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...

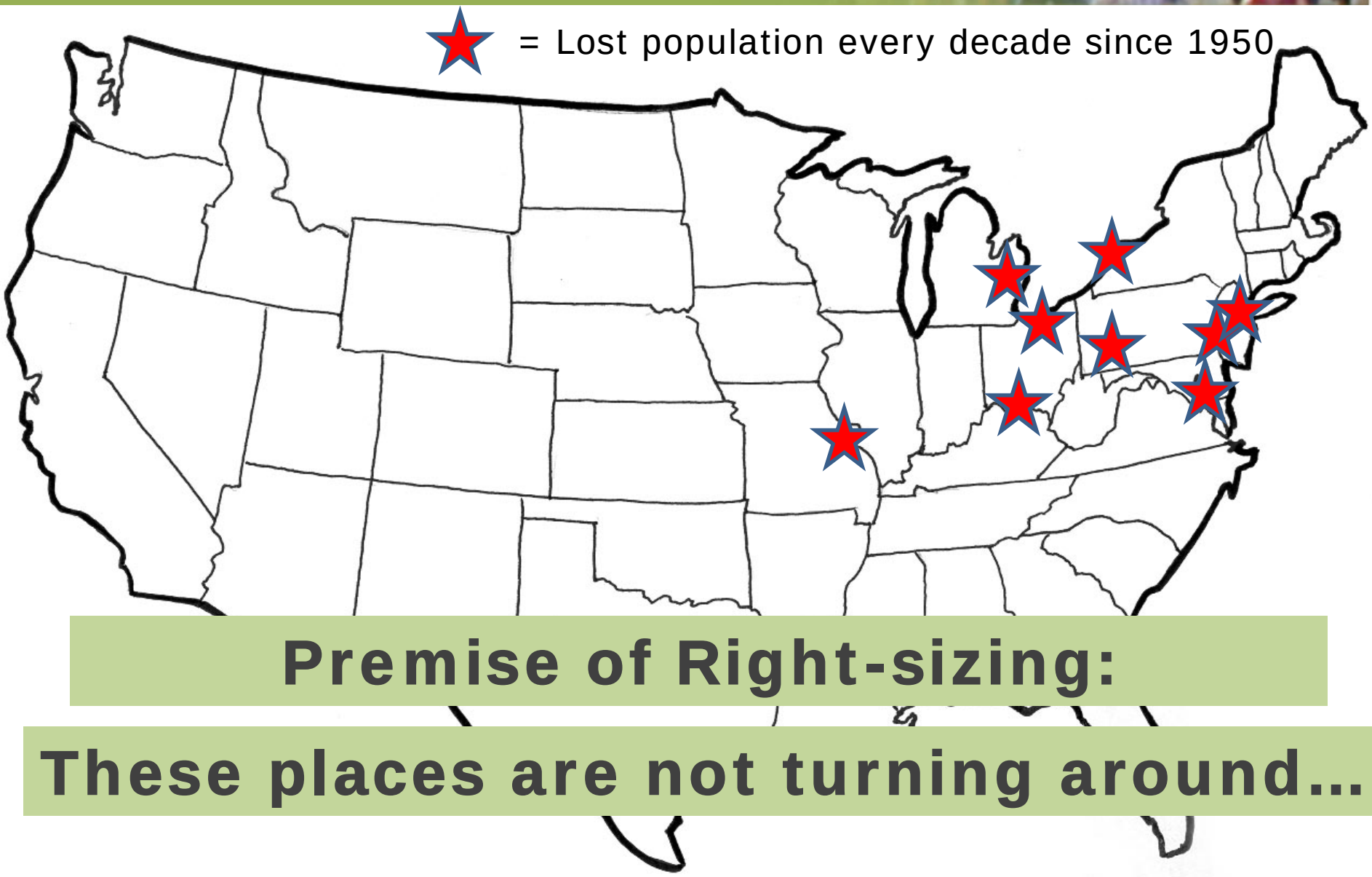
The Biggest Loser: Problems

- 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…

The Biggest Loser: Policy Choices

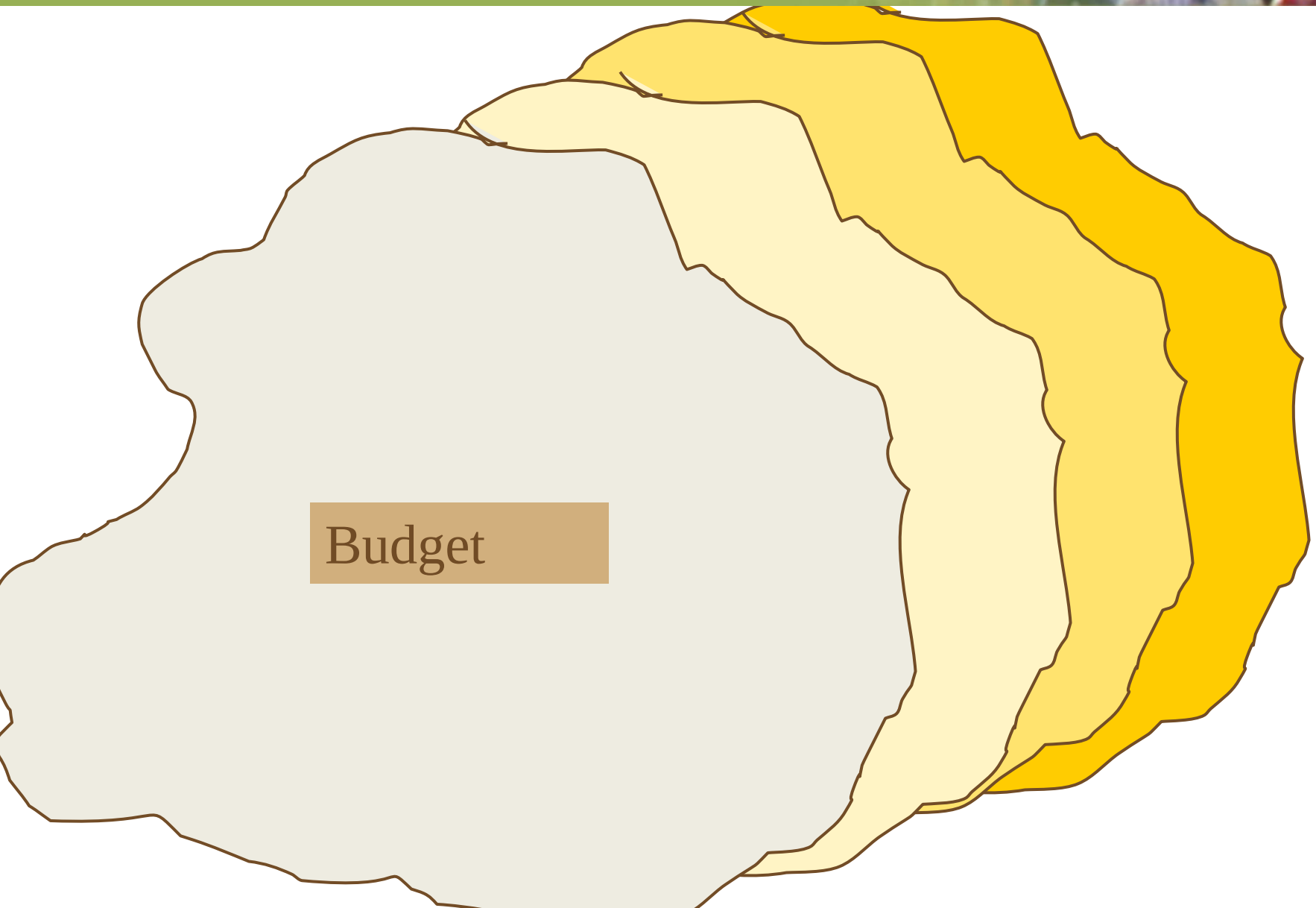
Ignore Shrinkage

Combat Shrinkage

Accommodate Shrinkage

Embrace Shrinkage

The Biggest Loser: Prescription



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.

The Biggest Loser: Politics

"If you say 'downsize,' politically you're dead."

The Biggest Loser: Players

Nonetheless, it's happening...

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