Slow Urbanism as a Sprawl Antidote

Winning the Race on Foot Borrowing from Slow Urbanism's Place-Based Sustainable Practices.

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“Slow but steady wins the race.”
-Aesop
0.0 | Abstract

America’s suburban development patterns that have contributed to the proliferation of sprawl have had many adverse effects on the quality of life able to be realized by many communities in urban metropolitan areas. Development that is automobile-focused, separates land uses, occurs on a rapid timetable, and is increasingly homogenous has been the result of new technologies and policies coupled with the removal of the circumstantial constraints that were present in ancient civilization formation. Moreover, the human predisposition and preference for speed over slowness reinforces fast development and the loss of a local, place-based character. In order to pursue a higher quality of life, particularly in suburban contexts, this paper proposes Slow Urbanism as a sprawl antidote and leans on six key components of the Charter of Slow Urbanism to guide policy reform and design goals as it is applied through the lens of retrofitting our existing autocentric suburbs.

At the most basic level, this framework is applied to an area of recent reinvestment in one of Atlanta’s inner-metropolitan suburbs, the City of Smyrna near the I-75/I-285 interchange. Through a systematic process of assessing the current “speed” of this locale, particularly the means of transportation available, the character of its urban form, and land use patterns, specific interventions will be proposed that incrementally incorporate the philosophy of Slow Urbanism and improve the livability, equity, and place-based identity of this area to better establish it as a compact, walkable district.
0.1 | Introductory Author’s Letter

As an Atlanta native having lived in metropolitan Atlanta for eighteen years and in Atlanta proper for eleven years, I have seen the city and its surrounding areas change at differing rates and in varied trajectories; some areas improving, some deteriorating. As a whole, the overwhelming trend has been development that is faster, whether in the form of low-quality, cookie-cutter single-family homes in suburban subdivisions, stand-alone strip centers that are surrounded by a sea of surface parking, or the ever-present project to widen a roadway under the auspices that additional lanes will equate to shorter travel durations and less traffic. Atlanta’s urban core is the exception to this trend, but has its own unique challenges, areas of disinvestment, and bias towards the automobile as the preferred mode of transportation and infrastructure investment.

This paper is both an explanation and discussion of “when and why we sped up” as well as “how can we slow back down” through the lens of the Slow Urbanism movement popular in many cities worldwide and especially present in Europe. I had the opportunity to experience Slow Urbanism’s positive effects firsthand on several trips to Italy over the years, in urban core cities such as Rome and Florence as well as the Tuscan hilltowns of Chianti, Siena, and Monteriggioni. By examining the key components that are foundational to this movement, we can contextually apply these principles to begin to remedy our addiction to speed and recapture the elements that make our cities and towns unique places. It is my hope that by adjusting these principles to fit our American context, we can incrementally revive our suburban areas and see a resurgence of activity and reinvestment in a better designed, more human-oriented suburb that restores the relationship between the community and the built environment.

For a more walkable Atlanta,

Allison Galloway

Allison Galloway
1.0 | Civilization Formation

The way our cities and towns have formed is a direct result of basic human needs and of human desires and tendencies. These, coupled with environmental constraints, have largely determined the development of nearly every ancient civilization. Only in the past century have we seen computer-aided human-generated technological advancements and modeling tools joining in this authorship. However, primitive new technologies played a role in authorship as well, serving as crucial factors in civilization formation. These include such innovations as new building techniques, defense, agricultural advancements, and specialization. So, together with human needs and desires, environmental constraints and technology work in concert in the process of civilization formation.

1.1 | Environmental Constraints

Natural determinants, like climate and solar access, played a major role in the siting of ancient civilizations. Most growth was through an organic, unplanned process whereby the urban settlement evolved from a primitive village into a more defined urban form. This organic growth model lacked any preconceived or intentional planning or strategic intervention, but instead stemmed from environmental constraints and how those either accommodated or precluded human needs. Beyond solar access and a temperate climate conducive to food production, the overwhelming majority of these settlements were sited alongside a river or water body. Not only is water access essential to human activity, but also directly coincides with fertile land favorable to agricultural production and the presence of a variety of animal populations vital to hunter-gatherer civilizations. As these civilizations advanced and specialization occurred, these waterbodies were especially beneficial for the transport of goods from one village to another and therefore essential to a civilization’s economic prosperity (Stone 2016).

1.2 | Technological Advancements

Planned settlements, in contrast to organic settlements, mark one of the first physical manifestations of how technology has influenced the formation of civilizations. At the most basic
level, the design of residential dwellings began to evolve with the discovery of convection as a means to a natural, non-mechanized way to cool interior building space. This can be understood through architectural designs that employ an interior courtyard, siphoning hot air off through the gap in the ceiling, while cool air from outside is brought inside from the negative air pressure created by the warm air leaving. Similarly, the dogtrot house gained popularity as a way to maximize the natural cooling mechanism of cross breezes (Figure 1).

Many other basic technological advancements can be understood by studying the construction of ancient Rome. The “castra” was the Roman approach to defense in the form of a fortified military camp. This consisted of a walled area housing several encampments for military forces housed behind heavily secured gates (Stone, 2016). The Romans are also lauded for their road network, developed in 200 AD, which was fairly advanced at the time compared to other civilizations. These ancient roads, totaling over 50,000 miles and stretching from Scotland to North Africa, were developed primarily for defense and supply transport purposes, rendering Rome the most powerful empire of that time. The roads were constructed of cobblestones and were sophisticated enough to have a three-layer substructure as well as the capacity to handle stormwater with primitive curb and gutter. In areas with steep grades, surfaces were even notched to aid in traction for chariot wheels (Facts and Details 2008). The most famous road enduring today is the Appian Way, still a popular tourist destination in ancient Rome. A primitive road in Tuscany, Italy, was actually constructed such that the roadway channels water downhill to low spots for optimal drainage off of the hilltown of Monteriggioni (Figure 3).
In fact, ruins in Pompeii demonstrate another engineering feat – raised stepping stones – for when roadways flooded with rain, or even more regularly, sewage and refuse (Figure 3).

This investment demonstrates a priority placed on the pedestrian in this ancient civilization. Another lesson learned from Roman advancements in the physical design of civilizations were aqueducts, which mitigated the difficulty in accessing fresh water for areas with topological variation. These elevated canals were developed specifically to serve the hilltop dwellings, which were considered premier building sites and were typically where more affluent Romans resided. A chief driver of this trend was the sheer gravitational phenomenon whereby sewage and polluted stormwater flowed downhill, making building sites in low-lying areas less desirable. The Romans did eventually develop a rudimentary framework for sanitary reform, consisting of an elaborate network of sewers, which began to help mitigate infection and disease (Facts and Details, 2008).

A non-physical technological advance that shaped ancient Rome that is relevant to mention are their rudimentary planning policies, particularly during the reign of Caesar. First, the Romans
developed a functional classification for their streets, much like the typologies used today by various municipalities. The “itinera” were footpaths intended for pedestrian use; the “actus” permitted the passage of a single cart and was a local street; the “viae” was a wider street intended for two carts. A maximum street width of fifteen feet was also prescribed. Interestingly, as congestion of these streets increased under Caesar’s rule, he implemented a time restriction on street usage where carts were only allowed on streets at night, preserving the daylight hours for foot traffic. Policies relevant to building code and life safety were also pioneering during this time. For example, in order to minimize fire risk, ceramic tiles were required as roofing material and a fire break of a specified width began to be required between building structures (Stone, 2016). These planning principles are important to note as they have been incredibly formative in how planning policy has progressed into the present day.

1.3 | The Human

Beyond considering the ways in which ancient civilizations formed, it is helpful to examine how the human being, from a purely biological perspective, impacted civilization formation. By very nature of being orchestrated by a human being, the human approach to forming a civilization colors that civilization’s plan, size, resilience, and future. It is instructive to consider human tendencies that affect the human way of development. The biological makeup of human beings predisposes them to certain preferences that are expressed in the way civilization formation has evolved over the past centuries.

