# **Edge Cities or Edge Suburbs?**

by

Woody Carter, Robert Frolick, and Tim Frye Metro Chicago Information Center

James H. Lewis and Kathleen Kane-Willis Institute for Metropolitan Affairs Roosevelt University

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> Metro Chicago Information Center 360 N. Michigan Avenue Chicago IL 60601 www.mcic.org

#### Abstract

This paper explores the degree to which Edge Cities, that is, city-like suburbs, can be described by a unique set of resident attitudes and behavior. The Metro Chicago Information Center's database of 30,000 interviews spanning 10 years offers a unique testing ground for measuring resident attitudes. The paper then enriches resident attitudes with the results of focus groups and key informant interviews, and compares them with a survey of planners from Edge Cities around the country to assess the "fit" between the views of residents and those planning on their behalf.

Analysis of Chicago Metro Survey data from 1998 through 2002 reveals that the typical Edge Cities resident is a white, well-educated, Catholic, and Republican. The profile is dramatically different than the City of Chicago, and a more condensed version of suburban patterns. The financial life of the Metro Chicago Edge Cities resident is booming. It is their perception of the delights of their own neighborhoods that Edge Cities residents most out-suburb the suburbs. The picture presented is of a population drawing enormous equity from the high quality property and community they live in. We see what appears to be the best of the best of the suburban experience – improving neighborhoods with low crime and diligent, respectful police, beautiful parks, and nearby jobs and shopping. In this "perfect place," residents don't need to monitor or maintain their neighborhoods because services are ample and risks slight.

Only traffic congestion threatens to strangle Edge Cities in their own retail success. Edge Cities residents are wedded to their automobiles even more than suburbanites in general. This presents a picture of caution for planners and elected officials from Edge Cities. Edge Cities are a myth; better to think of them as Edge Suburbs. Tread carefully in propounding or even in relying upon the values of urban America to effect policy and programs.

#### Edge Cities or Edge Suburbs?<sup>1</sup>

In his fountainhead book,<sup>2</sup> Joel Garreau posits that city-like suburbs, Edge Cities, represent a newly minted sociological phenomenon incorporating distinctive resident attitudes, public opinion, and behavior. Spawned at the intersection of expressways where malls and office buildings sprout and sprawl, surrounded by foothills of upscale homes built in the last few decades where corn fields grew, Edge Cities represent the new frontier of urban life, Garreau hypothesizes:

[P]laces like Tysons Corner, Virginia; Schaumburg, Illinois; and Irvine, California – have become vastly larger than many of the 45 remaining major downtowns in the United States. In fact, edge cities have become the standard for the world's urban environments.<sup>3</sup>

Edge Cities are municipalities and sub-regions that have experienced strong population growth or change within the past three decades, have become suburban destinations in and of themselves, and have strong commercial/industrial bases of their own. Garreau argues that there is a distinctive character to these evolving places, motivated by the aspirations and life-style interests of people who live there, by their energy – a result of rapid population growth or cultural transformation – and by the way these smaller places, usually in proximity to an urban core, embody most if not all of the institutions found in conventional cities. But Garreau also admits that edge cities "contain all the functions a city ever has…in a spread-out form that few have come to recognize for what it is."

This lack of public recognition continues today, although books, articles, and conferences nominate the concept as a real and determinative aspect of suburban life. Do Edge Cities exist outside the minds of some urban analysts? Are they a distinctive type of place, having many of the same strengths and concerns in common? Are they the look of the future or just a stopping point while central cities regentrify their pre-eminence? Through survey and qualitative data, this paper explores the degree to which Edge Cities can be described by a unique configuration of residents' attitudes and beha vior. It then compares the views of Edge City residents with those of experts who plan their future, to assess the degree to which planners and publics share an understanding of the Edge City state of mind.

This investigation stems from the "pivotal conceptual question" suggested by William M. Bowen in *Beyond Edge Cities* but seldom put to the empirical test:

Assume that for a set of metropolitan regions in the United States, the urban landscape is exhaustively divided into three categories, (1) the places within downtowns, (2) the places within edge cities, (3) other places. Further assume that a set of salient characteristics...of edge cities

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Analysis for this paper was supported in part through a grant from the Community Memorial Foundation. Thanks to Rong Zhang for computer runs on Metro Survey Data, to Jamie Woy and Peggy Berlin for research assistance on the national survey of planners, and to Cesar Hernandez for GIS support.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Joel Garreau, *Edge Cities: Life on the New Frontier*. New York: Doubleday, 1991, p. 4.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Joel Garreau, "Edgier Cities," in *Wired*, Issue 3.12, December 1995. Available on the web at <u>http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/3.12/edgier.cities\_pr.html</u>.

may be defined and the data obtained. Is there more systematic variation within or between categories?<sup>4</sup>

Chicago offers a unique testing ground for our permutation of this research question. A long tradition of qualitative community studies is supplemented by a decade of quantitative data assembled through 3,000 yearly telephone and in-person interviews conducted by the Metro Chicago Information Center, MCIC. Founded and maintained through support by the United Way, the MacArthur Foundation, and other Chicago philanthropists, MCIC's database of over 30,000 interviews can be interrogated to address a range of questions for tailored geographic areas, such as the region's Edge Cities.<sup>5</sup> To garner in-depth perceptions of residents in and near Edge Cities in the Chicago area, MCIC has initiated a program of focus groups and key informant interviews, the findings of which are also presented here. And a national survey of suburban planners served as a further methodology used to triangulate on this question.

