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The Quest to Confront Suburban Decline

Political Realities and Lessons

Thomas J. Vicino
University of Texas at Arlington

The social and economic decline of first-tier suburbs has emerged as an important issue in metropolitan America, yet little is known about the political and policy responses to this problem. An analysis of Baltimore County demonstrates that the local government was able to implement revitalization projects from 1995 to 2005 since it had jurisdiction over its first-tier suburbs. Characteristics such as a large population in both first-tier and outer suburbs, an affluent tax base, and the lack of municipalities allowed Baltimore County to redistribute funds for these projects. I argue that if policymakers and planners are serious about confronting suburban decline, then either a regional growth boundary or a regional zoning tool is necessary to slow the pressures of urban decentralization. The political realities suggest that the will to maintain local autonomy is stronger than the will to eliminate the real barriers to revitalizing first-tier suburbs.

Keywords: *suburban decline; first-tier suburbs; suburban revitalization; politics*

Recently, significant popular and academic attention has focused on the socioeconomic state of the nation's older suburbs, located just outside of central cities. Scholars and practitioners have increasingly paid attention to the changing nature of American suburbs, with an emphasis on the decline of first-tier suburbs (Hudnut 2003; Lucy and Phillips 2000, 2006; Wheeler 2005). A cursory glance at the latest headlines demonstrates the interest and public concern about the topic. For instance, newspapers across the country read, "older suburbs struggle to maintain their vitality" (Christie 2005); "old

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'burbs need work" (Ott 2006); "inner suburbs fall through the cracks" (Cohn 2006); and "suburbs nearer to cities neglected" (Ohlemacher 2006). Reports like these suggest that not only central cities, but also their surrounding first-tier suburbs, suffer from widespread social and economic problems. Consequently, this has fueled a variety of analyses into the state of first-tier suburbs today.

These suburban areas were once the icons of the "American Dream." Yet with the massive growth of metropolitan areas and the decentralization of people and jobs, these areas are no longer places of destination. The lure of the outer suburbs (Garreau 1991; Squires 2002) and the rebound of many downtowns (Grogan and Proscio 2000) have left the first-tier suburbs caught in between two stronger forces of place. Decades of deindustrialization, coupled with an aging population, an obsolete housing stock, and a diversifying population made suburbs fully mature by the beginning of the twenty-first century. Across the nation, these issues affected many older suburban areas to varying degrees (Bourne 1996; Hudnut 2003).

Consider the case of suburban Baltimore. For the past three decades, Baltimore's first-tier suburbs have experienced significant social and economic changes. They experienced marked transformations relative to each other and to the outer suburban areas of the region. The majority of Baltimore's first-tier suburbs witnessed moderate to severe decline between 1970 and 2000. The stagnation of population and income, the lack of a marketable housing stock, and changes in the labor market characterized Baltimore's suburban transformation. In short, Baltimore's suburbs—like many others in the Rustbelt—had reached a crossroads at the end of the twentieth century, and their future prospects were tenuous at best (Vicino, Hanlon, and Short 2007).

What ultimately happens to the first-tier suburbs is, in part, a question of public policy. What are the roles of local, state, and federal policies as they apply to first-tier suburbs? What can we learn from the Baltimore experience? What political and policy tools can be used to revitalize these suburban communities, and how are they limited? Drawing on the experience of Baltimore's confrontation with suburban decline, this study presents an analysis of how the political structure and actors that constitute local government affect what those local governments can do and choose to do about suburban decline. Then, I present a discussion of state and federal attempts to confront suburban distress and their relationship to local policy. I conclude with a discussion about the realities and lessons of confronting decline and put forth a research agenda for the study of first-tier suburban America.

Charting Suburban Decline

Before examining the political and policy responses, it is first important to chart a pattern of decline in the first-tier suburbs to frame the issue. Nationally, studies have shown that these suburban areas generally experienced a lack of population growth, diminished economic status of residents, an aging population and housing stock, and uncompetitive labor force in recent decades (Leigh and Lee 2005; Orfield 2002; Puentes and Warren 2006). These changes began to distress first-tier suburbs in 1970. Locally, the Baltimore region experienced a similar pattern of suburban decline. To present a critical appraisal of the political and policy responses to suburban decline, it is first necessary to characterize the nature of this public problem. Thus, I briefly review the principal findings of the recent studies on suburban decline, focusing on the changes from 1970 to 2000, the period when the key socioeconomic transitions occurred.

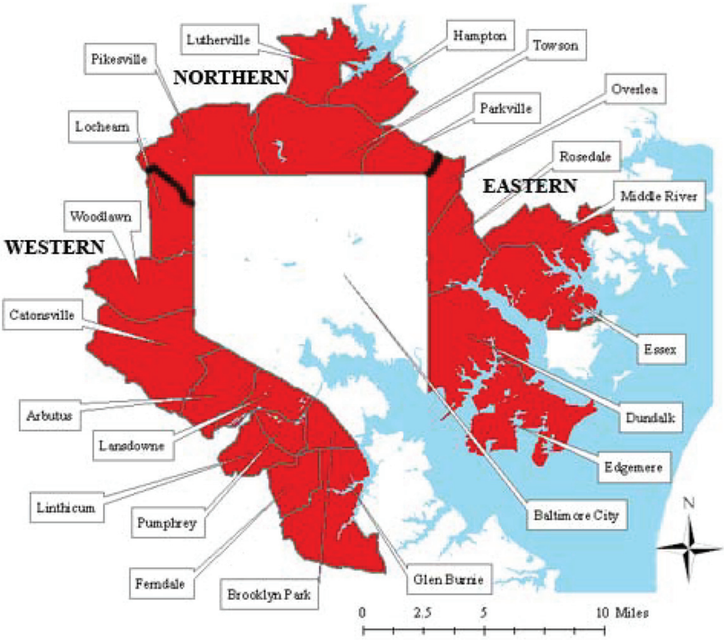
In one of the most comprehensive studies to date on suburban decline, Lucy and Phillips (2000) analyzed socioeconomic census data to examine recent suburban changes. They were among the first scholars to find that suburbs were systematically declining. In a study based on a sample of 554 suburbs in 24 states from 1960 to 1990, they analyzed census place-level data to identify trends on suburban decline. They defined suburban decline as income decline, concentrating on the median family income of a suburb relative to median family income of the metro area. Lucy and Phillips (2000) argued that a suburb with a declining income was a suburb experiencing overall socioeconomic decline.[1]

In another study, William Hudnut (2003), the former mayor of Indianapolis, studied the decline of older suburbs throughout the nation. His accounts of the socioeconomic state of first-tier suburbs provided an in-depth understanding about the current challenges that these places face. Hudnut visited some 60 first-tier suburban communities across the nation. Four themes characterized his findings. First, he observed a significantly aged housing stock. First-tier suburbs tended to have a very old housing stock relative to other suburbs. Hudnut observed that many houses had deteriorated and were in need of repair. Second, investment in infrastructure disproportionately favored sprawling, outer suburbs. In the metropolitan areas that Hudnut visited, he observed new construction of large houses, schools, roads, and water and sewer systems on the metropolitan fringe. Substantial public investments went to fund projects on the fringe while the first-tier suburbs deteriorated. Third, he witnessed an aging population from the Baby Boom. First-tier suburbs housed many residents who were born during the population boom during the late 1940s and 1950s. Some five decades later, these suburban residents had aged significantly compared to those in the outer suburbs. Fourth, the concentration of poverty moved from city to suburb. Hudnut drove along the city-suburban political border of many regions. He observed that residents of high poverty neighborhoods in the central city were beginning to spill over into adjacent first-tier suburbs.

