

Better Cities & Towns

Better *places*, stronger communities.

FEBRUARY 2015—VOLUME 4, NUMBER 1

We're going all-digital!

After this month's edition of *Better Cities & Towns*, you'll be receiving digital-only news from new urbanist projects around the country. This is our last print publication.

The move is a big step forward into a new era for us. Editor and founder Robert Steuteville is joining the full-time staff of the Congress for the New Urbanism and making "Better Cities" a key part of the expanding CNU communications platform. What this means for us is less time managing a print publication and more time expanding the coverage of projects and trends. It means better leveraging the networks of CNU leaders and staff. And it means assuming a new role in CNU's online storytelling as the organization prepares to launch a revamped website.

This will be an exciting transition for us. Thanks for coming along for the ride. Go to bettercities.com and look for our weekly digital newsletter.

The four stages of New Urbanism

ROBERT STEUTEVILLE

The New Urbanism began mostly as a large-project, greenfield movement. Some new urbanists concentrated on infill in the 1980s and 1990s, but their efforts attracted less media attention and investment.

Intellectually, the movement aspired to revitalize entire regions—especially historic cities and towns, which were, after all, the inspiration for a return to walkable places. However, 30 years ago most cities were in deep trouble, so just about every large developer focused instead on the suburbs. New urbanists looked at the damage inflicted by sprawl and fervently sought to reform the system.

That is what I call the first stage of New Urbanism, in which traditional neighborhoods developments (TNDs), inspired by historic neighborhoods, were built

SEE 'FOUR STAGES' ON PAGE 5

A parking lot in Somerville, MA, is turned into a temporary square. See the review of *Tactical Urbanism*, a book by Mike Lydon and Anthony Garcia, on page 10.



The benefits of form-based planning and coding

Let's discuss how community planning could be fundamentally reorganized to improve both efficiency and placemaking.

JAMES TISCHLER

This article is intended to provoke a discussion about what may be the next frontier for placemaking: The transformation of the movement into a more broadly applicable model for community planning. To start, I offer a limited narrative explaining a graphic (on page 7) presented as the principal object of attention.

The placemaking movement has incorporated key urbanism principles into policy and practice. This shift has transformed practice by recognizing the vital importance of development regulations and demonstrating that form-based codes can be used to assure that desirable change occurs. Recognition of local or regional "place" outcomes, and how to achieve them with form-based codes, has moved into the planning/design mainstream.

Despite this advance, we face challenges in achieving consistently good and predictable outcomes. These challenges are grounded in the present system—particularly in the elements

SEE 'BENEFITS' ON PAGE 6

Better Cities & Towns

Better! Cities & Towns is dedicated to covering smart growth and New Urbanism.

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COMMENTARY

A draft of new urban history

ROBERT STEUTEVILLE

Nearly 19 years ago, the first print issue of *New Urban News*—now *Better Cities & Towns*—was published, which included a list of 102 “traditional neighborhood developments” in the US.

The lengthiness of the list was good because some projects were never built, some turned out to be dreadful, and others are great and have become models for community building. The most prominent projects on the list are “new towns” but sprinkled throughout are new urban place-types that have become more prevalent today—transit-oriented developments, downtown revitalizations, suburban retrofits, and affordable or public housing in the form of neighborhoods.

This next issue, July of 1996, reported on the signing of the *Charter of the New Urbanism*. In an error of news judgment, I buried the *Charter* on page 15. That’s why journalism is a first draft—revisions are necessary.

I failed to realize that the *Charter* itself would have such a lasting influence. Having recently spent a weekend recording the work of the 2015 Charter Awards jury, I know first-hand that the *Charter* is now inspiring a wide range of land planning and development from campuses to adaptive reuse to form-based codes.

The issue you are reading is the last print edition of *Better Cities & Towns*—it’s the end of an era for this publication, but New Urbanism itself is just hitting its stride.

A MOVEMENT OF GENERATIONS

As I report in “The four stages of New Urbanism,” this movement has passed through the first generation in a multi-generational effort to restore the built environment. A hundred years ago, our cities and towns were 100 percent walkable and human-scale. By the late 20th Century, these settlements had merged into metropolitan areas that were 90 percent unwalkable and automobile-scale.

That transformation began early in the 20th Century with new laws and policies on streets, zoning, and finance. After World War II, trillions of dollars in real estate and roads were invested in the new planning model that separated uses and funneled traffic onto large roads designed like so many sewerage pipes.

By the time new urbanists came along, the development industry had long forgotten how to build human-scale neighborhoods. New Urbanism represented but a few grains of sand on the beach of sprawl, yet it also emerged as a laboratory for new ideas. Today we have adopted hundreds of form-based codes; Mixed-use buildings and urban housing units are widely under construction; We are reconnecting land use to mass transit.

New urbanists have survived because they had foresight: The real estate market for walkable communities has steadily grown in recent decades. In 2015 people *love* mixed-use and human-scale neighborhoods with a strong *sense of place*.

Since the housing crash, the movement has retrenched, in a way. Most of the work now focuses on the historic cities and towns that inspired new urbanists in the first place.

That retreat was good for the New Urbanism, but it can’t last forever. We still rely too much on infrastructure—the street grids—that are a hundred years old. Even as historic cities and towns rebuild over the next two decades, the next task of the new urbanists will be to rescue suburbs from poor planning and overbuilt, badly connected roads.

That effort won’t be easy, but it can be engaged incrementally, from the inside out. Just as the postwar suburbs were the first to sprawl, they can be repaired first. But we can only succeed to the extent that we reform street design and transportation engineering. In many respects, that industry is stuck in 1980.

This publication began before the Internet flooded the market with information. We were, and are, part of the glue that holds this movement together. In this age of hundreds of blogs, the movement still needs first-rate, reliable communications. As the second chapter in the history of the New Urbanism is written, I’ll still be sending out the first draft. ♦

Jane Jacobs was right: Study on older buildings

Older and smaller buildings and a wide range in building age offer real economic and social benefits for neighborhoods and urban centers, according to a study of three major cities—Seattle, Washington DC, and San Francisco.

The study was inspired by Jane Jacobs’s well-known contention in her influential 1961 bestseller, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. She argued that “Cities need old buildings so badly it is probably impossible for vigorous streets and districts to grow without them.”

Old buildings provide cheap and flexible space for business owners, skilled makers, and artists to operate. They balance the newer, more expensive buildings where more established enterprises and richer folk can reside. These newer buildings eventually become old and the cycle comes full circle. Small buildings add variety and diverse ownership to a neighborhood, also contributing economic vitality, according to Jacobs.

The study called “Older, Smaller, Better,” sponsored by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, comes to predictable but still important conclusions from core cities in three strong markets:

Young people love old buildings. In Seattle, San Francisco, and Washington, D.C., the median age of residents in areas with a mix of small, old and new buildings is lower than in areas with larger, predominantly new buildings. These areas are also home to a more diverse mix of residents from different age groups.

