



**issue no. 6: november 21, 2018**

Well, that went fast. We didn't stop working, or thinking, during this long break between Urban Weavers. But we didn't get a lot of writing done. We did a good job here at WiRED balancing work and life. Summer is short. And we believe in getting it in while the getting is good.

We're not alone. Milwaukeeans rode Bird scooters ([while they could](#)), and [rode bikes and built community for 24 hours](#), and [fested](#) like crazy. But while it seemed like it at times, life was not on pause. While those of us who can relax did, others continued to struggle. We had the luxury to take time to develop relationships, forge new connections, and recharge our batteries. And, we worked to build new perspective on the lives of those who don't share that freedom.

My daughter asked me the other day which holiday is my favorite. I didn't hesitate: Thanksgiving. Fall is my favorite season. Nights get crisper; the air is redolent of leaves aging on the trees and returning to the soil; the joyful chaos of summer returns to the invigorating schedule of the school year; nights lengthen; and our nesting instincts take over in preparation for the long winter. Thanksgiving is the culmination of all those senses and emotions for me.

Some seem to bridle against fall and winter as the end of something. "[Winter is Coming](#)" has taken on cultural significance. To me, Fall isn't the end: it is a beginning. The start of school is a moment in time when folks throughout our society soak up the last days of freedom while preparing our next generation of citizens and leaders to go back to the communal experience of school. Each year presents an opportunity for personal growth. It's a chance for new choices - a fork in the road that offers profound directional optionality.

Thanksgiving Day has mostly avoided being co-opted by crass commercial interests (unless you're in the [turkey business](#) or you conflate Black Friday with the actual holiday). It's one day each year on which the most diverse group of citizens in the world, fundamentally connected by Americanness, celebrate all those things for which they are thankful. We break bread, reconnect with loved ones, and hopefully take time to count our blessings.

I'm thankful for an incredible amount this year. I'm thankful first and always for my wife. I'm thankful for my son and daughter, and for our two dogs. I'm thankful for my parents and my brothers and their broods. I'm thankful for the school community that has so warmly welcomed us and taken such profoundly good care of our kids. I'm thankful for my dear friends. I'm thankful for my colleagues, and clients, and collaborators. And, I'm thankful for the tireless people who work every day to create a #strongermilwaukee.

I'm also thankful for you, our readers, for supporting the self-indulgence that is this newsletter. Here at WiRED we're going to continue to think and talk about issues associated with real estate development, design, inclusive economic expansion, community engagement, and community creation. We'll also tread in shallow waters and talk about anything else that captures our fancy. Thank you for reading and we wish you and yours a wonderful Thanksgiving.

## Pixellated - team WiRED

We find ourselves in the midst of what we think will be characterized as the greatest skilled labor shortage in America since the GI's left for World War II. Developers are struggling more and more to get their projects built, and at costs that are sustainable. But the market is powerful - new means of production will find their footing. Europe often leads the way in this kind of innovation (see [mass timber construction](#)). Pre-fab buildings are a brilliant solution, though they often get a bad rap for design.

We think [this](#) could go a long way toward dispelling those misconceptions.

Pre-fab simply doesn't have to mean lack of design flexibility. Yes, manufactured components suggest uniformity and the potential for a limited form palette. That said, patterns and repetitive design elements can be visually compelling and dynamically graceful. [Bjarke Ingels Group](#) did that in this building in Stockholm, Sweden with building blocks they call pixels.

The design is a revelation. It's adjacent to a national park, yet it is deeply respectful of its situs. It manages to internalize mixed densities through its patterned form, yielding to the pedestrian at the park's edge.

This is a 196 unit apartment building. In other words, it's not at all small. In fact it would be one of the larger apartment developments in Milwaukee in any single phase.

Despite this scale, and the repetitive character at its core, it manages to visually delight. We'll let the pictures carry the weight on this. But we aspire to hit marks like these.



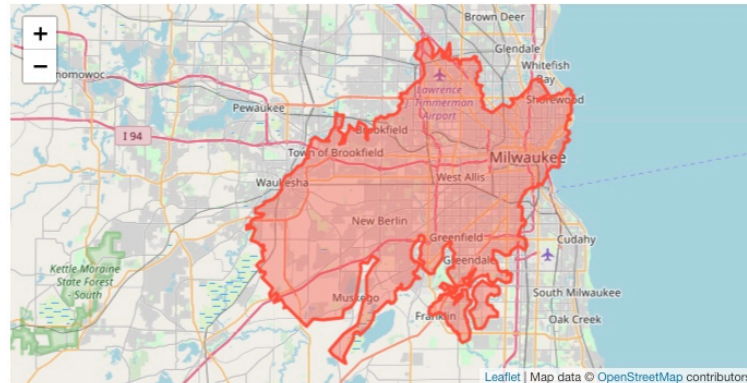
## Burned - team WiRED

[Holy shit.](#) EOM.

Look at the  placed on top of

The Camp Fire was 223 square miles as of Thursday, Nov. 15.  
That's 2.3 times the size of Milwaukee's 96 land square miles.

Share the link to this specific map: [Facebook](#) [Twitter](#) [Email](#)



## Amazowhatyoutalkinaboutbezos? - team WiRED

So Amazon picked suburban DC and NYC for its two(!) HQ2 locations. None of this is surprising. Politics matter. DC seems logical. And that workforce is solid. And NYC is NYC. Which is also solid.

There was press here in Milwaukee that Amazon is going to open [another huge distribution center in Oak Creek](#). 4 stories. 2.6 million(!!!) square feet. 1,000 employees. Well lordy. That is big. In fact, it's twice as much total space as the US Bank building.