Building on the previous work of Lucy and Phillips and Hudnut, Puentes and Warren (2006) conducted one of the most recent and comprehensive quantitative analyses of socioeconomic change in first-tier suburbs. They analyzed 64 urban counties that housed the majority of first-tier suburbs in the nation. Using the county level geographic scale allowed them to collect and analyze socioeconomic census data over a span of 50 years, from 1950 to 2000. Puentes and Warren (2006) compared socioeconomic change in the first-tier suburbs to primary cities, newer suburbs, and the nation, and then they developed four themes of suburban change. First, the most striking finding was that one-fifth of Americans lived in first-tier suburbs in 2000. This meant that the first-tier suburbs housed a significant number of residents, nearly 50 million. Second, over five decades, first-tier suburbs became home to a very diverse population. Large enclaves of immigrants and elderly populations developed in the first-tier suburbs. Third, income declined and poverty rose during the 1990s in all of the first-tier suburban counties. Fourth, the infrastructure of first-tier suburbs grew outdated as housing aged and commercial retail strips grew obsolete.

In yet another study, urban scholars have investigated regional patterns of suburban decline in a focused case study of Baltimore (Hanlon and Vicino 2007). They identified 21 first-tier suburbs based on a spatial criterion and age of development criterion. If the suburban place shared a boundary with the central city, or if half of the housing stock was built prior to 1970, then the suburb was classified as a first-tier suburb, and all others were classified as outer suburbs. Figure 1 provides a map of these places. In terms of the analysis of decline, they found substantial evidence of decline in Baltimore's first-tier suburbs but the extent of this decline varied among these suburbs. Specifically, Baltimore's first-tier suburbs witnessed increases in poverty, which became more pronounced during the 1990s. First-tier suburbs housed the oldest residents among all suburbs, and residents were passing away without a younger generation to replace them. These areas did not attract new population, and patterns of White flight were evident. The analysis theorized that three main factors contributed to decline among first-tier suburbs: economic restructuring, inferior housing stock, and economic and racial segregation.

Figure 1
First-Tier Suburbs in the Baltimore Region



Source: Author's production.

Without a doubt, evidence of suburban decline abounds. Recent scholarship has demonstrated that first-tier suburbs now have urban problems, and a clear pattern of social and economic decline has emerged in the first-tier suburbs. Problems of socioeconomic decline have often been associated with the city or urban areas, and these areas have been commonly depicted "as place[s] of crime and discontent" by the media (Vale 1995, 646). Popular representations of decline have been associated in a negative light as *urban* decline morphs into *suburban* decline. While popular parallelisms and social constructions of suburban decline have been related to urban decline, the experiences are vastly different given the difference in the age of development and the cycle of decline between city and suburb. The wrath of socioeconomic decline has wreaked havoc on U.S. central cities for decades, and it now creeps into suburbs (Short 2007).

Between 1970 and 2000, the outer suburbs flourished while the first-tier suburbs declined. In other words, these disparities were spatial in nature. In 1970, the first-tier suburbs were new places and the outer suburbs were still largely rural in character. By 2000, the spatial character of suburbs had changed. First-tier suburbs were built out and older, while the outer suburbs were newer, developing places. In essence, the life cycle of suburbs decentralized in an outward spatial pattern (Lee and Leigh 2005). The political and policy responses in first-tier suburbs have changed from growth to decline issues. I now turn to a critical discussion of how the public sector confronted with suburban decline, using Baltimore as a case study.

What Can Be Done?

Baltimore's first-tier suburbs changed into very different places as the socioeconomic status of its residents declined between 1970 and 2000. What, if anything, can be done to prevent further decline of these places and to put them on the track to recovery? In the following sections, I review current political and policy responses at the local, state, and federal levels of government that deal with the decline of older suburban communities, and then I offer a critical appraisal about the realities of confronting suburban decline.

Baltimore County, Maryland stands out as a national leader among local governments in confronting suburban decline (Outen 2005). In this section, I expand upon what Baltimore County did to attract national attention for confronting its problems of suburban decline. The primary focus is to review a sample of revitalization projects. I present a critical assessment of the realities and limitations of the county's suburban revitalization efforts.

Beginning in the mid-1990s, Baltimore County developed a strategy to systematically address the problem of suburban decline. Baltimore County Executive "Dutch" Ruppersberger created the Office of Community Conservation on July 1, 1995. When Ruppersberger ran for public office in 1994 and throughout the following eight years of his term in office, he focused on four strategic goals for Baltimore County: education, crime, economic development, and community conservation. The idea was to build human capital throughout this maturing jurisdiction by conserving areas that were already built. This office was charged with stabilizing and revitalizing the county's older neighborhoods and commercial areas in first-tier suburbs. The county's mandate to address this problem continued into the 2000s when the next county executive, James "Jim" Smith, following Ruppersberger, also made first-tier suburban renewal a platform issue for his administration. Following in the spirit of former County Executive Ruppersberger, Smith acknowledged the importance of revitalization by noting that, "the role of government is to protect the individual character of our neighborhoods, and safeguard our resources and adjust to the changing development needs of our communities" (Smith 2006, 1).

The mission of the Office of Community Conservation was thus "to preserve, stabilize and enhance the human, physical, and economic conditions of the County's urban communities" (Baltimore County 2000, 144). To carry out this mission, the Office created the *Renaissance Development Initiative*. This initiative was a countywide revitalization plan that sought to create a "renaissance"—or a new beginning—for Baltimore's aging suburban communities. When it began in 1995, the plan called for redevelopment projects that addressed the problems of a dilapidated housing stock and struggling commercial strips throughout first-tier suburbs. Funding for revitalization projects was directed exclusively to community conservation areas. All of the county's first-tier suburbs were located within the conservation boundaries. Furthermore, all of Baltimore County's first-tier suburbs are classified as census designated places (CDPs). CDP boundaries are delineated to collect data on unincorporated areas with concentrations of population, housing, and commercial sites, and a degree of local identity. These boundaries are established in cooperation with local and state officials, and they define the areas for Dundalk, Essex, and Middle River in this study. With this map and a public mandate from the county executive, the office focused its resources on these communities in an attempt to prevent and even reverse a pattern of socioeconomic decline.

