

Better Cities & Towns

Better *places*, stronger communities.

JULY-AUGUST 2014—VOLUME 3, NUMBER 4

Authors declare 'The beginning of the end of sprawl'

A strong trend toward walkable urban places marks “the beginning of the end of sprawl,” according to Christopher Leinberger and Patrick Lynch, authors of *Foot Traffic Ahead*, a study of 30 top US metro areas.

“The end of sprawl is as significant as when historian Fredrick Jackson Turner proclaimed the ‘closing of the frontier’ in 1893,” the authors note.

The report identifies 588 “regionally significant” walkable urban places (WalkUPs) -- major urban centers including downtowns, suburban town centers, small city centers, and transit-oriented developments that have a Walk Score of at least 70. These WalkUPs are scattered throughout most of the 30 regions, not just concentrated in cities.

WalkUPs account for about 1 percent of the metropolitan land area but a substantial and growing percentage of the commercial development. In DC, for example, WalkUPs currently account for 48 percent of the area’s new office, hotel, and rental apartment square footage. In Atlanta, 27 WalkUPs account for 50 percent of recent commercial development.

Foot Traffic Ahead offers one measure of walkable urbanism, focusing exclusively on “commercial development” that includes office buildings, hotels, major retail, and large multifamily buildings. It excludes single-family home construction. “Two caveats accompany this prediction. First, further in-depth analysis of all real estate products, particularly for-sale housing, needs to be conducted to confirm this conclusion.

SEE ‘BEGINNING OF THE END’ ON PAGE 4

The Meatpacking District in New York City: A walkable urban place.



America split between two community ideals

A Pew Research Center nationwide survey showed that America is divided nearly down the middle between preference for walkable urban and drivable suburban living arrangements. The survey, released June 12, asked US residents whether they would prefer to live in a community where the houses are larger and farther apart but schools, stores and restaurants are several miles away, or one where the houses are smaller and closer to each other but those services are within walking distance.

Forty-nine percent preferred the low-density model where the car is required, and 48 percent preferred the walkable neighborhood. More than 3,300 people were surveyed, in the 2014 Political Polarization in the American Public Survey, which looked at community preference among other variables.

The numbers are consistent with the 2013 survey by the National Association of Realtors (NAR), which found that about half of respondents prefer the walkable neighborhood, and about 45 percent the conventional suburb.

Both the Pew and NAR surveys find higher demand for walkable urban than

SEE ‘COMMUNITY PREFERENCE’ ON PAGE 6

Community preference

	Compact	Spread out	DK/NA ¹
Overall	48	49	3
Age 18-29	53	46	1
Age 30-49	43	55	2
Age 50-64	45	52	3
Age 65+	58	39	3
College grad	55	43	2
Post grad	57	40	3

Better Cities & Towns, Source: Pew Survey
¹Don't know/No answer

Better Cities & Towns

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COMMENTARY

What is the new American Dream?

ROBERT STEUTEVILLE

The new American Dream will transform cities and towns in the 21st Century. To understand it, we have to grasp a few features of the previous American Dream, which created the metropolitan regions that we know today. That Dream is still operative — although it has faded a bit since the 2008 housing crash. A Pew study shows the country now evenly split between two visions of the good life (see page 1).

There were many good parts to the 20th Century American Dream. It provided shelter for three generations of Americans. It delivered a house, a yard, and a car (later two or three cars) to most households. It also tended to separate society by income, reduce community connections through sprawl, and increase automobile and road costs.

The top tier of that American Dream was the McMansion. The front of the McMansion has what is called "curb appeal," an effect not unlike what the peacock achieves with its feathers. The multiple gables, the big, little-used front lawn, the porch too shallow to sit in — all have little practical function.

Those are status symbols — as is the big, expensive car. You can't walk anywhere from the McMansion. There's nowhere to walk to. For the children who grew up in these areas, the shopping mall was the town square.

This generation went to college, where many experienced walkable neighborhoods with diversity, culture, and mixed-use main streets and downtowns. Most don't want to return to the cul-de-sac.

Some say that cities are on the rise, and suburbs are declining. I don't think it is that simple. Rather, the new dream is based on the idea of "Place." When you go to a community with layers of history, with charm and character, where many people gather, you react emotionally and psychologically. That feeling, which everybody has experienced, is known as "sense of place." That sense has value. After six or seven decades of sprawl, many people seek it. Whether they get it in a central city, small city, suburb, or small town doesn't matter.

PLACE-BASED DEVELOPMENT

Recently I learned a new term, "place-based development," from James Tischler of the Michigan State Housing Development Authority. The term is objective and nonjudgmental, and refers to any development or investment that generates a sense of place. Place-based development is objectively a better investment today, and it creates higher values. Place-based development can occur in cities, suburbs, or rural areas, but it works best in urban centers and mixed-use corridors.

Compared to the last half of the 20th Century, which was a disaster for cities, downtowns and urban neighborhoods will do better in the 21st Century. Nevertheless, many of the best opportunities for place-based development will arise in the suburbs.

In just two years, the suburban municipality of Lancaster, California, saw \$273 million in economic benefit from a revitalization of its main street in 2010.

Place-based development correlates with Walk Score (walkscore.org), because Walk Score measures more than walkability — it measures the economic impact of Place. Economic activity gravitates toward Place — which raises the Walk Score.

The new American Dream especially appeals to the young and educated, and that is significant for developers, investors, and planners alike. Every community — suburb or city — wants to attract this demographic, the so-called "creative class" or "entrepreneurial class." Call them what you will, the urban preference of this group is a powerful argument for adopting the new American Dream.

Unless suburbs transform themselves to align with the new American Dream, they risk losing population in the young and educated demographic. The leaders in Northwest Arkansas, where Walmart is headquartered, are coming up with a strategy to deal with that reality (see story on page 3).

In the new American Dream, the incentive is enjoyment and participation in the economic benefits of Place. The chief thing we need to understand is that to create Place, a community must be brought together, and the land must be used more efficiently than it was when socioeconomic segregation reigned. ♦

‘Sense of place’ is key to regional talent strategy

Let by the Walton Family Foundation, Northwest Arkansas officials look to walkable urban solutions for future economic growth.

The foundation funded by the Walton family — of Walmart fame — sponsored about 25 people to come to the Congress for the New Urbanism in Buffalo in early June. It was a remarkable group, including mayors, city council members, chamber of commerce officials, and representatives of regional planning commissions, economic development and transportation agencies, and others from four primary cities in Northwest Arkansas.

The foundation’s purpose is to steer rapidly growing Northwest Arkansas toward becoming a walkable transit-oriented place that is attractive to educated young professionals.

The Walton Family Foundation initiative may seem ironic given that Walmart stores symbolize the single-use, big box format with large parking lots. Yet the foundation, which is led by a board of Walton family members, is concerned with the economic future of Northwest Arkansas, the fastest growing region in the US.

