New (Sub)Urban Dreams: A Case Study of Redevelopment in Upper Arlington, Ohio

THESIS

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By

Glennon Michelle Sweeney

Graduate Program in City and Regional Planning

The Ohio State University

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Master’s Examination Committee:

Bernadette Hanlon, Advisor

Rachel Kleit

Kevin R. Cox
Abstract

Many scholars discuss post-suburbia in terms of the urbanization of edge cities (Teaford, 1997; Phelps, 2012) or in regards to the broader trend of mature suburban decline and new outer-ring suburban growth (Lucy and Phillips, 1997). This thesis explores the trend of urbanization occurring in the inner-ring suburb of Upper Arlington, Ohio, located in the Columbus metropolitan area. The thesis seeks to answer three questions, first, to define inner-ring suburbs in the context of the Columbus metropolitan area; second, to determine whether or not Upper Arlington fits into the dynamic of suburban decline, and; third, to determine whether Upper Arlington is moving into the post-suburban era. I find that Upper Arlington is not experiencing the decline that other inner-ring suburbs are, but it is suffering from fiscal stress. This fiscal stress has encouraged the city planners to seek urbanization and densification in the suburb. This shift to redevelop Upper Arlington to become more city-like is not motivated by any desire to combat sprawl or improve environmental sustainability but is undertaken as a strategy so as to increase the fiscal capacity of this aging, landlocked suburb. I suggest that the desire for a more New Urbanist suburbanization is a necessary step for many aging suburbs to remain competitive in a highly fragmented metropolis.
Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my parents, for their unending support and faith in my abilities, making possible any success that I enjoy; and to my daughters, Lilly and Ryah, my two favorite people and endless sources of joy in my life.
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I would like to thank Bernadette Hanlon for her guidance throughout this process. Bernadette is a wonderful mentor and knowledgeable advisor, I am grateful for the privilege of working with her. I would also like to extend my gratitude to Kevin Cox for inspiring my fascination with jurisdictional fragmentation. I am also grateful for the support my education has received from my colleagues at the Kirwan Institute. Finally, I would like to thank my daughters for their patience as I completed this thesis.
Vita

January, 2001 ........................................Worthington Kilbourne High School

2004 ......................................................Associates of Arts, Columbus State

   Community College

2011 ......................................................B.A. Geography and Political Science, Ohio

   State University

2012 to Present ...........................................Graduate Research Assistant, The Kirwan

   Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity,

   The Ohio State University

Fields of Study

Major Field: City and Regional Planning
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Chapter 1: Introduction

In his 1997 book, *Post-Suburbia: Government and Politics in Edge Cities*, Jon C. Teaford discusses the urbanization of edge cities, or suburbs on the metropolitan fringe. Teaford (1997) describes a process in which these cities transform their economies into what he terms as “post-suburban” while maintaining solidly suburban ideals; residents still value the homogeneity of suburban life, they believe in small government, cherish green space, and consider themselves soundly anti-urban, and yet their suburbs are city-like. While suburban values have remained, the economies of these edge cities have changed and expanded. Teaford describes the dichotomy:

Consequently, life in the post-suburban metropolis was a delicate balance. The suburban ideal had to be preserved while the useful urban realities were tolerated. If the area seemed to be tipping too far toward the urban side, residents would raise cries of outrage against rapacious developers who supposedly wanted to transform Suffolk County into Manhattan and Oakland County into Detroit. But development that imposed no burden and remained at arm’s length elicited applause (p. 6).

Lucy and Phillips (1997) approach the idea of post-suburbia from a slightly different perspective focusing instead on the changing landscape across suburbia, and in particular describing the process of decline among certain suburbs. The authors point to
the dynamic of decline plaguing so many suburbs, particularly inner-ring suburbs; as these “mature” suburbs decline, meanwhile, newer suburbs on the edge continue to grow. Lucy and Phillips measure numerous indicators to calculate whether a region has entered the post-suburban era. These factors include, inner-ring suburb population loss and relative income decline, in addition to “suburban employment increase, suburban outcommuting reduction, exurban population and income increase, and farmland conversion” (p. 259). Lucy and Phillips focus on decline in inner-ring suburbs as a key feature in determining whether a region has entered the post-suburban era.

The notion that suburbs are changing is at the heart of the post-suburban thesis. Post-suburban refers to the notion that suburbs are becoming more like cities either because of their experience of decline or their urbanization or both, and yet these places continue to think of themselves as suburban in their way of life. The idea that older, inner-ring suburbs are becoming post-suburban is explored in this thesis through a case study of Upper Arlington, a wealthy inner-ring suburb in the Columbus, Ohio metropolitan area. The post-suburban nature of Upper Arlington will be explored in three ways: first, through an examination of its experience, if any, of decline; second by examining the extent and nature of urbanization in the suburb; and third, by identifying the way that inner-ring decline and the urbanization process are linked.

Lucy and Phillips (1997) envision the post-suburban era as a function of inner-ring suburban decline and continued outer-ring suburban growth. Lucy and Phillips are not alone in discussing the role of inner-ring suburban decline in the context of a changing metropolitan landscape (Hanlon, 2008; Lee and Leigh, 2007; Mikelbank, 2006;
This thesis will explore inner-ring suburban decline in the context of Upper Arlington. This suburb (2012), in its most recent Master Plan, pursues an aggressive policy of densification and urbanization in seven new planned mixed-use districts identified for redevelopment. As this new plan is being implemented, the built environment in these key areas is transforming from solidly suburban complete with strip malls into small urban reserves within the rolling lawns and large homes that make this suburb one of the most desirable in Franklin County. Is there a relationship between this urbanization and issues of decline? What are the reasons for recent shifts toward urbanization and densification? This thesis seeks to explore the motivations behind Upper Arlington’s recent urbanization and redevelopment of targeted districts within the context of suburban decline.

Across the nation inner-ring suburbs, and outer-ring suburbs alike seek to urbanize (Dunham-Jones, 2005; Leinberger, 2011). This development is encouraged by growing desires, from millennials to baby boomers, for more walkable cities (Dunham-Jones, 2005; Leinberger, 2011) and comes to life through the principles and built environments associated with New Urbanism (Kelbaugh, 1997; Dunham-Jones, 2005). Scholarship largely discusses New Urbanist principles as environmentally sustainable and economically efficient means of combating sprawl (Dreier, Mollenkopf, & Swanstrom, 2004; Kelbaugh, 1997; Dunham-Jones, 2005; Grant, 2009; Freilich & Popowitz, 2010). The efficiency of new urbanism, it is said, combats the negative social, economic, and environmental effects of sprawl (Dreier, Mollenkopf, & Swanstrom, 2004). While rallying against sprawl seems the common battle cry of New Urbanists,
questions remain over whether or not it is combating sprawl that motivates inner-ring suburbs to undertake mixed-use redevelopment projects or redesign the built environment (Leinberger, 2011; Narciso, 2011). This thesis seeks to explore the underlying motivations for densification and redevelopment within the context of the inner-ring suburb of Upper Arlington.

It is important to recognize the importance of metropolitan governance in the exploration of these underlying motivations. The metropolitan landscape, particularly so in the Midwest, is highly jurisdictionally fragmented. Upper Arlington is an incorporated city with its own ability to tax and provide local services such as schools, police and garbage collection. For instance, like other cities in Ohio, Upper Arlington funds its local school district from property taxes. In politically fragmented metropolitan regions, communities compete for resources, and they must ensure they maintain a strong fiscal base if they aim to provide good services. This will be important in future discussions around the motivation for why Upper Arlington is pursuing densification and an urbanization agenda.

The role of the political landscape is also important when aiming to define inner suburbs in the Columbus metropolitan context. Columbus, Ohio is atypical for a Midwestern central city. While most central cities find themselves landlocked and surrounded by inner-ring suburbs (Dreier, Mollenkopf, & Swanstrom, 2004) Columbus has pursued an aggressive annexation policy which has resulted in the city surrounding or engulfing its own inner-ring suburbs (Cox and Jonas, 1993; Jacobs, 1998). Upper Arlington is surrounded on all sides by Columbus, Grandview Heights, and the Village of
Marble Cliff while Columbus continues to annex strategically to grow its tax base (Cox and Jonas, 1993; Jacobs, 1998). As part of this thesis, I will develop a definition of inner-ring suburbs, recognizing the landlocked nature of Upper Arlington.

Overall, the notion that Upper Arlington is urbanizing, the question of how Upper Arlington fits into the dynamic of suburban decline, and the task of defining Upper Arlington as an inner-ring suburb are the central objectives which this thesis investigates. Thus, there are three principal questions this thesis seeks to answer:

1. What is the definition of an inner-ring suburb in the context of the Columbus metropolitan area?

2. Is the inner-ring suburb of Upper Arlington experiencing suburban decline?

3. How and why is Upper Arlington urbanizing?
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Many of America’s inner-ring suburbs were built during the post-World War II era. These suburban enclaves complete with rolling lawns and winding streets became emblematic of the White, middle-class American Dream (Hanlon, 2010). Some older inner-ring suburbs founded before World War II were elite and in many places served as reserves for the wealthy. Upper Arlington is one of those wealthy enclaves. This chapter will outline the history of suburban development, examine theories of suburban change, survey the dynamic of inner-ring suburban decline, discuss the advantages that inner-ring suburbs enjoy, explore suburban redevelopment, review urban-suburban governance, and finally, define suburbs and suburban types.

Suburban Development

The post war period is characterized by massive suburban expansion across the country (Hanlon, 2010). The G.I. bill enabled returning soldiers and their families to achieve the America dream in new suburban neighborhoods such as Levittown (Williamson, 2005; Littrell, Brooks, Ivery, & Ohmer, 2009). However, American minorities, most notably African Americans, were excluded from these new neighborhoods through the use of restrictive covenants, clauses written into home deeds precluding the sale of the house to Blacks and other minorities (Schildt, 2011). Restrictive covenants were often accompanied by exclusionary zoning practices (Schildt,
Such practices included large lot requirements and single family zoning which often prohibited those of lesser means from purchasing homes in these retreats. These practices were supplemented by racially prejudiced real estate and lending practices which steered potential Black buyers away from White neighborhoods and cut off loans to predominantly Black neighborhoods through a process known as redlining (Schildt, 2011; Highsmith, 2009; Logan & Molotch, 2007; Gotham, 1998). The practice of redlining classified neighborhoods based on a number of factors including quality of housing stock, the class of the residents, and the racial and ethnic make-up of the neighborhood; neighborhoods with high minority populations, lower quality housing stocks, and which were inhabited by poor residents were typically redlined, this meant that lending institutions would not issue loans to these neighborhoods (Highsmith, 2009; Logan & Molotch, 2007; Gotham, 1998). Such neighborhoods were overwhelmingly Black and this practice furthered the deterioration of many traditionally African American neighborhoods, precluding new buying and reinvestment in the housing stocks of these communities (Logan & Molotch, 2007; Gotham, 1998). Many of these predominantly minority neighborhoods were confined to the inner city (Highsmith, 2009; Logan & Molotch, 2007; Gotham, 1998). As a result, American suburbs became overwhelming White. Even among these White suburbs there was further segregation by class; there became working class suburbs, middle-class suburbs, and elite, wealthy suburban enclaves (Logan and Molotch, 2007; Hanlon, Short, Vicino, 2007).

