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# Assessing “Mixed-Use” - Evaluating New Urbanism in New England

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# **Assessing “Mixed-Use”**

## **Evaluating New Urbanism in New England**

**Michael Daniels**

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### **Abstract**

New urbanism is a movement in city and regional planning that is primarily based upon a return to mixed-use development. New urbanists contend that reintegrating land uses to make “walkable” urban neighborhoods will help increase residential financial diversity and make once downtrodden areas desirable again. It remains unclear if physical design changes can truly impact economic and social conditions. Is mixed-use development worth pursuing for cities looking to restore economic diversity? To investigate this question, I turn to two Southern New England cities of similar population which have faced parallel struggles: Worcester, Massachusetts and Providence, Rhode Island. I analyze the histories of mixed-use downtown areas in both of these cities and assess the potential of new mixed-use developments to bring residential financial diversity to mid-sized cities in Southern New England. I conclude that there is no evidence that mixed-use development directly impacts residential financial diversity.

## Preface

Southern New England is home to a great deal of the nation's wealth, but you probably would not realize it walking through most of its cities. While Boston, Massachusetts and Stamford, Connecticut have seen their fortunes improve over the past few decades, cities including Providence, in Rhode Island, Worcester and Springfield, in Massachusetts, and Hartford, New Haven, and Bridgeport, in Connecticut, have continued to struggle with urban problems. These cities have employed different strategies to improve their situations with varying levels of success. In choosing an honors thesis project, I wanted to evaluate revitalization plans that had been employed in these cities and project how they might be used in the future.

I initially wanted to analyze the plans for development currently underway in New Haven, including the elimination of the Route 34 connector and the redevelopment of the former site of the New Haven Coliseum. However, I could not spend the entire project speculating about future work. Rather, I needed to focus on cities where past development could be analyzed to draw lessons with applicability for future projects. It became apparent that criticism of prior strategies focused on the use of "big ticket" projects, such as convention centers and sports arenas, rather than on community building. This led me to focus on new urbanism, a movement in urban planning which highlights the role of co-locating housing, retail, and office space and designing spaces with an orientation towards streets as public spaces. These strategies are said to promote environmental sustainability and to create more diverse communities. But I was struck by the examples of new urbanist development I had encountered in person, particularly Blue Back Square in West Hartford, Connecticut, and Prairie Crossing, in Grayslake, Illinois. These

made me realize that there was potential in evaluating just how much new urbanism lives up to its rhetoric of building diverse communities.

I was impressed with the activity I saw in Blue Back Square and its almost seamless connection to the already existing portions of West Hartford Center. However, from my perspective, it seemed that nearly all of the shops, restaurants, and amenities available appealed only to the upper and upper-middle classes, aside from the incorporation of a public library. Additionally, the architecture of the entire Blue Back development appeared very homogeneous to me.

I was more surprised when I read about Prairie Crossing having been constructed by a new urbanist design firm. I was familiar with the development long before I learned about new urbanism, and despite knowing of its environmental focus, I never considered the area to be urban. It abides by the new urbanist principles of high-density access to public transportation with its own train station. However, Prairie Crossing is located in the northern Chicago suburbs and displays rural architectural forms. The residences are densely concentrated relative to most suburban developments, allowing for the preservation of a great deal of open space. This new urbanist development that lacks urban form highlights the stark contrast between greenfield developments meant to limit the impact of sprawl and urban infill developments and rehabilitation meant to revitalize pre-existing cities. While I understand the appeal of high-density suburban developments to preserve open space, I am more interested in the potential of new urbanism to revitalize existing cities and whether it can improve social conditions in the process.

This study differs from prior research because it specifically focuses on post-industrial cities looking to revive their downtowns. It is not concerned with diversity in new urban developments in suburban locations, as Grant and Perrott (2009) studied in Markham, Ontario. Rather, it focuses on the diversity in urban settings, and how it has fluctuated as a result of new urbanist plans being implemented. Also, this study uses gross rent as part of its measure of diversity, assuming that this will be correlated with wealth or income. It does not consider racial or ethnic diversity, as Grant and Perrott did. That is not to say this type of diversity is not important towards building strong communities, just that it is beyond the scope of this study. My work also does not consider the diversity in housing units, as Lanza (2013) did. It does use similar methodology, using a Herfindahl index to operationalize the diversity of gross rent.

In traveling to downtown Worcester for the first time in November of 2013, I found it to be almost exactly as I expected based on what I had read and heard. It certainly appeared to be run-down and in need of investment. Regardless, basic urban form still exists. There are plenty of basic services in street level storefronts, including barber shops, nail salons, and a shoe repair store. Public transportation is prominent, and there is a downtown grocery store within close walking distance of many apartment buildings. Despite the fact that the eastern portion of downtown is currently a demolition zone, with the Worcester Center Mall in the process of being razed, the streets were busy with pedestrians. Despite not being the most prosperous of downtowns, Worcester still represents many of the ideals expressed by new urbanists. It does not exhibit the repetitive architectural forms of newly built developments, nor does it house strictly upscale businesses. Some of that may begin to change once construction begins on new development to occupy the space left by the mall. It should be noted though, that changes in the

appeal of businesses may not indicate increasing class diversity, but could show signs of gentrification, with the lower classes being pushed out of a downtown as its appeal increases.

I had to reevaluate the thinking about my study after traveling to Providence in January of 2014 for the first time since 2009. The perception I got from reading books and articles was that Downcity (as Providence calls its downtown) had been largely gentrified. In hearing that the development began by the Providence Place Mall had begun to spread into Downcity, I envisioned something along the lines of Blue Back Square, with upscale restaurants and boutiques filling the formerly empty storefronts along and near Westminster Street. When I visited with the express purpose of viewing the character of Downcity as it related to my project, I was surprised at how different it was from the notions that had been building in my mind. I would not refer to what I observed as gentrified by any means. Many of the businesses I saw Downcity seemed to be aimed at college students, rather than upper class residents or tourists, especially as I got further from the Providence Place Mall. Convenience stores, corner delis, and basic services appear to outnumber the few upscale attractions present. After this visit, I shifted the premise of my thesis. I stopped viewing Providence as a city with a gentrified downtown and the middle and lower classes relegated only to the outlying areas. I wrote of it instead as a place where new attention has been given to a struggling downtown, and where the unique history of the city has presented Downcity with special opportunities not found in other New England cities. I understood that Providence is still in the midst of changing, and it has been over the last few decades. I realized I was inaccurate in considering Worcester as the downtown of the two with significantly more basic services and a more authentic urban way of living. Alternatively, it stands a model for most Southern New England cities that retain some level of original, naturally occurring, mixed use development but also have struggled with the impacts of urban renewal.

Worcester also is considered to have changed much less than Providence in terms of the levels of active downtown mixed use over the past few decades. In a sense, Worcester becomes a control variable with Providence as the independent variable. But to simply view the two cities in such basic scientific terms would be naive. I present the recent urban histories of both cities to ensure readers have sufficient background to understand the nature of downtown development in both. These histories will compliment the quantitative results to provide a stronger conclusion.

I had hoped to be able to identify causes of residential financial diversity that could then be employed as strategies to create it in future plans, especially in response to Emily Talen's (2010) request that future research should look into how to improve new urbanism. This proved to be difficult for a number of reasons. For one, the two downtowns are only composed of one Census tract each. This differs from major cities, like New York, which have numerous downtown Census tracts due to much higher populations. Therefore, it was not possible to see which regions of downtowns in Worcester and Providence had more diversity and if that was based on proximity to public transportation or to basic services. I decided to focus instead on the potential of mixed-use development to change the financial composition of downtown residents. The results are cautionary towards the thinking about the ability of new urbanism to create stronger communities, if it is assumed that financial diversity of downtown residents is a prerequisite for those communities to exist.

## **Introduction**

Land uses once were commonly mixed out of necessity. When travel was difficult and costly, it was beneficial to have places of commerce and residences nearby. Beginning in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, zoning laws, which forced the separation of land uses, began to emerge. These

laws became increasingly complex in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and separated residential, commercial, and industrial areas. Zoning is considered a legal expression of “NIMBYism,” standing for the philosophy of “not in my back yard,” resisting the presence of any nuisances near homes. Residents increasingly wanted to live separately from land uses which created noise, air pollution, and traffic congestion. As a result, cities which once were centers of all types of activity became less important throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Middle class residents predominately left cities for the low-density suburbs and began depending on automobiles to reach different necessities. This resulted in the creation of lower tax bases and decaying neighborhoods in once-prosperous cities. Urban problems such as poverty, crime, and blight began proliferating.