In the decade between 1995 and 2005, the Office of Community Conservation carried out a variety of projects to address the problem of an aging housing stock and struggling commercial areas. The office's planning efforts and funding largely focused on the eastern suburbs of Baltimore, particularly in Dundalk, Essex, and Middle River. Table 1 provides an overview of the community conservation projects from 1995 to 2005 in Dundalk, Essex, and Middle River. By 2000, these three first-tier suburbs had experienced the most socioeconomic decline, and they became the county's primary planning focus for targeted revitalization. Thus, the review is limited to projects in these three suburbs.[2]

First, consider the case of Dundalk. This first-tier suburb, located on the eastern fringe of the central city, is one of the largest and oldest suburbs of Baltimore (Reutter 2004). Dundalk's transition from a stable to declining community was dramatic. The suburb was home to some of the largest industrial plants in the world, including the behemoths Bethlehem Steel

Table 1
Overview of Baltimore County Community Conservation Projects for First-Tier Suburbs of Dundalk, Essex, and Middle River, 1995 to 2005

Area of Emphasis	Project	Location	Investment
Housing—New	*WaterView Homes*	Essex	$45 million* (1)
	Hopewell Pointe Homes	Essex	$60 million*
	Miramar Landing	Middle River	$20 million
	Shelter Harbor	Dundalk	N/A
Housing—Redevelopment (property acquisition, demolition of structure, and relocation of residents)	*Chesapeake Village*	Middle River	$2 million
	Riverdale Village	Essex	$0.5 million
	Villages of Tall Trees	Middle River	$17 million
	Tidewater Village	Middle River	$0.5 million
	York Park Apartments	Dundalk	$17.2 million
Housing—Owner Assistance	*Settlement Expense Loan Program (SELP)*	Conservation Areas	$10 million
Commercial	*WaterView Town Center*	Essex	$45 million* (1)
	Historic Dundalk Village Shopping Center	Dundalk	$7.7 million*
	Martin Plaza Shopping Center	Middle River	$25 million*
Infrastructure	*Eastern Boulevard Enhancement*	Essex	$15 million
	Maryland Route 43 Extension	Middle River	$60 million
	Streetscaping of Primary and Secondary Corridors	Dundalk; Essex	$50 million
	Tall Trees Park and Eastern Regional Park Enhancements	Middle River	$11 million
Planning	*Plan to Realize the Waterfront Potential*	Conservation Areas	$0.5 million
	Urban Design Assistance Team (UDAT)	Dundalk	$1.5 million
	ReDiscovery Campaign	Dundalk; Essex	$0.5 million

Source: Baltimore County Office of Community Conservation. * denotes private-public dollars. (1) total project.

Corporation and General Motors.[3] The massive deindustrialization of the economy hit the area hard because so many of its residents were employed in

Table 2
Summary of Socioeconomic Characteristics of First-Tier Suburbs in Baltimore County, 1970 to 2000

	Population			Income		
	1970	2000	Change (%)	1970	2000	Change (%)
Dundalk	85,267	62,306	–27	$45,450	$39,789	–12
Essex	38,112	39,078	3	$41,473	$34,978	–16
Middle River	19,917	23,958	20	$43,618	$37,900	–13
Baltimore PMSA	2,069,595	2,552,994	23	$39,289	$49,938	27

	Poverty Rate (%)			Age Over 65 (%)		
	1970	2000	Change (%)	1970	2000	Change (%)
Dundalk	5	9	4	5	19	14
Essex	6	12	6	6	14	8
Middle River	5	9	4	4	13	9
Baltimore PMSA	12	12	0	8	11	3

Source: U.S. Census 2000; 1999 Dollars. Poverty rate change and age over 65 change is the raw percentage point change from 1970 to 2000.

industrial jobs. Two out of three manufacturing jobs disappeared between 1970 and 2000. The poverty rate nearly doubled, from 5% to 10%; household income declined by 12%, falling from $45,000 to $39,000 in 2000 (in constant 1999 dollars). In consequence, the population declined by one-third; approximately 22,000 residents left (see Table 2). Dundalk became an aging community, and the number of residents over 65 tripled since 1970. By the end of the 1990s, Dundalk faced especially challenging issues. The enduring deindustrialized legacy of Dundalk became a familiar chronicle that many other first-tier suburbs across the nation also experienced (Niedt 2006). These trends of decline suggested that Dundalk would continue to deteriorate unless something was done to thwart the suburban decay.

As a result, Baltimore County Executives Dutch Ruppersberger and Jim Smith took a special interest in the revitalization of Dundalk. Since 2002, the Office of Community Conservation has invested $70 million into Dundalk. This public investment was aimed at demolishing rundown apartment complexes, renovating older housing units, and refurbishing Dundalk's town square. At a press conference, Smith continued his pledge to give Dundalk a suburban makeover. On March 27, 2006, Smith announced the $7.6 million purchase of the York Park Apartments, the first 20 buildings of the complex. The remaining 36 buildings were subsequently purchased for an additional $3.4 million. The housing complex, located in the center of Dundalk, was decrepit and an eyesore. It became a magnet for criminal activity—there were more reported crimes in this area than in any other part of the county, and Baltimore County police responded to 3,800 calls in 2005 (Smith 2006). After the purchase, the county worked for several years to condemn the property for demolition. County Councilor John Olszewski, Sr. (7th District, Dundalk), played a pivotal role in the condemnation of the property. As a chair of the council, he was able to convince other councilors to vote with him to condemn the property. Plans to raze the property came to fruition in January 2007, yet not without the costs of acquisition, demolition, and relocation of residents escalating to over $17 million for the entire project. Despite the costs, spirits were not dampened. Olszewski said, "bringing this type of significant change to my community is why I chose to be in public service" (Mosher 2006, 1). Smith (2006, 1) followed suit, declaring, "the wait is over . . . today Dundalk's renaissance shines like never before, and I promise you that as the York Park complex comes down, a wonderful new community will be born." Dundalk residents, including the suburb's community development corporation, the Dundalk Renaissance Corporation (DRC), rallied behind county planners and Smith for this milestone. Residents felt that the demolition of York Park would help Dundalk confront its challenges, including fighting crime and providing attractive, quality housing. DRC President Scott Holupka commented that, "the creation of desirable housing options for families in the area is critical for Dundalk's continued renaissance. The county's commitment to changing the landscape along Yorkway is a major step forward in that effort" (Smith 2006, 1). Carolyn Jones, president of the Greater Dundalk Alliance, echoed Holupka's sentiments. "We've wanted them down for years. It's finally coming to fruition. It's a sense of hope" (Malarkey 2007, 1).