White flight was encouraged by a growing middle class African American population and school desegregation. Since 1955 and the landmark Supreme Court
decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, cities across the country had been struggling to desegregate their schools and the White citizens living in these central cities began an exodus (Jacobs, 1998). A year later the Highway Act was passed, beginning the construction of the interstate highway system, encouraging suburban sprawl and making possible White flight for more and more Americans (Hanlon, 2010). As more Whites relocated to suburban retreats, central cities saw their tax base shrink as property taxes dwindled and poverty rates shot upwards (Jacobs, 1998). At the same time, the process of Urban Renewal was taking place in many central cities (Highsmith, 2009). This, combined with the effects of the new highways bulldozing through once vibrant minority neighborhoods, has left lasting effects in central city neighborhoods, many of which have never recovered.

In the 1970s and 1980s, school desegregation kicked into high gear as across the country dozens of suits were brought against urban districts that were slow to comply with the 1955 mandate (Jacobs, 1998). As a result, the 1970s was witness to a migration of middle class blacks from central cities – where crime rates were in many cases higher, education was substandard, and homes were often in states of disrepair due to years of redlining – to the idyllic American suburb, free from the problems of city life (Gotham, 1998; Hanlon, 2010). Many of America’s inner-ring suburbs were becoming more diverse and this trend toward diversity was amplified in 1990’s as immigrants began bypassing central cities for suburbs (Hanlon, 2010). The last few decades have witnessed the transformation of many of America’s suburbs, and scholars have become more
interested in examining the nature of this change. Some have recently posed a variety of theories of neighborhood change in a suburban context.

**Phases of Suburban Development and Theories of Neighborhood Change**

One of the most prominent theories of neighborhood change relates to the concepts of filtering and the life cycle. These concepts in their most basic form, posits that as a housing stock ages, poor residents move into the neighborhood, replacing the wealthy residents who once resided there (Baer, 1988). These wealthier residents then move to more expensive housing in the outer-ring suburbs (Bier, 2001). This process occurs at the intersection of economic (or housing) and social (or household) influences over time (Baer, 1988). Thus, in the filtering model it is both the condition of the housing stock (Baer, 1988; Hanlon, 2010; Madden, 2003) and the social forces influencing local households that contribute to neighborhood change (Baer, 1988).

According to this theory, an older suburb such as Upper Arlington would lose wealthier residents to the outer suburbs and lower-income households would in-migrate. As I will demonstrate later in my discussion of socioeconomic change in Upper Arlington, this has not occurred.

The suburban persistence model posits that suburbs themselves do not decline over time, rather, they match the income status of their residents and “persist” (i.e. the social status of the suburb remains consistent) (Hanlon and Vicino, 2007). The theory of invasion and succession, or ecological model, suggests that one group invades a neighborhood, succeeding over the former residents and pushing them out (Logan & Molotch, 2007; Hanlon, 2010). In the case of the suburban persistence model, in-
migrants have the same economic status as out-migrants. This is potentially the case with Upper Arlington, but why? The stratification model helps explain the reason.

The stratification model suggests that wealthier suburbs maintain their status by implementing exclusionary zoning regulation and other land use controls, and employing the many resources at their disposal to remain wealthy (Logan & Molotch, 2007; Hanlon, 2010). These exclusionary practices are only amplified further in areas with a high degree of metropolitan jurisdictional fragmentation where the likelihood of experiencing suburban inequality is higher (Hanlon, 2010). Upper Arlington, a wealthy suburb from its beginning probably best fits under the stratification model as it has managed to exclude poorer residents through the use of zoning and other land use regulations, including during this earlier history, restrictive covenants.

**Inner-Ring Suburbs and Decline**

In general, the literature on inner-ring suburbs speaks to a trend of decline (Hanlon, 2008; Lee and Leigh, 2007; Mikelbank, 2006; Madden, 2003; Puentes and Warren, 2006). Hanlon (2008) constructed an index of suburban decline from 1980 to 2000 which measured decline by income, poverty, and change in population size. Defining older, inner-ring suburbs as “contiguous suburbs that are adjacent to one another and to the central city and that have more than half of their housing stock dating from before 1969” (p. 425), Hanlon (2008) linked inner-ring suburban decline to the age of the suburb’s housing stock (the most vulnerable neighborhoods being built between 1950 and 1969) and neighborhoods with increasing minority populations. Hanlon also noted that the majority of inner-ring suburbs in crisis (more than two thirds) are older
inner-ring suburbs. Madden (2003) notes decline in inner-ring suburbs relative to outer-ring suburbs but not relative to central cities in the Midwest. Mikelbank (2006) measures suburban decline relative to the suburb’s own metropolitan area, arguing that suburbs can experience population growth and decline (such as income decline) simultaneously.

Puentes and Warren (2006) in their national guide to first suburbs, found that the nation’s first suburbs (i.e. inner-ring suburbs) are more diverse than the rest of the nation, home to more foreign-born residents, and are home to some of the most expensive housing in the country as well as some of the most well educated and highest earning people in the county. In addition, the authors found that concentrated poverty is increasing in inner-suburbs and the non-Hispanic White population is decreasing; these suburbs are undergoing rapid ethnic and racial change, are becoming more diverse, and are aging faster than the rest of the nation with disproportionately large senior populations. The authors also note that growth in inner-ring suburbs outpaces that of central cities but not that of outer-ring suburbs.

Studies have also shown that growing poverty is a concern for inner-ring suburbs (Hanlon, 2008; Hanlon and Vicino, 2007; Hanlon 2010; Lee and Leigh, 2005; Leigh and Lee, 2005). Cooke and Marchant (2006) link the increasing number of high poverty inner-ring suburbs to rapid population growth. As the filtering theory suggests, growth of poverty in suburbs should coincide with the aging and deterioration of the suburb’s housing stock (Baer, 1988). Indeed, many scholar have connected the two (Bier, 2001; Cooke, 2010; Hanlon, 2010; Lee and Leigh, 2005). Many scholars link decline of inner-ring suburbs to the age of the suburb’s housing stock, positing that suburbs experiencing
the sharpest declines are those with the majority of the housing stock built during the post-war era (Hanlon, 2008; Hanlon 2010; Lucy and Phillips, 2000). Hanlon and Vicino (2007) also link growth of poverty in inner-ring suburbs to a decline in homeownership.

Hanlon and Vicino (2007) discuss how some suburbs experience school overcrowding and a changing demographic among school-age children. Many suburbs have seen little growth in the school age populations, except among more minority populations, and senior population growth is on the rise in inner-ring suburbs (Hanlon, 2010). As I will demonstrate later, this is particularly true for Upper Arlington, which is home to the proportionately largest senior population in Franklin County.

Indeed, when it comes to decline in inner-ring suburbs, race matters and is linked to decline, particularly so with non-Hispanic African Americans (Schildt, 2011; Hanlon, 2008; Hanlon and Vicino, 2007). In addition, suburbs with growing immigrant populations are more likely to be experiencing decline (Hanlon, 2008). Indeed, some of America’s inner-ring suburbs are economically (Hanlon and Vicino, 2007), racially, and ethnically segregated today (Hanlon, 2010), despite increasing diversity (Hanlon 2008). Upper Arlington is a good example of an economically, racially, and ethnically segregated inner-ring suburb.

Hanlon (2010) and Hanlon, Vicino, and Short (2006) note that many of the issues that plague inner-ring suburbs, particularly those in the Northeast and Midwest, are very similar to problems faced by many central cities. Some inner-ring suburbs of the Northeast and Midwest, along with most Midwestern and Northeastern central cities, find themselves landlocked (i.e. completely surrounded on all sides by other jurisdictions and
unable to annex) (Bier, 2001; Hanlon 2010). Columbus city has pursued an aggressive annexation policy for decades (Cox and Jonas, 1993; Jacobs, 1998), yet the inner-ring suburbs of Columbus are all landlocked, and thus unable to expand. This inability to grow has had dramatic implication for some suburbs’ fiscal status. As will be discussed at length in the following chapters, this has impacted Upper Arlington (Cooke, 2010; Bier, 2001; Hanlon, 2010, Fitzgerald and Leigh, 2002). Many inner-ring suburbs face fiscal stress and several find themselves lacking the resources required to meet the service needs of an increasingly poor and aging population (Cooke, 2010; Hanlon and Vicino, 2007; Hanlon 2010). These fiscal constraints are not confined to poor inner-ring suburbs. Wealthy suburbs, too, can experience fiscal challenges and find it difficult to maintain the level of service needed to meet the demands of their residents. As I will demonstrate later in this thesis, such a situation has been playing out in Upper Arlington in recent times.

This fiscal stress becomes all the more important as infrastructure ages. Deteriorating infrastructure can be expensive to replace, which can result in even more fiscal pressure and constraints (Cooke, 2010; Lee and Leigh, 2005). School systems in inner-ring suburbs age alongside the housing stock. Sewer, water, and roads need constant repair. Buildings require updating, sometimes even replacement. All these costs can have severe implications for a small, landlocked suburb’s bottom line (Cooke, 2010; Hanlon, 2010; Lee and Leigh, 2005).

Finally, inner-ring suburbs are typically geographically small with correspondingly small populations (Bier, 2001) which often translates into little relative
power compared to the larger central city and still-growing outer-ring suburbs which surround the nation’s first suburbs (Bier, 2001; Hanlon, 2010). This power vacuum is compounded by the degree of competition between municipalities within metropolitan areas (Bier, 2001; Hanlon, 2010). Suburbs compete with each other to attract business, to increase their tax base, and to attract residents, the wealthier the better (Bier, 2001; Hanlon, 2010). Often, inner-ring suburbs, particularly those like Upper Arlington, which are predominantly residential, are at a disadvantage because they simply do not have commercial land available to attract new businesses. In addition, in many metropolitan areas, particularly those which have experienced high degrees of sprawl over the years (for example, the Columbus, Ohio MSA) many jobs have moved to the outer-ring suburbs (Clapp, Rodriguez & Pace, 2001).

**Advantages that Inner-Ring Suburbs Enjoy**

The plight of inner-ring suburbs is not one purely of decline. In fact, inner-ring suburbs enjoy some unique advantages when compared to suburbs on the edge. The most obvious and, in many cases, the most strategic advantage that inner-ring suburbs enjoy is proximity to the central city, which historically has meant proximity to places of employment (Fitzgerald and Leigh, 2002).