To conduct the Chicago Metro Survey analysis for this paper, we developed an operational definition of Edge Cities, based on the parameters set down by Garreau.<sup>6</sup> Edge Cities were selected by examining Metro Chicago municipalities that had a ratio equal to or greater than one of jobs (counted in 2001 by the state of Illinois Department of Employment Security<sup>7</sup>) to bedrooms (according to the 2000 census). Of these, only groups of contiguous communities that passed Garreau's threshold for commercial and retail space were retained. As a result, the following clusters of Chicago region municipalities were found to qualify as Edge Cities:

Edge City Municipalities	1960 – 2000 Growth	Jobs per Bedroom	Retail Square Ft. <sup>8</sup>	Commercial Square Ft. <sup>9</sup>
Rolling Meadows, Schaum- burg (99,990)	919%	1.0	5,557,000	14,916,000
Deerfield, Northbrook Village (51,855)	446%	1.1	2,406,000	9,453,000
Lombard, Oak Brook, Oak Brook Terrace (Pop. 53,324)	236%	1.5	3,924,000	15,716,000
Des Plaines, Elk Grove Village, Rosemont (97,671)	235%	1.4	10,000,000	10,000,000

 Table 1: Edge Cities in Metro Chicago

<sup>7</sup> Illinois Department of Employment Security, *Where Workers Work 2001*. Springfield, IL: IDES, 2002.

<sup>8</sup> Fall 2002, The Metro-Chicago Retail Space Guide.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> William M. Bowen, "Toward a Theory of Edge City Development and Function," in Bingham, Richard D. and Associates, *Beyond Edge Cities*. New York: Garland Publishing, 1997. P. 229.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> For information on access to Metro Survey findings contact Nyla Diab, Member Services Coordinator, at 312 580-2592 or <u>ndiab@mcic.org</u>. Also see the MCIC web site at <u>www.mcic.org</u> and customizable Chicago region census and HMDA data at <u>www.mcfol.org</u>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Garreau, pp. 6-7. His definition includes areas with five million square feet or more of leasable office space, 600,000 square feet or more of leasable retail space, more jobs than bedrooms, perception by the population as one place, and where nothing like a "city" existed as recently as thirty years before his 1990 publication date. Data was available for all but the perceptual criterion.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> CoStar Realty Information, Inc. Accessed on 10/25/02 courtesy of the Village of Schaumburg.

The Chicago Metro data presented in this paper compare Metro Survey responses of residents of these Edge Cities with responses by other suburban and City of Chicago residents. Respondents to the MCIC Metro Survey for the five years 1998 through 2002 were grouped to provide sufficient Edge City resident cases for analysis. This generated up to 512 responses from Edge Cities residents for any given question, resulting in a minimum sampling error of plus/minus 4%.<sup>10</sup>

The qualitative data stem from two focus groups and six key informant interviews in a community adjacent to one of the Edge Cities identified in Table 1. These findings are not generalizable and should be used only to suggest plausible configurations of attitudes and values of some residents.

The planning data stem from a market sur vey of 66 Edge City planners designed to ascertain agenda items of interest for the Second Annual Conference on Edge Cities, conducted by the Village of Schaumburg, Illinois and Roosevelt University, in June 2002. The market survey was motivated by the growing debate over how suburban America is evolving and the ways in which cities are evolving into increasingly decentralized population centers, many of which remain in proximity to the older urban cores, and is more fully reported elsewhere.<sup>11</sup> The survey of planners focused on three areas of particular interest: 1) perceived levels of satisfaction of residents of Edge Cities with a variety of components of urban life, 2) perceived levels of satisfaction with the design and function of local institutions and facilities, and 3) perceived levels of effectiveness of inter-governmental cooperation on a number of key issues.<sup>12</sup>

Since the planner data is national, evaluating it through the lens of Metro Chicago Edge Cities residents is illustrative at best, but it offers tantalizing areas for further research into the disconnect between the views of experts and the populations they are attempting to serve and to please. On the variables most crucial to the national study, Edge Cities tended to be similar whether located to the east, west, north or south. On most of the items listed on the inventories used, there was no statistical difference in planner perceptions across different regions.<sup>13</sup> This suggests that the findings here may be generalizable to other Edge Cities around the country, if similar regional data sets were to become available.

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> At the 95 percent confidence level. Sampling error is only one component of total survey error. Non-response to the telephone survey ranged from 45% to 74% over the five year data collection period.
 <sup>11</sup> James H. Lewis, Kathleen Kane-Willis, Jamie Woy and Peggy Berlin, *Exploring Edge Cities: Report of*

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> James H. Lewis, Kathleen Kane-Willis, Jamie Woy and Peggy Berlin, *Exploring Edge Cities: Report of a National Survey of Senior Planners*. Roosevelt University Institute for Metropolitan Affairs, October, 2002. Available at <u>http://www.roosevelt.edu/ima/pdfs/edge-city.pdf</u>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> For the survey, municipal governments drawn from Garreau's original list, supplemented by cities in the northeast and others that have experienced rapid growth, were contacted by telephone and the senior planner was identified and interviewed. Interviewers utilized a structured questionnaire and promised confidentiality to the individual interviewed. For that reason, no specific cities are identified with any specific finding in the report. A complete list of the respondent municipalities is available in the *Exploring Edge Cities* report, p. 39.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Alternatively, it may be the "culture of planners" that is similar across geographies. This study was not designed in a way that could test that possibility.

#### Who Lives in the Edge Cities?

As Table 2 indicates, the typical Edge Cities resident is a white, well-educated, Catholic, Republican. The profile is dramatically different than the City of Chicago, and very similar to the pattern of the suburbs, often exceeding the suburban values ("**suburbs** +").