It is important to note that the process of redevelopment in first-tier suburbs has not received uniform community support. In 2000, the Maryland General Assembly, with the endorsement of Baltimore County's Office of Community Conservation, Department of Planning, and Office of the County Executive, passed S.B. 509, a bill that permitted the county to use eminent domain for economic redevelopment. County Executive Ruppersberger and planners sought to condemn approximately 300 properties in the eastern first-tier suburbs of Essex and Middle River for a new waterfront mixed-use development. Residents of these suburbs strongly opposed the county's attempts to seize private property for private redevelopment. They formed a community group named "Essex-Middle River Community in Action" to oppose the law. On November 7, 2000, the group mobilized 70% of the electorate to vote to remove the county's right to use eminent domain for economic revitalization purposes.[4] In the aftermath of the community's opposition to S.B. 509, the Office of Community Conservation developed a participatory planning process for the redevelopment of its other eastern first-tier suburb, Dundalk. The county provided funding and logistical support for the development of the Dundalk Renaissance Corporation, a community development corporation that would serve as the suburb's community liaison and voice. As a result, subsequent efforts to revitalize the county's suburbs proceeded with community support.

Other projects in Dundalk were related to commercial and infrastructure areas of redevelopment emphasis. In 2000, the county commissioned local architect Jane Willeboordse to spearhead an urban design assistance team (UDAT) to develop a community-based vision for Dundalk in the twenty-first century. Willeboordse, with public funding and logistical support from the county, assembled a team of planners, academics, and community advocates to create the new plan for Dundalk (personal communication, October 12, 2004). Two years later, the results were presented to the county and a series of recommendations was given to the Office of Community Conservation. Among other suggestions, the UDAT urged: the renovation of the Dundalk Village Center; streetscaping of Dundalk Avenue; large-scale renovations of the Dundalk Village Apartments; and the expansion of the Heritage Trail to other neighborhoods, various parks, and the waterfront. Accordingly, in March 2005, the Office of Community Conservation worked with the County Council, particularly Councilor John Olszewski, Sr. of Dundalk and Council Chair Joe Bartenfelder, to sell the Historic Dundalk Village Shopping Center to a private developer to spur its revitalization. The village was designed by Frederick Law Olmstead and is considered Dundalk's focal point. County planners consider its redevelopment to be the anchor that stimulates future projects. In March 2005, developer Jack Jacob of JMJ Dundalk Properties, LLC, purchased the property for $3.7 million and promised $2 million in renovations of office, residential, and retail space. The county provided an additional $2 million in loans and grants. County Councilman Joe Bartenfelder viewed the deal positively, noting, "this partnership is really in the best spirit of government working together with business and the community to bring about positive change that benefits everyone" (Mosher 2005, 1).

In addition to the historic village, other developers have sought to capitalize on the waterfront development recommendations that the UDAT presented to Baltimore County. There are currently three developers moving forward with plans to develop Dundalk's waterfront. Land speculator John

Riehl, of Obrecht-Riehl Properties, announced in 2005 plans to build a large housing development on the water with a 50-slip marina as well as 79 single-family homes, 56 mid-rise condominiums, and 14 townhomes on 63 acres near Peninsula Expressway. In October 2005, T. Kevin Carney, president of Thomas Builders, announced the construction of three, four-story buildings of 144 condominiums and a 60-slip marina in Dundalk's Bear Creek. Last, yet another mixed-used development and 300-slip marina proposal remains pending. Baltimore County Director of Economic Development summarized aptly, "the magic is in the appeal of the water, and the water is all over the place there" (Graham 2005, 1).

Second, consider the case of Essex. By 2000, this first-tier suburb had become the most troubled in the region. The home of the former Glenn L. Martin Company, a defense contractor and long-time benefactor of the Cold War, it employed some 50,000 residents in its heyday. The fortunes of the middle class that were born during Essex's industrial era were lost with the onset of suburban decline. For instance, household income declined by 16% between 1970 and 2000, from $42,000 to $34,000 (in constant 1999 dollars). Additionally, poverty doubled from 6% to 12% during this period, which made Essex home to the largest poverty population in the county (see Table 2). The housing stock was very old; two-thirds of housing units were built during the 1940s for the Glenn L. Martin Company's work force. By 2000, Essex faced a critical point because the suburb had experienced three consecutive decades of the most severe socioeconomic decline, relative to all other suburbs in the Baltimore region.

The Office of Community Conservation attempted to tackle the decline of Essex. A decrepit housing stock became the center of planners' attention. A large number of apartment complexes in the suburban neighborhoods of Essex dated back to the World War II era. These apartment complexes had fallen into disrepair after some 50 years of neglect. They lacked the modern amenities that apartments feature nowadays, like central air conditioning, large bathrooms, and multiple bedrooms. Making matters worse, many of the complexes were poorly managed, becoming places that harbored crime (Smith 2006). In short, they were plagued with a variety of housing problems.

One of the first complexes that the Office of Community Conservation focused on was the Riverdale Village complex on Eastern Avenue in Essex. For half a century, the 1,140-unit apartment complex housed thousands of low- to middle-income families. In the 1990s, the complex was entirely composed of Section 8 renters. A lack of upkeep allowed the community to become infested with drug use and violence. A HUD foreclosure caused the complex to become fully vacant in 2000, and by 2002, the Office of Community Conservation spent approximately $0.5 million to acquire and demolish the property for redevelopment. In its place, the county sought to stimulate the redevelopment of a new suburban town center named WaterView Town Center. The county partnered with Mark Builders Company to construct the town center, described by the developer as a "neo-traditional community." The $45 million project featured 175 single-family housing units, linked with sidewalks and bikeways to the 96,000-square-foot commercial center that included a supermarket, a bank, and other local retailers. While this development was originally billed as "affordable housing," the waterfront property soared in value. As a result, many of the originally displaced residents were no longer able to reside in this development. In another nearby project, the county attracted Ellwood Building Corporation to Hopkins Creek in Essex to develop a similar suburban town center to WaterView Town Center. The $60 million development featured 262 housing units comprised of 86 single-family units and 176 condominiums as well as a community swimming pool, a restaurant, and a private marina. Both of these housing developments in Essex took advantage of their location on the waterfront, and other public investments such as new highways, freshly paved streets, and ample sidewalks to attract and retain residents. Ultimately, county planners aimed to have these projects serve as anchors for the county's revitalization plan for eastern suburban Baltimore, and planners continue to invest in strategies to capitalize on the suburban waterfront as the greatest asset.

Third, consider the case of Middle River. Similar to Essex and Dundalk, Middle River is located on the eastern fringe of the county. This first-tier suburb experienced many of the same patterns of socioeconomic decline that Essex and Dundalk faced (see Table 2). Like Essex, the Office of Community Conservation made housing redevelopment and infrastructure its primary goals. The county acquired, condemned, and demolished the Victory Villa Gardens Complex in the Glenmar neighborhood. In its place, Office of Community Conservation Director Mary Harvey and County Councilor Joseph Bartenfelder (6th District, Essex) enticed Ryland Homes, the region's largest homebuilder, with $20 million to redevelop the site. The new development is called Miramar Landing and will feature approximately 800 housing units, of which 100 will be for seniors. Priced between $250,000 and $400,000, the development is out of reach for many Essex residents.

