



THE URBANOPHILE

URBAN AFFAIRS AND THE FUTURE OF THE MIDWESTERN CITY

FRIDAY, JUNE 12, 2009

Midwest Miscellany

Urbanophile Media Roundup

That article featuring an interview with me in Crain's Detroit Business is [now available online](#). (There is some weird redirect, so please be patient)

Greg Hinz at Crain's Chicago Business [ran a blog post this week](#) discussing [my posting on preventing the self-destruction of diversity](#) in Chicago. It's worth a read for the counterpoint.

Some further thoughts on this. With 25 million square feet of Class C space, it doesn't look like the Loop will run out of cheap offices any time soon. I never suggested this was a problem in the immediate term, but down the road. Some ways to potentially measure this over time would be:

- Amount of Class C office space
- Quantity of condo conversions
- Diversity of employment (straightforward to calculate)
- New business formation rates

Unless someone wants to provide me with research department, I don't have time to calculate these. However, it does strike me that one could create a sort of "Loop dashboard" to measure various health indicators over time. I do think maintaining employment diversity and a fertile ground for new businesses is something to monitor, even though it is not at issue at present.

Lastly, the Chicago Community Trust story that put me in the top 20 news sites in Chicago drew [coverage from Phil Rosenthal](#) at the Tribune. CMW has a [full roundup of reactions](#). Plenty of controversy and discussion as you might expect for a nascent field.

Help Shape the Future of Chicago

Chicago's regional planning agency is soliciting citizen input for its "GOTO 2040" plan. There are several ways to get involved:

- Use MetroQuest *GO TO 2040* web tools to [create your own growth scenarios](#) and compare them to CMAP's.
- Attend one of 50 *GO TO 2040* "Invent the Future" [workshops](#) that CMAP will hold with partners across the seven counties.
- Visit one of the interactive *GO TO 2040* [kiosks](#) at dozens of locations, including Millennium Park, Metra stations, libraries, festivals, and other sites around the region.

So if you are interested in providing input into long range regional planning, now's your chance.

New Economy Pipedreams

Every single city and state it seems wants to both turn itself into the new Silicon Valley and the next biotech center. The New York Times this week runs [a great article](#) showing the [futility of these efforts](#) for the vast bulk of cities:

At a recent global biotech convention in Atlanta, 27 states, including Hawaii and Oklahoma, paid as much as \$100,000 each to entice companies on the exhibition floor. All this for a highly risky industry that has turned a profit only one year in

FEEDS

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ABOUT THIS BLOG

The Urbanophile is about the intersection of urban policy, architecture and design, strategy, transportation, economic development, talent acquisition, branding, arts and culture, and demographics as applied to the future of the Midwestern and American city. It features highly original analysis and insightful commentary available nowhere else on the web.

ABOUT ME

Aaron M. Renn is The Urbanophile, a leading independent urban affairs thinker and strategist based in the Midwest. As you can no doubt guess, he is a great fan of cities. Read [his bio](#).

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the past four decades.

Skeptics cite two major problems with the race for biotech. First, the industry is highly concentrated in established epicenters like Boston, San Diego and San Francisco, which offer not just scientific talent but also executives who know how to steer drugs through the arduous approval process.

"Most of these states probably don't stand much of a chance to develop a viable biotech industry," said Gary P. Pisano, a Harvard Business School professor and the author of "Science Business: The Promise, the Reality and the Future of Biotech."

"You can always get a few top people," Mr. Pisano said, "but you need a lot of critical mass."

Second, biotech is a relatively tiny industry with a lengthy product-development process, and even in its largest clusters offers only a fraction of the jobs of traditional manufacturing. In the United States, only 43 biotechnology companies employ more than 1,000 people.

Very true. There certainly can be some additional winners in the space, but they are likely to be few. Every city and state has at least one decent medical school and some companies in the sector. It can be easy to delude yourself that you are differentiated or have unique capabilities. A more realistic view would take a hard look at this.