In addition, many inner-ring suburbs with the oldest housing stocks tend to be the wealthiest inner-ring suburbs in the nation, and many have remained wealthy over time (Hanlon, 2008). Indeed, Hanlon (2008) suggests that “the very oldest and the very newest housing appear to be the key to success among suburbs” (p. 448). Such older neighborhoods exhibit a character and quaint old charm that is not reproducible. It is
these unique qualities that contribute to the success of many of America’s oldest suburbs (Hanlon, 2008), Upper Arlington being a prime example. An old housing stock with winding roads and ample green space combined with a “Main Street” commercial district conveys a small town appeal while remaining geographically close to central cities.

Policies and Redevelopment in Inner-Ring Suburbs

Many scholars argue that inner-ring suburbs have been largely ignored by public policy in favor of central cities or outer-ring suburbs (Hanlon and Vicino, 2007; Lee and Leigh, 2007; Bier, 2002; Cooke, 2010; Leigh and Lee, 2005; Puentes and Orfield, 2002; Puentes and Warren, 2006). Bier (2002) argues that policy tends to focus “on persons and places associated with the most distressed conditions… ignoring the middle spectrum of moderately filtered real estate” (p. 22). Often, it is the central city where people, buildings, and infrastructure are most distressed, so inner-ring suburbs, these places falling in the middle of the spectrum, go largely untouched by policy. Indeed, the cost associated with infill development can deter many developers from investing in inner-ring sites. These sites typically require some sort of assistance such as gap financing (Bier, 2001; Hanlon, 2010; Short, Hanlon, Vicino, 2007). Infill development often requires additional and costly remediation measures sometimes even requiring toxic waste removal, especially in the case of abandoned industrial sites (Bier, 2001). It is often easier to develop so-called greenfield sites in the outer suburbs (Bier, 2001; Hanlon, 2010).
Greenfield development is often supported by different programs and policies. Until the capital gains tax was changed in 1997, the only way that people selling their homes could avoid tax liability was to “move up” by purchasing a home of at least equal price (Bier, 2001). Likewise, the deductibility of mortgage interest also plays a role, as the larger the amount of interests one pays, the potential size of their tax refund increases. This creates pressure for communities to create a marketable housing supply, which can be difficult for landlocked suburbs whose housing supply is aging along with their populations and infrastructure (Bier, 2001).

Finally, many smaller suburbs are often ineligible to receive Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds because their population is not large enough to qualify for these federal development funds (Hanlon, 2010). This means local governments have less money for community development purposes. This tends to add to the disincentive to redevelop inner-ring suburbs.

Yet, despite the lack of incentives, some planners and designers suggest many suburbs are being retrofitted, mostly to prevent sprawl. The detrimental environmental effects of sprawl are well documented, and in the case of New Urbanist thinking, targeted urbanization in many suburbs is better for the environment. Some suggest that dense walkable neighborhoods are also preferred by both baby boomers and millennials alike (Dunham-Jones, 2005; Leinberger, 2011). Scholarship largely speaks of this New Urbanism trend in terms of environmental sustainability, although the planning approach is theorized to cure the economic and social costs of sprawl as well (Kelbaugh, 1997; Dunham-Jones, 2005; Grant, 2009; Freilich & Popowitz, 2010; Dreier, Mollenkopf, &
Swanstrom, 2004). Recently scholars have documented a growing trend of urbanization in outer-ring, exurbs or edge cities, as they are commonly known (Phelps and Wood, 2011; Teaford, 1997). As these edge cities urbanize, scholars note that they have transitioned to become “post-suburban” characterized by urban economic tendencies while maintaining suburban values, clinging to the small town feel and small government that traditionally typifies suburbs (Teaford, 1997; Phelps 2012). As I examine the urbanization of Upper Arlington, there is a similar effort to encourage economic development but remain a secluded suburban community.

*Defining Suburbs and Suburban Types*

The lack of a universally accepted definition of a suburb is problematic and does little to aid policy makers as they struggle with how to help the many inner-ring suburbs experiencing decline and fiscal crisis (Puentes and Warren, 2006). Forsyth (2012) examined definitions of suburbs, classifying them into many categories including positive (“what suburbs are”), and negative (“what suburbs lack”) definitions, definitions based on physical location within the metropolitan area, those characterized by social dimensions (government type, diversity, or lack thereof), others focused on process (including the design and building process), still, others defined by the problems or issues that the suburbs face, and finally some that include a combination of approaches. In addition, many researchers (Hanlon, 2006; Hanlon and Vicino, 2007; Hanlon, Vicino and Short, 2006; Cooke and Marchant, 2006) define suburbs by census designations because of the availability of census level data.
Puentes and Warren (2006) define inner-ring suburbs as those that developed first after the central city, are geographically close to this center, and developed before or during the suburban expansion following World War II. The researchers use county boundaries, removing the central city population from the county level data to accurately reflect the suburban population. Cooke and Marchant (2006) adapted a method of categorization to define inner-ring suburbs developed by Leigh and Lee (2005); this method was subsequently employed by Cooke (2010, 183) and views inner-ring suburbs as “any tract that is not identified as part of the urban core, with greater than 400 1950-1969 housing units per square miles, plus any contiguous tract containing more than 200 1950-1969 housing units per square miles and a population density of at least 1,000 people per square mile. Cooke (2010) also notes that neighborhoods experiencing increasing poverty are dominated by post-World War II housing and are adjacent to the older urban core. The author finds problematic census-based typologies and combines physical location in relation to the urban core, and housing and population density with the use of census tracts in this definition.

Hanlon (2010) emphasizes physical location in her definition as well, characterizing inner-ring suburbs as the “oldest suburbs closest to the city core of the metropolitan area” (p. 5) Hanlon and Vicino (2007) define inner-ring suburbs of Baltimore using census designated places that share a boundary with the central city and where more than fifty percent of the housing stock was built before 1970. This definition again relies on physical location but also takes into account the age of the areas housing stock. Hanlon, Vicino, and Short (2006) and Hanlon (2006) also defined suburbs from
census place-level data. Lee and Leigh (2007) defined inner-ring suburbs by proximity to the central city and the age of the housing stock, similar to Cooke and Marchant (2006), they focused on the period between 1950 and 1969. Lee and Leigh (2005) employ the 1950 to 1969 age-range of the housing stock in their definition, also specifying that the primary mode of transportation for the inner-ring suburbs in their study was the automobile. Lucy and Phillips (2000) study suburban decline generally, speaking specifically about “bedroom communities” built in the post-war era through 1970. Lucy and Phillips note that in some metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs) decline is most prevalent in the inner-ring while in others decline was stronger in the third-ring suburbs. Vicino (2007) defined inner-ring suburbs by census place designations, proximity, and age. In the next chapter, I provide my own definition of an inner-ring suburb.
Chapter 3: Methodology

This thesis employs a case study approach to examine the inner-ring suburb of Upper Arlington. I utilize mixed methods – including both qualitative and quantitative approaches – to analyze the city. I seek to define inner-ring suburbs in the context of the Columbus metropolitan area and to uncover whether Upper Arlington fits into the dynamic of suburban decline as well as whether Upper Arlington is indeed moving into a post-suburban era. In order to uncover whether Upper Arlington fits into the dynamic of suburban decline, a descriptive analysis of census data for Upper Arlington and other jurisdictions within the Columbus metropolitan area is made. Spatial analysis and mapping of census data are also employed to visualize these dynamics and allow readers to physically place Upper Arlington within the Columbus metropolitan area.

An understanding of where Upper Arlington fits into the dynamic of suburban decline can be ascertained through the study of census data and spatial analysis, I use census data and spatial and descriptive analysis to determine whether or not Upper Arlington is in decline. Determining whether Upper Arlington is moving into a post-suburban era cannot easily be done through the examination of census data and spatial analysis. Therefore, qualitative methods are employed to uncover Upper Arlington’s process of urbanization and it’s motivations for recent densification initiatives. The
examination of historic and contemporary reports, maps, and newspaper articles also tell part of the story. The examination of these sources has been combined with interviews of city employees – particularly of the planning and development department – a local developer, and civically engaged, long-time residents. It is through these conversations that I uncover the motivations behind urbanizing trends discovered in the review of reports, maps, and newspaper articles concerning development in Upper Arlington.

Descriptive Analysis of Upper Arlington and Other Areas for Comparison

Upper Arlington has a history spanning nearly a century. However, I used census place data for Upper Arlington beginning in the 1980s. I examined census from 1980 to 2012 to uncover changes in demographic patterns and socioeconomic characteristics in Upper Arlington. I explored demographic and socioeconomic data related to age, gender, educational attainment, income, poverty, race, and unemployment rates. My analysis of this data over time allows me to determine if Upper Arlington fits into the dynamic of suburban decline.

In order to understand Upper Arlington in a metropolitan context, it was essential that I compare the suburb to its neighboring city. I used information on race, unemployment rate, median household income, poverty, educational attainment, and the population over sixty-five to understand Upper Arlington’s relative wealth and opportunity compared to the city of Columbus.

In addition to the demographic and socioeconomic data I explored, I also examined housing data. Many measures used to define inner-ring suburbs examine the year that structures were built, determining that communities with a large percentage of
their housing stock built in the post-war era of 1950-1970 (Hanlon, 2008; Hanlon 2010; Lucy and Phillips, 2000). I examined the age of Upper Arlington’s housing stock to determine if Upper Arlington is similar in age to other inner-ring suburbs in decline.

Spatial Analysis and Mapping

I utilized US Census data and ArcGIS to create a rudimentary map to enable readers to place Upper Arlington within the Columbus metropolitan context and to illuminate controversial issues within the city itself. I also utilize an Opportunity Map of Columbus and vicinity created by the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity at the Ohio State University to illustrate Upper Arlington’s relative access to opportunity compared to the rest of the Columbus region. In addition, I employ a city of Upper Arlington zoning map to illustrate two points. First, that the city is overwhelmingly residential and, second, the locations of the planned mixed-use districts within the city of Upper Arlington.

