little boxes/limited horizons

David Rusk
4th Annual Community Development Summit
Pittsburgh, PA
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“little boxes” vs. “Big Box”

• “little boxes” states – New England, NY, NJ, PA, much of Midwest (OH, IN, IL, MI, WI, MN) – municipalities (cities, villages/boroughs, towns/townships) cover entire state; many, many school districts

• “Big Box” states – everywhere else (except Coastal California) – no townships; cities expand through annexation; county as local general government; fewer school districts
## “Big Box” vs. “little boxes”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mecklenburg County, NC (Charlotte)</th>
<th>Allegheny County, PA (Pittsburgh)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Population (2010):</strong> 919,628</td>
<td><strong>Population (2010):</strong> 1,223,348</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Area:</strong> 527 sq. mi.</td>
<td><strong>Area:</strong> 730 sq. mi.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Municipalities:</strong> 7</td>
<td><strong>Municipalities:</strong> 130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>City-County zoning:</strong> 80%</td>
<td><strong>County zoning:</strong> 0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Planning areas:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Planning areas:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Charlotte: 303.4 sq mi</td>
<td>• Pittsburgh: 55.4 sq mi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Huntersville: 39.9 sq mi</td>
<td>• 3 other cities (avr): 3.2 sq mi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Mint Hill: 23.9 sq mi</td>
<td>• Boroughs (med): 0.9 sq mi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Matthews: 17.1 sq mi</td>
<td>• Townships (med): 9.3 sq mi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Cornelius: 11.6 sq. mi.</td>
<td>• School districts: 41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Pine Hill: 6.6 sq mi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Davidson: 5.8 sq mi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School districts:</strong> 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
USA’s most fragmented areas
per David Miller’s Metropolitan Power Diffusion Index (MPDI)

1. Pittsburgh PA
2. Chicago IL
3. Boston MA-NH
4. St Louis MO-IL
5. Minneapolis-St Paul MN-WI
6. Philadelphia (PA only)
7. Detroit MI
8. New Brunswick NJ
9. Newark NJ
10. Cincinnati OH-KY-IN
11. Cleveland OH
12. Scranton-Wilkes Barre PA
“little boxes” regions

- Fragmented tax base; low municipal bond ratings for “inelastic” cities and boroughs
- Greater economic and fiscal disparities among cities, boroughs, and townships
- More segregated racially and economically at neighborhood (census tract) and school level
- Greater urban sprawl (i.e. rateables chase)
- Slower regional economic growth
Fragmented tax base = low bond ratings

Mecklenburg County, NC ... Aaa
- Charlotte ... Aaa
- Huntersville ... Aaa
- Matthews ... Aa1
- Mint Hill ... Aa2
- Cornelius ... not rated
- Davidson ... not rated
- Pineville ... not rated
- Other counties (avr) ... Aa2+
- Other towns (avr) ... Aa3

Allegheny County, PA ... A1
- Pittsburgh ... A1
- Penn Hills twp ... A2
- Bethel Park boro ... Baa1
- Mount Lebanon twp ... Aa2
- Ross twp ... A2
- Monroeville boro ... Aa3
- Marshall twp ... Aa2
- Moon twp ... Baa1
- West Mifflin boro ... A2
- Upper St Clair twp ... Baa1
- Other counties (avr) ... A1 -
- Other towns (avr) ... A2 -
little boxes = greater inter-town inequities

• In 2012, median family income in Allegheny County was $68,968.
• Highest was Fox Chapel borough at $196,927
• Lowest was Rankin borough at $23,704
--- a more than 8 to 1 difference!

Average town departed +/- $22,355, or one-third from county-wide median family income.
## Housing Sprawl
### Growth of Urbanized Area

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1950</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>pct.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>population</td>
<td>1,532,958</td>
<td>1,733,853</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>land</td>
<td>254 sq mi</td>
<td>905 sq mi</td>
<td>257%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Urban sprawl consumed about 1.05 acres per net new household from 1950 to 2010.
# JOB SPRAWL

## Percentage of jobs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Distance from Downtown</th>
<th>1998</th>
<th>2006</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Within 3 miles</td>
<td>27.0%</td>
<td>25.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 to 10 miles</td>
<td>29.7%</td>
<td>29.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 to 35 miles</td>
<td>43.4%</td>
<td>45.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
JOB SPRAWL
+
HOUSING SPRAWL
+
“little boxes”
=
“Today’s winners become tomorrow’s losers.”
GROWTH AND DECLINE
AS MEASURED BY
CITY MEDIAN FAMILY INCOME
AS PERCENTAGE OF
METRO MEDIAN FAMILY INCOME

GROWTH >>> PEAK >>> DECLINE
## OLDER CITIES/BOROS PEAKED BY 1950

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pittsburgh</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McKeesport</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aliquippa</td>
<td>103%</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilkinsburg</td>
<td>115%</td>
<td>105%</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clairton</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beaver Falls</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duquesne</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Braddock</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Many suburbs peaked, then declined

