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New urbanism has arrived on our doorsteps

There is plenty of economic reality to go around these days. Just ask the developers of the troubled \$100 million Town Center project in Fishers.

Development will continue in the suburban ring around Indianapolis. Farm fields will still yield office buildings and houses, instead of corn and soybeans.

But a shift in places like Chicago and Charlotte, N.C., is beginning to move the needle here. It's dubbed demographic inversion, and it means new life for urban areas.

The trend means a reversal with regard to suburban development, said **Christopher Leinberger**, author of "The Option of Urbanism." The pendulum is swinging toward the creation of walkable urban places and away from suburban drivable ones. Leinberger is scheduled to talk about how this trend applies to Indianapolis on Thursday during the 31st Monumental Affair at the Indiana Roof Ballroom.

Leinberger's appearance at the Monumental Awards, with its cross section of business leaders to be in attendance, is meant to push this message: If Indianapolis wants to be a player in the new economy, it needs to embrace the new urbanism.

There are many threads: development of the Cultural Trail Downtown that will link all of the cultural districts established in recent years; steady work toward remaking mass transit in the region; a new attitude toward bicycles and other forms of transportation.

"Whenever we have someone like Chris come to town, it seems like we're preaching to the converted," said **Brian Payne**, president and chief executive of the Central Indiana Community Foundation.

The converted -- CICF, Keep Indianapolis Beautiful and the Indiana Chapter of the Society of Marketing Professional Services -- have a new ally: the Central Indiana Corporate Partnership.

CICP's chief **Mark Miles** is working with Payne, **Kathy Shorter** of the Historic Midtown Neighborhoods Initiative, and members of Mayor **Greg Ballard**'s staff, among many others, to convert more in the business community.

They'll hear a sermon on Thursday. Leinberger likes to upend traditional arguments as he promotes walkable urbanism -- starting with the cost. Suburban development has gotten massive public subsidies, he argues, like highways and other infrastructure. Laws that discourage urban development and plentiful land fostered growth in the suburbs.

The housing meltdown will hasten that movement, Leinberger predicted. So will development of mass

transit, which is gaining speed locally.

Cost always has been a barrier to developing a mass transit system that integrates buses and trains, but that changes if people realize it's more than getting people to and from work.

If that happens, shifting dollars from roads to mass transit becomes an easier sell. And that's progress.