The county also paid attention to an area called Tidewater Village. This was another troubled apartment complex, located in the center of Middle Center. The property suffered from similar problems of decay. The Office of Community Conservation razed about half of the property to make it a less dense environment. The property was reduced from 981 units to 549 units. The remaining units were all renovated and brought up to modern housing standards. Green space and recreation areas were also integrated into the redevelopment. A playground was installed, and open space trails gave access to the Eastern Regional Park. Two other dilapidated apartment complexes were completely demolished after succumbing to years of abandonment. The county used a different approach in redeveloping these two properties. They were converted into parks. The Village of Tall Trees became a 50-acre neighborhood park for residents in Middle River. Chesapeake Village was transformed into a park with access to the Chesapeake Bay. Last, streetscaping also became a common approach for the revitalization of older suburbs. In Middle River, the Office of Community Conservation invested $5 million to refurbish Eastern Boulevard. The project improved transportation access, created pedestrian walkways, and provided aesthetic improvements along the main corridor.

In summary, this critical review of Baltimore County presents a typology of revitalization efforts in the county's eastern first-tier suburbs (see Table 1). It serves as a broad representation of the types of projects with areas of emphasis in housing, commerce, infrastructure, and planning that the Office of Community Conservation carried out over the past decade. Although the revitalization of eastern suburban Baltimore was a slow and lengthy process spanning over 10 years, these projects offer *some* evidence of progress (Malarkey 2006). Despite the progress and modest success, several limitations prevailed. These projects used a "bricks and mortar" approach. Policymakers and planners chose to focus on the renewal of physical infrastructure rather than the development of human capital and the social and economic well-being of residents in first-tier suburbs. While the built landscape was revitalized, these projects did very little to raise the economic standing for residents of first-tier suburbs.

In fact, the county's approach raises a number of concerns. First, the county's redevelopment strategy raises questions about gentrification and displacement (Niedt 2006). The lack of affordable housing remains a dominant trend for Baltimore County and the region. A recent study found that 25%, or 70,000 of all households, and 70%, or 30,000 of all low-income households, lack affordable housing in Baltimore County (Vicino et al. 2005). The county's strategy of demolishing affordable housing units and replacing them with significantly more expensive units only serves to further deplete the stock of affordable housing units. Despite these concerns, private developers have generally viewed the transformation of eastern suburban Baltimore County in a positive light. One developer commented, "that area [eastern Baltimore

County] has a lot of positive things going on . . . the Route 43 extension; the county cleaning up some of the older apartments; the whole area is undergoing a renaissance" (Graham 2005, 2). Second, the county and private developers have focused in large part on developing the land on the waterfront. In the case of WaterView in Essex, a suburban town center dubbed "affordable, middle-class housing" quickly morphed into upper, middle-class expensive housing as the value of land soared. Revitalized housing projects are increasingly out of reach for many residents of eastern suburban Baltimore County, and the majority of Baltimore County residents will not be able to afford waterfront property, especially residents of declining first-tier suburbs. Third, the county's policies largely do not tackle one of the core issues of suburban decline: income decline. The Office of Community Conservation does offer limited homeowner grants called "Settlement Expense Loan Program," which provides a $10,000 loan for closing costs that is forgiven after 15 years. Overall, income assistance programs were negligible and did little to impact the socioeconomic status of residents in declining first-tier suburbs. Despite these limitations, Baltimore County's community conservation approach was one of the most comprehensive local approaches in the nation.

The Political and Policy Realities

These accounts of the county's revitalization projects demonstrate that Baltimore County was able to confront the decline of its first-tier suburbs from 1995 to 2005. However, the effectiveness and impact of suburban revitalization projects are not yet fully known. Since accurate micro-level data are not yet available to test the impacts of these projects on the outcomes of the population, it is important to reflect on the process of first-tier suburban revitalization. This raises several important questions. What made these projects possible? What are the limitations of the county's revitalization efforts? What is the likelihood that these efforts will actually prevent future decline? In the following sections, I address these questions by critically assessing the realities and limitations of confronting suburban decline.

Strong County Government

Without a doubt, the characteristics of Baltimore County, namely the large size, the ability to redistribute funds, and its power, helped to facilitate these projects and make suburban revitalization possible. Baltimore County's revitalization projects were expensive. They required substantial public investment from the local government. In Maryland, county governments are very strong. In Baltimore County, the county executive maintains strong budget authority. This allows the executive to link his or her policy priorities to the budget process. Baltimore County Executives Dutch Ruppersberger and Jim Smith made suburban revitalization important policy issues for their administrations. They both supported the Office of Community Conservation by providing an annual operating budget of $55 million to support a professional staff of approximately 30 urban planners. According to the Office's director, Mary Harvey, this provided a mandate to engage in suburban renewal (personal communication, May 12, 2005).

The governance structure of Baltimore County is a corporate and political body that carries out public functions. The county is fully suburban and surrounds Baltimore City, an independent political incorporation in the state. There are no political subdivisions, and Baltimore County has been operated as a charter county since 1957 under a county executive and a seven person legislative county council. The General Assembly of Maryland vests the county council with all law-making powers granted under its charter. The seven councilors are respectively elected from each of seven equally populated and spatially contiguous districts. They each represent approximately 107,000 residents. Districts 6 and 7 represent the first-tier suburbs of eastern Baltimore County. John Olszewski, Sr. has represented Dundalk and parts of Essex since 1998 in District 7. Joseph Bartenfelder has represented Middle River and parts of Essex since 1994 in District 6. Both Olszewski and Bartenfelder have been key government actors in facilitating the redevelopment of first-tier suburbs in their districts. They have worked together closely in a coalition comprised of County Executives Dutch Ruppersburger and Jim Smith, Office of Community Conservation Director Mary Harvey, and various private developers to make the first-tier suburban renaissance initiative a reality.

Two implications of Baltimore's strong county government stand out as key to making these projects possible. First, Baltimore County maintained several important powers that allowed the county to confront suburban decline. Since there were no municipalities, the county had exclusive zoning and planning powers over the entire territory of Baltimore County, including the first-tier suburbs. Many of the projects required substantial land use authority. These powers included the ability to rezone land to other uses, condemn properties, and conduct countywide planning. These powers were essential to the county's suburban renaissance.

Second, Baltimore County was able to redistribute fiscal resources on a countywide level. This gave the county a substantial "throw-weight," or the ability to redirect revenue from one source to another. The size of Baltimore County and the relative affluence of the outer suburbs enabled the county to redistribute funds for suburban revitalization. The county was able to capitalize on its large tax capacity because it levied both income and property taxes over a large territory for a large and relatively affluent population. With over 760,000 residents, Baltimore County had a substantial tax base that generated over $1 billion in revenue for the county in 2000. Essentially, the redistribution of public funds from the wealthier outer suburbs of Baltimore County partially subsidized the renewal projects in the poorer first-tier suburbs. This occurred because of the *absence* of municipalities in Baltimore County. All of these suburbs were under a single jurisdiction—the county government. Hence, this provided Baltimore County the opportunity to direct a portion of its revenue toward suburban renewal.