Metro Survey Variable	rvey Variable Edge Cities Edge C		Bedroom Suburbs	City of Chicago
Race				
White	Suburbs +	87%	82%	43%
African-American	Suburbs	2%	6%	35%
Latino	Suburbs	4%	6%	16%
Asian	Toss-up	4%	2%	3%
Average age	Suburbs	47.4 years	48.2 years	40.5 years
Married	Suburbs	60%	61%	36%
Labor force status				
Working	Suburbs	69%	69%	59%
Retired	Toss-up	18%	15%	16%
Education				
Less than high school	Suburbs	4%	6%	17%
High school graduate	Toss-up	15%	17%	16%
Some college, trade school	Suburbs	32%	34%	26%
College graduate	Suburbs	26%	23%	18%
Advanced studies	Suburbs	23%	20%	13%
Religion				
Catholic	Suburbs	47%	43%	36%
Protestant	Toss-up	28%	31%	31%
Jewish	Toss-up	4%	3%	4%
Other	Toss-up	12%	12%	15%
None	Suburbs	8%	10%	15%
Party Identification				
Democrat	Suburbs	27%	29%	55%
Independent	Suburbs	31%	27%	21%
Republican	Suburbs	29%	30%	10%
Other/None	Toss-up	12%	13%	12%
General health is excellent	Suburbs +	50%	42%	34%

Table 2:	Basic	Demograph	nics,	Health <sup>14</sup>
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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Interpret the tables in this report as follows (first data line): "87% of respondents living in Edge Cities were white, compared with 82% of non-Edge City suburban respondents and 43% of City of Chicago respondents." The Edge Cities distribution was closest to the distribution of the other suburbs. The "plus" (+) means the Edge Cities result for this variable was 5% or more "suburban" than the suburbs. A value 10% greater than the suburbs or with an otherwise distinctive pattern is coded "**Edge Cities**."

In fact, in terms of key demographics, the Edge Cities "out-suburb" the suburbs, having a higher proportion of whites, a lower proportion of African-Americans, and more Catholics than the remaining Chicago suburbs. We will see this pattern repeat itself throughout this analysis. For example, housing patterns are shown in Table 3:

Metro Survey Variable	Edge Cities Most Like	Edge Cities	Bedroom Suburbs	City of Chicago
Own home, not rent	Suburbs	80%	77%	44%
Moved in last 5 years	Suburbs +	34%	41%	45%
Will live in same neighborhood in 5 years	Suburbs	64%	66%	50%
Median years in home	Edge Cities	7.0 years	5.8 years	4.7 years
Average years in neighborhood	Suburbs	16.2 years	16.5 years	12.8 years

## Table 3: Housing Patterns

Like suburbanites, edge city residents are highly likely to own rather than rent, to have lived in their current neighborhoods for a long time, and to plan to stay. In the first distinctive Edge City characteristic, they have settled into their homes for the duration – more than a full year longer than the suburban median of 5.8 years and over two years longer than the city median. Edge City scores indicate a high degree of satisfaction with housing opportunities in lifestyle areas that are the focus of this research. Review of financial variables helps explain why.

## In the Catbird \$eat

The financial life of Metro Chicago Edge Cities residents can be summarized in one word: booming. Enhancing a median household income that exceeds that of the other suburbs is a financial situation perceived to be getting better still. Add in a fat checking account, low mortgage rates, and low carryover credit card balances, and the result is a group of bill-paying, smart investing, 0-balance-maintaining consumers, as Table 4 demonstrates:

Metro Survey Variable	Edge Cities Most Like	Edge Cities	Bedroom Suburbs	City of Chicago
Median household income <sup>15</sup>	Suburbs +	\$57,500	\$54,100	\$36,000
Financial situation in last				
few years				
Getting better	Suburbs	43%	39%	35%
Getting worse	Suburbs	14%	17%	21%
Follow a monthly budget	Edge Cities	55%	63%	62%
Average checking account balance	Edge Cities	\$5,926 <sup>16</sup>	\$3,942	\$2,695
Have difficulty managing checking account	Suburbs	8%	10%	29%
Kept savings in				
Money market	Suburbs	38%	37%	23%
CD	Suburbs	25%	25%	15%
IRA	Suburbs	48%	45%	26%
Median APR on credit card	Suburbs	13%	16%	16%
No carryover balance	Suburbs +	58%	49%	36%
Fell behind on housing or utility bills	Suburbs	6%	10%	21%
Currently have				
Checking account	Suburbs	96%	94%	73%
Credit card	Suburbs	91%	87%	68%
Savings account	Suburbs	86%	84%	65%
ATM card	Suburbs	62%	61%	52%
On line banking	Suburbs	24%	21%	15%
Electronic banking				
Automatic deposit	Suburbs	60%	58%	45%
Telephone banking	Suburbs	33%	32%	27%
On line banking	Suburbs	24%	21%	15%
Banking needs met very well	Suburbs +	69%	63%	52%
Understand finances very well	Suburbs	56%	55%	44%

## Table 4: Financial Well Being

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Consolidated years before 2002 not adjusted for inflation, but cross-geography comparisons should not

be affected. <sup>16</sup> Shaded cells in this and subsequent tables involve suggestive data for Edge Cities, 50 - 100 responses. Error ranges for these cells could be considerably larger than for the others. Judgments of "most like" for these cells should be interpreted with caution.

These data suggest that not only are Edge Cities residents firmly in the catbird seat financially, they also consider themselves in the driver's seat of their financial domain. They take advantage of the most modern financial products, are confident in their financial management skills, and even in their ability to wing it without a household budget. Edge Cities' residents are sophisticated consumers of the regional economy.

#### Those Less Fortunate

As Table 5 shows, Edge Cities residents are not in favor of expanding welfare and food stamp programs, and they want single moms to work after being on welfare for a year. They support subsidized housing in their neighborhoods for the disabled and elderly, but not for low income workers. They are less likely to agree that school funding methods are unfair to poor communities, but they support increased taxes to fund these schools. They do not feel that too much is spent on the poor and agree that young offenders should be treated in the spirit of the juvenile court – with loving discipline.

Metro Survey Variable	Edge Cities Most Like	Edge Cities	Bedroom Suburbs	Chicago
Frequency see homeless in neighborhood is never/ hardly ever	Suburbs +	83%	75%	32%
Welfare benefits should				
be				
Increased	Suburbs	12%	13%	26%
Decreased	Suburbs	31%	29%	17%
Food stamps should be				
Increased	Suburbs	13%	13%	31%
Decreased	Suburbs	25%	25%	15%
Welfare recipients				
Prefer to work	Chicago	77%	70%	75%
Should work after one year <sup>18</sup>	Suburbs	54%	50%	37%
Support subsidized hous -				
ing in neighborhood for				
Disabled	Toss-up	77%	75%	79%
Elderly	Chicago	74%	64%	73%
Low income workers	Suburbs	44%	45%	60%
Favor right to abortion for				
Low income women	Chicago	65%	57%	63%
Married women	Chicago +	70%	56%	63%

Table 5:	Attitudes	Toward	the Poor	and the	Delinquent <sup>17</sup>
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 $<sup>^{17}</sup>$  A number of these questions have suggestive data only, 50 - 100 respondents, because the question was not asked in each year of the Metro Survey.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Question referred to single mothers.