I also use spatial analysis to define inner-ring suburbs in a Columbus metropolitan context. The review of suburban definitions above has provided me with a theoretical basis from which to borrow and ground the definition that I use for the purpose of this thesis. I define inner-ring suburbs in Columbus as *independent cities that are completely landlocked and within the I-270 Outerbelt*. I have chosen the political designation of city as a part of this definition because of the relative autonomy that cities enjoy in regards to legislative and taxing abilities. Further, I have confined this definition to landlocked cities in part because only landlocked cities exists fully within the I-270 Outerbelt and in part because the characteristic of being landlocked further constrains these suburb’s ability to
grow their tax bases through annexation. Only five independent suburbs in the Columbus Metropolitan area fit the definition of inner-ring suburb utilized in this thesis. Upper Arlington, Grandview Heights, Worthington, Bexley, and Whitehall are all independent cities within the outerbelt\textsuperscript{1} and all find themselves completely surrounded (or “landlocked”) by Columbus or other municipalities. Figure 3.1 below shows municipal boundaries within Franklin County with the names of these five inner-ring suburbs in red for emphasis. The focus of this thesis is Upper Arlington.

\begin{figure}[h]  
\centering  
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{inner_ring_suburbs.png}  
\caption{Inner-Ring suburbs of the Columbus metropolitan area}  
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{1} Except for a small portion of the city of Worthington which lies north of I270.
Examination of Historic and Contemporary Reports, Maps, and Newspaper Articles

I examined contemporary newspaper articles from local papers of the last decade to determine issues that the city might be facing. The newspaper articles that I examined centered on issues relating to redevelopment in Upper Arlington. I utilized the most relevant articles written in the last four to five years.

In addition to the newspaper articles, I reviewed the Upper Arlington planning department’s master plans, both current and historical, in addition to any other documents, reports, and maps included on the city’s website and archives. This review allowed me to understand the history of development and development regulation in Upper Arlington, and enabled me to place current events within an historical context. The Upper Arlington city archives provided much of the context for understanding the early history of the suburb. The review of historic and contemporary reports, maps and newspaper articles largely shaped the questions I asked during the interview process and provided me the ability to identify some of the redevelopment issues that the city faces before speaking to city officials.

Interviews of City Employees and Civically Engaged Residents

I interviewed city officials throughout the months of April and May 2014. I interviewed individuals from the planning, economic development, code compliance, and engineering departments. I also interviewed the City Manager. In total, six city employees were interviewed. The goal of these interviews was to understand the motivations behind recent urbanization trends in Upper Arlington.
I also interviewed a local developer who also resides in the community. I interviewed two other residents actively involved in civic affairs in the city, bringing the total number of interviews to nine. These interviews enabled me to gain insight from those outside of city government and, in the case of the developer, inside the development industry. The inclusion of gave me the opportunity to gain some insight into how the community might perceive recent redevelopment trends.

I used the “snow ball” tactic to recruit further interview subjects; at the end of each interview I asked each person if there was anyone else they thought that I should speak with. I recorded all interviews\(^2\) and transcribed the interview data. The interview subjects were asked the same ten questions (see the Appendix for a list of the questions). The questions can be divided into two very broad categories. The first concerns Upper Arlington’s redevelopment process with the aim of uncovering motivations for recent urbanization and densification. The second aims to place Upper Arlington within the metropolitan context by asking questions concerning the suburb’s relationships with its neighbors, the metropolitan planning organization, the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission, and Ohio State University (to which the city is adjacent). The interview style was very conversational and as such, if an interview subject mentioned something that sparked my interest, I encouraged them to elaborate on that issue and frequently asked follow-up questions specific to each individual conversation.

I subsequently analyzed the interview transcriptions and themes were drawn from the discussions. Each interview transcription was read and themes were derived from

\(^2\) The Code Compliance Officer’s interview was not recorded due to a recording device malfunction. Notes taken during that interview were used in the analysis.
each individual question. The answers to each question were compared across all
interviews to determine themes present in many or all of the interviews. Answers to each
question were also compared to the findings from the review of local newspaper articles
and the documents on the city’s website, particularly the city’s Master Plans to determine
whether answers were factually accurate.
Chapter 4: Upper Arlington as a Case Study

Upper Arlington is a wealthy, predominantly White suburb northwest of the City of Columbus and west of Ohio State University’s main campus. It is one of only five independent cities in the Columbus Metropolitan Area that is completely landlocked, (i.e. surrounded by Columbus or other municipalities) it thus fits my definition of an inner-ring suburb. In this chapter, I provide a brief history of Upper Arlington, examine its governance structure and identify recent redevelopment issues of concern to the city government and residents.

History

Upper Arlington, an early suburb of Columbus, was founded in 1918 by the Thompson brothers, King and Ben, who purchased the original 840 acres of what would be Upper Arlington in 1913 (Upper Arlington, 2013). Inspired by the Garden City movement, prominent landscape architect William Pitkin Jr. designed the original layout for the town (Upper Arlington, 2013). The Garden City movement was one among many upper-class utopian movements of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (Friedmann, 1987). The movement sought to create small, circular cities with no more than thirty-two thousand inhabitants and equal amount of space devoted to agricultural, residential, and commercial uses (Schumann, 2003). Residential neighborhoods modeled after this movement are characterized by winding roads and an abundance of green space.
Upper Arlington was built as a suburban retreat from city life for the upper class, complete with winding roads and just minutes from Downtown and Ohio State University. As city manager, Ted Staton succinctly put it, “our location is something that we can’t screw up” (personal communication, February 14, 2014). The proximity that inner-ring suburbs share with central cities is seen as a real asset. Upper Arlington’s schools are high quality and its early development provides it with lots of green space and an attractive landscape, this, combined with proximity to the central city, makes this suburb very attractive to families working in the downtown area. Upper Arlington, like many elite enclaves of its time, has sought and continues to seek to provide a secluded refuge residential community.

Governance

Upon incorporation, Upper Arlington employed a typical city governance structure of mayor and city council. The city switched to the merged governance style of city manager and council in 1954, capturing the efficiency and technical expertise of business-style management while preserving democratic representation with the continuation of the council (Upper Arlington, 2013). Modern governance in Upper Arlington stems from the progressive-era of “good governance”, with historical roots in the philosophies of Saint-Simon and Comte who advocated a scientific approach to planning (Friedmann, 1987). “Good governance” was a response to the machine-style politics which dominated most eastern and Midwestern cities during the industrial revolution in America (Lentz, 2003; Jacobs, 1998). Rooted in the rational approach to governance of Herbert Simon (Friedmann, 1987), the balance of power in the mid-
twentieth century governance of Upper Arlington fell in the hands of the technical experts, with the city manager at the helm. Modern roots of the rational approach can be found in the thinkers of University of Chicago in the mid-twentieth century (Oliveira and Pinho, 2010). This rational approach to governance, with heavy reliance on technical expertise likely served early planners of Upper Arlington. In the city-manager approach, the power of the city council is off-set by the rational and technical expertise of the city manager. In the Columbus metropolitan region, many suburbs, including both inner- and outer-ring, have adopted this style of governance as a result of progressive era influences.

In the city manager style of governance, the city council typically hires the city manager who then manages the city’s various departments and oversees the budget. This is the case in Upper Arlington (Upper Arlington, 2013). The city council of Upper Arlington consists of seven citizens elected at-large (Upper Arlington, 2013). While all city employees work for and report to the city manager, the city council has final say in development issues which require their approval. Yet, because the city is rooted in the rational approach, planners are given some latitude in their designs. Public input is invited in the planning process. The most contentious issues tend to stem from development, taxation, and land use issues such as the installation of sidewalks in residential areas (Narciso, 2013a).

Upper Arlington is known as one of the conservative strong-holds in Franklin County. As such, tax rates are relatively low and the size of the government is relatively small in the suburb. Recently, as I will demonstrate in later chapters, there has been a contentious debate between the professional expertise of planners and residential desire.
Development decisions in Upper Arlington are made in part by relying on the technical expertise of the city development and planning officials and in part by compromising that expertise to accommodate public demand.

Current Redevelopment Challenges in Upper Arlington

Through reviewing newspaper articles and interviewing city officials and residents, I identified three main redevelopment issues that the city faces. These include a controversy over the installation of sidewalks in some of the suburb’s older neighborhoods, the creation of a new road, providing additional freeway access to Upper Arlington, and the implications of the city’s limited commercial tax base. I will deal with each in turn.

Sidewalk Controversy

The first redevelopment challenge relates to a recent controversy surrounding the potential construction of sidewalks in Upper Arlington (Narciso, 2013b). Upper Arlington, designed in the Garden City style, originally did not have sidewalks in its residential neighborhoods. Although many of the newer (post-war era) subdivisions do include sidewalks, the oldest neighborhoods do not. Recently, the city’s planning department and many young families with children living in the portions of the city without sidewalks have been pushing for their installation (Narciso, 2013b; Chad Gibson, personal communication, January 9, 2014). Much of the controversy centers on funding for sidewalk construction with the local government suggesting that local residents pay for sidewalk installation immediately outside their home. The controversy highlights the importance of the changing demographic nature of Upper Arlington as its population ages.
but more importantly it demonstrates the recent push by planners and the younger community for a walkable environment, a more urban-like environment.

*The A to Z Connector*

Upper Arlington is an enclave which lacks direct connection to Columbus-area highways. The Ackerman Road to Zollinger Road connector (also known as the A to Z Connector) would provide the suburb a connection to Interstate 315. As shown in Figure 4.1 below, Zollinger Road runs east-west across Upper Arlington and serves as the southern border of the Kingsdale shopping center. The road dead-ends onto North Star Road, the eastern border of Upper Arlington. Ohio State University owns the land on the southeast side of North Star Road across from Zollinger Road and a residential development lies to the northeast. Ackerman Road also runs east-west from Olentangy River Road to Kenney Road and serves as the northern border of Ohio State University’s west campus. The proposed connector would run through Ohio State-owned property between Kenney Road and North Star Road, connecting the two.

Interstate 315 has an exit at Ackerman Road, so the proposed connector would not only provide the city with easier freeways access, it would also make the Kingsdale shopping center more accessible to people living outside of Upper Arlington. However, proposal of the connector has been met with opposition both by Upper Arlington residents and Columbus residents living in the neighborhood between North Star and Kenney Roads. Both civically engaged, long-time Upper Arlington residents I interviewed voiced their opposition to the connector, linking the lack of freeway access
the city enjoys as an asset in keeping the city secluded (Elizabeth Varanese, personal communication, June 10, 2014; Anonymous long-time resident, personal communication, July 5, 2014). As a result of resident backlash, plans for the connector have been scrapped. Upper Arlington has managed to maintain its secluded character. This controversy highlights the tension in Upper Arlington between becoming more urban-like and connected to the city, and remaining a secluded residential community.

*Limited Commercial Land and Its Implications for Upper Arlington’s Tax Base*

An important concern identified by the planners of Upper Arlington I interviewed is the need to attract industry as a way to increase the suburb’s tax base. Of grave importance is the amount of land available for commercial development. In the case of
Upper Arlington, the amount of commercial land within its boundaries is small, therefore any loss of this commercial land can have major impact on the city’s budget.