Today, with much less heavy manufacturing occurring in New England and in the United States in general, it seems less necessary to have most residents live far away from their work places. Members of the post-baby boom generations may prefer to live within walking distance to their workplaces and to amenities such as shopping, dining, and basic services. This creates the potential for the expansion of development under the principles of a planning movement known as new urbanism. It began in the 1980’s with Andrés Duany, who founded a planning firm focused on traditional urban design. In 1993, Duany joined like-minded planners to form the Congress for the New Urbanism (CNU), an organization devoted to furthering high-density planning and preserving local architectural forms. The group became increasingly influential and had gained over 500 members by 1996 (Al-Hindi, 2001).

As expressed in the organization’s charter, new urbanism involves reinvesting in dense cities and moving away from sprawling suburban development, which became the status quo throughout the mid to late-20<sup>th</sup> century (“Charter of the New Urbanism,” n.d.). New urbanists seek to restructure communities to be independent of the automobile. This means residents



would be able to rely on walking and having access to public transportation to fulfill their needs. While many residents of major cities such as New York and Chicago live this way, new urbanists believe it should be a possibility in smaller and mid-sized cities as well.

Beyond density and walkability, new urbanism addresses social conditions in neighborhoods. CNU's charter speaks of "the reconfiguration of sprawling suburbs into communities of real neighborhoods and diverse districts" ("Charter of the New Urbanism," n.d.). This implies that a shift to urban forms of living are intended to do much more than reduce dependence on the automobile. Emily Talen (2010) writes that new urbanism holds that neighborhoods "should be both socially mixed and well designed." New urbanists believe that urban form in planning is a necessary part of the framework for integrating people of different incomes and races into safer and more prosperous communities. But studies have shown that new urbanist developments have not necessarily created this kind of diversity in practice (Grant & Perrott, 2009).

This raises an important question. Can investing in mixed-use downtown development increase the financial diversity of downtown residents? If policy makers see an increase in residential financial diversity as being a goal in and of itself, or if they believe that this diversity will help lead to other goals, they will need to know the answer before they go forward with new urbanist plans. There may be other reasons why they would want to turn to new urbanism, such as beautification or making the city appeal to tourists. But my study focuses on determining if the new urbanist strategy of mixed use developments can make it possible for people of differing economic means to inhabit the same downtown areas.

In order to determine if a focus on bringing mixed-use development back to downtowns will result in increased residential financial diversity, I studied the cities of Providence and Worcester. Both Providence and Worcester have downtowns which developed an urban form naturally. Though the two city cores have struggled over the past decades, they present a unique opportunity to study the potential of new urbanism. Worcester retains downtown mixed-use development that existed prior to the urban renewal movement, despite a large section of the downtown having been demolished to build a now-shuttered shopping mall. Providence, meanwhile, has seen a recent effort to refocus development efforts on its downtown, known as Downcity. Having avoided the traditional urban renewal practices that ravaged so many of its peers' downtowns, Providence embarked on a unique series of projects that has come to be known as the "Providence Renaissance." Public and private leaders worked together to reroute rivers and railroad tracks to open new land for development. Initially, the historic central Downcity area was ignored. But eventually city leaders and private investors decided to turn their focus to revitalizing this existing urban area which had come to lack residents and retail activity. Today, some structures there have recently been adapted to be reused as mixed-use buildings with housing units on upper floors and retail space at street level. Many nearby units sit vacant, awaiting potential conversion in the future.

The cities invite comparison for a number of reasons, not limited to their patterns of development. First of all, they are separated by only about forty miles and directly connected by Route 146. Both cities have a population of about 180,000 residents, though it should be noted that Providence is the center of a more heavily populated metropolitan area. Both are influenced, both positively and negatively, by being within about fifty miles of Boston, New England's largest city and cultural and economic center. Worcester benefits from being on the

Massachusetts side of the border; the Bay State's economy consistently outperforms that of Rhode Island. Providence, meanwhile, benefits from being its state's largest city by population and its capital. While Providence dominates Rhode Island politics, Worcester has had very little influence on Massachusetts as a whole. It has only produced two Lieutenant Governors out of all state-wide officials since 1900 (Eide, 2013). Both cities are home to numerous institutions of higher education. Both are home to minor-league American Hockey League franchises and downtown arenas in which they are housed.

Although the similarities are plentiful, a great disparity exists between the reputations of the two cities. Providence has come to be known as one of the success stories in the renewal of post-industrial cities. It is praised as a lively city, filled with energy, and as a top tourist destination. Worcester, on the other hand, receives little if any praise. It is largely viewed as a city still struggling to overcome the decline of industrialization, filled with poverty and crime. Unlike Providence, it experimented with large-scale urban renewal efforts in the 1960's, demolishing a large portion of its downtown to construct the Worcester Center Galleria mall, which closed in 2006 (Damas, 2006). Are these reputations deserved? Not necessarily. As raised by Stephen Eide in a May, 2013 online article, Worcester actually exceeds Providence in many areas one would typically use to evaluate the health of a city. Worcester has consistently had lower unemployment since 2008, lower crime rates, higher home values, and more stable city finances (Eide, 2013).

Despite these statistics, Providence benefits from much more favorable reviews for a number of reasons. It has attracted a great deal of attention as a tourist attraction due to the advent of the Waterfire attraction and the construction of the Providence Place Mall, built on land created as a result of moving rivers and railroad tracks, not demolishing urban

neighborhoods. It also is home to Brown University, an Ivy League member situated in the picturesque College Hill neighborhood immediately to the east of Downcity. But if one focuses on the downtown cores of each city, they appear to be more similar than usually is portrayed. Both contain a fair amount of basic services that cater to residents' needs. From my perception in visiting the cities, Worcester has more of these basic services available than Providence. This differs from a city like Hartford, which focuses on downtown offices rather than residences and has virtually no basic services available downtown. Both downtown Worcester and Downcity Providence still contain many empty storefronts and vacant lots. Residential units are located above or immediately next to retail space in both downtowns. In Worcester, this has persisted through the decades in the areas of its downtown spared by urban renewal. In Providence, this type of mixed use development had nearly vanished but has returned to Downcity in recent years.

Knowing that mixed-use development has remained in Worcester, despite the city's overall struggles, and that it diminished but was intentionally returned to Providence allows us to view how the return of mixed-use development impacts residential financial diversity, under the assumption that other factors are generally constant across Providence and Worcester. This is an extremely important and relevant topic, as many Southern New England cities are currently planning or considering new urbanist revitalization plans. These cities struggle with urban problems and are faced with various options as to how to best invest the resources they have. It is crucial that government leaders and planners understand to what extent mixed-use development can increase residential financial diversity, if that is among their primary goals. If this diversity can help create stronger communities and decrease problems like poverty and crime, then new urbanism will help cities and the people who live there.

## Jane Jacobs

What exactly do new urbanists mean when they talk about stronger communities? Their ideal, it might be assumed, at least somewhat resembles the communities described in Jane Jacobs's seminal work, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, first published in 1961. Jacobs was one of the first people to question the status quo in development, which at the time was suburbanization. Her ideas were very important towards what became new urbanism decades after she first criticized sprawling suburbs. With no formal urban planning education, Jacobs wrote simply based on what she observed in her home of New York City and in other major cities across the United States and Canada. Jacobs rejected the common wisdom of urban renewal at a time when major projects were in the planning stages. She successfully fought to halt the planning of the Lower Manhattan Expressway which would have demolished parts of the SoHo and Little Italy neighborhoods, just south of her home in Greenwich Village. Jacobs relied heavily on her observations of her home neighborhood in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. It is now regarded as one of the great contributions to thinking about urban design. New urbanism is heavily related to the ideas she introduced, but Jacobs herself, before she passed away, indicated that new urbanism missed the mark on creating the communities she valued (Steigerwald, 2001).

The early pages of *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* talk about Jacobs's views of Boston's North End based on a 1959 visit. The neighborhood was regarded as a slum, and Jacobs's friends tried to dissuade her from visiting the area (Jacobs, 1993, 14). But Jacobs found redeeming qualities in the area. She found it to be very lively, filled with people walking, shopping, playing, and listening to music (Jacobs, 1993, 13). She considered it to be an example of a real community, despite the fact that it was not very wealthy or pristine looking. Jacobs

decided to write about the positive qualities of that neighborhood and others like it to refute the negative thinking of urban areas that predominated planning. At a time when governments were attempting to demolish or gentrify these areas, Jacobs understood their importance.