Metro Survey Variable	Edge Cities Most Like	Edge Cities	Bedroom Suburbs	Chicago
School funding unfair to poor communities	Edge Cities	48%	58%	72%
Willing to pay extra taxes for schools in poor areas	Chicago	84%	71%	83%
State and local govern- ment spend too much on poor	Chicago +	12%	27%	20%
Contributed to charity last year	Edge Cities	63%	73%	52%
Treat young offenders as loving, displining parent				
Strongly agree	Edge Cities	52%	42%	41%
Strongly disagree	Suburbs +	0%	6%	9%

 Table 5: Attitudes Toward the Poor and the Delinquent<sup>17</sup>

Overall, the picture presented by these findings suggests a heightened concern for the distant less fortunate, an ability and willingness to pay more to improve their lives *in situ*, but reluctance to open the gates to the Edge City to them. This is in some contrast to the views of planners, who reported residents felt strong concern over housing for low income people in their Edge Cities. Only 6% of planners said residents of their cities were very satisfied with housing options for lower income residents, while 55% were perceived to be not satisfied.

The housing reality is clear: affordable housing is mostly absent from the Edge Cities, forcing a commute on low income workers needed to keep the retail and commercial businesses thriving. Edge Cities rely heavily on the automobile for transportation, and because of their dispersion and distance from the urban core, have relatively little public transportation. Low income housing has increasingly become a problem for planners with the realization that businesses need to have a reliable supply of workers for entry-level and low wage occupations, and because as Edge Cities age, parents realize that their children, who start out with lower wages than the average resident, may not be able to live anywhere near them. But it is equally clear that planners and residents have very different views on the matter. Edge Cities' residents prefer to keep low income housing elsewhere. This disconnect suggests an area for dialogue and consensus-building before a thin spot in the social structure grows to a crack.

## Neighborhood Stability and Satisfaction

What is it about their neighborhoods that the Chicago region's Edge City residents appear so eager to defend? It is in their perception of their own neighborhoods as "perfect" that Edge Cities residents most out-suburb the suburbs. Table 6 presents a variety of neighborhood satisfaction measures from the Metro Survey:

Metro Survey Variable	Edge Cities Most Like	Edge Cities	Bedroom Suburbs	City of Chicago
Past 5 years				
Neighborhood improved	Chicago -	31%	27%	36%
Neighborhood deteriorated	Suburbs +	9%	14%	24%
Next 5 years				
Neighborhood will stay the same	Suburbs +	66%	58%	39%
Will improve	Suburbs	25%	25%	44%
Will deteriorate	Suburbs +	9%	14%	24%
Property values increasing	Edge Cities	95%	81%	73%
State and local taxes are	0			
Much too high	Edge Cities	22%	32%	35%
About right, too low	Suburbs +	45%	37%	30%
Property taxes up a lot	Edge Cities	29%	42%	62%
Neighborhood a good investment	Suburbs +	91%	86%	73%
Amount of crime				
None or only a little	Suburbs	76%	77%	45%
Some or a lot	Suburbs	24%	23%	54%
Home broken into, past year	Suburbs	4%	6%	14%
Chance of being victim of violence				
High or moderate	Suburbs	16%	19%	39%
Low/near zero/zero	Suburbs	83%	80%	59%
Police would spend a lot of time investigating				
a gun shot	Edge Cities	96%	86%	65%
drug selling	Suburbs	89%	88%	67%
a graffiti painter	Suburbs	67%	63%	29%
someone breaking a window	Suburbs +	39%	34%	16%
How much youth contri-				
bute to neighborhood				
A little/Not at all	Suburbs	37%	40%	52%
A lot/Somewhat	Suburbs +	63%	56%	44%
Police				
Set good example in talking and driving	Suburbs +	96%	89%	63%
Can be trusted	Suburbs	96%	94%	71%
Have resources to do a good job	Suburbs	94%	91%	74%

## Table 6: Perception of Neighborhood

Metro Survey Variable	Edge Cities Most Like	Edge Cities	Bedroom Suburbs	City of Chicago
Usually come quickly when called	Suburbs +	93%	87%	68%
Stop teens without good reason	Suburbs +	15%	20%	34%
Are too tough on people they stop	Suburbs +	5%	11%	25%
Take bribes/Involved in Drug Deals	Suburbs	2%	5%	19%

 Table 6: Perception of Neighborhood

The picture presented is of a population drawing enormous equity from the high quality residential property and community in which they live, and enjoying the tax advantages of living in an area with a sizable business and retail presence. Edge Cities' life appears to be the best of the best of the suburban experience – improving, stable neighborhoods with low crime and diligent, respectful police. In this "perfect place," residents enjoy the peace of mind that stems from ample amenities and minimal risks.

## The Scratch on the SUV

Is there anything to threaten this idyllic suburban utopia? If there is, it is traffic. The survey of national Edge City planners indicated that traffic congestion was the single most pervasive problem judged to burden the minds of their residents. As Edge Cities become increasingly populated and developed, traffic becomes increasingly congested. This congestion contradicts the quality of life that drew many residents to the location in the first place, causes lengthy commutes on road systems not built to handle the volume of traffic, and contributes to reduced air quality. The dispersed population of the Edge Cities makes public transportation systems and rail problematic, particularly for transportation between suburbs. In the national sample, not a single planner allowed that people in their city were "very satisfied" with the amount of traffic, and nearly two-thirds said they were clearly "not satisfied."