Nightlife is most alive on streets with a diverse range of building ages. San Francisco and Washington DC, city blocks composed of mixed-vintage buildings host greater cellphone activity on Friday nights.

Older business districts provide affordable, flexible space for entrepreneurs from all backgrounds. In Seattle and Washington DC, neighborhoods with a smaller-scaled mix of old and new buildings host a higher proportion of new businesses, as well as more women and minority-owned businesses.

The creative economy thrives in older, mixed-use neighborhoods. In Seattle and Washington, D.C., older, smaller buildings house significantly greater



Mix of older, smaller buildings on Barracks Row, Washington, DC. Source: *Older, Smaller, Better*

concentrations of creative jobs—e.g. media production, software, and performing arts businesses—per square foot of commercial space.

Older, smaller buildings provide space for a strong local economy. In Seattle and Washington DC, streets with a combination of small, old and new buildings have a higher proportion of non-chain restaurants and retailers.

Older commercial and mixed-use districts contain hidden density. In all three cities, streets with a mix of old and new buildings have greater population density and more businesses per commercial square foot than streets with large, new buildings.

The report argues for slow new development in historic neighborhoods. Drastic change may harm their economy. “While this research indicates that successful commercial and mixed-use districts benefit from new construction, these changes should be gradual.”

HOW THEY DID IT

In effect, researchers filtered each city through a 200-by-200 meter grid, measuring the age, diversity of age, and size of buildings in commercial areas. The team pored through records, many of them hard copies in assessor’s offices. Higher average building age, greater diversity of building age, and smaller individual buildings (greater “granularity”)

produced a higher score of “character.” The character score of each grid was compared with 40 measures of economic and social activity in census blocks.

Nearly all of the areas studied were on historic street grids. Downtowns tended to have larger buildings and less diversity in age. Main streets that grew around streetcar routes have older and smaller buildings (one of the recommendations is to “Preserve the streetcar legacy”). Single-use commercial areas in the suburbs were not included in the study, although a few such centers have been built in the core cities.

The results are variable—not all of the commercial districts with high character scores performed better. Overall, the study concludes: “Building age, building age diversity, and the granularity of building fabric emerged as significant predictors of community vitality, even when taking into account the effects of income, access to transit and construction permit dollars.”

Among the recommendations: Cities should make it easier to reuse small buildings. In some cities, “older commercial buildings languish, with empty upper floors or vacant storefronts. Cities can help unlock the potential of these spaces by removing barriers, such as outdated zoning codes and parking requirements and streamlining permitting and approval processes.” ♦

Office tenants choose mixed-use centers

Office tenants prefer amenity-rich, mixed-use centers (also known as “live, work, play” locations) over single-use office parks by a margin of 83 percent to 17 percent, according to a NAIOP Research Foundation report.

The nationwide study *Preferred Office Locations: Comparing Location Preferences and Performance of Office Space in CBDs, Suburban Vibrant Centers and Suburban Areas*, was commissioned by the research arm of the Commercial Real Estate Development Association and written by Emil Malizia of UNC-Chapel Hill.

Most of the nation’s office space—77 percent—is in the suburbs. The last half of the 20th Century was dominated by the development of suburban office parks. Since 2000, however, central business districts (CBDs) have revived. Lately, also, mixed-use centers have captured much of the suburban office market.

Suburban office buildings therefore come in two locational types—so-called “vibrant centers,” and single-use office buildings. There is no clear preference for downtown versus the suburbs in general. Central business districts command higher rents nationwide, and the vacancy rates are comparable with suburbs, which have absorbed more office space in recent years. Firms trying to recruit young talent, like technology start-ups, often seek a vibrant center location, which could be in either downtown or suburban areas.

The report’s bottom line: “... any company wanting to attract and retain young educated workers who prefer live, work, play locations needs to locate in a compact, mixed-use, walkable place, either downtown or in the suburbs.”

Educated young professionals in the knowledge economy strongly prefer walkable, mixed-use locations to live and work, the authors note. This preference has led firms to adopt many strategies: In Silicon Valley, bus shuttles carry workers from their homes in San Francisco; Other firms are moving to CBDs, smaller downtowns in the suburbs, or new mixed-use town centers.

“This is the best report I have seen on office space choice in well over a decade,” says Richard Hunt of Peloton Research Partners. His firm has come to similar conclusions in local markets in California, Wisconsin, and other states. “This report provides evidence and not just anecdotes” at the national level, Hunt says.

“Suburban vibrant centers” outperformed single-use suburban office areas across almost all metrics, including rent prices

A street in Belmar, Colorado, a suburban vibrant center that is attractive to firms in the knowledge economy.



Silicon Alley in New York—a tech magnet

and vacancy rates. Characteristics such as mixed-use buildings, higher density, and walkability to destinations make suburban vibrant centers appealing locations for work—and destinations outside of work hours. “The demand for these suburban vibrant centers should grow, compared to the demand for typical single-use suburban locations,” the authors find.

When the suburban vibrant centers are compared to downtowns, the preference is location specific; strong CBDs are preferred over suburban vibrant centers, but if the CBD is weak, then the opposite holds true, the authors report.

The report compares central business districts (CBDs) with their suburban areas in the 45 largest office markets in the United States. The report also analyzes 42 suburban vibrant centers compared to either nearby suburban office parks or the remainder of the office submarket. Some of these mixed-use centers are in smaller markets. Personal interviews support and add nuance to the data—largely provided by the CoStar Group.

Meanwhile, the anecdotal evidence is strong in support of the NAIOP report. Two recent articles are good examples:

1) Why suburban companies like McDonald’s follow the siren call of downtown. “Following similar moves by behemoths such as Walgreen, Kraft Foods Group, Sears Holdings and Motorola Mobility, McDonald’s plan [to relocate some employees downtown] demonstrates the increasing importance large corporations are placing on downtown real estate in recruiting and retaining younger employees,” according to *Crain’s Chicago Business*.

2) Downtown Detroit has overtaken the suburbs as a market for office space. “Once awash in vacancies, the downtown Detroit office space market is experiencing a reversal of fortune that is steadily filling old empty buildings and luring corporate tenants out of nearby suburbs,” according to the *Detroit Free Press*. ♦

Four stages

FROM PAGE 1

as alternatives to conventional master-planned communities. TNDs like Seaside, Kentlands, Orenco Station, New Town at St. Charles, Habersham, and Celebration represent this era well; they showed themselves to be laboratories of ideas. These were private-sector projects that created pockets of urban place by overcoming legal and institutional barriers to compact development.