Jacobs identified certain principles of healthy neighborhoods which have come to be highly regarded in modern urban planning theory. She is often cited for the principle of “the eyes on the street.” This refers to the collective security that is in place due to the presence of many witnesses on a city street at any given time (Jacobs, 1993, 45). Jacobs writes that people must not even usually be consciously aware of the fact that they are providing this security, but that they must generally trust that if a dangerous situation arises, witnesses will feel obligated to take action. Police cannot be relied upon to ensure the safety in all neighborhoods, so this natural form of security is imperative in urban environments. For the eyes on the street to work effectively a few conditions must be met. For one, windows must be oriented towards the streets, rather than towards large set-backs or inward towards courtyards. This will ensure that there are usually people watching even during late night hours when the streets are less active. To keep those times to a minimum, a variety of uses in the neighborhood are necessary. For example, bars and nightclubs will keep witnesses in the area past midnight, when others may have gone to sleep. Even though community members may oppose the presence of these kinds of establishments because of their negative reputations, according to Jacobs, their ability to keep the neighborhood active is important towards maintaining safety. This concept survives in the new urbanist notion of street oriented development. Rather than simply being an avenue for automobile traffic, new urbanists see streets as places where people interact and there are constant witnesses, creating a notion of public trust, and thereby creating safe and tight knit communities.

Jacobs talked about the importance of privacy created in cities through the sheer amount of people who live there. This is a different concept from the type of privacy that is created by shutting windows or moving to a remote suburban location (Jacobs, 1993, 77). The privacy Jacobs describes exists because people are forced to encounter so many strangers on any particular day. Therefore, a very small percentage of people a person encounters will know anything about his or her personal business. In small towns or suburbs, it becomes difficult for someone to rely on a neighbor for any kind of assistance without feeling an obligation to allow them to have some knowledge of personal affairs. But in a city, it is implicitly understood that people can rely on their neighbors without crossing social boundaries. Jacobs writes, “A good city street neighborhood achieves a marvel of balance between its people’s determination to have essential privacy and their simultaneous wishes for differing degrees of contact, enjoyment or help from the people around,” (Jacobs, 1993, 78). Oftentimes, urban residents need not rely on residential neighbors, depending instead on commercial establishments. Jacobs describes how her neighbors relied on trusted store owners to keep their keys for guests rather than having to rely on friends (Jacobs, 1993, 78). This system of public trust requires more than just urban form. It requires people to interact with other members of their community and to be willing to ask for and to reciprocate different favors which make the community greater than the sum of its parts. But this would not be possible without the urban form. Here, urban design is not the sole cause of, but is a necessity for the existence of a strong community.

While Jacobs is still very influential in urban planning today, not all of her ideas may still be relevant towards mid-sized cities like Providence and Worcester. Changes in technology may make building such a community more difficult. People can now choose to communicate with others who are far away with ease, allowing them to depend less on their neighbors. Regardless

of the time period, it also is notable that Jacobs specifies that her principles are only applicable to major, rather than small cities. She writes, “I hope no reader will try to transfer my observations into guides as to what goes on in towns, or little cities, or in suburbs which are still suburban,” (Jacobs, 1993, 22). Therefore, Jacobs herself would not be expected to assert that the dynamics she described would function similarly in small cities or in greenfield new urbanist structures built from scratch. That does not mean that we should completely ignore her theories in regards to mid-sized cities like Providence and Worcester. Their downtowns share some traits with downtowns in larger cities and some with outlying urban neighborhoods in those cities with mixed-use development of their own. Some of her principles, including the “eyes on the street” have influenced new urbanism in everywhere it has been implemented, regardless of the size of the city.

Jacobs offered commentary on new urbanism in a 2000 interview (Steigerwald, 2000). She praised cities like Portland, Seattle, and San Francisco for adaptively reusing old buildings and for using an ensemble of many small projects while avoiding gimmicks and splashy projects. But she criticized new urbanists for failing to understand that active urban centers must connect well to the rest of the city. She stated that in real cities, these centers developed naturally at the convergence of major thoroughfares, but new urbanists simply try to create them anywhere there is room for development. In thinking about Providence and Worcester, it becomes apparent that these connections and have been a concern for developers and city leaders. In Providence, part of the main justification for rerouting the railroad tracks that passed through Downcity was to remove the blockade, commonly referred to as the “Chinese wall” that the tracks created, separating the majority of Downcity from the Rhose Island Statehouse (Leazes & Motte, 7). In Worcester, the presence of the Worcester Center Mall made travel between the center of town



and the railroad station more difficult, by eliminating a stretch of Front Street. The mall's recent demolition has recreated this connection. This may mean the new urbanist development planned for the former mall location sits in a location that Jacobs would have favored, being naturally located between the center of activity and the center of transportation. However, this change does not impact the results of this study, as the analysis focuses on the state of Worcester before the street connection through the mall site was rebuilt.

Jacobs, in her interview, also talked of a fallacy of expecting people to live and work in the same place. She noted that in most households where more than one person works, it is rare for them to work in the same place. Especially as people find new jobs over time, they may not work near to where they live. So while dense urban neighborhoods may greatly increase the ability to walk to do errands, it does not eliminate the need to travel long distances. Having some connection to transit is vital to make independence from owning a car possible for most people. It seems unrealistic to expect many families to live in downtown neighborhoods, even if parents can walk to their jobs. This is especially true considering the struggling state of schools in most cities like Providence and Worcester. This is another challenge to community building despite urban form, even if it includes housing.

Jacobs added in that interview that oftentimes more needs to be done than simply changing zoning laws to allow for residential use where it was once prohibited. Housing regulations must be amended to be applicable to specific areas. For example, restrictions about how many parking spaces must accompany a residential building should not have to apply in a dense urban area where many people do not own cars and where there is not enough room for large parking lots. This indicates that much more detailed plans and actions are needed to revitalize areas than to simply change zoning to allow for a mix of uses. Even if zoning laws

were completely eliminated, that does not indicate that it will be simple to transition to mixed use development. In demonstrating this point, Jacobs talks about how Houston has no zoning laws, but developers still proceed as if there were. Financial and development organizations tend to hold to the common wisdom of the suburban pattern.

Jacobs talked about the resistance to changing zoning laws because residents assume that businesses moving in to their neighborhood will lower their property values without considering the convenience of having the new uses within walking distances. She said that busy streets with the proper types of buildings for a variety of uses are necessary to keep mixed-use buildings from becoming “ugly smears” but that she did not think new urbanists properly consider these issues. This reiterates the need for more detailed strategies when implementing mixed-use plans to avoid local resistance and to ensure the new development functions in ways that will take advantage of the mixes of uses.

Jacobs comments that it is reasonable to wonder why towns which were developed over 100 years ago grew more sensibly, and that possibly people of that age were less ruthless about destroying the old in favor of the new. In revitalizing areas like Downcity Providence, new urbanists try to take advantage of the efficiency and sustainability of densely built areas rather than building anew.

While Jacobs did not completely embrace new urbanism, her rejection of planning norms paved the way for others to change standard practices. Andrés Duany followed in her path of rejecting suburbanization and was instrumental in creating new urbanism.

### **Andrés Duany's New Urbanism**

New urbanism is a pattern of urban planning which marks a return to high-density, mixed-use development featuring common urban features such as narrow streets, pedestrian accessibility, public squares, and being located near public transportation. It stands as an alternative to suburban sprawl which features single-use zoning, low-density single-family homes, retailers with large parking lots, and is nearly completely dependent on the automobile for transportation.

New urbanism traces its origins to 1980, when Andrés Duany, who was successfully designing condominiums in Miami, was inspired by a lecture by urban designer Léon Krier. Krier is known for his distaste of modernist architecture, suburbanization, and single-use zoning. Duany decided to resign from his job to create his own architecture and planning firm which would focus on returning to more traditional forms of urban design. In his own words, new urbanism is basically “making communities that are mixed-use and mixed-income and complete, to the extent that they allow you to live without a car” (Redmon, 2010). This highlights that the mixed-income aspect of communities was a keystone of the original premise for new urbanism. Duany noted that other qualities that are now associated with the movement, such as environmental sustainability, were not originally part of new urbanism, but they were added as the pattern of development appealed to groups with other agendas.

Duany attended a 1991 conference with a group of like-minded architects and planners at the Ahwanee Hotel in Yosemite, California which produced a set of principles for new urbanism, known as the Ahwanee Principles (Al-Hindi, 2001). In 1993, members of the same group founded the Congress for the New Urbanism, incorporating many of the Ahwanee Principles into their charter. Some of these main principles are “the restoration of existing urban centers and towns” and that “neighborhoods should be diverse in use and population” (“Charter of the New

Urbanism,” n.d.). It remains the preeminent organization advocating for the new urbanist principles of mixed-use and transit oriented development. The group holds annual conventions of planners, architects, government officials, academics, and others interested in its philosophy of urban development.

