



Episode 2: How Suburban Development Makes American Cities Poorer

Episode Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VVUeqxXwCA0>

Running Time: 8:12

“The American Suburban Experiment is trading a centuries’ proven development pattern and replacing it with something that is not only financially unproductive but also extremely fragile.”

Discussion Questions

- Some of the hallmarks of the traditional development pattern include its human scale, mix of uses (commercial and residential), and especially its flexibility. Are there places in your community where traces of the traditional development pattern can still be found?
- Some of the hallmarks of the suburban development pattern—or the Suburban Experiment—is that it is scaled for cars, tends to separate uses, and is built all at once. Where in your community do you see the suburban development pattern?
- In what ways does your city’s current zoning code give rise to a suburban development pattern over a traditional development pattern? (Hint: Look for single-use zoning, single-family residential, parking mandates, and more.)
- Another feature of the suburban development pattern is its inflexibility. As Jason notes in the video, one example of this is with big box stores. Are there former big box store buildings in your community now sitting empty? Did your town initially court those same stores with tax breaks and other incentives?
- What are some of the risks of putting all of your community’s eggs, so to speak, in the big box store “basket”? Contrast that with the dispersed risk of investing in your downtown or other traditional neighborhoods.
- What else stood out to you from Episode 2?

Ideas for Taking Action

- Share this episode with someone whom you think the content will resonate with.
- Use a variety of media—original photos and video, Google Street View, etc.—to compare and contrast the traditional and suburban development patterns in your own town or city.

- The video showed two examples in which the traditional development pattern financially outperformed the suburban development pattern. The measure used is called “value per acre.” A number of Strong Towns advocates have conducted their own value-per-acre analyses. To learn more about how to conduct a DIY value-per-acre analysis, check out especially the following two resources:
 - [“Conduct a Value-Per-Acre Analysis,” by Daniel Herriges.](#)
 - [“Create Your Own Value-Per-Acre Analysis,” by Andrew Kelsey.](#)

Essential Strong Towns Content

- Articles
 - [“The Cost of Auto Orientation,” by Charles Marohn.](#)
 - [“The Spooky Wisdom of Cities,” by Charles Marohn.](#)
 - [“The Suburban Experiment vs. Traditional Development: 7 Key Differences,” by John Pattison.](#)

Go Deeper

- Articles
 - [“Taco John’s 2.0,” by Edward Erfurt.](#)
 - [“What Is Traditional Development,” by Daniel Herriges.](#)
 - [“Traditional Development is Not Retro. It’s Timeless,” by Daniel Herriges.](#)
 - [“The Power of Information Equity,” by Joe Minicozzi.](#)
 - [“This Is the End of the Suburban Experiment,” by Charles Marohn.](#)
 - [“The Mailbox: Tower Historic Harbor ‘Renaissance,’” by Charles Marohn.](#)
- Podcast
 - [Strong Towns Podcast: “Spooky Wisdom: What Lessons Should We Be Learning from How Our Ancestors Built Cities?”](#)
- Action Lab: [Big Box Stores.](#)
- Book: [Strong Towns: A Bottom-Up Revolution to Rebuild American Prosperity,](#) by Charles Marohn.

Got Questions?

Check out the [Strong Towns Action Lab](#). You can type in any word, phrase, or question into the search bar and be directed to core insights, top content, and case studies for your query. Try it out by typing in “Big Box Stores.”

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