Three of the nation’s Fortune 500 companies — Tyson Foods, J.B. Hunt Transport Services, and Walmart — are based in the in the region, which currently has 482,000 people. Because of Walmart, the largest retailer in the world, more than 1,300 vendors including Coca-Cola, Procter and Gamble, Unilever, Motorola, Nestlé, Dell, General Mills, Kellogg Company, and PepsiCo have set up corporate offices there. “People from all over the world are coming to work for these companies. We are in a race for talent,” says Rob Brothers, director of the regional Focus Area for the foundation.

The “talent” consists mainly of people with a college degree — who tend to favor mixed-use, walkable communities with a sense of place. Northwest Arkansas is historically rural. It’s four leading municipalities — Fayetteville, Springdale, Rogers, and Bentonville — range from about 40,000 to 80,000 people each. The growth pattern is dispersed and



IMAGES COURTESY OF DOVER, KOHL & PARTNERS. BY STEVE PRICE, URBAN ADVANTAGE



Images for Fayetteville’s downtown plan show a transformation that boosts ‘sense of place’ that will appeal to prospective professional talent in the region.

single-use, because it has mostly taken place in the last 40 or 50 years.

RETAINING THE YOUNG AND EDUCATED

The concern is that the young and educated will choose to locate elsewhere if the amenities they are looking for — particularly the diverse neighborhoods served by transit — are lacking. “The goal is to attract and retain the kind of quality people at all levels that we need,” Brothers says.

Tyson Foods has already taken tangible action — it is moving its head-

quarters back to downtown Springdale. “They have 5 acres, which was the site of their original building, which has been derelict and abandoned for some time,” says Matthew Petty, city council member of Fayetteville who works at the University of Arkansas Community Design Center, and a CNU attendee.

After the meeting at CNU, the group discussed potential strategies to improve the sense of place, Petty says. The first is a regional form-based code (FBC). The City of Fayetteville has a citywide, optional, form-based code, which developers are choosing to use because

by right they receive administrative approval of projects. The success of that code and the CNU experience — where many sessions covered FBCs — is helping Northwest Arkansas officials to feel comfortable with the concept, Petty says.

The second idea is to set up an training program in walkable urbanism, perhaps tied to CNU accreditation — as other places like El Paso, Texas, and Beaufort, South Carolina, have done.

OVERALL STRATEGY

The strategy for improving talent has four components, according to Brothers.

- Improve local primary education
- Create international-caliber culture
- Foster economic development
- Create a “sense of place.”

The last component, sense of place, is correlated with economic development.

There are six components to “sense of place,” according to Brothers.

- Increase nature trails and use of natural amenities

- Boost public green space
- Downtown revitalization
- Coordinate infrastructure and transportation networks
- Improve water quality
- Increase the knowledge base of local leaders in urban planning techniques and quality of life issues

Northwest Arkansas has a head start on this knowledge base from Fayetteville’s downtown plan and form-based code written by urbanists Dover, Kohl & Partners 10 years ago, followed by the citywide code written by city planners.

As for transportation, the region is fortunate in that all four cities are located on a single line. Despite the sprawl of recent decades, this geographic layout sets up the region for future public transit improvements. “The whole region originally grew with support by rail,” Petty says. “All of the downtowns are on a historic rail line – which still runs right next to the downtowns.”

But the most important factor could

be that, with the foundation help, key officials in the four cities seem to be pulling together.

“When this is developer-driven, it takes 10 years at least to make a difference,” says Greg Hines, mayor of the City of Rogers. “When the city recognizes a need for it, you can see it happening in a meaningful way in a few years.”

Key to this cooperation is the growing recognition, Petty says, that “The labor force chooses where they are going to live first, and then they look for a job. Times have changed and have to focus on different strategies.”

The initiative doesn’t yet have a name but these ideas have been brewing for some time, Petty explains. Two years ago, the foundation began to require that cities receiving grant funds for nature trails have a downtown master plan. “That was the first signal that they were zeroing on urban amenities as a solution to their talent challenges,” he says. ♦

Beginning of the end

FROM PAGE 1

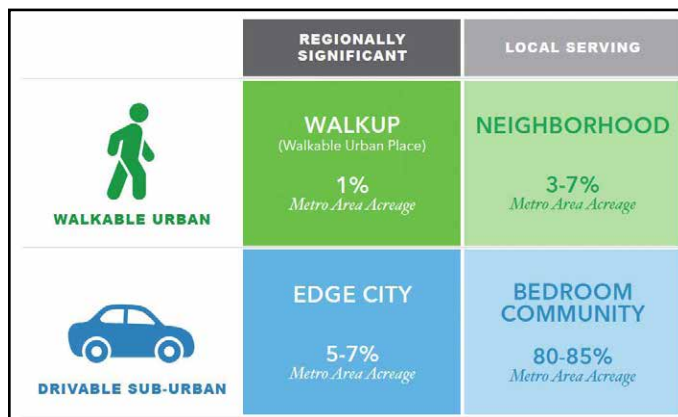
“Second, the end of sprawl does not mean sprawl will disappear immediately. Rather, its end marks a gradual shift from drivable sub-urban development as the dominant real-estate trend to walkable urban development. Even in Washington, DC, and Boston, two of the most walkable urban metros in the country, fringe, single-family drivable sub-urban housing is being built. However, this product type makes up less of the recent housing stock, as it is increasingly difficult to finance.”

These 30 metro areas contain 146 million people — 46 percent of the US population — and account for 58 percent of its gross domestic product.

The top metro areas for “walkable urbanism,” according to the report’s definition, are DC, New York, Boston, San Francisco, Chicago, and Seattle. The report identifies many other metro areas -- Denver, Los Angeles, Portland (OR), Miami, Atlanta, and Detroit -- that are projected to “accelerate their shift to walkable urban.” Some metro areas, such as Philadelphia, have strong walkable urbanism in the central city but little in the suburbs.

MAN BITES DOG STORIES

Leinberger said two of the emerging “walkable urban” metro areas are “man bites dog” stories, because they are so associated with sprawl and/or urban decline. Atlanta is the most spread out metro area in the country, according to a recent report by Smart Growth America. Since 2009, in the current real estate cycle, Atlanta has “turned a corner” and ranks fourth in the nation in building walkable urbanism, by the definition of this study. The question going forward is whether Atlanta



SOURCE: FOOT TRAFFIC AHEAD

US Metro land-use options

will build the infrastructure necessary to support walkable urbanism -- namely the proposed Belt Line transit system.

Detroit is the other surprise. That city ranks low -- 22 out of 30 -- in percentage of WalkUPs. Yet a “future ranking,” which measures development in this real estate cycle, puts Detroit at number 8. The big difference has been a downtown resurgence in the Motor City.