It may indeed be worth having a foot in the life sciences game, but I would also look for other sectors where you can complement it that with niches you can get first mover advantage on and dominate. I'll again recall the motorsports example in Indianapolis as a good one.

The NYT article is an absolute must read.

On a related note, a Pew study shows [above average job growth in the green tech sector in Michigan](#). This is clearly good news for a state that has taken an economic beating recently.

The challenge for the Midwest in green tech is two-fold. First is that it is yet another sector everyone is taking. Second is that green tech is only a transitional field. As with the internet and business, in a future there won't be "green technology", there will just be technology. All of it will be green. Similarly for manufacturing, energy, etc. The field as it exists today will likely dissolve as it is subsumed into traditional industries.

Shrinking Cities

Could the Obama administration put major federal dollars behind a shrinking cities plan? The answer may be Yes according to an article in London's Daily Telegraph. I encouraged just this in [my article about Detroit](#). There is simply no way most Midwest/Rust Belt cities are going to grow fast enough in their urban core to regenerate all the neighborhoods that were once there. All but a handful have vast tracts of blight across large swaths of their inner cities, often in what Jane Jacobs called "gray belts" of old, single family homes. Particularly for those that were built after the 1920's, they are often smaller, with obsolete floor plans, often not that well built, and are in major decay. They don't function as urban districts and probably never will without major retrofits. Cities are going to have to target specific nodes and corridors for redevelopment and consciously decide to forego investing in others if there is any hope of moving the needle. This is what I've advocated in Indianapolis, calling for a "100 Monument Circles" strategies focused around traditional neighborhood commercial nodes linked together to form chains to downtown and each other.

This might seem like a cruel or heartless policy, one unfair to those who don't live in favored districts. And I can't argue against that. It's true to a great extent. But that's also the reality of the situation. The alternative may be the further decline of the entire city and even bleaker future ahead. There are no guarantees this strategy will work, but the alternative looks much worse.

More on the Grass Roots

Following onto my series on the new grass roots (see [part one](#) and [part two](#)), Ed Morrison of open source economic development fame has some [interesting warnings for Indianapolis](#) over at the IBJ's News Talk blog.

He reminds that virtually all of the projects involved bricks and mortar. They're

[Other Midwest Miscell...](#)

[Tony George, the IMS, and the New Midwest](#)

[The Talent Equation](#)

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things, not people. He thinks the power brokering and equivalent of smoke-filled rooms that revitalized the city since the '60s will never work with arguably more important — and intractable — social problems like school dropouts.

Indianapolis mastered its strategy before there was an Internet and power began to disperse to more people, Morrison says. Now, the city needs to learn to take advantage of networks of people — not necessarily an easy transition.

As someone who's long said that cities are about people, not just buildings, I couldn't agree more on the bricks and mortar part. You need the physical to be sure, but if you don't have the people, it ultimately won't matter.

Similarly, I don't think there's an either-or on networks. To me the best mix is a strong combination of top-down and bottoms-up. The civic leadership strength of Indianapolis is still an asset I believe, particularly if marshaled in the service of the hard changes that continue to be necessary to take the city forward. This needs to be complemented by new networked capabilities, however.

Regional Infighting

Jim Russell talks about [zero sum economic development thinking](#) in the Midwest. The money quote:

Cleveland is at war with everywhere not Cleveland. Dayton is at war with everywhere not Dayton. The same is true for Pittsburgh and every other Rust Belt city. As long as this parochial perspective holds, Atlanta will continue to win.

National Roundup

Here's a [presentation with some really great descriptions of various public plazas](#) in the United States today. It includes Cincinnati's Fountain Square. (Via [Union Station Advocates](#) in Denver)

[Complaints about the new arena design](#) in Atlantic Yards in the NYT

The [High Line is now open](#). This is an innovative park in the bed of a former elevated railroad that has an excellent and forward-looking landscape design from what I've seen. I can't wait to check it out in person.

A [positive look at NYC's new street design guidelines](#).

The Economist [profiles municipal budget deficits in the United States](#).

