The Biggest Loser?
An Orientation and Insights on Right-Sizing Cities

A presentation to the conference on

Reinventing Older Communities: How Does Place Matter?

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The Biggest Loser: A Paradox

Small is beautiful.....

But Bigger is Better....
• Abandonment
• Vacancy
• Crime, arson, squatters
• Infrastructure inefficiencies
• Housing surplus
• Commercial surplus
• Declining property values
The Biggest Loser: Prevalence

1 in 6 cities worldwide

For large U.S. cities:
- 1950-1980: 87 instances of decadal population loss
- 1980-2000: 47 instances of decadal population loss
The Biggest Loser: Persistence, Premise

Premise of Right-sizing:

These places are not turning around...

= Lost population every decade since 1950
The Biggest Loser: Policy Choices

Ignore Shrinkage

Combat Shrinkage

Accommodate Shrinkage

Embrace Shrinkage
The Biggest Loser: Prescription

Budget
The Biggest Loser: Policies, Programs

1. Symptomatic Strategies
   - Vacant property strategies
     - Demolitions
     - Land banks
   - Facility closings
     - Etc.

2. Opportunistic Strategies
   - Re-greening
   - Gardening collectives
   - Deregulation – e.g., mixed use zoning
     - Tax abatements
     - Upbeat marketing
     - Etc.

3. Radical Strategies
   - Relocations
   - Decommissioning infrastructure
   - Planned abandonment
     - Triage
     - Etc.
“If you say ‘downsize,’ politically you’re dead.”
Nonetheless, it’s happening...

Germany, Japan, S. Korea, Flint, Cleveland, Detroit, Richmond, Youngstown, others