

Urban-X-Change: Designing Growth in the Contemporary Metropolis

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This third-year undergraduate design-research studio considers the development of Walmart Superstores as a way to examine the phenomenon of CHANGE in the contemporary metropolis. Since the first Walmart Supercenter opened its doors in 1988, the big box typology has emerged as the primary form of commercial development in North America.¹ A list of the ten largest retailers in the United States reveals that all are big box developers: Wal-mart alone has 3,029 Supercenters sites in the United States.²

Urban change involves increments. An increment is an increase in quantity or amount, either fixed or variable. This is appropriate because--geographically speaking--contemporary cities grow and don't shrink. In the United States suburbs, change increments are defined by three variables: time, scale, and sequence.

The TIME of change results from the demands associated with capital investment. What is the appropriate time increment to judge a Walmart Superstore development? The average lifespan of a big box is five years, but its urban impact is much greater. Can design resolve this discord?

Likewise the SCALE of change in the contemporary city emerges from the logic of real estate speculation. An average Walmart Supercenter is 20 acres. Is this an optimal unit of development? Perhaps it should be expanded to account for associated residential development or other non-commercial program? The Land Ordinance of 1785, for example, dictated 24-mile square units of land speculation in the U.S. Maybe we need to think bigger.

Finally, consider the importance of SEQUENCE in the development of urban landscapes. Which program should develop first: commercial or the residential? Historically suburban residential communities preceded the arrival of commercial program. Developers like Wal-mart Inc. have turned this equation on its head: developing greenfield sites prior to the arrival of any residential program. Is this an optimal arrangement?

This studio will make an attempt to PREDICT and DESIGN 3 change sequences as they relate to the development of Walmart Superstores.

Increment 1 : The Parking Lot

Time 1: 8 Hours, 24 Hours, 1 Week, 1 Year

Scale 1: Parking Space, Parking Lot

Sequence 1: Assembly, Dis-Assembly

Increment 2 : The Big Box

Time 2: 1 Year, 5 Years, 10 Years

Scale 2: Little Box, Big Box, Parcel, Commercial Cluster, Residential Cluster

Sequence 2: Development Of Commercial, Residential Clusters For 10 Years

Increment 3 : The Metropolis

Time 3: 10 Years, 25 Years, 50 Years, 100 Years

Scale 3: Cluster, Town, City, Metropolis, Region

Sequence 3: Development Of Commercial/Residential Clusters For 100 Years

This studio does not suggest that designers should abandon urban processes to economic requirements and capital markets; rather, it seeks to empower decision-makers by giving them the tools to critically and proactively engage the change processes that drive growth in the post-sprawl metropolis. Ultimately, this design research studio makes the claim that urbanism isn't the design of form; it's the design of change.

1. Retrieved from <http://corporate.walmart.com/our-story/heritage/history-timeline> on February 5, 2013.

2. Retrieved from <http://www.walmartstores.com/AboutUs/7606.aspx> on 5 May 2012.

URBAN X-CHANGE: DESIGNING GROWTH IN THE CONTEMPORARY METROPOLIS

This third-year undergraduate design-research studio considers the development of Walmart Supercenters as a way to examine the phenomenon of **urban change** in the contemporary metropolis. Since the first Walmart Supercenter opened its doors in 1988, the big box typology has emerged as the primary form of commercial development in North America. A list of the ten largest retailers in the United States reveals that all are big box

developers: Wal-mart alone has 3,029 Supercenter sites in the United States. Urban change necessarily involves increments. An **increment** is an increase in quantity or amount, either fixed or variable. This is appropriate because, geographically speaking, contemporary cities grow and don't shrink. In the United States suburbs, change increments are defined by three variables: **Time, Scale, and Sequence.**

INCREMENT 1: THE PARKING LOT
The first time span defines the change sequences that occur within the space of the parking lot over the course of 1 year.
Time 1: 8 hours, 24 hours, 1 week, 1 year
Scale 1: Parking space, parking lot
Sequence 1: Provide for assembly and disassembly

INCREMENT 2: THE DEVELOPMENT
The second time span defines the change sequences that occur within the space of the development over the course of 10 years.
Time 2: 1 year, 5 years, 10 years
Scale 2: Little box, big box, parcel, commercial development, residential cluster
Sequence 2: Provide for development of commercial and residential clusters for 10 years.

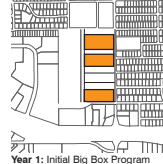
INCREMENT 3: THE METROPOLIS
The third time span defines the change sequences that occur within the space of the city over the course of 100 years.
Time 3: 10 years, 25 years, 50 years, 100 years
Scale 3: Cluster, town, city, metropolis, region
Sequence 3: Provide for development of commercial and residential clusters for 100 years.

Urban

San Antonio Location



Development Sequence



Year 1: Initial Big Box Program



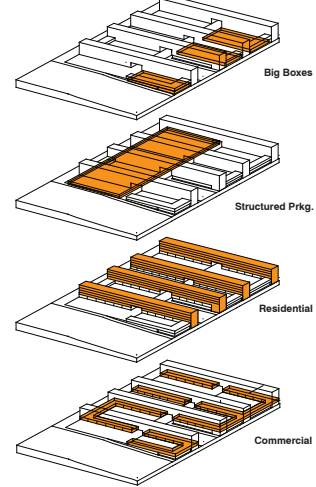
Year 5: Residential Program



Year 10: Retail Program

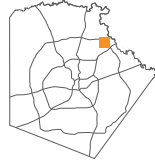


Development Systems



Suburban

San Antonio Location



Development Sequence



Year 1: Initial Big Box Program



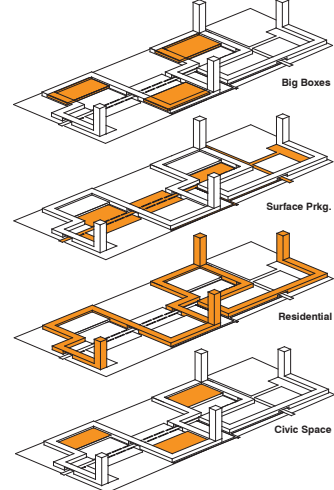
Year 10: Residential Program



Year 20: Big Box Infill



Development Systems



Exurban

San Antonio Location



Development Sequence



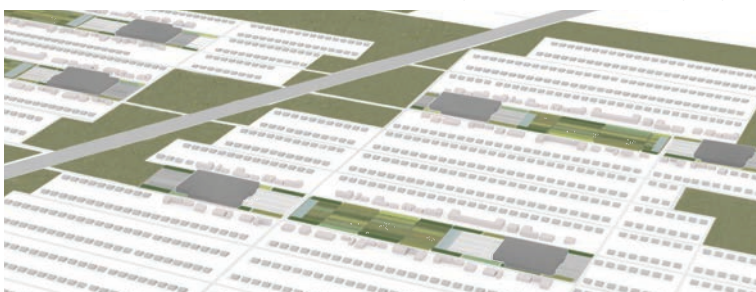
Year 1: Strips at town edge



Year 20: Strips in between towns



Year 40: Add'l Strip development



Development Systems