A very [interesting, creative take on what the future could look like](#) by Amsterdam's NL Architects. (Via [@acceptgiro](#))

Featured Site

I want to suggest everyone surf over and check out a new blog called [Human Transit](#). It's run by Jarrett Walker, a transit consultant who worked on the plan for the Minneapolis system. He's down in Australia-New Zealand these days, but the blog is going to be US focused. I very much like his rational and balanced approach. Here's an excerpt from his manifesto:

My goal is not to make you share my values, but to provide perspectives that help you clarify yours. Much of my work has been about analyzing public transit problems to separate the [technical question](#) from the [question about values](#). To take just one example, most transit agencies will tell you they want maximum ridership, but they usually also operate some low-ridership services that meet other goals, often to provide basic mobility to transit-dependent people who live in low-ridership areas. Every agency decides, explicitly or not, whether to spend a dollar on building high ridership or to spend it on serving people who really need it. Stated this way, this is a question of values. It has no technical answer, because it's a question about what your community feels is most important. My role is to point out the question itself, show how it's lurking inside debates that may seem to be about something else, and help you form an opinion based on [your](#) values.

Check it out.

More Midwest

Chicago

[Rethinking Brain Drain](#)

[Retrofitting Suburbia](#)

[Suburbs That Last 1 - Strategy](#)

[Suburbs That Last 2 - New Urbanism and Parcelization](#)

[The Importance of Aesthetic Design in Transportation Facilities](#)

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[Chicago Streetlights](#)

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BOOKSHELF

[Caught in the Middle](#) by Richard C. Longworth

[The Endless City](#) by Ricky Burdett and Deyan Sudjic

[Massive Change](#) by Bruce Mau

[Regional Advantage](#) by AnnaLee

[Saxenian](#)

[The Infinite City \(A Chicago Sojourn\)](#)
[Chicago's recent bike parking challenges \(Vote With Your Feet\)](#)
[Mag Mile facing a glitz gap \(Crain's Chicago Business\)](#)
[CTA ridership drops in the recession \(CTA Tattler\)](#)

Cincinnati

[Revitalizing Over the Rhine - Part One \(CNU\)](#)
[Revitalizing Over the Rhine - Part Two \(CNU\)](#)
[\\$120 million restoration of Union Station to begin \(Columbus Dispatch\)](#)

Cleveland

[Ohio Supreme Court rules against city residency requirements \(Plain Dealer\)](#)

Columbus

[Creative economy in Central Ohio \(Community Research Partners\)](#)

Detroit

[Urban villages in Detroit's future? \(Free Press\)](#)

Indianapolis

[Urban entryways to Indiana cities deserve our attention \(Morton Marcus\)](#)

Louisville

[It's about time we all loved Louisville \(Business Lexington\)](#)

Milwaukee

[Beyond the rust belt a year later \(TheDeal.com\) - Via RustWire](#)

Upcoming Events

It is Pride season in much of the country. The Bilerico Project has a [roundup of regional events](#).

Henry Louis "Skip" Gates, Jr. will be in Chicago for an interactive discussion about how the stories we tell shape history and how history shapes our stories. He'll also be doing a book signing after the event. This will take place at on Monday, June 29th from 6p-7:30p in the Cindy Pritzker Auditorium at the Harold Washington Library. Admission is free.

POSTED BY THE URBANOPHILE AT 5:40 PM

LABELS: [ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT](#)

16 COMMENTS:

 [Jim Russell](#) said...

Ed Morrison quote that most resonates with me:

"The places with vibrant networks are going to be where the kids want to locate."

Vibrant urban alumni networks?

JUNE 12, 2009 7:39 PM

 [hharrington](#) said...

Shrinking cities...

Interesting concept. I thought about that when I recently drove through St. Louis. Whole sections of the city have been demolished. There were blocks and blocks of nothing but grass, and maybe 1 or 2 structures left standing. How can a city let itself go like that?

I'm happy that Louisville hasn't completely demolished or just let rot it's urban neighborhoods. I can understand the idea that we may need to just forget about these sections of the city and move on, but in the long run it will eventually pull the city down with it.

