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Suburban Residents Want Urban Amenities

Baby boomers and millennials in suburban markets are driving the urbanization of the suburbs.

By [Kelsi Maree Borland \(/author/profile/Kelsi-Maree-Borland/\)](#) | December 13, 2018 at 04:00 AM

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Baby boomers and millennials in suburban markets desire the same lifestyle—walkability, access to retail and restaurant amenities and dense housing—as those living in urban markets. The urbanization of the suburbs is a growing trend, with urban amenities and development showing up in traditionally suburban markets.

“Demographic shifts illustrated that we are becoming a society that values main streets more than backyards,” **Jose Sanchez**, retail and mixed-use design leader at **DLR Group**, tells GlobeSt.com. “Walkability, density, sense

of community, mixed uses and a diverse population are bringing new life to suburbs. Placemaking, if applied thoughtfully and well executed, provides the soul for our communities through the design of a contextual urban framework of pedestrian friendly neighborhoods, open spaces and a vibrant urban environment created by the layered realm of architecture, landscaping, signage and lighting. It is also vital to understand that these new town centers should be developed in a way to attract multiple demographics and economic classes through inclusive design and programming.”

Baby boomers are catalyzing this trend. Once a proponents of single-family housing, baby boomers now want smaller more manageable living spaces, walkability and access to entertainment. “Baby Boomers spurred by a pent-up demand for achieving the American Dream initiated the exodus away from pre-war industrial hubs to suburban enclaves,” explains Sanchez. “The fast demand for affordable housing at the outskirts of American cities produced a housing boom of suburban single-family planned communities that became seas of similar looking homes lacking town centers or city amenities. Instead of developing around urban centers, these communities connected via commercial streets interspersed with strip malls, enclosed malls and businesses. At that time, the Baby Boomer population was 35-65 years of age and the largest group. The suburbs provided a safe environment suitable for raising children, however, as this population ages, they have looked to downsize since they no longer need the multiple bedrooms or large backyards and want to use their free time to engage with their community. Town center developments with condominiums and variety of amenities with a true sense of community are far more attractive than maintaining their oversized homes.”

Millennials, on the other hand, have been the major proponents of urban living, especially this cycle, driving substantial multifamily development and the rise of city centers. However, Sanchez says that as millennials age, they will return to the suburbs—but they will continue to want access to urban amenities. “Many of those millennials have moved away from the suburbs to earn a degree or for work opportunities within the urban core, and upon eventual return to the suburbs will be hard pressed to give up their urban lifestyle entirely,” he says. “That lifestyle consists of walkable urban neighborhoods that blend their social and professional lives, and they will seek the same as they establish themselves outside of the urban core. For those who spent their twenties in their parent’s extra bedroom, the suburbs have lost their appeal as a single-family-home way of life.”

Migration to the suburbs will begin to rise as millennials begin to get married and have children, just as other generations have moved to the suburbs. “Demographics show many are waiting longer to get married or have kids than their preceding generation,” says Sanchez. “When you’re starting out, traditional urban cities are competitive with a high cost of living; however, young professionals are going to seek affordable second tier cities with that familiar urban feel and dynamism.”

In addition to natural life patterns of millennials and baby boomers, affordability is also driving people back to the suburbs. "Housing shortages within the urban core have pushed rents to unaffordable heights," says Sanchez. "Even in Los Angeles, which has seen a recent housing growth within downtown, although still not at levels in which it can meet demand, typical rents are \$2,050, requiring an annual salary of \$87,260 to live comfortable within the city. Moving to edge cities and towns could mean a savings of up to \$20,000 in rent annually."

Suburban markets are picking up on this trend, and working with developers to create urbanized housing and amenities in the suburbs. "Civic leaders and developers see mixed-use housing developments as an opportunity to lure young educated professionals and empty-nest boomers that may not be able to afford urban core living but would like to maintain that lifestyle," says Sanchez. "Companies are choosing to locate their satellite offices in thriving towns and edge cities with distinct urban character in an effort to attract younger professionals, which in turn has generated momentum towards urbanizing these locations."

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Kelsi Maree Borland

Kelsi Borland is a freelance writer and editor living whose work has appeared in such publications as Travel + Leisure, Angeleno and Riviera Orange County.



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Standout features include Pulaski Skyway panorama photography displays, new indoor pedestrian routes, and refinished lounge areas with an industrial motif.

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