That stage lasted right up to the housing crash in 2008. Developers proved that mixed-use neighborhoods, with main streets and centers, could be built and that the public would buy into them. Long-neglected building types were reintroduced into many American markets: Among them were shopfront houses, small apartment buildings, granny flats, courtyard housing, liner and flex buildings, various mixed-use buildings, and small-lot single houses with usable porches and rear garages.

Walkable streets designed for slower-moving traffic were fought for and built. These included narrow residential streets, main streets, boulevards, and avenues. Although these types of thoroughfares continue to function in historic neighborhoods, few proposed building them again prior to New Urbanism.

The urban-rural Transect was conceived and explained, and new land-use codes—form-based codes—were created as alternatives to conventional zoning.

The difference between a neighborhood built around a five-minute walk



TNDs like Kentlands were laboratories for urban buildings types, public spaces, and streets.

and conventional suburban development was explained over and over to public officials, professionals in fields dealing with land use, and citizens. “The early victory of the New Urbanism was in shifting the academic and professional conversation away from mass suburbanization as the only available model for the human habitat,” explain Mike Lydon and Anthony Garcia in their upcoming book, *Tactical Urbanism*.

ENTER STAGE TWO

All of this effort set up the next stage of the New Urbanism: urban redevelopment. The stages of the New Urbanism overlap and, as I said, urban infill began early in the movement. The HOPE VI public housing redevelopment, for example, was a victory for cities and New Urbanism in the 1990s.

Yet redevelopment only took center stage after the housing crash. It did so for two reasons: First, the market for

building in cities had steadily grown as crime dropped throughout the 1990s and early 2000s. Second, the Great Recession stopped greenfield growth in its tracks and dried up financing for large projects. Suddenly, redevelopment looked very appealing.

The vast infrastructure of historic cities and towns, long neglected, could be built again. The street grid provided the armature for the mixed-use neighborhood advocated by new urbanists. Mixed-use centers and historic buildings already existed—the developers had only to rehabilitate them or put up new buildings around them.

Even as Stage 2 prevails today, a smaller version of Stage 1 continues as older TNDs head toward completion and new ones occasionally are launched.

Stage 2 has great advantages—our ancestors were better at building urban places than we are, and they left a great legacy, complete with historic buildings of excellent detail and superior transit services. Historic cities occupy many of the best locations. As long as people are willing to reinhabit an established city or town, there is less need to make places from scratch.

This redevelopment stage operates on a wide range of real estate—from downtowns and areas adjacent to downtowns to streetcar neighborhoods, former industrial districts, small cities and towns, and transit-oriented properties.

Stage 2 uses the lessons that were learned during Stage 1. Form-based codes work particularly well in older places that are undermined by conventional suburban codes. New urban

Paseo Verde in North Philadelphia by Jonathan Rose is typical of more recent New Urbanism.



street design helps repair city streets that were damaged by car-oriented traffic engineering. The building types and market studies created for TNDs are useful as well. Stage 2 breaks new ground in many areas, including finance reform for mixed-use buildings, parking policy, Tactical Urbanism and Lean Urbanism, and transit-oriented development. The architecture produced in Stage 2 is more varied and robust.

Second stage urbanism should carry on for decades, but it also poses some problems that require further evolution of the movement. One issue is gentrification. I strongly support revitalization of city neighborhoods, but the supply of 19th and 20th century street grids is finite. The limited supply causes prices to rapidly rise in economically strong cities with “good bones.”

Another problem with focusing on areas that possess historic street grids is that this offers little help to places that have already been consumed by sprawl. Up to 90 percent of the land in metropolitan areas has been shaped as conventional suburban development. These areas will become less accessible as transportation habits change and as fewer people drive. Now we have two systems functioning side by side: Old, walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods on historic street grids; and the larger conventional suburban development.

REPAIRING THE SUBURBS

Stage 3 New Urbanism is suburban retrofit, also known as sprawl repair. Planning books have described this growing trend in considerable detail. New urbanists have been trying to turn “grayfields” into urban places for a long time—Mashpee Commons and Mizner Park are just two of the mixed-use town centers that have been built on former suburban shopping malls—a transformation that got under way in the late 1980s. Sprawl is vast, however, and such projects are still isolated and pioneering. Stage 3 will take the spotlight when automobile-oriented transportation engineering is reformed on a much grander scale.

When that happens, sprawl repair will take pressure off historic neighborhoods. A new supply of walkable places will emerge in the suburbs.

The postwar suburbs hold the most potential, especially when affordability is a paramount concern. Twenty-six million houses were built from 1946 to 1965, most single-family,

Mashpee Commons: A town center created out of a former shopping center in suburban Mashpee, Massachusetts.



according to June Williamson, coauthor of *Retrofitting Suburbia*. These early postwar suburbs were built with mostly connecting streets and fading commercial strips lying fallow nearby.

Parking lots on these strips could support millions of new residential units. Stage 3 New Urbanism can revitalize languishing first-ring suburbs, but first, multilane arterials must be narrowed, redesigned, and made walkable. This outcome still seems hard to imagine, despite the success of the complete streets movement. Yet the formidable transportation industrial complex, the biggest impediment to Stage 3 New Urbanism, is showing signs that it will yield to pressure. Change will come sooner or later.

THE FINAL STAGE

Stage 4 is when we come full circle, and street grids are as normal as they were 100 years ago. These grids don't have to be rectangular like most of the 19th Century grids—they need only be connected, internally and externally.

The normalization of new street grids may be decades away, but extensively connected street networks are the natural way to develop communities, absent the obstruction caused by automobile-oriented transportation engineering and street policies. The transportation field must be fully reformed before Stage 4 takes effect. This is why the techniques that I associate with Stage 3 must come first. Expect to see early pioneering efforts in reestablishing new street grids that connect to larger thoroughfare networks.

Stage 4 New Urbanism will not mean an end to drive-only suburbs any more than the last century meant the eradication of historic cities and towns. Drive-only suburbs will always be with us—they continue to grow today due to zoning laws and the infrastructure that supports the separate-use mode of development.

The New Urbanism is emerging slowly, in stages. We are only part of the way through a change that will take generations. On a long journey, it helps to know where we are going. We are now immersed in the revitalization of cities, and many elements will play a critical role in this trend—architecture, building types, finance, and codes included. That work is crucial but it is not the end-game: the way we design and lay out streets will ultimately be the most permanent foundation of our physical communities.