The human fascination with speed is evident in our culture today. Fast cars, fast athletes, and fast results are praised and highly desired. Reinforced by everything from Hollywood and the popularity of fast-paced action films to the fastest internet speed available on a fiber optic network, we live in a world where speed seems to be widely preferred to slowness. Researchers studying this phenomenon have found biological drivers that explain this human preference. Adrenaline is the first biological reaction that occurs in the human body when speed is experienced. This substance results in an instant increase in blood pressure, heartbeat, and sensitivity (Science 2013). Speed
also trips Monoamine Oxidase (MAO), a regulator present in the human brain associated with the dispensing of dopamine into the human system. Because dopamine functions as “reward chemical that is strongly related to pleasure-seeking behavior,” it is associated with “feel good feelings” that make speed exciting and pleasurable for humans (Park 2008).

These biological reactions set in motion when a human being experiences speed, primarily doses of adrenaline and dopamine, have had lasting effects in the way civilizations develop. It could be argued that the thrill of speed has been a driver in many of the technological advancements discussed previously, since many deliver a quicker, more efficient method for completing the tasks necessary to human survival and flourishing. This is true even in our discussion of the most primitive technologies of ancient civilizations. Today, we have permit expediters because the planning approval process is too long and cumbersome. We have an entire profession dedicated to moving information and good and services quickly in the form of modern-day couriers. Emerging construction technologies are chasing after ways to cut construction schedules and prefabricate or machine fabricate building components. When the economy is strong, we brag about how quickly a skyline can change and how fast a building “screamed out of the ground.” Our financial framework for real estate development in the United States today dictates that a speedy building delivery directly correlates to a shorter construction financing period, less risk, and higher profit margins. These are only a few of the ways speed has impacted the way our civilizations continue to develop and their urban form evolve.

Another biological preference human beings are predisposed to is an avoidance of fear and a preference for order and control. The amygdala, a component of the human limbic system, is the part of the human brain dedicated to sensing fear. It is understood to be the “integrative center for emotions, emotional behavior, and motivation” (Leotti 2010). Pavlovian conditioning, specifically fear conditioning, is focused on the information-output cycle that happens in the amygdala to reinforce what humans consider to be sources of fear. Because of the strong effect the amygdala has on human behavior, it can be reasonably understood that human beings prefer an environment that
is safe, predictable, and orderly to some extent. In circumstances where this is not preferred, humans desire to maintain complete control to manipulate their environment.

This human desire for order and control has an impact on how civilizations have developed and the urban form we experience today. It further reinforces the human preference for speed and efficiency, since the presence of these factors in the systems within our cities generally equate to more margin and flexibility, and therefore a lower chance of unpleasant, feared, or chaotic consequences or events. This desire can help explain countless aspects of town planning that have endured into today. For example, the orderly gridiron street structure specified in the Commissioner's Plan of 1811 for New York was a foundational decision the planmakers made that has arguably had the most influence on the city's urban form today (New York 2018).

Control and order are positive aspects the early sanitarians brought to congested cities suffering from disease and epidemics when they pioneered the field of public health with formalized sewer systems and “townsite consciousness.” The definition of townsite consciousness inherently points to an increasingly formal and rigid prescriptive approach in city development: “Cities, most sanitarians agreed, should be arranged as airy, verdant places free from excessive crowding and physical congestion. Their sites should be dry and readily drained of stormwater. Parks and trees should be abundant enough to refresh the air. Ample opportunities for outdoor exercise should exist. A pure water supply should be available as well as a fully developed sewerage system …” (Peterson 2003). The development of a protocol for street utilities, building setbacks, green spaces, and countless other items brought order to previously disordered city functions that lacked a framework for addressing the needs of the community.

Perhaps the most poignant example of the human desire for order and control as expressed through city planning is the concept of zoning. Zoning was first pioneered in the United States by Benjamin Marsh, who was the first executive secretary of the Committee on Congestion of the Population, a group established in 1907 to address overcrowding and poverty issues in cities. Marsh toured Europe in an attempt to glean methods from older cities on how to deal with these
issues, and proceeded to write the first American book dedicated exclusively to city planning, *An Introduction to City Planning: Democracy’s Challenge and the American City*. The book lauded Frankfurt, Germany, for its approach to planning and advocated for zoning, land taxes, and the municipal control of undeveloped land. Zoning spread rapidly and its popularity was contagious; in the decade following the enactment of New York’s zoning ordinance, 591 other jurisdictions followed suit and adopted similar policies to promote order in terms of land use, building use, density, and intensity (Peterson, 2003).

### 2.0 | Enter, The Automobile

With the introduction of the automobile in the early 1900s, city streets became increasingly unsafe due to a shortage of space to accommodate multiple programs, including vehicles, pedestrians, carriages, storefront activities, and utilities. In an effort to mitigate safety concerns and restore the sense of peace and tranquility that cities progressively lacked, the Garden City Movement was born. Planned communities such as Sunnyside Gardens and Radburn (often referred to as “A Town for the Motor Age”) attempted to alleviate overcrowding in cities and address the growing problem of automobiles by planning for the complete separation of pedestrian activity and...
automobile traffic. Houses were oriented away from the streets and instead toward the perceived safety of interior courtyards, incorporating meandering footpath walkways throughout the development that avoided vehicular streets (Stone, 2016). “In our mind’s eye we still had the theme that Ebenezer Howard had created so vividly in his book [Garden Cities of To-Morrow]. We did not fully recognize that our main interest had been transferred to a more pressing need, that of a town in which people could live peacefully with the auto – or rather in spite of it” (Stone, 2016). The automobile represents a significant shift in the design of cities and is clearly evidenced by street frameworks, suburbanization and sprawl, and the increasing homogeneity of cities today.

2.1 | Street Frameworks

The convenience of the automobile enabled people to have a greater degree of choice in where they chose to live, independent of their place of work. It is said that “Henry Ford freed common people from their limitations of geography.” The increase of mobility provided by the personal automobile was unprecedented, as was its ramifications on social order and human behavior; no longer did rural inhabitants need to live by a rail line or make a living in farming, nor were they limited to partake only in the community in their immediate vicinity. A departure from walking emerged and became an increasing trend as the automobile became affordable to the average American family, partly due to industrialization and assembly-line technologies, and partly due to the leadership and direction of Henry Ford to ensure that his workers “would be able to purchase the cars they were manufacturing.” (Center, 2018). With cars now increasingly occupying the right-of-way, streets no longer needed to exist in a gridiron framework that once made navigation simple and easy. With changing methods of defense, the once-unimaginable winding streets with scenic vistas and low connectivity to other roadways were more and more palatable and became the new norm in many emerging metropolitan areas. Streets began to widen to accommodate more and more car traffic, and the notion of walking to complete everyday errands was practically nonexistent in many suburban communities by the late 1960s.
2.2 | Suburbanization and Sprawl

The automobile greatly influenced the rise of suburbanization and sprawling development. A more mobile America coupled with low-interest home loans made possible by the GI Bill and an influx of new consumers returning home from the war contributed to a need for more housing and the ability to locate that housing farther outside the city center. The construction of highways nationwide spurred by the passing of The Federal Highway Act in 1956 only further reinforced the choice to be able to develop housing in what became the early suburbs. The suburbs were largely greenfields, and projects were not bound by many of the constraints that were present in ancient civilization formation. The birth of what became known as the “American Dream” began to take root in the 1950s-1960s, using new media, newspaper advertisements, and television to sell the idea of a safe, tranquil, suburban life away from the troubles and crime of the city – made possible by the personal car and its capability to allow you to commute into town just for the workday. Home became more and more important as home sizes grew, and community life slowly began to turn inward, away from the public park or city plaza, and instead to the personal backyard or private living room. Many suburban subdivisions began to be developed without sidewalks, further reinforcing the lack of pedestrian activity anticipated and desired in these environments. The impacts of this trend on public life, how we design for it, and the quality of our public spaces today are innumerable and heavily impacted by the introduction of one simple technological advancement that Americans understood as freedom from city life.

