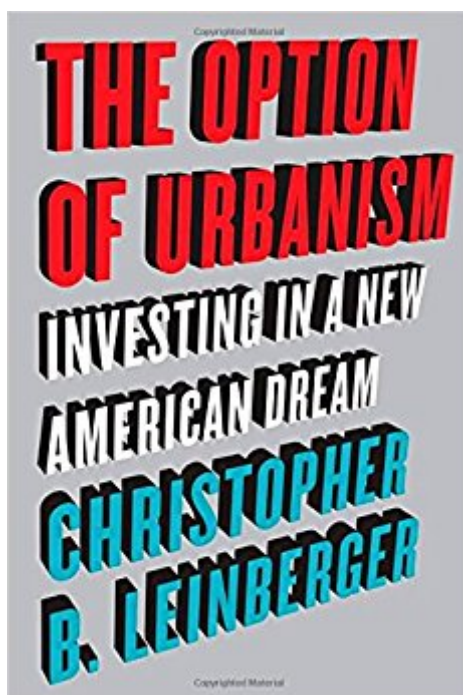


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# The Option Of Urbanism: Investing In A New American Dream



## Synopsis

Americans are voting with their feet to abandon strip malls and suburban sprawl, embracing instead a new type of community where they can live, work, shop, and play within easy walking distance. In *The Option of Urbanism* visionary developer and strategist Christopher B. Leinberger explains why government policies have tilted the playing field toward one form of development over the last sixty years: the drivable suburb. Rooted in the driving forces of the economy's car manufacturing and the oil industry's this type of growth has fostered the decline of community, contributed to urban decay, increased greenhouse gas emissions, and contributed to the rise in obesity and asthma. Highlighting both the challenges and the opportunities for this type of development, *The Option of Urbanism* shows how the American Dream is shifting to include cities as well as suburbs and how the financial and real estate communities need to respond to build communities that are more environmentally, socially, and financially sustainable.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"In the latest of his long list of notable writings and accomplishments, author Christopher B. Leinberger introduces in *The Option of Urbanism* a new framework within which to tackle the question of sprawl and imagine the future. In [his book], Leinberger deftly shares his wealth of knowledge through the musings of a writer, the patience of an academic, and the technical ability of an active developer. The book is straightforward and manages to be an enjoyable reading experience for just about anyone interested in where the developing landscape goes from here." --

Howard Kozloff "Urban Land magazine" (01/11/2007) Could it possibly be that [metropolitan] Washington, for years bashed by politicians, its [city] population shrinking and, at one point, almost bankrupt, has become a model of how the entire nation might smartly develop in the 21st century? I never thought I'd see the day. But Christopher Leinberger makes a startling case for it in his book.

-- Neal Peirce "Washington Post Writers Group" "Leinberger, a developer who teaches real estate at the University of Michigan, may be the boldest prophet of walkability anywhere. 'The United States,' he writes, 'is on the verge of a new phase in constructing its built environment.'" -- Alan Ehrenhalt

"Governing magazine" (02/01/2008) "A readable synthesis of history, planning, and real estate, the book is not yet another polemic about How We Should Live, but an informed and realistic argument about future growth and what choices we face along the way. Leinberger's book offers the novice a readable introduction to some of the debate surrounding the American city, and the veteran a lively respite from the house of mirrors. With well-selected references that provide a good jumping-off point for further reading, I wouldn't hesitate to recommend the book to my students or friends looking for a fresh take on the form and future of our cities." -- Rob Goodspeed

"Goodspeed Update" (02/22/2008) "The clarity of the descriptions and the grounding in economics and market are the best of our collective efforts. I particularly like the chapter on the costs of sprawl - a powerful summary that should be read by all new urbanists." -- Peter Calthorpe (06/03/2009) "Could it possibly be that [metropolitan] Washington, for years bashed by politicians, its [city] population shrinking and, at one point, almost bankrupt, has become a model of how the entire nation might smartly develop in the 21st century? I never thought I'd see the day. But Christopher Leinberger makes a startling case for it. in his book." -- Neal Peirce

"Washington Post Writers Group" "Developer and professor Christopher B. Leinberger...has written the book to give to colleagues, constituents, and public officials who don't quite get what's going on in American cities and suburbs. The Option of Urbanism: Investing in a New American Dream is free of jargon and, more important, free of ideological resentments." -- Harold Henderson

"Planning magazine" (02/01/2008)

Christopher B. Leinberger admirably chronicles the real estate industry's critical role in the evolving nature of the American Dream. Drawing equally from history, professional experience, research and pop culture, he makes a very readable case for the desirability and realization of the next American Dream â " walkable urbanism. Reading his analysis reinvigorates my passion for the dynamic potential of our industry. (Albert B. Ratner, co-chairman of the board of directors, Forest City Enterprises, Inc.) Could it possibly be that [metropolitan] Washington, for years bashed by

politicians, its [city] population shrinking and, at one point, almost bankrupt, has become a model of how the entire nation might smartly develop in the 21st century? I never thought I'd see the day. But Christopher Leinberger ... makes a startling case for it ... in his book. (Neal Peirce, Washington Post Writers Group) Chris Leinberger has spent many years thinking about real estate economics and how our culture is affected by our built environment. This book offers a cogent argument for changing that environment to achieve more lasting values, both economic and cultural. (Robert Davis, developer and founder of Seaside, Florida)