Some of the most prominent new urbanist developments, including Duany’s Seaside, Florida, have been constructed from scratch on greenfield sites. These developments are high density and often located near public transit connections, certainly marking a departure from typical suburban sprawl. While this is preferable to expansive suburbs for supporters of sustainability and open space preservation, this form of new urbanism does nothing towards revitalizing existing urban centers. These model communities have also been criticized as simply placing a façade over the continuation of suburbanism (Bohl, 2000, 765). They do little to bring about integration; entirely new suburban mixed-use developments typically are not affordable to the lower classes. They may even be sparked by social conservatism, based on feelings of wanting to return to the past, represented by the higher density development and vintage architectural forms (Al-Hindi, 2001).

While older, conservative homebuyers may be attracted to new urbanist developments on new land in suburban areas, younger generations are thought to have a greater desire to live in urban settings. This has provided some optimism that new urbanism might flourish in post-industrial cities. However, while youth may desire the excitement of cities, they are often unable to afford to live in them. Duany explains that young people, who grew up in the suburbs, love to descend on cities with their friends to enjoy the retail, dining, and nightlife options. But, in part due to the current state of the economy, a substantial portion of these people between the ages of 24 and 35 cannot afford real estate, so they are only visiting cities rather than living in them.

Duany criticizes their behavior as being incompatible with high quality urbanism. He states that teenagers and young adults, “come in [to cities] like locusts. They make traffic congestion all night; they come in and take up the parking. They ruin the retail and they ruin the restaurants, because they have different habits than older folks, (Redmon, 2010).” CNU’s charter claims that “a broad range of housing types and price levels can bring people of diverse ages, races and incomes into daily interaction, strengthening the personal and civic bonds essential to an authentic community,” (Talen, 2010). So while CNU highlights the possibilities that come with people of different ages and incomes interacting on city streets, the organization’s founder acknowledges that because of economic conditions, an entire generation is not able to afford to live in many downtowns, and they sometimes cause trouble when they visit.

### **Contemporary Academic Debate**

New urbanism has been the subject of considerable debate in academic literature. Scholars from different perspectives have used a variety of methods to evaluate the extent to which claims about new urbanism are true in practice. Most of the existing studies on the topic have been qualitative rather than quantitative in nature.

The existing literature on new urbanism represents a spectrum of opinions ranging from staunch defenders to opponents, with a middle ground occupied by those who support the fundamental premises of new urbanism but believe many modifications must be made before it can be considered successful. Much of this contention stems from a debate over whether physical design can be the cause of more desired social outcomes. Skeptics argue that economic and social conditions will always outweigh the built environment.

Detractors of new urbanism argue that it is unrealistic to expect new urbanist developments to be successful due to preferences for the privacy and low density provided by the

suburbs. Families may simply prefer the suburban way of life, and they might not want to return to cities even if problems such as crime and underperforming education systems could be solved. According to these skeptics, we cannot expect people to desire to live in the industrial-style cities that were once common now that they are used to the amenities of the suburbs. They now expect greater privacy, being close to good schools, and being closer to natural environments. Rowley (1996), though he believes that mixed-use development can help promote urban quality in the right circumstances, argued that small changes in design will not create large changes in culture or lifestyles. He argues that most people would rather only visit cities than live in them, and that the few areas of cities that would be desirable living places for most people are the areas that are too expensive for most of the population (Rowley, 1996, p. 90). This demonstrates the need for new urbanist developments to not only be desirable but also to be affordable to a variety of incomes.

Some challenge the notion that urban structure is necessary to build strong communities, arguing that the notion that communities are weak in the suburbs is unfounded. Other critics contend that the architecture of new urbanism is too homogenous and that it is at odds with the character typically found in old urban neighborhoods (Ellis, 2010, 272). Furthermore, some analysts of new urbanism note that where new urbanism proves to be desirable, the market pushes rents and home values to a level that is unaffordable to the working class (Knaap & Song, 2003). This leads to gentrification in city neighborhoods, sometimes displacing city residents and breaking up their communities. The retail components of new urbanist developments may be filled with upscale specialty shops rather than with basic services. This creates an additional burden for the working and middle classes and reduces the supposed new urbanist benefit of easy access to amenities. However, many of these criticisms are more pertinent to developments that

are more suburban in character. Rehabilitation and infill development in cities are more likely to preserve existing architecture and architectural forms already present in the areas. The market for upscale shopping and dining already exists in and near wealthier suburbs. Old downtowns with new urbanist investment may be less susceptible to these claims.

Knapp and Song (2003) attempted an empirical study to determine which traits of new urbanism are seen as desirable based on the way they impact the value of homes. They determined that people find more connective street patterns, pedestrian access to commercial uses, and proximity to public transportation to be attractive. However, they determined that other characteristics of new urbanism including increased density, a variety of commercial uses near residential space, and the presence of multifamily homes decreased housing values. This signals that consumers considered these attributes to be unattractive. For new urbanism to successfully create diverse communities, a delicate balance between creating desirable communities and avoiding making the communities so attractive that only the elite can afford to live there must be met.

Grant and Perrott (2009) also turned to empirical methods to evaluate how well new urbanism creates the potential for mixed-income neighborhoods. They studied mixed-use developments in Markham, Ontario, Canada and found that while the city as a whole was relatively diverse, individual Census tracts exhibited social homogeneity. They concluded that market and social factors persisted despite changes in planning and the built environment. In their view, encouraging diversity in housing stock is a good place to begin in plans to integrate communities, but it does not go nearly far enough. Economic integration in Markham may face different challenges from Worcester or Providence due to it being very suburban in nature, lying just north of Toronto. This study similarly seeks to evaluate how new urbanism impacts

diversity, but unlike Grant and Perrott's, it only considers mixed-use development in existing urban centers rather than those that are newly built in suburbs. In other similar studies, researchers concluded that urban form is important in sustaining diversity where it does exist (Talen, 2010) but does not necessarily lead to new diversity and that it is easier to preserve old examples of mixed-use development than to create new ones (Rowley, 1996).

Talen (1998) notes that while new urbanism "lives by an unswerving belief in the ability of the environment to create a 'sense of community,'" the term "community" has not been well defined and is nearly impossible to operationalize. Because different measures, such as residential financial diversity, must be used with the assumption that they might have an impact on community building, Talen believes it is not worth promoting the virtues of new urbanism towards strengthening communities. She suggests new urbanists would be wise to "tone down their social aspirations and declare that they are simply meeting the human requirements of physical design, rather than actively creating certain behaviours." She goes on to say "Physical design need not *create* a sense of community, but rather, it can increase its probability." This is consistent with the observations of Jane Jacobs where urban form was necessary for, but not the only cause of, the existence of real urban neighborhoods.

Another facet of the academic debate concerns whether new urbanism is actually a practical of increasing qualities of lives for residents or if it is no more than a collection of desires based on what urban planners personally think cities should look like. The primary basis for new urbanism may lie in nostalgia for the way cities used to be rather than in analysis proving that the claims made by promoters are realistic (Rowley, 1996, p. 85). Design alone faces many limitations. It cannot defy real-estate markets, so government subsidies may be needed in addition to diversity in housing stock to create affordability. Design also is not a



substitute for economic development activities such as job training or providing capital to start-up businesses. It will not take the place of social service or welfare programs either. Based on these factors, Bohl (2000) argues that new urbanism is only a small part of a much larger overall strategy for revitalizing cities. Talen (2010) found that urban design is an important factor in sustaining diversity where it happens to exist, but that in more recent creations of mixed-use development, affordability is possible, but it is not common. This supports the notion that government subsidies may need to be part of a strategy to make new urbanism affordable to the lower classes. Ellis (2010) notes that urban design alone is not enough to generate a sense of community, but it can increase interaction in public and semi-public spaces, which at least supports an aspect of community building.

Other criticisms of new urbanism come from the architectural community. Some argue that the architecture commonly associated with recently constructed new urbanist developments is too bland or kitschy. While new urbanists criticize suburban architecture as being overly repetitive, new urbanism also often features homogenous architecture without many unique forms. Ellis (2010) retorts that new urbanism is not itself an architectural form but a structure to arrange urban areas. Different architectural styles could be applied to buildings as long as they fit the criteria for how they are arranged in relation to each other, to the streets, and to the natural environment. Ellis even argues that new urbanist structure can lend itself to creating a space for a “front-page” piece of architecture, such as a church, museum, or civic center (Ellis, 2010, p. 274-275). He believes all architecture will gain character with time. New urbanism can be adaptable to local conditions, and often locally familiar architecture forms are emulated in new developments, such as in Pittsburgh’s Crawford Square district. Architecture can be important in community building as it can foster a sense of place and community identity.