2.3 | Homogeneity of Cities

The speed with which Americans were now able to conduct business and move from one activity to the next, combined with a growing lack of interest in city life apart from the necessity to commute to and from an office building for the workday, created a void in city activity and vibrancy once the car was introduced. The suburbs effectively upstaged the city as the center of human life, leaving cities to become increasingly utilitarian and function-driven places of disinvestment, sterility, and boredom. Cities became known for being places where deep pockets of poverty were
concentrated, with the poor driven into the leftover spaces the rest of American deemed unworthy to be called home. These factors culminated in a growing tendency for cities to become increasingly homogeneous in form, visual appeal, and architectural character. Design nuances and critical thought were reserved to be spent in more suburban locations, if at all – since the new suburban frontier and consequential housing boom kept many of the best designers too busy for careful attention and detailed design. Urban places began to lose their uniqueness and cultural identity as speed and convenience shifted to be top priorities in planning and development. This is a reality that has persisted for decades since.

3.0 | Alternatively, A Slow Approach

According to Dogrusoy and Dalgakiran in their research on Slow Urbanism, “The ‘speed’ concept, credited as being one of the significant phenomena that shaped industrial cities, today creates a significant obstacle for sustainability and the healthy functioning of cities and their inhabitants. The speed that was gained with mechanization and industrialization has resulted in disintegration in the urban environment, disrupted of the relationship between place and the individual, and caused the rapid transformation of cultural and environmental values that once belonged to the place” (Dogrusoy 2017). It would be useful to consider a ‘slowing down’ as an instructive concept and method for regaining a sense of sustainability and link between environment and the individual.

Slow Urbanism, or Cittaslow, first originated in the Chianti region of Italy and was originally inspired by the Slow Food Movement. It continues to be closely related to Slow Food as a way to uphold local production, and the traditional, place-specific way of life connected to an area’s culture. Slow Food was started in part in reaction to the increasing presence of fast food-style restaurants and chains in Italian cities and hill towns. However, structurally, Slow Food is a grassroots movement while Cittaslow is a more formalized organization with several city-members who have agreed upon a common philosophy, charter, and goals. Inasmuch, it functions on a city policy level having the power to affect urban planning decisions and investments (Radstrom 2011). Cittaslow cities may
not be more than 50,000 residents, although this does not directly speak to compactness of form or lack of sprawl since there is no stipulation for land area size within the city limits of a candidate city. However, a focus on compact, pedestrian-oriented walkable form is reinforced in several areas of policy discussed in the Charter. Currently, there are 236 cities in 30 countries and territorial areas that exist in the context of 20 networks of active member cities (Cittaslow 2017). While the greatest concentrations of these member cities are located in Europe and southeastern Asia, North America currently has four member cities in southern Canada and two in California, Sonoma and Sebastopol (Cittaslow 2017).

As an organization, Cittaslow has a multi-faceted aim of promoting a “place-sustaining” framework for communities around the globe by championing “localization and the importance of identity” (Radstrom 2011). The rise of globalization has exacerbated the existing issues created by suburban sprawl that have led to an “Anywhere, USA” epidemic of placeless-ness and homogeneity in our communities today. Paolo Saturnini, the Mayor of Greve-in-Chianti and cofounder of the movement, believed in the “need for maintaining the qualities and characteristics of smaller urban regions [in cities] ... in the long run, cities would suffer by becoming large global metropolises with no local connections. Cities are all becoming uniform; they are losing their identity, their soul” (Radstrom, 2011). This observation is a useful metric for evaluating the trajectory of cities today.

As suggested by Dogrusoy and Dalgakiran, can we “put forward Slow Urbanism as an alternative approach in sustainable planning as it forms the antithesis of ‘speed’ and confronts the deformations of global culture shaped by fast consumption?” They remark, “In this world of increased technology and multi-tasking, many people are seeking a slower pace of life...They see a slower pace of life as being equal to a higher quality of life.”

Supporters of Slow Urbanism tend to share common values with environmentally conscious groups and advocates of healthy, physically active communities (Radstrom 2011). This illustrates the tie between walkability and Slow Urbanism, as walkability contributes to a more positive outcome for both. Several other ties exist between the growing repertoire of “good urban design” trending
in the United States and goals of the Slow Urbanism movement. Perhaps the difference is Slow Urbanism focuses on maintaining and protecting culturally unique assets and warding off policies that deviate from the organization’s Charter, while in the United States, much damage has been done and we must focus on retrofitting our existing urban form and re-capturing the elements that were quickly lost when we sped up.

3.1 | Cittaslow Goals & Policies

In terms of urban policy frameworks, Cittaslow endorses goals and policies that are founded upon six key components that represent the values and ambitions of the movement at the most basic level.

1. Environmental Policies
2. Infrastructure Policies
3. Technologies and Facilities for Urban Quality
4. Safeguarding Autochthonous Production
5. Awareness
6. Hospitality

Environmental Policies

The Cittaslow Charter contains several environmental policies centered on promoting sustainability and maintaining healthy living conditions for both humans and the planet. Generally speaking, the document defines this aspiration as “protection of the quality of the air, water, and soil,” and follows it up by suggesting practical implementations to support the goal. These include having an “energy-saving plan, banning the use of genetically modified crops in agriculture, the control of electromagnetic pollution, noise pollution and light pollution, and the promotion and dissemination of policies for the recycling of urban refuse and other wastes – including composting,
and the existence of a purification plant for sewage.” The Charter also speaks to the regulation of advertisements and traffic signs, instead promoting unified wayfinding and signage that is minimally disruptive to the natural environment and complements the urban design present in that specific district or locale. (Cittaslow 2017).

**Infrastructure Policies**

The Charter also places a high importance on infrastructure policies which further its overall vision of place-based sustainability. Therefore, there is a strong focus on prioritizing pedestrian-oriented design and championing alternative modes of transportation, all of which are expected to refrain from disrupting the existing sense of place and culturally significant urban forms. On a practical note, the Charter encourages the production of plans for safer mobility and alternate modes of transportation, acknowledging the need to set aside funding for studies prior to constructing these facilities that often are expensive and will forever change an area’s landscape, whether for better or for worse.

Infrastructure policies that in the United States would not traditionally be classified as such, include the “promotion of programs to facilitate family life and social connections, recreation and assistance for those in need,” and “plans for the distribution of locally produced merchandise and the creation of ‘commercial centres for natural products’.” Similarly, “maintaining commercial areas which are welcoming, hospitable and friendly.” While the link to infrastructure is slightly more indirect and not as straightforward as building a road, bridge, or widening a highway, these policies and goals are greatly impacted by decisions made in the infrastructure realm, and may not be protected or prioritized if siloed into another category. (Cittaslow 2017).

**Technologies and Facilities for Urban Quality**

Upholding urban quality is at the forefront of assaults Cittaslow is seeking to combat, acknowledging the human nature to biologically prefer ‘speed’ over ‘slow,’ despite the damaging effects of this preference in the long-run. Policies in this category include environmental
provisions for upholding urban quality, including the championing of bio-architecture and planting environmentally suitable native species in both public and private spaces. It also expands to speak to the ways in which Cittaslow would augment trash collection and a city’s philosophy of waste removal, by prescribing Cittaslow cities to provide refuse containers “in keeping with the environment” and “landscape removal according to established timetables,” covering both the pruning and upkeep of city landscaping as well as the removal of landscaping that is not flourishing and poses a safety hazard.

This category also contains provisions for technologies that promote high urban quality. These include equipping the city with fiber optic and wireless networks to ensure connectivity to neighboring locales and effective communication, as well as promoting telework when appropriate and possible to mitigate traffic, encourage cultivation at home, and provide an option to embed oneself more deeply in home community. This network would also provide education and citizen services from a municipal standpoint through the form of an “internet-based civic network.” Finally, the Charter also considers a “plan for controlling noise in specifically noisy areas,” and a “plan concerning colours,” to be critical factors for good urban quality. (Cittaslow 2017).

