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For Shrinking Cities, an Aggressive Way to Dodge the Census Bullet.

Places where the population is declining know it could cost them money after the 2020 head count is taken. The solution: Expand their borders to add more residents.

DECATUR, Ill. — The last three census counts brought bitter confirmation of what Decatur residents could already see for themselves, after the factories cut shifts and the neighbors moved away. Their city, whose welcome sign boasts of being the original home of the Chicago Bears, was shrinking.

But ahead of this year's official head count, Decatur officials are trying a new way to boost their numbers: If people won't move to Decatur — where downtown coffee shops are nestled amid mid-rise buildings, factories are hiring again and the area's first Chipotle just opened — Decatur will move to them.

Over the last year, the City Council pushed Decatur's boundaries outward, annexing hundreds of properties despite vehement objections from new residents whose spacious houses and half-acre lots contrast sharply with the smaller, aging homes in neighborhoods closer to downtown.

Continue reading.

The New York Times

By Mitch Smith

Jan. 17, 2020

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