New Urbanism was founded by architects, and we have learned much from them. But transportation planning and street design will set the course for the future. ♦

Benefits

FROM PAGE 1

outlined below:

Time—public master plans take a long time to create and are often seen as shelf items and zoning ordinances are often not updated until several years after the plan is prepared or updated;

Money—many, if not most, municipalities do not have the necessary financial resources to prepare a high quality master plan and zoning ordinance, let alone one that focuses on form and character elements previously ignored. Existing staff may have little knowledge, experience, or interest in tackling such a task; Staff, time, and personnel resources are inadequate;

Public involvement—depending on one's role, there seems

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to be either too many public meetings, or not enough opportunity for public input, or both and because the time frame is so long, the public gets “worn out” long before adoption and when implementation begins;

Complexity—unless you have been or currently are a professional in the development industry or municipal government, the “process” seems complicated and difficult to understand;

Predictability—despite best efforts to manage the system, projects often do not achieve approval as proposed, even at times when all major stakeholders support them;

Outcome(s)—most people would agree that the results (i.e., on the ground development) being produced by the system are not consistent with what citizens may envision or support in their local plans.

Perhaps now is the time to reevaluate the current systemic approach to

planning—that is, what we have come to accept as the standard planning/regulatory/entitlement/permitting system practiced in communities today.

To this end, the graphic below is proffered for review and comment. This graphic compares a generalized ‘conventional’ planning/regulatory/entitlement/permitting process to what could develop if form-orientation were to be incorporated directly into a joint master planning/zoning process itself.

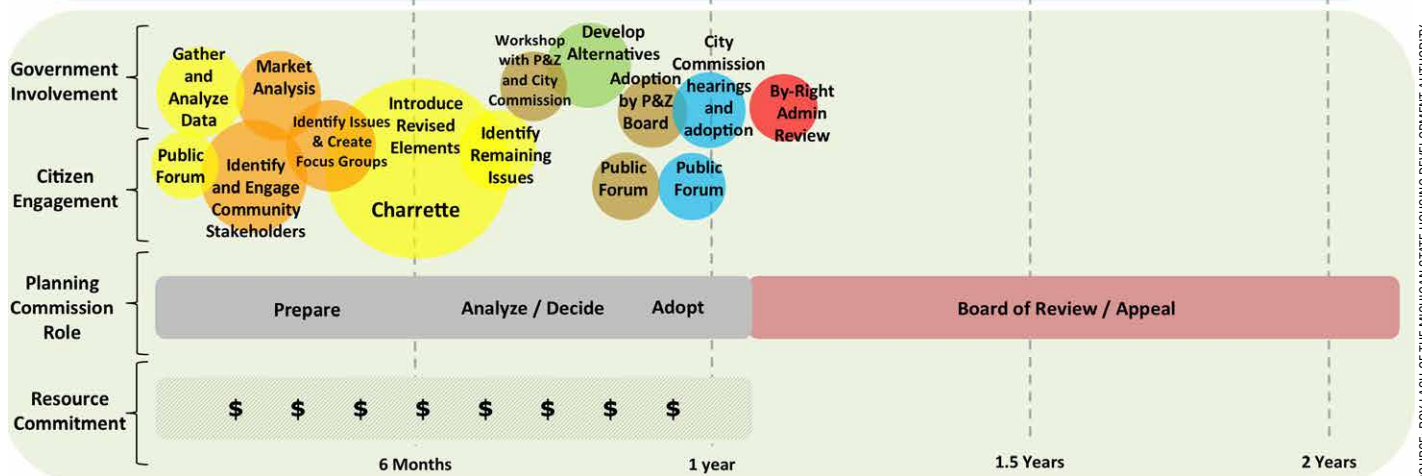
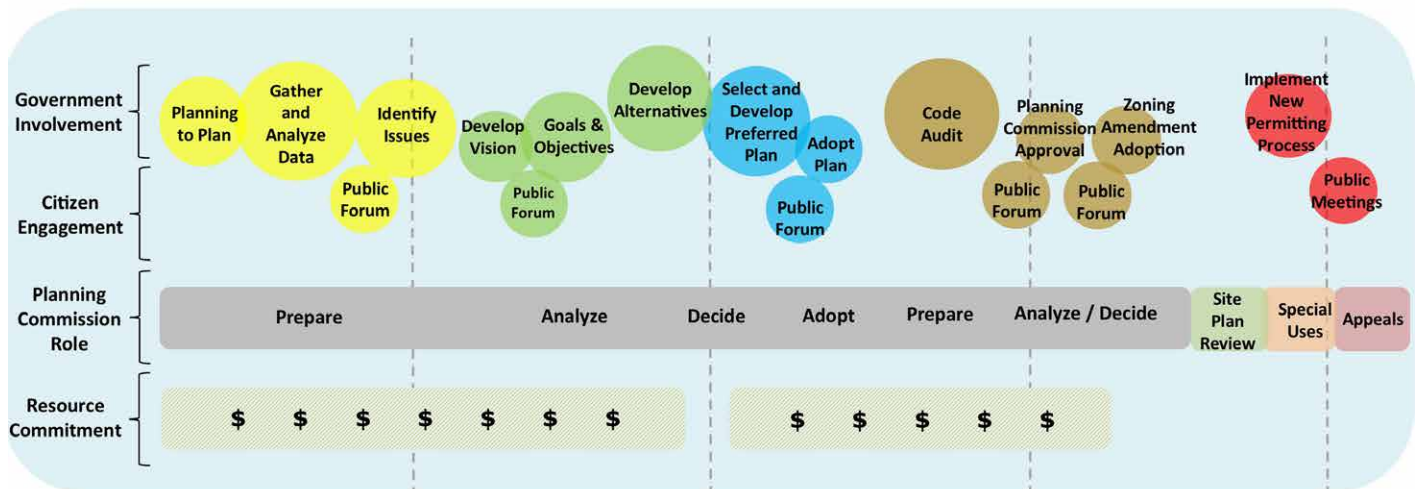
This graphic contains a large amount of information spanning five areas: (1) government involvement; (2) citizen engagement; (3) the role of the planning commission; (4) resource commitment; and (5) the time periods of operation of the four areas. The elements of the conventional planning/zoning/entitlement/permitting process are presented on the top half. In the bottom half, the present form-based code development process is appended in two key ways:

Master planning tasks are incorporated into the process “front-end.” The preparation/outreach/engagement activities that are critical for development of form-based codes can also play the same role for obtaining consensus on the community’s vision, goals, objectives, and the “form” of future land use(s).

A by-right entitlement/administrative permitting function is incorporated into the process “back-end.” Such changes would provide the ability to reduce or even eliminate the site plan reviewing process for projects where design and use dimensions fall within the established code form parameters, among other requirements.

Juxtaposition of the processes reveals some clear distinctions. The conventional process is needlessly redundant and duplicates the prepare/analyze/decide steps for master planning and code analysis. Under a stakeholder-engaged charrette-structured process, it appears

Conventional Planning / Regulatory Process



Form Planning / Coding Process

that the process redundancy is eliminated. Moreover, the planning commission role could return to its historic roots as (1) plan/code writer, and (2) administrative review board.