Safeguarding Autochronous Production

Focused on promoting native or indigenous goods and services, this policy category includes the following key points:

• Sustaining local, traditional industries and elements which represent the local identity. This area of policy relates directly to local context and sense of place

• Development of organic farming

• Certification of the quality of artisan produced products, objects and artistic crafts

• Programs for the safeguarding of artisan craft products, traditional methods of work and professions in danger of extinction
• Use of organic and local products and the preservation of local traditions in restaurants, protected structures and school cafeterias

• Programs for taste and nutrition education in schools in collaboration with Slow Food

• Favoring the activities of wine and gastronomic Slow Food Presidia for species and preparations risking extinction

• Census of the typical products of the local area and support of their commercialisation (updating of markets for local products and creation of appropriate spaces)

• Census of trees in the city and enhancing the value of large or ‘historical’ trees

• Promoting and preserving local cultural events

• Promoting “urban” and school gardens for autochronous cultures grown with traditional methods

(Cittaslow 2017).

Awareness

The Cittaslow focus on awareness suggests programs specifically tailored to equitably disseminating information and providing education to citizens on the city’s emphasis on Slow Urbanism and its benefits to be realized by the individual, family, and community as a whole. In particular, the Charter urges cities to focus on “programs to involve the social fabric in acquiring the “slow” philosophy and the application of Cittaslow projects and in particular: educational gardens and parks, book facilities, adhesion to the project of the germplasm bank,” and a general concentration on public education and organization marketing. (Cittaslow 2017).

Hospitality

While perhaps not as applicable immediately to cities in the United States considering Slow Urbanism as a “sprawl antidote,” the Charter’s explanation of “Hospitality” reinforces the
correlation between implementing slow principles and the growing attractiveness of an area, evidenced by this section dedicated to outwardly representing the city to tourists and visitors. Specific applications in this section include provisions that underscore the main goal of “helping residents and tourists feel at home,” while there is a subtle presence of the acceptance of tourist not only because it makes a city beloved regionally or globally, but also for the financial benefits of tourism as an economic industry. The Charter recommends Slow Cities do the following:

• Provide training courses for tourist information and quality hospitality
• Make use of international signs in the tourist signs of the historical centres with guided tourist itineraries
• Welcome policies and plans to facilitate the approach of the visitors to the city and access to information and services (parking, extension/elasticity of opening hours of public offices, etc.) with particular regards to scheduled events
• Preparation of “slow” itineraries of the city (brochures, websites, home pages, etc.)
• Making the tourist operators and storekeepers aware of the need for a transparency of prices and the exhibition of rates outside the business establishments (Cittaslow 2017).

3.2 | A Practical Intervention

A common pattern typical of many areas characterized as surban or suburban and containing varying quantities of strip center-style retail centers is the tendency for customers to re-park their car for each errand within the shopping district, albeit within a small geographic radius. Aiming instead to create a “park once, walk everywhere” environment allows people to park their vehicle, should that be their chosen method of transportation to a district, and from that point navigate throughout the district safely on foot or by bike, whether that bike is personal or equipment associated with a bike share program.
Multimodal paths, intended to be parallel to existing vehicular-focused roadways to provide safe, green, multimodal and equitable linkages between various developments and destinations, can be put forward as a practical consideration to realizing the “park once, walk everywhere” ambition. These formalized pathways, typically either surfaced in asphalt or concrete, may be located alongside an existing roadway in the right-of-way, through the perimeter of a surface parking lot’s underutilized space, or a combination of both in conjunction with other “leftover spaces” like redundant access drives, vacant land, or in occasionally in vegetative or floodplain buffers.

These paths help us physically “slow down,” and help us as we physically “slow down” with age. Jan Gehl, a Danish architect and designer, helps us understand the nuances of experiencing the urban realm on foot as opposed to in a vehicle. He recognizes, “There is now a considerable confusion in the gap between large and small scales and between ‘quick’ and ‘slow’ architecture.” ‘Slow’ architecture is that of the pedestrian, generally traversing a landscape at roughly 5 kilometers per hour, or 3 miles per hour. Spaces can be small at this speed; rich detail is perceptible and appreciated because maneuvering on foot provides the flexibility to interact with ground floor plinths and building facades. Gehl believes the ground floor shopfront has the potential to be a multi-sensory experience, weaving in smells, touches, tastes, and sounds that have strong emotional associations. Conversely, ‘quick’ architecture is associated with speeds of 60 kilometers per hour, or 37 miles per hour, which is roughly the travel speed of a car along roadways in and around urban cores. “Here large spaces and signs are a necessity, and since drivers and passengers cannot perceive detail when they are moving at this speed, the matching architecture is characterized by smooth buildings short on detail.” A problem arises when confusion exists over these two scales, an issue heavily plaguing modern cities today. “Pedestrians are often forced to walk in 60 km/h urban landscapes, while new urban buildings are designed as boring and sterile 60 km/h buildings in traditional 5 km/h streets” (Gehl 2013). This is how the suburbs are presently constructed, characterized by wide right-of-ways, narrow or nonexistent unbuffered sidewalks, and minimal architectural detail. There is no reason to slow down, and so the automobile remains the transportation mode of choice among the majority for these reasons and more.
But what happens when the option to drive begins to become less practical? By the year 2025, 66 million Americans will be turning 65-years old, which is a 38-percent increase in a mere 10-year window (Burns 2016). The Baby Boomer generation, presently between 52- and 70-years of age, are made up of individuals either already retired or anticipating retirement in the short-term. Unique to this generation is a desire to stay engaged; a trend growing among many Boomers is the choice to remain employed on a part-time basis, consult, take up a side-gig, or intentionally pursue a new hobby or passion project. Modern advances in medicine and healthcare are only adding to America’s “graying trend,” and it is imperative that the built environment responds to the particular challenges this will present. Varied modes of transportation, and the alternative to ‘slow down,’ will serve this generation greatly and provide the flexibility they will need to access daily needs, remain engaged in community life, and be afforded the opportunity to age in place. In this way, seniors will not be forced to relocate to the popular “active adult” community far from the city center or extract themselves from a community where they have deep roots and rich relationships, for the sole reason that the urban form is no longer conducive to their basic mobility needs as they age out of driving.

3.3 | Case Studies

Path Parkway, Atlanta, GA

A local example of a multimodal road is Path Parkway in Atlanta, GA. This new 1.5-mile stretch of cycletrack and dedicated pedestrian corridor was formerly the two southbound lanes of Tech Parkway, an autocentric roadway with narrow sidewalks. W Tech Parkway borders the western edge of the Georgia Institute of Technology. Prior to conversion, Tech Parkway was an underutilized four-lane thoroughfare separated by a large landscaped center median. To continue to accommodate traffic in its new iteration, the two northbound lanes were re-striped to allow one lane for circulation in either direction. This project sets an important precedent for the possibility of implementing a road diet on an existing roadway and promoting a more walkable and bikeable environment by rededicating existing resources. The Path Parkway project was funded through a joint partnership between Georgia Tech and the Path Foundation.
The Anacostia Trail, Washington D.C.

This new trail-oriented development is located along the backside of the D.C. Wharf – a mixed-use development and popular day-trip destination for visitors – located to southwest D.C. This mega project is not yet complete but already features a working 10- to 12-foot trail surface attracting both bicycle and pedestrian users. Developed by the D.C. Department of Transportation, the Anacostia Trail runs along both sides of the Anacostia River and functions both as a recreational opportunity and transportation alternative, with several popular residences, workplaces, and other destinations accessible by the trail. To mirror its dual purpose, the trail design takes into consideration a variety of users, including runners, cyclists, walkers, and skaters. Several initiatives to complement the system are being incorporated in tandem with its development. A few examples include trail-side seating, interactive online and mobile maps, wayfinding and trail signage, and bicycle racks. Moreover, the trail is truly accessible to a diverse group of users due to its close proximity to several public parking lots and two Navy Yard Metro stations. Presently, over half of the planned 20 miles have been completed (Capitol 2018).
Allen Street Cycle Track, New York City, NY

The Allen Street Cycletrack project originated due to safety concerns for pedestrians and cyclists. Before the roadway’s conversion and re-dedication to multimodal traffic, it was a 110-foot-wide thoroughfare with three travel lanes in each direction, crosswalks that were too long to safely traverse, and bicycle lanes that were located between travel lanes and parking lanes. Today, Allen Street features protected bicycle lanes, dedicated pedestrian walkways, public plazas, improved landscaping, and fixed seating. The project has resulted in a 35-percent decrease in automobile and bicycle crashes and an increase in bike ridership (43-percent for northbound traffic and 23 percent for southbound traffic) (NACTO 2017).

