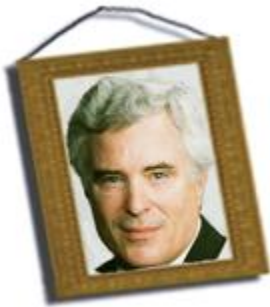


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Branching Out: Alumni Reaching for a Healthy Planet

The Infinite Character of Walkable Urbanism



“We may be moving toward a virtual, knowledge-based economy, but we still have to sit and sleep somewhere,” writes Christopher Leinberger ’72 in his new book *The Option of Urbanism: Investing in a New American Dream*. That “somewhere” has been the source of Leinberger’s career in progressive real estate development and, more recently, his work as a consultant, author, and professor.

The book has a simple thesis—that the “somewhere” that people are increasingly wanting to occupy is changing. Leinberger calls this new place “walkable urban,” which is neither traditional “downtown urban” nor “drivable sub-urban”—the sprawling “somewhere” that developed after World War II.

Evidence is growing that the sub-urban automobile culture is no longer sustainable. But that’s only part of the equation that is leading to the development of walkable urbanism. “More is less,” writes Leinberger. As we built more drivable suburban developments, we got more traffic congestion, pollution, and the inevitable decline of open space—and less quality of life.

“In walkable urban places, more is better,” he argues, pointing to successful developments such as Reston Town Center in Virginia; Belmar, the “new downtown” of Lakewood, Colo.; and revitalized inner-urban neighborhoods such as Washington, D.C.’s West End. Their mixed functions—offices, retail businesses, entertainment, restaurants, residential, and civic spaces—provide what Leinberger describes as “infinite character.”

After considering policies that encourage such development (good public transportation is among the most important) and some potential unintended consequences (such as

providing enough affordable housing), Leinberger closes *The Option of Urbanism* by speculating—almost wishing—that “there may come to be a moral imperative to build walkable urban places” because it could contribute significantly to reductions in greenhouses gases, dependence on foreign oil, and pressure to gobble up land on the fringes of metropolitan areas