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[Broken Sidewalk](#)
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You can ignore these areas. Most cities already have. Every city has that one side of town where nobody goes to unless they can't afford to move. That's the side of town with all of the section 8 housing, habitat for humanity homes, and police stations. However, these forgotten neighborhoods will demand more and more resources as they fall further behind, putting more stress on the rest of the city.

I don't think ignoring these neighborhoods or tearing them down is a "solution" at all. I think cities should lobby the Obama administration to restore the Hope IV grant. I know Chicago has done wonder with money as has Louisville.

Other than that cities are going to have to engage these communities and try to find grass roots solutions. Try to entice young professionals of the broker variety and not the ones who reside in the trendy areas to move back. The Feds offer \$8000 for first time home buyers maybe the city can also throw in a 10k forgivable mortgage as well.

Maybe cities can have their Housing Authorities build mixed use and income apartments in the affected areas.

JUNE 12, 2009 8:15 PM

 the urban politician said...

This was posted at the skyscraperpage forums, but since Aaron is the winner of that CTA award to boost ridership, I thought our blogger would be pleased to see this:

CTA Transit-Friendly Development Typology Open House

The CTA and the Chicago Department of Zoning and Land Use Planning will be holding an open house on the CTA Station Area Typology Study, to discuss transit-friendly development around CTA rail stations system-wide. Two meetings will be held at the following locations, are accessible to people with disabilities:

North:

Monday, June 22, 2009
6:00 - 8:00pm
Chicago Public Library
Sulzer Regional Library
4455 N. Lincoln Ave.
Chicago, IL60625
312.744.7616

South:

Tuesday, June 23, 2009
6:00 - 8:00pm
Chicago Urban League Center
4510 S. Michigan Ave.
Chicago, IL60653
773.258.5800

For more information please call or e-mail:

Ryan Mouw, Senior Government Relations Officer, Chicago Transit Authority at
312.681.2751 or rmouw@transitchicago.com.

JUNE 13, 2009 10:24 AM

 the urban politician said...

In response to the article "Urban entryways to Indiana cities deserve our attention"

I don't see NW Indiana developing the way northeast Jersey has any time soon, although it sounds promising.

The major issue is, NE Jersey is directly across the river from Manhattan. NW Indiana is across the state line from...the swampy & semi industrial far south side of Chicago.

Big difference. NW Indiana really is on its own, unless magically the south side & south burbs of Chicago suddenly stage a huge comeback. I have felt that regular passenger service at Gary-Chicago airport with train connection to the Loop would be a good start, as well as promoting residential development along the lakefront. But for the most part,

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BLOGROLL - DETROIT

[Detroit Blog](#)
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OTHER GOOD READING

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NW Indiana has a lot of stigma to overcome.

JUNE 13, 2009 10:34 AM

 Alon Levy said...

TUP, the South Side is gentrifying, from the University of Chicago outward. In 30 years, Hyde Park went from the ghetto my father lived in because as a grad student he couldn't afford any better to the neighborhood that the President of the United States lives in.

In fact, the part of Manhattan that suburban North Jersey faces is Harlem and Washington Heights, which are in similar position to Chicago's South Side. The entry point from suburban Jersey to Manhattan is the George Washington Bridge, whose Manhattan end is an impoverished section of Washington Heights.

JUNE 13, 2009 1:39 PM

 the urban politician said...

Alon,

The comparison you are making as well as the optimism you show towards the south side of Chicago are far from accurate assessments.

Much of the south side of Chicago is a far, far cry from gentrified.

And just as much of North Jersey is across the river from lower and midtown Manhattan as it is across from Harlem. Plus, I don't know about you, but Harlem and the neighborhoods uptown of it have very little in common with most of the neighborhoods I have seen on Chicago's far south side. The amount of empty land and abandoned buildings you'll see on Chicago's south side has no counterpart in Manhattan.

JUNE 13, 2009 5:27 PM

 Alon Levy said...