Furthermore, assuming steps are taken to solicit and actively engage all stakeholders (including citizens both individually and in groups), the consensus developed for planning goals, objectives, and future use(s) may also include consensus on the form of said objectives, goals, and future use(s). The basis is then established for simultaneous coding and moving entitlement/permitting to the by-right/administrative structure as depicted in the lower half of the graphic.

The comparison also reveals that while more intensive studies are undertaken—including market analyses—the form-oriented process can reduce the time required to update a community’s master plan. By combining formerly separate (but similar) stakeholder/engagement process structures, redundancy is eliminated and improved production for time spent is achieved. And, of course, the time savings translate to resource savings based on the typical hourly rate calculation.

Considering the system issues identified above, we can conclude that movement to a “form”-oriented model would have the following effects:

- A reduction in time needed for master plan revision or update;

- A corresponding reduction in resources needed to fund the process;

- Reduced staff time required for process support – both in plan/code preparation and entitlement/permitting – would provide increased time for other important tasks;

- An appropriate amount/intensity of public involvement, at the correct time(s), would support the obtainment of input and consensus while allowing the system to function at optimal efficiency for relevant individuals and groups;

- The process offers a veritable opportunity to demonstrate predictability for all parties – both at the onset and in the continuity of process;

- Because the process plans, codes, and then sets permitting based on the form identified by consensus, the community’s desired outcome(s) is realized at all stages, and consistency with the form-based outcome(s) is the metric by which

the process is organized and measured.

Again, this article is intended to open a dialogue, anticipating that some (or many) readers may have questions or comments. These are appreciated and requested. We have the opportunity to advance the form-based movement toward its next evolution of adaptation and adoption. We have already recognized the importance and benefit of form coding our neighborhoods and communities in order to achieve the outcome of

better placemaking. Imagine the benefit achieved if we can incorporate form to become standard community planning model?

James Tischler is Senior Manager of Community Development at the Michigan State Housing Development Authority. He can be reached by email at tischlerj@michigan.gov. Or, go to bettercities.net and comment online. ♦

The forward march of form-based codes

The latest update of the of the Codes Study led by Hazel Borys and Emily Talen, with contributions by public and private planners, tracks 584 codes internationally that meet criteria established by the Form-Based Codes Institute, as well as an additional 16 form-based guidelines. As of January, 2015, 344 of these codes are adopted with others in progress. Eighty-six percent have been adopted since 2003.

The number of form-based codes (FBCs) rose 22 percent from the last Codes Study update in May of 2013 (480 codes, 279 adopted).

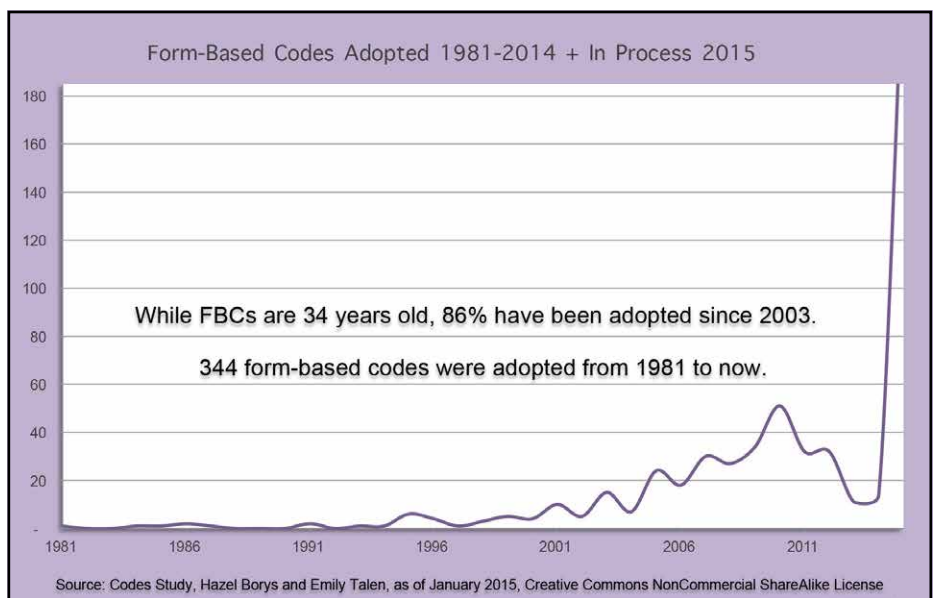
Even as the latest update was released, practitioners were adding to the list.

What’s the difference between a form-based code and conventional zoning? All codes shape the built form of communities. Conventional codes are

organized around separation of uses and the form is a byproduct. With a FBC, the form is the central organizing principle. It is intentional and based on a community vision.

Why form-based codes? Because our current laws tend to separate where we live from where we work, learn, and shop, and insist on big, fast roads to connect them all, the authors report.

The growing number of FBCs have clear regional concentrations. Big city adopters include Miami, Nashville, Dallas, Ft. Worth, Denver, Albuquerque, El Paso, Memphis, Baltimore, Tulsa, Portland, Cincinnati, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, San Diego, Austin, Chattanooga, Atlanta, Jacksonville, Calgary, Abu Dhabi, Dammam. Many small to medium-sized communities have adopted FBCs as well. FBCs have been applied to hamlets as



small as 35 acres and 100 people. The growth in FBCs represents “a tremendous shift in business as usual,” the authors report.

The Codes Study tracks SmartCodes, other Transect-based codes, and other form-based codes that meet FBCI criteria:

Is the code’s focus primarily on regulating urban form and less on land use?

Is the code regulatory rather than advisory?

Does the code emphasize standards and parameters for form with predictable physical outcomes (build-to lines, frontage type requirements, etc.) rather than relying on numerical parameters (FAR, density, etc.) whose outcomes are difficult to predict?

Does the code require private buildings to shape public space through the use of building form standards with specific requirements for building placement?

Does the code promote and/or conserve an interconnected street network and pedestrian-scaled blocks?

Are regulations and standards keyed to specific locations on a regulating plan?

Are the diagrams in the code unambiguous, clearly labeled, and accurate in their presentation of spatial configurations?

The Codes Study also tracks initiatives and guidelines that may assist in the formulation of form-based codes.

Google “codes study” to read the full study or add to the list. ♦

Dallas-Fort Worth is a laboratory for placemaking

ROBERT STEUTEVILLE

Dallas-Fort Worth (DFW) stands at a crossroads. Old infrastructure, zoning, and financial policies steer the region toward more Texas-sized sprawl. The real estate markets—aided by newer transit systems and forward-thinking planners and developers—point to connected, walkable neighborhoods.

Key upcoming transportation decisions could lead to a shortcut to the new future or prop the old system up. Either way, the dynamic, fourth-largest US metro is in flux.