A development challenged faced by Upper Arlington relates to issues concerning the former Compuserv site, located at 5000 Arlington Centre Boulevard (see Figure 4.2). This site, now owned by Tree of Life Christian Church, has been a source of controversy in Upper Arlington for years (Narciso, 2012). During its heyday, Compuserv contributed significantly to the city’s budget, employing roughly 1,000 individuals and producing almost a quarter of the city’s income tax base (Narciso, 2012; Chad Gibson, personal communication, January 9, 2014).

![Diagram of 5000 Arlington Centre Blvd.](image)

**Figure 4.1** The former Compuserv site now owned by Tree of Life Christian Church and a source of controversy in Upper Arlington. Source: *The Columbus Dispatch.*

Compuserv occupied the site during the dot-com boom; it was subsequently purchased by America Online who eventually sold the site to Tree of Life Christian Church when the dot com bubble burst. With the loss of a major company occupying the
site, the city experienced about a $600,000 reduction in the income tax it collects (Narciso, 2012). Meanwhile, Tree of Life Christian Church has been vying to turn the site into a school. Such a change would require the zoning for the site to be changed, a change the city has not, and according to planner Chad Gibson, will not approve without court order (Narciso, 2012; Chad Gibson, personal communication, January 9, 2014).

Tree of Life filed a discrimination suit against Upper Arlington which was thrown out in 2012, the organization then appealed to the U.S. Sixth Circuit court (Narciso, 2012; Chad Gibson, personal communication, January 9, 2014) Recently, the court ruled in Upper Arlington’s favor, agreeing with the city that it has not discriminated against Tree of Life Christian Church for refusing to rezone the site (Gray, 2014). However, Tree of Life plans to appeal the ruling, so it may be some time before Upper Arlington is able to collect taxes comparable to what the site once brought in (Gray, 2014). The CompuServ site was a topic of focus in two interviews with city employees. Both employees indicated that getting another major company to move its headquarters to the former AOL/Time Warner site would be quite advantages for the city’s fiscal status (Dean Sivinski, personal communication, January 28, 2014; Chad Gibson, personal communication, January 9, 2014).

These three challenges underline the tension within Upper Arlington. There is recognition that the suburb needs to remain attractive to young families who want a walkable, urban-like setting. There is also recognition that the suburb needs to provide access to nearby highways and remain economically competitive if it wants to secure an adequate tax base. Yet, the suburb also wants to remain a secluded residential
community. Teaford (1997) identified the struggle edge cities faced in their need to be competitive while maintaining the suburban ideal. Upper Arlington, as an inner-ring suburb, faces a similar tension.
Chapter 5: Upper Arlington and the Dynamic of Suburban Decline

Upper Arlington has a history as an elite enclave and a local reputation as one of the wealthiest suburbs in the Columbus metropolitan area. This evidence suggests that Upper Arlington may not fit into the category of declining inner-ring suburb. In this chapter, I examine socioeconomic and demographic change in Upper Arlington to determine if it is a suburb in decline. I also include an examination of some of the fiscal challenges the suburb may face.

Examination of Socioeconomic Change in Upper Arlington

I examined data on Upper Arlington’s housing stock as well as demographic information on population size, age, race, income, poverty rates, unemployment, and educational attainment to determine if the city fits into the dynamic of suburban decline discussed in the literature.

Housing

As Table 5.1 suggests (below), over fifty percent of the city’s housing stock was built between 1950 and 1960, according to 2010-2012 American Community Survey estimates. The community contains a core of older homes in the southern and oldest portion of the city making up roughly twelve percent of the entire housing stock, but also experienced a boom during the post-war period with sixty-seven percent of the total housing stock being built between the years of 1950 and 1980. After 1980 very few
homes have been built in Upper Arlington. Table 5.1 provides a breakdown of the city’s housing stock by the decade in which it was built.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year Structure Built</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1939 or Earlier</td>
<td>1,696</td>
<td>12.02%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940 to 1949</td>
<td>1,648</td>
<td>11.68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950 to 1959</td>
<td>5,077</td>
<td>35.97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960 to 1969</td>
<td>2,764</td>
<td>19.58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970 to 1979</td>
<td>1,616</td>
<td>11.45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980 to 1989</td>
<td>649</td>
<td>4.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990 to 1999</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>1.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000 to 2009</td>
<td>467</td>
<td>3.31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010 or Later</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Housing Units</strong></td>
<td><strong>14,114</strong></td>
<td></td>
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Table 5.1: Year structures were built in Upper Arlington. Data collected from the US Census 2010-2012 American Community Survey Estimates.

Many definitions of inner-ring suburbs consider the age of the housing stock, defining inner-ring suburbs as those that have the majority of their housing stock built in the post war period between 1945 and 1969 (Puentes and Warren, 2006; Cooke and Marchant, 2006; Leigh and Lee, 2005; Cooke, 2010; Hanlon and Vicino, 2007; Lee and Leigh, 2007; Lucy and Phillips, 2000). Upper Arlington fits in with the definitions of inner-ring suburbs with a majority of their housing stock built in the post-war period. Although only twelve percent of the city’s housing stock was built prior to 1939, in many

It should be noted that, according to interview sources, Upper Arlington experiences a high number of tear-downs of older homes in the neighborhood, with residents replacing these older homes with new, and typically significantly larger, homes (Chad Gibson, personal communication, January 9, 2014; Tom Paisley, personal communication, January 24, 2014; Dave Parkinson, personal communication, February 6, 2014; Theodore Staton, personal communication, February 14, 2014). The proliferation of McMansion infill in the city, along with recent redevelopment trends favoring targeted densification and mixed-use development, likely account for the majority of new builds from the 1990s onward.

Many of the city’s lower priced homes have been bought up by Upper Arlington residents wishing to build their dream home in this already built out city. These residents buy a perfectly fine four hundred thousand dollar home, tear it down, and replace it with a million dollar home (Chad Gibson, personal communication, January 9, 2014; Tom Paisley, personal communication, January 24, 2014; Dave Parkinson, personal communication, February 6, 2014; Theodore Staton, personal communication, February 14, 2014). Dave Parkinson, Upper Arlington’s city engineer described this phenomenon best:

We will have a resident buy a perfectly good $400,000 house and tear it down and build a $1,000,000 house in its place. And that just amazes me. And the reason, kind of goes back to the first question, we’re
landlocked. So, if you want to live in Upper Arlington and you want to have your dream house, that’s pretty much what you’ve got to do.

City employees view the city’s housing stock as an asset, with the older homes held in greater esteem. However, many old homes are torn down, creating problems for planners. Residents next door to those who teardown old homes and replace them with much bigger ones complain and often the new McMansion infill does not fit into the character of the neighborhood. Planners across the country are developing regulations to prevent the teardown process and those interested in historic preservation are often leading the charge, as demonstrated by a study on the McMansion infill phenomenon by Jack Nasar and Jennifer Evans-Cowley (2007). The massive amount of reinvestment in the Upper Arlingtons’s housing stock accounts for a portion of the six hundred and sixty four plus homes built since the 1990s.

The city’s housing stock – particularly the oldest homes in the southern portion of the city – is considered an asset by every single person interviewed for the purpose of this thesis (Chad Gibson, personal communication, January 9, 2014; Tom Paisley, personal communication, January 24, 2014; Dean Sivinski, personal communication, January 28, 2014; Robert Lamb, personal communication, January 28, 2014; Dave Parkinson, personal communication, February 6, 2014; Robert White, Jr., personal communication, February 7, 2014; Theodore Staton, personal communication, February 14, 2014; Anonymous long-time resident, personal communication, July 5, 2014). This is in part due to the tremendous amount of money residents pour into their homes renovating and putting on additions. Upper Arlington’s senior planning official, Chad Gibson describes how an entire group of what he terms “boutique builders” makes their living remodeling
homes and putting on additions in Upper Arlington, “The amount of money, annually, that gets poured into these older homes is astounding… We have these boutique builders who make a living here in Upper Arlington, upgrading our housing stock” (Chad Gibson, personal communication, January 9, 2014).

The fact that residents of Upper Arlington are reinvesting in the older housing stock suggests that this suburb is still desired and there is money available. In this sense, Upper Arlington is not a declining inner-ring suburb. Declining inner-ring suburbs typically see their housing stock deteriorate because of a lack of reinvestment.

Demographics

Table 5.2 below shows data on race in Upper Arlington relative to the city of Columbus. As is evident, Upper Arlington is and has been predominantly White with an extremely small African America population of less than one percent of the suburbs population consistently since 1980. It should be noted that the city of Columbus has become more diverse over time compared to Upper Arlington. Upper Arlington’s population demographics have changed very little, with today just over ninety percent of the population comprised of White residents according to the 2008-2012 American Community Survey estimates (see Table 5.2). The minority growth that has taken place in Upper Arlington has been among the Asian and “All Other Races” category, with substantial jumps occurring from 1990 to 2000 and 2000 to 2010.
Upper Arlington experiences low rates of poverty and unemployment as well as relatively high median household incomes (see Table 5.4). With a poverty rate of just over four and a half percent, a median income of nearly one hundred thousand dollars a year and an unemployment rate of just over four percent compared to Columbus’s poverty rate of nearly twenty-two and a half percent, median income of just over forty-two thousand, and an unemployment rate of nearly nine and a half percent, Upper Arlington appears, at least on the surface, impervious to the economic tribulations that have plagued cities around the country for the last seven years. Although Upper Arlington has experienced some population decline, the decline has not been accompanied by a large increase in poverty rates. In addition, Upper Arlington has sustained higher educational attainment rates...
educational attainment rates than the city of Columbus, as shown below in Table 5.5. The city is also known throughout the metropolitan region to have one of the best performing school districts, ranking forty-fourth in the state with a performance index score of 106.83 (Dispatch, 2014).