Scholars who write in defense of new urbanism contend that despite some drawbacks, the potential benefits of new urbanism make it a worthwhile pursuit. According to them, although new urbanism may not be perfect, it nonetheless provides substantial advantages over the status quo of suburban sprawl. Ellis (2010) argues that despite traffic congestion being a problem in cities, a major advantage of urbanism is the availability of alternative means of transportation, including walking, biking, and in some cases buses or rail. He acknowledges that simply building new transit lines will not automatically spark development near them, but he believes transit-oriented development is largely hindered by a lack of political will and by policy makers being stuck in the old ways of planning rather than by the actual merits of projects. He rejects contentions that new urbanism is simply based in nostalgia. He believes that planners who are nostalgic for older forms of cities are actually simply optimistic about what the future might hold. He believes a more appropriate way of describing this would be “respect for traditional urbanism and civic life” (Ellis, 2010, p. 267). Ellis argues that bringing nostalgic ideas to the planning conversation can be helpful because ideas which may not have been considered for many years may be more relevant than they were during the suburban era.

Talen (2000) believes that critics of new urbanism should be more specific in their recommendations. She notes that many tenets of new urbanism are now widely held and long-standing. Critics, in her view, rarely challenge the intentions of new urbanism, but rather they challenge the effectiveness of implementation. She advocates more empirical research into how new urbanist goals are being met and how they are not. In her view, criticism of new urbanism should be more constructive rather than dismissive since few analysts, aside from free-market advocates, still promote the traditional suburban model of development. Ellis (2010) refutes market-based arguments for the uninhibited continued growth of suburbs by referencing the

history of suburbanization that was caused in large part by government subsidized home loans and by racial tensions rather than by actual market efficiencies.

New urbanism specifies certain characteristics that should be included in developments such as “narrow streets, continuous sidewalks, street trees, shallow setbacks, urban public spaces and mixed housing types and land uses,” (Bohl, 2000, p. 781). However, it does not necessarily specify the types of amenities that should be available to sustain a development. This means that even “big box” retailers, often found in suburbs, could be integrated into new urbanism if they were constructed close to the street in mixed-use buildings (Bohl, 2000, p. 784). The presence of these sorts of retailers could either help or hurt the development of integrated communities. On the positive side, big box retailers are able to use economies of scale to sell goods at lower prices. These types of stores could make it possible for people of all income levels to live in a neighborhood without having to travel long distances for basic needs. Negatively, big box stores are capable of crowding out local businesses. This would make it difficult for a diverse business community to be created and for residents to create personal relationships with local business owners as depicted by Jane Jacobs.

Though zoning laws in new urbanist development allow for a wide variety of businesses near residential space, that does not necessarily mean they will be successful. In Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, residents of a recently constructed new urbanist apartment building successfully fought to have a nearby bar’s liquor license rescinded because of noise issues, despite the fact that the bar existed prior to the apartment building (Grant, 2002, p. 76). This shows that while mixed uses may be legally permissible, they may not always be compatible. This presents some reason to doubt the abilities of new urbanist infill developments to create stronger communities. There are no guarantees that residents and tenants who are attracted to newly constructed or

rehabilitated areas will collaborate effectively with the existing community. New tensions may be created, or old community members may be forced to relocate.

While a few free-market advocates may believe we should allow suburban development to proceed as it has been, most present-day urban planning analysts seem to think there is at least some merit in the premises of new urbanism. Differences among them primarily lie in how large of an impact design can have upon changing social and economic factors, whether or not enough of the general public would prefer to live in an urban setting, how communities will be impacted, the availability of services and amenities, and what kinds of architectural styles are used.

### **Worcester**

A trip to Worcester in 2014 seems to be somewhat reminiscent of Jane Jacobs's 1959 trip to Boston's North End. Worcester is often called a "dump" or a "slum" by people who know its reputation as a center of poverty and high crime. But much of Worcester's downtown displays its original urban form, something that is desirable to new urbanists. The Worcester Common and City Hall are centrally located in the heart of downtown. The remains of the Worcester Center Mall and Interstate 290 lie immediately to the east. To the north, south, and west, however, is a downtown filled with mixed use structures. Most buildings appear to be nearly a century old, and most have retail space at street level with office or residential space above. The storefronts are filled with basic services including a shoe repair store, a tailor, a nail salon, and a barber shop. Bus routes link downtown to the surrounding neighborhoods, and Union Station, an Amtrak stop, lies just across I-290. Perhaps most notably, a Compare Foods Supermarket is located on Main Street, near the Sky Mark tower, a large residential high rise. One could reasonably manage to live in downtown Worcester without owning a car.

The mixing of uses, orientation towards the street, availability of basic services and high levels of pedestrian activity in downtown Worcester make it a great example of urban form. This is mixed-use development that came about naturally, far before the emergence of new urbanism. Unfortunately, the presence of this urban form does not mean that the downtown can be considered healthy. A high percentage of the storefronts are vacant. The businesses that are operating tend only to appeal to members of the lower classes. Many structures show signs of disrepair. This clearly demonstrates that urban form does not protect against economic struggles by itself.

Downtown Worcester lacks the advantage of a strong presence of the college community. The city itself is home to numerous institutions of higher education, most notably the College of the Holy Cross and Worcester Polytechnic Institute. But most of the college campuses are removed from downtown, and students do not typically live in the heart of the city. College students do not influence development in downtown Worcester the way they do in Downcity Providence. Aside from a few music venues, there are no attractions to draw students into downtown.

Some of the Worcester's newer downtown development is situated near the former mall site, including the renovated DCU Center hockey arena and a more recently constructed adjoining convention center. Recently built hotels, St. Vincent Hospital, and a courthouse are located nearby. But it is the story of the failed mall on a 34 acre swath of land that defines this section of Worcester.

The Worcester Center Galleria Mall was the result of a public-private partnership. It benefited from approximately \$25 million in state, local, and federal funding. The total cost of

the project was \$127 million. In addition to the retail space, the project included two office towers and a parking garage. In 1965, the Worcester Redevelopment Authority acquired 83 separately owned parcels for the project, mainly through eminent domain. It then sold the property to a Boston-based developer for \$3.3 million. The mall opened in August of 1971, and later that year the project faced its first challenges, as the developer and the city disputed if a certain piece of land would be used to build an extra department store and a hotel or a civic center arena. One year later, in November of 1972, controversy emerged over how the city was collecting real estate taxes on the Worcester Center property. Feeling the tax structure would make continuing with the project unfeasible, the original developer sought and was granted a request to be let out of their commitment to build a hotel (Cantwell, 1991).

These early controversies were only the beginning of many troubles for the project. With tenants leaving and sales falling, the entire complex was sold to a new owner in 1988. Despite many grander renovation and expansion plans being floated, the mall was converted into an outlet mall with lower-end stores in 1994. This new approach did not change fortunes. A new owner purchased the property in 2004 with the intent of closing the mall altogether and redeveloping the property. While the office towers remained active, the mall's doors shut for good in 2006 (Damas, 2006). The new developers promised a new urbanist complex known as City Square (McMorrow, 2013). It was slated to feature retail, office, residential, and medical space. But the project stalled, and ownership of the mall area transferred again in 2010 (Novinson, 2013). The mall is now almost fully demolished as of March, 2014. While a few tenants have committed to leasing office space, it remains challenging to find retail and dining tenants who will agree to move into the area before residents move in. The developers have been unable to secure tax credits for market rate housing, and construction costs have been high

(Novinson, 2013). Front Street, running through the former mall site, has been reconstructed in anticipation of the coming development. But nearly 50 years after the project began, the promises of creating a sustainable and profitable retail destination in downtown Worcester have failed.

Though plans for revitalizing Downtown Worcester have been floated, and the city maintains a few large office tenants, the city's core continues to face major struggles. The enduring urban form present in Worcester has not protected it from the economic hardships faced by so many cities built upon the back of industry which has come and gone.

### **Providence**

Providence's more positive reputation is owed in large part to the efforts known collectively as the "Providence Renaissance" throughout the past three decades. Planners, government officials, business leaders, and community members came together to make drastic changes to the physical environment of the city in hopes of making it better respected and more vibrant (Leazes & Motte, 7). Having avoided the traditional patterns of urban renewal in the 1950's and 60's, Providence waited until the 80's and 90's to make wholesale changes to its urban fabric (Leazes & Motte, xxxiv). Ambitious plans were created and carried out to move Interstate 95's path (throughout the 2000's) (Leazes & Motte, 59), eliminate the "Chinese wall" comprised of railroad tracks and platforms (from 1984-1986) (Leazes & Motte, 96), and move the confluence of the Moshassuck, Woonasquatucket, and Providence rivers, creating Waterplace Park (in 1994) (Leazes & Motte, 131). These actions created the Capital Center area for office development, safer traffic interchanges, and a more walkable and aesthetically appealing riverfront area. While these changes are sometimes described as having created

“mixed-use developments,” the types of development vary greatly based on the area of the city. The initial changes of the Providence Renaissance did not incorporate new urbanist mixed-use principles.