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baldwin</td>
<td>121%</td>
<td>112%</td>
<td>106%</td>
<td>114%</td>
<td>102%</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Munhall</td>
<td>109%</td>
<td>105%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>104%</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penn Hills</td>
<td>120%</td>
<td></td>
<td>107%</td>
<td></td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Mifflin</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>106%</td>
<td>106%</td>
<td>105%</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greensburg</td>
<td>104%</td>
<td>101%</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Kensington</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butler city</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Others are riding high … for now

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Murrysville</td>
<td>137%</td>
<td>173%</td>
<td>153%</td>
<td>153%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cranberry</td>
<td>108%</td>
<td>133%</td>
<td>156%</td>
<td>165%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper St Clair</td>
<td>188%</td>
<td>222%</td>
<td>200%</td>
<td>189%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franklin Park</td>
<td>131%</td>
<td>143%</td>
<td>222%</td>
<td>199%</td>
<td>198%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marshall</td>
<td>126%</td>
<td>180%</td>
<td>230%</td>
<td>205%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pine (Allegheny)</td>
<td>120%</td>
<td>151%</td>
<td>196%</td>
<td>234%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fox Chapel</td>
<td>319%</td>
<td>293%</td>
<td>401%</td>
<td>403%</td>
<td>299%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Housing Policy Is School Policy

School segregation mirrors inter-municipal income disparities and racial and economic segregation --- just more so --- and so do test score outcomes.
Socioeconomic status & test scores

Test scores are explained substantially by just one factor (pct of low-income students)

- 55% for 72 elementary schools in York County;
- 67% for math and 63% for reading for 71 elementary schools in Lancaster County;
- 76% for 456 elementary schools in five-county Philadelphia area; and
- 77% for 288 elementary schools in seven-county Pittsburgh metro area
Economic segregation drives poor school performance: 100+ studies

influences on test scores
in 199 North Jersey school districts

- % FARM
- % minority
- % school factors
- % unexplained
Economic integration improves school performance

Figure 6. Effect of Red Zone/Green Zone Designation on the Math Performance of Children in Public Housing

- **Average district math score**

- **Green zone**
  - Child attended a green zone elementary school in previous year

- **Red zone**
  - Child attended a red zone elementary school in previous year

- **Number of years the child is enrolled in the district**

- **Average NCE math scores**
  - 30, 35, 40, 45, 50
Governmental fragmentation = slower economic growth

“Controlling for national trends and industrial composition, metropolitan competitiveness is adversely affected by metropolitan fragmentation.... The large negative impact of fragmentation indicates that unity could help resolve the kinds of cross-jurisdictional challenges that are needed for a region to be competitive. These challenges include transportation and infrastructure as well as workforce and social issues.

--- Prof. Jerry Paytas (Carnegie Mellon)
WHY?

Because “little boxes” regions suffer

• fierce inter-municipal rivalry over economic development
• uncontrolled sprawl/core community abandonment
• high cost of new infrastructure in peripheral communities
• waste of existing infrastructure in core communities
• hoarding by “winners” of revenues from new investments
• inability to access unified tax base
• greater economic/racial division = segregation of opportunity (“Housing policy is school policy”)
• unnecessary duplication of services [minimal impact]
How to reverse negative trends

Not just by inter-governmental collaboration for greater service efficiency (police, fire, parks, road repair, etc.), but by
How to reverse negative trends

inter-governmental collaboration for
greater *regional effectiveness* thru

• regional, anti-sprawl, pro-core community land use, transportation & other facilities planning;
• regional, unified economic development;
• regional, “fair share” housing policies/programs (“housing policy is school policy”); and
• regional tax-base sharing.
State government controls “rules of the game.”

Pennsylvania legislature & governor have constitutional authority to direct state’s many “little boxes” to act as one if state leaders had the political will.
Pennsylvania General Assembly will *not* formally merge “little boxes,” and local voters will *never* vote for meaningful mergers.

The Challenge:
how to get many “little boxes” to act as one “Big Box” for critical problems that cross municipal lines.
The Strategy:
Use your region’s only “Big Boxes” -- county governments -- to serve residents collectively on issues that “little boxes” cannot adequately handle independently or to force feed inter-municipal collaboration.
The Current Problem: county government doesn’t exercise municipal powers except through voluntary inter-governamental pacts. A “little box” can opt out or even veto pact for all.
The Solution:
a state law authorizing county government to designate multi-municipal “communities of common interest”

If plan is not approved by super-majority of local councils and boards, County holds referendum among all voters in “community of common interest” who vote as one ballot box (no “little box” opt out or veto).
You have done it before!

- Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission
- Allegheny County Regional Asset District
- Compact 21 – reform and modernization of Allegheny County government
- CONNECT (Congress of Neighboring Communities) – organizing collaboration of Pittsburgh and 36 adjacent towns that comprise region’s urban core
- Building One Pennsylvania
Acting as One does not guarantee progress, but “little boxes” going own way perpetuates stagnation & disparities.