![Figure 8. Allen Street Cycle Track in New York City, NY. Source: NACTO, 2017.](image)

Westlake Cycle Track, Seattle, WA

The Westlake Cycle Track, constructed in 2016, is a protected bike lane is a 1.2-mile stretch of dedicated cycletrack. It is located both along Westlake Avenue North and within an existing public parking lot situated between the Fremont Bridge and South Lake Union, linking downtown Seattle to neighborhoods on the north end. Including planning, design, and construction, the project totaled $6.1 million, of which $1.7 million was funded by a Puget Sound Regional Council grant, local funds, and bonds. A public outreach effort led by the Seattle Department of Transportation strategically involved local community members who lived and worked in the area so that the planning process was as inclusive and community-led as possible. This was particularly critical surrounding the issue of eliminating parking capacity in the existing surface lot to accommodate the
cycletrack. Bike ridership has reportedly doubled since the cycle track’s opening compared to the year prior. In final form, the project team managed to preserve 90-percent of existing parking and protect the interests of community members reliant on the public lot as well as transform the area into a better designed corridor that more equitably accommodates multiple modes of transportation (Seattle 2018).

3.4 | Policy Intervention

Promoting zoning ordinances that allow for mixed-use development patterns instead of single-use zoning classes creates a land use pattern that only further encourages this “park once, walk everywhere” idea, by varying the types and purposes of destinations people are able to access in close proximity to their original destination within a particular district. Co-locating spaces in the same building or within a .25-mile walking radius, the generally accepted 5-minute normal standard for the distance a person is willing and able to walk, produces a multitude of positive effects beyond alleviating vehicular congestion on roadways. Other effects include environmental benefits such as reduction in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, encouraging people towards physical activity and promoting a healthier active lifestyle, and mental and emotional health benefits from regular exposure to the outdoors and a decreased time spent enduring traffic stress. Perhaps the most poignant and overarching benefit is the general ability to lead a “slower” life afforded by the reduction in time spent commuting and instead allowing people to spend time inhabiting our cities, towns, and public spaces so that we might better design with the human in mind, restoring the link between the environment and the individual that was lost when we sped up.
The city of Charlotte, North Carolina began a process in 2015 of rewriting the city’s zoning code. According to Joe Padilla, the executive public policy director of the Real Estate and Building Industry Coalition in Charlotte, the current zoning ordinance was quite outdated and increasingly irrelevant and ineffective at fostering the type of community that is desired. Like many traditional Euclidian codes, it focused on separating land uses instead of promoting mixes of uses. In an article encouraging the public to participate in and understand the relevance of the code update to their everyday lives, Ely Portillo captures the general public understanding of zoning codes: “Zoning rules are often seen as arcane, dense and stuffy – any 830-page document describing parking ratios and the proper placement of garbage receptacles in strip malls would struggle to be a quick read. But they’re incredibly important. By dictating what can be built where, and how densely, such laws spin the invisible web that underpins the physical city.” He describes a unifying goal, despite differing positions of various interest groups in the city including developers, neighborhood coalitions, and government officials, to be an agreement that the current zoning code and rezoning process are not functioning properly to address today’s issues (Portillo 2015).

The entire code rewrite is expected to take at least four years to complete, which would likely mean that the new code would not be a governing document until 2020. It is an expensive endeavor; however, the city recognizes the expenses it currently incurs as a result of the current outdated code. “To accommodate new projects, Charlotte’s zoning code has been loaded up with amendments. Almost every rezoning request that comes up these days is handled on a “conditional” basis, with deviations from the approved code. That means the city often scrutinizes each detail and handles them on a case-by-case basis…95-percent of rezoning approvals in Charlotte are conditional.” This slows the process down and requires the city to spend countless man-hours managing the zoning code mess, undoubtedly resulting in an opportunity lost to use those resources to develop and promote other public services that could benefit the city. The new code is expected to be a hybrid of the traditional Euclidian zoning and the newer form-based code structure that places a heavier
emphasis on physical urban form, building density and bulk, and active ground floor design, rather than use (Portillo 2015).

2018 Livable Centers Initiative, Alpharetta, GA

The City of Alpharetta was awarded a Livable Centers Initiative (LCI) grant funding in 2017 to support the study of the North Point Activity Center, a 1.5-mile corridor of suburban-style strip center retail development with the North Point Mall situated at its center. Located approximately 30 miles north of Atlanta in north Fulton County, Alpharetta is known as the “Technology Capitol of the South” and boasts one of the highest median incomes in the southeast. With North Point Mall having recently lost several key tenants to Avalon, a nearby walkable and compact development created as an entertainment destination, City staff and community members had a strong desire to see the North Point district re-imagined and transformed into a walkable area characterized by quality retail and varied mixed-use development styles. In a recent article discussing the presence of mixed-use communities in North Fulton, Greenstone Properties partner Chris Scott commented, “Tenants are willing to pay for new construction if the property is part of a mixed-use destination. I don’t think you’re going to see anymore six-story, surface-parked buildings” (Schenke 2018). Reinforcing the aforementioned “slowing down” principle of “park once, walk everywhere,” Scott agrees, “They don’t want a building that’s a stand-alone where you have to get in your car to go do anything.”

A key component to achieving the city’s goal of walkability and quality mixed-use retail, and appearing as one of the items on the LCI’s 100-day priority action item list for implementation, is the updating of the City’s Planned Shopping Center (PSC) zoning category to allow for mixed-used developments. Presently, integrating any type of office or residential into the corridor’s parcels zoned PSC, which constitutes the vast majority of the study area, is considered illegal. In order to move forward, a zoning update would be essential.

Beyond illustrating the practical intervention toward a “slowing down” by means of restructuring zoning ordinances to allow for co-location of destinations and promotion of
The North Point LCI is also an excellent example of leaning on multimodal paths to achieve this goal. Through a robust process of public engagement, it became apparent that the community would prefer to preserve North Point Parkway, the key arterial that serves as the spine of the study area, as a vehicular corridor placing a priority on efficiently moving traffic throughout the area. Instead of incorporating walkability into the street section within the right-of-way limits, the project team made the strategic decision to target surface parking lots abutting North Point Parkway and buffer zones behind retail businesses as prime opportunities for formalized multimodal paths. In this way, the plan maximized an existing resource — surface parking — that was abundantly available in the study area making up 30-percent of its land area, and instead re-dedicate and reclaim this resource as a flexible asset that could morph into a new function to better meet the community’s needs.

4.0 | Slow-Supporting American Trends

The City of Atlanta and her metropolitan surrounding areas have enormous potential to reverse the adverse effects of speed and infuse a tailor-fit brand of Slow Urbanism to its urban frameworks. While the City of Atlanta proper has made tremendous strides to slow down in terms of walkability namely in the form of the Atlanta Beltline, surrounding metropolitan areas are lagging behind and have unique challenges and opportunities that lend these areas to a slightly different framework than a rails to trails conversion. After examining the nature of this framework, a concentrated discussion of the potential for implementation in an Atlanta metropolitan community will be explored and analyzed.

4.1 | The Surban® Phenomenon

John Burns coined this new real estate buzzword and defines Surban® as being “a suburban area that has the feel of urban, with walkability to great retail from a house or apartment,” in his book Big Shifts Ahead (Burns 2016). It is a “unique blend of suburban and urban,” affording those who cannot afford to live in the increasingly unaffordable urban core with a more urbane lifestyle.
option that maintains some of the “slow” perks of urban living. In particular, these include access to locally-sourced restaurants, proximity to public transit, streets with sidewalks and multimodal paths, an abundance of “third places” for community interaction and spontaneous encounters, and mixed-use activity centers that offer activities that are culturally-rich and place-specific.