Leinberger notes that hundreds of new WalkUPs have to be created with hundreds of millions of square feet of commercial development in order to meet market demand. Such development could boost the US economy, he says. “The reason why the economy is bumping along at 2 percent when it should be at 3.5 percent is that we in real estate have not figured out how to create walkable urban places,” he says. The biggest economic development opportunity around New York City is to urbanize the suburbs and take advantage of that great rail system, he added.

However, the issue goes beyond identifying opportune WalkUP locations — local public policy also has to be supportive. DC leads the nation in development of walkable urbanism because of local, not federal policy, Leinberger explained. “The public sector really understood how to create walkable urbanism,” he said. “They put in place the zoning to make walkable urbanism legal.”

Beyond zoning, the art and science of

placemaking is key, notes Richard Bradley, Executive Director of the DC’s Downtown Business Improvement District.

“What is making us competitive is place. It’s the mixed-use environment. It’s the attention to details,” he says. Since late 1990s, DC added thousands of downtown outdoor cafe tables, for example. “We were very intentional about the experience that we wanted people to have downtown.” ♦

one of the largest — six blocks long and portions of three cross-streets are pedestrian-only. Fulton Mall spared no expense. It followed a plan by a well-known landscape architect, Garrett Eckbo, and included generous sculptures and fountains — the sinuous shapes mimicking water features in the enclosed malls of the day. It started off with a tremendous mix of pre-existing retail stores and it was initially considered a success. Fulton Mall became a model for many of the pedestrian malls throughout the US, but its heyday did not last long.

“By 1970, Downtown Fresno business began to decline again, due to increasingly rapid growth in the northern parts of the city and the opening of the major suburban shopping mall, Fashion Fair. Shortly thereafter, the major and specialty retailers — including iconic department stores such as Gottschalks and JC Penney — left Downtown,” according to a 2011 downtown plan by Moule & Polyzoides Architects and Urbanists.

Fulton Mall has struggled since and recently has suffered a vacancy rate of 50 percent. Nevertheless, the mall has also had defenders over the last four decades and only this year — Fulton Mall’s 50th birthday — has the city, backed by a coalition of business leaders and citizens, moved forward with a plan to restore automobile traffic with the help of a \$16 million federal grant. City council voted to approve the project, but a group in March has filed suit to block it — questioning the certification of environmental impact. “The city remains on track to bid the project later this fall,” mayor Ashley Swearengin told the *Fresno Business Journal*. “Reconstruction of Fulton Street will start in early spring 2015.”

Assuming it is opened to cars, the street will not be oriented toward automobiles. Fifty percent or more of the streetscape will be devoted to pedestrians — with narrow crossings at the intersections, abundant street trees, wide sidewalks, one lane of traffic in each direction, and intermittent on-street parking.

UNIVERSAL DISSATISFACTION

Buffalo’s pedestrian mall on Main Street, Buffalo Place, built in the 1980s, came at the tail end of this planning

Why some cities are tearing up pedestrian malls

ROBERT STEUTEVILLE

At a time when walkable downtowns and main streets are reviving nationwide, it may be surprising that some cities are reintroducing automobile traffic to pedestrian-only streets in high-profile examples like Fresno, California, and Buffalo, New York.

As the *Associated Press* recently noted: “While many U.S. cities are converting urban cores into walkable oases where people can stroll to restaurants and shops, bike and be green, Fresno is going the opposite direction.”

Rather than a repudiation of pedestrian-oriented design, however, these projects are an affirmation of placemaking.

In Fresno and Buffalo, the pedestrian malls have long been a deterrent to foot traffic downtown. They have died economically — and to the extent that bringing back automotive traffic make them more attractive to businesses, humans will return as well.

Approximately 200 downtown pedestrian malls were created in the 1960s through 1980s in the US. About 85 percent have been converted back to main streets with cars. Of an estimated 30 that remain, only 10 to 15 can be described as highly successful. One in Ithaca, New York — my town — is moderately successful and is now undergoing a multimillion-dollar facelift. It will remain as a pedestrian mall.

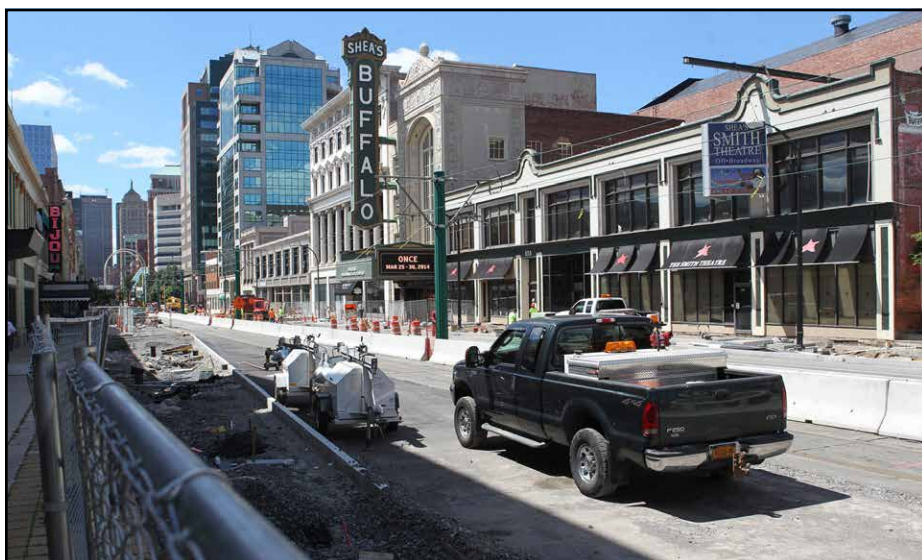
“Of the several dozen pedestrian malls that remain, many have been redeveloped and are thriving,” the *Associated Press* reports. “The pedestrian mall in Santa Monica had fallen into decline. It was revamped and now attracts thousands of residents and tourists a day.”

The very successful ones are in college towns or other places with high foot traffic, like Miami Beach. Most, like those in Boulder, CO, Madison, WI, and Miami Beach, allow cars to cross over at the intersections.

Fresno’s Fulton Mall was the second in the nation — built in 1964. It is also

Fresno’s Fulton Mall





Work on Main Street, Buffalo, to restore automobile traffic

trend. This mall included a light rail line — but still couldn't prevent Main Street from becoming largely derelict downtown. Unlike Fresno in the early 1960s, Buffalo's downtown was already

on a steep decline and Buffalo Place failed to live up to its promises.

"A lengthy construction process and a design that not only took cars off the street but blocked off key intersections

killed the little bit of life that remained on Main Street," reports Mark Byrnes of *CityLab*.