The region has a special opportunity to explore these issues with the upcoming CNU 23: Meeting the Demand for Walkable Places, to be held in Dallas from April 29 to May 2. Those who arrive at DFW for CNU will examine these issues from a national perspective—and they will find a local laboratory for transit-oriented development, form-based codes, placemaking, Tactical Urbanism,

and related topics.

Visitors to DFW may also be surprised at the growing number of hip, walkable neighborhoods in and around both cities. *The New York Times* last year reported on the changing demographics and market preferences in Texas in general and DFW in particular. “Pockets of walkable, mixed-use development have existed in Texas for years, especially in and around the major downtowns,” writes David Muto. “But an influx of young adults in Texas, the nation’s second-fastest-growing state from 2010 to 2013, has given walkability advocates more visibility.”

Christopher Leinberger will lead a discussion on growing demand for walkable urbanism around the US. That trend particularly applies to millennials—and the Texas economy attracts a sizable young, educated population. Senior citizens, also, are seeking to move closer to amenities, according to Tim Morstad, an official with AARP Texas.

Among the CNU attendees this year will be Stephen Klineberg, a director of the Kinder Research Institute for Urban Research at Rice University, who finds a dramatic rise in urban living preference in Houston (51 percent in 2012, up from 36 percent in 2008). “I don’t think there’s any reason to think that Houstonians are going to be different from Dallasites, Austinites, or San Antonians, because these are nationwide trends,” he told the *Times*.

FREEWAYS OR NEIGHBORHOODS

CNU has long advocated for the removal of redundant and poorly located urban freeways. A grassroots movement has emerged to tear down I-345, “an aging highway in Dallas that divides downtown from the Deep Ellum, a gritty but emerging neighborhood.” Local urbanists Patrick Kennedy and Brandon Hancock demonstrated that the highway removal would open up 245 acres—the equivalent of two neighborhoods—to redevelopment.

A proposed highway, The Trinity Toll Road, is a hot topic in the region. The original concept was to build a parkway along the Trinity River, opening access to parkland for all residents. A more recent proposal calls for a six-lane, limited-access toll road that is more of a barrier to the river. Opponents call it a \$1.8 billion waste of resources that would better be focused elsewhere.

“The toll road exemplifies a very public argument on how Dallas-Fort Worth should grow,” says Alex McKeag, program manager for CNU. “Should more money go into highways, building further out, or is the future in neighborhoods?”

Bicyclists in Deep Ellum, Dallas



CNU attendees will weigh into that discussion and they will examine alternatives to highways like transit and transit-oriented development. The region has built a sizable light rail system but connections to walkable neighborhoods are still lacking in many places. Projects like the Trinity neighborhood in East Fort Worth and the Bush Central TOD in Richardson, planned by Scott Polikov of Gateway Planning, seek to build connections between people and activities where none currently exist.

The discussion on transit will involve experts like Jarrett Walker and explore case studies on how to make TOD work.

Fort Worth, the smaller of the core cities, is big on placemaking. The downtown offers a mix of historic and new buildings that appeal to young and educated men and women who fuel the knowledge economy. Sundance Square, designed by Texas architect David Schwarz who will present at CNU, ranks among the livelier entertainment and shopping districts in America, built around a mixed-use plaza.

FOCUSING ON FORM

Fort Worth is a leader in form-based codes—they have been adopted in a dozen or more neighborhoods in the city. CNU members, who are the experts in this relatively new regulatory tool, will compare notes from around the US.

DFW is among the fastest-growing regions in the US. Once the people in this region take to an idea, they can implement it fast and well. Dallas was the birthplace of Build a Better Block, a Tactical Urbanism technique that uses temporary materials and programs to demonstrate how a street can be transformed—literally overnight (see photo at bottom of page).

Prolific urbanist and transportation planner Jeff Tumlin

pointed to the economic cost of DFW's sprawling growth at a recent local transportation summit. One you factor in Dallas's high transportation costs, it's cheaper to live in San Francisco or Boston, he says.

D Magazine argues: "Rather than squabbling over road dollars that facilitate immediate investments and development in the outer region, the competing municipalities must realize that the suburbs' best interests in the long run lie in supporting the growth of a city that looks like all great cities have looked throughout history: a strong core that pumps economic life outwards."

The region may be reaching a tipping point toward a new kind of growth. This spring, CNU 23 in Dallas will be at the center of that movement, both nationally and locally. ♦

BOOKS

Tactical urbanism

Short-Term Actions for Long-Term Change

By Mike Lydon and Anthony Garcia

Island Press, 2015, \$25.00 softcover. 260 pp.

REVIEW BY ROBERT STEUTEVILLE

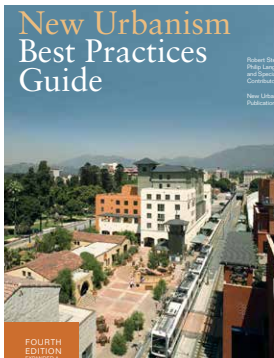
The housing crash of 2008 caused much suffering—bankruptcies, foreclosures, and unemployment included—but no dark cloud is without a silver lining. Among the bright fringes—sprawl was disabled and citizens sought low-budget ways to revitalize cities and towns. Out of the latter, Tactical Urbanism took hold.

The trend was identified and named by Mike Lydon and Anthony Garcia, urban designers of the millennial generation who founded Street Plans Collaborative. Tactical Urbanism is applied to what William H. Whyte described as the "huge reservoir of space yet untapped by imagination."

Tactical Urbanism: Short-Term Actions for Long-Term Change is a valuable text for citizens, public-sector planners, and developers alike. The book is easy to read, clear, and is all about action—something you can't say about many planning-oriented texts.

Tactical Urbanism revitalizes streets and public spaces with temporary, inexpensive materials and treatments as a test for more permanent measures. This could involve restriping or taking over a portion of the street, or creating a public plaza

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The first Build a Better Block in Oak Cliff, Dallas



PHOTO TEAM BETTER BLOCK. FROM THE BOOK TACTICAL URBANISM, ISLAND PRESS

BOOKS

in a parking lot.

Tactical Urbanism amounts to more than “do-it-yourself” (DIY) projects by those who are frustrated at the injustice and permanence of automobile-dominated public space. As the authors explain: “Not all DIY urbanism efforts are tactical, and not all Tactical Urbanism initiatives are DIY.

Citizens and planners need tactics in the fight over who owns streets and public space (driver or pedestrian/bicyclist). New York City’s Department of Transportation used tactical techniques to give half of Times Square to people on foot, the authors explain. The project began with cheap, movable planters and folding chairs, which showed that new traffic patterns with fewer lanes allowed automobiles to still flow while making better use of space in the third-most-visited crossroads on Earth. After a period of success, the changes were made permanent.

