regions and state now must come to understand and value the inner-ring suburbs and the dawning of the "Re" century. Ohio's future depends on it.

The Ohio First Suburbs Consortium encourages policies that would:

- ❖ *Create a tax credit for rehabilitation of homes more than 40 years old.*
- ❖ *Require state infrastructure funding to focus specifically on maintaining existing infrastructure.*
- ❖ *Replace the estate tax revenue local governments are losing as a result of federal and state legislation.*
- ❖ *Change the state's constitutional requirement that gas tax revenues be directed only toward highway spending.*
- ❖ *Revise Enterprise Zone program rules to restrict the zones to truly distressed areas.*

Endnotes

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- 2 2000 U.S. Census data.
- 3 Edward J. Malecki and Hazel A. Morrow-Jones of the OSU Center for Urban and Regional Analysis, "Ohio: Looking at the Future," 2002. The report emphasized that the State New Economy Index and Ohio's Gross State Product (GSP) find Ohio lagging behind its contemporary state rivals.
- 4 Ohio's population grew 4.7 percent from 1990 to 2000. The national average was a growth rate of 13.1 percent. This shrunk Ohio's representation in the U.S. House of Representatives from 19 members to 18.
- 5 Private non-farm employment in Ohio grew 14.6 percent from 1990-2000, below the national average growth rate of 18.4 percent.
- 6 References to Ohio's "First Suburbs" communities refer to those communities actively participating in the Ohio First Suburbs Consortium. References to other inner-ring communities will be described using different terminology.
- 7 Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, 2002, Basic Books.
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- 14 William L. Lucy and David L. Phillips, "Suburbs and the Census: Patterns of Growth and Decline," (The Brookings Institution, December 2001).
- 15 Ohio Public Works Commission website.
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