Table 7 reports answers to selected transportation-related questions on the Chicago Metro Survey. It suggests that gridlock in the Chicago region has not yet reached the crisis proportion reported by Edge Cities' planners around the country.

Metro Survey Variable	Edge Cities Most Like	Edge Cities	Bedroom Suburbs	City of Chicago
Location of work				
Suburbs	Suburbs +	80%	72%	23%
City of Chicago	Suburbs +	13%	18%	69%
Has auto insurance	Suburbs	99%	95%	67%
Average commute	Edge Cities	19 minutes	34 minutes	32 minutes
In past week, respondent				
took				
METRA	Suburbs +	19%	12%	8%
CTA subway or "L"	Suburbs -	13%	6%	38%
CTA bus	Suburbs	7%	5%	41%
<b>Reduce traffic congestion</b>				
(support/strongly				
support)				
New roads/highways	Toss-up	68%	72%	72%
Increase public transportation	Suburbs	80%	83%	86%

Virtually everyone has auto insurance, because most have no access to or eschew public transportation, and commute to work or to shop by car. The average commute is a about a quarter of an hour shorter than other suburban and city averages – saving over 120 commuting hours per year. In the national study, planners felt that residents were particularly dissatisfied with the usefulness and location of highways. Highways are a difficult problem for edge city design as they remain essential for efficient transportation in these communities, yet their noise, exhaust and appearance are clearly contrary to most residents' taste for their community. Clearly highways present a formidable design problem for edge city planners. But by living close to jobs and expressways less gridlocked, Chicagoland Edge Cities' residents appear to have avoided (so far) the traffic clot that strangles other Chicago suburbs in their own retail success.<sup>19</sup> This may explain Table 7's reduced Edge Cities support for new roads and public transportation compared to other suburbs and the city, although both still enjoy strong support.

#### **Quality of life**

When Edge City planners around the nation were asked an open-ended question regarding what they felt residents of their area valued, the most common attributes were the "status quo" (26%) and the general quality of life (18%). Approximately three-quarters

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Dana Doan and Tim Frye, *Community Hazards: Issues Affecting the Quality of Life of Chicago Metro Region Residents.* Chicago: MCIC, 2002. P. 8.

of planners agreed that people in their cities were "Very Satisfied" with their city in the following ways:

- A good place to raise children (80%)
- Had quality housing for higher income people (74%)
- Had good access to hospitals and health professionals (72%)
- Had good educational opportunities for adults (71%).

Planners thought people in their communities were also highly satisfied with availability of shopping (68%), levels of safety (65%), municipal services (65%), playgrounds and parks for children (62%), restaurants (62%), and the quality of public schools (60%).

Such extremely positive quality of life attributes tend to define much of what makes up the Edge City environment. To illuminate quality of life issues for the Chicago region, MCIC has developed a battery of questions to identify which communities offer the most to residents. Table 8 presents the responses regarding quality of life in the Edge Cities:

Metro Survey Variable	Edge Cities Most Like	Edge Cities	Bedroom Suburbs	City of Chicago
Quality of Life Outstand-				
ing/Very Good in terms				
of		0.604	<b>-</b> <i>c</i> o <i>i</i>	<b>50</b> 04
Parks and recreation	Edge Cities	86%	76%	53%
Safety/police protection	Suburbs +	85%	77%	41%
Health services	Edge Cities	82%	68%	54%
Access to financial services	Suburbs	75%	72%	49%
Public schools	Suburbs +	71%	64%	30%
Parking	Suburbs +	63%	58%	29%
Air quality	Suburbs	61%	62%	37%
Access to arts and culture	Suburbs +	58%	53%	51%
Utilities	Suburbs	54%	55%	41%
Social services	Suburbs	42%	43%	28%
Public transportation	Suburbs –	41%	37%	54%
Dealing with traffic congestion	Suburbs	31%	30%	23%

 Table 8: Quality of Life

Metro Survey Variable	Edge Cities Most Like	Edge Cities	Bedroom Suburbs	City of Chicago
Nearest park strongly				
agree				
Safe during day	Suburbs +	87%	82%	57%
Grounds are well kept up	Edge Cities	84%	72%	52%
Equipment, bldg kept up	Edge Cities	78%	68%	46%
Safe at night	Edge Cities	52%	38%	16%
Moving in next 2 years	Suburbs	52%	54%	60%
If moving, would go to				
Suburbs	Suburbs	53%	52%	23%
City of Chicago	Suburbs	10%	10%	49%

 Table 8: Quality of Life

The pattern is clearly suburban, or super-suburban, reflecting a perceived quality of life better than the city's on almost every dimension, with the only exception being public transportation. On most of these measures, Edge Cities score above even the lofty suburban values. Scores distinctive to Edge Cities are present for health services and parks. The detailed parks answers show a remarkable level of perceived safety and upkeep, echoing the attitudes about police responsiveness and municipal services. This mirrors the findings from the national survey of planners, who felt that their residents were highly satisfied with all aspects of parks and residential streets.

In other analytic work on Metro Survey quality of life questions, three key underlying dimensions emerged from factor analysis: Community Services (**police protection**, **public schools**, utilities), Community Resources (**parks**, **health and financial services**, **cultural activities**, public transportation, social services), and Response to Community Hazards (air quality, parking, and traffic congestion).<sup>20</sup> Bolded components reflect extremely positive scores on these measures for Metro Chicago Edge Cities. A danger sign for planners: the entire category of Response to Community Hazards measures lower than Edge Cities scores on the other two factors. This suggests that policy makers and Edge City planners may not be living up to the high standards they have set in the other dimensions of quality of life.

## **Cultural Activities**

The high score on cultural activities noted above raises an important distinction regarding Edge Cities' residents. Indeed, they are high demand consumers of cultural goods and services. They are more likely to have attended a museum, documentary film, or library function than their suburban neighbors or even residents of the City of Chicago, who live much closer to many of these cultural opportunities. Table 9 tells the story:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Dana Doan and Tim Frye, *Development and Analysis of a Quality of Life Index for the Chicago Metro Region.* Chicago: MCIC, 2001.