Similarly, a political logjam over a new square in Somerville, Massachusetts, was broken with food trucks and temporary seats set up in a parking lot. Citizens discovered the value of the public space.

When something new is planned, citizens most clearly imagine what they are losing. The loss may include a parking lane or a high-speed travel lane. Only by building something can many citizens take ownership of a new benefit—like public space or walkability. *Tactical Urbanism* shows the benefit without investing too much too permanently.

Tactical Urbanism can be used by cities, by citizens, and developers. Among the first applications in modern times occurred in Seaside, Florida, to seed low-budget commercial operations in the town center. Lydon and Garcia explain that “simply defining and designing beautiful public space is not enough. Ritual and use have to be further instigated; without the programming and activities—the rituals of daily life—that take place in public space there can be no urban life.”

GOALS, STRATEGIES, AND TACTICS

Planning starts with goals—like getting more people to walk and bicycle or strengthening downtown businesses. Strategies follow, like allowing higher densities around transit stations,

Car-free Herald Square in New York City



PHOTO BY MIKE LYDON. COPYRIGHT *TACTICAL URBANISM*, ISLAND PRESS

PHOTO BY DEBORAH PATTERSON. FROM THE BOOK *TACTICAL URBANISM*, ISLAND PRESS



Lou Catelli uses sprawl paint to create a crosswalk when the city never returned to complete the job.

retrofitting streets, or changing parking policies. “Although this approach does work in certain contexts, entrenched interests remain recalcitrant, outdated policy barriers stymie progress, and leadership voids leave well-considered plans, and their strategies, on the shelf. ... Planners, developers, and advocates alike need tactics that help grease the wheels for implementation from the inside out and the outside in.”

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Temporary materials and installations allow ideas to be tested and data gathered. If the project doesn't work as planned, changes can be made while the budget is not exhausted. "This iterative process not only creates better projects but also continues the momentum established during the conventional planning process."

HISTORICAL PRECEDENTS

Tactical Urbanism had many historical precedents. Unlike most thoroughfare innovations in the last 100 years, the Dutch "woonerf" did not originate with transportation engineers or planners. "The woonerf was created when a group of residents in the Dutch city of Delft grew frustrated with the growing problems related to safety, congestion, and pollution as car use increased in their compact and otherwise walkable city," they write. In the face of official inaction, the citizens tore up portions of their pavement late at night so that cars had to maneuver around the obstruction at low speed. With little evidence of any resulting disruptions, the municipality quietly ignored the change. In 1976, the national parliament voted to incorporate the woonerf into the national street design standards. Today the woonerf is accepted internationally as a traffic engineering type.

Citizens can use Tactical Urbanism when all else fails. The old adage, "it's better to ask forgiveness than permission,"

applies in many cases. Consider Lou Catelli of the Hampden neighborhood of Baltimore, who one evening used spray paint to create a crosswalk at a busy intersection. The city had repaved the intersection in 2011 and failed to repaint the crosswalks and stop bars, and motorists "stopped noticing the stop signs," the authors write. The DOT threatened civil and criminal action, but the local council representative defended Catelli. "Catelli was never charged, and the city returned soon thereafter to complete the striping of the street."

CATALYST FOR INVESTMENT

Tactical Urbanism sometimes is a catalyst for significant investment. Broad Avenue in Memphis was a forgotten main street that began to receive some planning attention in the mid-2000s—but the momentum stopped with the housing crash. A group of neighborhood activists decided to jumpstart revitalization using a tactical approach. They raised \$25,000 for the effort called A New Face for an Old Broad, which included crosswalks painted by school children, "pop-up" storefronts occupied by local businesses, and the implementation of a "road diet" using angled parking and temporary bike lanes along a three-block stretch.

"What transpired next exceeded all expectations. Using little else but Facebook to promote the event, they drew more than 15,000 people to the 2-day demonstration, which set

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off a wave of reinvestment. More than \$20 million in private investment ensued. The angled parking and bike lanes were never removed.

A section on finding and buying materials is useful—especially since the book is not aimed primarily at professional engineers. *Tactical Urbanism* is nothing if not useful. City planners and public works officials should buy it and use it. So should developers of new urban projects and every bike-walk advocacy group in the US and Canada.

Tactical Urbanism will not, by itself, transform America. But it is a valuable tool, suited to the times, to move America toward a more livable place. ♦

The Last Great Walk The True Story of a 1909 Walk from New York to San Francisco, and Why It Matters Today

By *Wayne Curtis*

Rodale Press, 2014, \$24.99 hardcover, 236 pp.

Imagine a time when one person could step out of their front door on one coast of America and walk clear across the country. The entire nation consisted of small walkable towns, big walkable cities, and mostly quiet country roads. Where no roads existed, railroad tracks sufficed.

The year was 1909, a time when the street was public space belonging to the man or woman on foot.

Wayne Curtis tells the story of Edward Payson Weston, a septuagenarian who captured the nation's admiration with a 4,000-mile trek from New York City to San Francisco from mid-March to mid-July of that year.

"When Weston walked to San Francisco, he pretty much had free reign over any street he trod," Curtis explains. "Not just because he attracted attention and crowds and he and his entourage were often too outsized a presence to be confined



Edward Payson
Weston circa
1909

to the margins of a narrow sidewalk, but also because anyone on foot could walk just about anywhere they pleased in 1909. That was their right and their habit. Walkers weren't confined to sidewalks; in cities, they wandered streets as if in a public plaza, crossing midblock or making their way diagonally or rambling in great zig-zags if they felt like it."

The Last Great Walk is great storytelling woven with analysis of how the geography of America has changed in the last 100 years. Curtis's prose is vigorous and entertaining, like his subject.

A century later, I wish I could tell you Curtis retraces Weston's route. That would be a great book, but probably not possible. The misery, punishment, and danger would be intolerable. Curtis walks about 45-40 miles at the most walkable points in New York City and San Francisco and still encounters 12-lane overpasses and trudges too-large intersections.

The nation has become an archipelago of a few walkable cities in vast expanses of highways and arterials roads linking a landscape of shopping malls, big-box stores, subdivisions, and countryside. The nation has sped up and the landscape has become boring—a place to speed through on the way to somewhere else.

Not long after Weston made his journey, the nation embarked on a 20-year battle during which pedestrians lost common law rights that had been in place for centuries. The story is sad and painful, but by 1930 pedestrians were relegated

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to the sidewalks and automobiles legally owned the streets. That was only the beginning—the real damage came in the half century after World War II when America was remade by traffic engineers and zoning laws. The transformation was gradual, and people accepted it like so many frogs in heating water. Within two or three generations, people forgot that streets ever were public spaces. Although a movement has emerged to reclaim streets for people, this goal may take a century to realize, Curtis explains.