Buffalo Place was met with "universal displeasure," reports Byrnes — and so converting it back to through traffic has not been controversial. Finding the money has been tough. The city has begun the conversion block-by-block, and so far business and investment has responded to the change. As the cars have come back, street life is also returning to a thoroughfare with great historic assets.

"We have a number of priorities when it comes to Buffalo's infrastructure," says Mayor Byron Brown. "This is a major, major priority."

DEVELOPER INTEREST

"Decades after Buffalo's light rail debuted, only now are developers starting to show serious interest in the vacant and underused buildings along Main Street," Byrnes says. "Nearly \$90 million in residential projects near light rail stations are either planned or under construction. That's mostly thanks to the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus (BNMC), located at the southernmost underground light rail station."

Given the right conditions that produce consistently high pedestrian traffic, pedestrian malls can be successful. They work best when key intersections are not blocked off and downtowns remain porous and well-connected to many transportation options.

When those qualities are lacking, the retail tends to struggle or die. A main street with little or no retail is a lousy place, and normal pedestrian traffic tends to flee. The homeless and others on the margins of society may remain and increase in number, dominating the space. In such cases, bringing back automobiles may be the best strategy for attracting investment, businesses, and a range of citizens. Fresno and Buffalo are only the latest to test that theory.

As urban theorist Bruce Katz notes, one key to a pedestrian-friendly place is the choice of many different modes of transportation, including cars. "Before, it was just the choice of the car. Now people are saying, we want to live in communities where we can walk, bike, take public transit, or drive to work," he told the *Associated Press*. ♦



The two versions of the American Dream

Community preference

FROM PAGE 1

the market research showed 10 to 15 years ago. About a quarter to a third of Americans preferred the walkable urban model in the early 2000s, according to a meta-analysis of market research at the time.

Some details from the study:

- While young adults are disproportionately in favor of walkable neighborhoods, the most favorable group is people 65 and older — led by women in that age category.

- Hispanic is the racial group most

favorable to walkable urbanism, followed by African-Americans, and then whites. No details were available on Asian preference.

- Those with a college degree are far more likely to prefer walkable urban places — bearing out Richard Florida's theories in *The Rise of the Creative Class*.

- Women lean toward walkable urban while men lean in the other direction.

- Liberals want walkable communities, conservatives prefer more room.

- "Walkable urban" doesn't necessarily mean city. Many of those who prefer a walkable community also choose suburb or small town as their ideal community type. ♦

Placemaking begins and ends with the people

The secret of success for urbanists is to listen more and strive to connect with the folks that we serve.

ERIC ALEXANDER

The question needs to be asked: Even if a strong minority or majority of people across the country believe in our fundamental principles, do we, as a movement, have a strong connection to these folks?

We run an organization on Long Island that has spent nearly 20 years working with the public to advance smart growth, New Urbanism, and infrastructure that supports those trends. We have sponsored 1,900 presentations in 75 communities, 20 visioning processes/charrettes, and a news service that reaches 25,000 engaged folks each week. One of many results: More than 7,500 units of transit-oriented housing have been approved with more on the way. Dan Burden, our local Congress for the New Urbanism chapter, and many others in the movement have championed this approach and helped us along the way.

So the good news is that now you can shop, eat, recreate, live, and invest in our region's many downtowns. A plethora of laws, public funds, and revised regulations on the village, town, city, county, state, and federal levels have assisted this transition to downtown renewal.

The journey has been long, but the result has been a local smart growth movement made up of civic organizations, chambers of commerce, and a healthy segment of the building industry — some of whom were former skeptics. A local businessman who was a huge critic now is the co-chair of our board and a passionate supporter.

It is worth noting that the successes we have achieved in our suburban region of Long Island were derived without one big project, federal or state grant, or plan or directive from a regional body or higher level of government. The progress has simply been a series of strategic interventions over a long period by community, government, and business leadership.

Our journey helps us identify pitfalls, like the four horseman of the apocalypse, that make engaging regular



Jefferson Plaza, a transit-oriented development at Farmingdale Station on the Long Island Rail Road. Photo courtesy of Vision Long Island.

people difficult. Here are a few:

1) *Excess regional planning*

Our region has over 15 regional plans with more on the way. The HUD Sustainability Partnership came by four years ago and we assembled 500 community, business leaders, and developers. The 20 municipalities in the room presented their existing downtown plans and identified three needs: 1) Infrastructure dollars, 2) Regulatory relief, 3) Technical assistance managing federal grants. A year later the Feds came back and said we hear you and but need to do more planning. It's no surprise that the remaining meetings had 20 to 50 participants, not 500, with little tangible investments to date.

2) *Over-reliance on design criteria*

Our movement has focused more on academic activity but less about working with local folks who make decisions. We have seen charrettes where architects focus on design criteria but ignored the public and the regulatory processes needed to actually build any of the potential projects.

3) *An attitude that more regulation is better*

We have folks in planning circles adding regulation piecemeal in the

hopes that it all fits together, or comprehensive codes that don't interact with existing ones. In our region, the best placemaking examples are simple variances to existing codes delivered by local villages.

4) *A disconnect with the public*

We often go to academic conferences with well-attended sessions teaching us how to connect with people. Comedian Chris Rock ridiculed a lady who was proud to say "I take care of my kids" saying "you're supposed to take care of your kids." Similarly, to every designer who says "I talk to the people" we should say "You're supposed to talk to people!" The people make our market. Who are we planning, designing, and building for if not the public? Rule number one is to avoid insulting them by calling them idiots, NIMBYs, crackpots, crazies, or the like, in any public forum.

When we stumble into these pitfalls, we risk diluting the substantive gains that we have made over the last 20 years.

In order to create great places, we must gain the trust of the people by stepping into their shoes.

What are folks dealing with right now? In our region here is what they tell us — "my health care costs are up 200-plus dollars a month, energy costs are up 20 to 30 percent even after our state

promised freezes with a new operator, wages lag behind tax increases, bureaucrats are messing with our schools due to common core curriculum and it is harder to access credit for my home or business." In a nutshell people say "I love the work that you guys do for our downtowns, please design our streets safely and we want our fair share of infrastructure funds for sewers and transit — but tell the people in charge to stop hurting us."

We are a movement that enjoys ideas and placemaking excellence and are proud of our progress. We shouldn't

stop developing the big ideas but we also need to listen to local people who make the decisions for the future of our communities. Take a moment and talk to ten random people in your downtown: Buy them a cup of coffee and ask them how they are doing and what should we be doing to advance placemaking in their community?

We will print responses in a future column. ♦

Eric Alexander is executive director of Vision Long Island.

Two projects share Charter Award Grand Prize

The Congress for the New Urbanism jury awarded two Charter Award grand prizes for the first time in 2014. One went to an affordable transit-oriented development in suburban Union City, built at "one of the farthest-flung BART stops in the San Francisco Bay Area." The other award went to a form-based code (FBC) for the City of Cincinnati.