Lack of Political Fragmentation

Baltimore's first-tier suburbs have only two local governments, making them atypical among the nation's larger metropolitan areas. There are no municipalities, independent school districts, or special districts in Baltimore County. Anne Arundel County has only two incorporated cities and no independent school districts or special districts. This means that there is virtually no political fragmentation in Baltimore's first-tier suburbs. In other words, local government is centralized at the county level. There are five county governments, and 13 municipalities. Only a small fraction of Baltimore's suburban population resides in these municipalities. The absence of political fragmentation is fundamentally important for addressing the decline of first-tier suburbs (Culver 1982).

Such widespread political fragmentation throughout metropolitan America may very well undermine any government's ability to confront suburban decline. In fragmented regions, the population is divided among many small municipalities (Teaford 1979). The consequences of this feature of American local government have been the topic of immense scholarly debate for decades.[5] Indeed, the academic and policy debates on fragmented versus centralized regional governments still range from centrist and polycentrist perspectives to regionalist views (Phares 2004). The centrists hold that large, consolidated governments are more efficient for the administration of local services while polycentrists argue that small, fragmented governments are preferred since competition among local units attracts economic growth (Ostrom, Tiebout, and Warren 1961). In the 1990s, the "new regionalist" perspective emerged as a new wave of local governance (Norris 2001b). New regionalists hold that a larger regional governance system is needed to manage local problems that transcend political boundaries like traffic and air pollution. Based on this perspective, we can view suburban decline as a regional problem since it spreads through neighborhoods of numerous first-tier suburbs. Without a regional system or some centralization of local government, potential challenges rise when confronting suburban decline. First, local governments may not benefit from economies of scale, which allows larger areas to collect the revenue necessary for suburban revitalization. In some instances, it should be noted that there is evidence that without a regional system or local centralization of government, cost-savings and efficiency of public programs still might be possible through techniques like interlocal agreements and informal cooperative networks (see Feiock 2004 and 2007; Frederickson, Johnson, and Wood 2003; Ostrom, Gardner, and Walker 1994; Savitch and Vogel 2000). Second, redistribution of public funds may not occur to the same degree that it would in a centralized government structure, and greater fiscal inequality among local governments is likely. Third, in fragmented systems, each local government maintains *independent* zoning and planning authorities. This means that suburbs that want to confront decline are able to while other suburbs do not have to do anything. Last, the political will to confront suburban decline varies largely among the elected officials of the many different municipalities. In a sense, the first-tier suburbs of fragmented regions can best be described as competing in an environment of the "survival of the fittest" places—a perverse outcome of the Tiebout (1956) world.

In stark contrast, Baltimore County has no municipalities, and there are several advantages that single local governments have in confronting suburban decline. First, the centralization of local government means that Baltimore County was able to collect revenue from a single, broad tax base and redistribute resources from wealthier to poorer communities. Second, Baltimore County's single government status means that the county had various planning powers such as the ability to zone land, guide development, and determine public infrastructure (e.g., water and sewer) for the entire territory of Baltimore County, including the first-tier suburbs. Baltimore County did not have to persuade other local governments to participate in the planning process for revitalization. Third, the lack of political fragmentation meant that Baltimore County leaders could set the regional agenda for the Renaissance Initiative. Since the county had jurisdiction over all of its first-tier suburbs, it avoided the arguments and infighting that are often typical between county and municipal governments and among municipalities within fragmented regions. Thus, in a region without widespread political fragmentation, like Baltimore, it will be easier for the local government to confront suburban decline. However, in both consolidated and fragmented regions, this still requires the political will, public and private resources, commitment and time to confront this problem. For the past decade, there has been strong political will to address suburban decline in Baltimore County. Yet even then, the first-tier suburbs still declined relative to the outer suburbs, suggesting that there are limitations to the extent that local governments are capable of responding to suburban decline.

Lessons From Baltimore County

The implications of a strong county government structure and the lack of political fragmentation suggest that these features of local government facilitated suburban revitalization projects. While the Baltimore region's structure of local government may be the exception to the American norm, there are some lessons that can be drawn from the experience of how Baltimore County confronted suburban decline. A caveat is in order. The single case nature of this study does make it difficult to draw wider lessons for metropolitan America. But a reflection on the characteristics that made Baltimore's experience with suburban renewal a success is warranted if we are to begin to understand the political and economic dynamics associated with confronting suburban decline in a systematic method as Baltimore did. In this section, I consider three lessons from Baltimore about the realties of confronting suburban decline.

The first lesson is that local governments are able to confront suburban decline and revitalize aging communities, but the ability to carry out and sustain revitalization will depend on the political actors. The Baltimore case informs us about what a large jurisdiction can do under a single political unit. The centralized government structure of Baltimore County streamlined revitalization because the multiple strong county executives supported the vision of community conservation, the county council remained engaged in the process, developers were willing to invest capital, and the bureaucracy of county government was made more efficient to support suburban renewal. In short, all political actors shared the goal of renewing suburbs and worked together. These characteristics ultimately allowed the county to develop a "semi-regional" plan to address the problem because the county governed all of its first-tier suburbs. This was only possible because Baltimore County had jurisdiction over all of its territory.

The second lesson is that confronting suburban decline requires the political willingness to confront the problem. Baltimore County's leaders were serious about doing something. They recognized the problem of suburban decline, and they acknowledged decline as a public problem. For a decade, multiple county executive administrations supported the Office of Community Conservation. This gave county planners an express mandate to confront the reality of suburban decline and develop a strategy of renewal. Support for these projects depended upon the political will of county leaders to commit to the renewal of older suburban communities. If future county executives do not support the Office of Community Conservation as strongly as the Ruppersberger and Smith administrations did, then the county's ability to deal with suburban decline may be substantially limited. Other jurisdictions that want to renew older suburbs would be well-advised to develop the political will necessary to confront this issue.

The third lesson is that when a local government has control over a significant tax base, it has a broader range of options for addressing suburban decline. Since the county levied a local income tax, Baltimore County had substantial public funds that it used for the purpose of suburban revitalization. The county's outer suburbs housed a quarter of a million affluent residents, which generated considerable funds for the government. Baltimore County used these funds, in part, for redistributive purposes. Whether public spending is higher on a per capita basis in a consolidated political structure such as Baltimore County (versus a fragmented structure) remains a question of scholarly debate.[6] Nonetheless, there is evidence higher levels of spending were used for distributive programs in the Renaissance Initiative. This meant that wealthier outer suburbs subsidized renewal projects in the poorer first-tier suburbs. This has allowed the county to invest over $1 billion in its declining suburbs since 1995. Such a large public investment in the revitalization of older, first-tier suburbs helped sustain projects like town center revitalization, infrastructure improvements, and homeowner initiatives in Baltimore County's Office of Community Conservation. Without a funding mechanism and control over a significant tax base, the "menace" of suburban decline is likely to persist (Smith, Caris, and Wyly 2001).