“Low density isn’t a genie you can put back in the bottle. The six-lane arterials flanked with strip malls and fast-food restaurants won’t be walkable until their parking lots are built up with commercial or mixed-use buildings and then the roads themselves are narrowed and rebuilt on a scale more suitable for walking,” he says.

In the meantime, Weston’s travails are entertaining today, much as they riveted the nation in 1909. He planned for the walk to take 100 days—averaging about 40 miles a day. He also greeted crowds in every town and city, gave speeches, and was interviewed by countless reporters. This may have been the most arduous publicity tour in history.

Weston made the mistake of heading west, facing into prevailing winds and storms. He trudged through two feet of snow and was misdirected and badly served by incompetent

crews. He eventually walked alone, hungry, and thirsty for vast stretches of the west.

Weston finally made his destination—the San Francisco post office—in good health but five days late.

The Last Great Walk, on the cusp of the nation’s transformation, offers an epic narrative to explore the nexus of walking and geographic change—an issue as relevant today as it was a century earlier. ♦


UPDATE

■ **The Project for Lean Urbanism will use Mobile, Alabama**, as a test project in the first quarter of 2015. Other cities yet-to-be-determined will also be test sites. Hank Dittmar, the director of Dittmar Associates—who led The Prince’s Foundation for Building Community for 10 years—will go to Mobile for an assessment of needs and opportunities.

The project began in 2014 with a grant from the Knight Foundation to devise tools so that “community-building takes less time, reduces the resources required for compliance, and frustrates fewer well-intentioned entrepreneurs, by providing ways to work around onerous financial, bureaucratic, and regulatory processes.”


Two urban-design projects already incorporate Lean princi-

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Downtown Mobile, Alabama

ples and tactics. “The first, Vista Field in Kennewick, Washington, (with Michael Mehaffy and Laurence Qamar) uses Lean Infrastructure, including the re-use of an airport runway for infrastructure and footings. The second, on the former Entergy site in Midcity Baton Rouge, Louisiana, applies thresholds and uses Lean building types,” noted Brian Falk, director of publications at the Center for Applied Transect Studies.

■ The National Association of Homebuilders (NAHB) announced in January that the **Village of Providence** in Huntsville, Alabama was been named the Community of the

Village of Providence, bridging a suburban arterial



PHOTO BY STEVE MOUZON

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Year in the 2014 Best in American Living Awards (BALA). The Village of Providence has been developed since the beginning by a local family business headed by Town Founder David Slyman. Providence was planned by Duany Plater-Zyberk & Company in 2002.

The project used a regionally calibrated pattern book created by Steve Mouzon, at the time with Placemakers design firm. It was Placemakers’ first project.

Providence’s town center straddles a suburban arterial with 3-5 story mixed-use buildings. Two of the five lanes were converted to parking, creating a main street.

■ A thesis by Chester W. Harvey titled “**Measuring Streetscape Design for Livability Using Spatial Data and Methods**” (2014) is an important advance in the urban design field, writes urbanist Laurence Aurbach. Harvey developed a computerized method to evaluate the essential form of streetscapes. He tested the results against a survey of streetscape appeal and found significant relationships.

Streetscapes shaped like outdoor rooms are perceived to be safer and more attractive to walk in. More importantly, perhaps, the streetscape design is strongly related to safety. “Streetscape design is traditionally overlooked as an approach to improving traffic safety on urban streets, though traffic operation is inherently affected by built environment context,” Harvey writes.

Harvey’s study evaluated streetscapes within the city

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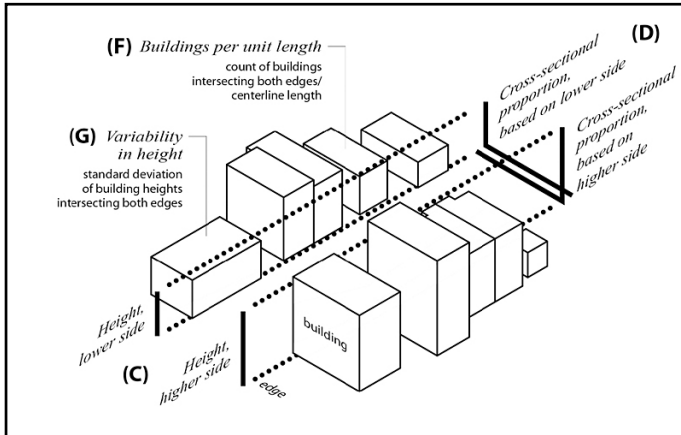


Figure from Harvey's streetscape study

boundaries of Boston, New York, and Baltimore. The streetscapes were located generally in high-density core districts and medium-density peripheral neighborhoods. More than 7,400 miles (12,000 km) of thoroughfares were studied, representing about 65 percent of all public thoroughfares in the three cities. He was able to categorize these streetscapes as either upright, compact, porous, or open, which Aurbach notes roughly translate to Transect zones Core, Center, Neighborhood General, and Sub-Urban. For a full report go to bettercities.net and see "A Computerized Model to Judge Streetscape Quality."

■ The **Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE)** manual for trip generation radically overestimates traffic caused by new development, measuring "phantom trips" that never materialize.

Planners have long known that mixed-use, transit-oriented developments tend to generate far fewer trips than transportation manuals would suggest—44 to 48 percent fewer, we reported in articles in 2006 and 2008.

But the problems with the ITE manual—the standard tool to estimate traffic generation—go deeper than that, according to new research published in Access Magazine. Comparisons between actual trip generation, as revealed in the National Household Travel Survey (NHTS), and ITE data points to a 55 percent overestimation across all household and commercial development. NHTS is the most comprehensive travel survey in the US.

Moreover, as automobile travel has leveled off in the last decade and a half while development has continued apace, the gap between ITE estimates and actual traffic has increased, according to the research by Adam Millard-Ball, Assistant Professor in the Department of Environmental Studies at the University of California, Santa Cruz.

The contrast is even starker in more recent years: an increase of 2 million trips between 2001 and 2009 according to NHTS, but 90 million by the ITE-based method.

Use of the ITE manual has a profound affect on new development—opposition often centers around traffic generation. But the bigger impact is on overbuilt roads and the construction of too much parking.

Millard-Ball explains why ITE numbers are likely based on a biased sample that is weighted towards suburban roads. Moreover, many developments don't generate new traffic—

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they just shuffle it around. Google Access Magazine "Phantom Trips" for more on this study.

■ Recent research adds to volumes of studies that say **walkable streets** will make us safer, healthier, and improve the economy and communities. In *CityLab*, Richard Florida summarized a raft of new research showing that walkable places "not only raise housing prices but reduce crime, improve health, spur creativity, and encourage more civic engagement in our communities." Some of this research is made possible by Walk Score, a website that assigns a walkability score for every address in the US. ♦

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