This is great news for Milwaukee. But what has us most interested is what all of this Amazon news means about the size and scope of Amazon itself. [This article on curbed.com is fascinating](#) and leaves us as incredulous as Arnold.



Amazon itself is a beast. Here are some of the numbers from that article that boggle us:

1. During some holiday rushes some warehouses ship more than 1,000,000 items per day
2. The company's total footprint is over 250 million square feet of space!!
  1. That's about 9 square miles or 4,340 football fields
3. Amazon has warehouses within 20 miles of 50% of the total US population
4. The USPS ships ~40% of all of Amazon's packages
5. Amazon may collect 49% of ALL online purchases in 2018
6. Amazon spent \$6.6 **BILLION** in the **3rd Quarter** of 2018
  1. That is \$837 per *second* or \$50,228 per *minute*

We'll catch up to this topic later, but as we've suggested before it may be better for Milwaukee to get the distribution center than the headquarters. Did we mention 2.6 million square feet?



## (Sub)Urbanism? - blair

We read a lot about design, and planning, and community creation, and real estate development, and... One overwhelming constant seems to be a notion of *virtuous urbanism*. Since Jane Jacobs' seminal "[The Death and Life of Great American Cities](#)", authors and academics have considered the great social and economic benefits of density and urbanity.

Milwaukee has long ties to urbanist design and development. Lake Park, Riverside Park, and Washington Park were designed by the firm of legendary landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, who was responsible for some of the greatest urban parks in the world. John Norquist, Milwaukee's former mayor, and his planner Peter Park were responsible for a wave of urban development through the city. Norquist went on to head the Congress for the New Urbanism.

We want to be very clear: we believe in the great strengths and value of urbanist development and the efficiencies of density. [This article](#) by the CNU provides 65 reasons to support the new urbanism, and the reasons are compelling. Consider that in cities: infrastructure costs per capita are far, far lower; real estate values per acre are far higher; walkable urban neighborhoods hold real estate values more firmly; households in drivable suburban neighborhoods spend 24% of their income on transportation vs. 12% for those in walkable neighborhoods.

But we aren't dogmatically urban. We don't believe that everyone should live in a city, and we don't believe everyone should want to live in a city. Consider [niche.com](#)'s list of the [2018 Best Places to Live in America](#). 9 of the top 10 are suburbs of cities (and #10 is a town of 22,000 outside Lansing, MI).

What I find compelling is that under the Niche [methodology](#), other than Presidio and Rincon Hill in San Francisco and the Harbour Island neighborhood in Tampa, FL, **not one other** of the top 25 places to live is within the municipal boundaries of a large city. While that seems to suggest that folks specifically prioritize NOT living in cities, we look at the data a bit differently. Of that same top 25, only Okemos, MI, Naperville, IL, Houserville, PA, and Los Alamos, NM aren't immediately connected to a larger city.

There are other interesting trends in that data. If you rank cities by the apparent attractiveness of their suburbs, then Indianapolis, Columbus, Philadelphia, Chicago, St. Louis, Detroit, San Francisco, Tampa, Milwaukee, Dallas, and Minneapolis are doing some awfully good things with more than one community each in the Top 50. There's a lot to consider in that. Another day.

Antipathy seems to dominate our national discourse at this point - on almost every topic. The suburb vs. city conversation gets downright nasty at times. And, the rhetoric mirrors perfectly: each thinks they are the organism and the other is a parasite.

But, this is a symbiotic relationship. Suburbs have value specifically because of their connection to the financial markets and cultural strength of cities. And cities have financial strength and cultural cachet because of the folks who come to consume workplaces, civic place, arts places, and play places - regardless of where they live in relation to the city.

Living in a city is where the issues get laid bare. Those great places to live? Well, they're profoundly economically homogenous. That is to say, they're expensive. Whitefish Bay and Elm Grove are terrific. And super expensive compared to their peers. That financial baselining

makes them non-inclusive at their core. Their residents don't want to live in the city, and they can afford to live in the best community available. But - they absolutely want the city nearby.

And there lies the rub. Great suburbs need their city to be strong. And great cities need their suburbs to provide the oasis that some residents demand. While it's easy to suggest that suburbs don't exist without their city, and to believe that urbanity is the virtuous high ground, we should always remember that Birmingham and Beverly Hills were pretty great places to live even as Detroit faced bankruptcy.

We know we're ignoring the elephant in the room in this article. The relationship between socio-economic status and race is absolutely direct in Milwaukee and other cities like it. And we know that suburbs have a long developmental history of chasing homogeneity at the expense of underlying equality. That's a huge issue and we aren't blindly ignoring it. And it deserves profound dedicated attention.

But, we also believe that until suburbanites and urbanites are interested in the strength of the city and of the suburbs, we will continue to talk at each other, instead of to each other.

We have seen an incredible amount of activity in Milwaukee over this real estate cycle. But, as we've written before, that growth has been marked by a lack of inclusivity. What we all need to own is that we will only be as strong as our weakest link. If we want to see our cities thrive, then we need to find a path toward homogenization of quality of service. We get that it may be unreasonable to expect that the Milwaukee Public School System can hit the marks set by Whitefish Bay or Brookfield/Elm Grove. Because money.

That said, suburbanites need to recognize that moving to the suburbs shouldn't free them from the quest to make their city stronger. They have an absolute vested interest in the quality of MPS, despite the fact that their own kids don't attend those schools.

And, urbanites shouldn't feel virtuous in their condemnation of folks choosing to live in suburban communities.

Rather, everyone needs to grab an oar to pull in order to steer us toward a #strongermilwaukee.