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Upper Arlington</td>
<td>$29,427</td>
<td>$31,140</td>
<td>$26,651</td>
<td>$37,116</td>
<td>$37,897</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Columbus</td>
<td>$14,834</td>
<td>$17,200</td>
<td>$14,815</td>
<td>$16,900</td>
<td>$22,400</td>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Upper Arlington</td>
<td>Columbus</td>
<td>Upper Arlington</td>
<td>Columbus</td>
<td>Upper Arlington</td>
<td>Columbus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than High School</td>
<td>4.74%</td>
<td>31.12%</td>
<td>4.30%</td>
<td>21.30%</td>
<td>2.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Graduate (includes equivalency)</td>
<td>22.30%</td>
<td>25.00%</td>
<td>13.40%</td>
<td>28.60%</td>
<td>10.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>15.30%</td>
<td>20.00%</td>
<td>23.10%</td>
<td>25.50%</td>
<td>20.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>32.30%</td>
<td>33.70%</td>
<td>16.40%</td>
<td>37.70%</td>
<td>19.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s Degree</td>
<td>52.00%</td>
<td>18.60%</td>
<td>25.50%</td>
<td>8.20%</td>
<td>9.36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional School Degree</td>
<td>5.40%</td>
<td>1.20%</td>
<td>7.00%</td>
<td>1.40%</td>
<td>7.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The 1980 data categorized educational attainment as years of school completed. Therefore, the categories of Bachelor’s, Master’s, Professional School, and Doctorate Degrees are lumped together as “Four years of more” of a college education. In addition, the category of Less than High School is the combined percentages of people completing elementary school (grades one through eight) and one to three years of high school. The 1990 data also consolidated Master’s, Professional, and Doctorate degrees. These categories are colored in other shades of blue above to denote the difference in categorization in the 1980 and 1990 census year data.
The Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity creates Opportunity maps which illustrate relative access to opportunity for a given geography. These maps merge a number of indicators chosen specifically for the geography being mapped; education, economics and mobility, housing and neighborhood, and public safety and criminal justice are the categories under which indicators were collected for the Franklin County map below (Figure 5.1). Opportunity is divided into five categories, very high opportunity is denoted with dark red, high opportunity with red, moderate opportunity with orange, low opportunity with an orange/yellow, and very low opportunity with the lightest color. As is evident in Figure 5.1, Upper Arlington is completely dark red indicating that the municipality exhibits very high access to opportunity.

As demonstrated by these data related to race, poverty, income and population, Upper Arlington is not showing any signs of decline or increasing diversity. It remains a wealthy, white enclave with access to lots of opportunity for local residents.

No Decline, but Significant Challenges

Although Upper Arlington is not experiencing many of the common signs of decline, the city still faces a number of challenges. An understanding of the challenges that Upper Arlington faces today was derived from a thorough review of current news reports and interviews with city officials and civically engaged residents. These challenges are largely connected to fiscal stress, although there is also evidence of a generation divide in Upper Arlington.
The State of Opportunity in Ohio: Franklin County

Description: This map displays the spatial pattern of distribution of opportunity in Franklin County, relative to the rest of Ohio based on Education, Economic & Mobility, Housing & Neighborhood, Public Health and Public Safety & Criminal Justice indicators.

Ohio Dept. of Rehabilitation and Correction, Ohio Dept. of Public Safety.

Figure 5.1 Franklin County Opportunity Map.
Source: The Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity
Generational Divide

The city is currently undergoing a population turnover with many older residents selling homes they’ve owned for decades to younger families, many of whom have children. As a result, Upper Arlington has seen a slight rise in the number of children under the age of eighteen since the 1990s. The 2008-2012 American Community Survey estimates put the population in Upper Arlington under eighteen at nearly twenty-five percent of the total population up from twenty-two and a half percent in the 1990 census. Recent planning initiatives, such as the recent and contentious investigation into installing sidewalks throughout some neighborhoods, are evidence of a generational divide in the population (Narciso, 2013b).

The interview portion of this research did shed some light on the degree to which this controversy impedes planning initiatives and whether or not the planning department favors the design preferences of one group over another. Overall, there seems little recognition of a generational divide among development and planning staff with the city that were interviewed. However, residents have noticed neighborhood turnover as retirees move out and younger families move in (Elizabeth Varanese, personal communication, June 10, 2014; Anonymous long-time resident, personal communication, July 5, 2014).

A Growing Aging Population

Upper Arlington is also home to a senior population which is almost proportionately double the size of the senior population in the city of Columbus as seen in Table 5.6 below which compares the population over sixty-five in Upper Arlington to
that in Columbus, the four other inner-ring suburbs (Bexley, Grandview Heights, Whitehall, and Worthington) and three of the county’s fastest growing outer suburbs (Dublin, Gahanna, and Hilliard). In fact, the only other city compared below with a senior population of similar size is Worthington, another inner-ring suburb, where the population over sixty-five makes up sixteen and a half percent of the total population.

The implications of having a disproportionately large senior population are tied directly to the fiscal issues that the city is facing. Retired individuals do not have income that is taxed, they are therefore not contributing to the tax base in the same ways that employed individuals do. Although many retired individuals do own property, very little property tax funds the cities in which Ohioans live; rather, these taxes fund Ohio school districts. Therefore, having nearly twenty percent of a city’s population be out of the workforce, can impact the city’s fiscal stability, particularly when its citizens demand a high quality of services like Upper Arlington (Chad Gibson, personal communication, January 9, 2014; Dean Sivinski, personal communication, Robert Lamb, personal communication, January 28, 2014; January 28, 2014; Dave Parkinson, personal communication, February 6, 2014; Anonymous long-time resident, personal communication, July 5, 2014).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Upper Arlington</th>
<th>Columbus</th>
<th>Bexley</th>
<th>Grandview Heights</th>
<th>Whitehall</th>
<th>Worthington</th>
<th>Dublin</th>
<th>Gahanna</th>
<th>Hilliard</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percent of Population Over 65</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>8.80%</td>
<td>9.70%</td>
<td>8.60%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>16.50%</td>
<td>8.20%</td>
<td>12.00%</td>
<td>10.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 5.6:** Percent population over sixty-five in Upper Arlington, Columbus, Bexley, Grandview Heights, Whitehall, Worthington, Dublin, Gahanna, and Hilliard. Data collected from the 2008-2012 American Community Survey
A Bedroom Community

Upper Arlington’s primary land use is residential; subsequently Upper Arlington suffers from a deficiency in commercial land. Unable to grow out because it is landlocked, the city has recently began to build up, creating mixed use structures along Lane Avenue which are now home to shops, apartments, and the city’s first hotel (Narciso, 2013a). This approach to land use is consistent with the city’s 2012 Master Plan, leading me to conclude that, at least upon the surface the city takes seriously the process of comprehensive planning and visioning. The trend towards urbanization is present in Upper Arlington’s Master Plan through their new mixed-use and dense developments. This is consistent with the literature regarding urbanization and retrofitting of suburbia discussed in the literature review (Dunham-Jones, 2005; Leinberger, 2011).

In nearly all of the interviews, the inability of the city to grow was cited as a challenge, a challenge most frequently cited in connection to revenue sources. Senior planning officer Chad Gibson summarized Upper Arlington’s position succinctly:

We are a landlocked community. We don’t have frontage on I270 or another interstate. We have very limited areas to annex. Our infrastructure is aging and we have pipes and sewers in the south part of town that are clay tile and are very… almost ancient, almost one hundred years old in some cases.

The challenge of being unable to grow was also cited in the literature regarding inner-ring suburban decline (Hanlon, 2010; Fitzgerald and Leigh, 2002; Bier, 2001; Hanlon, Vicino,
and Short, 2006; Cooke, 2010). In addition to being landlocked and overwhelmingly residential, Upper Arlington is also an older suburb, as are most inner-ring suburbs.

An Older Community

One of the potent challenges associated with being an older city, is the challenge of aging infrastructure. The useful life of infrastructure is roughly one hundred years. Upper Arlington was founded in 1918, so much of the infrastructure in the southern, oldest portion of the city, is nearing the end of its useful life. Dean Sivinski, Director of Community Economic Development for Upper Arlington described this predicament:

> We saw expenses increasing, you know, possibly redoing a half a mile or a mile of street might cost close to a half a million dollars, where years ago it might not have cost that, but now, if you dig up the pavement, all the infrastructure below it needs to be replaced. All this needs to be done, possibly, as long as you’ve got it torn up.

The city is in need of roughly $111-112 million worth of capital improvements (Robert Lamb, personal communication, January 28, 2014). Currently, the city is crafting a ten-year capital improvement plan to meet these infrastructure needs. However, without a sustainable revenue source, these improvements may not happen in the ten year time frame the city is hoping for (Robert Lamb, personal communication, January 28, 2014; Dave Parkinson, personal communication, February 6, 2014). Aging infrastructure is another indicator closely associated with inner-ring suburban decline in the literature (Cooke, 2010; Lee and Leigh, 2005).

Upper Arlington’s school district is old, like the city. Consequently, so are the district’s buildings. Although the school district is managed separately from the city
itself, the high quality of the district is one of the city’s strongest assets. However, two interview subjects mentioned the aging physical features of the schools as one of the city’s greatest challenges (Robert White, Jr., personal communication, February 7, 2014; Anonymous long-time resident, personal communication, July 5, 2014). Most of the city’s school buildings were built before the 1960s, so many lack the amenities that modern buildings enjoy (Robert White, Jr., personal communication, February 7, 2014; Anonymous long-time resident, personal communication, July 5, 2014). In addition, buildings age over time, and without proper reinvestment, can fall into disrepair. Aging schools is another indicator associated with inner-ring suburban decline in the literature (Cooke, 2010; Hanlon, 2010; Lee and Leigh, 2005; Hanlon and Vicino, 2007).

In Ohio, schools are funded through local property taxes, which, for a city like Upper Arlington with high home values, can be advantageous. However, the city had a school levy fail a few years ago, only to pass the following election cycle by a slim margin, signaling that residents are not as keen to keep throwing money at the schools without a plan for improvements (Robert White, Jr., personal communication, February 7, 2014; Anonymous long-time resident, personal communication, July 5, 2014).

**Stellar Service Delivery**

Upper Arlington has long been known as one of the premier cities in which to live and raise a family in Franklin County. The city is known for its great schools, beautiful neighborhoods, and fantastic service delivery. For example, every road in Upper Arlington is salted and plowed every time that it snows. One of the long-time residents interviewed for this thesis cited the snow removal and upkeep of the city’s roads and one
of the reasons she was first attracted to Upper Arlington (Anonymous long-time resident, personal communication, July 5, 2014). As a result of years of stellar service delivery, residents in Upper Arlington have come to expect high quality snow removal, trash pickup, and road upkeep. This can be difficult for a city in fiscal distress and was cited as a challenge by a handful of city employees interviewed (Chad Gibson, personal communication, January 9, 2014; Dean Sivinski, personal communication, Robert Lamb, personal communication, January 28, 2014; January 28, 2014; Dave Parkinson, personal communication, February 6, 2014; Anonymous long-time resident, personal communication, July 5, 2014).

_Fiscal Stress_

Upper Arlington is over ninety percent residential and is a true bedroom community. This creates some unique challenges, particularly in terms of collecting taxes. In Ohio, both the city in which a person lives and the city in which they work have the ability to levy income tax. However, in most cases, income tax is typically paid only to the municipality in which a person works, not where they live as most municipalities grant one hundred percent credit for income taxes paid to the city in which residents work.

