

Louisville 2035

Louisville 2035: What could Be for the Next 25 Years

By Steve Wiser, AIA

A major demographic shift is happening in metro Louisville right now. Cultural trends and mega projects have begun to reshape this region for the next 25 years. This shift though is not new to Louisville. Our community has experienced similar growth-altering influences over the past half-century.



In 1960, the 5000 block of Shelbyville Road was sparsely populated. By 1962, the Mall St. Matthews and Watterson Expressway were completed. Just to the west, the city's first notable high-rise outside the downtown core, Lincoln Income Life (now Kaden Tower) was under construction. And throughout the suburbs, new schools were popping up to educate the baby-boomers.

Downtown declined significantly during this period. Landmark buildings like the Columbia and Rialto were demolished for lesser quality structures and parking lots.

Then, in the early 1980's, downtown began to stabilize. The Science Center initiated a West Main Street renaissance while the Galleria (now 4th Street Live!) brought urban vibrancy. The Kentucky Center for the Arts added a featured attraction, and the Humana Building put an exclamation point on downtown's resurgence in 1985.



2010 will be another 25 year milestone. Billions of dollars of construction is currently underway or being planned: Museum Plaza, Arena, Bridges, City Center, Iron Quarter, 21st Century Parks, among many other initiatives. Along with these impact projects, there are societal transformations taking place. Rising fuel costs, increasing traffic congestion, aging population, more demand for affordable housing, and over 50,000 additional residents are projected by 2030.

How will metro Louisville change due to these dramatic projects and influencing factors? Using the previous two 25 year trends as a guide and a bit of creative conjecture, there are several crystal ball scenarios to be considered.



21st Century Parks: This exciting initiative will remake suburbia in a manner similar to how the Olmsted Parks altered urban areas 100 years ago. Residential and commercial development will spring up around these parks. However, these projects should use smart growth planning principles, like 'Norton Commons', to aesthetically and functionally compliment the adjacent natural setting. Of course, Norton Commons is based on the traditional neighborhoods like Cherokee Triangle which sprang up around the original Olmsted Parks.

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Revitalization: Instead of bull-dozing the rural countryside, an influx of residents and businesses will seek inner city districts like Park Hill, Shippingport, and Portland. There are hundreds of thousands of underutilized properties within the western urban zone that already has distinctive buildings and ready-to-use infrastructure. These areas offer lesser expensive real estate and easier commute times. While these areas have blight and crime challenges, these can be addressed through home ownership (not absentee landlords) and citizen action, such as the recent precinct alcohol ban.



Contributing to this inward migration can be destination magnets like an outdoor amphitheater, botanical garden, or large outdoor sculpture park. Located along the scenic Portland Canal would be an ideal positive incentive here.



Street-Rail: Rethinking how our transportation network should function is another strategic change. Instead of pumping billions of dollars into more pavement, we should consider street-rail mass transit from west Louisville, along the waterfront, with stops at Museum Plaza, Ali Center / Belvedere, Arena, Humana Waterside Building / Waterfront Park, and then over into southern Indiana.

Alternative Bridges: More 'local-access only' bridges need to connect Louisville to southern Indiana. One such bridge could possibly be built parallel to the Clark Bridge, with lanes for the street-rail line, bikes, and pedestrians. The recent McAlpine Lock Bridge offers a proto-type for this type of simpler, quicker-to-build, and lesser-cost river connection.



Southern Indiana: The metro's northern region can take tremendous advantage of these transformations. First, though, it needs to encourage its 'boom towns' along I-265 to use smart growth 'Norton Common' style layout. Next, it should join with 21st Century Parks to create a 'Community of Parks', a 360 degree emerald necklace.

The Jeffersonville - Clarksville leadership should look to northern Kentucky on how to strengthen its economic vitality. A signature condo tower along the riverfront like the one architect Daniel Libeskin designed in Covington is definitely doable. A large parking garage that facilitates restaurant row and contains an intermodal transit center for the street-rail would be beneficial. And, another large visitor attraction to compliment the Falls Interpretative Center is desirable. Northern Kentucky built an aquarium. Maybe a botanical gardens would do better here on the sunny side?

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These are several of the numerous changes that could occur as more people want to live and work closer to the urban core than away from it. They will also prioritize quality of life amenities and favor alternative transportation modes.

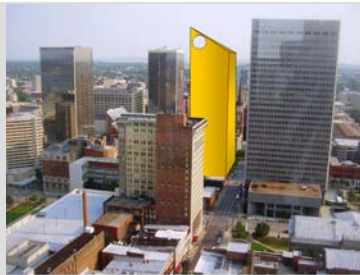
Metro Louisville is well-positioned to maximize its potential. It will though take long-range creative planning, activist citizen involvement, and innovative implementation to reach this goal. If the past is any indicator, we will achieve this bright future vision by 2035.

Steve Wiser is a local author, historian, and architect who recently wrote the book "Louisville 2035". He will give a free public talk on "Louisville 2035" at the Filson Historical Society, 1310 S. Third Street, on Thursday, March 27th at 5:45 pm. For reservations, call 635-5083.

"Louisville 2035" is on sale for \$10 at both Carmichaels Bookstore locations as well as the Arts & crafts Museum downtown at 715 West Main Street, and via mail at www.WiserDesigns.com



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