Metro Survey Variable	Edge Cities Most Like	Edge Cities	Bedroom Suburbs	City of Chicago
Visited a museum in the last 12 months	Edge Cities	73%	60%	61%
Went to documentary film in last 12 months	Chicago	22%	14%	19%
Went to adult program at a library in last 12 months	Suburbs +	23%	15%	12%
Past year went to any				
Play/dance performances in Chicago	Suburbs	46%	43%	41%
Art shows in Chicago	Suburbs	36%	37%	43%
History/culture museums in Chicago	Edge Cities	24%	34%	38%
In past 12 months, visited				
An art museum	Edge Cities	61%	45%	48%
A cultural or history museum	Edge Cities	64%	49%	48%
A science museum	<b>Edge Cities</b>	55%	44%	46%
A botanic garden or arboretum	Edge Cities	53%	42%	31%
A zoo	Toss-up	51%	51%	49%

 Table 9: Cultural Activities

Edge Cities are in many respects self-contained, following a trajectory outlined by Garreau:

Edge Cities represent the third wave of our lives pushing into new frontiers in this half century. First, we moved our homes out past the traditional idea of what constituted a city. This was the suburbanization of America, especially after World War II. Then we wearied of returning downtown for the necessities of life, so we moved our marketplaces out to where we lived. This was the malling of America. Today, we have moved our means of creating wealth, the essence of urbanism – our jobs – out to where most of us have lived and shopped for two generations. That has led to the rise of the Edge City.<sup>21</sup>

However, Edge Cities' residents cannot satisfy their culture cravings within the confines of the new frontier. They must return to the downtown they grew "wearied of" as a place to reside and shop, because only "downtown" offers a diverse menu of this type of amenity. It remains to be seen whether this is a stable facet of Chicagoland Edge City development, whether cultural resources will in fact migrate to the Edge, or whether the rebirth of the inner city will create some sort of new configuration.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Garreau, 1991, p. 4.

#### **Social Connectedness and Isolation**

Table 10 presents Chicago Metro survey data that addresses issues of connectedness:

Metro Survey Variable	Edge Cities Most Like	Edge Cities	Bedroom Suburbs	City of Chicago
Has personal computer	Suburbs	70%	67%	49%
Uses internet, e-mail	Suburbs +	81%	76%	64%
Owns handgun	Chicago	8%	15%	10%
How many neighbors you				
know personally				
15 or more	Suburbs +	32%	26%	24%
One or none	Suburbs +	4%	9%	13%
All or most teenage boys are friendly to adults	Suburbs	46%	42%	30%
Places outside home you take special care to maintain?	Edge Cities	39%	44%	45%
Voted in 2000 Presidential election	Edge Cities	69%	76%	74%

 Table 10: Social Connectedness and Isolation

These data, supplemented by that presented in the welfare and financial tables, paints a picture of well-connected, well-befriended Edge Cities residents who are also well insulated from the problems and issues of City of Chicago life and isolated even from the milder vicissitudes of the bedroom suburbs. Perhaps as a result of this distinctive status, they are less involved in monitoring and maintaining their environments and in participating in the electoral process. Although it would be an exaggeration to label them "self-absorbed" it might be accurate to term them "self-actualized." Not "smug" but "satisfied." And well they should be, because they live in a "perfect place."

## Toward a Theory of Edge Suburbs

Edge City planners have the financial resources and the modern infrastructure to think big and to build big. And sometimes their *a prioris* sound like a page out of Garreau. As one Edge City mayor said in support of a planned \$300 million convention center complex, "It is of regional significance. We're building a downtown for the entire suburbs, and the downtown...should include a convention center."<sup>22</sup> The question is, do the residents share with the planners this vision of their community as a super-downtown? From this analysis, it appears they may not. What they enjoy in fact is life in a supersuburb. For the downtown amenities, they go downtown. This picture of contemporary

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> "Schaumburg wants center of attention: convention complex planned; 'downtown for suburbs' is goal," *Chicago Sun-Times*, June 3, 2002, p. 8.

Chicago Edge Cities meshes with the conclusions of Jon Teaford in his study of government and politics in post-suburbia:<sup>23</sup>

despite some appearances to the contrary, post-suburbia in many ways remained suburban. By the 1980s Long Island, Oakland, DuPage, Saint Louis, and Orange Counties were not suburban in the sense of primarily serving as bedrooms for central cities. They were not a conglomeration of residential satellites rotating around a dominant central city downtown. But they remained suburban in the sense that residents continued to reject much that smacked of the big city. During the 1980s DuPage Countians had no more desire to imitate life in Chicago than they had in the 1930s....This persistent suburban vision was in marked contrast to the notions that had molded urban America.

The Metro Survey data illuminates the issue of what is valued in two related questions:

Metro Survey Variable	Edge Cities Most Like	Edge Cities	Bedroom Suburbs	City of Chicago
What value about the				
region as a place to live				
Open spaces, recreation	Toss-up	14%	13%	11%
Education, schools	Suburbs	14%	14%	7%
Public safety	Toss-up	12%	8%	10%
Cultural, ethnic diversity	Suburbs +	8%	13%	17%
Jobs, work	Toss-up	7%	10%	11%
Transportation	Suburbs	7%	5%	16%
Housing, development	Toss-up	6%	6%	8%
Taxes, government	Toss-up	3%	1%	1%
Suggest one change to				
improve quality of life				
Transportation	Suburbs	20%	19%	12%
Taxes, government	Suburbs	11%	8%	4%
Public safety	Suburbs	6%	6%	19%
Housing, development	Toss-up	4%	5%	7%
Jobs, work	Suburbs	2%	3%	8%
Education, schools	Suburbs	2%	5%	8%
Cultural, ethnic diversity	Toss-up	1%	2%	2%
Open spaces, recreation	Toss-up	1%	2%	2%

 Table 11: What is Valued by Edge Cities Residents<sup>24</sup>

Residents across the three geographies do not differ much in their rating of what they value about the region as a place to live. Where differences are present, in terms of schools, diversity, and transportation, Edge Cities' residents present a suburban or super-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> Jon C. Teaford, *Post-Suburbia: Government and Politics in the Edge Cities*. Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997. P. 207. <sup>24</sup> Totals do not add to 100% due to the large proportion of respondents who provided answers coded

<sup>&</sup>quot;other."