I've drank the urbanist Kool-Aid, for sure. However, I was very pleased that this book presents both sides of the argument between walkable urbanism and driveable suburbanism. The author, who is a real estate developer and expert, goes through the benefits and drawbacks of each with some fairness, though he seems to prefer the urbanism argument. I particularly liked his framing of the situation in terms of demographics, social policy, and long term effects, and how he posits that perhaps we've gone too far down the suburban path and need to swing back toward walkable urbanism. His arguments describe how Wall Street, large developers, and government policy lead us toward suburban development, and why urban areas are so expensive (longer term building timelines, more expensive land, and most of all, lack of supply.) I highly recommend this for anyone unfamiliar with walkable urbanism, or who might be interested in why our built environment is the way it is. It's a pretty short book but well written and researched, and certainly more even-handed than Kunstler or Kotkin.

Christopher B. Leinberger's book put a name to a desire I have had in my search to find a new home. I wanted a place where my family had the option of walking to most of the day to day places we tend to visit - school, post office, drug store, grocery store, barber, dry cleaning, coffee shop, bookstore, etc. It turns out the name for this is "walkable urbanism" - it's a return to an older time (pre-car) neighborhood, in terms of property value it has a premium compared to drivable suburbanism and there is a small movement making it more popular. This book from a real estate professional offers a logical and positive view of "walkable urbanism" without bashing drivable suburbanism that has dominated the landscape for the past fifty years. It provides a historical context to how we got to where we are and why the next phase will be a return to "walkable urbanism". The benefits to mitigating climate change and eliminating dependence on foreign oil are obvious. However the additional benefits of personal health and feeling a part of a community are also just as appealing.

This book could very well be the 'Death and Life of Great American Cities' of the 21st century! The author, a specialist in real estate development and not in urban planning, explains how government policies and standardized real estate products have supported the growth of drivable suburbia over the past decades. He demonstrates with refreshing arguments that 'walkable urbanism' is actually favoured by a large portion of the population and challenges the market and governments to respond accordingly. This concise, well-written eye-opener is light-years away from the rehashed New Urbanism discourses and should absolutely be read by all concerned with the future of our cities!

I just read a Dan Brown book (Inferno) that dealt with the over-population of cities of the world in an entertaining way. This book...is interesting...but in a different fashion. By fashion, I mean...an angle that I've never thought of, and am really not convinced is accurate...but whatever. I'm from Detroit, don't tell me cars are ruining the world! To elaborate, the author begins in chapter one talking about GM's, "Futurama" at the World's Fair in 1939. He describes it as the birth of "drivable suburbanism", meaning...people who work in the city can now live 45 minutes or more away from work because they can drive. Thus, the "American Dream" was born, and we all bought our acre of land with a tacky-tacky house on it, and had 2.5 kids. I get it...and actually that makes sense to me. Post-War, that's all anyone wanted. By chapter four, he's blaming Social Segregation, Environmental Problems, and Obesity...on this very drive. We use polluting cars for everything, our kids don't ride their bikes to school, poor people can't afford to drive...etc. Can I stretch my mind REALLY far...and kind of follow that logic? Maybe. But I don't feel I should have to strain my brain like this to make such a connection. He goes on to talk about parking and zoning policies, and how the Government has puppet strings on Real Estate...and TV and Media sway us toward or away from everything we do. Do I get that? Yes. I can follow some of these arguments, but it hurts my head. I'm a girl who loves the city...and I believe in Urban Farming initiatives, car-sharing, and TRUST me...the convenience of city living if nothing else. According to the evidence cited in this book, we are slowly moving away from sub-urbanism, and back into, "walkable urbanism" or, city living. That would be just fine with me, but I don't think it's for everybody. There will definitely be a few generation cycles passing before we get there. My biggest critique would be: leave the political stuff out. Talk about the positives of Walkable Urbanism, and people will catch on. We're not dummies...everyone I know HATES driving to work, and according to the book, we're already moving in that direction. With as many childless families as there are with children, and the baby boomers retiring...people will

migrate back to the convenience of the city on their own. Don't hate on the American Dream just yet, we're always evolving.

This book truly gives a full view of urban geography of yesterday, today and where the US is heading! Kudos!

Excellent!!

Great Resource for school, it was very helpful. I will look at others like this. Good, Good, Good, Good Resource.

Great book. I lived the phases of walkable neighborhoods to driving-suburban. Now we have return to sustainable, walking neighborhoods especially with the gas cost. As I grew up, I felt supply and demand dictated growth. This book explained government and economic factors that influence development. good read

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