The Capitol Center area was created after railroad tracks were buried and Providence’s Amtrak station was relocated, opening land for development near the Rhode Island State House (Leazes & Motte, 95). In 1999, the area became home to the Providence Place shopping mall and eventually a number of office buildings near the new confluence of the Woonasquatucket, Moshassuck, and Providence Rivers (Leazes & Motte, 192). Though the project struggled to attract development, and some of the lots still are left with only surface parking, some truly mixed-use structures, containing high-end apartments, office space, and street level retail have been constructed, notably the Avalon at Center Place building. The area is separated from the main portion of Downcity by the Moshassuck. It appears to be somewhat challenging for pedestrians to navigate from Capital Center to the rest of Downcity. This area also contains the newly constructed Waterplace Condominium buildings. This complex would likely draw the ire of Jane Jacobs, as it is very insular, and separated from the rest of Downcity despite being in close proximity. This discourages active streets. Aside from a few street-level businesses at the Avalon at Center Place, the Capital Center district is not street-oriented.

The little opposition that existed during the planning of the Capital Center project came from property owners in the main Downcity district (Leazes & Motte, 94). This traditional downtown area had lost most of its retail activity, and past efforts to revive it were to no avail. In the mid-1980’s Westminster Street, once Providence’s main retail corridor, was converted into a pedestrian mall, but attracted nearly no activity. Thomas Deller, Providence’s director of planning and development, was quoted in the New York Times in 2008 as saying, “In 1990, you



could have thrown a bowling ball down Westminster Street” (Paul, 2008) But as soon as 1991, new thinking about Downcity’s role in the Providence Renaissance began to emerge. Arnold Chance, CEO of Cornish Associates, a real estate development firm, convinced then-Providence Mayor Vincent “Buddy” Cianci to hold a forum concerning the future of Downcity. They recruited Andrés Duany, founder of the Congress for the New Urbanism, to help develop a new downtown master plan (Paul, 2008). The plan was focused on returning a mix of uses to the area, with continuous retail at street level and offices and residences on the floors above.

To encourage new development in Downcity, Providence introduced a tax stabilization program in 1992. This granted tax breaks to developers who invested in vacant structures or creating new Downcity jobs (McGowan, 2014). The developers received an initial tax break, and the amount of property taxes they paid would gradually increase over ten, fifteen, or twenty years, until they were paying the usual property tax amount. The philosophy behind this kind of tax incentive is that the city loses no money compared to if the structures sat vacant. By offering a discount, they spark development that otherwise would not have occurred, eventually reaping the full property tax payments at the end of the stabilization period.

Keeping with the new urbanist principle of adaptive reuse, Cornish Associates would go on to purchase eight historic structures in the neighborhood at a low cost and, in turn, invest over \$80 million to restore them. In addition to the city’s tax stabilization program, Cornish benefited greatly from state and federal tax credits which reimbursed them for significant portions of the cost of rehabilitating the historic buildings (Paul, 2008). Their focus turned to housing upon the opening of the Providence Place Mall in 1999, which posed major competition for retail traffic.

In 1999, Mayor Cianci sought a strategy to attract young residents to the area, and thus he successfully championed a proposal to exempt artwork sold in the Downcity district from sales taxes and to exempt artists who live in the district from the Rhode Island state income tax (Paul, 2008). Financial efforts to appeal to the arts community combine with the presence of educational institutions such as the Rhode Island School of Design, which owns property in Downcity despite being mainly located across the Providence River in the College Hill neighborhood, near Brown University.

Providence has been able to build off the presence of educational and cultural institutions to restore some vitality to Downcity. Weybosset Street is especially active with the presence of the Providence Performing Arts Center and Johnson and Wales University's Downcity campus. However, it would be difficult to label Downcity as a clear success story of new urbanism at this point. Westminster Street still contains plenty of vacant storefronts and surface parking lots where buildings once stood. The retail stores are tailored towards young people, particularly college students. One would not expect many families to be living in the area based on the amenities present. The northern part of Downcity contains Kennedy Plaza, a park and public square which serves as a busy hub for bus transportation in the city. To the west of this plaza is an area that includes the Biltmore and Omni Hotels. Pedestrian bridges connect the Omni to the mall and to the Rhode Island Convention Center. This makes it easy for visitors to stay within the hotel, mall, convention center, or Dunkin Donuts Center arena without venturing throughout the parts of Downcity with more urban character. Also attached to the Omni is The Residences Providence, an upscale condominium building. Like Waterplace Condominiums, this structure is separated from the core of Downcity and separates upper class residents from the mixed-use historic urban areas.

The most iconic building in the Providence skyline is the Industrial Trust Tower, more commonly referred to as the “Superman Building” because its art deco design resembles that of the buildings in the fictional Metropolis of comic books. The building is currently vacant, and this creates an apparent dearth of activity in Downcity’s financial district, located between the arts district and the Providence River. The high amount of office vacancies in Providence’s Financial District limits the potential of Downcity residents to walk to work.

There are a few small convenience stores and pharmacies located in Downcity where residents could fulfill basic needs. But these stores only cover a limited amount of items. There is no regular sized grocery store. Some basic services are present in the area, including a dry cleaner, eye doctor, health club, and shoe repair. Many storefronts are vacant, especially on Westminster Street, where the struggling financial district leads into the upstart arts district. There are a few upscale restaurants, but the overall nature of the area does not necessarily appeal to the upper classes. The college community seems to be the most prominent influence on Downcity. Though public transportation is available, it seems that it would be more difficult for residents of Downcity Providence to live there permanently without the advantage of owning an automobile.

Downcity is certainly livelier than it was in the early 1990’s when the new urbanist master plan was created. But much of this activity seems to be caused by tourists and college students. The streets do not seem to resemble the ideal communities described by Jane Jacobs. The upscale condominium complexes are examples of urban enclaves, separated from the street-oriented mixed-use buildings. Downcity Providence seems more aesthetically appealing than downtown Worcester. The buildings that are left standing appear to be better maintained. But both Worcester and Providence demonstrate urban form. This raises the question: how has

residential financial diversity fluctuated in these two downtowns in the past two decades, especially considering the new urbanist strategies being employed in Providence? Quantitative analysis shows the changes of financial diversity for residents in Providence as compared to Worcester.

### **Research Design**

The major question I hope to answer is whether or not increased urban mixed-use development should be expected to increase the amount of residential financial diversity in a downtown. This question is important because it determines if building more integrated communities, at least in terms of financial diversity, can legitimately be used as a reason why cities should decide to invest in new urbanism. It is not clear to what extent residential financial diversity translates into the amelioration of social ills or into the creation of the “real neighborhoods and diverse districts” mentioned in the Congress for the New Urbanism’s charter (“Charter of the New Urbanism,” n.d.). Even if new urbanism were shown to increase residential financial diversity, that would not necessarily guarantee the creation of stronger communities, especially as it is difficult to define exactly what a strong community means (Talen, 1998). Furthermore, my research question does not address other reasons why new urbanism might be attractive, such as historic preservation, beautification, attracting tourism, or growing environmental sustainability. It focuses narrowly on if mixed-use design can be thought of as a cause of increased financial diversity.

If new urbanist development makes a neighborhood a very attractive place to live, property values will naturally rise to a point where only the affluent can afford to own or rent a home. This goes against the goal of residential income diversity. Government officials may be content with this result, as it provides them the opportunity to collect property tax revenue and

worry less about the appearance of their downtown districts as they try to attract business activity and tourists. But if a government is focused on creating more financially integrated downtowns, my study is relevant to them as it seeks to show whether or not there is a direct connection between urban form and increasing the amount of residential financial diversity.

The most basic definition of “mixed-use development,” as it will be used in this study, is a physical area that combines residential property with another use such as retail or office space (which is typically at street level). Ideally, mixed-use development would involve multiple uses within a single structure. However, it is still possible to have a mixed-use community where various uses are near each other, but in separate buildings. This is possible because the main premise of mixed-use development is that people can live, shop, dine, and work all within a compact area, rather than needing to travel long distances, as is the case in most suburbs.