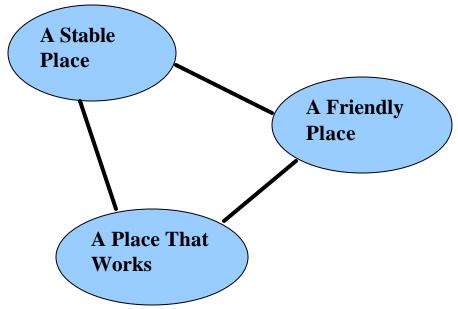
suburban vision. Surprisingly, "jobs" is not selected as a leading value of the region by Edge Cities' residents as it is by other suburban and city residents.

In terms of one change that would most improve the quality of life, transportation as the key resident priority for change echoes the finding of the national planner survey. Planners were asked what they felt were the events that were most likely, if they occurred, to change the character of their Edge City. Most of what planners mentioned had to do with aspects of continued development or enhanced transportation that could bring higher levels of traffic and population density. This suggests another disconnect between planners and their publics in Edge Cities, and the picture presented here should provide a caution for planners and elected officials from Edge Cities. Edge Cities are more accurately conceptualized as Edge Suburbs. Planners must tread carefully in propounding or even in relying upon the values of urban America to effect policy and programs.

### The Edge Suburb: A Perfect Place

Edge Cities, by their nature, have succeeded economically over the past two decades and it is reflected in the high levels of satisfaction with availability of commercial establishments and employment opportunities. In key informant interviews and focus groups involving those who live within the magnetic lure of Edge Cities, preoccupations and perceptions of residents have emerged that illuminate the facts and figures provided by the Metro and Planner Survey data. The Edge Cities, as super-suburbs, provide a lifestyle ideal in its mix of low taxation and living costs, high quality community services, a dearth of social problems and the people that exhibit them, readily available shopping, and close proximity to the cultural and culinary attractions of an old-style downtown. Recognizing this, residents in focus groups refer to their Edge City literally as "a perfect place." This can be deconstructed into three primary dimensions: stability, friendliness, and "a place that works."

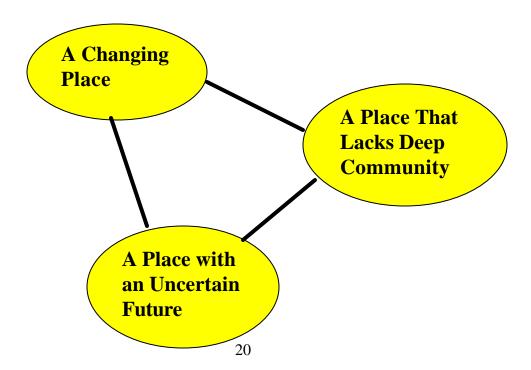
#### Chart 1: The "Perfect Place"

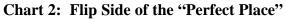


Regarding stability, Metro Survey responses confirm the view of Edge City planners that the "status quo" is the quality their communities' residents value the very most. This contradicts Garreau's notion that it is the dynamism, growth, and urban-like excitement that draws people to the "new frontier." The lure of Chicago's Edge Suburbs stems from their stability and predictable source of tax resources, non-rustscape service and retail industries, low crime, rule-abiding neighbors, and a location near everything they need. In focus groups, their community's very "boringness" is a quality residents praise and cherish. The national planner survey mirrors this finding; 88% report their residents prefer their Edge City to be "quiet" rather than "busy" or "both."

Unlike the big city, there are few surprises. But unlike many of the bedroom suburbs, there are growing financial resources to provide high quality services and to continually upgrade and supplement them, including basic municipal services and libraries, parks, playgrounds, and schools. Rooted in an ecology that is stable and that meets or exceeds their needs, residents have the emotional collateral to be friendly and caring with their children and their neighbors – even if somewhat more guarded with their contributions to strangers and the distant needy.

But living in "a perfect place" can be a double-edged sword, and the sharper edge may sometimes fall on the administrators and planners responsible for the future of Edge Suburbs. Higher performance generates higher expectations that generate a chronic state of dissatisfaction and griping. In the city, a dent on the Taurus's bumper is just part of the urban experience; in the Edge Suburb, a scratch on the SUV can ruin the week. Focus groups reveal the dimensions of Edge Suburb anxiety:





Edge Suburbs are changing, in ways that are impossible to remain hidden from current residents. Because of their very "perfectness," Edge Suburbs are powerful residential destinations for two demographic growth sectors: seniors and ethnic minorities. The national data show that Edge City planners believe the vast majority of their residents will opt to remain after retirement (89%). An analysis of Chicago Metro survey data confirms that Chicagoland retirees want to downscale to housing near their suburban family home location yet closer to transportation, shopping, and health care, suggesting that Edge Suburbs as a likely retirement destination.<sup>25</sup> Hispanics, South Asians, and East Asians are eager to enjoy the "good life" and quality services, especially in safe areas that enjoy lower property taxes. These demographic changes are altering the "look" of the Edge Suburbs and will also pressure municipalities to provide improved, expanded services to seniors and minorities, as well as to offer them a greater say in the plans and priorities of local government.

The uncertainty about the future of Edge Suburbs stems primarily from the inevitable decay of the huge retail areas they contain, and their reliance on the internal combustion engine to fuel economic success. The direction and the scope of redevelopment will come to Edge Suburbs as an issue just as it came to the central city decades ago. Meanwhile, Edge Suburbs are being strangled in the success of their own economic siren song, luring shoppers and traffic to their sprawling malls and creating a logjam of traffic congestion.