Both Upper Arlington and the city of Columbus grant the one hundred percent income tax credit to residents working outside of their borders. For example, Columbus charges an income tax rate of two and a half percent, whereas Upper Arlington charges only two percent. For a resident living in Upper Arlington and working in Columbus, they pay the full two and a half percent of their income to the city of Columbus and
nothing to Upper Arlington. However, for a resident of Columbus working in Upper Arlington, the story is slightly different. This resident would pay two percent of their income to the city of Upper Arlington and, since Columbus’ income tax rate is higher, an additional one half percent to the city of Columbus, bringing their total income tax liability to two and a half percent. City Manager, Ted Staton (personal communication, February 14, 2014) describes the effects of this taxing process:

> It’s not so much that we’re landlocked, we’re landlocked and ninety-five percent of our land is residential. And even that would be okay if you paid taxes in Ohio based on where you live instead of where you work. So we know that eighty-three percent of the income earned by Upper Arlington is taxed to somebody else, they don’t pay it here. And sixty-seven percent of the total is taxed at a higher rate than we levy. So, a bunch of our people pay very little for the services that we provide and that is a function of not having [commercial land]. If we were landlocked and had commercial land, even if you had to redevelop it, we’d be alright.

The city’s coffers have been hit hard in the last decade. The State of Ohio made two big changes to the way that local governments are funded. First, the state eliminated the estate tax, which enabled cities to collect tax revenue when wealthy residents with large estates passed away (Siegel, 2014; Jerde, 2013; Chad Gibson, personal communication, January 9, 2014; Dean Sivinski, personal communication, January 28, 2014; Robert Lamb, personal communication, January 28, 2014; Dave Parkinson, personal communication, February 6, 2014; Theodore Staton, personal communication, February 14, 2014). The estate tax levied by the State of Ohio on large estates when the
principle owner passed away, the tax was essentially an inheritance tax. With the
election of Governor John Kasich in 2008, the estate tax was subsequently eliminated,
taking effect in 2013 (Siegel, 2014; Jerde, 2013). Of all cities in Ohio, Upper Arlington
was hit third hardest by this change, behind mammoths Cleveland and Cincinnati (Chad
Gibson, personal communication, January 9, 2014; Dave Parkinson, personal
communication, February 6, 2014; Theodore Staton, personal communication, February
14, 2014).

In addition to the elimination of the estate tax, the state reduced funding to cities
through the local government fund, which took effect around the same time as the
elimination of the estate tax (Siegel, 2014; Jerde, 2013; Chad Gibson, personal
communication, January 9, 2014; Dave Parkinson, personal communication, February 6,
2014; Theodore Staton, personal communication, February 14, 2014). Combined, these
two changes, along with the recession, left Upper Arlington with a projected deficit by
2015 (Chad Gibson, personal communication, January 9, 2014; Robert Lamb, personal
communication, January 28, 2014; Dave Parkinson, personal communication, February 6,
2014; Theodore Staton, personal communication, February 14, 2014). In response the
city laid-off employees, made cuts wherever possible, and will be asking for a half
percent increase in income tax collected in November (Rinehart, 2014a; Chad Gibson,
personal communication, January 9, 2014; Dave Parkinson, personal communication,
February 6, 2014; Theodore Staton, personal communication, February 14, 2014).

Although Upper Arlington is not a declining inner-ring suburb, the city does face
severe fiscal challenges. In response to these fiscal challenges associated with being an

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older, landlocked, bedroom community, Upper Arlington has devised three strategies to ease fiscal pressure, increasing revenue, shared services, and densification.

In response to the projected deficit, many city employees interviewed implied that the city may very soon be asking for an income tax increase (Robert Lamb, personal communication, January 28, 2014; Dave Parkinson, personal communication, February 6, 2014; Theodore Staton, personal communication, February 14, 2014). These hints became reality this July when the city council approved a ballot measure for the November election that, if approved, would bring Upper Arlington’s income tax level in line with most of the metropolitan area at two and a half percent. (Rinehart, 2014a; Rinehart, 2014b). The degree of controversy which this ballot measure for an income tax increase will generate is yet to be determined as election season is still months away at the time of this writing. However, much of the recent development in Upper Arlington has been retail, which doesn’t typically pay high salaries, causing one to question how much of an effect a half percent raise will have on the city’s finances.

The city is looking to its neighbors to work out shared service agreements as another means to cut costs. Upper Arlington is currently working with the city of Dublin on a shared 911 service agreement (Chad Gibson, personal communication, January 9, 2014). The city has also tried to work out agreements to provide services to nearby Clinton Township. However, Upper Arlington’s neighbor, Grandview Heights outbid the city, winning the service agreement and the revenue that came with it (Chad Gibson, personal communication, January 9, 2014).
It is Upper Arlington’s third strategy to combat fiscal constraints, that of targeted urbanization and densification which is of interest to the final question this thesis seeks to answer. The question of whether or not Upper Arlington is entering the post-suburban era is the topic upon which the next chapter focuses.
Chapter 6: The Urbanization of Inner Suburbia

Upper Arlington is employing a policy of targeted densification and urbanization at selected sites throughout the city. The broad goal of this policy is to increase the city’s commercial tax base thereby increasing revenue (Chad Gibson, personal communication, January 9, 2014; Dean Sivinski, personal communication, January 28, 2014; Robert Lamb, personal communication, January 28, 2014). While the suburb hopes to increase revenue, it also hopes to simultaneously attract young professionals to within its borders as well as providing attractive homes for the city’s growing senior population (Master Plan, 2012). The targeted densification and urbanization strategy the city is implementing is not motivated by a desire for sustainability. Instead, this economic development policy is motivated by a desire to combat fiscal constraints.

This chapter will cover the trend of targeted densification and urbanization occurring in Upper Arlington and the motivations behind this trend, determining whether Upper Arlington has indeed entered into the post-suburban era. After exploring the details surrounds Upper Arlington’s targeted densification and urbanization policy, I will explore the role that metropolitan competition plays in Upper Arlington’s quest to urbanize key areas. Finally, I will explore the new (sub)urban utopian dream.
Densification and Urbanization

Upper Arlington approved their first master plan in nearly forty years in 2002 after a three-year visioning process with residents (Chad Gibson, personal communication, January 9, 2014; Dean Sivinski, personal communication, January 28, 2014; Robert Lamb, personal communication, January 28, 2014). Among the many issues discussed in the plan is the creation of planned mixed-use districts or “P-MUDs” as the city calls them (Chad Gibson, personal communication, January 9, 2014; Dean Sivinski, personal communication, January 28, 2014; Robert Lamb, personal communication, January 28, 2014). Seven P-MUDs were designated throughout Upper Arlington, including Tremont Center, Kingdale shopping center, and the Lane Avenue corridor which is home to the city’s first hotel (Chad Gibson, personal communication, January 9, 2014; Dean Sivinski, personal communication, January 28, 2014; Robert Lamb, personal communication, January 28, 2014). Figure 6.1 Upper Arlington’s zoning map below shows the P-MUDs in purple. The map highlights just how overwhelmingly residential the city is.

Height restrictions are relaxed in the P-MUDs, along with frontage limits, and amount of parking spaces required (Chad Gibson, personal communication, January 9, 2014). Senior planning officer Chad Gibson describes the development that will be taking place in these new P-MUDs. He states “we want a more urban style of development versus a suburban and your standard strip center types of development” (Chad Gibson, personal communication, January 9, 2014). These new districts, with urban-style zoning
Figure 6.1: Upper Arlington Zoning Map. Source: City of Upper Arlington, Ohio.
regulations are Upper Arlington’s attempt to urbanize strategically designated areas, creating a walkable environment while diversifying the city’s housing stock. In addition to the first and only hotel in Upper Arlington, many of the P-MUDs are or will be home to apartments and condos, two housing types which Upper Arlington could use more of, particularly if the city hopes to be a community where its citizens can age in place (Upper Arlington, 2012). As senior planning officer, Chad Gibson describes (personal communication, January 9, 2014), these P-MUDs are Upper Arlington’s attempt to grow its commercial tax base and the city is doing so through densification and urbanization:

We are going to look at our limited commercial areas and we are going to allow them to redevelop in a way that gets us more revenue. So that’s going to address, at least partially, the challenge of increasing costs and replacing infrastructure. So, the Master plan recommended that we designate at least those 7 commercial areas as Planned Mixed-Use Districts, or P-Muds. And the development standards in our zoning code, that ultimately corresponded to those mixed-use districts allow for very dense, tall development with much less parking than was historically accepted. So we want to see larger buildings, closer to the road, less parking, and parking located behind the building instead of looking across a sea of parking for a one story strip center, that’s the opposite of what we want

The new and contentious mixed-use development occurring along Lane Avenue is an example of New Urbanist influence in planning design in Upper Arlington (Narciso, 2010). The two new buildings include retail space at ground level and apartments above one multi-story building with a multi-story hotel above the other. These two new
structures are built up to the sidewalk with parking in the rear and are within view and walking distance of the Shoppes at Lane Avenue which consist of retail and restaurants, including a newly renovated and expanded Whole Foods Market. The current sidewalk initiative is another example of the walkable principle of New Urbanism in action in an Upper Arlington planning initiative.

The trend of redeveloping central cities to take advantage of the often historic housing stock, walkability, and proximity to places of employment, is also taking hold in suburban planning departments across the nation (Kelbaugh, 1997; Dunham-Jones, 2005; Grant, 2009; Freilich & Popowitz, 2010; Dreier, Mollenkopf, & Swanstrom, 2004) as they vie for the title of most attractive city in the metropolitan area for young professionals. Upper Arlington lacks the commercial land to create a truly walkable community. The city will continue exploring the viability – in terms of built environment and public opinion – of these New Urbanist design principles as it competes to attract the tax-base it so desperately needs to avoid the impending fiscal crisis from the elimination of the estate tax and changes in state funding to local governments. Director of community and economic development for Upper Arlington, Dean Sivinski (personal communication, January 28, 2014) describes the effects the fiscal constraints mentioned above in regards to the city’s needed capital improvements:

So, basically, in order to get those sorts of revenue, the city stepped back, did a master plan and relooked at everything and their priorities and decided we need to intensify our commercial land use. And I think the word that would come out of all of this would be density, if there was one buzz word for all of what took place it would be density. And
the master plan was still trying to maintain the residential character and flavor of the community because it is a bedroom community, a residential community. It wasn’t to allow any commercial development to grow and creep into the residential zone that we have in place… So, the growth in area is minimal because we're kind of land locked, but the growth in intensification and density, that needs to increase; that is what’s continuing to occur throughout Arlington.

Suburban Utopia Faces Competition

Upper Arlington faces competition on all sides from the Goliath that is Columbus, fellow inner-ring suburb, Grandview Heights, and the Village of Marble Cliff. While these adjacent competitors do present challenges for the city, according to interviews with city officials, the real competitors of Upper Arlington are found in the outer-ring suburbs of Dublin and New Albany.