From a land use perspective, Surban® places typically have higher-density, more compact nodes of residential that exist in a variety of forms, whether mid- to high-rise multi-family for-rent or for-sale housing units, attached fee-simple townhouses, or detached single-family houses on small

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**Figure 10. The Spectrum of the Surban® lifestyle, understood through the relative scoring of the lifestyle among several metrics, with Urban and Suburban as the two extremes. Source: Burns, 2016.**
lots.

4.2 | Small Lot Policies and Residential Trends

Planners and developers are finding power in policy and knowledge in market trend analysis to better address chronic issues of housing affordability, access to quality amenities, and sprawl. One such policy adopted in Los Angeles is a small-lot ordinance allowing for the construction of homes that are fee-simple, contrasting the popular shared form of ownership condominiums historically utilize. Poised as an infill solution to densify underutilized land area, this policy gratifies the growing trend toward an “urbane lifestyle in a walkable neighborhood,” currently desired by a growing market segment (Macht 2014). The small-lot ordinance increases a parcel’s development potential from one single-family structure to up to twenty-four “urban houses” per acre, which is arguably a more appropriate “highest and best use” for the land. This new pattern of development unlocks the possibility for more future homeowners to enjoy core nodes, greenspaces, and revitalizing activity centers – essentially, urbanity – in a manner that does not hinge on the automobile or necessitate battling Los Angeles’ traffic.

Another relevant policy that directly impacts efforts to diversify housing stock is a
The jurisdiction’s setback requirements as codified in its zoning ordinance. While useful to correct poorly ventilated, poorly exposed, and overcrowded tenement-style housing of the past, setbacks can be overly restrictive when applied to a parcel or assemblage of parcels. They effectively encourage the “typical townhome configuration” where units share long walls and are simply arranged in a long, linear fashion (Macht 2014), because the developer must concentrate them in the center of the property to maintain a minimum distance from adjacent property lines on all sides. This is particularly important to consider with the growing trend of “personalization” and the individualistic nature of Western society. The desire for custom-designed goods and services is pervasive in our culture – from a person’s Starbucks’s drink to his hand-picked, curated wardrobe. Developer Michael Marini even admits, “people buying in [small urban infill] neighborhoods tend to appreciate good design.” (Khouri 2015). For this reason, buyers have hesitated at semi-attached housing and condominiums, deemed “cookie-cutter,” and sought addresses that do not incorporate complicated letters of the alphabet or unit numbers. After all, who wants to be just a number?

Mordoch’s “careful design so that each house is light and airy,” varied lot sizes, and uniquely designed at-grade outdoor spaces enable prospective buyers to still have a property that feels distinctive (Macht 2014).

Conversely, according to Wingfield, to forgo “expansive” sprawl is to promote “expensive” home prices. He argues “growing upward” correlates to a lack of affordability and cautions Atlanta – a city with a growing population – against ceasing its sprawling growth outward (Wingfield 2016). Sprawl is characterized by low density ratios, seas of surface parking, and auto-biased infrastructure.
These attributes are not inherent to growing outward. Is it possible to grow outward, but in a more sustainable fashion? Could we replicate Murdoch’s model in an area with a lower cost of living and still deliver a quality product? Macht is not calling for an urban growth boundary policy, but proposing a more efficient use of resources. Fee-simple housing and small-lot ordinances meet market demands and are powerful tools that allow for greater flexibility in land development.

4.3 | Commercial Setbacks and Creative Placemaking

A hallmark of the suburban American retail corridor is attached, strip-center style development that is one- to two-stories in height and is setback a great distance from the roadway, buffered by a sea of parking spaces with oftentimes minimal landscaping. This was previously discussed as being a condition of the North Point Activity Center, a study area composed of 30-percent surface parking. These setbacks do not encourage Slow Urbanism. While they not only hinder walkability, they also have economic ramifications, since businesses have very poor visibility from the roadway. Moreover, the majority of these corridors were developed without any sort of priority places on interparcel connectivity, resulting in redundant curb cuts and more uncertainty for pedestrians, cyclists, and vehicles attempting to coexist in the right-of-way.

Today’s consumers are looking for a shopping environment that blends culture and entertainment into the experience. Creative placemaking has emerged as a powerful trend in real estate development that is being integrated into new projects at unprecedented rates. End-users have come to expect new developments to deliver a “wow-factor” that is incredibly multifaceted: they must be unique – by being true to the local context of the community; sought after – they attract visitors from neighboring communities; and accessible – only a short walk from your front door. This concept can effectively turn the typical single-family or townhouse community into a mixed-use entertainment destination.

In a very real sense, consumers are attracted to the traditional essence of old towns and desire to see practical aspects appropriate to the modern-day of “Main Street, USA” reincarnated in their community. “Walkability, proximity to daily destinations and quarter-mile pedestrian sheds are
integral aspects of many old towns,” (Evangelopoulos 2016). Emerson explains “It has only been within the last seventy-five years that suburban developments have become increasingly synonymous with the unsustainable sprawl of use-based zoning” (Emerson 2007).

5.0 | A Candidate for Slow Principles

The City of Smyrna, Georgia has experienced several waves of revitalization in recent years, most notably an LCI study grant in 2003 that resulted in a walkable town center, as well as the relocation of the Atlanta Braves baseball team and its resultant infusion of private development dollars to build a new stadium and surrounding supporting developments. Additionally, the Spring Road Corridor LCI study was recently completed in 2017, taking a deeper look at the corridor-specific impacts and proposing recommendations and initiatives in light of the new Braves stadium, SunTrust Park. The City has several unique assets beyond these real estate developments, including a connection point to the Silver Comet Trail, an abundance of City green spaces and parks, close proximity to I-75 and I-285, and transit bus service provided through Cobb County with mobility access connecting to MARTA in Fulton County. The LCI Master Plan aims to position one of Smyrna’s key arterials - Spring Road - as a corridor that creates “connected communities with multimodal access for all users, including transit, roadways, walking, and biking” (Spring 2017). Similarly, a Georgia Tech studio performed in conjunction with the LCI included recommendations to enliven and connect the area including a bicycle/pedestrian network, street typologies, and the identification of key character areas and districts (Smyrna 2015).

Despite the recent planning efforts, implementation can take time and Smyrna is presently still coping with the adverse effects of its previous identity as a sprawling suburb. Despite the walkable, mixed-use new development incorporated into the SunTrust Park, referred to as “The Battery,” access to these shops and restaurants is difficult for pedestrians and requires crossing Cobb Parkway, an enormous 11-lane roadway. This starkly contrasts with the street section once inside The Battery – a pedestrian “safe haven” – characterized by two-lane roadways flanked by ample sidewalks, with some streets being designated as pedestrian-only.
5.1 | Context

In order to improve that walkability, an assessment of existing conditions and determination of factors that are under-performing or unnecessarily redundant may highlight some opportunities for regaining square footage that could be allocated to greater quantities of space prioritized for pedestrian circulation. The below map depicts political boundaries, parklands, waterbodies and pedestrian circulation.

Boundary Location Map

Figure 13. Location map of Smyrna and I-75/I-285 surrounding areas.
streams, and parcels and roadways for the eastern side of the City of Smyrna and area surrounding the I-75/I-285 Interchange and SunTrust Park. According to the US Census Bureau, Smyrna’s population was 56,664 in 2016, and is projected to continue to grow as the area gains popularity for being an inner-suburb of Atlanta that is easily accessible to downtown jobs and employment centers. Given the predisposition to sprawl typical of Atlanta’s suburban areas, however, this is actually a workable population size not far outside of the reach of the Cittaslow required cap for member cities. Even with growth, this is a great starting place to begin studying, planning for, and even implementing Slow Urbanism principles and interventions in the City of Smyrna.