These lessons show that Baltimore County's ability to confront suburban decline depended upon several factors. A favorable economic climate and the political will to tackle the issue made suburban revitalization projects feasible. Confronting suburban decline also depended on the lack of political fragmentation, which gave the county the ability to generate substantial public funds and then redistribute them from wealthier outer suburbs to poorer first-tier suburbs. Any changes to these characteristics might threaten Baltimore County's ability to carry out revitalization projects in the future. These lessons are consistent with the findings of a similar study, which concluded that regions were better off when governed by few government actors in a consolidated local structure for the regional benefit (Nelson and Foster 1999).

State and Federal Policy Initiatives

Taking a broader perspective, Baltimore County was still relatively limited in what it could do about suburban decline. Its efforts were focused on physical infrastructure in primarily three first-tier suburbs. The county benefited from state programs that aided its ability to revitalize first-tier suburbs, and federal programs also offered assistance. In the case of Baltimore County, the approach has largely been local. Policymakers and planners have used local funds to address what is perceived to be local issues. Yet other possibilities for state intervention exist, and interactions between state and federal government with local governments represent other paths to confronting suburban decline. They merit brief attention, and in the following sections, I reflect on the role and interaction of state and federal government.

For a decade, Maryland has been heralded as a national leader in managing the growth of its urbanized areas (Burchell, Listokin, and Galley 2000; Cohen 2002; Downs 2001). In 1997, under the mantra of "smart growth," then Governor Parris Glendening developed a state program to fight urban sprawl. The *Smart Growth Areas Act of 1997* sought to encourage the investment and revitalization of cities and established suburbs. This legislation provided state funding for transportation, housing, economic development, and environmental projects to "priority funding areas" (PFAs). In Baltimore County, the PFAs were strictly located in the first-tier suburbs. These were areas that already had existing development, and they covered all of the first-tier suburbs of Baltimore. To enforce the smart growth policies, the legislation allowed the governor to deny state funding for projects that demonstrated the potential to exacerbate sprawl.

Despite the national recognition that Maryland received, various scholars have noted that Maryland's smart growth policies are severely limited in what they can realistically do. Cohen (2002) points out two critical limitations in Maryland's smart growth program: (1) it preserves local autonomy; and (2) it favors incentives over regulations. Similarly, Knaap (2001) argues that smart growth will continue to be largely ineffective as long as local governments maintain exclusive zoning and planning powers. Indeed, smart growth policies are only as strong as the willingness of Maryland's counties and municipalities to support them. For example, if a jurisdiction does not want to embrace smart growth's plan for mixed-use, high density communities, then it can simply prohibit that type of development through its own zoning laws. In effect, this diminishes the state's role in smart growth (Porter 1999). Given the popular support for control over local zoning, it is unlikely that county governments will relinquish these coveted powers any time soon (Gainsborough 2001).

In national terms, the federal role on urban policy has not only focused on the development of metropolitan infrastructure and the renewal of older central cities (Wolman and Agius 1996), but it has also historically focused on metropolitan development (Teaford 2008). Specifically, the federal government spurred the development of suburbs through a number of policy initiatives including FHA loans, mortgage interest tax deduction, and the construction of major highways.[7] Thus, while the development of suburbs garnered substantial federal attention, neither the decline nor the revitalization of first-tier suburbs has received the attention of the federal government until very recently (Puentes and Orfield 2002). In 2005, a bill was introduced in the 109th U.S. Congress to revitalize first-tier suburban communities. This was a significant policy proposal for first-tier suburbs because it represented the *first* time that the federal government explicitly recognized the problem of suburban decline. On May 12, 2005, Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-NY) sponsored the *Suburban Core Opportunity Restoration and Enhancement (SCORE) Act* (S.1024) with a companion bill in the House of Representatives (H.R. 2347), which was cosponsored by Representatives Peter King (R-NY) and Carolyn McCarthy (D-NY). The bill sought to target declining first-tier suburban communities by providing grants for revitalization projects.

The impetus for this legislative proposal was to call attention to the problem and prompt federal action. Senator Clinton acknowledged that federal government action was critical because first-tier suburbs were caught in a "policy blindspot." In other words, current public policies did not address the problem of suburban decline. Clinton recently commented that, "we need to spur revitalization in declining suburban areas before they hit rock bottom, but most first-[tier] suburbs don't qualify for existing federal programs" (Clinton 2006, 11). Moreover, Clinton even went on to say that first-tier suburbs were "frozen out" of the majority of the federal government's support programs. These suburban communities, for example, have typically been excluded from the largest federal redevelopment programs during the 1990s, such as Empowerment Zones, HOPE VI, and Community Development Block Grants (CDBG). Each of these federal programs provided substantial funding to urban areas that faced critical challenges like extreme poverty, decrepit housing stock, and lack of employment opportunities, but many suburban areas with similar problems have been excluded.[8]

The SCORE Act did not advance in the 109th Congress. It was the first attempt at creating a national program that could potentially become a comprehensive policy and planning tool to tackle the decline of first-tier suburbs. Through the legislative process, the problem of suburban decline was defined and recognized as a public problem (Rochefort and Cobb 1994). The implication is that at the very least, the bill prompted a national discussion on the problem of suburban decline. At most, the SCORE Act may be revamped and reintroduced into the 110th Congress. The issue of suburban decline transcends local and state boundaries—it is a federal issue that has yet to be tackled systematically at the federal level (Weir, Wolman, and Swanstrom 2005).

In summary, the state of Maryland's initiatives have focused on smart growth and the federal government historically focused on central cities as well as housing and transportation systems in the suburbs. New federal legislation on suburban decline has yet to become law. Given the overall lack of progress in confronting suburban decline at the state and federal levels of government, it is worth contemplating briefly, then, how state and federal policies might interact with local policies to revitalize first-tier suburbs. For instance, are different levels of government more suitable for funding or administering certain types of suburban revitalization efforts? Similarly, could federal government funding for infrastructure projects compensate underfunded, yet politically popular, local revitalization efforts in jurisdictions with smaller tax bases than Baltimore County's? Questions of this nature abound. It does seem appropriate for the federal government to consider a similar grants-in-aid program to declining suburbs for expensive revitalization infrastructure projects as well as social programs to improve the economic status of residents in declining areas. Suburban decline is an emergent social problem, and its path of destruction knows no political, economic, or social boundaries. These are important questions and issues that policymakers will need to consider to confront suburban decline.