In nearly every interview, competition with the outer edge city suburbs of Dublin and New Albany was mentioned as important (Chad Gibson, personal communication, January 9, 2014; Dean Sivinski, personal communication, January 28, 2014; Robert Lamb, personal communication, January 28, 2014; Dave Parkinson, personal communication, February 6, 2014; Robert White, Jr., personal communication, February 7, 2014; Theodore Staton, personal communication, February 14, 2014; Anonymous long-time resident, personal communication, July 5, 2014). Ted Staton mentioned Dublin fourteen times during his interview and New Albany six times (personal communication, February 14, 2014). The city of Dublin is an edge city northwest of the central city along Dublin-Granville Road that was once a distant city from bustling
Columbus. Only in the last forty years has Columbus grown to border Dublin and as such, the city once viewed as independent of Columbus is now viewed as one of the city’s suburbs. New Albany, another edge city, is a planned community northeast of Columbus on the opposite end of Dublin-Grandville Road. Both of these cities are located on what is now the outskirts of Columbus and both have the ability to annex.

Across all of the interviews, both Dublin and New Albany were mentioned in reference to one of three general topics: schools, diverse housing stocks, or amenities. I discuss each in turn.

Local developer and Upper Arlington resident Robert White describes Upper Arlington’s competition in this way:

Upper Arlington is becoming a harder sell. I think you used to be able to say, ‘we are the best school system.’ But you looks at the statistics, are we aren’t the best anymore by ourselves, a lot of school systems have caught up to Upper Arlington in that regard. And that’s kind of scary. If we can’t hold up our hat to our school system being that much superior to others, and we have all [these] other challenges… that’s a scary situation.

In terms of housing, many of the older parts of Dublin are home to housing stocks similar to that found in Upper Arlington. Yet Dublin is still a growing city, and as such, it has newer homes and a wider variety in terms of housing choice. In particular, Dublin has begun to cater to senior citizens wishing to downsize from the large homes and lawns found throughout Upper Arlington. Dublin is not landlocked and land prices in the newer portions of this outer suburb are much lower than in Upper Arlington, making the suburb
attractive to young families looking for as much space as they can afford (Dean Sivinski, personal communication, January 28, 2014; Robert Lamb, personal communication, January 28, 2014; Robert White, Jr., personal communication, February 7, 2014; Theodore Staton, personal communication, February 14, 2014).

New Albany is a very young suburb with a young but in many ways magnificent housing stock. Home to many of the Columbus metropolitan area’s largest homes, New Albany offers amenities and space not found in the older homes of Upper Arlington, particularly when it comes to closet space. The new homes in Dublin and New Albany do not require updating in the way that older homes in Upper Arlington often do (Dave Parkinson, personal communication, February 6, 2014; Robert White, Jr., personal communication, February 7, 2014; Theodore Staton, personal communication, February 14, 2014).

Both Dublin and New Albany also have an abundance of greenfields, which means that each suburb is home to a number walking and bike paths. Upper Arlington lacks parks, something that both Dublin and New Albany have in abundance. As Chad Gibson, Senior Planning Officer for Upper Arlington put it: the city is “under-parked.” Although Upper Arlington does actually have a lot of green space, the vast majority of it is consumed by three golf courses, only one of which is public. Even though many interview subjects, particularly the residents, stated that more green space was part of their vision for Upper Arlington, the high price of land in the city is a deterrent. As Chad Gibson described it, “our land cost is probably our best friend and our worst enemy” (personal communication, January 9, 2014). As planned communities are built, parks and
paths are typically included in the development plans. This was not so when Upper Arlington was being built out. As a consequence, Upper Arlington simply cannot compete with the amenities that many of these newer neighborhoods afford.

In addition, Upper Arlington lacks a community center, a fact that one longtime resident interviewed for the purpose of this thesis was keen to point out multiple times (Elizabeth Varanese, personal communication, June 10, 2014). New Albany and Dublin, as well as Worthington and other inner- and outer-ring suburbs are home to community centers. The lack of a community center in Upper Arlington is in many ways a function of land prices; the city simply cannot afford to purchase land inside of Upper Arlington. This is best illustrated by the fact that the city’s public services building is located a few miles away in the nearby suburb of Hilliard (Dean Sivinski, personal communication, January 28, 2014).

Upper Arlington has enacted a policy of targeted densification and urbanization very similar to the trends described by Teaford (1997) and Phelps (2012) in their work on post-suburbia. While this policy is in many ways a response to fiscal pressure, it should also be viewed in light of the metropolitan-wide competition for residents and commerce. Perhaps a part of Upper Arlington’s impetus to urbanize came from sheer competitive spirit in the jurisdictionally fragmented metropolis that is the Columbus region.

*Modern (Sub)Urban Utopian Dreams*

What are the desires of the new (sub)urban pioneers? One of the questions asked in each interview was “what is your long-term vision for Upper Arlington?” The
responses were remarkably similar in most of the interviews and were summarized quite well by senior planning officer, Chad Gibson:

Maximizing our revenue potential in our very limited commercial areas and just enhancing the quality of life through small adjustments, like sidewalks. Once our planned mixed-use districts get filled in, that’s going to make our community even more desirable for people that want to be able to walk to work or walk to restaurants or shops. I just see our population becoming more diverse and I still see the property values remaining one of the strongest markets in all of central Ohio.

Generally, residents and city employees would like to see the city become even more family friendly, this means building more sidewalks and parks (Elizabeth Varanese, personal communication, June 10, 2014; Theodore Staton, personal communication, February 14, 2014). There is also a desire for a more racially and ethnically diverse Upper Arlington (Theodore Staton, personal communication, February 14, 2014). Residents and city employees would like to see a suburb that is more walkable with a generally more urban feel without impacting the current character of the neighborhoods, which I interpret to mean a desire to see the P-MUD areas succeed in their aims of densifying and urbanizing key corridors; a desire which was directly expressed by a number of interview subjects as well (Chad Gibson, personal communication, January 9, 2014; Robert Lamb, personal communication, January 28, 2014; Dean Sivinski, personal communication, January 28, 2014; Robert White, Jr., personal communication, February 7, 2014).
Many city employees expressed a desire for a viable revenue source so that the suburb can catch up on capital improvements and, “make the city shine” again (Dave Parkinson, personal communication, February 6, 2014; Dean Sivinski, personal communication, January 28, 2014; Theodore Staton, personal communication, February 14, 2014). Often, these sentiments were accompanied by a desire to find more sustainable funding sources for the city (Dave Parkinson, personal communication, February 6, 2014; Theodore Staton, personal communication, February 14, 2014).

The dreams of the individual’s interviewed for this thesis all share a common theme: continued, targeted urbanization, diversification, and New Urbanist improvements. The key word to note is targeted. For it is targeted urbanization, not general urbanization that these city employees and residents desire. While maintaining their solidly suburban values, targeted urbanization offers the chance for fiscal stability and staves off metropolitan competition. Indeed, it does seem that Upper Arlington is moving into the post-suburban era in which these modern (sub)urban utopian dreams of Upper Arlingtionians do seem eerily similar to the contention Jon C. Teaford (1997) described in Post-suburbia when recounting the desires of the residents of America’s edge-cities.

The motivations for Upper Arlington’s targeted urbanization and densification policy seems rooted in two challenges that the city faces, fiscal stress and jurisdictional competition. The fiscal stress that the city faces stems from the elimination of the estate tax and the reduction in the local government fund, formerly the city’s most reliable revenue sources and is compounded by the city’s lack of commercial land and landlocked
position in the metropolitan area. This lack of commercial land leave Upper Arlington unable to collect the income tax required to maintain the high level of services the city is known to deliver. Upper Arlington competes with the various jurisdictions within the metropolitan area for both residents and commerce. The P-MUDs are an attempt to increase the city’s commercial tax base and provide new, mixed-use buildings to attract both residents and business.
Chapter 7: Conclusion

“The right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city. It is, moreover, a common rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanization. The freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves is, I want to argue, one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights” (Harvey, 2006, p. 23).

This thesis sought to answer three central questions regarding inner-ring suburban development in Upper Arlington in the context of the Columbus metropolitan area. The first, to define inner-ring suburbs in the context of the Columbus metropolitan area, was achieved by pulling from existing definitions of inner-ring suburbs in the literature and understanding them in the context of Upper Arlington and post-suburban development. Thus the definition developed for this thesis states that inner-ring suburbs in the Columbus metropolitan area are independent cities that are completely landlocked and within the I-270 Outerbelt.

Second, this thesis sought to understand how Upper Arlington fits into the dynamic of suburban decline that plagues so many inner-ring suburbs across the nation. While demographic and census data do not suggest that Upper Arlington is experiencing decline, the city does face many of the fiscal challenges common to inner-ring suburbs in
decline. Despite these fiscal challenges, it has been determined that Upper Arlington is not facing decline, rather, the city is coping with these fiscal challenges as many outer-ring suburbs cope with the social, economic, and environmental effects of sprawl, the city is urbanizing.

Finally, the targeted densification and urbanization of Upper Arlington in the face of fiscal distress and metropolitan competition suggests that the city is indeed entering the post-suburban era. The degree to which Upper Arlington’s evolution towards becoming a post-suburban city is unique amongst wealthy inner-ring suburbs in the face of fiscal crisis is one that should be explored in future research. Are other landlocked, primarily wealthy, inner-ring suburbs facing fiscal crisis attempting to grow their tax bases through targeted densification and urbanization strategies like Upper Arlington? Is this a trend amongst this type of inner-ring suburb? Does this trend transcend to other types of inner-ring suburbs? Are many suburbs, from edge cities to inner-ring and distressed pursuing targeted urbanization strategies? Such questions should be explored in future research.
References


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Appendix A: Interview Questions
Interview Questionnaire

1. Arlington is an older inner-ring suburb which is completely landlocked without the ability to annex, how has city government (planners and policy-makers) dealt with the challenges this position puts the city in? Policy solutions? Government investments? Anything particularly concerning?
2. How has the age of your housing stock and infrastructure effected development in Upper Arlington?
3. Have you noticed any demographic shifts in your population? Possible follow-up: How are you dealing with the fiscal disparities created by this demographic shift?
4. What is your long-term vision for Upper Arlington? What would you like the community to look like in the next 10 years or more?
5. What would you consider are the biggest changes that Upper Arlington has faced in the last 15 years? 20 years? 30 years? How has Upper Arlington adapted to and handled those changes?
6. What would you consider to be Upper Arlington’s strengths/assets? Its weaknesses/challenges?
7. How would you characterize the city of Upper Arlington’s relationship with Ohio State University? Do you think Ohio State has played a role in past and/or present development issues in Upper Arlington?
8. From your perspective, what are the biggest development challenges faced by your neighboring communities? (name certain communities if necessary)
9. Can you describe Upper Arlington’s relationship with MORPC? What role do such organizations play in development issues in Upper Arlington?
10. How do you view Upper Arlington’s role in the Columbus Metropolitan Area? What does Upper Arlington contribute?