Harlem has a lot of abandoned housing, too... and the wealthiest parts of North Jersey are those facing Harlem and the Bronx, not Midtown. The parts that face Midtown or even the Upper West Side are in Hudson County, which is very much like Brooklyn or Queens in character.

JUNE 13, 2009 6:14 PM

 Jefferey said...

That was a good article on the Louisville/Lexington relationship. I always thought it was fortunate that Kentucky (not considered an urban place) has two great (or potentially great) cities. Lex & Lou do sort of compliment each other.

I blogged on [urban triage for Dayton](#) a while back. but it's sort of tragic that the parts of this city that make it most distinctive, the 19th century neighborhoods, are the ones that will be lost. Guess that can't be helped.

I'm happy that Louisville hasn't completely demolished or just let rot it's urban neighborhoods.

Actually, Louisville did exactly that via urban renewal. The oldest parts of the city are gone, baby, gone (with a few exceptions).

JUNE 13, 2009 6:59 PM

 Anonymous said...

Calling HP a ghetto 30 years ago is an overstatement.

While Bronzeville, Bridgeport, South Shore & others are seeing development, the areas of Chicago adjacent to Indiana on the far south side are not really impressive (there's a little forest, modest well kept houses and very large power lines)

JUNE 13, 2009 7:45 PM

 sukwoo said...

If anything, the far southside neighborhoods of Chicago are in continued economic decline - unlike the inner-urban neighborhoods (Bronzeville, Hyde Park, etc.)

[Urban Construction \(All\)](#)

[Good Reading \(All\)](#)

[Don't Build It \(All\)](#)

[Bad \(All\)](#)

[Good \(All\)](#)

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decine, unlike the near southside neighborhoods (Bronzeville, Hyde Park, etc.)

JUNE 13, 2009 8:18 PM

 David said...

Jefferey,

Thanks for the Louisville-Lexington link.

I do believe that Lou-Lex could accomplish very much together. Actually accomplish more than with ANY other linkage.

JUNE 13, 2009 9:30 PM

 Anonymous said...

Chicago's far south side-

The neighborhoods east of the Calumet are holding steady, they're not upper class but by no means are in a steep decline, there's been some residential construction in the last decade or so. They're just not an impressive gateway by any means.

Beverly, old section of Pullman & parts of Morgan Park are doing okay too.

But the "wild hundreds" are wild.

JUNE 14, 2009 5:57 PM

 hharrington said...

Louisville did demolish some of it's urban neighborhoods via urban renewal, but nowhere near to the extent that St. Louis has or many other cities. I live in one of those urban neighborhoods (Russell, just west of downtown) that has been the focus of urban renewal. They demolished a lot, but left a lot as well. Smoketown, Phoenix Hill, Old Louisville, Schnitzelberg, GermanTown, Portland, and Butchertown although altered are still pretty intact.

I also agree that if Louisville and Lexington were to work together more they could accomplish great things. I'm just not sure the will is there.

JUNE 14, 2009 8:36 PM

 The Urbanophile said...

harrington, Butchertown won't be intact for long if the Ohio River Bridges projects is constructed.

You are right. Louisville had a lot of core area demolitions, but far smaller scale than most cities. To the south and east there are plenty of intact neighborhoods that are still reasonably healthy, all more or less connected to downtown. The west end has long suffered from racial segregation and civic neglect. I think there's a lot of redevelopment potential there. The challenge is to make sure that redevelopment doesn't simply displace the existing residents but also benefits them.

JUNE 14, 2009 8:40 PM

 Jefferey said...

^

I'd disagree about how much is intact around downtown Louisville. I used to think that Louisville did retain most of the 19th century city, until recently.

Louisville urban wastelands ringing downtown:

Limerick

Smoketown

Phoenix Hill

eastern Russell

JUNE 15, 2009 7:54 PM

 The Urbanophile said...

Jeff, you always know how to depress me with your impeccably researched articles of what we did to where we are today.

JUNE 15, 2009 9:02 PM

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