5.2 | Existing Urban Framework

Block Size Analysis

According to the H+T Affordability Index’s 2017 data, only 3-percent of workers Smyrna’s city limits ride transit, and transportation costs as a percentage of household income are approaching housing costs, at 21-percent and 28-percent, respectively (Center, 2018). Annual vehicle-miles traveled per household is 19,537 (Center, 2018), which is considerably higher than in Atlanta’s urban core, which ranges from 12,000 to 14,000 mile per year overall (Center, 2018) but varies greatly by neighborhood. Average block size in Smyrna is 13 acres, or 566,280 square feet (Center, 2018), meaning that for a perfectly square block with no intervening streets, one block edge would be 752 feet in length. This defies the traditional quarter-mile pedestrian shed rule of thumb (1,320 feet) for nearly all trips that require the pedestrian to venture outside of a single block (Figures 14, 15, 16 on the following pages). Any trips outside of the block on foot are not possible for some, depending on physical capabilities — and at best, are inconvenient for all. This metric begins to explain the inadequacy of Smyrna’s urban fabric and lack of conduciveness for walkability. It should be noted that the 2015 Smyrna Studio in collaboration with other entities proposed bisecting an oversized parcel with a pedestrian path to enable better circulation into The Battery. The lot in question is presently a Lexus dealership, which occupies the northwest corner of the US-41/Cobb Parkway and Spring Road intersection (Studio 2015).
Figure 14. Block A shows the average block size in Smyrna, at 13 acres. The maximum distance to traverse this block from edge to edge, assuming the square footage is arranged in a perfect square, is 1,025 feet. This closely approaches the maximum 1,320 foot metric used for a “comfortable 0.25-mile walk.” Some trips from Block A to Block B are still within this threshold (shown in pink lines), but for destinations much farther outside this area, namely in Blocks C, D, or edges of any other block, shatter the threshold (shown in red lines). This is a simple diagrammatic approach to demonstrating the lack of walkability created by Smyrna’s large block structure.
Figure 15. A suggested block framework that enables a trip from the edge of Block C to the edge of Block G in a 9x9 grid, as well as any other possible trip, to fall within the 1,320 foot “comfortable 0.25-mile walk” metric.
Figure 16. Smyrna’s average block size scaled and overlaid for visual comparison on top of the suggested average block grid diagram from Figure 14.
5.3 | Recent Investments

Immediately east of Smyrna’s city limits sits SunTrust Park and adjacent mixed use development The Battery. Opening in early 2017, this recent investment sparked not only interest in the relocation of the Atlanta Braves baseball team from Turner Field in Atlanta to Cobb County, but also in the influx of private capital towards an area that is ripe for redevelopment that is sustainable, place-based, and contrary to its existing suburban sprawl conditions. The Battery is consistent with the character of a compact, walkable environment Cittaslow endorses. SunTrust Park is not only environmentally-conscious, obtaining the LEED Silver recognition for green development, but The Battery has attracted restaurants with local Atlanta flavor, including Fox Brother BBQ, Terrapin Brewery, and Antico Pizza, to name a few. Other uses include hotel, for-sale and for-rent housing, retail, and a concert theater. Plazas, amphitheater-style seating, an intimate-sized green space with a concert stage, and high-quality public furniture and seating areas are all incorporated into the development’s narrow streets, one of which is closed to vehicular traffic altogether.

Figure 17. Tree-lined residential streets of The Battery, featuring abundant landscaping, lighting, banner signage, and active ground floor retail. Source: The Battery Atl website.

Figure 18. Pedestrian-sized comfortable green space serves as both a gateway SunTrust park entrance and concert venue, available for public use year-round. Source: The Battery Atl website.
Parking decks were included in the development plan, but game days see several fans and restaurant-goers utilizing public transit or parking off-site and accessing the development on foot or through shuttle services. Three pedestrian bridges were scoped as part of the development, and provide much-needed access and walkability to this transitioning area, including a bridge over Circle 75 Parkway, a bridge over I-285, and a bridge over I-75 that was widened to accommodate pedestrians, formerly the Windy Ridge Parkway bridge.

Another notable feature in the planning of this development was a corrective action taken from a lesson learned from Turner Field, the former home of the Braves. In her article, “The Other 284 Days,” Rebecca Burns chronicles the lost opportunity of Turner Field to engage the surrounding neighborhoods and operate as an activity center on the total number of days that the Braves did not have a home game occurring to activate the stadium. Shops and restaurants were situated on the interior of the stadium, necessitating a ticket to patronize, and failing to be open and operating except on game days (Burns, 2018).

To remedy this, The Battery was conceived as a development that would be more outward-facing, open 365 days, and operate as a separate entity to serve the community independently of the food and restaurants available within the actual SunTrust Park stadium. No ticket is needed to visit The Battery or its attractions, and game days find many people sitting on outdoor verandas, playing at the centrally located splash pad plaza, or enjoying the communal green as park space.

Sandwiched between the I-75/I-285 interstate interchange — a somewhat logical location for a regional sports stadium — the unexpected inclusion of The Battery in the overall development project has most impressively created an active, mixed-use destination with a growing sense of place at a seemingly unlikely location, setting an important precedent for other inner-ring suburbs and removing doubts that any place is too-far suburbanized to change course.
Figure 19. Interior streets of The Battery showcasing restaurant roof decks and abundant ground floor glazing for active shopfronts. Source: The Battery Atl website.

Figure 20. Atlanta’s own Antico Pizza, originally located in the Home Park neighborhood, supports local food and a place-based economy. Source: The Battery Atl website.

Figure 21. Atlanta’s own Fox Brothers BBQ, originally located in the Edgewood neighborhood, supports local food and a place-based economy. Source: The Battery Atl website.
Figure 22. Key Points of Interest.
Residential Use Parcels

Figure 23. Parcels Zoned for Residential Uses, including Planned Village Communities and Urban Condominiums.
5.4 | Mobility Choice

Existing, Programmed, and Proposed Paths

The below maps show the existing paths and programmed paths in the vicinity, while the map on the opposing page illustrates the full path network envisioned for the area with the inclusion of proposed future paths.

Existing paths include a recreational path through the Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area (in the southwest corner of the map) and on-road facilities in and around major developments, including Circle 75 Parkway around SunTrust Park, Spring Road westward toward Smyrna, Cumberland Boulevard on the southwest edge of Cumberland Mall, and northward on US-41/Cobb Parkway.

Programmed paths are not currently existing but in the planning stages, including the

Figure 24. Existing and Programmed Path Networks.
Figure 25. Complete Path Network.
Chattahoochee River Connector alongside SunTrust Park, as well as Bob Callan Trail along I-75 North, which will run parallel to the existing multimodal path on Akers Mill Road.

Proposed paths add to the network of existing and programmed paths, but are still in early stages of planning, approval, and feasibility study. The entirety of the proposed network links onto the existing network and does not exist in a vacuum — a positive attribute that maximizes funding and creates the most comprehensive network possible while still maintaining contiguity. Another interesting attribute is the concentration of proposed paths northward of the interchange, dedicated primarily to connecting predominately residential areas with the places of interests to the south. This is evidence of the beginnings of path planning for the end-user to benefit from using the path not only for recreational purposes, but also as an alternative means of transportation that begins to support the “park once, walk everywhere” philosophy consistent with Slow Urbanism discussed earlier. Another notable proposed path is the vector that bisects the SunTrust Park/The Battery node — a step in the right direction of creating smaller blocks of pedestrian scaled spaces that fall within the 0.25 comfortable walk rule of thumb.

Several other informal paths are only activated during certain large-scale events and are implemented by active flagmen or paid officers, the majority of the time, during a Braves baseball game or event at the Cobb Galleria. These are not represented on the map due to their “pop-up” nature and the agility and flexibility with which they can change and adapt.

**Bus Service**

The map in Figure 21 depicts bus routes and bus stops in the area, an important factor to consider as it contributes to the breadth of choice available beyond automobile travel and travel on foot along dedicated paths. The area is serviced by Cobb LINC, the County’s local bus service, and bisected by the GRTA Express Route that runs north-south within the I-75 corridor. Bus stop locations provide satisfactory coverage of the area, but there are key residential nodes not well-serviced by the route network, including the area northeast of I-75 and directly west of Heritage Pavilion Shopping Center.
Figure 26. Existing Local and Express Service via Cobb LINC and GRTA.
5.5 | Honing in on a Reasonable Walkshed

The concentric circles below represent different walking-sheds with a residential node as the point of origin. Specifically, this node includes the townhome and apartment communities Ashford 75 and Crescent Park. While we know that the “comfortable walk” is 0.25 miles in any direction, given the existing urban framework and large block size and roadway widths in the area, is will be useful to consider 1.00 miles as a given radius to ensure we are evaluating an area that includes a variety of land uses, potential origins and destinations. While this may not be considered to be a “comfortable” distance for all special interest groups and populations, it takes into account the cycling population and increased distance able to be effectively covered on a bicycle, assuming pathways accommodate both pedestrian and bicycle traffic.