As part of a regional effort to focus development around transit stations, Union City created an ambitious plan to build a mixed-use center around the BART station. With the housing crash of 2008, the developer and city scaled back these plans and "focused on building an affordable housing project," CNU says. David Baker Architects responded with a "remarkable building that succeeds on virtually all levels," according to the jury. The LEED Platinum, 157-unit development features great placemaking, a retail arcade, social services, and whimsical public art, "all wrapped up in a lively, contemporary package," says jury chair Jeff Speck.

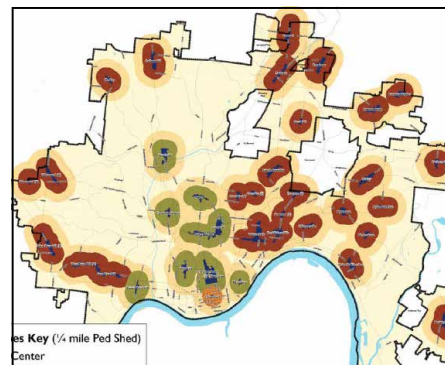
Station Center remediates a brown-field site, sandwiched between existing commuter and freight lines. The residential buildings frame a public playground and overlook a new landscaped plaza. The main entry court features a towering entry portal adorned by a 62-foot community-sourced mural.

CINCINNATI

The Cincinnati code, by Opticos De-

sign, is one of the largest applications of form-based coding in the country, CNU says. The code was created through the leadership of Vice Mayor Roxanne Qualls and Planning Director Charles Graves. A Community Challenge Planning Grant from The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) "brought much-needed funds," CNU notes.

Cincinnati is desperately in need of revitalization, having lost 40 percent of its population after 1950 and with more than 10,000 historic units in need of renovation. "But like many other rust belt cities, this abandonment actually creates a moment of tremendous opportunity. These urban neighborhoods already have what other cities want and are trying to build: A variety of urban



Cincinnati neighborhoods, with mapped urban centers and the 5-minute walk circles.

housing types, including some of the best mid-rise buildings in the country; a network of neighborhood main streets ready to be revitalized; a rich, diverse, and well-built collection of historic architecture; and accessible open space networks created by the topography that weaves throughout these neighborhoods," CNU says.

The code is organized around the urban-to-rural Transect. Extensive photo documentation and mapping analysis were done to calibrate the Transect and apply it to the city's unique neighborhoods.

The SmartCode is deployed "with particular attention paid to public process, neighborhood structure and graphic presentation. It reinforces Cincinnati's historic urban patterns with guidance for appropriate infill and predictable redevelopment building," says architect and planner Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, a juror.

The City unanimously adopted the code in 2013 and applied it to two neighborhoods. ♦

Station Center in Union City, with playground and public art.



Major transit-oriented project advances in Atlanta suburb

A form-based code is approved for the City of Doraville's town center and former GM factory.

The City of Doraville, Georgia, approved a new form-based code for a town center including a former General Motors Assembly plant. The code covers a large sector to the north and south of a MARTA (Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority) station. The GM site is the largest property in the area. "At 165 acres, it dwarfs any other completed or planned transit-oriented project in the region," says Caleb Racicot, a planner with TSW.

Up to 5,000 housing units and 16,000 jobs could be added to the development area in the next three or four decades. The plan calls for an urban center and downtown with perhaps 50 blocks and several major public spaces — plus a half dozen or so other small parks and squares.

The city has already received development interest on a number of smaller parcels within the FBC area. The GM site is still owned by General Motors, but The Integral Group, an Atlanta-based developer, is looking to complete acquisition this summer.

LIVABLE COMMUNITY CODE

Funded by the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) as part of its Livable Centers Initiative program, the new zoning, known as the Livable Community Code, was created by TSW, an Atlanta-based planning, architecture and landscape architecture firm, in partnership with the City of Doraville. "The new code represents a turning point for our city and promises to usher in exciting new changes," said Doraville Mayor Donna Pittman.

The project is part of a joint effort between MARTA (Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority) and ARC to spur transit-oriented development throughout the greater Atlanta area. The goal is to increase transit ridership and reduce sprawl by creating livable centers that coalesce around a mix of uses including residential, commercial

and entertainment.

Doraville is a fairly close-in suburb, just within Atlanta's beltway, with a population of more than 8,000.

To the south of the transit line is the existing heart of Doraville, and it will likely be the first to be developed as a transit-oriented development (TOD). It includes housing and Doraville's existing civic center and also large underutilized or undeveloped parcels. In this area, the code and regulating plan specify new streets that developers must agree to build in order to gain entitlement. This area is zoned as urban center (the intensity and mix of a main street) and urban core (the intensity and mix of an urban downtown).

"While the opportunity to redevelop the GM site was the impetus for the re-zoning, we also want to transform our downtown into a more walkable, urban area," said Joe Cooley, director of community development for the City of Doraville.

ADAPTATION OF SMARTCODE

The FBC is a "straight adaptation of the SmartCode," says Racicot, who led the project for TSW. For the code, TSW was hired by the city and paid through a \$15,000 grant from the ARC, plus an in-kind contribution from Racicot. In 2010, TSW completed a

downtown master plan that "created a vision for bringing together housing, office, entertainment, retail, dining and public spaces, in a compact and well-designed setting," Racicot says. "Refining the zoning to support this plan and the redevelopment of the former General Motors site was key to making the vision a reality."

The area to the north of the MARTA station, the GM site that closed in 2008, will require environmental remediation and is several years away from development. A vision plan was created for this site — a planned intensity of urban core and urban center — but no specific regulating plan. The code specifies a maximum block size, which will create a connected grid of streets, Racicot explains.

Many stakeholders participated in the Downtown Plan and helped define policies, including encouraging green development and creating a community where residents can age in place. The plan serves as a guideline for future development, and provides the groundwork for implementing future transportation projects.

Central to the effort was establishing a plan that would improve connectivity, encourage market-viable and pedestrian-friendly mixed-use development, promote increased density to support transit and a vibrant community center, maintain diversity, ensure multiple transportation options and support economic growth and a high quality of life. ♦

A vision plan for redevelopment of the General Motors site, with square and green.





Poynton's 'double roundel' intersection functions as a public space — despite handling 26,000 vehicles per day, including trucks and buses.

Battle cry of British street designer: 'Remove traffic signals'

The idea of "shared space" is capturing the collective imaginations of North American urbanists — partly due to a recent presentation by English architect and urban designer Ben Hamilton-Baillie at the Congress for the New Urbanism in Buffalo.

Hamilton-Baillie is heavily influenced by Hans Monderman, the late Dutch traffic engineer who promoted the idea that stripping streets and intersections of traffic signals, signs, paint, and other regulatory clues improves safety and performance.

