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Caring for Places: Caring for Thought

Suburban places have long been both beloved and maligned, no less now that more than half of Americans choose to live and work in them. The larger social and environmental consequences of those choices have prompted considerable scholarly and professional attention to the problems of sprawl and the provision of alternatives—redevelopment of the urban core or designs for new neighborhoods at the suburban periphery. However, there has been far less study of the opportunities for the existing suburbs, the middle landscape, to absorb new growth and to evolve in relation to changed demographic, technological, and economic conditions. In this issue of *Places* we hope to frame the larger arguments advocating this kind of suburban evolution—which we define as *retrofitting*. As distinct from infilling, retrofitting involves systemic changes intended to enhance the sustainable performance of places. We hope this work will encourage *Places* readers to help suburbs, both aging and booming, evolve.

The most widely recognized examples of suburban retrofits are the failed shopping centers and malls that have been converted to successful mixed-use “Main Streets” and neighborhoods. In this issue we present a new generation of projects, many of which build on this work while broadening the range of prototypical American suburban places subject to retrofitting to include edge cities, office parks, commercial corridors, residential subdivisions, suburban apartment complexes, and street infrastructure. The articles we have gathered here also seek to chronicle the range of change—historic, physical, demographic, regulatory, and financial—occurring in today’s suburbs.

As members of a generation reared in suburbia and schooled in urbanism, we are excited about the opportunities afforded by these projects’ conversion of devalued suburban formats into more urban places. Collectively, they suggest an ambitious agenda of retrofitting sprawl itself and the systems by which it is reproduced into a healthier polynucleated pattern. Without attempting to define or assess such a large-scale agenda of (sub)urban renewal, we hope this issue of *Places* will stimulate debate on both this larger project and the more immediate changes to the suburban landscape.

—*Ellen Dunham-Jones and June Williamson*, Guest Editors