Finally, focus groups reveal a discontent with the Edge Suburbs' inability to provide a degree of community commensurate with the other amenities and services they offer. To the extent that this qualitative finding is real, it may reflect the relative youth of the Edge Cities and their lack of gathering places where the community can observe and define itself. Certain the mall, with its amalgam of people drawn from a variety of geographies, cannot easily play this role.

## **Dynamic tension**

Elements of the Edge Suburbs mind set as suggested in focus groups are contradictory and suggest the potential for dynamic tension and conflict. The value of stability and status quo does not mesh with the certainty of change. The community that works is threatened by an uncertain future of increasing congestion. And a friendly suburban place may not ever achieve that kind of "old style" small town community some residents hope to recreate.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> Garth Taylor, *Some Like It Hot, Some Like It Cold, Most Like It Here: Forecasting Retirement in the Chicago Region.* Metro Chicago Information Center, 2000. Available on the web at <a href="http://mcic.org/reports\_newsletters/publications/Some\_Like\_it\_Hot.pdf">http://mcic.org/reports\_newsletters/publications/Some\_Like\_it\_Hot.pdf</a>.

What may amplify these basically low-level tensions is the apparent failure of Edge Suburbs to engage in regional planning to address regional issues that go beyond what happy homeowners, a healthy tax base, and a thriving economic mix can provide. The major challenge facing Edge Suburbs is inter-governmental cooperation. Civic leaders and residents value the independence of their municipalities, yet a wide variety of issues require cooperation among neighboring municipalities, often across a wide region. Planners are aware of such potential gaps in their ability to deal with emerging and contentious issues that cross geographies that increasingly see themselves in competition with each other for consumers, retailers, jobs, and residents. The national survey asked planners, "How effective do you think cooperation between your municipality and other types of governments is, such as local governments, the county, or regional agencies or authorities?" and Table 13 presents the findings, sorted in order of the percent responding "very effective:"

Planner Survey Variable	Very Effective	Somewhat Effective	Not Effective
Effectiveness of cooperation with other			
governments regarding			
Law enforcement	74%	26%	0%
Supply of gas	73%	25%	3%
Supply of water	63%	34%	3%
Solid waste disposal	60%	39%	2%
Water quality control	59%	38%	3%
Supply of electricity	57%	36%	7%
Flood control	54%	43%	3%
Planning air traffic	44%	44%	11%
Creating residential development	42%	42%	15%
Environmental/wilderness preservation	42%	49%	9%
Creating commercial/retail development	35%	41%	24%
Planning rail transportation	33%	50%	17%
Creating industrial development	31%	49%	20%
Air quality control	31%	58%	12%
Planning roads, highways and traffic flow	27%	67%	6%
Tax policy	26%	54%	20%
Building sports/ entertainment facilities	24%	54%	22%

 Table 13: Planner Assessment of Effectiveness of Regional Planning

Police and hard infrastructure lead the list of areas currently perceived as enjoying broad inter-governmental cooperation. Planners felt that least effective cooperation took place with regard to more contentious log-rolling or "soft" issues like tax policy, construction of sports and entertainment facilities, planning highways, and creating new commercial development. Planners also rated low cooperation around creating commuter rail lines, industrial development, and air quality.

Planners may be less aware of how the various dimensions of the Edge Suburb experience form a whole. For example, they may tend to think of problems of development and traffic flow as separate and unrelated issues. Planner responses to the national survey indicated little to no correlation between levels of satisfaction with traffic and satisfaction with location of housing, commercial, and industrial developments. A clear area for further research and analysis is the study of Edge Suburbs that have found ways to overcome the blocks to coordination and who have moved beyond the isolation and insulation that their unique status created and sustains. Notes:

Retirement destination – get paper Get other papers we've done that might relate Get visuals from the powerpoint on Mt. Prospect Index of diversity (where born, ethnicity, race, age, income) Secular The cream of the city Autonomous, independent, residents of the world not of their geography Safety net – they are walking the high wire with ample safety nets; don't need services; therefore for those who do need services, they're not there

Work around public policy issues Category of cultural issues Economics of living around so many jobs Social implications re citizens hip Cultural implications Bad citizens SUV potatoes (not couch potatoes) What does it mean when people live amongst so many jobs rather than people

Methodologically, how do you link a national data set like this with a local data set? Kind of interesting.

### A fitting logo for an edge city might be a beautifully manicured park with an office tower or mall rising in the background and a family playing peacefully and without fear of predators in the foreground next to their SUV

The uncertain economic times, aging of the shopping meccas constructed early in the mall-building frenzy, and unknown effects of new retailing strategies, including the internet, contribute to an uncertain future. Finally, unrealistically high expectations about the degree of community possible in 21<sup>st</sup> century America contribute to a low grade discontent, a social malaise simmering in the background of "a perfect place." Residents express feelings of lack of knowledge and awareness of what is going on in their Edge Suburb, and no where to go to celebrate the community that they yearn for. Certainly the mall food court or Starbucks cannot fulfill their inflated hopes. The situation may be summarized as "many friendly neighbors, but few neighborhood friends."

## Bflk

The Metro Survey provides a question that may suggest a communication strategies to address these tensions. Respondents were asked about effective ways to learn about personal finance topics, but the results may be more generalizable to communications issues in general:

Metro Survey Variable	Edge Cities Most Like	Edge Cities	Bedroom Suburbs	City of Chicago
Which is an effective way for you to learn personal finance topics?				
Newspapers, magazines	Toss-up	83%	80%	80%
Television	Chicago +	78%	68%	71%
Internet	Edge Cities	75%	63%	62%
Information pamphlets, booklets	Toss-up	73%	71%	72%
Video, CD-ROM, DVD	Edge Cities	70%	62%	64%
Formal courses at community school	Toss-up	58%	62%	60%
Information seminars in your community	Suburbs	56%	55%	50%
Radio	Chicago	52%	47%	52%

## Table 13: Effective Communication Strategies in Edge Cities