To measure residential financial diversity, I used gross rent statistics from the Census and the American Community Survey (ACS), a project of the U.S. Census Bureau which records statistics on the basis of small districts known as Census tracts. Gross rent measures the monthly cost of housing by combining the monthly cost of contract rent with the monthly cost of utilities. While gross rent applies to renters and not owners, there is very little ACS data for owner-occupied monthly housing costs, so I assumed renters are representative of the whole. The amount people pay for housing should be correlated with their wealth. I constructed a Herfindahl index to show diversity, combining the gross rent and monthly owner costs from the 2000 Census, 2009 ACS, and the 2012 ACS. This is similar to how Steve Lanza analyzed housing stock diversity in Connecticut towns (Lanza, 2013). The index was constructed by starting with the groups the ACS and Census uses to group the number of units that pay within a certain range of gross rent, for example, between \$900 and \$999 per month, or between \$1000

and \$1249 per month. The number of units in each group was then divided by the total number of units, resulting in the percentage of the whole for each group. This percentage was then squared, and these squares were added, showing the average percentage of the whole. To make the index easier to understand, this percentage was subtracted from 100%. The result is that values closer to 100%, or to 1 if used with decimals, are more equitable.

The year 2000 serves as a base year. The major early projects of the Providence Renaissance had been completed, including rerouting the railroad tracks and rivers, and constructing the Providence Place Mall. The new urbanist-minded rehabilitations in Downcity were still in their early stages, and the tax incentive to attract artists to the area had just been passed. By 2009, the focus had shifted to development in Downcity, spurred by the ongoing investments by Cornish Associates to rehabilitate buildings for housing and offer affordable rent to street-level retailers (Paul, 2008). Finally, 2012 represents the most recent data, and takes some of the newer high-end mixed-use developments in Capital Center into account. Though the Worcester Center Mall closed during this time frame, and plans for a replacement new urbanist district began to be drawn up, no significant changes in the nature of mixed-use development took place in Worcester. We will assume it to be a control city for the time frame, impacted by the same economic conditions.

I also analyzed other statistics from the Census and ACS: median income and median rent, which allow us to understand the relative state of residential wealth, in addition to the diversity. This will show if wealth in general is increasing or decreasing among residents in a downtown even if the diversity is not changing.

The null hypothesis is that there is no substantial link between mixed-use design and residential financial diversity. If this is true, the changes made in Providence will not have resulted in a significant change in its residential financial diversity beyond the changes in Worcester, which exists as a control. If this null hypothesis stands, the results would indicate there is no evidence that the focus on rehabilitating Downcity structures for mixed-use residential and retail purposes has changed the financial diversity of residents in Downcity Providence. The alternative hypothesis is that more mixed-use design will cause greater residential financial diversity. If this hypothesis is true, we would expect that Worcester's index score would begin in 2000 at a higher level than Providence's respective score, as Providence lagged behind Worcester in mixed-use development present in their downtowns in 2000. We also would see Providence's index score growing at a pace that outpaced any growth in Worcester because of the increasing presence of mixed-use development over the periods in Providence, while it remained stable in Worcester. While it is impossible to know all of the effects which may influence residential financial diversity, we will assume that these factors are, in general, constant across both Providence and Worcester.

To get some perspective on the range of the index numbers, I will use New York City as an example. Lower Manhattan could be considered an area that very much lacks residential financial diversity, as nearly all of the rents are above \$2000. In New York County's Census Tract 21, home to the World Trade Center, the index score for the 2012 ACS is 0.268, an extremely low score. Crossing the East River, Downtown Brooklyn is an area of greater residential financial diversity, and it is popularly known to have been experiencing gentrification in recent years. Its index score for the 2012 ACS in King's County Census Tract 15 is 0.783, substantially higher than lower Manhattan. Downtown New Haven (New Haven County,

Connecticut Census Tract 3614.01), to compare another mid-sized city in Southern New England, has a score of 0.760 for 2012. Hartford County Census Tract 4969, which includes West Hartford's new urbanist Blue Back Square has a 2012 score of 0.798, though it should be noted that this tract contains primarily single family homes in addition to the mixed-use Blue Back development.

### Quantitative Results

A Herfindahl index of gross rents is used to operationalize residential financial diversity, as was explained in the research design section:

Figure 1: Gross Rent Diversity Index

	Downcity Providence (Tract 8)	Downtown Worcester (Tract 7317)	Change Difference (Prov. minus Worc.)
2000 (Census)	0.901	0.906	
Change	-0.033	-0.011	-0.021
2009 (ACS)	0.868	0.895	
Change from 2000	-0.007	-0.024	+0.016
Change from 2009	+0.025	-0.012	+0.037
2012 (ACS)	0.894	0.883	

Source: US Census Bureau; American FactFinder

The table above displays the results of the Gross Rent Diversity Index, constructed as a Herfindahl index, as described in the Research Design section. The differences over the years and between the cities are not very large. To support the alternative hypothesis, we would expect Worcester's downtown to have more residential financial diversity, and therefore, a meaningfully higher score in 2000. However, Worcester's score is less than 0.01 higher than



Providence in 2000. Considering how scores range (as explained in the Research Design section), the diversity in 2000 can essentially be considered equal for Downcity Providence and downtown Worcester. This does not support the alternative hypothesis. Additionally, as Providence continued to implement new urbanist plans between 2000 and 2009, its index score did not increase as a result. It declined even more than Worcester's score over the same period, indicating that the revival of mixed-use development in Providence's Downcity did not spur an increase in the diversity of gross rents. Between 2009 and 2012, the index score for Downcity Providence grew very slightly and fell slightly in Downtown Worcester. But this change is in no way a resounding sign that mixed-use development caused growth in residential financial diversity, especially considering the overall trend over the period 2000-2012. Diversity in both downtowns decreased over the period, and Downcity Providence's score only decreased 0.016 less than Worcester's, where the major changes were not taking place.

To understand the broader trends of residential financial diversity in both cities, the same statistics are shown here for neighborhoods that border the two downtowns. These include College Hill, in Providence, home to Brown University, and Shrewsbury Street in Worcester, a district that is home to both nightlife and industrial uses.

Based on this data, there is nothing that showed the focus on mixed-use development in Downcity Providence substantially caused the diversity in gross rents, representing the financial diversity of residents, to grow. Therefore, the null hypothesis stands. I conclude that there is no direct link between mixed-use development and residential financial diversity.

For further perspective, nearby neighborhoods are considered:

Figure 2: Gross Rent Diversity Index for Neighboring Census Tracts

	College Hill, Providence (Tract 36.02)	Shrewsbury Street, Worcester (Tract 7318)	Change Difference (Prov. minus Worc.)
2000 (Census)	0.901	0.937	
Change	-0.199	-0.018	-0.181
2009 (ACS)	0.702	0.913	
Change from 2000	-0.080	-0.016	-0.245
Change from 2009	+0.122	+0.008	+0.114
2012 (ACS)	0.821	0.921	

Source: US Census Bureau; American FactFinder

The trends of these neighborhoods are similar to those of their downtown counterparts. Both lose diversity between 2000 and 2009. College Hill, like Downcity, gains diversity between 2009 and 2012, while Shrewsbury Street also gains diversity during that time, unlike its downtown counterpart. The major difference, however, is the magnitude of these changes. College Hill's score plummets 0.20 between 2000 and 2009, showing how dramatic changes can be within a Census tract. College Hill makes up a sizeable portion of that deficit during the period from 2009 to 2012, rising over 0.12 to 0.821. Shrewsbury Street remains much more stable relative to College Hill, falling by just over 0.01 during the first period and climbing less than 0.01 during the second period. While I will not speculate on what cause the changes in these areas, this shows that the changes in each downtown are unique to the downtowns. The downtown diversity differs from neighborhoods with less mixed-use development.

I also analyzed the trends in median gross rent and median household income within these Census tracts to see if these figures climbed or declined despite the diversity of gross rents remaining fairly stable in both Census tracts from 2000 to 2012.

Figure 3: Median Gross Rent (in Dollars)

	Providence Tract 8, Nominal Values	Adjusted to 2012 Dollars	Worcester Tract 7317, Nominal Values	Adjusted to 2012 Dollars	Adjusted Change Difference (Prov. minus Worc.)
2000 (Census)	471	628	551	735	
Change	+275	+170	+239	+110	+60
2009 (ACS)	746	798	790	845	
Change from 2000	+578	+430	+295	+111	+319
Change from 2009	+312	+260	+56	+1	+259
2012 (ACS)	1058	1058	846	846	

Source: US Census Bureau; American FactFinder

Figure 4: Median Household Income (in Dollars)

	Providence Tract 8, Nominal Values	Adjusted to 2012 Dollars	Worcester Tract 7317, Nominal Values	Adjusted to 2012 Dollars	Adjusted Change Difference (Prov. minus Worc.)
2000 (Census)	13,182	17,576	24,107	32,142	
Change	+275	+170	+239	+110	+60
2009 (ACS)	13,361	14,299	28,894	20,922	
Change from 2000	+587	+430	+295	+111	+319
Change from 2009	+312	+260	+56	+1	+259
2012 (ACS)	15,613	15,613	27,162	27,162	

Source: US Census Bureau; American FactFinder

Between each survey year, and over the entire period 2000-2012, the median gross rent grew at a higher pace in Downcity Providence than it did in downtown Worcester. Also, while Downcity Providence's median household income started as being much less than downtown Worcester's, it grew at a higher pace during those years. The high population of college students also helps us to understand why Downcity Providence still does not appear to be gentrified compared to downtown Worcester despite the rising median income. Despite growth in that Downcity's median household income, the population that would sustain a market for upscale goods and services still does not exist in Downcity.