While Monderman worked mainly in small Dutch towns, Hamilton-Baillie has applied these ideas successfully to thoroughfares with high traffic volumes. His talk at CNU was leavened with understated *humour* — albeit with radical overtones.

"I urge you to take out all of the traffic signals in every city in the US — it would be a very simple thing to do," he told the audience of about a thousand people. Although the group applauded enthusiastically, I'm guessing most understood the statement as hyperbole. Shared space is not an all-or-nothing proposition, and urbanists can apply Hamilton-Baillie's ideas in many ways.

Successful shared space examples are rising in Europe. They work, in part, due to very careful design. A critical element is to slow design speeds radically — comfortably below 20 miles per hour — so

that pedestrians, bicyclists, cars, trucks, buses, and even handicapped people can mix in a continuously flowing dance.

THE IMPORTANCE OF 'EDGE FRICTION'

Hamilton-Baillie fosters slow speeds through what he calls "edge friction" and close attention to elements such as pedestrian crossings. "We are learning how every centimeter of crossing counts," he says. "We are keeping them as narrow as they possibly can be." US street designers think in terms of feet — Hamilton-Baillie suggests that they need to start paying attention to inches.

High street in Poynton, with narrow travel lanes and lots of pedestrian space.



Streets are among the most intractable problems for urbanists — shared space offers fresh inspiration. Urbanists in America previously fought more energetically for pedestrian-friendly streets with narrow lanes — only to crash into the brick walls of departments of transportation (DOTs) and fire chiefs.

In the last decade that struggle has been partly supplanted by working with engineering organizations and DOTs on better standards. While new standards represent an improvement, they tend to be bland and compromised. Perhaps Hamilton-Baillie can get US urbanists fired up again for better streets.

Here are some of the highlights from his talk:

- Monderman's most radical design involved extending a primary school playground across a road in Noordladden, Netherlands. "You can't drive into the town without becoming intimately familiar with the activities at the school. There are no signs at all. The drivers slow way down, and that slow speed is extended throughout the town," he says, adding dryly: "An infinitesimally small number of people wish to kill children. It's very encouraging."

- The town of Poynton, England, received a shared-space makeover of an intersection with 26,000 automobiles per day, including heavy truck traffic, designed by Hamilton-Baillie. The adjacent High Street was rebuilt. The project cost 4 million pounds (about \$6.5 million), and a primary motive was economic development. Half of the storefronts were closed at the time,

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Edge friction in Hennef, Germany, at left, and a square designed by Hans Monderman, above

Hamilton-Baillie reports.

Two lanes of traffic approaching the primary intersection in each direction were replaced with a single lane. “Most people thought we were mad. It was already congested.”

The lights were removed and the offset intersection was repaved as a “double roundel” — shaped like the outline of a snowman — in pavers. Congestion dropped while pedestrian traffic has risen to 4-5 times the previously levels. Now all of

the storefronts are leased and Poynton recently placed number 7 on a list of most livable places in Britain, he says. The project “gave us huge volumes of space for pedestrians, parking, much wider footways — people were amazed that within 10 minutes of opening it there were no more queues,” he says.

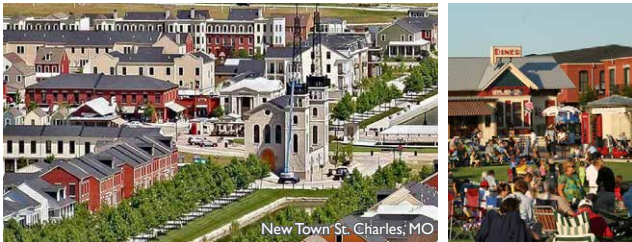
A 14-minute video, Poynton Regenerated, has received 176,000 views on YouTube in the last year and a half.

- “Edge friction” is created mostly with vertical elements

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on the sides of travel lanes. Lamp posts are placed very close to traffic. A canopy of street trees over the right of way, on-street parking, and even changes in pavement can contribute to this friction, which is the primary means of controlling design speed. Accidents, injuries, and fatalities plummet below 20 miles per hour (see graph at right).

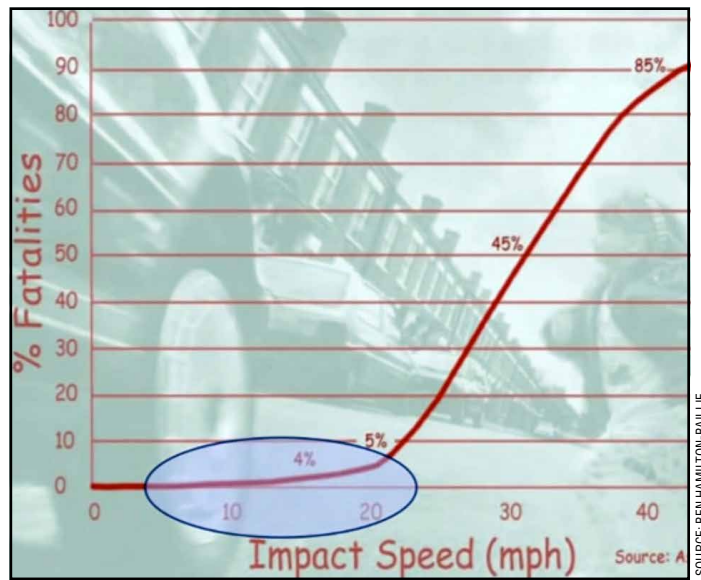
- Pedestrian crossings in Poynton were placed in diagonal patterns where people tended to cross. "It enables people to wander across the road wherever they are," he says.

- On Poynton's High Street, travel lanes are marked by darker pavement that is barely wider than an automobile.

- The new pattern is helping to bring civility back to the town. "What's amazing about Poynton is the change in relationship between drivers and pedestrians, pedestrians and drivers, and drivers and drivers. As someone says on YouTube, people are just nicer to each other."

- Exhibition Road in London, which handles 9,000 vehicles per day, was also given a shared space makeover. Other successful examples include a square in Sweden (11,000 vehicles per day), and a major street in Hennef, Germany, near Bonn.

- The Seven Dials intersection in London, which carries significant vehicular traffic including buses and trucks, was remade as a shared space intersection 25 years ago with a monument where people sit in the middle of traffic. "We have 25 years of data ... It turns out to be the safest and least congested junction of its type in the West End," he says.