Figure 27. Walkshed Diagram.
5.6 | Evaluating “Highest and Best Use”

This walkshed includes SunTrust Park/The Battery, several residential uses, and both Cumberland Square North (northeast of US-41) and Heritage Pavilion (southwest of US-41) shopping centers. These shopping centers are similar in form to the auto-centric retail corridor discussed earlier, with massive setbacks from the roadway, overbuilt parking lots with minimal landscaping, and low-rise attached retail.

One way to further the principles of Slow Urbanism in this walkshed and increase walkability in the area would be to identify ways to elevate pedestrian activity and support the “park once, walk everywhere” philosophy to connect areas along the corridor. Both shopping centers represent key opportunities to incorporate multimodal paths that connect to the overall path network and are “quick-win” projects for the community by implementing similar principles discussed in the “Case Studies” chapter of this report.

Heritage Pavilion

Cumberland Square North

Figure 28. Heritage Pavilion (left) and Cumberland Square North (right) Google Image Aerials.
Currently, these shopping centers utilize building setbacks ranging from 300 to 470 feet from the street curb, setting a minimum distance from roadway to shopfront door that a pedestrian must traverse to patronize these establishments. From the aerial images, it is also evident that the parking lots for these centers are hardly full, leaving much land area unoccupied and underutilized in this walkshed area near the interchange and close to so many regional points of interest. Arguably, this is not the “highest and best use” of this land that is only increasing in value as new development continues in the area. Instead, Slow Urbanism would argue that a more equitable, sustainable, healthy, and forward-looking usage of this space would be to re-dedicate a small percentage of it to encouraging walkability as a viable option. This area is indeed becoming the “unique blend of suburban and urban,” typical of an area growing in Surban® character, and affording the community opportunities to live a more urbane lifestyle will be important to the area’s success and longevity.

Figure 29. The enormous 7-lane roadway needed to cross US-41 to access The Battery and SunTrust Park. Crossing is manned by a paid crossing guard during game days. Source: Allison Galloway.

Figure 30. Cumberland Square North vacancies and building typology. Source: Allison Galloway.
Figure 31. Cumberland Square North empty surface parking lot with large amounts of impervious surface and minimal landscaping. Source: Allison Galloway.

Figure 32. Cumberland Square North new Vietnamese restaurant with outdoor seating. Source: Allison Galloway.

Figure 33. Cumberland Square North connection across US-41 looking toward Heritage Pavilion. Massive grade change and no sidewalks. Source: Allison Galloway.

Figure 34. Pedestrian entering Cumberland Square North alongside vehicular traffic via US-41 entrance lacking sidewalks. Source: Allison Galloway.
Figure 35. Heritage Pavilion does not have the vacancies Cumberland Square North does. More landscaping is present, better striping, and overhead lighting. Source: Allison Galloway.

Figure 36. Expanse of underutilized surface parking present at Heritage Pavilion. Source: Allison Galloway.

Figure 37. Massive crossing distance at the entrance to Heritage Pavilion off of US-41. Source: Allison Galloway.
The following images depict practical interventions to help achieve a more balanced environment of transportation alternatives in the form of a site plan diagram and section sketch, and help Smyrna and the I-75/I-285 Interchange area slow down, and “up-zoning” portions of the sprawling parking lots of these two shopping centers in order to add to the area’s comprehensive path network and better connect the district.

By locating the multimodal paths predominately at the parking lot edge, it allows for flexibility for future development, whether it is outparcel buildings to densify the development, or complete demolition of the existing buildings and new development. With vacancies already present in the Cumberland Square North shopping center nearby to several places of interest and residential areas, these properties will only increase in demand potential in the coming months, making it important to consider the long-range potential of Slow Urbanism interventions if these types of shopping centers are to be truly sustainable in nature.
Heritage Pavilion

Figure 39. Heritage Pavilion Slow Urbanism Intervention.

Total Parking Spots: 1,535
Parking Spots Lost: 144
Percent Parking Maintained: 91%
Path Footage Gained: 2,640 linear feet
Percentage Path Increase in Walkshed: 18%

9% UNUSED PARKING
18% NEW TRAILS

Cumberland Square North

Figure 40. Cumberland Square North Slow Urbanism Intervention.

Total Parking Spots: 548
Parking Spots Lost: 27
Percent Parking Maintained: 95%
Path Footage Gained: 1,630 linear feet
Percentage Path Increase in Walkshed: 11%

5% UNUSED PARKING
11% NEW TRAILS
Figure 41. Complete Path Network with new proposed Slow Urbanism Interventions.
Heritage Pavilion | Existing Conditions
Heritage Pavilion | Multimodal Path

- Slow Urbanism Multimodal Path to accommodate both pedestrian and bicycle traffic

- A row of parking spaces measuring 18’ in length can be re-appropriated into a 14’ path striped for 2-way traffic and a 4’ planting strip

- Other human-scaled features add to the environment, including an increased tree canopy providing shade, parallel parking spots functioning as a pathway buffer, signature lighting to increase safety, and banners to support placemaking. 2-way vehicular circulation is maintained by angling the parking spots on the other side instead of having them extend at 90 degrees
7.0 | Conclusion

Evaluative Inventory of Slow Principles in Walkshed Case Study

The following goals and policies in the six key component areas are achieved as a result of the proposed intervention designs at Cumberland Square North and Heritage Pavilion.

Environmental Policies

• Protection of the quality of the air, water and soil (through increased landscaping and elimination of impervious area)

• Regulation of advertisements and traffic signs (signage and wayfinding unified plan)

• Control of electromagnetic pollution, noise pollution and light pollution (lighting compliant with DarkSky requirements and additional pedestrian-scaled lighting).

Infrastructure Policies

• Strong focus towards a priority of alternative forms of transportation and pedestrian-oriented urban design, and sustaining a sense of place which is represented in built form (multimodal paths)

• Plans for safe mobility and traffic focus on plans for alternative transportation – including bicycle, pedestrian and mass transit (multimodal paths)

• Accessibility of public places and those of public interest (multimodal paths)

• Promotion of programs to facilitate family life and social connections, recreation and assistance for those in need (multimodal paths and access to local restaurants and places of residence)

• Quality green areas and pedestrian accessibility (multimodal paths as green veins throughout the area)

• Maintaining commercial areas which are welcoming, hospitable and friendly (multimodal paths
through commercial shopping centers and better access to commercial structures).

**Technologies and Facilities for Urban Quality**

- Development and promotion of bio-architecture (through increasing landscape plantings, bioswales and other green infrastructure to mitigate stormwater and runoff).

- Planting environmentally suitable and autochthonous plants in public and private places (selecting native species to support lower maintenance costs).

- Plan concerning colours (unified wayfinding and signage plan).

- Plan for controlling noise in specifically noisy areas (increasing the tree canopy to deal with noise).

**Safeguarding Autochthonous Production**

- Sustaining local, traditional industries and elements which represent the local identity, specifically in a local context and upholding a sense of place (pop-up and semi-permanent activating installations including an artwalk, farmer’s market, local goods market).

- Promoting and preserving local cultural events (pop-up and semi-permanent activating installations including an artwalk, farmer’s market, local goods market).

**Awareness**

- Focuses on public education and marketing the [district] (unified wayfinding and signage plan).

**Hospitality**

- Helping residents and tourists feel at home (embracing the pace of Slow Urbanism with these principles).

- Preparation of “slow” itineraries of the city (publishing multimodal path network brochure and marketing through signage; advertising pop-up events along path network).
Works Cited


Works Cited (continued)