These statistics give some credence to some of the concerns that mixed-use development can lead to gentrification. Conversely, this shows that new urbanist design can make a downtown a more attractive place in which to live. For policy makers, whether or not this statistic works in favor of employing new urbanist development depends on priorities. The investment in Downcity contributed to the rising profile of Providence. The median gross rent

grew as living in the city's core became more attractive. If bettering a downtown's reputation is an objective of city leaders, new urbanist planning can contribute to that. However, officials should be wary of claims that mixed-use development will create more financially integrated communities. They should not rely on this as an argument in favor of mixed-use development.

### **Discussion**

The results indicate that it is important for us to think about new urbanism primarily as a movement in urban design rather than social reform. Compact, mixed-use, cities still seem to have many advantages over sprawling suburbs regardless of their potential to integrate classes. These include environmental sustainability, lower transportation costs, economies of agglomeration, and urban beautification. But to the notion that design can influence social outcomes has limits. Urban form was a necessary component to the strong communities described by Jane Jacobs in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. However, it was not the primary cause of the way those neighborhoods functioned. We should remember that Jacobs was writing about New York, a massive metropolis where neighborhoods outside of the primary centers of Midtown and Lower Manhattan functioned partially on their own while still a part of the greater city. The economic conditions, especially the availability of a variety of jobs in the city, made it possible for people of various means to live in the same area and easily commute to work. Today's post-industrial mid-sized cities struggle with employment. Downtown jobs are often either white collar or service based, while industrial work which once supported the middle class has declined immensely since the time cities like Providence and Worcester flourished. Though the lack of industrial uses reduces the need to separate land uses, it also means that city residents are more likely to be of the upper or lower classes, without a middle class to bring financial diversity amongst residents.

It is also noteworthy to reference Jacobs's *Reason Magazine* interview, especially as it pertains to the location of new development and the importance of connectedness. The removal of the "Chinese wall" of railroad tracks and realignment of the rivers facilitate the connection between the northern and main portions of Downcity Providence. But it does not address connections for residents of surrounding neighborhoods, especially those that are separated by Interstate 95. Pedestrian access from the Capital Center area to the rest of Downcity remains fairly complicated. Addressing the way residents travel within the area and where resources such as a supermarket, should one ever open in Downcity, should be located, will be important towards growing a community there that resembles the ones in Jacobs's writing.

Emily Talen (2000) argues that we should not waste time debating if new urbanism is simply a good or bad strategy. She believes research should seek to identify ways to improve it, since it is now generally accepted as the future of planning by all except free market advocates. Unfortunately, it is difficult to identify ways to improve new urbanism that will result in greater financial diversity based on knowledge of what currently exists. This is because existing diversity seems to be influenced more by other attributes of cities than by simply mixed-use form. For example, the presence of educational institutions is likely responsible for much of Providence's residential financial diversity, especially considering college students are counted by the Census.

Talen's 2010 study analyzed affordability in new urbanist developments all over the United States, including those built anew in suburban locations. But her results are consistent with mine: it is very difficult for design to create diversity. This conclusion is accentuated by the fact that in rehabilitating old cities, the basic structure is already in place. Planners must work with a framework that already exists rather than being able to design buildings and

accompanying public spaces in any way they see fit. On occasion, these spaces can be created anew in a city, such as when a stadium or highway is demolished. But the goals of bringing life back to these areas and diversifying communities may not work in concert.

Leazes and Motte, in their 2004 book describing the Providence Renaissance up to that point, aim to define what exactly an urban renaissance entails. They note attributes of improving physical appearance, generating revenue to provide municipal services, increased property values, business retention, and higher incomes and quality of life for residents. What is not explicitly addressed in this description is if stronger communities are created and if these improvements are part of a zero-sum or positive-sum game. Should the integration of classes be a prerequisite for the changes in Providence to be considered a renaissance? And would that integration lead to other desirable outcomes, such as lower crime or better schools? Further research should investigate the value of financial residential diversity, beyond whether or not design changes can encourage it.

### **Application to Other Cases**

This analysis to be can be useful for planners, leaders, and community members in mid-sized cities in Southern New England. In addition to the two cities being studied, which continue to plan for their futures, Hartford and New Haven, Connecticut and Springfield, Massachusetts are similarly situated cities which are currently undergoing and exploring new urbanist plans. Hartford's iQuilt plan is focused on making the city more walkable, but the current lack of residents and basic services limits the applicability of the plan to new urbanism. Mixed-use structures are often talked of as possibilities to fill surface parking lot, created after the

demolition of old structures to clear way for skyscrapers which were never constructed after the burst of the technology bubble of the 1990's. New Haven, under Mayor Richard C. Lee, eliminated the Oak Street neighborhood and replaced it with a highway connector to Route 34 and the New Haven Coliseum. Now, the Coliseum has been demolished, and Route 34 is being transformed from a highway to an at-grade street. From Jane Jacobs, we can expect that the connections recreated by connecting cross streets over Route 34 will be important for neighborhood residents. We also may expect, based on Jacobs, that the Coliseum site, though it has been cleared both legally and physically, for development, may not necessarily become a natural cross roads for people to gather. Springfield is currently considering plans for a casino located on the south side of its downtown and would potentially be accompanied by mixed-use housing and retail structures.

The analysis may also provide important lessons for smaller cities in the region as well. For example, Meriden, Connecticut, is considering major changes to its downtown area based on new urbanist transit-oriented development principles. It is also considering demolishing a downtown public housing project. Downtown Meriden is much poorer than the outlying residential neighborhoods. This study cautions that mixed-use development in Downtown Meriden may not diversify classes but could gentrify the area over time.

This study may not be applicable to some mid-sized cities in Southern New England that exhibit many different attributes from those aforementioned. For example, Stamford, Connecticut has been transformed as a result of state tax credits which drew many financial services and media firms to locate there. Stamford also benefits from its proximity to New York City and its transit connection via the Metro North Railroad. Other mid-sized and smaller cities such as Lowell, Massachusetts and West Hartford, Connecticut function largely as urban



suburbs. Though they contain urban centers, substantial portions of their residents commute to Boston and Hartford to work, respectively. West Hartford Center and its Blue Back Square development are often cited as prime examples of new urbanism's potential, but West Hartford is much wealthier on a per-capita basis than most other similar cities in Southern New England. Its poor are mainly relegated to the southeastern part of the city which abuts Hartford. I would not expect many lessons of new urbanism in West Hartford to apply in Worcester or Providence.

Much of the analysis may apply to other mid-sized post-industrial cities throughout the American Rust Belt, but Southern New England sets itself apart from the traditional rust belt locations in New York, Pennsylvania, and Ohio. This is due to nearby pockets of wealth, human capital, educational resources, and the presence of many large corporate headquarters.

### **Conclusion**

This study assesses whether or not the renewed focus on mixed-use development in Downcity Providence, inspired by new urbanist ideas, had any significant impact upon the financial diversity of the residents who live there. It concludes that there was no direct link between the changes that took place in Providence's downtown development since 2000 and the diversity of gross rents paid by the inhabitants there. This is based on the fact that this diversity did not change substantially more, either positively or negatively, than the same metric in Downtown Worcester, an area which also has mixed-use urban form, but where mixed-use development has remained relatively unchanged compared to Providence since 2000. It is assumed that other factors that could influence this diversity are constant between the two downtowns because they are cities of similar population in the same region which have shared similar industrial histories.

The results are important to mid-sized cities considering the potential of investing in mixed-use development, especially in Southern New England. City leaders may favor this as a strategy to help integrate classes in hopes that it will help to solve urban problems and build stronger communities. But on the results, policy makers should not assume that encouraging mixed-use development in downtown areas will lead to the residents of those areas becoming more financially diverse. It is not clear if this diversity is a prerequisite for creating strong communities, especially because there is no clear definition of what a strong urban community entails. However, the results indicate that is no evidence that mixed-use downtown development will lead to residential financial integration.

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