The effect of speed on traffic fatalities, and the inflection at 20 mph

- Public spaces and highways have opposite characteristics. Highways are regulated, impersonal, linear, single-purpose, and controlled by signs and markings. Public spaces are culturally defined, personal, spatial, multipurpose, and regulated

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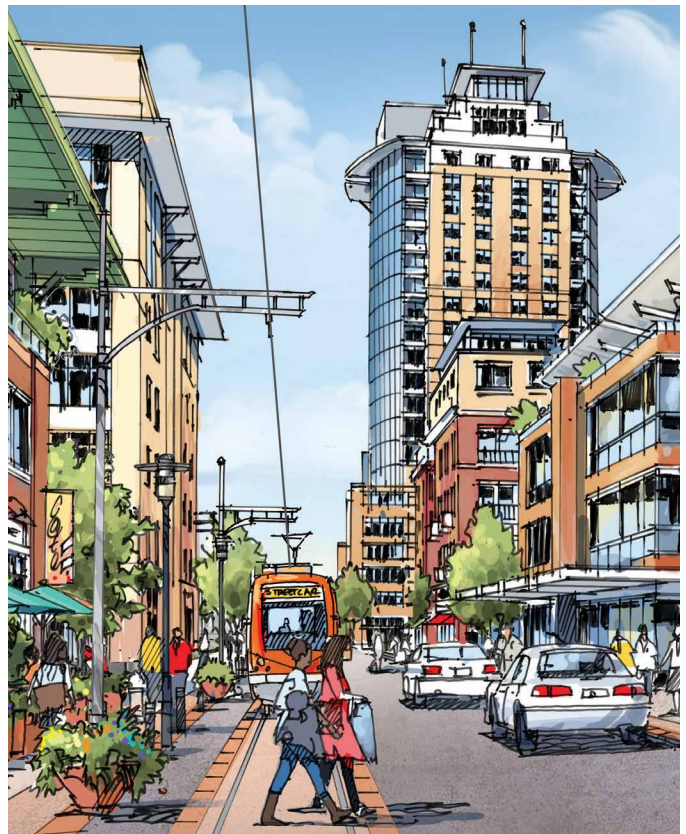
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through eye contact and individual behavior. “The worst urban spaces come when highways and public space clash. It works badly on both counts,” Hamilton-Baillie says.

- In cities and towns, the streets and intersections are public spaces and should be treated as such.
- If you treat drivers like idiots, they will act like idiots — so give them fewer instructions and let them use their own judgment, Hamilton-Baillie recommends. ♦

UPDATE

■ A 22-unit apartment complex of 10 small buildings was finished in May of 2014 in **Chico, California**, which completes the traditional neighborhood development Doe Mill, begun in 2000. “We were working with Tovey Geizentanner of Green line Partners in identifying infill sites downtown when the for-sale sign went up. We advised Tovey to initiate his developer experience with these parcels — no unknown existing conditions, familiarity with existing entitlement/process, comes with some surplus construction material from the adjacent row houses,” says David Kim of Anderson | Kim Architecture + Urban Design.

Kim’s partner John Anderson was closely involved with New Urban Builders in completing most of Doe Mill. The multifamily units were designed by Anderson | Kim. “All 22 units have been leased at rents about 15 percent above the pro-



Doe Mill apartments, above, and site plan, below



COURTESY OF ANDERSON|KIM

UPDATE

forma. Most units were leased to single person households, which the market identified as significantly underserved when we looked at existing and recently constructed local apartments,” Anderson notes.

The units are built with stained concrete floors on the ground floor and vinyl plank on the upper floors. The exterior is finished with three coats of portland cement stucco. The bay windows are sided with Hardie panels. The cabinets were fabricated locally. The window trim was left over from the construction of the adjacent townhouses in 2006.

The parking is hidden behind the buildings in surface parking lots.

“Investors are happy with the project and the developer is looking for another site closer to downtown and the Chico State campus,” says Anderson.

■ California is considering changing its standards for transportation projects under the state’s Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) from Level of Service to Vehicle Miles Traveled, CityLab reports. This policy change would make transit and complete streets projects much easier and possibly have a ripple effect across the US (see “Transit Projects Are About To Get Much Easier in California”). The Level of Service standard has resulted in bigger, more expensive, drive-only roads all across the country.

In California, if a new project provides mobility benefits but will result in any reduction in LOS, a huge CEQA report is

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required, delaying the project for years and raising costs. With a change in policy, this report will no longer be necessary as long as the project results in a reduction in VMT.

Eric Jaffe reported how CEQA delayed a bus rapid transit line in San Francisco for years, but that the new policy would change all of that.

“Chris Ganson told me Office of Planning and Research was planning to recommend “vehicle-miles traveled” as the new “central metric” under CEQA. He says VMT meets all the state’s major criteria for a traffic evaluator: fewer greenhouse gases, more multimodal networks and urban infill develop-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 16

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Revitalizing cities for all residents

LYNN RICHARDS

I want to thank Mayor Brown and the businesses and residents of Buffalo for the warm welcome and hospitality they gave us in early June at CNU's 22nd annual meeting. Buffalo has great assets to help rebuild and revitalize the city into a thriving region. Our hope is that in every city where we have our annual Congress, we are able to offer guidance, help address barriers, and generally move conversations forward on where and how residents want to grow their city.

Just as our members flew home, Colin Dabkowski published a critique of CNU he called an "An Open Letter to the New Urbanist Movement." He felt CNU's approach benefits the wealthy and leaves low- and middle-income residents behind. In truth, CNU strives to provide solutions for improving cities and towns for all residents, and has done so throughout our 22 years of history. CNU cares deeply about revitalizing distressed communities, and has a track record of doing just that.

In the 1990s, the CNU worked with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to create design standards for the Hope VI program. We introduced mixed-income and mixed-use building types that accommodated a range of incomes, ages and lifestyles. The result? From 1993 to 2010, HUD spent \$6.7B to rehabilitate over 600 of the most deteriorated and isolated public housing facilities in the nation into vibrant mixed-income neighborhoods.

CNU members have been active throughout the U.S., working with local governments, residents, and community

groups to determine the best approaches for revitalizing local economies. We've worked in Cabrini Green in Chicago, the La Alma / Lincoln Park neighborhood in Denver and the Corn Hill neighborhood in Rochester, NY, where several new urbanist projects have inspired dozens of additional developments along both sides of the river, increasing the demand for city living

Investing in road, water and school improvements in areas where the city wants reinvestment sends a strong signal to the private sector that the city cares. Hamburg, NY, a village of 10,000 people, resurrected itself from a 30-year slide by transforming the design of its Main Street from a major thoroughfare to a walkable Main Street, while maintaining traffic volumes. Since 2009, business owners, inspired by the new road, have spent \$7 million on 33 building projects and average property sale values along Route 62 increased 169% since 2005. Placemaking and revitalization strategies ARE economic development strategies.