Implications and Future Work

Baltimore County stands out as a national example of what a centralized local government is *capable* of doing in terms of first-tier suburban revitalization. The government was able to launch a decade-long suburban revitalization effort after three decades of social and economic decline.[9]

While this case may be atypical for the very reason that few other jurisdictions or states in the nation have developed such an approach to tackle the decline of older suburbs, policymakers and planners elsewhere might still examine the Baltimore experience to learn about the realities and limitations that a mature county faced in confronting suburban decline. A number of implications prevail for various levels of government.

At the local level, suburban political leaders need to figure out ways to cooperate, especially to address suburban decline (Katz 2000; Foster 2001; Rusk 1999; Orfield 2002). In the Baltimore case, confronting suburban decline depended on the willingness of various political actors in a single jurisdiction to address the problem. This was easier to do in Baltimore County because political leaders used the county's large tax base to redistribute funds for first-tier revitalization projects. The challenge, then, is for other more fragmented regions to provide funding mechanisms that will be redistributive in nature. One such example is the tax-base revenue sharing program in Minneapolis. A metropolitan council redistributes public funds from high tax capacity municipalities to low tax capacity municipalities.[10] Other regions have developed voluntary tax-base sharing agreements. For example, the New Jersey Meadowlands Commission was established in 1970 to pool the resources of 14 municipalities in two urbanized counties to grow as a common region. Similarly, Montgomery County, Ohio, including Dayton and its 29 surrounding municipalities, established a program to share the benefits of economic development. These voluntary programs, while small in scale, do provide both a model and a mechanism for local governments to share the benefits of regional cooperation.[11]

The reality is that to effectively confront suburban decline, there is a need to develop a politically feasible mechanism to fully fund initiatives like tax-base sharing. However, an important caveat is in order. The scale and scope of voluntary, local programs is limited. The political will to maintain local autonomy is likely stronger than the will to eliminate the real barriers—fragmented governments—to regional cooperation and renewing first-tier suburbs (Norris 2001a and 2001b). These limitations on local jurisdictions suggest that other levels of government might also provide, then, an opportunity to address the problem of suburban decline.

At the state and federal levels, it is essential for policymakers to realize that the decline of first-tier suburbs will continue in the absence of meaningful regional growth management policies. For instance, a growth boundary that is truly regional in nature would limit leapfrog development and uneven growth that contributes to the demise of first-tier suburbs. Without a real regional growth management policy, this pattern will continue. It is plausible that greater public investments will benefit growing outer suburbs rather than declining first-tier suburbs. The reality is that market-driven development will continue to move outward as the aging process in first-tier suburbs continues. While regional policies are not panaceas for urban growth, there is tremendous pressure to continue the decentralization of population and to build out new suburban areas. In the absence of such regional tools, it is imperative that governments provide substantial funding for the reinvestment of established communities in the first-tier suburbs. Indeed, an increased state and federal role in suburban revitalization may also very well begin with the development of new institutional arrangements for dealing with problems like suburban decline that transcend federal, state, and local government (Colman 1965). Last, it is especially important to pay particular attention to the impacts of revitalization policies on residents in first-tier suburbs. A well-balanced approach should incorporate not only physical, place-building policies, but it should also integrate people-based, human capital policies that seek to improve the social and economic well-being of residents.

In closing, grave social and economic problems now plague suburban areas. Without substantial changes to public policies and proactive, forward-looking policies and planning, the forces of suburban decline and the outward decentralization of that decline are likely to continue. This is the defining new feature of the suburban landscape, and these are the realities and lessons of confronting suburban decline.

In an era when more Americans than ever live, work, and recreate in suburbs across the nation, there continues to be a deficit of scholarly work about suburbs in general and first-tier suburban change in particular (Palen 1994; Hanlon, Vicino, and Short 2006). It is time for scholars to revisit and expand the study of suburbs. Future research should first address the role that political fragmentation (or its absence) plays in the process of suburban decline. Why do Baltimore's suburbs still experience decline in a centralized county government structure? Do similar regions decline *more* because of political fragmentation? If so, how and why do the causes of suburban decline vary? Does political fragmentation exacerbate the process of suburban decline? Additional investigation is also needed on the policy responses to suburban decline. What are the effects of the suburban revitalization efforts on human capital or people-based policies versus physical or place-based policies? An emergent body of work on first-tier suburbs is reshaping how we think about the process of suburbanization, and urban scholars should continue to study these dynamics.

Notes

1. Various scholars have developed competing definitions of first-tier suburbs. In general, the common threads are spatial and temporal criteria (see Puentes and Warren 2006; Leigh and Lee 2005; Hanlon and Vicino 2007).

2. This article provides a critical overview of the first decade of Baltimore County's Office of Community Conservation, and therefore the analysis is limited from 1995 to 2005.

3. Dundalk's Bethlehem Steel Plant opened in 1917 and employed some 40,000 workers at its peak in 1950, and today it employs approximately 2,500. Similarly, Dundalk's General Motors Broening Highway Assembly Plant opened in 1935 and employed some 10,000 workers at its peak in 1950. It was closed in 2005 when only 1,100 jobs remained. The plant was demolished in 2007.

4. The U.S. Supreme Court subsequently reaffirmed the right to use eminent domain for economic development in Kelo v. City of New London 545 U.S. 469.

5. For an overview of the debate on centrist, polycentrist, and regionalist perspectives, see Nelson and Foster (1999).

6. This debate has a long scholarly tradition, and this journal has covered the debate. For an introduction, see Dolan (1990) and Boyne (1992).

7. Historian Kenneth Jackson (1985) provides detailed descriptions of these policy initiatives in his landmark book *Crabgrass Frontier*.

8. It should be noted that several other federal urban policies have benefited the suburbs during the postwar boom. For example, one of the largest grants-in-aid programs is the federally funded Highways Trust Fund program, which funds the construction of the state-owned Interstate Highway System. Approximately $32 billion is provided as grants-in-aid to states to construct and operate highways, and funds are provided for mass transit as well.

9. When County Executive Jim Smith leaves office, Baltimore County will have committed 16 years to the effort of community conservation.

10. The Metro Council in the Minneapolis-St. Paul region redistributes tax revenue, and in some instances, Minneapolis has actually been a net loser based on the redistribution of a portion of the commercial and industrial property tax. See Orfield (1997) and Rusk (1999) for in-depth descriptions of the Twin Cites experience.

11. A number of other regions and states have a similar tax base and revenue sharing programs such as Louisville-Jefferson County, Kentucky, Ohio, Michigan, Virginia, and Wisconsin.

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Thomas J. Vicino is an assistant professor of urban affairs in the School of Urban and Public Affairs at University of Texas at Arlington. He is author of the forthcoming book *Transforming Race and Class in Suburbia: Decline in Metropolitan Baltimore* (Palgrave Macmillan 2008). His recent work appears in journals such as *Urban Studies*, *The International Journal of Urban and Regional Research,* and *Geography Compass*.