Turning neighborhoods around, after decades of disinvestment, is a long and complicated process. We welcome thoughtful challenges like Mr. Dabkowski's because it gives us the opportunity to improve our approaches. Positive robust discussion from a range of stakeholders is the only way to achieve places that celebrate residents, are safe and economically prosperous, and serve as an icon to the great city that is Buffalo. ♦

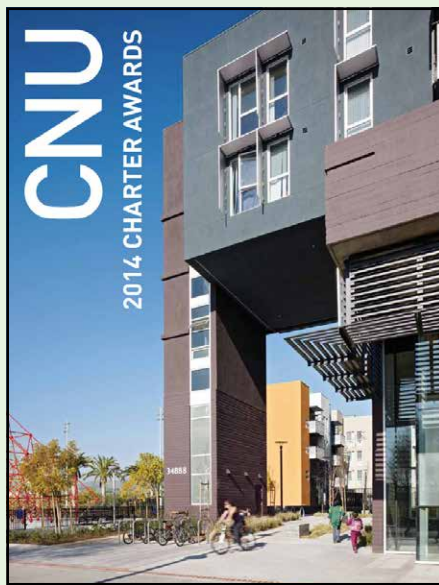
Lynn Richards is President and CEO of the Congress for the New Urbanism. The Op-Ed appeared in The Buffalo News June 22, 2014.

2014 CNU Charter Awards announced

Projects from Houston to Luxembourg honored; Tie for Grand Prize

A contemporary transit-oriented development in Union City, California and a massive form-based code for Cincinnati, Ohio took top honors last night at the 13th Annual CNU Charter Awards. The ceremony was held at the Buffalo Niagara Convention Center in Buffalo, New York at the organization's yearly Congress, which brings architects, urban planners, developers and advocates together to network, learn and collaborate.

Architect David Baker took the stage with a smile as his Stational Center affordable housing project in Union City, California tied for grand prize. "This 157-unit housing block simply has it all," commented Jeff Speck, who led the jury. "TOD, affordability, great public spaces indoors and out, LEED Platinum, hidden parking, community gardens, social services, recreation, and public



art, all wrapped up in a lively, contemporary package." Opticos Design, also of California, was the other grand prize winner for developing the largest form-based code in the country for Cincinnati,

Ohio. The code was adopted last year.

The winners were selected by a prestigious jury including European sculptor and architect Rob Krier, modernist Arizona-based architect Will Bruder and CNU co-founder Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk. Winning projects are recognized for their excellence in fulfilling and advancing the principles of the Charter of the New Urbanism, which defines the essential qualities of walkable, sustainable places from the scale of the region down to the block and building.

"The quality of submissions we received this year was remarkable," said Jury Chair Jeff Speck. "I served on a Charter Awards jury years ago, and many of the submitters didn't understand New Urbanism at all. It's a testament to the impact CNU has had over the past two decades that the principles in the Charter are now embraced and reflected in projects around the world." The program book with the full list of winners can be downloaded at www.cnu.org/node/6518 ♦

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ments, a general boost to both the environment and public health. Where LOS encouraged public projects to reduce or eliminate driver delay at city intersections, VMT would encourage them to reduce or eliminate driving at all.

Since California is by far the largest state transportation system, its policies are often adopted by other states.

■ Opticos Design, which won a 2014 Charter Award for Cincinnati's form-based code (FBC), is working on a Land Development Code rewrite for Austin, called CodeNEXT. A creative public participation process called **Community Character in a Box** is helping Opticos comprehensively document neighborhoods throughout the city with the help of residents.

After downloading the "Box," residents are assisted by staff to organize and identify assets, constraints, and opportunities for their neighborhoods. These are documented with maps and photos and are being compiled into a Community Character Manual. A sample "Box" survey recommends that neighbors include photos of buildings, streetscapes, frontages, and other critical aspects of the public realm.

Residents have completed this process for more than 80 neighborhoods in Austin.

"We are excited about this Community Character Manual which will enable us to determine shared and unique characteristics of neighborhoods throughout Austin and define where Form-Based Coding should apply (walkable urban or desired walkable urban places) and where conventional zoning will be applied (drivable suburban areas)," Dan Parolek of Opticos told *Better Cities & Towns*.

See www.austintexas.gov/departments/community-character.

■ **Kevin Klinkenberg**, an architect and urban designer, was hired as the director of the Savannah Development and Renewal Authority. Klinkenberg is author of the forthcoming book, *Why I Walk: Taking a Step in the Right Direction*, which is due out in September. Klinkenberg moved to Savannah three years ago from Kansas City.

■ **Home ownership is now cheaper than renting**, according to an analysis by *Market Watch* in June. The analyst, Steve East, is puzzled as to why the multifamily market continues to skyrocket while the demand for single-family homes lags. His explanation: people can't get mortgages.

Another story may explain part of this apparent anomaly. Most of the single-family housing is still being built in automobile-oriented subdivisions that young and educated families — some of which might be able to get a mortgage — don't want. Baby Boomers, on the other end of the working-age spectrum, are starting to move out of single-family homes. Some are moving to multifamily housing, adding to the single-family supply. See "The Housing Market: Owning Versus Renting."

■ A new townwide **form-based code (FBC) was approved in May for the Town of Port Royal** in South Carolina. Port Royal first adopted a traditional neighborhood development ordinance — a forerunner to a FBC — in 1997 for a portion of the town. This has worked well, and the town has expanded the code now, 17 years later.

The Port Royal Code written by Opticos Design uses the rural-to-urban Transect, a far more extensive framework that delineates building types, but also addresses civic spaces,

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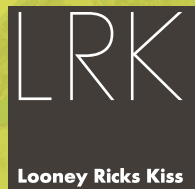
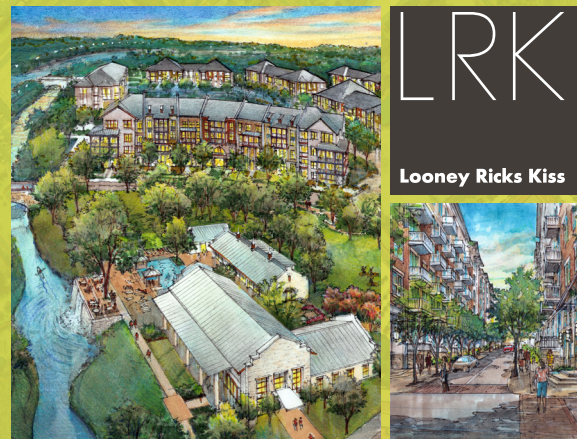
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UPDATE

thoroughfares, and other key components that impact and shape the Town's public realm.

■ **US mayors** — about evenly split between Democrats and Republicans — **unanimously approved a resolution to fight climate change**. "The resolution encourages cities to use natural solutions to "protect freshwater supplies, defend the nation's coastlines, maintain a healthy tree cover and protect air quality," sometimes by partnering with nonprofit organizations. The resolution only "encourages" steps rather than mandating action," *Associated Press* reports. ♦

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